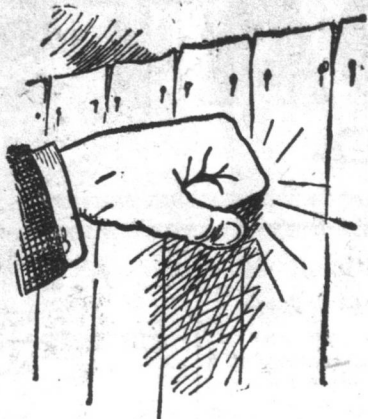


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## Happiness At Last; Loyalty Recompensed.

### CHAPTER VII.

Her father had already breakfasted and gone to his laboratory, and Bobby was dashing wildly through a course of eggs and bacon and marmalade, preparatory to his morning grind with the "coach," who lived in the town, three miles distant.

"You'll be left to your own devices all day, Decie. What shall you do?" Decima smiled rather nervously. "I am going to interview the cook and Sarah Jane," she said.

Bobby grinned. "Well, if you live though it, you shall, as a reward, go fishing with me at Leafmore this evening. I generally take a rod down before dinner, and to-day's a good day. Meet me at the gate—you know—at five o'clock. Going to interview the slaves, are you, my poor child? If a brother's blessing and deepest sympathy—I've been there myself—are of any service to you, pray accept them. I'm off. Five, by the gate, remember."

After breakfast, Decima went all over the house, and then "interviewed" the cook and Sarah Jane. The former at first met her timid remarks about the dinner of the preceding evening with a bland contempt which gradually developed into a reluctant respect and civility, for there was a certain something at the back of Decima's innocent blue-gray eyes which had its effect. As for Sarah Jane, she was instantly moved to tears, and remarking that she was an orphan, and had been "brought up by a charity," assured Decima that she would be more careful of the crockery in the future. A portion of the morning Decima spent in the laboratory, where



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her father submitted to her presence in an absent-minded way. She "lured" him into lunch at one o'clock, and in the afternoon she wrote to Lady Pauline a full account of this first chapter in her new life.

Then, at a quarter to five, she went down to the gate through which she and Bobby had passed to the Leafmore avenue.

Bobby was sitting on the bank, awaiting her, a pipe in his mouth and his fishing-rod by his side. "Good girl!" he said. "Always be in time, though, for that matter, half an hour later wouldn't have mattered, for it's too bright for trout. But there's a cloud coming up, and I can start presently. Meanwhile, as you see, I am hard at work."

"Yes; smoking. Come and sit down." She went and sat beside him, and examined his fly-book with some interest for a few minutes; then she got up and wandered down the avenue, picking the wild flowers which grew along the border.

Bobby lay back with his eyes closed and half asleep, until suddenly he was aroused by a clinking sound. He looked up, and saw a gentleman shaking the big entrance gates.

Boy-like, he watched him for a moment or two with bland enjoyment; then he shouted:

"Hi!"

The gentleman looked round, saw the recumbent figure, and said:

"Well?"

"Gate's locked," remarked Bobby in his concise fashion. "There's a door here"—he indicated the gate—"if you want to come in."

"Thanks," said the gentleman; and he came along to the wall, passed through the gate, and stood beside the lad, looking down at him.

"That gate's always kept locked," said Bobby.

"Indeed?" said the gentleman. "I am a stranger here; I didn't know."

Bobby looked at him casually. "Are you going to see the house?" he said. "It's worth seeing, the carving and pictures especially."

"Are they?" responded the gentleman. "Do you live here?"

"Oh, no; that is, not at the house. I live in the village; but I know it very well."

"You are going to try your luck with the trout, I see. Is the sport good?"

"Oh, yes; it's a capital river," said Bobby. "Been neglected and a good deal poached, but there are plenty of fish in it still."

"Will you let me look at your flies?" said the gentleman. "I'm a fisherman also."

Bobby handed him the book with an angler's promptitude.

"I'm going to put on a blue upright and a march brown."

"Yes," said the other. "And a 'coachman' an hour two later. You have some good flies. I hope you will have good sport."

"Thanks. I think I'll get down to the river; it's just below here."

face inquiringly, as if he were half-curious to see what she would do. He had not long to wait. With a touch of color in her cheeks and a coy, embarrassed expression in her eyes, Decima looked at him, then looked beyond him, over his head, and passed on without a sign of recognition.

Gaunt smiled grimly, and stood, like a soldier, erect and unbending, his eyes fixed on her, as if the cut direct amused rather than wounded him.

As she passed on, her lovely face set and cold, she continued the arrangement of her flowers, and—perhaps her hand trembled, for it was trying business, this cutting of a man who had been kind to her—she let a large number of them slip through her fingers.

She stopped, and, biting her lip softly, began to pick them up; and Gaunt stepped forward and assisted her.

As he handed the yellow blossoms to her, he said, very quietly: "Have you forgotten me?"

"No," she said.

"Not forgotten me? And yet you would not bow to me? Why was that?" Decima looked from side to side.

"I—I can not tell you," she said.

"But—forgive me—don't you think you owe me some explanation? Let me put the case the other way. If you had deigned to bow to me, and I had declined to respond; if I had cut you, would you not think an explanation due from me?"

"Yes," said Decima, her brows coming straight, her lovely eyes growing dark-blue.

"Be just, then. Do unto others as you would that they should do unto you," he said. "There was a suspicion of banter in his tone, and at the same time a grim kind of appeal which touched Decima."

"Must I tell you?" she said in a troubled voice.

"Yes, I think you ought."

"Then—oh, I wish you would not ask me!—my aunt does not wish me to—to know you."

"Why?" he asked, very quietly. "I admit that it is a sufficient reason for the cut, but I am curious to know her reason."

"Because—because you are— Oh, I can not tell you," she broke off, scarlet to the very neck.

He smiled.

"Too bad for you to know?" he said, with a smile.

Decima hung her head.

"Thank you," he said. "I am answered. Good-bye."

She turned and went a few steps from him, then she swung round and came back, her innocent soul shining through her eyes.

"Why are you so wicked?" she said, painfully, as if the question were forced from her. "You were so kind to me."

His face grew hard and set, then he smiled grimly.

"That would take a lot of answering," he said. "Wait a moment until I decide whether I can tell you."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Wait until I decide whether I can tell you," said Gaunt.

And Decima waited, her innocent gray eyes on his face with a kind of troubled patience.

He looked beyond him fixedly, with a grave thoughtfulness, and was silent so long that Decima almost thought that he had forgotten her; then he looked at her with a grim smile.

"I have decided that I can not tell you, Miss— He hesitated.

"Deane," said Decima—"Decima Deane. You have forgotten my name!"

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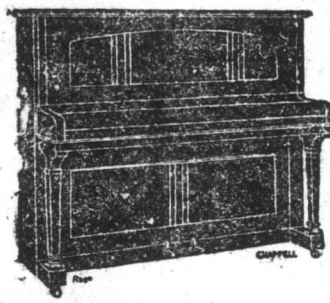
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