



**A Child of Sorrow.**

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"He expects us," said Robert. "He is waiting within call. Give your consent; say that you will marry me, and I will fetch him. You will be my lawful wife; we will go to Melbourne, to England; you shall do what you like; there shall be money enough to satisfy every whim. I'm proud of you. I shall be proud of you as my wife. No lady here or in England shall queen it higher than you. Say the words, and I'll bring him."

"No, no!" panted Maida. "I will not; I cannot! You don't know what you say, what it is you have dared to do. I could not marry you. I—oh, God, help me!—I love another man! Let me go, let me go!"

"You cannot," he said. "If I were the best man that ever breathed, I couldn't let this chance slip. It's as dear to me as salvation itself. I want you more than life; I'd rather die than lose you. Tell me to call the man and we will be married. If you do not, I keep you here the night—you'll wish then that we'd been married, and perhaps you'll wish it in vain."

It may be said that Maida did not realise the full significance of the threat. Indeed, crouching up through her a cry of fear and indignation, there came every now and then a sense of unreality in the situation itself. It was as if she were taking part in some melo-drama, too highly coloured to be anything more than play-acting. But, as she looked round the hut and at the man standing before her, with his white, set face, his brooding eyes, the consciousness of her peril grew upon her.

She half-suspected that she had to deal with a madman, a man whose ungovernable passion had destroyed in him the sense of right and wrong. "I am frightened," she said, striving for calm. "Give me time—time to think!"

He waved his hand consentingly. "Take your time, by all means," he said. "The more you think, the plainer you will see that you'll have to do what I wish. It's not my fault that I'm forcing you. I asked you to marry me in the regular way; you've driven me to this. And even now I don't want to be hard on you. If you'll marry me now, I'll promise to take you back to Milda Wolda on the instant; I'll promise not to claim you as my wife until you've had time to think it over. I'm not afraid of the result; a woman's more likely to care for a man who knows his own mind and is ready to get her at any cost."

As he was speaking, there was a slight noise outside the window of the hut, the shutter of which Robert had closed and barred from the outside; but the noise was so slight that neither he nor Maida noticed it.

Maida sank on to the sheep-skins and covered her face with her hands. No escape seemed possible. She could not doubt for a moment that the man would carry out his threat and keep her there all night; she would be compromised, ruined. What should she do? Her trembling lips murmured a prayer; her heart ached with misery as she thought of her future, yoked to this man, so hard and cruel, a man whom she was beginning to hate with the hatred of a great loathing.

Robert Brosley watched her closely. "You might think of others besides yourself," he said. "I don't mean myself; put me out of the question. But give a thought to your sister. I believe you are poor and alone in the world. What would happen to you if you left Milda Wolda, you two helpless girls?"

She replied, as much to gain time than from any desire to argue with him. "We are not helpless. I can work, as I worked in England," she said, in a low voice.

He laughed contemptuously. "Pretty kind of work; and it all depends on your health; and you're not very strong. What would happen to you if you fell ill? What would happen to Carrie? You are very fond of your sister, but you seem to forget what an advantage it would be to her if you married me. There would always be a home for her, she could have as much money as she wanted, there would be a prospect of her settling well. Why don't you think of her future, as well as of yourself? She and I are good friends, and I will continue to be a good friend to her. I'd settle a sum of money on her when she married—I'll settle it on you. What's the matter with me? I am neither a cripple nor a hunchback. Other women—But I won't speak of them; there's only one woman in the world for me, and you are she; and I mean to have you. But there! I don't want to threaten you. I don't want to frighten you; think of Carrie—think it all out."

He seated himself upon an upturned box as far from her as possible and took out his pipe; but he glanced at her and returned the pipe to his pocket. As far as was compatible with his forceful proceedings he wished to show her every respect. Maida sat gazing vacantly at the fire, her hands writhing together, her head bent. She had taken off her hat and one strand of hair had come loose and fell down beside her face. Alas! she looked ravishly beautiful, and he sure her beauty was not lost upon the man who loved her so madly.

She turned her eyes upon him presently. "You said—you said that there was a clergyman here. It cannot be true."

His heart rose with sudden hope. "It's true enough," he said. "I came upon the fellow, tramping, a little while ago and I sent him on here. It was just a sheer piece of luck, one of those things which people call providential. It gave me the idea of carry-

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ing you off—yes, I've carried you off, but many a better man than I has done the same thing. I'm only doing what they used to do in England, what's been done here often enough; and I'd bet my life that the women have thought all the more of the men for running some risk to get them. It proves their love, anyway."

Maida shuddered. "I—I should like to see him," she said.

A vague hope sprang up in her bosom that, if the man were really there, she could appeal to him for protection against Robert.

"I'll call him in a moment," he said; "but you must make up your mind before I do so, that you will marry me. There must be no coming; you must tell him when he comes that you are quite willing for him to perform the ceremony."

"How can I trust you?" cried Maida, her voice quavering. "He may be no clergyman, you may be deceiving me—"

"I swear I am not!" he responded, eagerly. "Why should I? You are here and cannot escape. Besides, I want you to be my wife too badly to play any trick of that kind. I tell you I love you, and I want to have you forever. I am content to wait after we are married till you come to me of your own accord; but I want a real marriage so that you can't give me the slip. I know you: you won't go from your marriage vow. The man's all right—why should he say he was a parson if he wasn't? Besides, he looks like one, he's got their lingo—oh, he's all right! Shall I call him?"

Maida rose and stood trembling. She was like a bird caught in the snare of the fowler; the net was closing round her, she could feel its meshes. An overmastering desire for the presence of some third person, even though he were a confederate of Robert's and an enemy of hers, took possession of her. If he were there, he might, would, see that she was being forced into the ceremony, he might have pity upon her; after all, he was a clergyman and could not be altogether bad and insensible to her distress. She made a movement with her hand, and in a voice scarcely audible, said:

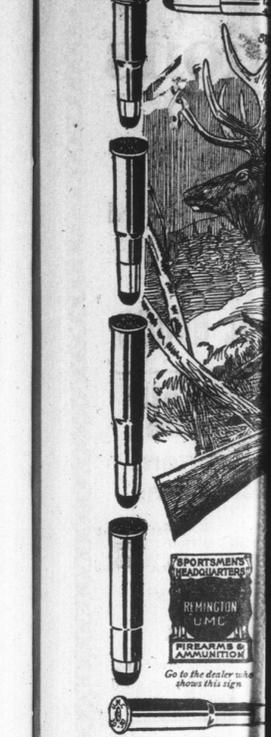
"Yes, if you have no pity on me, if you are lost to all sense of the wrong you are doing, call him."

(To be continued.)

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**List of Letters Remaining in the G.P. O. to July 23rd, 1917.**

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The first is of a Christmas spent in the house of a young German woman with four sweet young children. Her face of the Christmas past, there, too, was the young mother, waiting and watching eager eyes for the wonder of the eyes of her children in the first moments of breathless over and "Stille Nacht," had been sung, she called earnestness to play something. Then there was a romp with the young mother taking her youngest on either side, laughing and shrieking. I stood in the open doorway, and if there were more moving for me in the scene, than the happiness of the children, it was the search for mother-heart throbbing through it.

The second of the mothers come back to me is of a home of happiness a few days after various carols, such child voices at the back of the room door, the house was with noiseless footsteps creeping upstairs behind the mother to the darkness where her golden-headed

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