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LORD MORDEN'S DAUGHTER
 — OR —
THE TRAGEDY OF THE CEDARS.

CHAPTER IV.

She interrupted him with a gesture of loathing, her eyes flashed, and she stamped her foot angrily.

"Have they dared to tell you this? I hate Mr. Marlowe; I will never marry him! I promised two years ago, when I was little more than a child; I promised to please grandfather and Esther I now detest the man."

"I am so glad," began Locksley; then he stopped, growing red to the roots of his hair. "Yes," he went on, "I repeat that I am glad, and I shall go away a much happier man!"

She was a little startled by his tones and the fire in his bright-blue eyes; but this admiration, his love for her, flashed into her soul, and she trembled, half in fear, half in gladness.

"What is it that I can do for you, Miss Deene?" he went on, taking one of her soft hands between his own. "You will forgive my impetuosity, and you will not be angry with me for saying that I knew the moment I beheld you that our future lives were not things apart!"

"Hush, Mr. Locksley," whispered the girl. "My grandfather and Esther have warned me of such speeches as these!"

"Does not Mr. Marlowe talk to you in this way?" he smiled.

"I would not permit him," she retorted, haughtily, and Locksley felt his heart throb with delight. "I sought you, Mr. Locksley, to ask you if you would grant me one little favor."

"A thousand," he said.

"Nay, I ask for only one, and to me it is a matter of life and death. I know nothing of the great world beyond; I have never even had the advantage accorded to girls who are permitted to go to school and mingle with their fellows. I have had the best lady teachers that money could procure, but I am practically a prisoner here, just to humor the whims and caprices of my grandfather and Esther Marsh. For years I have longed for an opportunity like this, and I know that you will help me, Mr. Locksley. I know that you will tell me the truth."

"She sank her voice to a whisper, and continued:

"It is true that the name of Morden is in the pedigree?"

"It is in Debreth," he replied.

"Then it is true," she laughed, almost hysterically. "Grandfather has told me often that it was not."

"It is in Debreth," Locksley went on, "but I have never met Lord Morden. I will ask a friend of mine who

is awaiting me at Broadstairs. He has all these things at his fingers' ends. I can give you the history of the Mordens to-morrow, Miss Deene."

Her face and neck were now aflame with color, while her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"Where shall I meet you?" he continued. "If you prefer it, I will come direct to the house. I do not care two straws for Esther Marsh."

"No, no! There is Mr. Marlowe."

"Oh, Mr. Marlowe!" he smiled.

"But I am afraid. You do not know how much I fear that man," Miss Deene whispered. "He seems to hold both Esther and my grandfather in complete subjection."

Locksley clutched his hand, and gleams of savagery shot from his eyes. Miss Deene thought that he looked terrible.

"Excuse me," he laughed. "I only felt for the moment that I should thrash him—for your sake. I will be here, or anywhere else, at three o'clock to-morrow. Will the hour suit you?"

"Oh, I can never thank you enough," murmured Dora, "if you come through the belt of firs that break the winds from the sea, you can reach the summer-house unobserved, and I will come to you here."

"You have made me the happiest man in existence!" Locksley said, that dangerous light coming into his eyes again. "To-morrow you must contrive a long talk, and if Mr. Richard Marlowe becomes offensive to you, I will be your champion against a hundred Marlowes, grandfathers, and Esthers!"

A half-sob burst from her lips, and he felt that he would have given ten years of his life to be able to take her in his arms, and comfort her. Instead, he raised one of her hands to his lips, but she snatched it away from him, saying haughtily:

"Hark! Mr. Marlowe is inquiring for you!"

It was not a poetical word that escaped the lips of the young surgeon; at the mention of Marlowe's name; he added:

"Pardon me, Miss Dora. Which way shall I go?"

"Push your way through the trees at the back of the summer-house until you reach the firs; then return by way of the drive. I will remain where I am."

"At three to-morrow, here," he said, and, kissing the tips of his fingers to her, he vanished.

"This is not my usual way of doing things," he thought. "I would sooner face Mr. Richard Marlowe, honestly, and punch his confounded head."

He forced his way through a hundred yards of thickly planted firs and limes, found the drive, and walked slowly back to the house to find Mr. Marlowe fuming suspiciously, and asking for Miss Deene.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," said Locksley. "I should like to say good-morning to Miss Deene myself, if she is in."

He stepped into the waiting carriage with that perfect sang froid that your parvenu vainly tries to imitate, though he half-believed at the moment that either Marlowe or Esther had seen Dora follow him to the summer-house.

Mr. Marlowe did not seek further for his fiancée, but growling some indistinct reply, he took his place by Locksley's side, and roughly bade the coachman to drive on.

"Are you going direct to Broadstairs, Mr. Locksley?" he asked presently, in his most suave tones. "You must excuse my annoyance with Miss Deene, but she is the most aggravating of girls. I know that she is as fond of me as I am of her, but she takes a constant delight in teasing me. Are you—or a married man?"

"Not yet," replied Locksley, flippantly. "I hope to be soon, though."

"I congratulate you, I am sure. My own wedding will take place within three months I am sure that I have waited long enough," Mr. Marlowe said, plaintively.

"So I should think," replied Locksley.

"Do you know anything about the matter, sir?"

"I meant, judging by your age. You must be sixty at least."

Mr. Marlowe flushed with passion and annoyance, but continued, viciously:

"Your estimation is incorrect, sir, and I suppose you think that Miss Deene is giving much for little by marrying me? Let me undeceive you, Mr. Locksley, let your pity—yes, your pity, for I can see it in your manner—run away with your reason. I am forty years of age, sir, and Miss Deene is twenty. I think those ages are fairly compatible. I am a rich man, sir, and Miss Deene hasn't a shilling in the world. I come of an old family, sir, and Miss Deene has no legal claim even to the same she bears. You understand?"

"Yes, I understand," replied Edmund, his blood boiling with suppressed passion. "I understand that you are a mean, despicable cur, whom I should heartily like to horsewhip! Order your man to stop the carriage so that I may get down, or I will not be responsible for my actions!"

Mr. Richard Marlowe was so completely taken aback that he could only splutter out some reply that was anything but intelligible. However, he had presence of mind sufficient to touch the checkstraps, and before the carriage stopped Locksley had sprung out, his eyes blazing with wrathful contempt.

Muttering something about "a beggarly doctor," Mr. Marlowe ordered his man to return to the "Firs," and the vehicle wheeled round and dashed away, while the indignant Locksley walked toward Deal, which was now but about a mile distant.

"The cad!" he muttered, fiercely. "How dare he speak of that angel with his foul tongue! I shall never forgive myself for not thrashing the scoundrel! Of course, he had a double motive in speaking as he did. He imagined that if I had been at all smitten by Miss Deene's charms, the hint at some mystery or shame in the family would effectually choke me off."


He looked after the carriage savagely, and mentally resolved to get even with Mr. Richard Marlowe at an early date.

After that his thoughts took a happier turn, and when he remembered how sweetly Miss Dora had looked upon him—when he thought of her resolute words, "I will never marry Mr. Marlowe!" and the confidence she had reposed in him, his very soul throbbled with a sort of ecstatic joy.

"I love her!" he murmured. "I love her with a man's fond, enduring passion, and I don't care a straw who and what she may be! At all events," he added, "she is a lady, and the most lovely darling in the whole world!"

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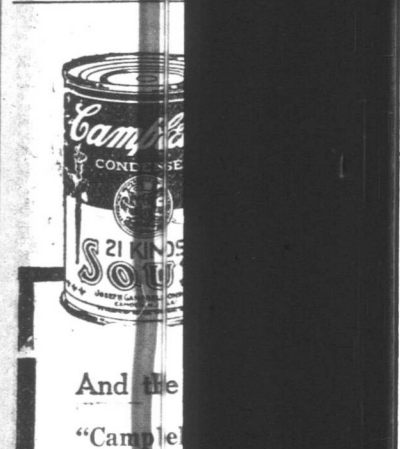
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(To be continued.)