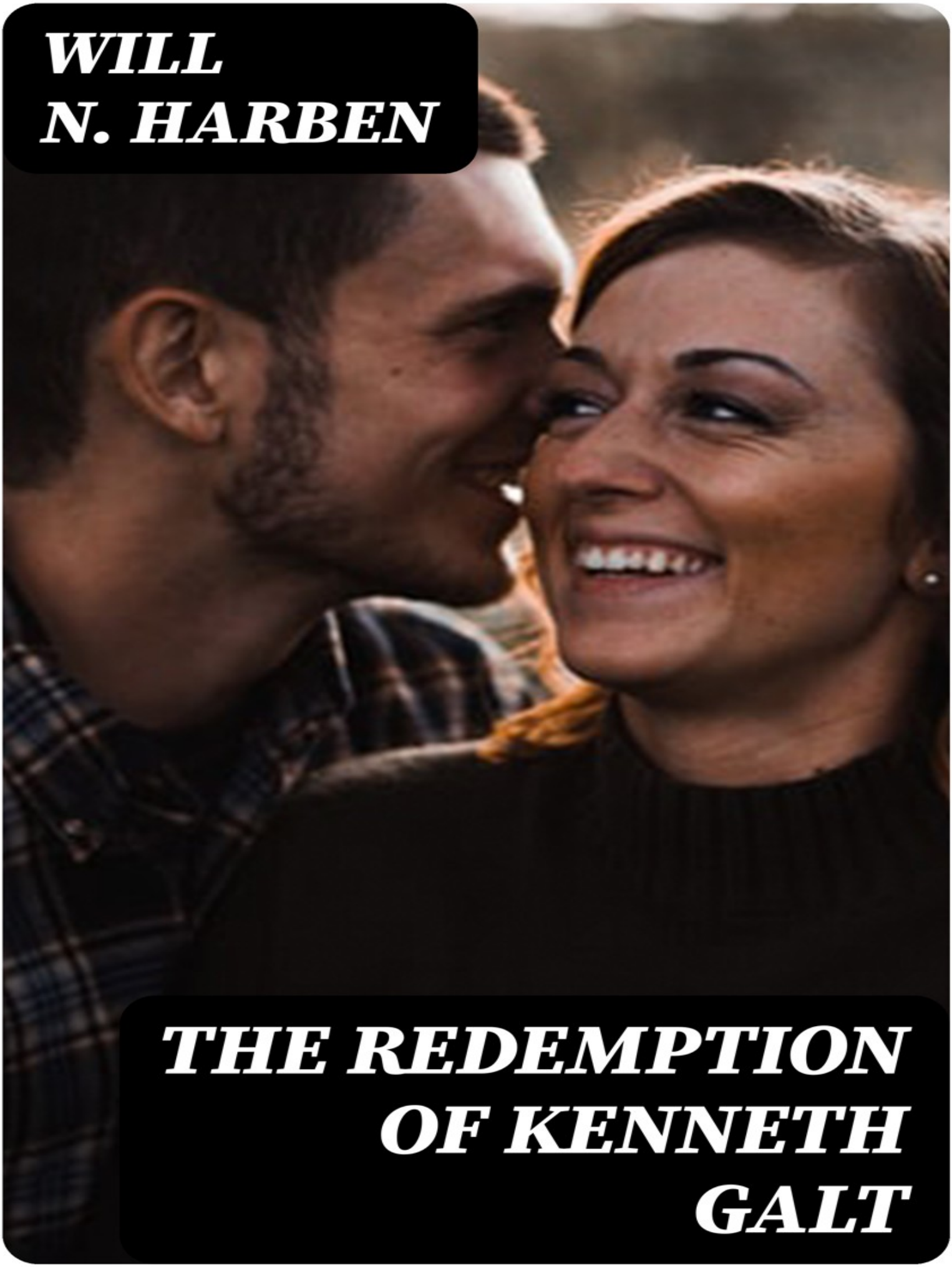
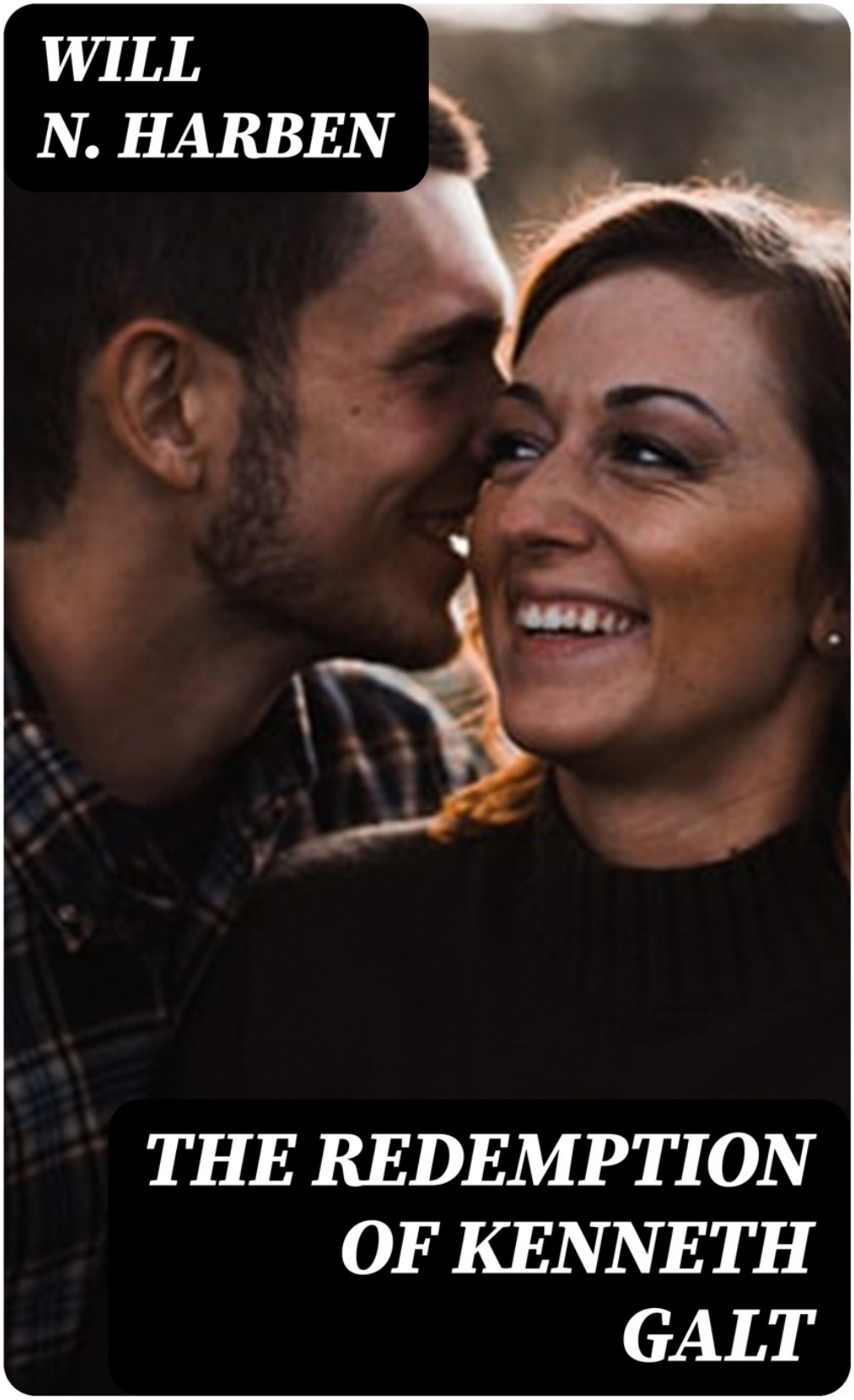
WILL N. HARBEN



THE REDEMPTION OF KENNETH GALT


WILL
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THE REDEMPTION
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GALT

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The Redemption of Kenneth Galt

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MABELLE

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CHAPTER I

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YOUNG Doctor Dearing sat in the little church at an open window through which he had a partial view of that portion of old Stafford which stretched out desultorily toward the east. Immediately in front was a common fairly well covered with grass and weeds, except at the pawed and beaten spot where the public hitched its riding-horses, and beyond stood rows of old-fashioned residences of brick and stone, interspersed with a few modern frame cottages which, in gaudy paint, thrust themselves nearer the street than their more stately neighbors.

It was a Sunday morning, and the smile of a balmy spring day lay over every visible object, filling the ambient air with a translucent message that no human mind could interpret. It was as though an infinite God were speaking to eyes and ears too coarsely fashioned to fully see and hear.

The whole was conducive to the doctor's feeling of restfulness and content and good-will to every human being. He liked the young minister who was seated in the high-backed rosewood chair behind the white pulpit, holding a massive Bible on his slender knees, a look of consecration to a sacred cause in his brown eyes. There was an assuring augury that spoke well for the youth of the town in the spectacle of the choir—the young men in their best clothes, and the young women in their flower-like dresses and plumed and ribboned hats.

His gaze was drawn perforce to the face of the young organist, who sat staring listlessly over the top of her hymn-book. She had a face and form of rare beauty and grace. Her features were most regular; her skin clear; her eyes were large, long-lashed, dreamy, and of the color of violets. Her hair was a living mass of silken bronze.

“She looks tired and worried,” was Dearing's half-professional comment. “Perhaps her mother is worse, and she sat up last night. Poor Dora! she has certainly had a lot to contend with since her father died. I'll wait for her after church and ask about her mother.”

The service over, he made his way through the throng down the aisle toward the door. He was quite popular, and there was many a hand to shake and many a warm greeting to respond to, but he finally succeeded in reaching a point in the shaded church-yard which Dora Barry would pass on her way home, and there he waited.

For some unaccountable reason she was almost the last to leave the church, and the congregation had well-nigh dispersed when he saw her coming. He noticed that she kept her glance on the ground, and that her step was slow and languid; he was all but sure, too, that he heard her sigh, and he saw her firm round breast heave tremulously as she neared him.

“Good-morning, Dora,” he said, cheerily; and she started as, for the first time, she noticed his presence.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, a flush forcing itself into the pallor of her really exquisite face. “I thought—that is, I didn't expect to—to see you here, and, and—”

“I have been watching you this morning instead of the preacher,” he said, with a boyish laugh, “and I made up my mind that I'll have to take you in hand. You are burning the candle at both ends, and there is a fire-cracker in the middle. What is the use of being your family doctor if I let you get down sick, when I can prevent it by raking you over the coals? How is your mother? You had to be up last night—I can see it by the streaks under your eyes.”

“No, I wasn't up,” the girl answered. The color had receded from her cheeks, and the abstracted expression which he had noticed in the church began to repossess her wondrous eyes. “She is not quite well yet, but she did not call me at all through the night. Your last prescription did her good; it soothed her pain, and she rested better.”

“Well, I'm going to walk home with you and stop in and see her, to make sure,” he answered, still lightly. “If you don't look out you will be down yourself. Two sick persons in a family of two wouldn't be any fun.” She made no response; her eyes had a far-off look in their shadowy depths, and as he walked along beside her he eyed her profile curiously.

“Well, I declare, Dora,” he said, half jestingly, “you don't seem overjoyed to have a fellow's company. Of course, I'm not a ladies' man, and—”

“Forgive me, Wynn.” She looked up anxiously, and her lip trembled as she suppressed another sigh. “It wasn't that I didn't want you to come. You know better than to accuse me of such a thing. I have always considered you the best, kindest, and truest friend I have.”

“I was only joking,” he responded, touched by the undoubted sincerity of her tone and manner; “but, really, I don't like to see my little neighbor looking so glum, and I am going to stop in and see how your mother is. If she needs a trained nurse I'll get one, or come over and look after her myself.”

They had reached the cottage where Dora lived. It was small, and stood in a diminutive but rather pretty flower-garden on a short, little used street immediately behind Dearing's home. And when he had opened the sagging gate in the white paling fence, she preceded him into the low, vine-grown porch, and narrow, box-like hallway, from which she led him into the parlor, the room opposite to the chamber of the sick woman.

“Sit down, won't you?” Dora said, in a weary tone, as she began to unfasten her hat. “I'll tell her you are here.”

He took a seat in the bowed window of the plainly furnished room, and she brought a palm-leaf fan to him. “I'm sure my mother won't keep you waiting long.” And with the look of abstraction deepening on her mobile face, she turned away.

A neat matting made of green and brown straw covered the floor, on which were placed rugs made of scraps of silk of various colors artistically blended. A carved rosewood table with a white marble top stood in the centre of the room, and on it rested a plush-covered photograph-album, a glass lamp with a fluted and knotched paper shade on a frame of wire, and a vase of freshly cut flowers. Between the two front windows, which, like their fellows, were draped in white lace curtains of the cheapest quality, stood Dora's

piano—a small, square instrument with sloping octagonal legs and lyre-shaped pedal-support. Against the wall near by leaned a time-worn easel, on which lay some torn and ragged sketches, a besmeared palette, and a handful of stubby, paint-filled brushes. The ceiling overhead was made of planks and painted light blue; the walls were plastered and whitewashed and ornamented by some really good family portraits in oil which had been done by Dora's deceased father, who had been the town's only artist. A Seth Thomas clock presided over a crude mantelpiece which was bare of any other ornament. The deep chimney was filled with pine-tops and cones, the uneven bricks of the hearth were whitewashed.

Dearing heard the girl's returning step in the hallway, and then she looked in on him.

“She is sitting up,” Dora announced. “She wants you to come to her.”

As he entered the room across the hall Dora turned toward the kitchen in the rear, and he found himself facing her mother, a thin, gaunt woman about fifty years of age, who sat in a low rocking-chair near her bed, the latter orderly arranged under a spotlessly white coverlet and great snowy pillows.

“This is not a professional visit, Mrs. Barry.” He smiled as he bent to take her thin, nervous hand, the fingers of which were aimlessly picking at the fringe on the arm of the chair. “Dora was headed for home, and so was I. The truth is, I am not half so much worried about you as I am about her. Your color is coming back fast enough, and you have no fever. You are all right, but she looks upset and nervous. It may be

due to her highly artistic temperament, which is a thing medicine can't easily reach. Do you know if her appetite is good?”

“Really I haven't noticed about that particularly,” the woman answered, in a plaintive tone. “You see, since I got down I haven't been about the dining-room at all. She has waited on me instead of me on her.”

“Well, you'll be all right in a day or so,” Dearing said, his brows drawn thoughtfully, “and then you can take charge of her. She declares, though, that her health is tip-top.”

The old patient folded her thin, blue-veined hands tightly for a moment, and twisted them spasmodically together; then suddenly she fixed her sharp, gray eyes anxiously on the young man's face, and he saw that she was deeply moved, for her lower lip was twitching.

“I have always felt that you are the one young man whom I could trust—absolutely trust,” she said, falteringly. “Physicians are supposed to keep certain matters to themselves, anyway, but even aside from that, Wynn, it is hard to keep from speaking to you in a familiar way, having seen you grow up from babyhood right under my eyes, so I hope you will forgive me if—”

“Oh, I wouldn't have you quit calling me that for the world!” Dearing flushed deeply and laughed. “I haven't grown a full beard yet to make me look older and wiser than I am, as many young sawbones do. I hope I'll always be simply Wynn Dearing to you, Mrs. Barry.”

She looked as admiringly and as proudly as a mother might at the strong, smooth-shaved face, with its merry eyes of brown, firm chin and mouth, and shock of thick, dark

hair, and at the tall, muscular frame and limbs in the neatly cut suit of brown.

“Yes, I can trust you,” she muttered, her voice growing husky, “and it seems to me if I don't confide in some one, I may as well give up.”

“Why, what is the matter, Mrs. Barry?” Dearing inquired, now quite grave.

“Oh, it is about Dora!” The old woman sighed. “Wynn, I may as well confess it. My sickness is partly due to worry over her. It is not because she is unwell either. It is something else. I am afraid she has some—some secret trouble. You must not show that you suspect anything—that would never do; but all is not as it should be with her. Naturally she has as happy a disposition as any girl I ever knew. Her art pupils adore her, and up to quite recently she used to laugh and joke with them constantly; but she has altered—strangely altered. I catch her sitting by herself at times with the saddest, most woebegone expression on her face. When I try to worm it out of her, she attempts to laugh it off; but she can't keep up the pretense, and it is not long before she begins to droop again. Her room is there, you see; and as the partition is thin, I often wake up in the dead of night and hear her cautiously tiptoeing over the floor—first to the window and then back to her bed, as though she were unable to sleep.”

“That is bad,” Dearing said, sympathetically, as Mrs. Barry paused and, covering her wrinkled face with her hands, remained silent for a moment.

“I would like to ask you something,” the old woman continued, hesitatingly—“something of a personal nature. I

have no earthly right to do such a thing, but I thought, you see, that it might help me decide whether I am right in something I fear. Is it true that—that your uncle has forbidden Fred Walton to visit your sister Margaret?”

Dearing shrugged his broad shoulders and contracted his heavy brows. “I may as well tell you that he has, Mrs. Barry. I don't like to speak against another young man, and one who has never harmed me in any way; but I agree with my uncle that Fred is not exactly the kind of man I'd like to have Madge make an intimate friend of. His general character is not what it ought to be, and he seems to be going from bad to worse. He still has plenty of friends and even sympathizers, who think Fred would reform and settle down to business if his father were not quite so hard on him. Madge is one of them. She has a sort of girlish faith in the fellow, and the slightest word against him makes her mad.”

“Well, it is about Fred Walton that I want to speak to you,” Mrs. Barry resumed, tremulously. “He has been coming to see Dora a good deal for the last year. He passes by the gate often in the afternoon, and they take long walks over the hills to the river. Sometimes he accompanies her when she goes to sketch in the woods. And now and then she slips out after dark, and won't say where she has been. You see, I am speaking very frankly. I *have* to, Wynn, for I am in great trouble—greater than I ever thought could come to me at my time of life. My child is an orphan, and there is no one, you see, to—to protect her. It is hard to think that any man here at home could be so—so dishonorable, but they all say he is reckless, and—well, if I must say it—I am afraid she cares a great deal about him. I may be very

wrong, and I hope I am, but I am deeply troubled, and need not try to hide it.”

“I see how you feel,” Dearing said, his face hardening as he bit his lip, and a fixed stare came into his eyes, “but I am sure you have nothing very—very serious to fear. Dora may think she cares for him. He seems to have a wonderful way with women, young and old. They all stand by him and make excuses for his daredevil ways.”

“Well, I do hope I am wrong,” Mrs. Barry said, brightening a little. “It has made me feel better to talk to you. We'll wait and see. As you say, it may be only a fancy on Dora's part, and it may all come out right. I have said more to you, Wynn, than I could have said to any one else in the world. That shows how much confidence I place in you.”

“You can trust me, Mrs. Barry,” Dearing said, as he looked at his watch and rose to go. “I know how to keep my mouth shut.”

As he was leaving, Dora stood motionless at the window of her room, hidden from his view by the curtains. She watched him as he passed out of the yard and crossed the narrow street to reach the rear gate to his own grounds.

“If he knew the truth he'd despise me!” she moaned, as she sank into a chair and tensely clasped her little hands in her lap. “How can I bear it? I'm so miserable—so very, very miserable!”

She rose, and went to her bureau, and took up a photograph of Fred Walton; as she gazed at it her eyes filled and her lip quivered.

“Dear, dear Fred!” she said, fervently, “in spite of all the faults they say you have, you are the best and truest friend

a poor girl ever had. If I'd only listened to your advice I'd never have been like this. Oh, what will you think when you hear the truth—the awful, awful truth!”

She threw herself on her bed, and with her face covered she lay trying to sob, trying to shed tears, but the founts of her agony were dry.

CHAPTER II

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DR. DEARING'S house was an old-fashioned structure built long before the Civil War. It fronted on the main residential street of the town, and was of red brick partly covered with clinging ivy. It had a colonial veranda with the usual tall, fluted columns, which were painted white and rested on square blocks of masonry. It had been the property of several generations of Dearings more or less distinguished in the history of the State, and since the death of the doctor's father, a prosperous merchant, slave-holder, and planter, it had been in the possession of the brother and sister, who, with an aged maternal uncle, General Sylvester, now occupied it.

As Dearing entered the lower gate of the grounds he saw Kenneth Galt, his next-door neighbor, crossing the lawn to reach his own house just beyond a low hedge of well-trimmed boxwood. And hearing the clicking of the iron gate-latch, Galt paused, turned, and advanced toward his friend. He was a handsome man, tall, dark, well-built, about thirty-five years of age, and with a strong, secretive face—the face of a man full of nervous force and the never-satisfied hunger of ambition.

“You've been to church like a good little boy,” he laughed, as he paused and stood cutting at the grass with his cane.

“Yes, and it is exactly where you ought to have been,” Dearing retorted, with a smile. “If you would only listen to a few good sermons on the right line you'd burn up that free-

thought library of yours, and quit thinking you know more than your good old Godfearing ancestors.”

“I simply couldn't sit and listen to such stuff with a straight face,” Galt answered. “Goodness knows, I've tried it often enough. It really seems an insult to a fellow's intelligence. I can't agree with you that any man ought to try to think as his forefathers did. You don't in your profession, why should a man do it in more vital matters? You don't bleed your patients as doctors did fifty years ago, because you know better. I believe in evolution of mind as well as of matter. We are constantly advancing. Your old-time preacher, with all his good intentions, is a stumbling-block to intelligence. You may listen to a man who tells you your house is burning down over your head and urges you to save your life, but if you don't believe him you wouldn't care to have him pull you out by the heels on a cold night to convince you. But you don't hear what I am saying!” Galt finished, with a short laugh. “I am sowing my seed on stony ground. I've been in to see the General. I have some important letters about the railroad that he and I are going to get built one of these days. As a rule, he is more than eager to talk about it, but he was certainly out of sorts just now. I have never seen him so upset before. While I was talking to him he kept walking up and down the room, and not hearing half I was saying. He is not well, is he?”

“No, he really is not in the best of shape,” Dearing answered, with a thoughtful shadow on his face; “but I think he will pull through all right. I see him on the porch now. I'll walk on, and talk to him.”

As Dearing drew near the house General Sylvester, who was a tall, slightly bent old man with long gray beard and hair, came down the steps and walked across the grass to a rustic seat under a tree. He was about to sit down, but seeing his nephew approaching he remained standing, a gaunt hand held over his spectacled eyes to ward off the sunlight.

“I have been waiting for you,” he said, in a piping, irritable voice. “Kenneth was in to talk business, but it seems to me that I'll never be interested in such things any more. What's the use? I didn't want the money for myself, anyway. I saw the others coming back from church some time ago, and couldn't imagine what delayed you. I've had another row with Madge, and this time it is serious—very, very serious.”

“Oh, *that's* the trouble!” Dearing cried, and he attempted to laugh. “Uncle Tom, in your old age you are just like a school-boy with his first sweetheart. You are actually flirting with your own niece. You and she bill and coo like doves, and then get cold as ice or as mad as Tucker. What's wrong now?”

“Well, I think a young girl like she is ought to take the sound advice of a man as old and experienced as I am, and she won't do it. That's all—she won't do it, sir!”

“Of course she *ought* to,” Dearing said, still inclined to jest, “but you are wise enough to know that no woman ever took the advice of a man, young or old. See here, uncle, I'll bet you haven't had your medicine yet, and the dinner-bell will ring soon and you will have to wait fifteen minutes before you shall taste a bite. You and I 'll quarrel if you don't

do as I tell you. Madge won't obey you, but you've got to get down on your marrow-bones and follow my orders."

"Oh, I'll take the blasted stuff in time!" the General fumed. "I don't want to eat now, anyway. I tell you, I'm too mad to eat."

"I suppose it is Fred Walton again," Dearing said, resignedly.

"Who else could it be?" the old man burst out. "She tries to close my eyes as to her doings with him; but I got it straight that he was out driving with her last night while you were in the country."

The face of the doctor clouded over. "You don't mean to say that—"

"I mean that he was afraid to drive up to the door like a gentleman, but met her down-town and took her from there, and when they got back, long after dark, he left her at Lizzie Sloan's, to keep us from getting on to it. You know, folks will talk about a thing like that."

Dearing's eyes flashed, and a touch of whiteness crept into his face, but he said, pacifically: "Oh, there must be some mistake. I hardly think Madge would—"

"But there *isn't* any mistake, for she admitted it to me not ten minutes ago, and just as good as told me it was none of my business besides. Now, listen to me, my boy. I am an old man, but I am still in the possession of my faculties, and I know what I am talking about. I was in the bank yesterday, and had a talk with his father. He told me frankly that he intended to cut the scamp off without a penny. He gave the fellow a position of trust in the bank, but instead of behaving himself properly, he started into

gambling, speculating in futures, and every reckless thing he could think of. He turned customers away, scared off depositors, who don't like to leave their money in such hands, and in many ways injured the business. Old Walton was so mad he could hardly talk to me, and when I told him right out how I felt about my niece going with him, he said he didn't blame me; that he wouldn't let such a rascal go with a servant of his, much less the acknowledged belle of the town, and a prospective heiress. Now, Wynn, this is what I have decided to do. You know that I have made my will, leaving all I have in the world to her."

"And it is blamed bully of you, Uncle Tom," Dearing said, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder, which he could feel quivering with a passion not good for even a younger man. "I am sure, neither of us is worthy of the great interest you have always taken in us."

"*You* are, my boy. I am proud of *you*. You are already a shining light in your profession, and will make all the money you'll ever need. But I always have worried about Madge. I want to provide well for her, and I haven't many years to live. Sometimes I think I may snuff out like a candle without a moment's notice, so I don't intend to leave my affairs in such a shape that Fred Walton will gloat over my demise and throw away my savings. No, sir. I tell you if your sister does not agree to give that scamp up inside of the next twenty-four hours, I will set my effects aside for another purpose."

"I'll see her and talk to her, Uncle Tom," Dearing promised, gravely. He had never seen the General so highly wrought up, nor heard such an exasperated ring in his voice.

“Now, you go take your medicine. Madge will be sensible. She loves you, I know she does.”

“Well, remember what I've said,” the old soldier threw back as he turned away.

Dearing waited till he had disappeared through the side entrance of the house, and then he went up the front steps, crossed the wide veranda, with its smooth, rain-beaten floor of ancient heart pine, and stood in the great hall, straw hat in hand, looking about him.

“I'll see her at once,” he thought. “She must come to her senses. She is driving uncle to his grave with worry over her silly conduct.”

“Oh, Madge!” he called out. His voice rang and echoed in the great opening through which the walnut stairs and polished balustrade ascended to the corridor and sleeping-rooms above, but there was no response.

Still holding his hat, with which he fanned his heated face in an absent-minded, perturbed sort of way, Dearing went through all the lower rooms—the parlor and library and adjoining study, and even the dining-room and kitchen. The colored cook, old Aunt Diana, a former slave of the family, in white apron and turbaned head, informed him that his sister was in her room.

“I know she is, Marse Wynn, 'case she sent Lindy down fer some fresh col' water not mo'n ten minutes ago.”

Back to the front hall Dearing went, and thence up the stairs to his sister's room, adjoining his own. The door was ajar, but he stood on the threshold and rapped softly.

“Come!” It was a sweet young voice, and belonged to a pretty girl seventeen or eighteen years of age, who, as

Dearing entered the room, sat at a quaint mahogany writing-desk between two lace-curtained windows through which a gentle breeze was blowing. She wore a becoming wrapper, and her small feet were shod in dainty embroidered slippers. Her abundant hair was quite dark, and her eyes very blue. She had been writing, for on the page of tinted note-paper before her he saw an unfinished sentence in the round, schoolgirl hand.

“I don't want to disturb you, Madge,” Dearing began, “but you will have to stop anyway soon, and get ready for dinner.”

“I am not going down,” she told him, her glance falling to the rug at her feet. “I had breakfast late, and I am not a bit hungry.”

“But that wouldn't be treating Uncle Tom quite right, you know,” Dearing gently protested, as he took a seat on the broad window-sill, swung his hat between his knees, and eyed her significantly. “You know how childish he is getting, Madge. It really upsets him not to have you at the table. He is old-fashioned, and was something of a beau when he was a young man. Making a fine lady of you and paying court to you seems to be about all the pleasure he gets in life. I know it must be tiresome, but there are many things we—”

“He is *childish!*” Margaret exclaimed, her eyes flashing angrily, “but I bore with it because I loved him, and because mother would have approved it; but he is getting worse and worse. He wants me at his beck and call every minute in the day, and even if I go out to see one of my girl friends he either comes or sends one of the servants to see if anything

has happened. Then he—he—oh, there are a lot of things a girl can't put up with!”

“You mean his opposition to the visits of a certain friend of yours?” Dearing said, in a forced tone of indifference, as he glanced out at the window. Although his eyes were still ostentatiously averted, he saw her cautiously draw a blank sheet of paper over the lines she had written.

“Yes,” she said, “that is *one* thing. Fred Walton is a friend of mine, and for all I know his feelings may be hurt by what uncle has said and done. I know Fred is wild and reckless, but he has a good side to him—a side everybody can't see who doesn't know him intimately.”

Young as he was, Wynn Dearing was wise in the ways of the world, and he well knew that a temperament and will like his sister's would never be coerced. He decided to profit by the error in the method of his blustering uncle.

“You have never heard *me* abuse Fred,” he said, gently. “Many young men who have wealthy parents are inclined to 'sow wild oats,' as the old folks say; but really, Madge”—and he was smiling now—“for an honest, inoffensive cereal, the 'wild oat' has to bear the burden of many a tough young weed. Charity is said to cover a multitude of sins, but for genuine selfsacrifice give me the old-fashioned, long-bearded wild oat, in all its verdant and succulent—”

“Brother, I'm not in a mood for silliness!” the girl interrupted him, quickly, and with an impatient flush.

“I'm not either, Madge.” He took one of his knees between his hands, and drew it up toward him. “The fact is, I am worried—worried like everything! I may not show it, but this thing has taken a deep hold on me. Something has got

to be done, and that right away. Young folks may love each other, or *think* they love each other, and if it does no harm to any one *else*, why, all well and good. But if their love business is causing suffering—yes, and positive bodily injury to another—then they ought to stop and ponder."

"You mean that Uncle Tom—"

"I mean this, Madge, and now I am talking to you as a physician—*his* physician, too. The old man is actually so near the end of his natural life that irritation like this is apt to undermine what little constitution he has left. I've known old men to worry themselves into softening of the brain over smaller things than this. You may not think it would make much difference; but remember that if any act of yours and Fred Walton's were to cause his death, even indirectly, you could never outlive the reproach of your conscience. Uncle Tom is in a dangerous condition: his heart-action is bad, and so are his kidneys. You are too young a girl to take such a responsibility as that on your shoulders; besides, Madge, I must say that Fred—it is my duty as a brother to say—"

"You are going to abuse him; remember, you have not done it so far!" Margaret broke in. "You won't gain by it, brother. The whole town has talked of nothing lately but him and his faults, and I appreciated your silence, and so does he. We were speaking about it only yesterday, and he praised you for it. He said you were the truest, most perfect gentleman he had ever known, that you knew human nature too well to expect young men to be absolutely perfect, and that—"

"I wasn't going to say a word against his *honor*, Madge," Dearing interrupted her, gently; "but I am going to say this:

if I were in *his* place right now I'd feel that I could not conscientiously, or even quite honorably, continue to pay attention to a young lady situated—well, situated *just as you are*."

"Why, what do you mean?" the girl asked, her lip quivering stubbornly.

"This, sister, and nothing else. We may say what we please about Fred's good qualities, his sincerity, his—his devotion to you; his plans, whatever they are; but a very disagreeable fact stands out like a black splotch on the whole business, and that is simply this: Fred really has failed to make good in the way a man ought to make good who aspires to the hand of a girl like yourself. His father gave him a splendid chance in the bank, but Fred's best friends admit that he hasn't profited by it. Instead of attending to business and helping his old daddy—who, harsh old skinflint though he is as to money matters, is a safe man in any community—instead of doing what was expected of him, Fred—well, he has turned his father against him, that's all. The old man swears he is going to cut him off without a penny, and everybody in town knows he means it; Fred doesn't dispute it himself. So, taking that along with *the other thing*, I honestly can't see how he can talk of love and marriage to a girl like you are."

"What *other* thing do you mean?" Margaret demanded, pale with suppressed emotion.

"I mean the fact that his marriage to you would cause Uncle Tom to disinherit you outright. A man might sink low enough to want to marry a girl after he himself has been disinherited for his irregular conduct, but no creature with a

spark of manhood in him would let his act impoverish the woman he loves. I have said nothing against him so far, but when he knows what uncle has determined to do—when he is told that if he persists—well”—Dealing's eyes were burning now with the fire of genuine anger—“he'll have *me* to reckon with, that's all—*me*, Madge!”

Margaret stared at him for a moment, and then, with a piteous little sob, she covered her face with her hands. “You are going to *tell* him!” she said, huskily. “Yes.” Dearing stood up and laid his hand on her head. “I'm going to tell him, Madge, but it will be only for his own good. In any case, he couldn't honorably ask you to marry him *now*, and the delay—if he is willing to wait—won't do either of you any harm. You are both young, and the world is before you. You can't realize it now, Madge, but this very thing may be the making of him. If he loves you as truly as he ought, this will be only a spur toward proving his worthiness.”

“Brother, must you really—? oh, I can't—can't—” The girl stood up, her cheeks wet with tears, and clasped her hands round his neck appealingly. “You really must not! He is already in trouble. Surely—surely—”

“There is no other way, Madge, but I'll not be rough; I pity the poor chap too much for that.”

“When do you intend to—to see him?” She was sobbing again, her face pressed against his shoulder.

“This evening, Madge, if I can find him at home. There is no other way. Uncle and I are the only protectors you have, and he is too angry and easily wrought up to be trusted with the matter. I'd better manage it; but you know I'll be fair.”

The girl gazed fixedly at him for a moment, and then, in a storm of tears, she threw herself oh her bed and hid her face in a pillow. Glancing at her pityingly, and with moisture in his own eyes, Dearing turned from the room.

“I am sorry for them both,” he muttered. “They are having hard luck, and yet Fred Walton isn't, from any point of view, worthy of her; there are no two ways about it. He has got himself into a terrible plight, and he has no right to involve my sister. No, and he sha'n't!”

CHAPTER III

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THE greater part of the ensuing afternoon was spent by Dr. Dearing in his musty little office on the ground-floor of a building in the central square of the town which was devoted to lawyers' quarters, the rooms of the sheriff of the county, and the council-chamber where the mayor held his court. He received a few patients, made some examinations, wrote several prescriptions, and, considering that it was Sunday, he felt that he was fairly well occupied. His mind, however, was constantly on the topic of the morning and the disagreeable task confronting him. Finally he turned over the placard on the door till the word “out” was exposed to view, and went home to supper. Here, however, he met only General Sylvester, who, a dejected picture of offended loneliness, sat on the veranda, a dry cigar between his lips.

“Where is Madge?” Dearing asked, half standing, half sitting on the balustrade in front of the old gentleman, and assuming a casual tone which was far from natural.

“She hasn't been down at all to-day,” the General answered, pettishly. “I wouldn't send for her. She knew I wouldn't knuckle like that, but she knows I always expect to walk with her Sunday afternoons, and she stayed pouting in her room. She resents what has been said about that