

UNDER SUSPICION.

CHAPTER I.

"Uncle Joseph will you see to the luggage?"

"Certainly, madam," I replied. I always called my brother's second wife "madam"; we never quarrelled, but each other thought that the other was the most disagreeable person in the universe, and as we each knew what the other thought, it may be imagined our intercourse was not of a very cordial kind.

I did see to the luggage, and then took tickets for the party for the York express by the Great Northern Railway.

Fortunately we had a compartment to ourselves, that is, Mrs. Webster, my niece Clara, and myself.

"Clara, my dear, you look as ill as you can look, no one would think that to-morrow was your wedding-day."

"Do I look ill, mamma?" said Clara, dreamily.

"Yes, my dear, and wretched too. I wonder you've not more sense at your age, a girl of twenty-five and breaking her heart for love of a man who for four years has not taken the slightest notice of you."

"Why, it was one of the conditions, Mrs. Webster, that he should not write," I exclaimed.

Clara said nothing but looked her thanks at her uncle.

"However, Uncle Joseph, he ought to have come back and taken his dismissal quietly. I have no patience with these poor men blighting a girl's chance of getting well settled in life in this way; however, thank goodness, it is over now; the four years are gone these three months, and to-morrow you will be the happy wife of a man whose age will command you respect, and whose position will secure you every comfort."

"And one, mamma, whom nothing on earth but my solemn promise to my own dear father would make me call husband."

"Well, my dear, it's fortunate for your future interests that you made that promise. I'm sure that Mr. Tredgar is a man after my own heart. If I had not other views for my children's sake, I should have set my cap at him myself."

"Well, you know, Uncle Joseph, I am content to a fault."

"Decidedly, madam, most decidedly," I replied, a remark which caused Mrs. Webster to read a yellow-covered novel for some time in silence, though shortly afterwards she dropped asleep.

Clara stole to my side of the carriage, and leaned her head on my shoulder.

"Oh uncle, I wish I were dead; can it be so very wrong to die? I am so wretched; I dread to-morrow; oh! why will not God pity me, and take away my life?"

"My dear Clara, don't, that's a good child; it's wicked to talk in this way; life must be borne; I have felt as you feel, and yet I live, and am not positively unhappy; only a vague, shadowy regret for what might have been stands like a cloud between me and any happiness that might be mine. Yours are keen sufferings, but bear them patiently, and use will dull the pain."

"But, Uncle, why did he not let me hear from him, as mamma says?"

"Because he was a man of honor; the four years were up on last April, and this is but July, who can tell where he is? Wherever he is, he is faithful and true, I know."

"Oh! uncle; God bless you for these words. I know it too, but what can I do? I cannot delay longer; my poor father's dying words, my solemn promises to marry this man, my stepmother's persecution,—what can I do? Three months have I fought, and now I wish I could lay down and die. Oh! uncle, is there no escape? I have such a dread that he will come back after I am married, and then—Oh! it would be worse than his death to see him! The temptation—oh! why cannot I die?"

"Poor child! my poor child!" was all I could utter.

Bound by a vow made at her father's death-bed, she was going the next day to marry a man who was old enough to be her father, and who, but for the fact of his persisting in his claim, spite of her only expressed dislike of him, was esteemed a very good kind of a man.

True Clara was beautiful and accomplished beyond the average of women of her class, and it would be a struggle to any man to give up such a prize, backed as he was by the assurances of the stepmother that it was only a childish fancy, and that love coming after marriage was more to be trusted and more lasting than it is to be before; I confess I was but a poor counsellor under such circumstances; still I loved her truly—she was almost as my own daughter, for I was a childless widower, and I would have given my life to save her. But it was impossible and to-morrow would seal her fate.

It was not a pleasant journey, that Mrs. Webster read and slept at intervals the whole time, and when she slept Clara nestled close to me.

We arrived at York about six o'clock, and, just as the train was slackening speed into the station, a guard jumped on to the foot-board, locked or unlocked the door, and remained there until the train stopped.

"Have you all your parcels, madam?"

"All, thank you, Uncle Joseph, except my umbrella—oh! that's under the seat," said Mrs. Webster.

"Now, guard, unlock this door."

"Are you with that young lady, sir?" pointing to the niece.

"Yes, certainly, unlock the door."

"Better not make a fuss, sir."

"Fuss, what do you mean?"

The man who seemed to be looking out for somebody, now asked "all right, sir?"

"All right," said the station master, coming to the door, and opening it; "this way, miss."

"What does this mean?"

"Step into my office, I dare say it's all right. Better not say too much out here you know."

We followed him through the little crowd of passengers and porters, accompanied by a policeman in uniform. As we passed we heard fragmentary observations of a most pleasing kind.

"Which is it?" said one.

"It's the girl, I think."

"No, it's the old woman, she looks as if she'd do any one a mischief if it suited her."

"Old man looks too soft for anything," and so on.

We went into the office, and I indignantly turned to the station-master.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?"

"Oh! it's very simple, sir, a telegram has arrived from the police of London, with orders to stop the young lady; here it is."

I took it and read it:

"The young lady, looking very ill, dressed in black silk mantle, white straw bonnet, with white flowers, is to be detained at the station till the arrival of the officer by the afternoon mail. She is seated in the middle compartment of the third first-class carriage from the end of the train. Her present name is Clara Webster. To avoid the possibility of mistake, she has a diamond ring on the third finger of her left hand, with the words 'from Herbert' engraved on the inside."

It certainly was a correct description, and then the name—but then there might be two Clara Websters though.

"Let us see your left hand, dear."

She pulled off her glove, and there was the ring.

"Let me see that ring with the diamond on it."

"Uncle, what does this mean? Is any thing gone wrong at home?"

"I'll tell you presently dear; give me the ring."

She took it off and gave it to me, and I read 'From Herbert' on the inside.

"Why that's the ring Mr. Langley gave you."

"What has he to do with this?" said Mrs. Webster. "Perhaps he—"

"He what, Madame?"

"Perhaps it did not belong to him, I was going to say."

I saw it was no use to struggle; when the officer came down he would explain the mistake.

"Where can we wait?" I said.

"Wait, Uncle Joseph, what for?"

"Madame, this telegram orders the arrest of your daughter, and her detention here till the arrival of an officer from London."

"But what for?"

"I can't tell you; it is useless to complain now. We must wait."

"I shall do nothing of the kind; I shall at once go and get my brother and Mr. Tredgar to come down."

"Pray don't, madame; there is no occasion to make more noise about this matter than can be helped."

"I shall remain with Clara; you had better go and say we are coming very shortly."

"Your instructions don't include this lady or myself?" I asked.

"Not at all, sir; you are both free to go at any time, but the young lady must stay."

"Where?"

"Well, sir, I am sure there is some mistake, and was so from the first moment I saw the young lady, so if you'll give me your word not to go away, I'll take you into my house out of the bustle of the station."

Mrs. Webster went off, and Clara and I went out to the house.

"What can it be, Uncle?"

"Can't say my dear; it will be something to laugh at by-and-by, though it's not pleasant now."

"But about the ring?—do you think it possible what mamma said?"

"Possible! my dear, it's ridiculous. It's a hundred years old, and I dare say belonged to his mother before he gave it to you."

"I can't think what it can be."

"Don't think about it. It is a mistake, that's all; it will be cleared up in a few hours. We'll have some dinner; and pass the time as well as we can."

"Do you know, Uncle, I feel almost glad of this, it seems like a breath in the dullness, it puts off my wedding at least a week, mamma herself could not press it for to-morrow after this."

We had dined, and got to be quite cheerful and laughing over the blunder as we sat at the window, when a rap at the door startled us both.

"Come in."

A gentleman entered.

"Miss Webster?"

Clara bowed.

"Clara Webster, he said, reading the name from the letter."

Clara bowed again.

He handed her the letter which she opened, read, and dropped on the floor, exclaim-

ing "Thank God! Thank God! Oh! uncle, I am so happy, and then fell into a chair fainting."

I picked up the letter, and calling the people of the house, very soon brought her to, and we were once more alone with the bearer of the note, which ran as follows:

TRENGAR HALL.

"Mr. Francis Tredgar presents his compliments to Miss Webster, and begs to state that he must decline to make her his wife. The unhappy circumstance of Miss Webster's public arrest, on the charge of being in possession of a diamond ring, stolen by her former lover, will at once account to her for this decision; Mr. Tredgar's wife must be above suspicion."

"Mr. Tredgar begs also to inform Miss Webster that the services of his solicitor, Mr. Blake, (the bearer,) are at her disposal."

"Well, Mr. Blake," said I, "you see we shall not require your services; I shall wait the event, and, if it is not cleared up, shall employ my own solicitor in the matter. Will you present my kind regards to Mr. Francis Tredgar, and express my own and my niece's admiration of his gentlemanly courtesy and kindness. I would write to him if I did not consider that a correspondence with such a miserable, cowardly scoundrel was too utterly degrading to be thought of."

"I will faithfully convey your message, sir, and allow me to assure you that I was quite ignorant of the contents of the letter, and that it shall be the last time I ever bear one from him; and now, as you will not let me help you as a solicitor, allow me to profess my services as a friend."

"With all my heart, Mr. Blake, come in here a few minutes before the train comes in, and we shall be glad of your help."

"Was I not right, uncle dear?" said Clara, as soon as we were alone. "Oh! you can't tell how happy I am; I can live now. O, this glorious mistake! it's the most fortunate thing that has happened to me in all my life. Now you are glad, uncle, isn't you?" and she came up to me, and kissed me and would have me speak.

"Yes, darling, I am so glad—more glad than I can find words to tell. Your fate linked to such a man as this scoundrel, would have been a living death, I am heartily glad, Clara."

CHAPTER II.

"This way, sir. The young person is in my house; she gave her word not to attempt to leave; the old gentleman is with her."

This we heard through the door as the station-master came along the passage. Our friend Mr. Blake had arrived, some time before.

The station-master entered, and behind him a tall, broad-shouldered man, with bushy beard and moustaches concealing all the lower part of his face.

"Will you have a light, sir?" said the station-master to the officer.

"Thank you, no."

Clara started at the sound of the voice, and laid her hand on mine.

"Now my good man," began Mr. Blake, "perhaps you'll explain this matter; you telegraphed down from London to stop this lady, and here she is. Now, if you please, explain."

"This gentleman," I said to the officer, "is my niece's legal adviser. I assume it as a mistake; still, we shall be glad of your explanation. You are a detective, I presume."

"No, sir, I am not, my name is—"

"Herbert! Herbert! my dear Herbert, it is you!"

Clara had gone to him, and he was clasping her in his strong arms, while her face was hidden in his great beard.

"My own! my darling! my own true darling!—she loves me still."

"But why describe my meeting? Mr. Blake said to me at once:

"My dear sir, I am not wanted here, and I doubt if you are," and we left them.

In half an hour we thought it possible we might be less in the way, and went in. They sat on the sofa at a most suspiciously great distance from each other, and looked as happy and foolish as possible.

"And now, my dear Herbert, please to explain to us what has taken you at least half an hour to make clear to my niece."

"Uncle?"

"Oh yes; a month sooner is not much consequence."

"Don't, Uncle," said Clara.

"You know how I went away with just enough to pay for my tools, and outfit, and passage. I went to California, to the diggings, and was lucky, got a good claim, worked it, made a little money, took shares in a machine, worked the claim, improved the machinery, became manager, director, and got rich, started six months ago to come home for Clara, took the fever at Panama, was down for two months there, not able to move hand or foot, and arrived only last night in Liverpool. There I met an old friend and heard all the news; poor Webster's death, the promise, and the rest, and above all that to-morrow was the day. I started by the first train to get to London, thinking the marriage would take place there, and that I should be in time. Looking out of the window of the carriage as the trains were passing each other at Peterborough, I saw Clara with her mother. I did not see you. I was mad; the trains had both started. I could not get out. There

was Clara going from me, and I going from her, as fast as express trains could take us. What could I do? I knew nothing of where she was going, and yet my information was positive that she was going to be married to-morrow, solely because she would keep her promise."

"Can you wonder at my doing as I did? The train did not stop till it reached London, and I found that by the time I had hunted up the address to which you had gone, from the servants at home, I should have lost the last train and not been able to get here till long after midnight. What to do I could not think."

"In the carriage in which I sat somebody had been talking about the murderer, Tawell, and the telegraph, the police on the doorstep, and so on. It all flashed on my mind in an instant."

"I went to the telegraph office, and, looking in, there was only a young lad there."

I went in, and called him.

"Can you telegraph to York for me?"

"Certainly, sir."

I wrote the telegram you saw.

"You must sign this, sir."

"No, I must not, young man," and I drew him toward me by the shoulder.

"My name's Field, Inspector Field; you understand!"

"Oh! certainly sir. Did you catch that man the other day? I heard it from one of our clerks."

"Oh, yes; caught him safe and sound; he's in Newgate now."

"You send that at once; the train's due in less than an hour. I'll see you do it."

"He did send it, and as I heard the click, click, it was like the throb of a new heart, circulating fiery blood into my arteries, for I knew it would enable me to see you, Clara dear, and then I came down, as you see, by this train, and felt disposed to embrace all the telegraph clerks in the kingdom."

"Well, young man, it's a dangerous game; I suppose you're aware it's an offence not lightly punished to pretend you're an officer of police," said Mr. Blake.

"My dear Mr. Blake, if it was death on the instant of discovery, and I was in the same strait, I should do the same thing over again."

"You must find a prosecutor, Mr. Blake," said Clara, "and as I, the principal person concerned, am not going to prosecute the officer, I think he will escape."

"But why," said I, "did you not telegraph to Clara direct?"

"Because I feared Mrs. Webster might possibly have prevented our meeting."

Mr. Blake left us with his eyes twinkling, and muttering something about "servitude for life."

A month after this I had the pleasure of giving my niece to Herbert, and in two months more I had the pleasure of reading in the Times the announcement of the marriage of Mrs. Webster to Francis Tredgar, Esq., of Tredgar Hall, to which ceremony I need scarcely say I was invited.

Clara and Herbert and I all live together, and to this day he is spoken of amongst his intimates as Herbert Langley, "that active and intelligent young officer."

The words of a language are like the pieces of a child's dissected picture; and eloquence and poetry and philosophy are the pictures made by putting them together; but somehow it is hard to fit the words into their proper places.

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June 15, 1865—1y

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UNDERWRITERS' AGENCY.

Aggregate Assets, \$2,987,166 58.

Statement of the condition of the GERMANIA FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY, of the City of New York, on the 2nd day of January, 1865, in conformity with the laws of the State of Missouri.

CAPITAL.

Cash capital and surplus \$656,789 35

ASSETS.

Cash in Banks and in hands of Agents 10,609 18

Loans on Bond and Mortgage 143,750 00

United States Securities 463,720 00

Loans on Stocks and Bonds, payable on demand 23,500 00

Bank and Insurance Stocks, &c. 13,210 17

\$656,789 35

LIABILITIES.

Losses incurred and in process of adjustment \$7,164 93

Statement of the condition of the HANOVER FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY, of the City of New York, on the 2nd day of January, 1865, in conformity with the laws of the State of Missouri.

CAPITAL.

Cash capital and surplus \$536,380 64

ASSETS.

Cash in Bank and in Office 114,744 51

United States Securities 336,495 00

New York County and Tennessee Bonds 16,600 00

Loans on Bond and Mortgage 133,300 00

Loans on Stocks and Bonds, payable on demand 16,600 00

All other Securities 18,591 13

\$536,380 64

LIABILITIES.

Losses incurred and in process of adjustment \$9,000 00

Unpaid taxes, 8,335 00

\$17,335 00

Statement of the condition of the NIAGARA FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY, of the City of New York, on the 2nd day of January, 1865, in conformity with the laws of the State of Missouri.

CAPITAL.

Cash capital and surplus \$1,270,353 46

ASSETS.

Cash in Bank and in Office \$25,186 76

Loans on Bond and Mortgage 276,100 00

United States Securities 438,127 50

California Bonds 6,750 00