

# SIR WILLIAM'S WILL

CHAPTER IX.

Jack rowed a little way out, and followed the coastline; and, of course, rowed in silence.

He had come to Withycombe on the impulse of the moment, and just because it occurred to him that he would like to see it again. He was not in the mood for London, for his father's death had hit him hard, and the fact that he had died in enmity with him had filled him with a regret, and caused a softening of the heart, which made him long for quiet and repose. And Withycombe, he remembered, was quiet enough.

The fisherman's kit was adopted as much for convenience as disguise; he was fond of the sea, he had worked his passage out to Australia, and he plausibly accounted for his presence at Withycombe by telling the simple fisher folk that he was out of a job, and fancied a spell of rest. No one had recognized him. Mrs. Bunce would have done so, of course, but Mrs. Bunce was dead, and her daughter did not recognize the good-looking young fisherman the lad who had scamped about the place in the by-gone years.

Jack, not having heard of the Misses Bramleys' arrival, had no idea of the identity of the two girls who had engaged him as if he were an ordinary fisherman. He felt rather amused, and was not at all annoyed at their mistake; indeed, it was a tribute to the excellence of his disguise; and he considered it rather a pleasant way of spending the morning, far pleasanter than rowing by himself, or lounging on the beach brooding over the miserable past.

Every now and then he glanced at Clytie, who was leaning back, her eyes fixed on the small village of white cottages which climbed from the beach itself, and wound in broken line through the ravine until it was lost among the trees above. It was as beautiful a scene in its way as any part of England can show, and Clytie, as she sat and gazed at it, surrendered to her. He listened in a kind of dream to the girls as they talked and laughed.

"Clytie, you're getting your feet fear-

fully wet!" said Mollie reproachfully; but Clytie laughed almost gaily; she seemed as young, as girlish, as Mollie at that moment.

"Who cares?" she cried.

"That's all very well," retorted Mollie. "But what would Doctor Morton say?"

"So, she was ill, delicate, thought Jack as he watched her.

"What does it matter? Besides, salt water never hurts one," replied Clytie carelessly.

"That's a mistake, a popular fallacy," said Jack involuntarily.

Both girls straightened themselves. They had been bending in search of the shells—and looked at him with a scarcely veiled surprise; and Jack bit his lip and looked, in his confusion, very much as a fisherman would look who had been guilty of an involuntary presumption.

"I beg your pardon," he said—it seemed to him that he was always suing for forgiveness—"but salt water is just as likely to give you cold as fresh. Why, nearly all the old people in Withycombe have rheumatism—so I'm told."

"If that's the case—and he ought to know; he's a sailor—you'd better come home as soon as possible and get your feet dry," said Mollie. "I don't want to have you laid up with a feverish cold or rheumatism, or whatever it is cold feet give you."

"Nonsense!" said Clytie, resuming her hunt for the shells. "You talk as if I were an old woman."

"You're worse; you're young and giddy," retorted Mollie. "We've got quite enough; let us go now; besides, I'm hungry. What shall we do with the shells?"

"We're like the poor millionaires," said Clytie, with a laugh. "Embarrassed by our riches."

"Put them in this basket," said Jack, holding it out.

Like children they poured in their treasures. Then Clytie went to step into the boat. Jack jammed it against the rock and held out his brown hand; and Clytie put her white one into it. His strong fingers closed over hers, and seemed to support, to steady, her whole body. Mollie put her small paw on his shoulder and jumped in. His pea-jacket lay in the bottom of the boat, and gradually he managed, as if unconsciously, to drag and push it forward with his feet until it touched Clytie's; then he remarked, as if the thought had just struck him:

"You might as well put this round you, miss."

"Oh, no, thanks!" said Clytie, with a laugh. "My feet are not at all cold; and I'm not at all likely to catch cold; I never do. My sister was only joking."

"Yes, put it round them!" said Mollie. And she bent forward to take the coat; but Jack, as if he had not noticed her intention, drew the thick coat over Clytie's knees and dexterously turned it under her feet.

"That's first-rate—and very thoughtful of you, Douglas," said Mollie. "They say that Jack is always the handy-man."

"Yes, Jack's my name," he said.

"Oh, it is? Yes, I'd forgotten; I meant a sailor, of course. Row quickly, please; I don't want my sister to sit too long."

Clytie looked at her with faint surprise and reproach, but laughed amusedly as she said:

"Mollie, I decline to be treated as if I were an invalid, especially as there is nothing whatever the matter with me. Why, I'm stronger than you!"

"You!" retorted Mollie scornfully. "I'll bet you I walk you, swim you, ride you, row you, for— for a dozen pairs of gloves—Pine's!"

"Done!" responded Clytie, imitating the boyish challenge.

"You couldn't row from here to the pier!" declared Mollie contemptuously. "I don't believe you could get those frog's paws of yours round the oars!"

"Clytie rose promptly, but Mollie pulled her back again.

"No, no! You look so comfy! But I think I'll have a turn, please," she said to Jack.

He glanced at her hand sideways, but Mollie had the quick eyes of a monkey, and caught him.

"Oh, yes, my hands are large enough. They're ever so much bigger than my sister's. Look!" she said, holding them out.

"Yes, they'll go round," he said, with a smile. He gave up his place, and was going to the vacant seat beside Clytie; but, suddenly remembering himself, pretended to arrange the coat, and went into the bow.

"How heavy it is!" remarked Mollie, after a pull or two. "Why, no wonder! The boat's all down in front. Go to the stern, please, Douglas."

"The boat's all right," he returned, almost sullenly, and therefore more like a fisherman than any former speech of his was.

"Go and do as you're told," said Mollie, sharply.

But she had met her match. He

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got up and reached for the oars. "Better let me take her in, miss," he said, in the tone which always obtained obedience for Jack Douglas, the other before which Teddy's lofty spirit had bent submissive. "There's a current setting off the shore, and you may not hit the channel."

Mollie looked up at him for a moment rebellious; then Clytie said: "Come back to your seat." Mollie's eyes fell, and she obeyed.

The tide had run out since they started, and he saw that if the girls tried to land without assistance they would have to wade. He leaped to shore with a painter in his hand, and pulled up the boat as far as it would go, but it was not far enough to permit them to step out dry-foot. Without a moment's hesitation, and in a matter-of-fact way, he went to the side of the boat and held out his arms.

Mollie went into them with a spring that would have knocked him over if he had been less strong, and laughingly clung to him as he carried her to shore. Then he returned for Clytie. She had not been carried in a fisherman's arms since she was a child, and she hesitated, standing with one foot on the gunwale of the boat, and eyeing the water doubtfully.

"There used to be a landing-board," she said.

Jack looked round. "There isn't one here now," he answered.

"Oh, well," she murmured, with an air of resignation, and he took her in his arms. She was very little heavier than Mollie, but for some reason or other, Jack's heart beat fast, and he felt a strange embarrassment and awkwardness, which did not, however, discover itself, for he bore her with apparent ease—and indifference—to the beach, and did not deposit her until he could do so on absolutely dry land.

"Thank you," she said, quite placidly, and without the trace of a blush; why should she be confused?

Jack touched his cap, and was turning away with an apologetic:

"Oh, I forgot!"

She felt in her pocket, consulted in a whisper with Clytie, then said:

"I'm so sorry, but we haven't any money with us. We will pay you to-morrow."

For the life of him Jack could not prevent the rush of blood to his face, but he said, with feigned politeness:

"It's of no consequence." Then he added, on a sudden impulse: "Shall you want me to-morrow?"

"Shall we, Clytie?" asked Mollie.

"Oh, I don't know. But perhaps you

had better keep about. We'll send word. Good morning. Come on, Clytie, I'm simply starving!"

Jack tugged the boat up the beach, and, lighting a pipe, sat down beside it.

The situation was a bit grotesque, he thought. Here was he, Sir Wilfred Carton, a baronet, playing at fisherman, boatman, and "waiting" on the girl who might have been his wife. It was all very well for a day, was rather amusing than otherwise; but—but had he not better take himself off? Why should he remain in England, to be harassed and worried by his proximity to the hall, and—and what might have been? Out there in Parraluna a warm welcome awaited him; he had half the prospect in Silver Ridge, was not quite a beggar—in Australia; while here—

But he had asked if the girls would want him on the morrow, and had been hidden by Mollie to "keep about!" Yes, it was funny, very, he told himself, and he smiled, but rather ruefully. Then he thought of the two sisters. He liked Mollie—a rippling little tomboy, and as quick as a needle. He had seen that in the glance he had got of her in the churchyard. And, of course, that was—Clytie, he should say—Miss Bramley—who was playing the organ. Though she had scarcely spoken twenty words to him, he felt that he liked Clytie better even than he liked the younger girl. She had altered so much that it almost seemed to him as if he were making her acquaintance for the first time. How gentle she was. And yet there was strength of character behind those gray eyes, indicated by the firm lips with their dainty curve of sadness, of wistfulness.

Now, supposing that he had not quarrelled with his father and left England to wander in strange lands; supposing Clytie and he had grown up together—it was just possible that he and she—

He awoke from his dreams, and, with a rather angry gesture, muttered:

"What an idiot I am, to moon like this! What's the use of supposing things, that and the other? I've settled things once and for ever, and the best thing I can do is to clear out, to go where there's work waiting for me. She'll make a splendid mistress of the Hall, will marry a decent chap, a nice earl or marquis—she wouldn't make a bad duchess, by George—and—well!—What is it, Mary Mavourneen?"

The little girl of the cottage where he was lodging came unsteadily down the beach toward him.

"Mavourneen says your dinner's ready," she said; "and gettin' cold!"

"And I'm ready for the dinner, and I'm precious warm; been getting into hot water, Mary."

He swung the child on his shoulder and marched up to the cottage.

He was lodging in a little rook's nest of a place stuck half-way on the hill which commanded a view of the sea and the road that wound through the valley; his landlady was the widow of an old fisherman, with one child, the Mary Mavourneen aforesaid; and both the mother and the child had taken a great fancy to their young lodger; and both, after the pleasing way of women, had begun thus early to domineer over him, and to regard him as one of those simple and helpless men who require careful looking after in the matter of meals and wet clothing.

"Do'ee put the chill down and come to your dinner," said Mrs. Westaway; "it's been waitin' for ever so long, and must be as cold as charity, tho' I've done my best to heat it up for you. You men, the best of you, 'ud worse a woman to a skeleton. Polly, come off Mr. Douglas' knee."

"No, no; let her stop where she is," said Jack. "You stay and see that I don't eat too much, Mary. It's your mother's fault if I do; best steak pudding I ever tasted. If Eve had been half as good a cook as you, Mrs. Westaway, Adam wouldn't have got into trouble over his gardening. Didn't you say there was a cushion for that boat, and didn't I see a scrubbing brush lying about somewhere? should like to give her a good cleaning."

"Cushion? No, of course there isn't; and you didn't see any brush o' mine lyin' about, because I keep 'em in their place. But there's an old cushion somewhere, and you can have a brush. I suppose you want to spruce her up for the young ladies from the Hall?"

"There's no concealing anything from you, Mrs. Westaway," said Jack.

"I thought as much. Well, they're worth taking a little trouble over, for, bless their hearts, they're like all the Bramleys, sweet and kind to the core. I like the old families myself, Mr. Douglas."

"Hear, hear!" said Jack.

"They're both as sweet as they can be," she went on, "and have always got a word for one. Miss Mollie—Lor', what a handful she must be to Miss Clytie, bless her!—must stop on her way up to Mrs. Fry's, though she was late for lunch, to a handful of chocolates. What have you done with them, miss?"

"I've eat 'em, all but this one for Jack," said Mory, proffering a moist and dilapidated chocolate cream.

"Thank you, Mary Mavourneen," said Jack gravely, as he disengaged the sticky mess from the warm pink little palm. "I'll eat it with the rest of the sweets. When I've finished, you can come down and clean the boat while I help by looking on. That's the way, isn't it, Mrs. Westaway?"

"Yes, that's the way with most men," she assented, with a sigh; "but you're one of the soft sort, I'm thinkin'!"

When he had finished his pipe, Jack took Polly on his shoulder—she

## Such a Change



in feelings and looks.

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was already so accustomed to her beast of burden that she could ride by holding on with one hand only—and, with his brush sticking out of his pocket, went down toward the beach. As he crossed the road, Clytie and Mollie, on horseback, rode up. Clytie, with a smile at the child, rode on; but Mollie stopped, and, as she held the fidgeting horse well in hand, said:

"So you're going for a ride, too, Polly? I hope your horse is quieter and better tempered than mine."

"He's the best horse as ever was," said Polly emphatically.

"Say 'ass' and you'd be right," muttered Jack.

"I'm glad to hear it," remarked Mollie. "Oh, Douglas, we shall want you to-morrow, in the afternoon. Have everything ready, please."

"Certainly—thank you, miss," said Jack.

He turned as she went on, his eyes fixed on Clytie. How slight and graceful she looked in her habit; and how well she sat her horse. Suddenly he saw a horseman coming down the hill road. Jack's eyes were as keen as a hawk's, and he recognized the thin, pale-faced man with the dark hair he had met the night he had arrived, as he was going into Mr. Granger's.

Mrs. Westaway had come out of the cottage with a pitcher, to draw water from the village well; he waited until she had come up to him, then he said:

"Do you know who that gentleman is, Mrs. Westaway?"

She shaded her eyes with her hands; her sight was not so good as Jack's.

"No—yes; that's Mr. Hesketh Carton, of the Pit Work," she replied.

(To Be Continued.)

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