

The Albany Register.

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NO. 6.

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Albany Register.

The Old Man's Darling.

Margery Hilton's fortune was made. So she congratulated herself as she gazed exultingly upon the diamond solitaire which, but an hour before, Colonel Leslie had placed upon her finger. His words of love still vibrated in her ears; but, strange to say, there was no responsive melody in her heart, although her lips had promised that she would become his wife. She was a young girl, not yet out of her teens, poor, beautiful and ambitious. Colonel Leslie was fifty, hale, hearty, gentlemanly and rich. He had gone to the little manufacturing village of S— upon business, had accidentally met with Margery, and having been enraptured with her beauty, addressed her after a short acquaintance. And so, while he was being rapidly borne to this city home, thinking of the loveliness of the young bride he had won, and his abundant means of making her happy, Margery sat in her little chamber dreaming bright dreams to be realized in the future. Her fortune was made! What did it matter now if there had been poverty and privation in the past; was not the future bright with wealth and splendor?

"I shall have diamonds, and laces, and society to my heart's content," she mused, gazing from her window into the cloudless east, where the round rising moon looked softly into her glittering eyes. "I shall purchase them dearly perhaps, but I shall be an old man's darling. Col. Leslie said so to-night as he placed the seal of our betrothal upon my finger. It is true that there is a great disparity of years between us, but I am satisfied with the contract I have made. I shall be clothed in purple and fine linen every day, and if I am not happy there is no one to blame but myself, I shall be no longer dependent upon those who grudge me even the little morsel I eat." The wedding was a quiet one. The village had never seen a lovelier bride nor a happier groom, and when, after a month's travel the couple took possession of their luxurious home, Margery again congratulated herself upon the brilliancy of her fortune. Her brightest dreams were meeting with fulfillment. She entered into her new life with all the zest of her fresh, young spirit, glorying in the beauty that had purchased her pleasures, and leaving nothing undone that could enhance her loveliness.

Colonel Leslie accompanied her everywhere she wished to go. "She is too young, too inexperienced for me to allow her freedom," he said, earnestly. "She will doubtless tire of this frivolity after a while, and then we will settle down in that happy home I have so often pictured to myself."

But time wore on, and not even the shadow of such a weariness appeared to cloud the young wife's spirits. No gaiety was produced which did not tempt her participation, and no temptation met with resistance.

After a year of patient waiting the frivolities in which she had indulged so freely became so utterly distasteful to him that he could no longer restrain his impatience. But friends interposed, declaring that the lovely Mrs. Leslie should not make a recluse of herself, and offering to accompany her wherever she wished to go. He transferred her, as it were, to their protection, and day after day and night after night he was left alone as mercilessly as though he had been but a hired attendant of the household.

Devoted as he had once been to his wife, the strength of his ardor began to abate, and beginning to believe she had married him for his wealth, he determined to restrict her gaieties in a measure. He would make overtures to her reason and judgment, and if they failed he would assert the authority which centered himself, and which she had so seemingly ignored. He was in the library awaiting Margery's coming, as usual, upon the evening of the most brilliant entertainment of the season. An hour after midnight she entered, radiant in velvet and diamonds. He arose and offered to remove her wrappings.

"Thank you," she returned icily, still standing, "but I shall retire immediately, and there is no need of unwrapping here."

"Just as you please," he answered haughtily, resuming his seat and gazing for a moment into the beautiful face before him; "but I have something to say to you, which must be heard here and now."

Margery gathered her cloak more closely about her shoulders, and resting both hands upon the back of the chair by which she was standing, said, almost defiantly:

"If you have anything to say, please say it as quickly as possible. I am tired and have need of rest; my demands for to-morrow are pressing."

"And mine, Margery, you will find, are more so. I have been trifled with, and my expressed desire neglected long enough. You will remember hereafter that I stand first in this household, and that my wishes are entitled to some consideration."

"Perhaps you had better explain," she said contemptuously; "I do not know that I have the honor of comprehending your remarks."

"I shall certainly be more explicit, then," he answered mildly, still determined not to appear irritated by her indifference. "We have been married almost three years, Margery, and in all that time I have been but a slave to your bidding. It is true that I am more than twice your own age, but I became your husband, fondly believing that in your love my heart would regain its youthfulness, and that you would find comfort and happiness in being an 'old man's darling.' That I have been disappointed I freely acknowledge; that you have been I can but infer. I realize now the vanity of the hope which led me to unite old age with youth, since our tastes are so dissimilar. What I have to say to you, however, is this, that I desire you to relinquish, in a measure, those frivolities which are separating us so surely and so utterly."

Margery looked for a moment in his face and said:

"Suppose I do not desire to renounce those pleasures which you seem to condemn so heartily?"

"Then I shall resort to that authority which, as your husband, is vested in me."

"And if I do not choose to submit to that authority?"

"That is not a question to be discussed between us," he exclaimed, emphatically, now thoroughly aroused and irate. "I am master of this house, as you will find to your cost. That you have never cared for me except as the representative of the wealth which purchases your pleasures, is too plain a case to admit of argument. But there is one thing of which you may rest assured; while you bear my name it must remain as unsullied as when you received it. I do not wish you to regard me as a brute, nor yet as a tyrant, but this continued dissipation must cease. I am too old to be dragged from one scene of gaiety to another—tied, as it were, to the wheels of your triumphant chariot, and since I cannot attend you, you must confine yourself more at home. You can retire now; if you please remember that I expect your compliance with my wishes."

"Thank you for the privilege," she returned, sarcastically. "I shall not retire, however, until this question is definitely settled." Her eyes glowed like midnight stars and upon her white forehead the beads of perspiration sparkled like diamonds in the full blaze of the chandelier beneath which she stood. "That I do not love you, Colonel Leslie, you seem to be well aware. I married you because I was dazzled by those visions of splendor which you placed before my eyes, and I sighed for them as those who travel in the sandy deserts thirst for water. Fashion and society are my idols, and disconnected from them I would not turn over my hand to live another hour. I shall not give them up without a struggle, you may rest assured; but the victory is not always to the strong. Good night!" she added, turning from him and leaving the room with the air of an empress.

Colonel Leslie, stunned and mortified by her confession, buried his face in his hands. This was the bitter ending of his pleasant dreams; this cold calculating woman the wife who presided over his home.

"She shall have her own way," he suddenly, stoically resolved. "If she married me, as she says, for my wealth, she shall not be cheated in the bargain. She shall enjoy her freedom unmolested while I live and my wishes shall hereafter remain untold."

Two-four years passed away, and then the end of it all came. Margery was sitting alone in her elegant drawing-room, whence a hundred guests had just departed, when Colonel Leslie entered hastily and drew a chair to her side. She gathered her trailing robes of amber satin more closely around her, as if fearing contamination. He noticed the movement, and exclaimed, apologetically:

"I vowed years ago, Margery, that I never would again, by word or look, detract from your happiness, and faithfully until now have I kept that vow. This, however, is a perilous moment for both of us, and must account for this intrusion. I have a communication to make which will startle you, but you must hear it. Are you listen-

ing? I am a bankrupt, Margery, a bankrupt!"

"A bankrupt!" she exclaimed, hoarsely. "Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, in terrible, terrible earnest, as to-morrow's proceedings will show. I have not a dollar in the world which I can honestly call my own. For your sake I regret it. You worship wealth and position, you told me once; I have never forgotten it. God knows I pity you."

"What are we to do?" she asked, brokenly, for, try as she might, the tears would not be repressed.

"I do not know," he answered, vaguely. "The tidings reached me but a few hours ago, and since then I have thought of nothing but how I should tell you without breaking your heart. I am not too old to work for you, Margery; but how will you endure our misfortunes? You will doubtless reproach me for not having provided against this contingency when we were married, but I did not know then that you sold yourself to me. I thought that you loved me a little, notwithstanding the disparity of years between us."

He ceased speaking and abruptly left the room. For a moment Margery's heart softened toward him, but the next she rose up, and, sweeping her eyes over the magnificent apartment, said bitterly:

"No, no, I cannot live without them."

She ascended to her chamber, where her maid was waiting her coming. She wearily submitted herself to her skillful hands, and having substituted a morning wrapper for the party robes, she dismissed her sleepy attendant and sank into an easy chair which stood before the fire. She folded her white jeweled hands in her lap and thought over the events of the past few years.

"What a vain, profitless life I have lived!" she murmured regretfully. "Who has been benefitted by it? Not even myself. And with the abundant means I have wasted how much good I might have done. Have I, indeed, been happier than I was when I sat in my little chamber, the only ornaments I possessed a white rose for my hair and my old mother's old-fashioned wedding-ring for my finger?" And with her mother's memory came back a tenderness, a softness to the heart of Margery Leslie which had not visited it for years. "It is not too late to retrieve myself, and I will," she added, resolutely. "I cannot recall the past, but I can at least prove to my husband that I am not dead to all sense of honor and shame."

Margery descended to the breakfast-room a different person. The elements of true womanhood had so long slumbered in her breast that only the rudest shock could have aroused them. With the awakening came the conviction of her unworthiness and a determination to regain esteem she had lost. Colonel Leslie was not present at the table, and to the servant who summoned him he said:

"Excuse me to your mistress and bring me a cup of coffee. I wish nothing else."

"I will carry it to him myself," said Margery, when she received the message, and in a few moments more she entered the library where he was sitting.

"Can I assist you?" she said, softly, as she deposited the unique silver breakfast service at his side.

He had not noticed her presence before. He glanced hastily in her face and the tears stood in his eyes.

"I do not know whether you can or not," he replied, almost wildly. "My brain is in a whirl. These papers," pointing to the heaps upon his either hand, "represent all I possessed. I have been here all night, Margery, and my conviction, after a thorough investigation, is that we are almost beggars."

"You must rest now, at any rate," she said, gently; "and when you have drunk your coffee we will talk our misfortunes over."

Whilst he partook of his breakfast she busied herself in arranging the disordered apartment. She turned off the gas, which still burned brilliantly, and throwing aside the heavy curtains, admitted the sunlight into the room. Not until that did she observe the change that had taken place in her husband's appearance. He was worn and haggard, and his whole frame trembled as with an ague. Margery sat down near him, and, leaning her arm upon the table looked into his face.

"You are too easily discouraged, Colonel Leslie," she exclaimed with emotion.

"I comprehend our situation much more clearly than you do," he replied, gloomily.

"Of the business details, I am, of course, ignorant," she answered; "but they do not alter nor affect the fact which so intimately concerns us."

"You realize it all then, and yet your heart is not broken!" he gasped rather than asked.

"You refer to the conversation that passed between us years ago?" she inquired, the red flush mantling her cheek, and the tears gathering in her eyes.

"Yes. You told me that you would not care to live, if bereft of society and wealth. That remembrance has been the bitter, bitter cup."

"Forget it!" she exclaimed, passionately. "Forget that I was ever so unwomanly, so ungrateful. Our married life so far has proved a failure, but there is time enough to redeem it."

Colonel Leslie could scarcely believe that he heard aright. "You are not jesting with me, Margery?"

"Indeed, indeed I am not," she exclaimed earnestly. "Although I have proved recreant to the trust you once reposed in me, I am worthier to-day to be your wife than I was upon our bridal morning. If you will only esteem me again as you once did, you shall never have cause to regret it."

Colonel Leslie gathered her to his heart and pressed his lips to her forehead.

"There is light ahead for us, Margery," he said, as soon as he could trust himself to speak. "It is not all as dark as it was a while ago. I have education, talent, too, my friends used to say, and old as I am, they must be brought into requisition. In my early manhood I read and practiced law, and a few months study will fit me for the profession again."

There was but a few thousands left of all of Colonel Leslie's vast estate. But when Margery left the spacious residence which had been the scene of so many social triumphs, she felt but one sincere regret, and that was that so many opportunities for doing good had been wasted. Through the home she entered was humble in comparison, she realized that domestic contentment which otherwise she never would have known.

With the vigor and energy which had always been prominent traits in Colonel Leslie's character he entered into his profession and became distinguished as a lawyer. Once in the right path, Margery never faltered, and being constantly in the society of her husband, she learned to love him devotedly. Although to-day his hair is white with age, his form still stately, and his step still firm, whilst by his side, whether in his library poring over his ponderous books, or in his parlor entertaining his friends, is the elegant form and beautiful face of Margery, "the old man's darling."

The Emperor of Morocco is dead, and a civil war has broken out between the son and brother of the deceased Sultan. The trade of the country paralyzed. [The above is denied by late telegrams.]

MISCELLANEOUS.

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