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## The Web;

OR,  
**TRUE LOVE'S PASSION.**

CHAPTER XXXII.

### A Deal With a Burglar.

"May I trouble you for a light?" asked Furlong, blandly. "No? Well—" He craned forward, and lit his pipe at the lantern. "Now, then, Mr. Berton, I'm ready to hear anything and everything you've got to say. Chin-music is not much in my line, but I'll allow that you feel anxious to abuse me, and I don't like disappointing you. Just blow off the steam with some of the hardest words you know."

Guildford Berton caught up a chair with a strong impulse to fling it at the man's head, but instead he planted it in front of the door and sat down on it.

"You'll find this the worst night's work you ever did, my friend," he said between his teeth. "I gave you a chance—a poor one—of escaping just now, and you refused it. Now I tell you that you will not leave this room until the police take you, unless you pass over my dead body."

Furlong laughed grimly. "Very nicely put!" he said. "Why, my dear sir, I could lift you up chair and all, and pitch you out of that window there, and you know it. But I shan't have to do that, I think—that is, if you are a sensible man. Now Mr. Berton, I suppose you think that we are to sit here until some one comes who can raise an alarm and fetch the police, and that you will have me arrested?"

Berton shut his lips tightly, and folded his arms.

"Just so. I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. First of all, let me explain matters. Oh, you needn't sneer; it doesn't give any additional beauty to that handsome face of yours. I'm going to tell the truth, as you'll find if you listen attentively. What I told you just now, for instance, was the truth. I found that door of yours unlocked, and I could not resist the temptation of strolling in. You see, I've passed it so often and looked at it so hard, every time asking myself why on earth a young gentleman should choose to live in such a gloomy hole, that my curiosity—and it's my weak point, I'll admit—got the better of me. So I stepped in, and waited in the opposite room—I followed you so closely that if you'd have turned you'd have seen me, by George!—and, being in, I amused myself with watching you—"

Guildford Berton succeeded in suppressing any outward sign of the start the man's words gave him.

"I'd half an idea that you were a—well, a coiner. I beg your pardon, I had indeed. But couldn't see any trace of the work about. And I know it when I see it—and so I concluded that you were just a crank, that you'd got a mental twist-somewhere that caused you to take to such a grim, forsaken hole as this. Then I thought that I'd wait until you'd go to bed and clear out. But I happened to look in here, and the desk lay handy and it occurred to me that I might find something in it that might help me to understand your peculiar character."

A sneer that was half a scowl crossed Berton's face.

"Ah, you don't believe me, I see," remarked the man, apparently not at all offended. "But, strange to say, it's the truth. The fact is, among the many trades I've tried, my hand at, I've done a bit of the detective. That was in New York. I didn't stick to

it long; but that kind of work leaves a mark behind. You can't lose the habit of trying to satisfy your curiosity. And you raised mine, you did, indeed, Mr. Berton."

Guildford Berton smiled furiously.

"You impudent—but go on my friend; your time is growing short."

"Not a bit of it," retorted Furlong.

"You think you'll have me arrested, but you won't, and I'll tell you why. Because you and I are tarred with the same brush. We're both curious men. Of the two of us, I should say, you're more curious than I am, but you're too cautious to follow a man into his house and examine his desk, eh?" and he laughed.

"Now you wonder what I'm driving at. Wait a bit; I'm coming to it. I didn't find much in this old desk of yours to enlighten me about the little game you're playing; but I did find something that gave me a start;" he stretched out his hand, and let it fall upon the photograph of Catherine Hayes—"and this is it."

The other glanced at the photograph with an incredulous sneer.

"No," said Mr. Furlong, "it is not a plant, and I'm not going to palm off a pack of lies on you. But I tell you what I am going to do. I am going to make a bargain with you. With. Better not cut in yet a while, for it strikes me that when you've heard what I've got to say you'll be sorry for cutting up rough. Now, Mr. Berton, don't think me impertinent if I ask you a question. Is it a fact that you want to marry the beautiful young lady up at the Court there?"

Guildford Berton started, and the color rushed to his face, but he remained silent.

"Silence gives consent," resumed Furlong, puffing at his pipe. "I give you credit for the best of taste. I've seen a great many of the fair sex in both hemispheres, and I say—he struck the table with his powerful fist—"that that young lady towers above them all—as—as a palm towers above them all—why, sir, if I were as young and good-looking as you are, I should be as much in love with her as you are. From all I hear there isn't a young man within twenty miles who wouldn't give all his boot to lead her to the altar."

Guildford Berton rose, as if unable to control himself, but Furlong coolly waved to him.

"Sit down, Mr. Berton. I meant no offence. I wouldn't speak a disrespectful word of her—ay, and what's more, I'd knock down any man that offered to do so in my presence. Sit down and keep your temper. You'll want all your wits presently."

There was something, a subtle significance, in his tone which carried weight, and Guildford Berton sank into the chair again.

"That's right," remarked Mr. Furlong, approvingly. "And now about this bargain I spoke of. Suppose, Mr. Berton, I possess some information which would help you in your suit with that young lady. Suppose I could tell you something, a secret worth its weight in gold to you, something that would make your way straight and plain, and insure your getting that young lady for your wife—what would you say?" and he leaned forward and looked him straight between the eyes.

Guildford Berton smiled incredulously.

"I should say—" he began, then he laughed shortly. "I utterly refuse to believe a word you say," he said, "and if you knew me better, you would know that I am the last man to make terms with a ruffianly burglar. Tell your story, whatever it may be, to the police; I fancy you will find them as incredulous as I am."

"Good," said Furlong, coolly. "You have said what you ought to say, and you've said it very well. I give you all credit for your courage. But I'll give you another chance, and I tell you frankly that if you don't come to my terms I shall, very reluctantly, have to tie you in that chair and gag you while I get clear off. Come, you're dying to ask me what I meant. Just ask me a few questions. For instance, what do I find in the photograph of this lady to interest and startle me so much?"

"I shall ask you nothing, I want to hear no more from you," was the stern reply.

"Then I'll ask you a few questions," said Furlong in an unruffled tone.

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"First of all, do you know who this is?" he held up the card. "I don't ask you how you came by it. Perhaps the young lady gave it to you, or you found it, or perhaps you stole it."

Guildford Berton's face flamed, but he swallowed his rage and answered quietly enough; for Furlong had spoken the truth, and he was dying to hear what the man had to say.

"You don't deserve an answer," he said.

"But you'll humor me, eh? Just so. Well?"

"It is the portrait of the late Countess of Arrowdale's companion," said Guildford Berton, slowly, and almost sullenly.

Furlong nodded.

"And her name was Catherine," he said. "It's written here on the card, and her surname was Hayes. And when the countess left her husband, the earl, her maid, this Catherine Hayes, went with her?"

"She did?"

"Is she dead?" asked Furlong, very grimly.

"The countess? Yes."

"The woman, the maid, this Catherine?" said Furlong.

Guildford Berton nodded.

"Yes, she is dead, too."

"Dear, dear!" muttered Furlong. "Tell me, now, did she live with her mistress till the countess died?"

"She did," said Guildford Berton, much less sullenly and with a barely concealed interest.

"And the young lady, Lady Norah, was left in her charge, I suppose?" asked Furlong.

"That is so. Why do you ask? What interest—"

"I ask because I didn't know," replied Furlong. "I knew a great deal, but not all."

He gazed at the portrait for some moments lost in thought, then he got up and laid it on the table.

"Come and take a good look at it," he said.

Guildford Berton hesitated a moment, half-suspicious that it was a trap to get him away from his post in front of the door, but Furlong cast a glance of contempt at him.

"Man, can't you see I'm in earnest?" he said, sternly, and his companion rose and looked at the card with seemingly indifference.

nearer, and, laying his heavy hand upon the shoulder of the other, whispered a few words into his ear.

Guildford Berton started, and turned a white face of amazement and unbelief upon him.

"What!" he exclaimed under his breath. "Pshaw! It's impossible!"

"It's not only possible, but it's true!" retorted Furlong, with grim earnestness. "Sit down and listen to me."

Berton sank into the chair, and, standing before him, with his hands thrust into his pockets, the man spoke on in a low voice, which, though cool and collected, impressed every word upon his startled hearer.

As Guildford Berton listened drops of sweat came out upon his forehead, and his face changed from red to white.

"If, if this is true—if I can believe it!" he said, huskily, his lips twitching.

"It is gospel!" retorted Furlong, laconically, "and you do believe it. I can see it by your face, man."

"Prove it—give me proofs," dropped from the white lips.

"Proofs? Yes, conclusive, irrefutable ones. Proofs strong enough for any court of law in the land."

An exclamation difficult to describe burst from Guildford Berton, and he rose and paced the room, his face working, his hands clasped tightly behind his back.

Furlong sat himself on the table, and watched him coolly.

Suddenly he stopped before the sideboard, and took out the brandy decanter.

"Oh, that's it!" muttered Furlong to himself; then aloud:

"Here, steady! Not too much of that! A glass apiece. You want to keep your head cool, you know, if you're going to work this properly. And you are, you know."

Guildford Berton poured out a couple of glasses with a shaky hand, and with an uneasy laugh.

"When—when will you let me have the proofs?" he asked, looking not at Furlong but at the table.

Furlong considered for a moment or two.

"In three days," he said. "Meanwhile, keep your mouth shut."

Berton laughed.

"Oh, yes; you can do that, I dare say. And now, what do you say to our bargain?" and Furlong smiled grimly.

Guildford Berton, still looking at the table, nodded.

"You want to know how much—"

Furlong took his hands from his pockets, and eyed him up and down slowly.

"No," he said, quietly. "I ask nothing. I'm not sure I'll take anything. But, we'll see. It strikes me I'm the homelier man of the two, Mr. Berton. I bargained for my liberty and your silence about this little escapade of mine. Well, you shall give me a hundred or two to take me out of the country when you've done with me, and we'll cry quits."

Guildford Berton held out his hand, and Furlong took it, but with an utter absence of alacrity or effusiveness.

"Open the door," he said.

Guildford Berton opened it, and with a nod and a quiet "In three days—say Friday," this singular specimen of "the genus" burglar went out.

(To be Continued.)

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