

RED CLOUD CHIEF.

WEDNESDAY DEC. 23. 1874.

THE OLD HOME.

An old quiet held the earth beneath the winter moon. The cricket chirped in cozy mirth. And the kettle crooned upon the hearth. A sweet, old-fashioned tune.

CARRY ME BACK.

Virginia's wood were clothed in green. When from my home I turned; With hope to win undying fame, My youthful genius burned.

THE BAG OF GOLD.

"Money is a great trial," said the Widow Peckington, impressively. "I declare I did not know what care meant before brother Garbriel died and left me all the money."

"Well, Cousin Clarissa," observed George Merrilton, who was assiduously engaged in entangling the widow's work to the very worst of his ability,

"In the bottom of your big red chest?" mischievously hazarded George.

"No matter where, sir," said the widow, nodding her head.

"O, but, Cousin Clarissa, you might tell us," persisted Merrilton. "We are all your own folks, Cora and I."

Cora Dallas sat stitching quietly in the corner—the pretty orphan whom good Mrs. Peckington had taken out of the orphan asylum "to bring up," five years before.

"I don't expect to leave you nothing," Mrs. Peckington had said, "for I've relations of my own; but I'll give you a good despatch school education, and a decent bringing up, and a good chance to do for yourself."

And Cora accepted the good dame's offer with glad gratitude. She had grown very pretty in the last few years, this solitary child of nobody. Dark-eyed, with her hair full of deep chestnut golden shadows, a peach-blossom skin, where the rose-pink glowed brightly through on the slightest provocation, and a mouth like Hebe, it seemed as if nature had made a solemn compact with herself to atone for all social slight that might be cast across Cora Dallas' path.

"Well," said Mrs. Peckington, seriously. "I don't mind telling you, but mind you don't repeat it to the bag's hang half way up the chimney on an iron hook."

"But suppose the chimney should take fire?" said Merrilton.

"It won't. I keep it well swept, and, besides, if it should, it takes a pretty good heat to melt gold."

"Upon my word, Cousin Clarissa," said Merrilton, "you are a second Machiavelli."

"Who in pity takes was he?" asked Mrs. Peckington. "Her neighbor Simkins at the door jump and let him in, Cora, for it's beginning to snow like all possessed."

"Sit by, Mr. Simkins," said the widow, hospitably, putting another moss-fringed log on the fire; "seems like we're going to have another spell of weather."

And while the widow and her mid-aged lover discussed the weather, George took occasion to help Cora get down half a bushel of red apples from the garret, and was unnecessarily long about it, too.

"I should think you would be ashamed of yourself, George Merrilton," said Cora, disapproving and blushing, and trying to look very angry, in which she succeeded but indifferently.

"What for?" audaciously demanded George. "One doesn't get behind the garret door with a pretty girl every day in the year."

"What would Mrs. Peckington say?"

"I dare say she's doing the very same thing herself down stairs with Jehoram Simkins."

And Cora burst out laughing at the preposterous idea, just as the widow came for quince jelly and apple butter, and to tell Cora to mix up a batch of muffins in the twinkling of an eye, for neighbor Simkins was going to stay to tea.

After supper Mr. Simkins took his leave, with a roguish twinkle of his eye toward the young people, and Mrs. Peckington went over to spend the evening with Mrs. Dorcas Dottleford, her pet enemy, and Cora sat all alone in the fire-light, sewing and sighing thinking. For George Merrilton had gone home early to secure Mr. Simkins' companionship a part of the way through the lonely roads, which were already becoming veiled in snow.

The tall old-fashioned clock in the angle of the old-fashioned kitchen chimney had just struck midnight, when Cora Dallas was roused from her sleep by a sheeted form at the foot of her bed—tall and narrow, clad in white—but no ghost, nevertheless, but Mrs. Peckington's self.

"What's the matter?" cried Cora, breathlessly.

"My money!" gasped the widow, waving her hands tragically in the air. "But what of it?"

"It's clean gone, stolen, took a way!"

"Are you sure?" eagerly demanded Cora.

"As sure as I am that you're staring at me now. I felt up chimney for it the last thing afore I got ready to go to bed, and it was gone."

In vain proved all search. Neither up chimney, nor down cellar, nor in any imaginable or unimaginable corner was the bag of gold to be found.

"Mrs. Peckington," said Cora, huskily, "it must have been stolen."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peckington, whose lips were now compressed, and there was something in her manner that Cora never before noticed, as she called the white-headed farm-boy, and told him to run over and ask Farmer Simkins to step to the Peckington place that morning.

"And you may as well stop for George Merrilton as you come back," said she.

When he was gone she came close up to Cora Dallas.

"Cora," said she, "we two are alone together now, and I am the last one to be hard on you; confess now, and we'll see how the matter can be cleared up."

Cora opened wide her brown eyes. "Confess what?" she asked innocently.

"That you took the money; there was no one else that could have done it. You were here all alone yesterday evening, and I know it was a strong temptation to a gal that never had five dollars of her own in the world. Cora, you're young, child, and I don't believe you're altogether bad, but Satan sifts us all as wheat, and—"

"Stop!" cried Cora, growing white and breathless; "you suspect me—you think I am a thief! Mrs. Peckington, you may forgive me for your very great suspicion."

Mrs. Peckington was silent. She knew not how she could help the impression which so strongly bore upon her mind. Who but Cora Dallas could have taken the missing gold?

"George, George!" gasped the poor girl, flitting up to him as for safety, as the door opened and the stalwart form of George Merrilton appeared; "she believes that I stole the money; you do not think so, do you?"

George Merrilton's eyes sparkled nervously.

"Cousin Clarissa, I would stake my life on Cora's innocence."

Mrs. Peckington shook her head. "It looks very ugly for her," she said, "but of course if she can prove it—"

"At all events," she said, turning to Cora Dallas, "you can't expect shelter under my roof no longer. I did not ask for such treatment from you."

"Cousin Clarissa," said Merrilton, bravely. "I love Cora Dallas, and I stand here to espouse her cause. You may see her if you like."

"I shan't do that," said the widow, "leastwise not until Jehoram Simkins comes home to advise me what's best."

"But," went on George Merrilton, "I shall make her my wife this very day, in order that I can offer her a home in place of the one of which you have so cruelly deprived her."

The widow, albeit naturally a kind-hearted woman, fired up at this.

"Of course I've nothing to say," she said, "if you choose to marry a thief—"

But she stopped here—the upbraiding fire in Merrilton's eyes admonished her to go no further.

It was lonely enough those cold winter days, sitting at her fire-side, the money gone, the merry sound of George Merrilton's voice silent, and Cora's bright presence vanished.

"If I should be wrong in 'sposing she took it," she said to herself. "I should be dreadful sorry to think of all the ugly, names I called her—but I don't see as there can possibly be any doubt to it. Any way, Jehoram will advise me when he comes."

And on the dusky edge of Saturday Farmer Simkins came.

"I never was so glad to see anybody, in all my born days," said Mrs. Peckington, lapulatively jumping up from her seat—and she told him the story of the vani-hed bag of gold before he had a chance to deposit his portly bulk upon the chair she hospitably drew forward.

Mr. Simkins turned doll red—then a tallow white—got up and sa' down again, and finally dragged a leather bag from the recess of his butternut-colored coat-tail.

"I never'll play off a practical joke again, blamed if I do," he ejaculated; "for I declare to gracious I hadn't any idea of the mischief I was doin'! Here's your money, Clarissa—I heard you tell the folks where it was—I was a scarpin' the snow off my feet under the window that night, and I reached it down, just for a joke, when you was gone to see about the supper. I meant to have brought it back the next morning, and have a good laugh with you about the barzars, but see how I was fixed—farther got poorly, and I could not think of nothin' but him—but you won't lay it up again me, Clarissa, now will you?"

"But Cora Dallas?" gasped the astonished widow. "It's told every body—the widow."

"Then you and I must go around and explain matters to everybody, that's all," said the farmer.

And Mrs. Peckington began to cry.

"Poor, Cora," she sobbed, "poor motherless child! I could bite my tongue when I think of what wicked things I have spoken with it. But I'll go right over and beg her pardon, so I will, and George's too."

Cora Merrilton forgave Mrs. Peckington more sweetly and readily than her husband could bring himself to do—and she even came over to help the widow make cake for her own wedding.

"For, of course, I know it would all be set right sooner or later," said Cora, cheerfully, "and we'll let bygones be bygones."

And the widow salaced her conscience by presenting Mrs. Cora with just half the contents of the mischievous leather bag for a wedding present.

A man cannot expect half a loaf when he loaf—all of the time.

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