

## RIGHT AND PROPER.

She was the parson's daughter. And he was the deacon's son. He saw her home from meeting. And thus it all began. He saw her home from meeting. Just as he should have done. For she was the parson's daughter. And he was the deacon's son.

He called to see her father. Upon a Sunday night. He called to see her mother. And that was but polite. They always made him welcome. As they did every one. And then—why, 'twas the parson's son. And he was the deacon's son.

At length there came a crisis: He took her out to ride. And love o'ercame his shyness. He begged her to be his bride. And gossip never wondered For once, at what was done, For she was the parson's daughter. And he was the deacon's son.

The girl was sweet and pretty. And she could sew and bake. And he was tall and manly. And bold in meeting spake; And all was right and proper. The prize was fairly won. For she was the parson's daughter. And he was the deacon's son.

—Persis E. Darrow, in *Good Housekeeping*.

## THE OLD MILL MYSTERY

By Arthur W. Marchmont, B. A.

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CHAPTER XIV—CONTINUED

"You had better sit down, Mary," he said, very kindly and gently, but in a manner calculated to add to her alarm. "I have a good deal to say to you."

"What is it about, Mr. Gorringe?" she asked. "Please don't keep me in suspense, but tell me what it is at once."

"In the first place, tell me," he said, very seriously and concernedly, "whether you think you can trust me as a friend."

"Yes," answered the girl; "you may know that; otherwise I should not have come to you as I did this morning."

"Then will you tell me why you wanted that money?"

The question surprised her, and she shrank from it almost as if it had been an insult.

"No: I cannot tell you that. I had sudden need of the money."

"Was it for Tom Roylance?" he asked, with equal suddenness, looking keenly at her.

"I said I could not tell you, Mr. Gorringe. If I had known it was to ask me this question that you wanted me, I should not have come here now. Nay, I should not have come to you as I did this morning;" and she rose to go.

"Don't go. I wished to see whether you would, as you said, trust me. I see you do not. I know that you wanted the money for Tom. Here is the note that I gave you. It was brought to me by Murstone, who had it from Tom within an hour or two of your being here."

The girl made no answer, but sat down again in her chair. She knew there was more to come.

"Why did Murstone bring you that note?" she asked.

"Will you tell me whether you have heard anything about money matters between the two men? Did you know the purpose for which Tom wanted this money when you gave it to him? If you would tell me it would make me able to speak with greater freedom."

"I know what lies were told about Tom having kept some of the money of the sick fund," said Mary, angrily.

"I thought so too."

"You thought so? Say whether you know Tom to be as straight as I know him to be. Don't say you thought. That means you don't think so now."

"That means that I don't—or rather that I can't—think so now."

Mary rose from her chair, her face flushed crimson and her eyes flashing with angry light.

"This is no place for me, then," she said. "I will stay nowhere to hear Tom—my Tom, my husband that is to-day—insulted like that."

"You are right to be angry. I admire you for it. I knew you would be, and that made me hesitate how to speak at first. I know you may think I have some cowardly motive in saying what I have said, and what I have to say. But I can find no one else to say; and yet you must know all; and you will help me, and help us all, if you do not make it so difficult for me to speak."

His manner impressed the girl, and the fear that there was something really serious to be heard overcame even her anger.

"If there is anything that I ought to know, I will try to be patient while you tell me; but please do not again make such charges against him, or I may not be able to keep my temper."

"I will try to give you the facts by themselves, and leave you to form your opinion; but I shall be obliged to ask you a question now and again. You say you know that the trustees of the sick fund believe the books to be wrong; that, acting under this belief, they went to Tom last night and asked him to explain; that he did not give any explanation which they could understand; that he said he had the proper amount of money in the house; that when he went to fetch it he returned with a broken cash box which was empty; that he said the money had been stolen, and that he took the money which the book showed to be the balance round to them this morning. You know that?"

"I know that some one stole the money belonging to the sick fund which was in the cash box, and that Tom took the full amount for which he was accountable to them to-day."

"Do you know that he gave up his books in order that no scandal might be made?"

"I know that he allowed himself to be hoveaten out of his books by some threats that they made about public life," said Mary.

"But do you not know that subsequent examination of the books showed a further amount missing of ten pounds?"

"No," answered Mary, emphatically; "and I don't believe it. If these men were fools enough to believe Tom would take money placed in his charge for such a purpose, they would be spiteful enough to try and make the books out to be wrong. But if ten pounds is claimed, ten pounds can be paid."

"It has been paid already," said Gorringe.

"Who paid it?"

"I did. I said I knew there must be a mistake, and that I thought Tom would wish the amount paid at once. I thought you would wish that to be done, Mary, when I saw what you had wanted the other ten pounds for."

"But why did they bring that to you at all?"

"They came to tell me about it all—and the note had my own private mark on it, which Murstone knows; so he—he thought it would be better to show it to me."

"He thought Tom might have stolen it from you to cover the amount stolen from the fund, I suppose?" said Mary, in clear, distinct, scornful tones. "I don't believe a word about any more money being short. I believe it's all a lie from first to last," she said, vigorously. "But you know Tom better than to believe a word of it. You have had him about you here in this office. If any man knows that Tom's as straight as a die, you must know it."

Reuben Gorringe did not speak, and avoided the girl's look. The expression of eager, harassed pain in her eyes was too distressing for him to endure when he reflected that he had to thrust the bayonet deeper into the wound than ever.

"Why don't you speak, Mr. Gorringe? Why don't you answer?"

"I know not how to answer, Mary," he replied, in a tone scarcely above a whisper.

"Do you mean that you don't know that Tom's straight?" she cried, at her heart a great fear.

"I have told you that I would not let myself hold a doubt of him. You know how I have trusted him. How I have had him here in the office. If there is any change in him, I do not believe it is his fault. I know that in some things he has changed. I have heard it. He has spent money—more money than before. He has drawn out all his money from the savings bank. He has been with—those who will do him no good. But it is not his fault. Nay, indeed, the blame is partly mine."

"Yours?" cried Mary, quickly. "What do you mean?"

"It was my fault that the girl ever came here. I did not know—I could not know—what would happen?" he said this as if excusing himself. "I only thought to bring a good hand here at the time of the strike; but I had never a thought of what might happen."

"Whom do you mean?" asked Mary, her face pale.

"Forgive me if I pain you. I refer to what everyone in Walkden Bridge knows—the relations of Tom with the girl Savannah."

She had felt it coming, but the blow struck her with cruel force. She sat silent, first trying to calm herself, and next trying to force herself to be angry, then to persuade herself that it was all untrue. But she could not do it at once, for all the hard struggle that she made. She could not but feel the truth of what lay beneath what Reuben Gorringe had said, and she longed and yet dreaded to hear more.

"Savannah Morbyn is not a woman to be trusted," said the manager, after a pause. "I know that now. I fear that the money has been spent upon her. And how much has gone I cannot yet tell."

"Do you mean that more of the sick fund money has gone?" asked Mary, in a dull, misery-tuned voice.

"Worse than that—much worse, I fear. When those men came to me today and told me what you know, I felt that, though I trusted Tom Roylance, I could not do otherwise than look into the books here. I have done so to-day."

"What did she want?"

"Didn't say; except that she wanted to speak to you. Seemed mighty curious to know whether you'd come from the mill yet."

For a moment the mention of Savannah's visit drew away Mary's thoughts from the chief subject; but they soon went back to Tom and the course which she had better take.

She made up her mind before she finished her tea, and she started her mother by the abruptness with which she jumped up from the table and put on her hat. She would go straight to Tom, tell him all she had heard, or nearly all, and ask him what it meant.

Tom was at home when she reached the cottage. He was sitting alone, looking so dejected and miserable that the girl's heart went out to him with a great rush of sympathy and love. He looked up when she entered and gave her a smile of welcome—sad, feeble smile enough, that flickered out quickly, and was followed by a look of anxious, searching scrutiny which Mary could not fail to notice. He seemed as if he was almost afraid of what might be her object in coming to him.

For the moment she could find nothing to say, and busied herself in taking off her hat and jacket, loitering so as to gain time. Then she went to him, and, moved by a sudden impulse, put her arms round him and kissed him. She was so rarely demonstrative in her affection that so unusual an act on her part unsettled him somewhat, and his response to her caress was not a very warm one.

"Well?"

He looked at the girl pityingly and sadly.

"Tell me what you believe to be the worst," she said, clasping her hands together tightly and knitting her brows.

"I cannot say how much has gone, but I have found one amount, and a considerable one. And I know that there are others."

"And you believe that Tom has taken it?" she asked.

"I cannot believe that he has not," was the reply.

But her concern was not on account of money. She did not for a moment credit the possibility that Tom would do anything of the kind. Her only fear was about Savannah. Thus she surprised Gorringe by laughing at the idea that Tom had acted as suggested.

"It is nonsense—sheer, silly nonsense," she said. "Tom would not rob millionaire of a penny piece. It is nonsense. There is some blunder, or somebody else has taken what you have missed. What does he say to such a ridiculous charge?"

"I have not told him. I have spoken only to you."

"I suppose that is what you think prudent and brave. To try and set me against him with charges which you dare not make to his face," she burst out, venting on him the anger which she felt on account of the tale about Savannah. "That is the act of a man, indeed," she added, very bitterly.

"If I have deserved that taunt I am sorry. If I have not you should be sorry. Whether I have or not you shall judge for yourself. Look here at this book and these papers," and as he spoke he spread before her the papers which showed the missing sum.

"Why shew these to me?" she cried.

"I do not understand them."

"Yet they trace the amount to a certain point and then show that it disappeared. But the last person to whom

it is traced is Tom Roylance. See here, again," and he took other papers.

"I don't want papers!" she cried, impatiently, pushing them away from before her and refusing to read them. "I don't understand them. If they stated in black and white that Tom had taken your money, I would not believe them one minute against his word. Where is he? Send for him, and when you are face to face tell him what you have told me. He will have an explanation."

"If he comes here will you ask him whether he has given the money to Savannah Morbyn?" asked Gorringe.

"No," she answered, flushing. "I will not insult him by even hinting at such a thing. What is it to you what he does with his money?"

"It is nothing to me what he does with his money," said Gorringe, hastily. "It was the first slip he had made during the interview, but he was irritated at finding her so persistent in her belief in her lover's honesty.

She took fire at the words instantly.

"You needn't imply by your sneers that he has taken yours for such a purpose. It is easy to sneer at an absent man," she said; but Reuben Gorringe had conquered his irritation before she had finished.

"Have I done wrong to take you into the secret, Mary?" he asked, somewhat sadly. "I would not have done so had I not thought that with your assistance some means could have been devised to put things on another footing. My wish was to try and do him good for your sake; but if it only angers you for me to tell you what has happened, then, indeed, I have blundered. But, at least, I have done nothing to deserve your sneers."

Reuben Gorringe did not speak, and avoided the girl's look. The expression of eager, harassed pain in her eyes was too distressing for him to endure when he reflected that he had to thrust the bayonet deeper into the wound than ever.

"I am sorry I was hasty," said Mary. "I can see you meant to do what was best. But what do you mean to do?"

"A question of this kind, and all that it may lead to, does not rest with me. It is solely for old Mr. Coode. He will settle what shall be done. What I thought to do was to get you to help in unraveling the cords that seem to bind Tom to a course of conduct that looks like ruin. He can't keep in with such a girl as Savannah without suffering. However, I have made a blunder, I suppose, and I am sorry."

As he spoke he put the books and papers away in a drawer, locked it, put the key in his pocket and then got up as if the interview was at an end.

"Forgive me, forgive me; I have been bitterly unkind; but you cannot tell what all this is to me. Let me see you again, and try to do nothing till then. I cannot bear any more now," and with that Mary hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT TOM HAD TO SAY.

Mary left the mill feeling wretched and heart broken. In the gloomy dejection which came over her, even the confidence she had felt in Tom's innocence in the matter of the money troubles was shaken, and more than once she asked herself whether any of the terrible accusations could possibly be true.

She went home and tried to assume something of her usually cheerful demeanor.

"Savannah's been here asking for you," said her mother. "Seem's a good bit put out about something or other. I can't make her out; and I'm blest if I'm glad she's gone. Can't like the lass, for all her soft ways and voice and that."

"What did she want?"

"Didn't say; except that she wanted to speak to you. Seemed mighty curious to know whether you'd come from the mill yet."

For a moment the mention of Savannah's visit drew away Mary's thoughts from the chief subject; but they soon went back to Tom and the course which she had better take.

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