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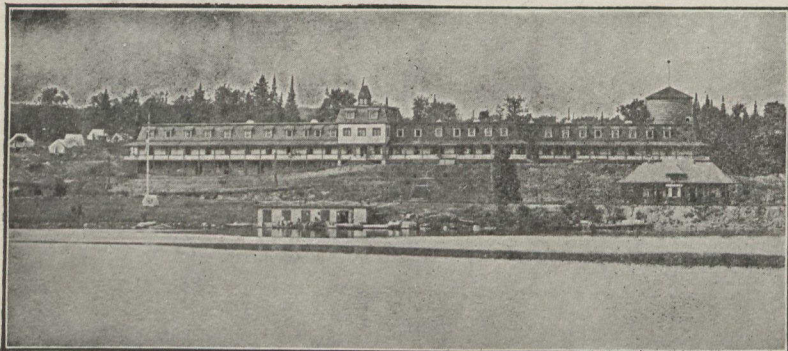
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ter which had caused her so much pain; but whilst she hesitated as to the advisability of so doing, the opportunity passed; his next words swept the subject again from her mind.

"No, sweetheart," he said tenderly, "what I meant was that, since we plighted our troth, everything is changed. To begin with, I thought myself to be the son of a wealthy man; now I have reason to believe that I shall be practically penniless."

"That does not matter, love," she interposed quickly. "I shall have money, you know; when I am twenty-one I come into the seven hundred pounds a year left me by my godmother, Mrs. Trevanion."

"I could not live on you, Enid." "Live on me! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dick, for talking such rubbish!" she cried indignantly—her cheeks glowing, her eyes flashing. "Is a matter of pounds, shillings and pence to come between you and me? Can the wings of your love, the love you have called holy, not soar above such contemptible trifles?"

"Dearest," he whispered, trying to appease her genuine wrath, "you must remember there are others to be considered, besides ourselves. When your father realizes my true position, he will feel with me that, as a man of honour, I am bound to release you from your promise. He gave his sanction to our marriage under a misapprehension; he may very reasonably withdraw it now."

"I think my father will feel as I do," said Enid, with conviction; "but if he does not it will make no difference to me; it will only mean that we shall have to wait until I come of age. Meanwhile," she continued energetically, "you must take up the profession you have neglected. Mr. Alston told me the other day that you had passed all your exams, for the Bar and eaten all your dinners. Is that not so?"

"Oh, yes," he answered gloomily. "I am in a position to join the big army of briefless barristers at any time; but of what use is that? I might have time to starve a dozen times before I got my first case to defend."

"I think you must exaggerate, dear," said Enid softly. "Your father may have been in financial difficulties; he may have crippled himself for the time to buy back the property."

Dick groaned, and leaning his head upon his hand tried to shield his face from her observation. This she would not allow him to do. Softly pulling his hand away, she pressed a kiss upon the young man's brow, now pleated and furrowed by premature lines, and continued—

"That will all right itself in time! You must not forget that you have friends. My father and Mr. Alston will be only too glad, I am sure, to come to the rescue."

"I could not touch a penny of Ted Alston's money!" cried Dick, almost fiercely.

"He would be very much hurt if he heard you say that," said Enid reprovingly. "He is a good friend to you, Dick, the best of friends. I don't think you have treated him very well lately; but we won't enter into that now, dearest. I am so glad you have at last spoken to me freely; it is an immense relief to me to know that it is only money matters which are worrying you. I began to fear—I don't exactly know what; but something worse—far worse than that."

"And you were right," he said, almost in a whisper.

"Dick, what do you mean?" she said, in an agony of apprehension.

"There is a something worse—far worse than monetary embarrassments hanging over my head—there is a big cloud of shame—of disgrace—which may burst at any moment—that is one good and sufficient reason why I cannot ask you to share my fate."

"But I will share it," she answered passionately, "for weal or woe! I will not be shaken off. Dick, do you think mine is only a fair-weather love? If I were your wife I should have to share your fortunes, good or evil. I am your wife in heart, in spirit. I claim my rights. Only put mysteries aside, love, and tell me exactly what it is you fear."

"That is just what I cannot do, sweetheart," replied Dick sadly. "I can only repay your generosity by an un-

gracious silence—the secret for which you ask is not mine, it belongs to the dead."

CHAPTER XI.

The Bird Flown.

ENID retired to rest that night with a feeling nearer akin to happiness than she had known since the terrible day when grim tragedy had stalked into her young life, and changed for the time its whole colour. Her talk with Dick had left much unexplained; a man would probably have thought it unsatisfactory in the extreme; but, being essentially feminine, she was content. Assured not only of her lover's affection, but of her right to enjoy it, she felt that she could bear all else with patience and equanimity.

Poverty! What is poverty to one who has never known it? No more than an opening for sweet self-sacrifice, an occasion to spend oneself in the service of the loved one. Shame—disgrace! Ah, yes, those were words which made the listener at first catch her breath with apprehension, only to dismiss them later with a confident smile. The secret, whatever it was, which cast its monstrous shadow over Dick's life, belonged to his father; the shame, therefore, if shame there were, lay on the latter's head. The thought of it hurt her for her lover's sake; but it had not the bitter sting of personal dishonour. If the cloud of which he spoke burst, and the name dearest to her in the world—his name—was tarnished with disgrace—she would still wear it proudly, she said to herself, as any coronet; he and she would live the dark memory down.

Dick did not appear the next morning at the breakfast table. When the meal, purposely prolonged, had ended, the two ladies began to cast apprehensive glances at each other and wonder if he was ill.

"Ill? not he," replied the Colonel disdainfully; for the absentee was not by any means so great a favourite with him as he had been; and not once, but several times already, it had occurred to him to regret his daughter's engagement. "Lazy is more like it."

"Shall I go and see what's amiss," suggested Ted. "If I find him snoring soundly, I will administer a dose of 'cold pig,' otherwise wet sponge," he added, seeing Mrs. Anerley's mystified gaze.

"No, no, poor boy; if he can sleep, let him," cried that lady. "Only make sure that he is all right."

A moment or so after, young Alston had started on his errand, his voice was heard in a shout of dismay from the bedroom door. It struck terror to the hearts of the other three, who rushed upstairs as fast as their trembling limbs would carry them. Without thought of ceremony, they burst into Dick's room, and found the latter lying like a log in bed breathing heavily and unnaturally, whilst Ted, standing by his side with a very white face, was shaking him vigorously by the arm in an ineffectual attempt to rouse him.

A faint and sickly odour pervaded the room, which was in a wild state of confusion. The contents of the writing-table, which had been the late Mr. Emberson's property, together with those of the chest of drawers, the toilette table, the wardrobe, had been thrown out and lay scattered about the floor. The garments which Dick had worn the night before were lying across a chair with their pockets turned inside out. It was clear that everything in the room—with the solitary exception of the iron safe, which was dented and scratched, but had successfully withstood the attempt to force it open—had been hastily but exhaustively ransacked.

"Chloroform, by Jove!" cried Colonel Anerley, as he raised a pad of linen which lay on the floor close by the bedside, and sniffed it enquiringly. Striding to the window, he threw it wide.

"Give him air," he said, "that will bring him round sooner than anything. Now, what devil's work is this, I'd like to know? And why should Emberson in particular have been the victim?"

Enid, leaning white as a sheet against the lintel of the door, was the only one of the number who understood the situation; to her it was clear enough that the mysterious packet, now in her pos-