

## AN HUMBLE HERO

BY THOMAS P. MONTFORT  
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ing against a tree. She was trembling all over, her face red and white by turns and an uneasy, scared expression in her eyes.

After a momentary pause he advanced toward her, but she held up her hand to stop him.

"You forget," she said in low tones. "Forget what?" he asked, his eyes fixed eagerly on her.

"That—that I am married."

He hesitated an instant, then said slowly:

"No; I don't forget that. I wish to heaven I could and that you could forget it too. But I love you, Louisa, and if you were married a thousand times I'd love you. It may be wrong, but I don't believe it is; but right or wrong, I love you, and I'll always love you. I can't help it."

A light of heavenly bliss swept over her features, then quickly died away.

"Don't say that," she pleaded. "You have no right."

"But I have," he replied. "I have more right than any one else, for I love you more, and you love me. Isn't that true, Louisa? Don't you love me?"

She made no reply, but hid her face in her hands. Presently he repeated:

"Don't you love me, Louisa?"

She waited a moment, then looked up appealingly.

"You are cruel, cruel!" she cried. "If you were not, you'd spare me. You have no right to ask me that."

"Then it is true," he cried joyfully, "and you do love me."

She looked up into his face and said quietly:

"God knows I do! It is wicked, but it is true, and I cannot help it. I love you with all my heart and all my soul."

"It is not wicked," he replied. "We learned to love when we had a right, before you married that man. It is not as though we had begun to love now. You were mine—your heart and your soul—before you became his. We loved each other then, and it is not wicked in us that our love will not die."

"I don't know," she answered thoughtfully. "It seems like all happiness is wrong and that we can't do right without being miserable. Oh, I don't know why we should ever have met!"

"Say rather that you don't know why we should ever have parted," he said.

"Oh, Louisa, why did you go away from me when you knew I loved you and wanted you to be my wife? Why did you leave me when you loved me?"

"I didn't know then."

"Didn't know what?"

"That I loved you."

"Didn't you know it then?"

"No. I knew I liked you, and I thought of you sometimes in a different way from what I ever thought of any one else, but I was young, and I didn't know what love was."

"Why did you marry—that other?"

"My parents urged me, and I liked him. I even thought I loved him. Afterward there was an awakening, and then I knew the truth. That awakening was bitter and cruel."

"And you suffered?" he said softly, placing his hand on her head. "My poor little girl!"

"Yes; I suffered," she replied wearily, "and God alone knows how much I suffer yet."

"I know," he said, again taking her hands in his. "But there is the future."

"What future?"

"But you need not."

"I must."

"He was thoughtfully silent for a little while. Then he said:

"Louisa, you have no right to sacrifice your life and happiness, but mine. It would be a sin, a far greater sin than—the other."

She knew his meaning, and she drew away from him. When she spoke, there was resentment in her voice.

"I don't think I have given you any excuse for saying that," she said. "If I have, I didn't mean it. You must let me go."

"Have you nothing more to say to me?"

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after all our long separation?" he asked in hurt tones.

"I have said too much already," she replied.

"I did not mean to say anything to hurt you, and I humbly and sincerely

repent."

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not committed a crime? Don't tell me you have."

"Louisa," he said in all seriousness, "I have done something dreadful, something I would give all the world to undo. But it was not my fault. I did it because I could not help it."

She looked up at him wonderingly, while a terrible sensation of fear and dread tugged at her heart. With that keen, unaccountable intuition peculiar to women she guessed the truth at once, but she would not accuse him even to himself. She drew a little nearer to him and spoke in low tones.

"Frank," she said, "tell me the truth. What have you done?"

"Are you sure," he asked, "that I had better tell you?"

"Yes; I must know."

"But it is dreadful, Louisa."

"Yes; I expect the worst."

"The very worst?"

"The very worst."

"And you do not shrink from me?"

"No, because you say you were not to blame and that you couldn't help it."

"But I tremble to tell you."

"Have no fear for me. I believe what you have said. You have."

"Taken the life of a fellow man?"

## CHAPTER X.

NEIGHBORLY GOSSIP.

"You uns may say what you please, an you uns may say it just as long as you uns please; but, as I have said before an as I'll continue to say, that's somethin' pow'ful heavy a-weight on Sim Banks' mind."

"Lord, Pap Sampson, you've been a-sayin' them words till we uns have all done learnt 'em by heart, an you can keep on a-sayin' 'em till you've worn 'em plumb out, if you want to, but I tell you right now you're barkin' up the wrong tree. I've said before, an I say ag'in, that all on earth's the matter with Sim Banks is that he's fixin' to have a spell of fever."

"You have said that, Jason Roberts, an meebly you have said somethin' you know, an meebly you ain't. My notion is you ain't. But if you'll allow me I jest want to ask you one question."

"You jest go ahead, Pap Sampson, an ask all the questions you please. I'll answer all I kin of 'em, an when you ask one I can't scrape up no answer for I'll holler."

"V'ry well. Now, then, Jason Roberts, can you tell me why a feller fixin' to have a spell of fever would go moppin' round for two long weeks, not a-feelin' sick nor nothin', but jest actin' for all the world like he'd lost ever' cent he owned an ever' friend he had to his back? Can you jest tell me that?"

"Couldn't a feller fixin' to have the fever get that question?"

"Mebby he could, Jason, but he don't. You hain't answered my question, though."

"My notion is, Pap, that thar ain't no need of him answerin' it, for I reckon you an Jason's both got the wrong pig by the tail."

"If you're so smart, Jim Thorn, why don't you reach into the pen an git a hold of the tail of the right pig?"

"I have."

"Then you jest show that pig to us an let us see its color, will you?"

"I will. All on earth's the matter with Sim Banks is jest this. He's in love with the Widder Mann, an he's moppin' round 'cause he can't have her."

"That's the color of the pig you got by the tail, is it?"

"It is."

"Then, Jim Thorn, all I got to say is that you didn't even git your pig outen the right pen. The one you got's a plumb stray."

"That's jest your notion, Pap Sampson, but you jest wait an you'll see."

Pap thumped his cane down almost viciously.

"Jim Thorn," he said, "you'll never make me believe no sich a thing as that of Sim Banks, not if you preach it till your head's as bald as a pumpkin. I've known Sim since he wa'n't no bigger than a cat, an I can say, an say it open an aboveboard, that I ain't never yet knowed him to do ary a single thing that he had any call to be ashamed of."

"My land, Pap, do you think bel'n in love with Miss Mann is anythin' to be ashamed of?"

"It would be for a man that's already got a woman shorely, an I don't know, Jim Thorn, but what I'd be ashamed of it even if I didn't have no woman."

There was a general laugh at this, which caused Pap to straighten up and look important.

"That's a putty hard knock on the widder," Hicks observed presently, "but if Pap was a widower I bet he wouldn't talk no sich a way."

"Nary time he wouldn't," Jason agreed. "Lord! If Pap was single, he'd be cuttin' round after the women wuss'n a hungry cat after cream."

"That's all right, Jason," Pap said, "an I reckon you ain't talkin' so moughty much out of your head as some folks mought think. Lord a-massy, it's a pow'ful good thing for these young chaps round here that I hain't single. Lord, I'd soon have all their noses out of joint even if I am fish on to 70."

"You 'low you could cut 'em all out, Pap?" Hicks asked.

"Jest as easy as fallin' down a well. Why, shucks, Jake, don't you know I'd have the pick and ch'ice among the women?"

"Mebby you wouldn't, Pap," some one said, "if that Mr. Melvin were to turn loose an take to sparkin' round."

To Be Continued.

To some intellectual palates conscience is a matter of taste, remorse a mere condiment of life, while sin is as the perfume of a dying rose.

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