

MRS. GAINSBOROUGH'S DIAMONDS. JULIAN HAWTHORNE. Copyrighted by G. Appleton & Co. Published by Special Arrangement. 1892.

CHAPTER V.



"I wish to marry Miss Birchmore."

I saw nothing more of Kate that day, but I came across Slurk several times, and there was a peculiar look on the fellow's countenance which made me renew my longing to chastise him. I was anxious to know whether Mr. Birchmore had returned, but as I could not bring myself to make any inquiries in this vein and did not care to let him see me asking any one else, I was obliged to remain in ignorance. However, as I sat out under the trees at dusk a tall figure, with a lighted cigar in his mouth, appeared in the doorway of the hotel, and on my saluting him he sauntered up to my table and complied with my invitation to sit down.

The waiter brought us coffee, and under its stimulus I ventured to introduce the subject which lay nearest to my heart to Mr. Birchmore's notice. No doubt I put my best foot foremost, and spoke as eloquently as was consistent with my downright earnestness and sincerity. Mr. Birchmore heard me almost in silence, only giving evidence by an occasional word or interjection that he was giving me his attention. Once or twice, too, I was aware of his having given me one of those sharp, icy glances for which he was remarkable. When I had spoken he fingered the pointed beard on his chin meditatively and puffed his cigar.

"This is a very fair and honorable offer that you make, Gainsborough," he said at length. "I liked you before; I like you better now. You take it for granted, I suppose, that I am pretty well off. There, you needn't say anything—I have no doubt of your disinterestedness, but these matters would have to be mentioned, sooner or later, if the affair went on. I say if, because—I may as well tell you at once, it will save us all pain—because it can't go on, it must stop right here, and I only regret, for both your sakes, that it has gone so far."

"Mr. Birchmore, I cannot take this for an answer. You have given me no reasons. If you want confirmation of my account of myself, I can—"

"I want nothing of the sort—on the contrary, I feel complimented that you should accept us, not only without confirmation, but without question. But you can't marry my daughter, Gainsborough, much as I like you, and much as I dare say she does. When you are older you will understand that men cannot always follow that course in the world which appears to them most desirable."

"However young or old I may be, Mr. Birchmore, I am old enough to know my own mind and to require good reasons for changing it. If you have any such reasons, I wish you'd show your liking for me by telling me what they are."

"Do you remember a talk we once had in Paris, when you hinted that I should accompany you on your jaunt? I told you then that the past life of a man sometimes had a hold over his present, constraining his freedom whether he would or not. And can't you imagine that those circumstances, however cogent they may be, or very likely, just because they are so cogent, might be very inconvenient to talk about? To speak plainly, Gainsborough, I don't see how your loving my daughter obliges me to tell you all the secrets of my life."

"Very well, young sir, I have nothing more to say. Come with us to the farmhouse tomorrow; there's plenty of room there, and they are used to being accommodated. Stay with us until you're satisfied, and then—don't forget your promise."

He rose as he finished speaking and flung away the remains of his cigar. "Good night," he said, holding out his large, well-shaped hand.

"Good night, and thanks for your confidence, which you will never regret, Mr. Birchmore."

"Qui viva, verral" was all his answer as he walked away, with his hands in his coat pockets and his singular short steps.

He was an enigma sure enough, and yet my belief in him was as intuitive and inalienable as in Kate herself. His mysterious hints and warnings were powerless to disturb me; I trusted in the ability of us three combined to overthrow any antagonist. I sat late beneath the trees, smoking and brooding over my passion, as young men will, and ever and anon glancing up at a certain window, behind the lamp illumined curtain of which I had reason to suppose my darling was. Was she thinking of me now? Even as I asked myself this and gazed upward a shadow fell upon the curtain: it was pushed aside, and the window was swung back on its hinges.

With a throb of the heart I sprang to my feet and wafted a kiss from my finger tips toward the face that peeped out upon me. Stay! was it Kate's face, after all? The arms and shoulders now appeared, and the form leaned upon the window sill. A lucifer match flashed, and I had the pleasure of beholding the sinister visage of Mr. Slurk lit up by a sulphurous gleam as he leisurely lit his pipe and stared down at me.

"Schone gute nacht, Herr Gainsborough!"

CHAPTER VI.

We made a late start the next morning and did not reach the farmhouse before four o'clock. I had little opportunity of speaking to Kate on the way; in fact, the presence of Slurk, who sat on the box of the vehicle and once in awhile threw a glance at us over his shoulder, irritated me to such a degree that more tender sentiments were temporarily pushed into the background. Kate herself, though she attempted to appear cheerful, betrayed signs of inward anxiety and nervousness, while Mr. Birchmore conversed with a volubility and discursiveness greater than I had ever remarked in him before.

The farmhouse stood quite alone on an unfrequented by-road, in a little angle of the hills. It was not exactly a picturesque building, with its four walls covered with rough plaster and pierced with dozens of small windows, and its enormous red tiled roof, with those quaint, narrow apertures, like half opened eyes, disclosing a single pane of glass, which do duty as dormers. It stood flush with the road, as German houses are fond of doing; but behind was a large inclosed farmyard, roughly paved with round stones and well walled in. The front door, though rather pretentiously painted and ornamented with some religious versicle or other written upon the lintel, was not used as a means of entrance or exit.

It was, as I afterward discovered, not only locked and bolted, but actually screwed up on the inside, and the only way of getting into the house was by a side door opening into the courtyard. As the courtyard itself was provided with a heavy gate, you will see that the farmhouse, close to the road though it was, was by no means so easy of ingress or egress as it appeared—supposing, of course, that it was the humor of the inmates to declare a state of siege. I mention these particulars merely by the way, they are common to three houses out of five in this region.

trunk over his shoulder, he must have been as strong as August der Starke himself, whose brazen statue dominates over the market place in Dresden.

"Guten morgen, Herr Rudolph!" said Slurk, hailing this giant affably. The two seemed to be on some sort of terms of comradeship, having perhaps struck up an acquaintance during the previous negotiations for lodgings. I must say they looked to me to be a not ill matched pair.

We alighted and were welcomed in with airy courtesy by Herr Rudolph. Kate, confessing to a headache, went at once to her room, whence she did not again emerge; Slurk disappeared into the kitchen regions with the landlord; Mr. Birchmore presently went out for a stroll before dinner, and I, finding myself thrown temporarily on my own resources, decided to make a virtue of my loneliness by writing some letters which had been long owing. I accordingly groped my way up the darksome stone staircase and so along an eccentric passage to my room.

I did not know then nor could I even now accurately describe the arrangement of rooms in that farmhouse. There were at least three separate passages, not running at right angles to one another, but seeming to wander about irregularly, now and then turning awkward corners, descending or ascending short flights of steps or edging into a little cul de sac, with perhaps only a closet door at the end of it. The consequence was it was nearly impossible to say whose room adjoined whose. It might be a long distance from one to another measured along the passage, and yet they might actually be separated only by the thickness of a wall. Where the farmer and his family slept I know not, but I have reason to believe that all our party, including Slurk, were accommodated upon the same floor.

On opening the door of my room I found some one already there. This person was a comely young woman, the farmer's daughter evidently, busy in the benevolent occupation of putting things in order. She had moved my trunk beneath the window, she had put fresh water in the ewer, she had straightened out the slips of druggot on the rough board floor, she had placed some flowers in the window, and she was now engaged in tucking a clean sheet on the bed. I said she was comely; on second look she was better than that. She was positively pretty, with the innocent, blond prettiness of some German peasant girls.

Her fair hair, smoothed compactly over her small head and wound up in a funny little pug behind, possessed a faint golden luster; her eyes were of as pure and serene a blue as any I ever looked upon, her smooth cheeks, slightly browned by much sunshine which had rested on them, were tinged with healthful bloom; her mouth might have been smaller, but the full lips were well shaped and there were white, even teeth behind them. Her figure, like that of most Saxon peasant girls of her age, was robust and vigorous; she wore a simple bodice and skirt, and her feet and legs were bare. Altogether, I thought her a very agreeable apparition.

"Good morning, honored Herr Gainsborough," she said gravely in German as I entered.

"Good morning, pretty maiden," returned I, gallantly. "You seem to know my name, though I don't know yours—what is it?"

"I am called Christina—Christina Rudolph. It is some time since I have known Herr Gainsborough's name," she added.

"Really! how comes that?" I asked, by no means displeased.

"The honored Herr has been kind to a relation of mine—a very near relation," replied Christina, with the same gravity.

"And Herr Birchmore's daughter?"

subjoined Christina with a twinkle of mischief so demure that I could hardly be sure whether she meant it or not.

"Thou art as clever as thy brother Christina," I laughed, coloring a little, too, however, I dare say. "It is true I have not known them long, but—but people see a good deal of one another in traveling together."

"I have heard it said that traveling makes people acquainted with"—she paused and looked down thoughtfully at her bare feet. Presently she lifted her blue eyes straight to mine and asked, "Herr Gainsborough has his diamonds with him?"

"Undoubtedly! They are never away from me."

"In going about this place the Herr should be cautious. Some of these hills and valleys are very lonely. There are spots not far from here where no one goes for sometimes many months."

"Well, I'll be very careful Christina," I rejoined laughing, and in truth not a little amused at the care my friends took of me. "But thou must remember that no one in Germany, except Herr Birchmore and his daughter, and thyself knows that any such diamonds as these are in existence—much less that they are in my pocket!"

Christina raised her finger to her lips, as if to caution me to speak lower. "There is at least one other who knows—the man Slurk!" she said.

"Well, perhaps he may," I replied, somewhat struck by her observation; "and as I see thou hast taken a dislike to the fellow I will confide to thee that I consider him an atrocious brute. But, brute though he is, there's no harm in him of that kind. He is an old servant of Herr Birchmore, I believe, and would of course be dismissed at once if there were anything serious against him."

"Naturally!" was all Christina's answer; she made no pretense of arguing the point with me. "Adieu, honored sir!" she said at the door. But, with her hand upon the latch, she paused, turned around and added, rather confusedly, "Will Herr Gainsborough go on any expedition with his friends today?"

"Why, I hardly think so, Christina."

"But tomorrow, perhaps?" she persisted, lifting her blue eyes to mine again. "Perhaps," I admitted with a smile. "Then—if he can trust me—would the Herr mind leaving the diamonds with me until he comes back again?"

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Final Settlement. I hereby give notice that I have filed in the county court of Clackamas county, Oregon, my accounts and vouchers for final settlement, as administrator of the estate of Christian Wagley, deceased, and the court has appointed Tuesday, May 3, 1892, as the day for examination and settlement of the same.

ADMINISTRATOR'S SALE. In the matter of the estate of Andrew Dolbarg, deceased. I hereby give notice that pursuant to an order of the honorable county court of Clackamas county, Oregon, I will, on Saturday the 31st day of May, A. D. 1892, at the court house door in Oregon City, Oregon, sell at public auction to the highest bidder, for cash in hand, the following described tract of land situated in Clackamas county, Oregon, to-wit: Commencing at the half mile post between sections 4 and 5 in T. 3 S., R. 1 E. of the Willamette meridian, and running thence north 100 rods, thence east 100 rods, thence north 10 rods, thence west 300 rods, thence north 40 rods, thence west 40 rods to the place of beginning, containing 97 1/2 acres, more or less. Sale subject to confirmation of said court. ASKIN & KING, Administrators. Dated April 22, 1892. W. CAREY JOHNSON, ATTORNEY.

SCHOOL TAX NOTICE. To the taxpayers of school district No. 62, of Clackamas county, Oregon: The school tax of the above named district for the year 1892 is now due, and must be paid to the undersigned at his office in Oregon City within sixty days from date of this notice, or the same will be returned as delinquent. THOS. F. BYAN, Clerk School District No. 62. Dated this 19th day of April, 1892. [4-21-92]

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION. Land Office at Oregon City, Oregon, April 15, 1892. Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before the Register and Receiver of the U. S. Land Office at Oregon City, Oregon, on June 14, 1892, viz: Homestead entry No. 6966, for the s w 1/4 of sec 22, T. 8 N., R. 3 E. He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: George Hunsage, Albert Pasold, F. Pasold and J. Vaughn, all of Molalla P. O., Clackamas county, Oregon. J. T. APPERSON, Register.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION. LAND OFFICE AT OREGON CITY, OREGON, April 9, 1892. Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before the Register and Receiver of the United States Land Office at Oregon City, Oregon, on June 7, 1892, viz: James F. Neilson, homestead entry 8277 for the lots 2 and 3 of section 28, town 4 south, range 2 east. He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: Silas Wright, Reuben Wright, William White and J. B. Jackson, all of Molalla post office, Clackamas county, Oregon. J. T. APPERSON, Register.

Final Settlement. I hereby give notice that I have filed in the county court of Clackamas county, Oregon, my accounts and vouchers for final settlement, as administrator of the estate of Christian Wagley, deceased, and the court has appointed Tuesday, May 3, 1892, as the day for examination and settlement of the same. L. L. PORTER, ABY, Dated March 18, 1892. 4-14-92

NOTICE. Notice is hereby given that my wife, Lydia D. Howlett, has without provocation left my bed and board, and the public is hereby warned against harboring or trusting her on my account, as I will not be responsible for bills of her contracting. JOHN N. HOWLETT, Eagle Creek, Oregon, April 1, 1892. [4-15-92]

Executor's Notice. Notice is hereby given that the final account of the undersigned as executor of the estate of John Frank, deceased, has been filed in the county court of the state of Oregon, county of Clackamas. And the 2nd day of May, 1892, at 10 o'clock, a. m., has been set by said court for the final hearing of objections to said account and the settlement thereof. A. R. SHIPLEY, Executor of the estate of John Frank, deceased. Dated Oregon City, Or., March 24, 1892. MILLER MILLER, Atty, for Executor. 3-25-92

Final Settlement. I hereby give notice that I have filed in the county court of Clackamas county, Oregon, my accounts and vouchers for final settlement, as administrator of the estate of Frederick Rockman, deceased, and the court has appointed Monday, the 2nd day of May, A. D. 1892, as the time for the examination and settlement of such accounts. W. CAREY JOHNSON, Executor.