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CHAPTER XXXVII.

Gaunt ate his breakfast, and he was lighting a cigarette when Wilkins announced two gentlemen. They were Mr. Belford, and Mr. Burns, the detective in charge of the case.

Mr. Belford was very pale, and evidently struggling with his agitation. "This is Mr. Burns, Lord Gaunt," he said—"the detective."

Gaunt nodded, and Mr. Burns looked at him keenly. "Sorry to disturb you, my lord," he said.

"Not at all," said Gaunt. "I'm afraid I've given you a great deal of trouble, Mr. Burns, quite unwittingly. Will you take a cup of coffee? No, a cigarette?" He handed his cigarette-case.

Mr. Burns was rather staggered. He had had a large experience of criminals, small and great, but he had never met with one quite so cool as this.

"I'm afraid I have an unpleasant duty to perform, my lord," he said. "Most duties are unpleasant, Mr. Burns," said Gaunt. "You have come to arrest me, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid so, my lord," said the detective. "I need not warn your lordship that I shall be obliged to use anything you may say against you."

"Quite so," said Gaunt. "Wilkins may I trouble you to get me my hat and coat?"

"I wish to remark," said Mr. Belford, with an agitation in strong contrast to Gaunt's coolness, "that Lord Gaunt has come back to England of his own free will, and with some difficulty, to meet this charge."

"I quite understand that," said Mr. Burns. "I've got a brougham outside. We shall drive straight to Holloway."

As they entered the brougham, a newspaper boy pushed forward, yelling: "Murder in Prince's Mansions! Arrest of Lord Gaunt!"

Gaunt smiled grimly. "They get the news very quickly, don't they, my lord?" said Burns.

"I have wired to Mr. Bright and Mr. Robert Reane," said Mr. Belford; "and I have seen Sir James this morning. Everything is being done that can be done."

"I am quite sure of that," said Gaunt, pleasantly.

It was a long drive to Holloway, but they reached it at last, and the governor of the prison received his famous charge courteously. As Gaunt was only a "suspect," and had not yet even been examined, the governor was able to allot him fairly comfortable quarters, and Gaunt found himself in a large and decently furnished room.

"This is quite luxurious," he said. The governor smiled apologetically, and Mr. Belford looked round with a sigh. Presently he was left alone with Gaunt.

"Is there anything you can tell me anything that will help us, Lord Gaunt?" he said.

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Gaunt seated himself on the bed, and shrugged his shoulders. "I'm afraid not, Mr. Belford," he said. "If I were to go over it, I should only repeat the evidence against me. I can not deny that I was at Prince's Mansions the night of the murder, that the poor woman, my wife, came in while I was there; that I had a scene with her, a scene which is engraved on my memory, and I fear will never leave it, and that I left her storming against me. It was my coat that was found covering her; it was my dagger with which she was stabbed. Against these facts my bare assertion that I did not kill her will weigh but very little, I am afraid."

Mr. Belford, went to the window heavily barred, and stared out into the prison courtyard.

The case looked very black. He remained with Gaunt for half an hour talking over the thing, until Gaunt was weary and sick at heart; then he went, and Gaunt was left alone.

He was almost glad of the quietude. He was free to think of Decima. Certain privileges, which to a free man would seem of very little worth, but which to a prisoner are valued exceedingly, were permitted him. His meals were sent in by the nearest hotel; there was a goodly supply of newspapers and magazines. But Gaunt could not read, and could not do justice to the dishes which the hotel cook had so considerably supplied.

The short winter day was drawing to a close, when there came a knock at the door, and the governor entered. "There are some visitors for you, Lord Gaunt," he said.

Gaunt rose from the bed on which he was lying.

"Oh, very well," he said. He thought it might be Mr. Belford or Mr. Lane, but the governor ushered in Mr. Bright and Bobby.

For the first time, Gaunt's self-possession forsook him, and he could not speak as Bobby rushed forward and took his hand; but he recovered his usual sang-froid in a moment or two. "This is good of you, Bobby!" he said.

"We got a wire this morning," gasped Bobby, "and Bright and I came up." Gaunt shook hands with Bright.

"I'm fated to be a trouble to you, Bright," he said.

Bright could not find his voice for a moment; then he panted: "Thank God you are alive! Oh, what is to be done, my lord?"

Gaunt shrugged his shoulders. "Not very much, I'm afraid, Bright," he said. "Then he turned to Bobby quickly. 'Is your sister—Miss Dean, quite well?'"

"Yes—yes," replied Bobby; "she's all right. She's here—with Lady Pauline."

Gaunt winced, and the color left his face.

"Here! Not here—in the prison?" "Yes," said Bobby. "She would come; nothing would stop her."

"I am sorry," said Gaunt, gravely. "Will you not take her back, Bobby?" Bobby shook his head.

"No," he said; "it wouldn't be any use asking her. You don't know Decima."

"Do I not?" thought Gaunt. "The moment we got the telegram," said Bobby, "she insisted upon coming up. She said she'd been there, at the Mansions, that night, and she might help you."

"I know," said Gaunt, quietly. "That your sister was there is my greatest trouble. That she should be mixed up with this affair, that her name should be mentioned in connection with it, causes me greater grief than anything else. Will you tell her that I am deeply grateful to her for coming, but that I—"

"—I—" his voice broke.

"Tell her yourself," said Bobby. "She's outside in the corridor waiting."

Gaunt sunk on the bed and remained silent for a minute or two.

Heaven alone knew how he longed to see her; but Heaven alone knew how keenly he desired that she should not be in any way associated with his trouble.

"I play this hand alone," he said to Bobby, with a sad smile. "Tell your sister that I am sorry she has come; that I am grateful to her; but that I shall be glad if she would go back home and forget that such a person as I ever existed."

"I'll tell her," said Bobby. "But—"

They talked, Bright and Bobby, one against the other. Of course, they assured Gaunt of their belief in his innocence, and their assurance that his innocence would be proved. They were both very excited, very agitated; but

Gaunt was quite cool and self-possessed. As a matter of fact, he was thinking, not of himself, but of Decima, that she was there near him in the corridor. Bobby and Bright would have remained for any length of time, but at last Gaunt dismissed them.

"Take your sister home, Bobby," he said, "and watch over her. Tell her that on no account is she to appear in this affair. Don't worry about me; my lawyers will do their best, be assured."

Bright and Bobby, as agitated as when they had entered, left the cell, and Gaunt paced up and down. Presently he heard a knock; the warden opened the door.

"A lady to see you, my lord," he said. He stood aside, and Decima entered.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Decima came in, and they stood looking at each other in silence. Gaunt could not have spoken or moved if his life depended upon his doing so. And as he looked at her, he saw with a pang of remorse the change that had taken place in her.

The face, the form, were girlish still; but on the face was an expression which only comes to those who have passed the brook which divides girlhood from womanhood, and in the lovely eyes was a look which told him all too plainly how much she had suffered.

But to the man whose heart ached with love for her, how beautiful she was! How her presence seemed to bring a ray of sunlight, a glow of warmth, into the cell! And yet he would have done much to prevent her coming. It seemed to him that she suffered desecration by breathing the prison air, as if her purity were polluted by her surroundings.

He would have liked to take her in his arms and carry her outside, far away from the hateful, degrading place.

She looked at him steadily, with a grave sadness which he had never seen before in her eyes and it smote him with an added remorse. He had found her an innocent light-hearted girl; it was he and his love which had robbed her youth of its brightness, and its faith—and its innocence.

He met her gaze for an instant, then his eyes fell. She sighed. She had not offered him her hand—he had noticed that—and she stood apart from him as she spoke.

"I came at once, directly I heard," she said.

Her voice thrilled through him; and yet, how low and grave it was: how different to what he remembered! Was it Decima who was speaking, or an angel who had won her way to heaven through the ordeal of sorrow and suffering?

"I am sorry," he said, hoarsely. "You— you should not have come. This— this is not a fit place for you."

Commonplace words enough, but she knew the feeling, the emotion which they masked.

"Ah, yes," she said, with a faint smile. "They said at first I must not come; but when I explained—"

She stopped. "I knew you were not dead"—her voice broke—"I felt that you were not! But—but I was glad when I heard—"

Her eyes filled with tears, but she checked them. "Aunt Pauline came with me. She is in the corridor."

"I will ask her to come in," he said, scarcely knowing what he said.

"No; do not. I told her that I wished to see you alone."

He bowed his head.

"Why? I am sorry you have come. It— it hurts me to see you here—in this place."

"I know," she said, simply, as if she understood him fully.

"All through this—this awful business I have had but one paramount desire; that you, that your name, should not be connected with it. I have brought you unhappiness enough, surely. You might have been spared this crowning misery."

"I know that you would think as you do, and that is why I came," she said in the same sweet, low voice.

He looked at her in helpless pain. (To be continued.)

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