



Deceived AND Disowned True as Steel!

CHAPTER XXVII.
UNWELCOME SURVEILLANCE.

"You need have no fear," said Olive, with cold contempt, as she watched Morgan wipe his forehead with his shaking hand.

"Is he always like this?" asked Normanby.

"Yes," said Olive sadly. "When he is away from home, he always fancies that his daughter is waiting for him, and he is cheerful enough. It is not until he returns that he remembers that she is gone."

"Let us go back. I—upon my word, I feel quite upset," said Morgan; and his white face and trembling lips proclaimed the truth of his words.

Olive turned at once, without comment; and Normanby found an opportunity for whispering to him:

"Do you want to betray all—idiot! Brace yourself!"

Morgan did his best, and strove to explain away his extraordinary behaviour as best he could; but it was difficult to remove the gloom and constraint which had fallen on the little party.

"I always have a horror of madmen," said Morgan, his spirits rising as they neared the Hall. "I'd have the old man locked up, Olive; I'm sure he'd be more—more comfortable."

Nothing was said to Sir Edwin about this incident of their walk; he chatted away as amiably as usual, but Mr. Normanby took the first chance he had of persuading Morgan to play a game of billiards; and here, in a room which had been newly fitted up, expressly for the amusement of its future master, he severely rated Morgan for his conduct.

"If you only knew what a coward you looked," said Normanby, puffing at his cigar. "You went as gray as this cigar ash."

"Well, so would you," retorted Morgan sulkily. "I thought he was going to strike me."

"Guilty conscience!" said Mr. Normanby, shrugging his narrow shoulders. "I don't wonder you funk the scene, though. Poor little girl! What became of her?"

"That's my business," said Morgan tensely.

"Quite!" agreed his friend. "But what had you to fear from him?"

"Nothing, except that Olive might gather something from his driving," said Morgan.

"The best thing you can do," Morgan, you graceless rascal, is to get married as quickly as possible. Play your cards carefully, and get Olive to name an early day. Once married, you are safe."

Morgan sighed. "Once married," he said irritably. "I am doomed to this life, I suppose. Shut up here with a driving old idiot, and a wife who hates the sight of me—nice prospect to look forward to, isn't it?"

"A safe one," returned Normanby, significantly. "Come," he said, throwing away his cigar end, "let's see what the fair Olive has got to say to you."

They repaired to the drawing-room, where they found Olive at the piano playing a dreamy, melancholy nocturne of Chopin. With an air of polite homage, Mr. Normanby crossed over to her.

"I am counting the hours," he said, plaintively; "the sands of my pleasant holiday are running out. Tomorrow I shall plunge into the vortex of London again."

"I am glad you have enjoyed your rest," said Olive conventionally—she did not say she regretted his departure, and Mr. Normanby noted the omission.

"I am very sorry to go," he said. "I really ought to have taken flight before, but I couldn't tear myself away until I had accomplished my purpose."

Olive turned pale, she could not misunderstand his meaning.

"What purpose?" asked Olive, although she knew only too well.

"Have you forgotten?" he said, almost reproachfully. "Did I not undertake to prove that Morgan has altered for the better. Have I not proved it?"

Olive could not deny this. "He certainly is changed," she said, in a low voice.

"I am satisfied," Mr. Normanby said, with a triumphant smile. "I will leave him to plead his cause, and to fix the day for his happiness; unless you would gratify me very greatly by naming it to me."

Olive felt as if a mountainous weight were crushing her. There was no longer even any shadow of excuse, nor a remnant of hope left to her.

"Not yet—not yet!" she almost moaned.

"Shall we say a month hence?" said Normanby.

"Say two months," replied Olive; and Mr. Normanby, as he looked at her tightly set lips, was obliged to be satisfied. He thanked her gratefully; indeed, he could not have been more moved had he been pleading for himself—and slowly moved away.

Olive's hands strayed over the keys, her fingers mechanically falling into the rhythm of a funeral march of Chopin, which tells more of dead hopes than the death of the body. She shuddered. Her life indeed was coming to an end; once married to such a man as Morgan Verner, she felt that her youth, indeed her very spirit, would die within her.

No way could she turn for help. She knew Mr. Normanby had some ulterior motive in thus blackening the man she loved, and whom she knew to be alive in spite of his denials. But what difference could it make? Try as she would, she could see no reason for his interference; yet, on the other hand, even if Reuben returned in time, what could he do? He could not release her from her bond to the Verners. Only Morgan himself could do that; and in her secret heart she knew that that would never be.

The evening dragged on, only too slowly for Olive; and Morgan, prompted by his friend and master, succeeded in inviting her into the conservatory. Here, in tones which he strove to make sound, tender and sincere, he besought her to name an even earlier date than two months hence for their wedding. But he found Olive firm as a rock. She was determined to see Reuben—if but once more—before the hated marriage. Once more—and then the deluge!

She freed herself gently from the hand which Morgan had ventured to place upon her arm.

"In two months' time," she said, "I will keep my promise. My father is too weak even yet for much excite-

ment, however quiet the ceremony may be. I cannot leave him till he is stronger," she added, though she felt mean for withholding her real reasons.

Morgan was obliged to yield to her wishes, and together with Mr. Normanby, later on, he took his leave of her and Sir Edwin. Polite speeches faltered on his lips, but a very demon of hatred and thwarted will was raging in his heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
A FRUITLESS QUEST.

THAT night Olive, in her room, gave way to the grief that consumed her. Once more she had pledged her word. She was doubly bound; and even if Reuben returned, it would only be a meeting over the grave of her dead hopes. Twice he had saved her life from death, but he could not save it a third time from what was harder to bear, a life which she instinctively felt would be one of degradation.

She prayed earnestly for Reuben's return, but not with any hope of deliverance. That release her sense of honor forbade, even though it permitted her to long for the return of the man she truly loved.

Olive Seymour was not the only one who was anxious as to Reuben's whereabouts. John Wynter, since the night when, as he supposed, he had found that Reuben was a thief, had fallen into a state of melancholy. His love for his "lad," as he always termed him, was, if anything, stronger than ever, and he longed to find him. Accordingly, he passed his time traveling throughout the country, acting small parts where he could obtain them in the countless minor, traveling theatrical companies, known in the profession as "fit-ups." On the road he made inquiries and scattered descriptions of Reuben broadcast, hoping that some one would come in to contact with him, and thus restore him to his "grandfather."

All his patient search was in vain—it was as if the earth had opened and swallowed Reuben within its depths.

It never occurred to the old man to return to Reave Hollow. Indeed, after his fruitless inquiries in that neighborhood he had gone out of his way to avoid so doing, for he blamed himself bitterly for ever having come there, and brought his "lad" into contact with Olive Seymour. It was to her that he attributed Reuben's downfall, even as she had caused him to fall from the horse's back in the circus ring long years ago.

Wynter blamed himself, too, for having forced Reuben to accompany him on the night he set out to find the precious packet of the proofs of Reuben's birth, but he had thought it better to leave him on the spot beside his natural heritage. When he had

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at last succeeded in finding the man to whom he had entrusted the packet, it was too late; Reuben had been overcome by his new position, and was by this time dead—perhaps.

At times Wynter felt tempted to destroy the packet which had been the cause of his leaving his "lad," while at others he went over the paper setting forth the scene which had taken place between himself and John Verner, all those weary years ago. He had, by reason of his various engagements in the small theatres and traveling companies, got into touch with nearly all the members of that little company who were with him, and had signed as witnesses. These would come forth gladly to proclaim Reuben the heir, but what was the use of doing so; the lad was dead?

So he went his way, ever grieving, yet ever hoping against hope that Reuben would be restored to him.

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE HOME-COMING.

TO Reuben, the sight of Olive and his meeting with Sir Edwin was as a dream. He had resigned himself to her loss as inevitable; but the charges made against his honor filled him with rebellious indignation. He could see no reason for believing that John Verner would lend his aid to such a plot, for a plot it was, and one which would require the aid of more than one man to unravel.

As to finding Lord Cravenden, deep down within his heart Reuben believed him to be dead in the bush, and at times he blamed himself for remaining behind, although his common sense told him that, by remaining, he had given his partner a chance of life, at least.

He hastened to register his claims for the land in the Golden Valley, and to bank and change his nuggets. Sir Edwin had wished to return to the gold fields when he had seen them, but Olive had firmly refused to let him think of it; and Reuben had pledged himself by promising to make a claim for land in the Golden Valley, if a piece were obtainable. He then occupied himself with reporting to the authorities the attack and capture of the thieves, and gave what description he could of the position of the lonely farm-house. This done, he made another search for Lord Cravenden.

Meanwhile, he might have searched forever in Australia for his friend, because before Reuben reached Balarat with Olive and Sir Edwin, Lord Cravenden had sailed from Melbourne with his wife—Mary Castle.

The romantic nature of her rescue had been heightened by her helplessness and Lord Cravenden had fallen deeply in love. On the morning following the day on which they had camped in the ravine, the two wanderers had set forth, traveling blindly, with no means of even knowing in what direction they were going. At the end of three days, during which Lord Cravenden had striven his utmost to cheer and comfort his companion, they reached a large farm, which turned out to be a good seventy miles from the bush farm of Mr. Castle. Here Lord Cravenden had related their adventures, and handed his charge into the care of the worthy farmer's wife.

Mary Castle had kept up bravely throughout all this awful time; but as she touched the good woman's work-roughened hands, and thought of her own loneliness in the future, her fortitude broke down, and it was some days before she was well enough to meet and talk with her rescuer.

(To be Continued.)

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