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## Which Was The Heir?

CHAPTER XXXVII.  
(Concluded.)

"FOR God's sake don't go!" he said, hoarsely. "Don't leave me! Don't send me away with my fate hanging in the balance. I have told you all—everything. I can't tell you how much I love you, because that is impossible."

Cottie sank on to the bench again and gripped her shawl tightly over her heart as if to still its throbbing. The moon swam in a haze before her. She seemed too great to be real or true.

"I love you," he said. "I have loved you since the first night I saw you here. All my heart went out towards you. It was as if I'd never lived until that moment. I have thought of you ever since—Oh, haven't you seen, haven't you known? And here I am, poor and nameless, telling you this, you who are so beautiful, a queen among women, worthy of the highest and the best. And I—do you know what I am—dare to love you!"

There was silence for a moment; then, in his deep, grave voice, he went on more calmly:

"But I am not sorry that I told you—that is, if you are not angry with me, if you do not think I have insulted you. I can't hope to win you—of

course I know that; but it will be some comfort to me that I have told you—though God knows why! I'll go back to Australia and look for my boy Ronnie. But, wherever I am, I shall always think of you. Out there, away from everybody, an exile and an outcast—oh, it's right enough, I don't complain; one must take the fate that is dealt out to one—I shall treasure these few days when I was with you as an equal, and shall always remember, when I told you of my love for you, you did not strike me to the earth with your scorn and contempt, but listened to me patiently, with all the sweetness of your nature. My dearest—oh, forgive me, you are so dear to me in my thoughts, you are all my life and soul, that the word slipped out, came straight from my heart—I don't want you to be even sorry for

neither offended nor insulted that you knew I told you because I could not help loving you. Will you say it just to—just to humour me, and because I am very wretched and down on my luck."

The old phrase brought a lump to Cottie's throat.

"I—I forgive you!" she breathed, almost inaudibly.

He took the edge of her shawl and raised it to his lips passionately but reverently; then he rose, with outward calm and his lips tightly set.

"Give me your arm down the slope," he said.

She put her hand on his arm, thrilled to the core as she thought that it was Geoffrey, her Geoffrey, who loved her, and who had pleaded his love with such manly tenderness. He felt the little hand tremble, and looked at her with penitence remorse in his dark eyes.

"Oh, I have distressed you!" he said. "I didn't mean to do that. I would rather have died."

The tears were running down her face by this time. She put up her shawl to wipe them away. Her step faltered and she swayed a little towards him, and he caught her arm and looked at her, his breath coming fast.

"You are—crying! You are sorry for me!" he said—whispered, rather—hushily. "You don't—you don't care enough for me—it is not because you—love me!"

The last words were almost inaudible.

Something in her silence lit a spark of hope in his bosom which rose to a consuming flame.

"Constance! My dearest! For God's sake, speak to me! Tell me—is it possible that you love me?"

The Geoffrey of old sprang up in him, his arm went round her; in another moment she would have been on his breast and her secret would have been hers no longer; but she put out her hands, their palms against his breast, and so, slight as her strength was compared with his, kept him at bay.

"No, no, wait! Ah, wait! I do

"I—I don't think he's gone to Australia. I think he's in England—perhaps in Scarborough. Go and look for him there."

"So I will," said Geoffrey stoutly. "Though I don't know why you make it a condition."

"Not after what you told me!" she retorted. "You made me take an interest in the boy, and now you want to cast him off."

(To be continued.)

not know—not yet! You have taken me by surprise. Don't force me to speak, or—I shall send you away—I shall say 'No.' I want time—to think."

His arms dropped from her, and he stood looking at her with all his love in his eyes, as if she were asking too much and to wait were impossible. But Geoffrey was a gentleman, though he disclaimed the title, and what is better, a strong man. He summoned all his strength to his aid.

"Sit down," he said, almost gruffly. "I won't touch you again, I swear it. But you must tell me what you mean. Don't think me hard and brutal; but, you see, I love you, and I am hovering betwixt happiness and misery for the rest of my life. You shall tell me and I will listen; and whatever you say, whatever you ask me to do, I will promise to do."

"You promise?" she said, with a catch in her breath.

"I promise!" he said, solemnly. "I've never broken a promise yet, and I'm not likely to do so to you. Only tell me this: do you love me? Do you think that you ever can love me?"

As he waited, she put one trembling hand and brushed the hair from her forehead. It was a gesture so like Ronnie's, one that he had seen Ronnie use to often when bothered with her lessons, that he started and could scarcely repress an exclamation.

"I can't tell you—yet," she said, trying to speak calmly, though her heart was throbbing, aching, with the desire to throw her arms about him and pillow her head upon his breast. "You—you must give me time! Besides, there is the boy—Ronnie—"

"Ronnie!" he echoed, with surprise.

"Yes," she said, almost defiantly. "You seem to have forgotten him! And yet he was your dearest friend; he was the partner of your life. I seem to have come between you and him, and—that makes me unhappy. I won't say anything until you have found him, and—he has given his consent."

Geoffrey stared at her.

"Until I have found him! I may have to go to Australia first."

She coloured, and her lips trembled.

"I—I don't think he's gone to Australia. I think he's in England—perhaps in Scarborough. Go and look for him there."

"So I will," said Geoffrey stoutly. "Though I don't know why you make it a condition."

"Not after what you told me!" she retorted. "You made me take an interest in the boy, and now you want to cast him off."

(To be continued.)

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G. P. O., May 17th, 1901.

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me. I have never been as happy in all my life as I have been these last few days.

As he paused to recover his breath, to gain complete mastery of himself, the joy in Cottie's heart was suddenly chilled by a spasm of jealousy. It was a strange feeling. It was actually the boy Ronnie who was jealous of the girl Constance. Had he not been happy with her in the hut beside the forest? It was a strange feeling; but most women will understand, though to most men it will seem inexplicable. The tears started to her eyes.

Geoffrey drew a sigh which he tried to check in a manly fashion.

"I'll go now," he said. "I'll start for Australia to-morrow morning."

Cottie's heart gave a leap of terror, she felt cold all over. Go to Australia now that she knew he loved her!

"I'll take you back to Mrs. Sefton and tell her I'm going." There was a pause. "Before I go, would you mind saying that you forgive me. I won't cost you much—you are so sweet and tender-hearted—oh, I know—and it will be something for me to carry away with me; something for me to think of when I am miles away out there in the wilds, and I know that I shall never see you again. I shall be able to say to myself that you were

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