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The Countess of Landon.

CHAPTER III.

As Royce Landon, drawing himself up, exclaimed, "I'll face it!" the door opened and a lady entered.

She was of middle age, and still singularly beautiful; but the beauty of the face was marred by an expression of pride which would have been too pronounced and vivid even for a man. She was tall, upright as a dart; there was not a speck of gray in the dark hair, and on looking at her one saw at once where Royce had got his graceful bearing; for this was his mother, the Countess of Landon. She was dressed in gray satin trimmed with white lace—the Hamilton of the picture—and, though there was no company at Monk Towers, wore diamonds at her throat and on her fingers.

As her gray eyes rested on the handsome face of her son, they melted into softness for a moment. But it was for a moment only, and it gave place to an expression of proud and passionate anger only kept in check by an iron will.

Royce came forward and kissed her. "Well, mother?" he said.

She suffered the kiss, but did not return it, and as she took in the torn and dusty condition of his clothes, her eyes flashed.

"Why have you come home?" she asked in a low, clear tone singularly like his own.

He put a chair for her—Madame the Countess exacted and received the most punctilious respect from all about her, and from none more than her own sons—but she still stood, regarding him fixedly.

"Won't you sit down, mother?" he said. "I'm afraid you are not glad to see me, that—that you didn't expect me again so soon."

She remained silent. It was evident that she did not intend to offer him any assistance, or render his difficult task easy.

"I didn't expect to come back, myself," he went on. "But the fact is, mother, I've—well, I've got into a scrape."

He stopped, but still she would not help him. This second son of hers was the child of her heart, the apple of her eye. She would have laid down her life for him willingly; but her love was concealed beneath an iceberg of pride and ambition. Most mothers would have sunk into the chair and probably begun to cry; but she remained motionless and apparently unmoved.

"What have you done?" she asked as he paused, and with knit brows, gazed at the carpet. "I never see you, hear from you, but I expect bad news. This occasion, I presume, is to prove no exception. Why are you in this state?" and she looked him over severely.

"I've walked a long way," he said; then he added, candidly, for one of the very few virtues this young man could boast was truthfulness, "and—and I had a bit of an adventure on the way."

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Mrs. L. Whiting, 202 King St. West, Brockville, Ont., writes—

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—a tussle with a man of the fair, mother."

Her eyes flashed with indignant scorn.

"You come home in disgrace—" His face flushed and he raised his eyes, but dropped them again without saying anything.

"In disgrace, and you stop on the way to indulge in a vulgar brawl at a fair—"

"Not a brawl, mother—but no matter."

"No, it does not matter. You have, I suppose, sunk too low to care for the dignity of a gentleman—"

"Mother!" burst from him; but he stopped with the exclamation and shut his lips tightly.

"What is it you have done now?" she asked. "Have you been gambling again and lost more money? You gave me your solemn promise when last we parted that you would play no more, but I fear that you regard such promises as lightly as you regard the duty a son owes his parent. How much do you require of me? I will give it you while I have it, as you know too well. You reckon on the knowledge, and take advantage of my weakness, Royce. How much is it? I will give it you, though I presume it will but follow the rest."

"It is not money—this time," he said in a low voice.

"Not money? What then?" she asked, sternly. "Is it some fresh trouble with which you will burden me? Royce, I never see your face but my heart sinks with dread, never hear your name but a fear springs up in my heart. What is it? Tell me, what at once!"

All this time Mrs. Evelyn had stood in the background with pale, downcast face. She would have gone, but she thought the hope that she might be permitted to say some word that would act as oil upon the waters had kept her. She moved now to the window, but stopped there, still waiting for the chance to play peace-maker. But Royce and the countess seemed to have forgotten her presence.

"I scarcely know how to tell you, mother," he said, after a pause, his face flushed, his eyes fixed on the carpet. "It's—it's a bad business, the worst scrape I ever got in, and—and I'm afraid there is no way out of it."

"Then go back and live it down," said the countess, sternly. "Go back to your regiment."

"I can't," he said, doggedly. "I have left the army."

Her face grew pale and her eyes dilated.

"You have left the army? What is it you say? Are you mad?"

He shook his head.

"I was afraid you'd take it like this," he said. "Perhaps I'd better not have come home. I ought to have stayed away. But I didn't know where to go, and—and I didn't like to go off without telling you—without seeing you again and saying good-bye."

"You have left the army?" she repeated, as if she had not heard his last words. "Why? Why?"

He leaned against the table and bit his lip.

"I was obliged to," he said, at last.

"I was compelled. There was nothing else but that. If I hadn't left, I should have been—cashed."

She sunk into the chair and leaned her head on her hand.

"What have you done?" she demanded.

"It was just this," he said in a low voice. "You have heard me speak of Colonel Trace. You know what I have told you about him. A drunken bully who is no more fit to be an officer in her majesty's service than is a shoe-black. Most decent shoeblacks would make a better officer! He has had a spite against me ever since I joined."

"It"—he colored, but his eyes did not quail beneath her stern gaze—"It was about a young girl he had treated badly, and—and I stood up for her. He has borne me a grudge ever since then, and has lost no opportunity of dropping down on me. He has made my life a burden!" His face reddened and his eyes flashed. "But I made up my mind to bear it until he or I exchanged and left the regiment, and things were going better till three days ago. He's been drinking heavily, and seemed as if he couldn't let me alone. Mother, you don't know how a man in his position can torture the life out of a man in mine. And he lost no opportunity. Well, the night before last we were at mess. He was half drunk—I'll say that for him—and he amused himself by making a butt of me. I stood it like a lamb till—but I had to drink or go mad, and at last—he'd thrown a glass of wine in my face. He said it was an accident; but it was meant—it was meant—and I—drew a long breath—"I struck him!"

The countess sat with her eyes hidden by her hand. She now rose, white to the lips, and trembling with fury.

"I struck him," he went on, his nostrils expanded, his eyes blazing. "I would have killed him if I could, but—but they tore us apart. There was a mark across his face—"

He stopped and controlled himself.

"They all said that I should be court-martialed and punished. I was placed under arrest—" He stopped again. "But Trace knew he couldn't face the inquiry. He had got a better card than that, mother, and he played it. He meant to drive me out of the service. He sent me word that if I would send in my resignation the matter should drop."

Once more he paused. The sweat stood in his drops on his forehead; his hands were clenched tightly.

"I thought it all out as clearly as I could. I knew that if it came to a court-martial I should be cashiered and disgraced. I'd struck my superior officer, you see—that's unpardonable!—and I—resigned."

The countess stood speechless for a moment, her bosom heaving, then she raised her hand with an action almost tragic in its intensity.

"You have disgraced yourself—you have dishonored the name you bear! Look here!" She pointed to the portrait of the earl in his general's uniform. "Your father won in the field a coronet for his race. His name was honored wherever and whenever it was spoken. You have dragged that name in the mire; have been expelled the service of which he was so proud—and which was so proud of him—by striking your superior officer in a drunken squabble. And you are my son and his!"

No words can describe the passionate bitterness of her tone. It made Royce start as a thorough-bred starts at the cruel cut of the lash.

"My son, for whom I had hoped so much! It was for you to carry on the traditions of the house—to raise the name of Landon still higher, or at any rate to keep its luster bright. You have dragged it in the mud, trampled it in the dust. Do you think that the world will not learn the truth—that it will not consider that you have expelled the service? It knew it before I did! It will never forget it, never! When they speak of the Earl of Landon they will add, with a sneer, that it was a son of his who disgraced himself, and barely escaped punishment and dismissal!"

She paused for a second or two to gain breath, then went on as passionately as before.

"And now you have come home, what is it you intend to do? Do you intend to loaf round the place, dragging your burden of shame with you for every one to point at? What do you mean to do, I ask? To lounge about the stables or the village almshouse, to consort with groggers and pot-boilers? You cannot dare not offer any gentleman your society—you, disgraced, cashiered, an outcast—"

(To be continued.)

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Man Hunting With Bloodhounds

Police methods of crime detection have changed greatly since the days of the first step taken by the authorities in learning of a murder was to rush trained bloodhounds to the scene, writes H. D. S. McMillan in a London paper.

The fact of the matter is that the bloodhound is almost as obsolete as trial by ordeal, and whereas twenty years or so ago the police could rely on the aid of scores of these wonderful animals at almost a moment's notice, to-day it is doubtful if there are many more than half a dozen of these canine sleuths in existence in the whole country.

Though there would seem to be no relation between the two, the rapid growth of the motor car has been largely responsible for the passing of the bloodhound as a man hunter. Lieut.-Col. Richardson, perhaps the greatest authority in England on

Scottish Islands

REFUSE AID FROM ENGLISH HANDS.

LONDON, Feb. 6.—A condition likened to Irish famine times is now existing in the Hebrides or Western Isles, that group of forsaken islands off the bleak coast of Scotland, where, of the population of 40,000 there are 30,000 people starving and powerless themselves to relieve their condition.

At the best these people have made a livelihood. Their life is a continual struggle against a relentless climate and a still more relentless soil. The last year has been more than usually hard, and misfortune has come so steadily that now, without food or fuel, the people face misery unless outsiders force them to accept charity or move to the mainland.

To help these people is a problem. They live in poor huts talk only their own language, and have a hearty dislike for anything English or modern. But the real tragedy is that they resist any suggestion that they should migrate to more productive land. They have stubbornly refused to do this for the last hundred years, but continue to bear the hardships of the islands while they might become a

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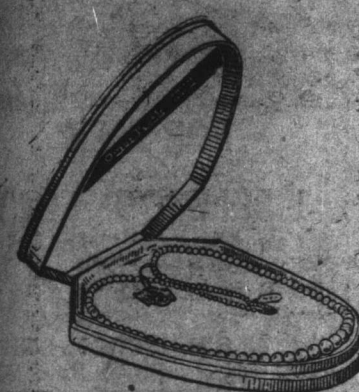
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