

CHILDREN OF DESTINY.

A Novel by William J. Fischer.

Author of "Songs by the Wayside," "Winona and Other Stories," "The Teller," "The Years Between," etc. etc.

CHAPTER III.

ROSEMARY AND HUE. Somewhat nervously, Muriel moved a little closer to the window.

"Good-evening, Mazie," said Arthur with brevity. "Miss Rawlins, if you please, sir," interrupted Mazie, indignantly.

"Good-evening, Miss Rawlins, then"—and Arthur bowed gallantly. "I see you are not pleased," he continued, "that I called this evening, but I shall nevertheless make bold enough to offer myself a seat."

Rather unconcerned, Arthur sank into a comfortable arm-chair near by. Mazie's face flushed crimson. Every drop of blood seemed to have rushed to her cheeks.

"You are the moon, dear love, and I the sea;—the hope sweet high within my breast And hidden—"

"Lescot—the wretch!" groaned Arthur. Just then hate, jealousy and despair almost robbed Arthur of his senses.

"I'll kill him! I'll kill him!" he said to himself. Nervously his hand sought the pistol in his pocket. It flashed silver in the moonlight and crunched down in his hand.

"The top of the morning to you, Mister Arthur," he called briskly. "Good-morning, Matt. I am surprised to see you about so early."

"And I, you. May I ask what brought you out of bed so early, Arthur?" For a moment Arthur was perplexed. He had not been able to sleep for reasons which the reader already knows and had wandered out into the open air rather aimlessly, his mind in a state of deep unrest.

"Well," he declared, "I forgot to wind my watch last evening and when I awoke this morning, it pointed the hour of eight. When the cathedral chimed however pealed five I noticed the mistake. So that explains my early appearance. But it is so very pleasant out here I think I will remain. There's nothing like a good whiff of fresh air so early in the morning, eh, Matt?"

"A good whiff of fresh air and an easy conscience," rejoined the gardener. The words stung Arthur. His conscience was anything but easy at the moment, notwithstanding the resolution he had made.

"Be seated, Mister Arthur!" said Matt, pointing to a bench facing him. Presently the gardener raised himself from his knees and, leaning on his shovel, said: "By the way, Mister Arthur, I ha' somethin' to say to you, but you must not get angry at me for speakin' the truth."

"No, I shall not get angry. Go on!" "Well, I was over at Meeke's grocery store last night. It's a place the fellers call 'the night.' They talk an' argue like a lot of washerwomen an' then they fight like by-gones. Well, Bill Storms was there. Bill Storms, you know him—that big sort o' burly lookin' chap."

"Oh yes, Storms, the liverman's son. Well, I know him," interrupted Arthur. "Well, we got to discussin' politics an' then we drifted into a talk about the overly rich. Storms talked like a lawyer. He knew it all. He argued an' fought with his tongue an' then his face got as red as a tomato. 'Down with the rich man! He is the biggest enemy o' the poor people,' he cried. Then he asked me for my opinion but I said not a word. This made him angry. He didn't like my silence, so he up an' says: 'There sits a sleepy Matt Pency over there with his lips closed tight, afraid to say a word.' An' then he up again an' says: 'I know now why he won't commit himself. He daren't say one word. The Arthur Gravenor he is workin' for is one of them 'rusty cats.' My blood got boilin' hot. 'What did you say, Storms?' he cried. 'I said your master was one of them 'rusty cats.' 'Take back those words Bill Storms,' I cried an' I rose from my chair, 'or I'll make you.' 'I'll take nothing back,' he snapped again. 'Gravenor's a rusty cat. Isn't this so, Sins, Flare, Bates?' and he appealed to the other men. I jumped across the floor an' the next minute landed him a sweet one in the face with my fist, an' you bet, Mister Arthur, I'm sure he never received such a warm 'n' before. I'll teach him to call you a 'rusty cat.'"

"I feel sorry for Arthur," Mrs. Hawkins remarked, "but Muriel be careful not to mention the matter to him. If he knew that you tracked him to the place, he would never forgive you. He would hate you all his life for it."

"That evening Muriel went to bed with a heavy heart and drifted into a nervous sleep. Arthur, lest he might disturb the sleepers, tip-toed to his room across the hall. He did not turn on the light. The room was bathed in the moon's soft rays. One face looked out brighter than all the others on the wall. It was Mazie's. In a time of friendship she had given the picture to him. Long he stared at it. He felt sure he could never forget her. Love had set its tendrils too deeply into his heart and he feared they would have to remain there always. He could not sleep. The Past haunted him. He rose and opened the window. A cool breeze swept in cooling his face. Kempton slept peacefully. Afar off, the lakes flashed like sheets of molten glass beneath the starlit, blue heavens. Now and then a bird-voice sounded in the surrounding trees. It was like the cry of a soul, lost forever in impenetrable darkness. Presently the clock on the cathedral tower chimed the hour of midnight. Arthur sank into his chair and gazed for some time into the lonely night about him. His thoughts were still on Mazie. Later a new light came to his eyes, and he whispered to the stars about him: "I will not trouble her any more. God! give me the strength to do it, for in my heart I know I shall love her always! The old love can never die."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW FALLS.

Mat Pency had risen with the birds for he had a great many things to do

that day. The dawn was just breaking when he rose from his bed and sleepily walked over to the window. The regal day was just then donning its crimson garment in the east. The sun-children too were busy stirring their morning fires for the skies were growing very bright. Those precious early moments were one continual rhapsody of bird music. Everywhere the melodies echoed. Everywhere voices trilled and exulted. Everywhere cadenzas charmingly. The gates of heaven seemed to stand wide open as Matt gazed across the pleasant landscape. For some minutes he stood spellbound.

"Sure, this is a grand world to be in," he muttered to himself as he left the window, "and yet people are never satisfied. God gives them flowers, birds, an' sunshine in plenty. His fields yield them their daily food an' yet they grumble and grumble. I know I shall be very sorry when the call comes. It will be very hard to leave the big, wide green earth."

A few minutes later Matt was busy at work in his garden, his lips echoing the faintest words of a song. He always sang when the flowers began to come, but in the fall of the year when the place looked desolate and bare not a sound of song escaped his lips.

Before long the old gardener felt footsteps very near. Turning, he saw Arthur but a few feet away. "The top of the morning to you, Mister Arthur," he called briskly.

"Good-morning, Matt. I am surprised to see you about so early." "And I, you. May I ask what brought you out of bed so early, Arthur?"

"For a moment Arthur was perplexed. He had not been able to sleep for reasons which the reader already knows and had wandered out into the open air rather aimlessly, his mind in a state of deep unrest. Matt's question therefore rather puzzled him. He hardly knew how to answer it.

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"Well then he did, Mister—the little sneak." "Now, are you sure? You said that you were discussing the overly rich."

"Yes, well, might he not have said aristocrat? Then Arthur spelled the word 'A-r-i-s-t-o-c-r-a-t', aristocrat. Think again Matt. Isn't this the word?"

"By Jimmy! I believe it is," Matt cried, dropping his spade. "I feel kind o' sorry now for young Storms. I should not ha' struck him."

"It will do him no harm. Besides a 'rusty cat' and aristocrat sound so much alike the mistake could have been made quite easily."

Thereupon the two laughed good naturedly over the misunderstanding while in his heart Arthur gloried over the sworn fidelity of this trusty son of Adam.

Just then Noddles, Muriel's pet spaniel, appeared, wagging his tail in delight. Arthur bent over and stroked the sides of the pretty canine.

"See, Matt, how he speaks to us with his short tail," declared Arthur.

"Ah, he's a fine dog," said Matt, "all animation, an' how he does seem to speak, Mister Arthur. His tail bein' rather stumpy, I suppose he might be called a stumpy tailed dog. Mister Arthur and he roared loudly."

Presently Arthur rose to go. For a few moments he had forgotten his troubles—and Mazie.

"Must you go, Arthur?" asked Matt,

kindly. "Yes, I'm feeling just a little chilly. By the way, Matt, who was that woman I saw you talking to last evening down here at the first corner?"

"Oh, that was Miss Hogges, the old maid who keeps the seed-store on Wortley Street."

"Miss Hogges, did you say? The poor thing is to be pitied for having such a name."

"That she is, Mister Arthur. I pity her a whole heap, but then I'm gettin' too old an' it would be a shame to offer her my name now," and he chuckled lustily.

"Not every man who dives into the ocean of matrimony brings up a pearl, Matt," declared Arthur.

"Perhaps not. But at all events Hogges will always be on the market," answered Matt wittily.

"Falling in love is like falling into the sea," continued Arthur thoughtfully, "it's easier getting in than out."

There was a tinge of sadness in his voice. He had been a pupil in the cruel school of experience.

"Ah, blast all this love business anyway, Arthur. Give me the birds an' the flowers for company. That is all I want. A woman will jump into the sea for a man an' the story hoods just as good on the other side. It's the same everlasting question all the world over an' it's old as the hills. Now the women are raked over the coals—now the men. So I am content to steer clear o' all this bloomin' love business. But here's the best thing o' all, Arthur. There's a woman of my acquaintance—Jemima Jepson's her name. She beats them all. She lost her speech through a bad cold an' in one small week she had thirty offers of marriage."

"Now, now, Matt, that's a big one," laughed Arthur. "Poor Jemima! Well I must go Matt."

Matt, with spade in hand, was soon busy again.

"I don't know what's the matter with that boy at all—at all," he murmured to himself. "He looks so strange. He's got a world o' trouble in his eyes."

When Arthur entered the house he was met by Mrs. Hawkins.

"Where have you been, Arthur? I have been looking all over for you," she spoke nervously.

"I've been out with Matt in the garden."

"Surely not at this hour of the morning."

"Yes, he is out there digging. My watch played me false this morning and I consequently rose too early."

"But you have not been in bed at all, Arthur? The pillows and covers are just as I left them yesterday."

"True, auntie. When I came in last evening I was so very tired and I merely laid on the couch. But what is the matter, auntie? Your eyes look strange."

"I am afraid you will have to telephone for a doctor. Muriel is very ill. She woke me during the night. Her teeth chattered—she had a severe chill. All night long she has been talking strangely."

Arthur was totally upset. His sister was very dear to him and he hoped that no harm might come to her.

A moment later the two entered the sick girl's room. Muriel lay there with half-shut eyes, moving about uneasily. Her cheeks had a feverish flush and her lips were very parched. The fever temper was evidently raging.

"Arthur, Arthur!" she called strangely.

He hurried to her side and placed his hand upon her forehead.

"She does not know you are here, Arthur. See, her eyes remain closed."

"She is delirious," said Arthur. "Muttered she said Mazie was good," muttered the sick girl.

"Mazie!" gasped Arthur. "What can she mean?"

"I saw Mazie in the room," she continued "and Arthur was there—poor poor Arthur! I'll twine for them a rose wreath on their wedding morn. Mazie, Mazie! You must not cry—you are so dear to me. The angels are singing. I can hear them so plainly. A smile stole to her face, a sweet lingering smile which seemed to have come from afar."

Mrs. Hawkins left the room. "Last night's trial was too much for the poor thing," she thought to herself. "Even in her delirium she is unravelling the threads of her experiences. I hope Arthur will not discover her."

"Oh, God, keep Arthur from harm!" the sick girl pleaded.

"Muriel, Muriel!" he called loudly. "I am here! Listen! Open your eyes, your brother is standing before you!" But not a sign of recognition was written on the young girl's face. She was breathing faster and she spoke with difficulty.

"Take me away from these bad men! Mazie—Arthur—do you not hear me? They have come to carry me away. Then she mumbled strange sounding words which Arthur could not understand.

The first gleam of sunlight shone through the delicate lace curtain and lay about Muriel's hair like a halo of light.

Arthur bent over the tossing form and kissed tenderly the red lips.

"Poor little saint!" he whispered as he rose and gazed upon her. Then the tears came to his eyes. A few minutes later he left the room.

she had come across the torn pieces of that mysterious letter. For some days she had been thinking seriously of opening her heart to her brother and telling him all. But her courage failed her.

Arthur however, came to her rescue rather unexpectedly. Her references to Mazie during her flights of delirium had set his mind a-thinking. No wonder, then, that he spoke rather abruptly: "By the way, Muriel, the first day you were ill I went to your room but you did not recognize me. Your mind wandered on in strange delirium, yet you spoke of a certain Mazie quite frequently and you coupled mine name with hers. Then you spoke of rose-wreaths and weddings—"

Muriel's cheeks flushed crimson. Had she really referred to these things during her illness?

A painful silence stole between them for some minutes, their eyes staring strangely at each other.

Slowly Muriel began: "Yes, brother, there was more truth than fiction in what I was saying. But before going further, will you promise me not to get angry?"

"I promise, dear!"

Then Muriel related the details of that eventful evening in July—her finding a clue in the mysterious letter and her shadowing him to the Rawlin's cottage.

"It was love, Arthur, that urged me to go—love for a brother. I could not resist. The arms of a great temptation encircled me, and my heart urged me on. I felt that I had you to save—no matter the cost. That very night I caught the cold—"

Which came near ending in death, dear sister. However I can understand your anxiety in the matter and can blame you only in having been too kind to a brother who does not deserve your affection. Yes, Muriel, I loved Mazie, and now that she has gone out of my life, there will always be a vacant spot which no other shall ever fill."

"Do you mean then Arthur that you will never marry?"

"I do, sister. I always dreamed of possessing Mazie, and no woman living will ever be worthy to fill her place."

"She rose from her chair and walked over to him. "I pity you," lovingly she twined her arms about his neck.

"Come in," cried Muriel. "Oh, it is you Kitty?"

"Yes, Mister Arthur, the postman just called so I thought I would bring your mail up here," remarked the kindly Kitty.

"It's very good of you, Kitty. Thank you!"

"But what is the matter, Kitty?" asked Muriel. "You look as if your mind had been ruffled."

"Oh," replied Kitty, "a thin, miserable dyspeptic agent just rang the door bell. He thought I had a whole hour to spare listening to his story. Now, I didn't care whether his brooms were any better than ours. Oh, he was so bold. Imagine, he asked me: 'Is your master at home?' I replied: 'No, he's out, and besides, he never buys brooms.' 'Is your mistress in?' 'No, she's out, too.' Then he got fresh and said: 'Well, I'll just come in and warm my feet at the fire until they return.' But I took him short by telling him the fire was out, too, and he'd better call again to-morrow. And laughing, she ran out of the room."

"She is a great girl," said Arthur as he looked over his mail. "Ah, here's the Daily Chronicle. I wonder what's new to-day."

He had barely picked up the paper and commenced reading when unconsciously almost a few words escaped his lips.

"Too bad! too bad!" he whispered, but it was loud enough for Muriel's ears.

When he had gone Muriel picked up the Daily Chronicle. The first thing to meet her eyes was the announcement of Mazie Rawlins' marriage to Lawrence Lescot, and in her heart she felt sorry for her brother. It would all have been very nice if Arthur's dream had come true. God, however, willed otherwise.

But a few months before Love had built a beautiful garden in Arthur Gravenor's young heart, musical with bird song, bright with sunshine and odorous with rose perfume. But it was not to last long. Ever so soon the transformation had come. Now that same heart was nothing but a bleak desert—covered with the dust and ashes of young ruined hopes and dreams. Birds and sunshine and flowers had vanished in one moment. The fragrance of memory alone lingered. The dark heavy shadows had fallen.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A FALSE PROPHECY.

Now that I am an old man I judge that it is worth while to write down what I can recall of the things which happened many years ago. Hence I will write of the Prophet Elisha and of the Prophetess Rebecca Whiting; and of the days which stirred the souls of men—for even the least superstitions of us were disturbed as well, in the days of 1843.

It was a bleak day in April of that year. A day when the snow blew and the wind howled deservingly around the house; a day in which it was not good to be out of doors, for the wind had a sting to it, as it blew in from the sea, more biting than even in midwinter.

While the storm was at its height the Prophet came to our house, beating his way against the wind and snow as I have seen a schooner beat against the tide in coming up the bay. My father opened the door when he knocked, and a gust of snow whirled across the room. I saw a man tall and gaunt, with a light in his eyes I had never seen before. "Prepare to meet thy God!" he said abruptly, as he shook the snow from his beaver hat.

I started, fearing that he was insane; but my father laughed reassuringly. "We must prepare to keep warm, my friend," he said, genially. "Did you ever see such weather for the middle of April? In my opinion the month is doubling on its tracks and making its way back toward March instead of going on toward May."

"It is but the beginning of the end,"

man," said the stranger, solemnly. "The last days of the world are at hand and the King of Kings will soon be here. The days are numbered."

"That may all be, friend," said my father, "but the numbers will run into the tens of thousands yet, I hope; aye, millions, too, for aught we know. It is no given to man to know when the end of things will be. Are you travelling far?"

"I am from Ohio, and I am making my way east toward Jerusalem, for there I must be when the Lord comes. I travel slowly and warn people as I go to flee from the wrath to come. Is it possible, man, that you do not believe that the end of all things is at hand?"

"I in no more believe that you or any other man can know when the end of the world will come than I believe that your oak will be blown over by the storm to-day, after the century of storms it has withstood," pointing as he spoke to a giant tree, the pride of our farm and the neighborhood, which stood by our gate. But, even as his arm was outstretched there came a fearsome rush of wind from out of the east, which seized the old tree in its mighty grasp. There was a wild, impotent beating of the air with its tortured branches, the crash of splintering straining wood, and the great oak thundered to the ground, breaking our windows as the topmost limbs struck earth for many feet around, and the huge roots were dragged to the surface from their deep resting places beneath the frozen earth."

The very suddenness of the thing amazed us for a moment. Then the Prophet, pointing to the fallen tree, exclaimed in solemn tones: "Behold! God has given you a sign! Now will you believe? He has chosen you, by the sign of yonder prostrate oak, as his elect. He calls on you to make your peace with Him. As it was in the days of Noah few believed and the many perished. Once again I ask you: Do you believe?"

"My father was a man of hard common sense, but the strangeness of it all came over him as a feeling of awe. My mother was crying with fear, thinking that the Lord had indeed sent a sign to us, that He was coming soon, and even my father believed that it was the sign of the last day. But, to me, it looked like a strange coincidence, for I had long known that the old tree was dead and must sooner or later fall."

"My name is Elisha Wells," said the stranger, after the wreck of the tree had been cleared away and the windows mended as best they might be in such a storm. "But I am called the Prophet Elisha. I could tell of many strange things which I have seen and foretold. But there is one thing which I must show you, for it is this which brought me to the absolute knowledge that this is indeed the year of our Lord." He drew an egg, a trifle larger than an ordinary hen's egg, but of perfect shape and coloring, from his pocket. Its contents had been carefully blown out and the shell itself filled with plaster of paris. He held of this as he passed it to my mother. "It was laid by one of my own hens. Look at it closely and tell me what you see," he said impressively.

My mother passed her fingers over it as she held it up to the light. "It looks as if these ridges on the shell were figures," she said slowly.

"They are," said the Prophet. "Read them," he commanded.

"A three, a four, and eight and a one," she said in an awed tone.

"You have them read the one," he corrected. "Begin with the one."

"One—Eight—four—three," she read slowly. "Eighteen forty-three," she repeated in a dazed way. "Who put these marks on this egg?" she questioned suddenly.

"The Lord of Hosts!" he replied decisively. "No human hand could have ridged that shell. He chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the mighty. I was, like Paul of old, an open believer; I needed a sign; so when this was sent to me I could not help but believe. Others all over the country have received such signs and thousands upon thousands are turning from the paths of sin; for now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. I will read to you from the prophecies and you will see how everything points to October of this year. The word of God never lies and it cannot err." And until far into the night he read and expounded the mystical meaning of the Book of Revelation as well as the sayings of the prophets, until my parents believed as well as he. They were sorely grieved because I did not believe likewise, but to this day I cannot help but wonder at their credulity in believing the signs and omens of that strange year.

The snow which fell that day remained on the ground for nearly a week. I believe that I said that it was the middle of April, but I think now that it was not much later than the 10th; still it was very strange and cold weather for our latitude. The next day I took the sleigh and drove some three miles to the home of Israel Whiting, on business for my father, and the prophet went with me; and by his burning eloquence and almost magical power he had of swaying the hearts of men, he converted the Whiting family to his way of thinking; a proceeding which troubled me greatly, for Rebecca and I were sweethearts and had planned to be married in the fall. After the Prophet's visit, however, she would not hear of it.

"There is no use to argue with me, David," she said firmly. "In heaven there are no marriages and no one is given in marriage; and as the end of all things is at hand, we must remain as we are."

But all the more need of our being married immediately, I urged, "if you are so sure that the end of the world is coming soon—although I do not believe a word of it, led us be married to-day or to-morrow, instead of waiting any longer."

"No, David. We could not be husband and wife then, and the pain of being separated from you eternally, after a few months of wedded life, would destroy for me the happiness of heaven," she answered resolutely.

"But we would be together, just the same," I insisted. "What ails you, Re-