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CHAPTER XLIII.

"Something caught fire and exploded. Some preparation of Mr. Dean's, I believe," ironically, "that it was the compound which he was inventing for the extinction of fire."

Gaunt smiled.

"And they're all safe? The servants and all?"

"Yes, quite safe. You are the only one who has suffered."

"That's all right," said Gaunt, with quiet satisfaction. "I fell from the ladder, I suppose? I remember now, I'm rather thirsty."

The nurse gave him some water.

"Thanks. The house—the Woodhings—must be rebuilt. It should like to be rebuilt as soon as possible, and as much like the old one—"

"Plenty of time for that, my lord," said the doctor. "We must not let you worry yourself about that of anything else at present. Are you in any pain?"

"Nothing to speak of," said Gaunt, though the aching of the burned muscles made him catch his breath even as he spoke. "I suppose I shall pull through?" he asked, quietly.

The doctor smiled, but it was an uncertain and painfully professional smile.

"I hope so, my lord," he said. Gaunt looked at him calmly but searchingly.

"There's a doubt, eh?" he said.

"Well, I am sure you will do your best, doctor." He was silent for a minute or so; then he said, with an affection: "I've been unconscious, haven't I?"

"This is the first time you have been conscious," said the doctor.

"Yes? I—I fancied—you know how one fancies things when one is off one's head—that there was some one else here beside you two. Thank you, nurse; that's more comfortable!"

The nurse had raised the pillows slightly. The nurse and the doctor exchanged glances, and it was she who answered:

"It wasn't fancy only, my lord. Miss Deane has been to see you; in fact—"

She hesitated, but Gaunt's eyes were fixed on her, and she went on. "Well, she did say that we were not to tell you, my lord—but Miss Deane has been here all the time helping to nurse you."

A slight flush rose to the white face.

"I thought so," he said, quietly.

"Any one else been here?"

"Mr. Bright and Mr. Robert. Miss Deane's brother," said the nurse. "He came down from Sandhurst. He's down-stairs now."

"Is he?" said Gaunt. "I should like to see him."

"Not just at present. Later in the

day; after you have had some sleep," said the doctor, decisively.

Gaunt nodded and closed his eyes.

"Very well," he said; "I'm under orders and must obey."

He slept, or seemed to sleep, for about an hour, then opened his eyes.

"Ask Mr. Robert to come up," he said to the nurse; and Bobby entered the room.

"Ah, Bobby, how are you?" said Gaunt. "Sorry I can't shake hands. How is your sister?"

"Bobby bent over the white, wasted face with its scorched hair and too brilliant eyes.

"Decima's all right," he said. "She's—she's down-stairs."

There was a suspicious moisture in Bobby's bright eyes.

"I—she—I—want to thank you, Lord Gaunt!" he stammered; but Gaunt cut him short.

"That's all right, Bobby. All's well that ends well. She's safe—and not hurt, they tell me. And that's the principle thing. We'll build up the house again." A spasm of agony silenced him for a moment, but he still smiled.

"And—and—we must persuade your father to drop the fire-extinguishing business. And how do you like Sandhurst? Tell me all about it."

But Bobby could not talk of himself or Sandhurst.

"You saved her life," he said, brokenly.

"Why not?" asked Gaunt, with a quiet smile. "Wouldn't you have done the same? Very well, then. How well you are looking! Nice place, Sandhurst! We shall see you a general, commanding one of her majesty's regiments presently, Bobby." His voice broke, for another spasm of pain had caught hold of him. "I—I want to send a message to your sister. Tell her—Are you listening? I want you to remember the exact words, please. Tell her that I'm not in the least pain. Don't forget."

Bobby nodded and went away. He could not have spoken to save his life.

The doctor came up to the bedside and Gaunt smiled up at him. "Am I going to die doctor?" he asked, coolly.

"There's a funny feeling about my heart."

The doctor grew grave and bent his ear to Gaunt's breast.

"It's the shock," he said, under his breath. "You were very badly burned, Lord Gaunt."

"I know," said Gaunt. "I asked you because, if you think there is a chance of my joining the majority, I—I—well, I should like to see Miss Deane."

"The doctor was silent for a moment, then he said:

"I will tell her, my lord."

"Thanks," said Gaunt, cheerfully.

He lay quite still after the doctor had left the room, and the nurse, watching him, thought he had gone to sleep; but when the door opened, Gaunt opened his eyes and a faint flush rose to his white face, for Decima had entered with the doctor. As she came to the side of the bed, Gaunt said:

"Will you two clear out for a few minutes?"

They went out, and Decima was alone with him.

She knelt beside the bed and looked at him. The light was waning, and he could not see the expression on her face, in her eyes; but her sweet presence thrilled through him.

"I wanted to see you, to thank you—" he said in a low voice.

She raised her eyes.

"To—to thank me—me!" she whispered.

"Yes," he said in a thin voice, which for all its feebleness had nothing morbid in it. "They have told me that you have helped to nurse me. That is so, isn't it? It was like you, Decima. You see, I call you—Decima. You—you will not be offended, angry?"

She looked at him in speechless sorrow and anguish.

"I—I wanted to see you, to bid you—well, to wish you 'good-bye.' I'm afraid our friend, the doctor, doesn't think any great things of me."

She hid her face in the coverlet for a moment, but raised it again and looked at him.

"And I wanted to ask you—to bear—Decima, do you think you can—that you can forgive me?"

"She fought for calmness, prayed for it. She had been warned that she must not excite him."

"Forgive! You ask me that! You who—who have saved my life, who may be dying!"

(To be continued)

Better a Peasant Than a Peer.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh! not now," responds the boy, pitching the book on a distant sofa. "It's too dark—at least—it's dark here; it's light enough outside," and he swings toward the window. "No snow, Jeanne; the ice will bear tomorrow. I wonder where my skates are?"

"Well," replies the girl, serenely, "we used one for a scare-crow, you know, and the other aunt took to prop up the milk pails."

"Oh, I say, you know! It's too bad!" ejaculated Hal, lugubriously. "A fellow doesn't know where to put his things for safety in this house. Well, if Aunt Dostrill hadn't taken 'em, Uncle John would have wanted them to tie up for one of his chemical experiments, I suppose. But it's too bad! and just as the Lambtons are talking about this skating party!"

"Never mind, Hal," says Jeanne, clasping her hands behind her head—golden, seen in the firelight—and leaning against Hal's legs, "I'll coax aunt to buy you another pair; the old ones were nearly worn out. But who told you about the Lambtons' party, Hal?"

"Oh, Maad Lambton herself," replies the boy, beginning to wig his legs again, and thereby rocking the girl to and fro like a ship in a storm. "I met her yesterday morning on the street—you know her way—with her head on one side and her sweetest sugar-candy smile on! Tell your sister that Georgina and I are going to call on Mrs. Dostrill, and we shall like to have the pleasure of your sister's company at the park when the skating comes on—"

"Oh!" says Jeanne, putting her head on one side with a little toss, "very kind, very patronizing. What else, Hal?"

"Oh, a lot more," replies Hal; "but I didn't listen—something, though, now I remember, about some swell who was coming down to stay with them. An honorable—somebody."

Jeanne laughs softly, showing her white, even teeth.

"That's why she is coming, Hal! To wave the honorable before our faces, like a flag. I wonder what he does down there? He took Lambton's word-knowledge pills, and, being cured by them, visits the maker out of gratitude. You might ask them, Hal!"

The boy leans back and laughs.

"Catch me!" he says; "though, mind, it would serve them right. What's the use of being ashamed of the way one makes money? Pills made old Lambton's fortune, and yet you can't say that you've got a bilious headache before the girls but they turn as red as beet-root, and look as if they were going to die. But they're awfully rich, Jeanne!" he adds, gravely.

"Yes," says Jeanne, stretching out one shapely foot, and eyeing it contemptuously, "awfully rich. And, after all, it doesn't seem to matter how you get the money, Hal, so that you get it. Pills or pump-handles, it doesn't matter. I wish we were rich, Hal!"

"So do I," says the boy, but with a yawn, as one who has not yet realized the value of money. "Money doesn't seem to run in our family, Jeanne."

"N-o," says Jeanne, thoughtfully. Then, suddenly and softly:

"Do you remember papa, Hal?"

The boy shakes his head.

"How should I? He died before I was five year old. Do you, Jeanne?"

Jeanne shakes her head.

"No. He must have been very poor, Hal?"

"Yes," assents the boy. "And so is Uncle John. I wish some of our people had gone in for pills and ointment, Jeanne, then we might have a big house, all plaster outside and fresh paint in, and a carriage, and a four-headed hunkey. And you could have talked through your nose, and carried your eyebrows in your hair like Maad and Georgina."

Jeanne laughed; all her gravity disappeared by this sarcastic picture, and springing up, thereby nearly upsetting the boy, ran to the window.

"It's snowing just now, Hal," she said. "You can't see the flowerbeds! How jolly it looks! I wish I were out in it—anything rather than shut up strumming on the piano. You must have been used to prop up the beer barrels—oh, Hal, here are the Lambtons!"

"Eh? what!" exclaimed the boy, slipping off the table, and preparing to beat a precipitate retreat; for Hal has all a boy's instinctive hatred of "visitors."

"Stop, Hal!—wait, there's a dear boy!" pleads Jeanne. "Where's aunt? Go and fetch her!"

"Fetch her!" echoes Hal, with a short laugh. "Likely matter! She and Jane are up to their necks in the kitchen making sausages. Fetch her! No, Jeanne, you'll have to bear the torture alone; aunt wouldn't leave the sausage-machine for fifty pill-makers' daughters! Good-by!"

"Stop!" cries Jeanne, in dismay.

But Hal is deaf to all prayers, and Jeanne hears a distant door slam after him, as Jane's thin voice announces: "The Miss Lambtons!"

(To be continued)



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