

Up to this point, Agatha had listened impatiently in the adjoining room, wondering whether it would be desirable to show herself and by that means commence her attack upon the unsuspecting Colonel.

But now that he had begun to talk upon fatherly love, she thought it would be opportune to step forward; so, turning the handle of the door, she appeared on the threshold, exactly opposite the Colonel, who was seated upon the sofa.

The widow greeted her with a look of astonishment, but the Colonel rose gallantly, and measured her from head to foot.

Agatha hurried at once towards him, and seized his hand passionately.

"I have some claims to this love you say you would have possessed for a daughter!" she said, with fervor. "Surely you cannot be angry any longer with my poor Howard? Time has softened your heart—give up your obstinate prejudices!"

Poor Agatha! she had rushed headlong into the subject, not minding what she was saying.

The Colonel stared for some time at her in sheer amazement; but when she talked of his prejudices, his annoyance became apparent to both, and the admiration the lovely child had just awakened in him, departed, leaving only gall and wormwood in its stead.

The Colonel made use of the first pause Agatha allowed herself, by saying, "Dear me, madam! you take me evidently for one of those fathers in a tragedy; but you are mistaken, I assure you. According to my views, time can never soften me, nor make me wish to increase my family by adopting my sons' wives. If you have any further request to make, I am quite at your service; otherwise I should ask you at once to retire behind the scenes again, where you waited before so admirably for your cue. We cannot remain together in the same room!"

The widow's woe-begone countenance showed that she had expected nothing else but this discomfiting reply, and Agatha, bewildered at the rebuff she had received, stood like a statue.

She was assured the breach between her husband and his father was indeed impassable. She ventured no further words, for she knew not what to say. Delicate in health as she was she now felt the imprudence of an encounter with the hard old man; therefore, with a beseeching look, she disappeared.

A painful silence ensued. The Colonel did not seat himself again; but prepared to leave. The widow, who was rather angry with Agatha for forcing herself into the Colonel's presence, in spite of her advice to the contrary, put no obstacle in his way. She rang the bell for her maid, and asked her if the Colonel's servant was there ready to attend his master to his lodging. She gave herself no trouble to disguise her ungracious mood, and made no attempt to assist her relative to his conveyance.

The widow knew well where to touch him most.

Her conduct frightened him, as he was thoroughly dependent upon her; so he said, good-temperedly enough, on taking his leave, "Good-bye, my dear sister. When the locksmith's daughter has left you, I shall come and pay my respects to you again, not before. You might have known, Dame Wisdom, that such explosions of effect and surprise would be wasted upon me. You had better go now and comfort your weeping protégée, for, of course, tears are necessary, aren't they?"

With this, he laughed, and quitted the house.

### CHAPTER III.

A week passed without the Colonel making any inquiry about his sister-in-law's health. He was comfortable in his new quarters, which overlooked the beach, and had a charming view. He began at once to try the water cure, and to see how far that would restore him to health and strength.

In the meantime, Agatha Steward took her departure. She had always intended leaving Westbury at the end of May; but the meeting with her father-in-law had decided her to quit the place at once. Mrs. Rowland, too, had taken offence at Agatha's refusal to follow her advice. Words ensued between the two ladies, which made farther residence under the same roof very disagreeable to both. Agatha, grieved at the blunder her inexperience and self-confidence had led her into, hardly possessed courage to tell her husband what she had done.

After some little time, however, she did manage to confess all that had taken place between herself and the Colonel, and was rejoiced to find Howard entirely approve of her proceedings. He was indignant at his father's harshness towards his wife, and could not help harboring bitter feelings, and hoped an avenging Nemesis would overtake the invalid, who had shown himself so harsh and unforgiving.

The Colonel carefully acquainted himself with the movements of all the inmates of Mrs. Rowland's establishment, and paid the latter a visit the day after Agatha's departure. She received him as if nothing had happened.

Amidst pleasant gossip, in which the old soldier revelled, tea was served. Presently the Colonel inquired where the little girl was he had seen there, and why she did not come in as usual.

"The child has gone, Colonel," replied the widow, thinking he knew to whom it belonged. "Of course its mother would not let it remain here without her; and as you ordered Agatha away in such a peremptory fashion, she natu-

rally got frightened of you, and took herself and child off."

The Colonel's hard heart felt a sharp twinge at this information, though he said nothing on the instant. He was nettled to think that the lovely little child was his discarded son's daughter; but when he recollected she had called him a "good man," and allowed herself to be fondled by him, the Colonel could not restrain a sigh as he asked, reproachfully, "Why didn't you tell me that Gwendoline was my grandchild?"

"What good would it have done?" was the reply. "Gwendoline is her mother's daughter."

"Really, Dame Wisdom? But the child seemed to take a wonderful fancy to its grandpapa."

"So did its mother, for that matter," interrupted his sister, promptly; "else she never would have begged for her father-in-law's affection, as she knew his character very well before doing so. But the affair is passed; drop the subject."

It was the first time in his life the Colonel obeyed a request when it went against his own wishes.

The image of the little girl to whom he had taken such a fancy never quitted his memory, nor did he make an effort to efface it.

Pondering over his own lonely state, he said, "I am almost tired of the world. I shall soon retire from the service altogether, and buy some little hermitage in which I may end my days in peace."

"Stuff and nonsense about a hermitage! If you would only see the error of your ways, you could end your days in the bosom of your family, who would love and tend you properly."

"Hush!" interposed the Colonel, beckoning her to silence.

And the subject dropped.

### CHAPTER IV.

The residences facing the sea presented the advantages of the country with the comforts of the town. The Spa, where the waters were drank, lay in the midst of a group of such houses. In consequence of these, all the invalids resided in this part of Westbury.

The day after the last described scene, the Colonel noticed two strange ladies strolling along the beach. They were simply clad, and their manners and carriage were more distinguished than those of the generality of persons resorting to Westbury. The elder was evidently a great sufferer; her steps were uncertain, although she grasped her companion's arm with firmness.

The young girl at her side, dressed in simple gray linen, with a low, broad-brimmed hat on her head, had some charm about her more than beauty, that drew general attention to her.

The ladies just then passed the spot where the Colonel was seated under a shady rock. Always civil to strangers, he at once raised his hat, without, however, addressing them, and then turned away.

No sooner had he done this, than he heard the elder remark to her companion, "That must be he, Isabel."

"I am almost sure of it, mamma," replied the daughter, in low, modulated tones.

The Colonel had distinctly heard the conversation, with evident surprise. Who could they be? But he comforted himself with the knowledge that four-and-twenty hours would not be passed before he should find out all about them.

After the ladies had gone a short distance, the elder lady seemed to grow tired, so her daughter at once led her back again to their lodging. As soon as her mother had reached there, the girl left her, and returned quickly and resolutely towards the Colonel, who had now taken his seat upon a bench.

She bowed quietly when she had reached him, and said, "Colonel Steward, I presume?"

Agreeably surprised and charmed with the girl's frank and easy manner, the Colonel at once rose, and answered in the affirmative.

"You will wonder at my addressing you without having previously gone through the form of an introduction. I am Isabel Landville, and am fortunate enough to possess your son Vincent's affection."

The Colonel, who would gladly have turned to the right about, said something in his usual sarcastic manner, which contrasted forcibly with the polite reception he had just accorded her.

But Miss Landville seemed not to care in the least degree for the change, but continued quickly, "I persuaded mamma to bring me here, as Vincent told us you were visiting this place for a short time."

The Colonel listened to her, although the ironical smile was still upon his lips; but he now seated himself upon the bench again, and invited the young lady to take the vacant place beside him.

"Let us sit down, Miss Landville, and then we shall have a better chance of arguing with one another."

"Well, then, Colonel, what I propose is to appeal to your sense of justice, and submit myself to your scrutiny. Four weeks will surely be sufficient to judge whether I am worthy of becoming your son's wife. I require your consent first. But do not fancy, Colonel, that I shall seek your favors with signs of affection, emotion, or pretended respect."

"Indeed, I don't think you will give me any opportunity for fancying such a thing," smiled the Colonel.

"Very well. You understand me, I see. Vincent will return from America in a week. He will have told you so by letter—"

"May be," replied the Colonel. "I do not read his rash letters."

"You have done yourself more injury than any one else. You know Vincent has been engaged to me for two years, and that a marriage between us is the greatest wish of our life."

Isabel then explained to the late Colonel, who began to exhibit symptoms of impatience, that Vincent went to America on business for her father, and had succeeded in saving some property belonging to his deceased brother: that though he did so without the Colonel's consent, out of affection for her, winning her parents' gratitude for the services he had rendered to them in this business, it was against his personal feeling to do so; and wound up by asking him if he would promise to decide his son's fate without any prejudice in respect of the act of insubordination of which Vincent had been guilty.

The Colonel smiled sardonically, saying, "And supposing I pronounced you worthy at once, without any further delay?"

"I should know that you intended to treat him as you did Howard, whom you told to do as he pleased."

"But you would marry him just the same?" "Never without your consent!" exclaimed she, with firm resolve.

The Colonel took her hand, and promised all she asked him. She looked, with an expression of deep emotion, into his stern face, and pressed his hand warmly. After this, she raised her head proudly, and walked back quickly to her lodging.

The Colonel looked after her, and said, "I wonder whether she would keep the promise? I feel a desire to humiliate this proud, self-sufficient young damsel."

### CHAPTER V.

In the afternoon, when Mrs. Landville was talking her usual nap, her daughter prepared to pay a visit to her lover's aunt. She had brought a letter of introduction from Agatha with her to Westbury, and had already sent it on.

Mrs. Rowland gave her the kindest welcome. She had never shared her brother-in-law's views or principles on any point whatever, least of all his unfounded objection to the objects of both his son's choice. Agatha had explained in her note that Miss Landville (whose cleverness and good sense had evidently made a great impression upon her) was going to tackle the Colonel, and bring him to her way of thinking; but she did not mention how this change was to be brought about.

So the old lady inquired what Isabel's plans were.

Isabel told her she had already made a beginning that morning.

The widow listened, and shook her head.

"You are calculating wrongly, my child," she said, sorrowfully. "You will never gain your object in that way. I know my brother-in-law. Ah, no matter what promise he has made you, he'll find some means of cheating you."

Isabel smiled, with an air of triumph, and said, "Trust me, the Colonel cannot persist so far in his obstinacy as to make one who never did him an injury, miserable for life; and when he has once confessed himself conquered, it will be easy enough to settle matters between Howard's family and himself."

"Would you really keep your word, and not marry Vincent?" inquired the old lady doubtfully.

Isabel, with evident emotion, assured her solemnly that nothing should induce her to do so against the Colonel's wishes.

"Isabel, you are standing on the brink of an abyss. Don't be too confident. Your happiness, and that of Vincent, is at stake. Think of what you are doing. Does Vincent know of your resolve?"

She replied in the affirmative, and added that he entirely approved of her plan.

"With the full understanding that he is to give you up if his father remains obdurate?" asked the widow, with considerable astonishment. "This is, indeed, a strange piece of heroism, or else shows his implicit and blind confidence in your persuasive power."

Isabel was not to be shaken in her resolve, and promised to see her again next day, after she had been to the Colonel.

The girl went happily back to her lodgings, to attend once more to her invalid mother's wants. That evening she enjoyed a pleasant walk in the sea-breeze; and next morning awoke refreshed by sleep, ready for an early stroll before her mother rose. The probability of meeting the Colonel may have done something towards inducing her to walk thus early. Nor had she deceived herself.

She had not gone far before she saw the old gentleman advancing in a stately manner towards her. He greeted her, from some distance, with a far pleasanter voice than she had expected.

They met in a very picturesque spot, overlooking the sea, with shady nooks, formed by the rocks, on every side.

"You must possess some superhuman power, Miss Landville," he said, with apparently forced frankness; "for you have succeeded where everyone else has failed. I never slept a wink all night!"

The girl raised her beautiful face, and said some words of regret at his discomfort.

"But I know now I shall escape any more of such wakeful nights," continued he, taking no notice of her kind words. "The plans you have formed for your own benefit, and mine too, as you seem to think, were the entire cause of my

misery. You have regularly beset my path and hope that I may capitate some day; but, my dear young lady, this is the last hour I shall remain in Westbury. I'm off now to Whitehill, to further my cure without interruption—good-bye!"

Isabel looked like some beautiful statue. All life seemed to have fled from her glowing young features, and her arms sank enfeebled by her side.

"Is this my sentence?" asked she, in scarcely audible tones.

"Take it as you please. Marry my boy; I have nothing to say against it. Farewell!"

Isabel's lips moved to repeat these words, but she could not succeed in giving utterance to them. Silently she bent her head, and stood there as if unable to move.

The Colonel left her, his face beaming with satisfaction. After he had gone some distance, he turned and looked back.

Isabel was standing in the same position gazing across at the horizon. He arrived at home, and looked again back towards the beach, but the girl still lingered, exactly as he had left her.

He went into his room. Was it curiosity to gaze unseen upon his sacrifice, that made him take his field-glass? He arranged the focus, and turned it upon her son loved, and whom he had so cruelly wounded.

Isabel had not moved—had not even changed the position of her arms; she seemed to have forgotten that she existed—not to know that eat tears were coursing each other slowly down her cheeks. Thus the Colonel saw her, and his heart began to beat fitfully. He paced his room restlessly to and fro. Several times he hesitated at the door; then he hastily took up his glass again. Isabel was coming calmly, with seeming unconsciousness, towards her lodging again. On seeing this, he jumped into a fly, and went on his road to Whitehill without having deigned to wish with his sister-in-law good-bye.

### CHAPTER VI.

Whitehill was five-and-twenty miles from Westbury. It was a poor little fishing village, with no charms about it except the sea. It consisted of a few scantily furnished lodgings, occupied only by some cripples.

The Colonel saw, immediately, that he had regularly exiled himself. His temper was not improved by the wretchedness of the apartments he had taken, and which, he had been told, were the best in the place. A flimsy paper, no carpet, hideous chintz curtains hanging to the low windows,—all these discomforts reminded him of his school-days; but had not the effect of cheering him.

He had to submit to the inevitable, however, as he knew he could not return to Westbury without yielding.

Three weeks were passed in the greatest misery. Nothing happened. The time approached when Vincent was expected from America.

"Pack up my things, Craven," ordered he, one evening, as he sat in his stuffy little room, gazing at the setting sun, till he was almost blinded by it. "Pack up my things, and order a carriage to take me to the station. I am going to Southport."

The man stared at his master, in astonishment.

"To Southport?" repeated he.

"Yes. We shall go through Eden en route for ——" He left his explanation unfinished, and began moving about restlessly.

Steam is a splendid means by which to carry out quietly some project, and the man who sits on to meet his fate. If it had not been for this, the Colonel might have changed his mind ten times during the journey; but he reached his destination before he had time to do it. When he arrived there, the well-known manufactory, belonging to Starr and Company, was immediately pointed out to him, as well as the almost princely mansion where the family resided.

At the Colonel walked up the gravelled path leading to the mansion he saw, sitting on a garden seat, Agatha. By her side stood Howard, who, holding her hand affectionately, tried to console her for the disappointment which had attended her appeal to his father.

The sharp, crisp, regular tread of the haughty officer on the gravel, grated on their ears, and caused both to turn in the direction from whence the sound came, when, to their astonishment, they beheld the man who, of all others, they dreaded most to meet.

Howard, to avoid a scene, hastily drew his dejected wife along a side-walk which led to the house, in which they were speedily lost to sight; while the Colonel passed on, as though he had not noticed the sudden flight.

He walked up the broad stone steps leading to the noble portico without a moment's hesitation and opened the door, which led into a wide and lofty hall.

Through folding-doors he beheld a female figure, standing in the adjoining room, gazing through the window. He stepped in.

"Good morning, my dear," said the Colonel, and his voice sounded with more resonance than when last he saw her, and told her it was impossible for both of them to remain under the same roof.

The lady turned round; but only for a moment; in the next she rushed forward to meet him, and threw her arms round his neck.

He had not deserved this much. An inward voice whispered that to him; but he took care not to say so. He mentioned nothing about the retreat from the grounds.