

A Chip of The Old Block

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manded his wife and older children never to mention Robert or Agnes Glover's name in his hearing again. This command was obeyed. For fifteen years Agnes had been as dead to her father as if she had been buried under six feet of turf.

They had been hard years for her. She had a large family, and Robert was a careless and improvident husband. For the last two years he had been ill with consumption and if it had not been for kindly neighbours his family would have been in utter want.

On the day of the funeral Mrs. Carter took her poor courage in both hands and asked her husband if she could go—or at least if Mary might go, for appearance's sake. David Carter furiously demanded what appearances needed to be consulted in the case of a stranger's funeral. He ordered her and Mary to dress in their best and go with him to a political picnic in Carmody. They obeyed, and great was the scandal of that same shrinking, shame-faced obedience in Avonlea.

But Robert Glover was buried and then the neighbours took up the case of his wife and family. A delicate woman—seven young children—nothing for them to live on! What was to be done? The answer was prompt. Her father must help her; he was well able to do it. But who was to be the lion in his den and tell him so? One and all, the Avonlea people refused. Finally, they took a mean advantage of their new minister, who had not been long enough among them to have learned fully what manner of man David Carter was. They told him that it was his duty and privilege to reconcile father and daughter, so he went obligingly.

Poor Mr. Bentley! To his dying day he never forgot that interview. He met David Carter in the yard. Carter was surlier than usual that day; he did not even ask the minister in. His wife and Mary crouched behind the curtains of the open parlour window to listen; they knew why the minister had come; Jim Boulter also knew and he took care to hoe the onion beds within earshot.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Carter," said Mr. Bentley affably.

"Good afternoon. What have you come for?" said David Carter bluntly. Mr. Bentley was not accustomed to being asked his reason for calling so unceremoniously. It rattled him.

"Oh—I—ahem—I have called—been asked to call—to tell you—about your daughter, Mr. Carter. I—"

"Why, what has Mary been doing?" asked David Carter stolidly.

"Mary? Oh, your younger daughter? I did not refer to her, but to your other daughter, Mrs. Glover."

"I have no other daughter." David Carter planted the pitchfork he was carrying in the ground before him, put his hands on top of it, bowed his chin on them, and looked squarely at the minister with a black scowl. "I have only one daughter, Mary, who lives here with me. If you have anything to say of her, say it and have done."

The minister had got his second wind, and, being a plucky little man, did not quail.

"You have another daughter, Mr. Carter," he said firmly. "You cannot do away with the relationship by any arbitrary decree. Mrs. Glover is your daughter and she is at present in very poor circumstances. It is your duty to help her, Mr. Carter, since you are amply able to do so. Have you no pity? I sincerely hope—"

"Stop!" David Carter fairly shouted the word. He was purple with rage. "Hold your tongue," he went on furiously. "I won't hear another word from you. Mind your own business. You come here and talk to me about religion and I'll listen to you. But leave my family affairs alone. That woman and her young ones are nothing to me—nothing. They needn't come whining to me for help, for I'll never give it. And you go! If you wasn't a minister I'd teach you to interfere with what doesn't concern you. As it is, get out."

The minister got out. He realized that this was one of the times when discretion is the better part of valour. He went away, pale and horror-stricken, and told the people who had sent him that he could not influence Mr. Carter.

He did not give them the particulars of the interview, but Jim Boulter did. By the next day Agnes Glover heard them. Mrs. Peter Sloane, her next door neighbour, dropped in and told her that her father had abused the minister scandalously and hoped she'd starve—the latter assertion being a bit of embroidery on somebody's part. Agnes wept, and said, oh, wasn't it hard? Her own father, to be so bitter! She didn't see how he could be!

Her children were all around her, wistful, pale-faced, frightened—all except Christina, the second girl. Christina sat back in a corner, with her hands gripping the chair rungs on either side. She neither talked nor cried, although she could do both when she had a mind to. She did not look like the other children, who were all meek and drab-coloured. Christina had black hair, hanging in a heavy, straight braid, deep-set black eyes, and crimson cheeks. Her mouth was close-shut and determined, her chin gave the world assurance of a chin. As she listened to Mrs. Sloane's story, at which her mother whimpered, her eyes grew blacker, her cheeks redder, her lips tighter. Finally she got up and left the room.

Nobody noticed her departure. She put on her little black hat and left the house. It was a mile and a half to David Carter's place, and thither Christina proceeded, silently and determinedly. She had never been there in her life, but she walked unhesitatingly across the yard and into the house, without knocking. There was nobody in the kitchen so Christina marched across it and pushed open the sitting room door.

Mrs. Carter and Mary were working in the garden. David Carter was sitting by the window, reading his newspaper. Christina's eyes flashed dangerously when she saw him. She walked inflexibly across the room, caught the paper from his hand, threw it on the floor, and stamped on it.

David Carter stared at her in blank amazement. He had not the least idea who she was, but he felt that she was an enemy. Antagonism radiated from every curve of her body, every feature of her face; it exhaled from her like a breath.

"Who the devil are you?" he demanded, more in bewilderment than in anger.

Christina drew a long breath. Unquittingly she glared back into the eyes against which so few people could hold their own.

"I am Christina Glover," she said, clenching her brown fists, "and I have come here to tell you to your face just what I think of you. You are a bad-tempered, cruel, unjust old man! I hate you! I despise you! I wouldn't have you for a grandfather! I am not afraid of you. And I am glad you disowned my mother! She is far too good to have such a man as you for her father. You said you were glad my father was dead. My father was a good man, and people loved him but nobody ever loved you. You said you hoped we'd starve. Well, we won't starve! But I'd rather starve than take any help from you! You are a tyrant! You make grandma's life miserable, and you make Aunt Mary's life miserable, and you made Uncle Henry's and Uncle Reuben's lives miserable before they went away. They were all frightened of you, but I am not. I don't care what you say or do. If you strike me I'll strike you back. I'll scratch you. I came here just to tell you my opinion of you and it's this—you are not fit to live!"

David Carter had listened to this tirade in the silence of absolute amazement. When Christina stopped for lack of breath, with a final stamp of her foot, he suddenly burst into loud laughter. With a mighty slap of hand on knee he exclaimed:

"I vow you've got spunk! You're a chip of the old block! There's nothing white-livered about you. You're a Carter. I didn't know Agnes had such a daughter. You're worth doing something for. I like spunk. Sit down—sit down."

"I will not." Christina's eyes flashed more than ever. She thought that she was being made fun of—treated con-

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