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# "Love in the Wilds"

—OR—

## The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER IX.

### A DUEL OF WITS.

Give him gold enough and marry him to a puppet, or an aglee-baby; or an old trot with ne'er a tooth in her head. . . . Why, nothing comes amiss, so money come withal.—SHAPESPEARE.

Captain Reginald Dartmouth was not a very bad man, at least, not at present. But money, or rather the love of it, is the root of all evil; and this journey down to Dale to see and share the heiress of the manor was the first step of a very promising line of wickedness and crime.

Many men marry for money, and see neither harm nor sin in so doing. Not a few, especially of Captain Dartmouth's class, think it rather creditable than otherwise, as well as profitable.

Yet the captain had some misgivings—not on the score of morality or righteousness, but on that of policy.

Was the game worth the candle? That is to say, would the squire's fortune be large enough to compensate for a bread-and-butter school-girl wife?

He shook his head and pondered, and determined, as he stroked his thick mustache, to feel very sure of this bargain before he committed himself. But when the coach dashed into Dale and the old house rose from above the trees and the rich lands lay beneath his eyes, he shook his head with a silent determination.

No; it was too good to be let slip. Squire Darrell's money and Squire Darrell's lands, if they were not to be Hugh's, must be his—Captain Reginald's; and with this resolution finally settled in his heart he passed through the lodge gates, that the obsequious porter swung back for him, and rang the bell.

Reginald was known only to a few of the old servants, for, hoping nothing from the Dale, he had neglected it, and the man who opened the door was a new-comer, and consequently a stranger to him.

"Master's not at home, sir," he replied, in answer to Captain Reginald's question.

"Oh, don't trouble," said the captain. "Just tell Mrs. Lucas—I think it's Mrs. Lucas—that Captain Dartmouth is here; and help that clumsy fellow down with my portmanteau, or there will be very litle of it left."

Mrs. Lucas, who looked upon the members of the family she served as being of a higher order than the rest of humanity, arranged her cap and hurried up.

"Well, Mrs. Lucas," said the captain, offering his hand—he was always more than polite to the housekeeper of the Dale, for he judged it good policy, and Captain Reginald would have shaken hands with a cannibal if he had deemed it politic, "how are you by this time?"

"I'm very well, I thank you, sir," replied Mrs. Lucas, very much flattered and delighted by the captain's condescension; "and I trust you are well, sir?"

The captain nodded.

"You've come quite unexpected, sir. The squire will be quite took aback."

"More sudden than welcome, perhaps," thought the captain; but he said, languidly:

"Yes, I am rather unexpected. I hope I sh'n't inconvenience you, Mrs. Lucas."

"Bless you, sir, no!" replied the lady, horrified at such an insinuation. "The blue-room'll be ready in half an hour. I think you like that, sir."

"That will do very nicely," said the captain, taking off his gloves. "And how is the world going on at the Dale, Mrs. Lucas?"

Mrs. Lucas sighed heavily.

"Ah, sir," she said, sorrowfully, "you've heard, maybe—"

The captain nodded, and looked down at his boots.

"Yes," he said; "but only a little. Mr. Hugh has run away, hasn't he?"

"Run away, sir?" repeated the housekeeper, with suppressed indignation. "Not run away, but turned away. Bean't it shocking, Captain Reginald, to think as Master Hugh, the pride of all our hearts, should be turned away from his own house, as one may say, by his own father? Poor boy, poor boy!" and she wiped a sympathetic tear from her old eyes.

"Ah!" said the captain. "So the squire tu ned him out? Pray what for? Did he set fire to the hayricks, lame the squire's mare, break some of the old china, or what?"

"Ah, that's where it is!" said Mrs. Lucas. "No one knows the rights of it, but I b'lieve it be something to do with Miss Rebecca—"

"Miss Rebecca?" replied the captain. "Who is she?"

"Sir, you don't mean to say as you have forgotten Miss Rebecca, Mr. Reginald? Miss Rebecca Goodman, of the Warren, yonder."

"And what had Hugh to say to her that riled the squire, eh?"

"That was just it," said Mrs. Lucas. "He wouldn't have anything to say to her."

The captain looked up.

"Oh," he said, "I see, I think! The play ran thus: If indulgent but somewhat irritable father—eh, Mrs. Lucas?—commands his son—dutiful, but somewhat obstinate—to marry a certain lady. Certain lady rather old, ugly, and poor—"

Mrs. Lucas shook her head.

"No," said she. "Miss Rebecca bean't neither of them. She ain't overyoung, it's true, but she bean't ugly; and she's almost as rick as the squire himself. Why, Captain Reginald, all that park and the meadows down in the hollow there joining the ten-acre be all belonging to her. Poor!"

The captain shook his head languidly.

The enigma was too much for him. He could not understand a man refusing to marry such a well-endowed individual, much less his preferring to throw up his inheritance than do so.

"Ah, well," he said, as Mrs. Lucas placed a decanter of sherry and some biscuits on the table, "ah, well, my cousin is a peculiar young man, but I don't think you need fret about it. He'll come back in a day or two, depend upon it—come back and marry the lady, after all."

Mrs. Lucas shook her head sadly.

"No, captain, he won't. I know Master Hugh too well to comfort myself by saying so. He'll never come back to the old place any more."

"Then he's an idiot," muttered Captain Reginald, inaudibly.

But he added aloud:

"Well, I should, and marry Rebecca into the bargain." Yes, I'll have a glass of sherry. So this is some of the old brown I remember? Yes? Then it's worth having another glass. Dinner in an hour? Very well," and he followed the old lady to his room.

At Hugh's door he stopped.

"Have [illegible] a gh st at last, Mrs. Luca[illegible], nodding at the screwe[illegible]or. "I thought the Dale was free from that sort of vermin."

"No, sir," said Mrs. Lucas, in a sorrowful whisper. "That be Master Hugh's room. The squire has put all his odds and ends into it and screwed the door up."

"Phew!" said the captain. "The squire doesn't do things by halves."

"Not he. He's been very hard upon the poor boy," said Mrs. Lucas, ready to cry again. "Why, bless your heart, Mr. Reginald, we ain't allowed to mention his name, not one of us—nor in the village, neither. It's just as if the poor boy was dead, every bit. Indeed, Miss Grace—bless her heart!—do believe he is, for the squire went and told her so, and Miss Rebecca backed him up."

Strange to say, the captain had not mentioned the girl who had taken his cousin's place.

He could scarcely have explained to himself why he had avoided the subject, but now the name struck him rather unpleasantly.

"Grace!" he said. "So that's the name of my new cousin, eh, Mrs. Lucas?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Lucas. "Yes, Mr. Reginald, that be the name, and a sweet name it is, and a sweet girl she be. She be out with the squire. I'm very fond of her, Mr. Reginald. She's a Darrell, every inch of her. But I can't forget the poor boy I had the nursin' of ever since he was born, and it 'u'd be unnatural if I could.

The captain languidly agreed with her, and the good old soul trotted off leaving him to dress for dinner—he had not brought his man with him because he did not know what sort of reception he should get, and Williams, the valet, was apt to carry things with rather a high hand, as became so important an individual as a "gentleman's gentleman;" so Captain Reginald left him in London, for he did not want a kitchen disturbance to arise and spoil the little game he had almost made up his mind to play.

As Captain Reginald descended the stairs from his dressing-room the hall door flew open—it could be opened from the outside—and his uncle and Grace entered.

The squire had his whip in his hand and Grace was in her habit.

"Hollo, Reginald!" exclaimed the squire, coming forward with outstretched hand to meet Reginald, while Grace held back and knitted her black brows as was her wont when in fear of an introduction. "Why, who ever thought of seeing you at the Dale? I didn't."

"Nor I, sir," said Reginald, quietly. "I should have written, but I really had no idea of coming until yesterday."

"Well, I'm glad to see you, letter or no letter," said the squire, and, turning round, added: "Here, Grace, is a cousin for you. Reginald, this is Grace Darrell, my adopted daughter. Come and be friends."

(To be continued.)

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## Household Notes.

To keep cut apples from burning brown, place in salt water for a few minutes.

Add a little salt when cooking very sour fruits. Less sugar is then required.

Clean your wicker chairs with a scrubbing brush and soup suds. Then shellac them.

A level teaspoonful of cornstarch added to fudge while cooking will make it creamy.

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