ALL FOR LOVE.

CHAPTER VII.

BETH RUNS AWAY.

(Continued.)

He reached his destination late in the afternoon, sought the nearest hotel, where he got rid of the dust of travel, and made some change in his apparel; then took a carriage and was driven directly to Miss Prudence Russell's thrifty farm, which was located on the outskirts of the charming mountain village, which, of late years, had become a popular summer resort.

When he arrived Mr. and Miss Russell were seated upon the broad, cozily furnished piazza, the only modern innovation which the present owner had ever permitted to change or embellish her childhood's home. Philip found Mr. Russell sadly changed, by his illness, from the alert, handsome man of ten years ago, though the warmth of his greeting assured him that the same genial, generous heart beat in his bosom; but his voice grew suspiciously tremulous when he remarked to Philip that he should never have recognized the stripling of a decade previous in the bronzed, broad-shouldered man of to-day. Miss Prue's gentle heart warmed toward him instantly, and she betrayed it as she graciously welcomed him to her home, but with a secret sigh of regret that Beth had been so hasty in writing to have the proposed relation between them annulled.

"You have been on the train nearly all day, Mr. Walton, and I am sure you need refreshment," she smilingly observed, on hospitable thoughts intent. "Of course we were expecting you, so a plate is laid for you, and our evening meal is ready to be served."

Philip thanked her, but remarked that he had eaten a hearty luncheon in the dining car about one o'clock.

"Oh, but that was hours ago, and I am sure you are hungry by this time. Come, you and brother can talk over old times while you are eating, and so lose no time," she cordially returned, adding as she saw Philip's glance wandering about, "I am sorry Beth is not here to greet you——"

"Beth not here!" repeated Philip, his face falling.

"No, she has gone to York Harbor for a visit to her friend, Mrs. Armstrong. She left on Monday," Miss Prue explained.

On Monday. That was the day she had written to him. So Beth had run away from him, and left him to settle the disagreeable conditions of Miss Crawford's will with her father, he thought with a touch of chagrin. But—with a settling of his firm chin—he would see her yet, all the same, and have a straightforward talk with her. He had really been fond of her as a child, and he wished to renew their friendly relations, even if he did not want her for a wife. He must also try to efface the sting of those cruel words which she had overheard on her unsuspected perch in the old beech tree.

The evening meal proved to be a bountiful repast, such as only an old-fashioned country housewife can set before a guest, and to it the traveller did ample justice. Afterward Miss Prue, seconded by her brother, insisted that Philip should remain with them during his sojourn in the town, saying she would send a man to the hotel for his grip; then she busied herself with various household duties, leaving the gentlemen free to say all that was in their hearts to each other.

During the conversation Mr. Russell expressed his great disappointment in view of the stand Beth had taken regarding their union, saying he knew of the letter she had written him.

"Of course," he observed, "I have always felt that Eliza Crawford's will was a preposterous piece of folly, and, in this advanced age, compulsory match-making is a fatal mistake. Yet I have hoped, all these years—let alone the desire to keep that money where it belonged—that you and Beth would find your affinity in each other, and so perpetuate, in a more sacred union, the long friendship that has existed between the two families."

"I know my father felt the same way, for he always declared that Beth was the brightest girl of her age he had ever seen, and would make a splendid woman;" said Philip, adding gravely: "And I came home at this time, Mr. Russell, as I wrote you, to fulfill the conditions of the will; but, as Beth has said, we are almost strangers to each other, and I could not for a moment think of forcing anything of a repulsive nature upon her. I am sure you would not wish it, either."

"No, I would not have her do anything that was—er—repulsive to her," Silas Russell thoughtfully admitted, while he covertly studied the young man's averted face; "nor you, either, my boy," he added after a moment. "How is it, Philip: Will the loss of this money be a disappointment to you?"

"In a way it will," the young man replied. "Not because of my own personal loss, for I am well fixed financially, and have always felt I had no moral right to any part of Miss Crawford's sentimental legacy; but, since learning of your reverses, I have been bitterly rebellious over this preposterous piece of folly—as you rightly term it—and the injustice of it as well; especially since, now that I am appointed one of the trustees, I shall have to see that the will is carried out. I swear, Mr. Russell, it makes me feel almost like a robber, and it is a burning shame!" he concluded, flushing with indignation.

"No blame can be attached to you, Philip, and I can understand that you find yourself in an unpleasant position," said Mr. Russell with a sigh. "I confess," he went on, "that I had hoped, if this money had come to her, that Beth would lend me enough to see me on my feet again——"

He broke off suddenly, looking so utterly discouraged, his lips unsteady, his massive chin quivering with repressed emotion, that Philip was deeply moved also.

"I will do that, Mr. Russell," he said eagerly, "and that was part of my errand in coming to you. I have money to invest, and I shall want something to do myself, now that I have returned; so if you want a partner, take me into business with you, and we will try our luck together. What do you say?"

Mr. Russell got up suddenly and walked the length of the piazza and back. When he sat down again he looked like a different man, his eyes were bright, his manner alert.

"Philip, you can have no idea what your offer means to me," he said, a new hope vibrant in his tones. "With returning health I know my business capacity will be just as vigorous as ever. Capital is all I need to give me both courage and opportunity to regain the ground I have lost. You are your father's own boy—a noble, generous-hearted man, and from the depths of my heart I thank you. But, we will not talk any more about it to-night. I feel we both should think the matter over more carefully before deciding it definitely. Now let us go inside and join my sister, who, I know, will be glad to make your acquaintance. You have hardly seen each other yet."

Philip gave him his arm and helped him into the house, for, in spite of the new hope which seemed to animate him, he could see the man was greatly excited over their conversation, and was trembling visibly. They spent a social hour with Miss Prue, whom Philip found most charming, and he secretly wondered how it was possible that so sweet a woman had lived so long without finding her proper mate.

The next morning, Mr. Russell was the first one downstairs, and surprised every one by the change in his appearance. His face was bright and animated, his movements alert, his step firm and steady. It was as if he had imbibed some subtle elixir that had put new life into him during the night.

"Why, Silas, surely the coming of our guest has done you a world of good. You seem years younger than you appeared last night," his sister joyously observed as they sat down to the breakfast table.

"Philip has done me good, Prue. I feel like another man this morning. He has generously proposed to set me up in business again, coming in with me as partner, and, my boy, after giving the subject earnest consideration, I am going to accept your offer. God bless you," the man returned with a thrill of eagerness in his tones that brought tears to his sister's eyes.

"I am very glad. You are doing me a great favor, Mr. Russell, for I did not anticipate finding a favorable opening so soon after my return," Philip cordially observed, and from that moment Miss Prue was his warm friend and champion.

"Poor Beth," she thought, "you don't know what you have missed by running away. Philip Walton is a man after my own heart, and I believe you will yet be sorry you were so hasty in sending that letter. I suspect there is a secret reason why you were afraid to meet him."

She regretted that she had not been more insistent in her argument to keep her at home, for Beth, feeling sure Philip would come to see them in spite of her letter, had taken it into her willful little head that she could not, would not, meet him just yet; so, immediately after writing him, she had gone to make a long-talked-of visit to her friend, Muriel Armstrong.

After breakfast, Mr. Russell and Philip held a long business conference on the veranda. Then, when they had lunched, Miss Russell drove them about the pretty village, in her handsome station wagon, taking in the famous River Road Drive, returning in season for an early dinner, and, later, Philip, having made an appointment to meet Mr. Russell, in Boston, the following week, took the night train back to that city, where he arrived early the next morning, feeling very well satisfied with himself and the world in general.

He was free from what had long been a galling bondage, without compromising himself in any way, while he believed he had also released Beth from a prospect equally revolting. He had inspired his father's old friend with new courage by pledging capital sufficient to start him anew in life, and at the same time had secured a partnership in the business which he felt sure would result to his own interest. He must have something to do—idleness he detested—and, with Mr. Russell's capacity and experience, backed by his money, he knew this was an opening not to be despised.

(To be Continued.)

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