

LOVE FINDS A WAY.

By JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH.

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"I'd just as lief as not nobody should be spying on him in his last hours. He do mumble a lot of mortal strange stuff with the fever in his poor head." But the fever was all out of Horace Matthews' head when he turned toward Reuben and asked feebly: "Reuben, when was Thomas telegraphed for?"

"Night before last sir."

"And what did you say in it?"

"Guardian very ill. Wants to see you. Come at once."

"Has he answered?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps he didn't get it."

"Now, there you go to fretting, sir. It ain't a bit like you. The doctor says you was to keep calm."

"So he did, Reuben, so he did. If he got the message, when ought he to be here?"

"I asked the telegraph man that same question. According to his calculation, Mr. Thomas is due here about 11 a. m."

"And it is now—"

"Just half past 11, sir."

The sick man closed his eyes wearily. How insignificant all things here below now seemed! It was as if he were getting his life, with all of its loves, all of its ambitions, its toils, its achievements, its mistakes, in a true perspective at last. And how mean, how absolutely worthless, the sun total was!

All the capacity for loving he had been endowed with he had exercised for one child. He had loved Olivia to the exclusion of that broader, more elevating love for his fellow man as his neighbor. To make Olivia happy, to secure her against any mischance in the future, had seemed the one thing worth doing. That she might have, others must give; that she might rejoice, others must suffer. When he was working his way with strenuous stubbornness to this goal, he had not questioned his own methods nor the danger of working harm, and not good, to the idol of his life.

With the presumption born of a phenomenally good physical record he had looked forward to seeing Olivia enjoying the fruits of his wise stewardship, while he aided and encouraged Thomas Broxton in his ascent of the ladder which it was well for every man to climb in his youth.

He was not the first man who has been surprised by death in the midst of unfinished schemes, and presently Thomas Broxton would be standing where that terrible old woman had stood, defiant, accusing, merciless. He opened his eyes from what Reuben had thought was a tranquil slumber to say hurriedly, "I think I should like to see my daughter, Reuben, before Mr. Broxton gets here."

And it was then that Reuben, going in search of her, had found her in her own room, sitting with her head buried in her outstretched arms.

For the first time in her life Olivia obeyed the summons to her father's presence with reluctance. Dr. Govan had reassured her on the subject of paralysis.

"Your father was violently agitated by the visit of that poor old irresponsible creature and temporarily lost his powers of speech. All agitation must positively be avoided, my dear, and when you go into his presence you must remember how much depends upon your personal observance of this caution."

Then for the first time in her life she must act a falsehood. She must go into her father's presence with a heavy load on her young heart, longing to ask him questions that must never be asked, yearning to have him exercise the demons of suspicion and distrust awakened by that old woman's cruel words. Perhaps he would die and leave them uncontradicted. Could bereavement hold a sharper sting?

She got up heavily and, going into her dressing room, bathed her eyes to efface the marks of recent tears and smoothed her hair into trimmer shape. Then she walked resolutely into the sick man's presence. He held out both wasted hands and drew her down upon the bed by him, murmuring familiar terms of endearment.

"You are better, father, much better. Dr. Govan tells me so," she said, returning his caresses gently.

The sick man sighed wearily.

"For a little while, for a very little while, my darling. I have told Govan to keep me here until Thomas gets home."

"Thomas? Why, papa, have you sent for Thomas?"

She was trembling violently. A deathly pallor spread over her sweet young face like a gray veil. Had her father any confession to make to Thomas Broxton? Why did he want him to come?

The sick man looked at her imploringly.

"I beg of you, my daughter, to summon all your fortitude. Your agitation reacts on me. You are losing control of yourself. I am a very ill man. Several days ago I made Reuben send a telegram to Thomas Broxton. He may be here at any moment."

"Yes, father," she spoke in a dull monotone, but her eyes looked tenderest pity into his.

"I want to beg his pardon."

"For what, father?" in the same sad monotone.

"For my bad management of his affairs."

Olivia dropped on her knees by his bedside. She clasped both her hands about one of his, as if imploring him to vindicate his own good name before he left her.

"But you did the best you could, father. Of course you did. Oh, I know you did! I know you did by Thomas as his father would have done by me if I had been left a helpless little orphan like Tom."

A groan was his only answer.

"There, dear. Dr. Govan will scold me sharply for agitating you in this cruel way. Don't let us talk about it at all, papa. We believe in each other. There, now. Go to sleep in your naughty Ollie's arms."

She laid her soft cheek against his and crooned a soft lullaby. He stroked her shining hair caressingly.

"Olivia, my darling, you heard that old woman's terrible charges. She hurled them at me over this precious head."

She lifted her head and looked at him gravely.

"She knows better now, father."

"Knows better now?"

He repeated the words after her with labored slowness. He looked bewildered. Olivia smoothed the gray hair back from his furrowed forehead with a slow, mesmeric motion.

"Poor old 'Mother' Spillman is dead, father. She is at rest. I think Miss Malvina is scarcely sorry. She says life has been such a burden to her mother for a great many years that death meant release. She says her mother was very 'queer.'"

"And she is gone, actually gone? Do you know it to be a fact, child?" He labored to lift himself into a sitting posture.

"I know it to be a fact, father. I saw her myself, dead. She looked so quiet, so serene. She is at rest."

"You saw her. Then you have been to the Spillman cottage. What did you go there for?" His voice rang out in challenge.

She shrank away from him until the pile of pillows with which Reuben had propped him into a sitting posture hid her pallid face from him. Was he going to force her to say why she had gone to the Spillman cottage? If he did, must she lie? Instead he spoke to her in the gentlest of voices. Rather did he seem to plead for mercy than upbraid her.

"Don't cower behind my pillows, my poor child. Come where I can look into your dear eyes. You have nothing to be ashamed of, Olivia. I know what took you there. You went in search of a vindication for your most unhappy father." Her head drooped until it touched his pillows. "You thought to learn something more about the papers which she claimed to be holding for Thomas."

"Yes, father."

A gleam of gratification shot into the shrewd eyes of the dying man. It was almost as if his departing soul paused to score on more pitiful little triumph.

"Poor old magpie! She overreached herself. Now they never will be found."

"Were they very valuable to—Thomas—father? That is, if you don't mind telling me, dear."

"They were—they are," he amended slowly, "of no value to any one. Thomas would not be one dollar the wealthier for the finding of them."

A silence fell between father and daughter. The sick man seemed to fall into a sudden doze. Olivia brought a light chair and seated herself as close as possible to his side.

The clock struck half past 11. Reuben was to come on watch at midnight. She twined her small, cool fingers about the sinewy wrist that lay nearest to her and found its pulse. The moments passed on. She waited. For what?

The ticking of the clock on the mantelshelf and the beating of her own heart seemed equally loud. A low muttering from the sick man's sunken lips made her bend her ear quickly. Every syllable that fell from his lips now was a thing to be hoarded. In a state of semiconsciousness Horace Matthews was doing battle with his conscience for the last time.

"It was for her sake, for my tender little child's sake. Good Lord, forgive me! She could not battle with the world in poverty, only a helpless, weak girl. He is strong; he is young; he is ambitious. It will all work out right for him. He will carve out a name and a fortune for himself. But—but I am going to meet them. I am going to see Lucetta, Rufus, all of them. What shall I say? What can I tell them? Unfaithful friend, false steward, sinful man—I hear them crying it in chorus. Thomas, forgive me! Lucetta, don't turn your dear face away from me! Rufus, friend of my boyhood."

He opened his eyes with a start. His first fully conscious gaze fell upon Olivia's face. Its drawn, frightened look startled him. He grasped her wrist with a force that pained her.

"I have been dozing. Did I talk in my sleep? Did I say anything silly, as sleep talkers always do?"

"You talked a little, father, just a little. There, dear. Don't stare at me so. You look as if you were angry with me. It is only I, father, your loving little daughter. There is no one else here, no one at all."

"I know, I know—only you, poor little lonely girl; only you, my precious one."

She answered him with a pathetic little boast.

"Oh, I could have half the town if I wanted to! Everybody has been begging to help nurse you. Everybody holds you in such high esteem, dearest. But we don't want them," he echoed dully. "No, we don't want them. I won't last very much longer, my child. I am just waiting to see Thomas, and then I will go."

"Father, father, have you no thought for me?"

The wall escaped not unguarded lips with piercing shrillness. "No thought for you? God forgive me, Olivia, there has been room in my brain for no one but you. For you, and you alone, I have lived, I have labored and"—his voice dropped to a tired whisper—"yes, sinned."

"Sinned? Father, take that one word back. I know you do not mean it. Take it back in pity for me. Don't leave it to me as a horrible puzzle. It will torture me all the rest of my days. Death is not the very worst that can befall us, father. Leave me the reverence for you that has glided all my young life, father. I know you have loved me too well. Perhaps in your tenderness for me you waxed careless of others' interests. That was all, papa. I am sure that was all."

She was on her knees by the bed. Her slight frame was quivering under the storm of emotions no longer under her control. The dying man laid his hand on her bowed head. When he spoke, his voice was calm and solemn, but very weak.

"True, child, death is not the worst that can befall. I have confessed everything to my Maker. I had meant to confess to Thomas, but my strength ebbs fast. I doubt if I shall be here when he comes. The temptation to secure your future against the possibility of want was too mighty for me, Olivia. My idolatrous love for you turned my boasted strength into weakness. Opportunity was my undoing."

"I will make restitution, father. He shall have everything."

"And blacken my name in the grave? Restitution lies in one direction only. At least my falling senses can point out no other course. You alone can right the great wrong I have done Rufus' son."

"I, father?"

"Don't speak. Listen to me. Would you help me undo what I have done for your sake?"

She shivered as if an ague had seized her.

"Only you, poor little lonely girl," is mortal of us with contemptuous pity for its infirmities, its temptations and its mistakes. I have been an unfaithful guardian to Thomas Broxton. You can make the losses I have brought upon him as nothing, weighed in the balances against his happiness."

A perplexed look came into the wide eyes fixed upon his face. "I, father?"

"You, and you alone, can turn a curse into a benediction."

Again that pathetic "I, father? Oh, tell me how!"

"Marry Thomas Broxton. He loves you. You know that he does."

"But I do not love him, father?"

"Marry—Thomas—Broxton."

"Father, have you forgotten Clarence, forgotten that I betrothed myself to him with your full consent? I belong to Clarence Westover, father, and I love him."

A grayish pallor was creeping over the sick man's pinched features. She did not know that it was death. She had never before stood in the presence of the grim conqueror. Her father's voice was lifted to a clear high note in a supreme effort to impose his will upon her.

"Marry Thomas Broxton! I command it!"

A cold current of air swept across the bed. Olivia rose quickly to cross the door by which it had entered. Another hand drew it softly shut from the other side. She turned toward the bed to enter her final protest against this monstrous invasion of her rights.

"But, father, would you want me to live my life out a stupendous falsehood?"

The unseeing eyes stared straight beyond her; the tired lips fluttered and drooped; a heavy sigh, stillness—Horace Matthews was done with beseeching, done with commanding.

In a piercing cry she called his name aloud and again. It brought to the chamber of death Reuben, Dr. Govan, who had just arrived; Clarence Westover, who had been waiting and watching in the distant drawing room, and—Thomas Broxton.

It was toward the latter that Reuben turned his eyes anxiously.

"Oh, Mr. Thomas, if you'd only got here a hour earlier! It's your fate to be always too late!"

"It is my fate, Reuben, as you say, so we won't quarrel with it," Broxton answered quietly and turned to question Dr. Govan.

CHAPTER XVII.
THE RETURN OF THE KING.

Mandeville was not so well supplied with roads as historic Rome, to which all roads lead. Only one led to and from Mandeville. One might indulge his individual preferences in the matter of a route after leaving that secluded spot some 50 miles in the rear; but, whatever his final destination, the wayfarer must make his start from a modest little depot labeled "Loop and Twine R. R." on the outskirts of the town. Clarence Westover recalled this necessity with some satisfaction as he jumped into his smart little cart and urged his horse toward the depot at its best speed.

Having failed to find Thomas Broxton either at the Commercial Men's home, Dr. Govan's or Miss Malvina Spillman's, he proposed heading him off at the station. He hung the reins of his man and jumped out of his cart just as Thomas, dusty of foot and heavy of heart, mounted the platform steps with bag in hand. He advanced with cordially extended hand.

"I'm awfully glad I'm in time, Broxton. You came very near giving me the slip."

Thomas met the extended hand with perfunctory politeness. He wished he could feel more cordial toward Olivia's lover, but deep wounds need time for their healing.

Westover was distinctly aware of this wordless antagonism. He rather suspected he should have felt quite sour and belated even more querulously if matters were reversed, but at this particular juncture he could not afford to resent Tom's aloofness. He had pursued him with a definite object in view.

"You see," he said easily, falling into step and going with Tom toward the waiting room, "I want to talk to you about a matter of interest to both of us. I don't want to lose sight of you just yet. Can't I induce you to spend the night with me?" He stopped and reddened. It occurred to him that the last of the Broxtons would not care to accept the hospitality of strangers under his old roof-tree. Tom covered his confusion courteously.

"I don't know," he said, falling into step and going with Tom toward the waiting room, "I want to talk to you about a matter of interest to both of us. I don't want to lose sight of you just yet. Can't I induce you to spend the night with me?" He stopped and reddened. It occurred to him that the last of the Broxtons would not care to accept the hospitality of strangers under his old roof-tree. Tom covered his confusion courteously.

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FOR SALE—75 acres of choice land, all cleared and in good state of cultivation, fair farm buildings, being south part of lot 29, in the first concession of Malahide, convenient to church, school and post office; also cheese factory, blacksmith shop and saw mill close at hand. \$1000 will buy the above on easy terms. Apply to C. O. LEARN, Real Estate Broker, Brown House Block, Aylmer, Ont.

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FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE—100 acres, being the south half of lot 26, con. 3, Township of Bayham, 75 acres cleared and free from stumps. All the necessary farm buildings in fair repair, orchard, 150 trees; 24 miles to Vienna Station. Price, \$8000, small payment down; balance on easy terms of payment. For further particulars, apply to C. O. LEARN, Real Estate Broker, Brown House Block, Aylmer, Ont.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE—100 acres being the north half of lot 29, in the Township of Malahide, formerly known as the Bedford farm, good buildings, good orchard, plenty of good crops; will sell cheap and on easy terms; will take a small farm in part payment. Apply to C. O. LEARN, Real Estate Broker, Brown House Block, Aylmer, Ont.

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FOR SALE—Three storey brick store, in the Township of Malahide, being part of lot 49, in the 10th concession of Malahide. The house is one and one-half stories, in fair shape, small barn, well fenced and well watered, fair buildings, very cheap for cash. For further particulars apply to C. O. LEARN, Real Estate Broker, Brown House Block, Aylmer, Ont.

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FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE—20 acres of choice land with good fair buildings, situated in a first-class neighborhood, being the north part of lot 10, north of the Township of Bayham, School and Methodist Church on adjoining farm two miles from Railway Station. This is the very best of clay loam soil, offered on very easy terms. A small payment required down. Fifteen years will give for balance, with interest at five per cent. Will take a small farm in part payment. Apply to C. O. LEARN, Real Estate Broker, Brown House Block, Aylmer, Ont.

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FOR SALE—Twenty acres, being part of lot 10, in the 5th concession of Bayham of farm buildings, only three-quarters of a mile to post office school, church, etc., six miles to cheese factory. Will sell cheap and on easy terms of payment. For further particulars, apply to C. O. LEARN, Real Estate Broker, Brown House Block, Aylmer, Ont.

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