

"Is it any thing dangerous, Mr. Arnton? My uncle will recover, will he not?" Kate asked, when, after a careful examination of his patient, Edgar stood for a minute or two in the wide, old-fashioned hall.

Very charming looked the questioner, and there was no wonder that Arnton was once more magnetized.

"I sincerely trust so, Miss Gerrow," he replied; "of course I dare not disguise from you that there is risk—grave risk—that is inseparable from such cases; but I see not the least reason for despair. Pray do not worry yourself unnecessarily."

"My uncle is the only relative I have living in the whole west of England," she said. "You will not conceal his real condition from me at any time, I beg, Mr. Arnton?" she subjoined.

"No, Miss Gerrow, I will be quite frank; although it is a medical privilege to be discreet, you know. But you will need a trained nurse; the work will be too delicate for ordinary servants and too wearying by far for you. May I send one from the Holstead Infirmary?"

"If you think that will be the best course to take. But I shall certainly wait on uncle principally myself."

And so Kate did. And day by day in his visits Edgar Arnton met her, and fell more deeply, more indubitably in love. Not that he abandoned in any degree his determination to refrain from becoming Kate's suitor. That resolve was as firm as ever. He simply elected to drift with the tide.

The patient gradually recovered, and bore grateful testimony to Edgar's professional skill.

The mend was not for long, though; a message in the dead of night some few weeks after took Edgar hurriedly away to Brixby Lodge, to find that another and a severer seizure had proved immediately fatal.

Kate's grief was intense. Edgar must have seemed strangely cold and distant in the dark days before the funeral, for he was compelled to keep down his sympathy with an iron hand, and to breathe condolence in the most conventional of phrases. But for so doing he felt morally sure that his vow of personal silence would have been irretrievably broken; and he meant to conquer yet.

But in the course of time an odd rumor reached him. The old man's will had been read, and Kate was not an heiress, after all. With a chaos of conflicting emotions surging within his breast, Edgar called on Mr. Trent and learned the truth.

"The document is dated ten years back—before Miss Gerrow came to live with her uncle," said the solicitor; "there is no doubt as to its genuineness. Every one thought he had made a later one—I did myself—but none can be found beside this. I suppose he put the business off, as so many people do, until it was too late. The property all goes to a wealthy Lancashire manufacturer."

"How does Kate—Miss Gerrow take it?"

"As quietly as you may guess. Some girls would have been almost killed by the disappointment, but not she. You had better go up and see her; she is not an heiress now. Indeed, she'll have barely enough to live upon, unless this cousin does something for her—which is doubtful."

Edgar took the advice, and went up to the desolate great house the same afternoon. Some commonplaces passed, and then that old, old story burst forth, which somehow always seems to me far too sacred to be written out in detail on any author's scribbling-paper. Edgar made a full confession, and not in vain.

"The saddest experiences of my youth," he said, "came through a marriage for money and through misplaced confidence. Very early I vowed that that mistake should in no shape ever be mine; that nobody should ever throw fortune-hunting of that kind in my teeth. And yet"—with a smile of infinite content—"I am not certain, Kate, after all, whether love would not have beaten me in the end."

"I hope so," the maiden answered shyly.

III.

There was a sale at Brixby Lodge, and in due course one of the Lancashire manufacturer's sons, who had recently married, came down and was installed as his father's representative.

Edgar Arnton had arranged that Kate Gerrow should

reside in London with his sisters, until such an interval had passed as etiquette prescribed. At the sale he was a large purchaser, and, poor as, by comparison, he had once styled himself, the house he furnished was one of the best in the village.

Wedding and honeymoon were both over. Edgar had just come in from his day's round of visits, and was standing with his wife at the window, gazing out at the fast-falling snow-flakes that foreboded a white Christmastide. Suddenly there was a crash behind that caused both to look round. A Persian kitten, gambolling mischievously on the top of an escritoire, had knocked down the plaster figure of an antique cup-bearer. The fragile article of vertu was broken into a dozen fragments, amidst which a tiny silver key revealed itself.

"That is where the key of uncle's Japanese cabinet went to, then," said Kate; "the hand and arm of the image must have been hollow, and the key, once put into the cup, slipped through into the interior."

"Odd, certainly," answered Edgar; "let us try if it is the one."

He went out, and from the next room fetched a small inlaid cabinet of exquisite workmanship. The key fitted at once.

"I was sure it would. I knew it again at first sight," said the lady. "It is fortunate we waited and did not trouble to force the box open; that would inevitably have spoilt it. I don't suppose there is any thing in the casket, though."

"O, but there is!" ejaculated Edgar, as at that instant he poised up the delicate lid, and caught sight of a tight little roll of paper. Kate watched in silent surprise; Edgar slowly undid the bundle, a shrewd suspicion of what he had found flashing upon him, and making his ordinarily firm, white fingers hot and bungling.

"It is your uncle's real will, his last and legal will, I should say, rather," Edgar said, with a gasp; found just where he might have been expected to have placed it, and where searchers might equally have been expected to miss it. Quite a wonder I bought the cabinet!" And then he read slowly, till the full moment of the discovery had been realized by both brains.—how land and houses and money, snugly invested in consols, had all been devised, without either reservation or qualification, to Mr. Gerrow's beloved niece, Kate, "the companion of his old age and the faithful guardian of his interests."

Husband and wife gave each a long, earnest look, which ended in a mutual smile and a caress.

"Despite all precautions you have married an heiress, then, Edgar," said Kate, merrily; "the pity of it is, it's quite too late in the day to disown her now."

"As if I could possibly wish to!"

Mr. Trent laughed likewise. "All's well that ends well," he said. He was speedily put in possession of the recovered document, acquainted Mr. Mudbury with the circumstances, and convinced the manufacturer how futile it would be to contest his cousin's claim. In a very brief space the Lancashire gentleman returned in disgust to his own district. Brixby Lodge became the residence of the Arntons and their children.

Both husband and wife treasure the once lost key above its weight in gold. But for its opportune disappearance, two loving souls might have remained apart. To it Kate says she owes her husband, and by it Edgar thinks truly that he has both kept his vow (in the spirit) and won a wife with a fortune.

SPOILED MARRIAGES:

Some Hitches at the Altar.

The question how near a couple can come to being married without actually becoming husband and wife was answered in a very extraordinary case reported not long ago from Lyons in France. All the preliminaries, including the marriage contract—the bride being an heiress—had been arranged with the utmost harmony, and the day had arrived for the civil marriage—which, under the law of the Republic, is the binding one—in the morning, and for the blessing of the priests at the cathedral altar in the afternoon. The parties were before the Mayor, and what a Chicago lawyer, addressing a divorce jury, called "the fatal question" had