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## THE GLEANER.

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### AN EMPTY HEAD-POP.

"Well, what is Walter Grantly coming here for every evening? I hope you are not encouraging him in any intentions he may pay you."

"Why should I not encourage him, Uncle Charles? I respect and like him."

"Respect him! A walking tailor's advertisement! An empty headed pop!"

"You are very severe, Uncle Charles. Mr. Grantly dresses well, but with no more attempt at display than any young man of his age and appearance is justified in doing. And he is by no means empty headed. He has read much, has seen the world at home and abroad, and converses well far better than any other gentleman who visits here."

"Humph! All of which means that he has succeeded in fascinating you. I expect you to marry, Nell. You cannot waste the whole of your young life with an old fellow like me. But I would like to see you the wife of a solid man—a good business man—one able to carry on his business when I am dead—a man like James Nelson."

Ellen Baldwin kept a profound silence, her eyes fastened upon the sewing.

"I know he is not handsome, and is nearly forty. His clothes are not made in the latest fashion, and he is sometimes rough in speech. But he is a thorough business man, able to take care of your fortune, and even to increase it. He would make the best of husbands, and, Nell, he loves you."

"Not at all, Uncle Charles. Mr. Nelson has done me the honor of proposing to marry me, but love has nothing to do with the matter. And I neither use nor trust him."

"Not trust him? Why, Nell, he has almost the entire control of the warehouse! I saw gradually left everything to him. No trust James Nelson. You must be insane!"

"I am perfectly sane. You are the best judge of Mr. Nelson's business powers, and I would not presume to question your ability to manage your own affairs; but I spoke of my life, my happiness, and I would not trust his tender mercies."

"Preferring Walter Grantly?"

"Yes. He has asked me to be his wife, but I, knowing your prejudice against him, have told him he must win your cordial liking before I consent to be his wife. I could not be happy if you were not friends with my husband, Uncle Charles."

Mr. Baldwin looked at his niece with glowering eyes. As she was entirely independent of his control, right of an inheritance from her father, though his own companion for nine years, this marked deference to his wishes touched him deeply. He was a self-made man, lacking refinement, not well educated, but with a money-making capacity, and he had the too common contempt for young men who, like Walter Grantly, were college graduates, and paid attention to dress, to looks, to the niceties of etiquette and conversation.

"You know, Nell," he said, after a moment of silence, "that I have only your interest at heart."

"I do not need to be told that," his niece said, warmly. "Have you not been father and mother to me since my own parents died? My hopes lie, that knowing I love Walter you will also learn to respect and like him. He labors under the disadvantages of wealth, having independence, means, but he was in business for a long time before a legacy from his grandfather gave him sufficient employment in managing the real estate and stocks in which it was invested. Try to like him, Uncle Charles, for my sake."

"Well, I will try. But I wish it was James. I could like him without trying."

Not long after this conversation, while her own heart was very happy in her love and her uncle's kindness, Nellie saw that a change had come over Mr. Baldwin. He had always been a genial man, with kindly impulses, friendly with all the world, proud of the prosperity that was of his own hands, but he became very grave and quiet, even sad, absorbed in papers, and evidently deeply troubled. Nell worried over the change, but waited to know the cause.

The knowledge came one evening when Walter Grantly was making a call. True to his promise, Uncle Charles was trying to be friendly with the young man, and that he was succeeding was proved by his speaking in his presence.

"Bad news, Nell," he said heavily. "I am a ruined man!"

"You, Uncle Charles?"

Nell's arms were around his neck while his hand was taken in a cordial grasp by Walter.

"My dear sir," Walter said, in a tone of warm concern, "I hope it is not so bad as that."

"But it is," was the broken reply.

"If I do not see my way out of the muddle in a few days, the old house of Baldwin must go into bankruptcy."

"There is my money, Uncle Charles," said Nell.

"God bless the child! Do you think I will let that! No, no. I am past seventy, and if I must go down, I will not drag your young life with me. But I can't understand it all. Everything seems to have gone on well, and yet we cannot meet our obligations."

"Fraud?" suggested Walter.

"But where? Nelson is as puzzled as I am."

Walter Grantly frowned a little, but by a few questions and an unfeigned interest soon drew from Mr. Baldwin a long story of the perplexities and the gravity of the danger, menacing him. Nell sat silent, her heart swelling with pride as she noted her uncle's gradual growing respect for his companion's opinions, as the clear, searching questions revealed his intelligent comprehension of the state of affairs. It was late in the evening when they separated; but, early in the morning, Walter received a little note from Nell.

"Uncle Charles is very ill. He wishes to see you. Can you come?"

"Well..."

In answer to the summons, Walter was soon at the bedside of the invalid. He was very ill, gradually losing control of his own thoughts, but he seemed to wish Walter to examine his business. By a great effort he wrote a paper appointing the young man his representative until he was better, and before noon desired need him fast. For many long days Nell scarcely left the sick room, save for a few hurried interviews with Walter. The old man, exhausted by his unwonted anxiety and application to business, after years of comparative idleness, lay between life and death, fighting a violent attack of fever. Even when the raving was over and he knew Nell again, he lay in a state of pitiable weakness, unable to keep up a settled train of thought for two minutes together, and still in danger of sinking into a death sleep.

Walter came often at night to take Nell's place in the sick room, and give her some hours of sorely-needed rest, and friends were plenty to help in nursing. Still, it was more than six weeks after the evening when he opened his heart to Walter Grantly, before Mr. Baldwin seemed to remember his business perplexities. But one night, when all the household slept, the invalid seeing Walter seated beside him, said, in a low weak voice:

"Is the warehouse closed?"

"Closed? No indeed. Business was never more prosperous."

"But how?"

"Are you able to hear about it? You have been very ill, and must be patient. Will it not be enough tonight to know that all is going on well?"

"I am stronger than you think. Tell me how you saved the old ship from wreck."

"I took control at once, as you gave me authority to do. Before my grandfather's death, and the legacy that made it unnecessary for me to work, I was book-keeper in a large warehouse similar to yours for six years, and had a knowledge of the business. An examination of your books soon convinced me that they had been falsified to a frightful extent and that checks drawn upon your bank, in your name, had been used for other purposes than the payment of the obligations of the business."

"How could that be? James Nelson alone had signed checks."

"Exactly so; and James Nelson has been systematically defrauding you for about fifteen years."

"Impossible!"

"Quite true. When he found I was searching the matter to the bottom, he pocketed his ill-gotten gains and absconded. As you were too ill to give the order for any pursuit, I let him go."

"But the money? How can all be going on well if he has taken it with him? There was a deficiency of thirty thousand dollars for immediate obligations."

"And having this sum title in the bank, I took the liberty of investing it in your business."

"You threw in your fortune to help, a shaming ship?"

"The ship was not sinking, but fairly afloat, and I consider the money well invested. I have long wanted to buy a partnership in a business I understand, having no love for an idle life, and I hoped you would repay this loan, but allow it to give me the right to help you out yet in business. There is an opening even now, that needs only a little capital to largely increase the business; and I waited for your authority to purchase it."

The old man's eyes sparkled as Walter clearly explained the nature of the proposed enlargement of the

warehouse business.

"It has been Mr. Nelson's policy to keep all such opportunities hidden from you," Walter said, "knowing that such alterations would involve such an examination of the books as would expose his frauds. But there is no need now to fear to open the books for any eyes."

"Thanks to you!"

"If you will. Do know what is the dearest wish of my heart, Mr. Baldwin. I love Nell, and I am fully able to give her a home as luxurious as your own, without touching her own fortune. I know that you have thought me a drone in the world's hive, unworthy of the love of such a woman, not fit to be trusted with her welfare. I will not deny that the hope of winning your approval has been my great stimulant in the efforts I have made regarding your perplexities. I have taken no steps that will not bear full investigation. I have rid you of a robber who was ruining you under the guise of friendship, and I most earnestly desire my reward."

"Nellie?"

"Nellie and the right to be your son at home—your partner in business. Let me take the burden