

"I would not raise my little finger in that direction," said Miss Erminie, with savage intensity. Once more a question, a surmise, flashed across Olive Ledyard's brain. Surely there was no way in which her father and the little old maid could know each other?

The answer came sooner than she thought it would. Mr. Ledyard, overseeing some of the improvements he was having made about the grounds of his new purchase, was caught in a heavy shower and wet through. That night a slight chill set in, and in the morning he was in a raging fever. The doctor, called immediately, said that it was pneumonia in an exaggerated form. He might recover, but—

Olive almost despaired. To the loss of a kind and indulgent father was added the fear of the loss of his immortal soul. With all her strength she besought him to see a priest, but he turned from her in anger. He had lived without them—he would die without them! And the words seemed but an echo of those the little old maid had uttered a few days before.

There were trained nurses day and night, but Olive could not leave the sick-room. Her every thought was a prayer, and as the crisis approached her fears knew no bounds. She sat with folded hands and moving lips at the foot of the bed, watching the dear face over which, it seemed to her, the grim shadow of death was slowly stealing. Tears were in her eyes, sorrow in her heart. None can know such desolation as hers save those who have seen a beloved soul pass away without the ministrations so necessary to reconcile it to a God whom it has offended. For death is sad, but when Mother Church is with us, it is robbed of all its sting.

And as she sat looking at him, her ears strained for any word that would show, perhaps, the slightest turning toward his Saviour, the slightest contrition, his lips parted.

"Erminie," he said. "Oh, Erminie, Erminie!" Olive sat bolt upright, unable to speak, to move. And again, in such tones of pleading as would touch the hardest heart:

"Oh, Erminie, Erminie Wakely, forgive, forgive!" As if the name had power to wring his innermost soul, he called it again and again. Through all the delirium of his fever it lingered with him, was ever on his lips. Toward evening, Olive, wan, and with shadowed eyes, stole softly out of the room. There was a resolute expression on her face.

"You are tired—you must rest," said Jack Severne, meeting her in the hall. She looked at him with a pitiful smile.

"Afterwards—there will be lots of time to rest," she said. "Afterwards. And now—now I am going to the little old maid."

"And why?" he asked, struck with astonishment. "Why, Olive?"

She pressed her hand to her heart. "I don't know," she faltered. "I feel that my father's soul is in her hands. He knows her—he is calling her name, Erminie, Erminie! Erminie Wakely! We have been blind—all of us. My father and she know each other. She must help me now—she must."

"But, my dear Olive, my dear girl," said Jack Severne. "This is a notion, pure and simple. How in the world can such an idea have crossed your mind—"

"Jack, I shall go—I shall, I shall!" she said, passionately, and when he heard the words he knew that she would. "My father's soul—it may be the saving of his soul!"

So, accompanied by the young man, she made her way to the quaint cottage with its quaint occupant. She entered. It was quite late, but the little old maid looked up from her rocker with a smile of greeting. She had missed Olive Ledyard during the past few days—missed her more than she had imagined she could possibly miss any one. A second glance at her agitated face showed that something was amiss, and the little old maid rose to her feet hurriedly.

"My father is dying!" said Olive, in quivering accents. "Unreconciled to God, dying without the Sacraments! Calling for no priest—only for Erminie Wakely and Erminie Wakely's forgiveness! Come, come at once; come, forgive him, and save his soul. His soul is in your hands—yours, yours. Come with me, and save it."

The little old maid grasped at the corner of her little old showcase to steady herself. Her face was ghastly white.

"Go with you—to him?" she shuddered. "No, a thousand times no, no!"

"But you must," said the girl, in the high, piercing tones of one laboring under frightful excitement. "I don't care what he has done, what evil, what sorrow he has brought upon you—nothing, nothing can equal

the loss you will let him suffer now. Come, make ready the way for his reconciliation with God. Forgive him, you, forgive him—and he will see then that God has forgiveness, too—"

The sobs broke in her throat. Jack Severne cast his arm about her shaking form.

"In the name of humanity, of religion, come, Miss Erminie," he said entreatingly.

The little old maid still clung to the show case, her lips quivering.

"He was my promised husband—I defied all for his sake—gave up all to prove my love—was willing to leave my father's house a beggar to show that I—that I—. And he went away—deserted me, made me a laughing-stock, held me up to the scorn of my townspeople, the pity of my friends. Without a word, without a sign. And afterward—I heard the truth. He wanted my father's money, not my heart, and on the eve of our wedding was enriched by a distant relative, so that he no longer had need of mine—or me." She hurled the words at the two young people, still clinging to the case. "And now—after forty years—after my wasted life—after such—such—after the conduct of a dastard—you ask me to go to him—you ask me? What right has he to call my name—"

With a low sob Olive slipped from Jack Severne's encircling arm and held out her hand beseechingly.

"Yet he calls on you, he calls! Miss Erminie, come. There must be something within his heart that tortures him. Oh, Miss Erminie, come—he will listen to you, and he is dying. In the presence of death everything must be left aside—all thoughts of revenge. Come to him now, Miss Erminie. God is waiting for you—just think, perhaps waiting for your presence there to save his soul! How can you resist the call of God?"

Miss Erminie stared at her. She braced her shoulders and drew a long breath. For a few moments the struggle raging in her heart was visible in her face. Suddenly she sighed and passed her hand across her eyes.

"I will go with you," she said. "Let us go—quickly!"

The next time the good Sisters passed that way they were told that the new master of Wakely had departed this life fortified by all the rites of the Catholic Church. Olive met them, subdued and melancholy in her mourning robes, but with a peace in her soft eyes that reflected the peace in her soul.

"Visit the little old maid on your way down, Sister," she said.

"We do always, my child, although it is a fruitless errand. But we pity her, and remember her always in our prayers."

"Then your prayers are answered," said the girl. "For she, too, has seen the error of her hardness of heart. My father and she were friends in youth, Sister, and he behaved most cruelly, so that he felt he could not ask forgiveness of God when she had never forgiven him. But she did forgive him, and made ready the way for his reconciliation with the Church. And then she herself saw the folly of living apart from our dear religion. Oh, how peacefully, how calmly he died, blessing her and me, and thanking God, and asking His mercy. I shall never cease to thank God myself, Sister."

"And she—poor Miss Erminie?" asked the nun involuntarily.

"She is not poor," Sister—she has just lived that way from choice. I am going to close up Wakely—this place was her old home, and she is coming away with me until—until we both forget a little. And after that, when Mr. Severne and I marry, she will stay with us until she dies."

So ended the history of the little old maid.—"Benziger's Magazine."

His eyes were red, his nose was blue,  
He couldn't speak, he'd just say "Tchwo!"  
And everybody round they knew  
And pitied him, he had the "floo."  
At last he gasped "What shall I do?"  
And swiftly came the answer, too,  
For each one cried "Oh, fool! procure  
A bottle of Woods' Great Peppermint Cure."

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