



## Plot That Failed;

## Love That Would Not Be Denied.

### CHAPTER XXV.

"Come far, sir," he said, opening up a conversation.

Leicester raised his eyebrows and shook his head, waving his hand toward Stumpy, who interpreted the sentence, and replied, in broken English:

"No, not far; from London."

Then he commenced to talk of fine houses and big fees, and somehow drew from Job the story of the murder of Stirling and the fact that most of the people concerned in the tragedy had gone away.

"It is very strange," he said, "very! A murder is not what you call common in England? What did you do with ze Mastro Leicester; hang him up by ze neck?"

"No," said the man, shaking his head. "He died without that. He fell over the cliff with the chap he'd done for, and so the country was saved the trouble of that."

Leicester sat like a man in a dream, but gave no outward sign that the story had affected him.

Stumpy, thinking that he had pumped quite enough for the present requested Polly to bring cigars for himself and his master, and leaned back with an air of enjoyment.

After a few words with Leicester, who was known as Signor Edgardo, Stumpy asked if they could have a bed.

Martha answered shortly and decisively:

"No! I haven't got any beds to spare."

Stumpy inquired where he could get one.

"Here, Will," said the talkative fisherman, shaking Willie Sanderson, who had been asleep. "Can't you let this gentleman and his man have a couple of beds?"

Willie rubbed his eyes and nodded.

"I dare say," he said, staring about him.

Then the signor rose, bowed all round, and took his leave, followed by Stumpy, with Willie Sanderson to lead the way.

Slowly they tramped down to the Sandersons' cottage.

Willie opened the door and beckoned to the visitors to enter.

As they entered the small sanded room a lad rose from a chair and hobbled forward on a crutch.

He was a frail boy with a pale, intellectual, and mournful face.

Willie nodded to him.

"Jamie, these gentlemen want a

bed; show 'em upstairs to the best room."

The lad took the candle and hobbled up the stairs.

At the stairhead he stopped, and looked hard at Leicester, who turned his face slightly and adjusted his spectacles.

Stumpy, who had been warned to be careful, took the candle and thanked the lad.

Then the two Spaniards entered the room.

Leicester lay on the bed for an hour, without moving—plotting, planning; and Stumpy, after a prolonged entreaty that he would undress and get some rest, desisted and sat down patiently to wait until his master and preserver, and hero—for Stumpy considered Leicester to be everything that was courageous and noble and good—should choose to move.

Leicester rose at last full of self-reproach.

"I had forgotten you," he said. "You should have got to bed. Come, let us get some sleep. You want it badly enough."

As he spoke, and commenced undressing, their candle sputtered and went out.

Leicester took no notice, and Stumpy, after a moment's grumbling at having to undress in the dark, was just getting into one of the beds—there were two in the room—when Leicester said:

"Hush! Listen!"

Stumpy listened, and heard a noise of crying and sobbing in the next room.

He stared at Leicester and shook his head.

"It's that young lad we saw downstairs," he said. "Listen! Some one's giving him a beating."

"No," said Leicester, in the same low voice, "there's no other voice or noise in the room. What can be the matter?"

Stumpy looked up at the ceiling.

It was an old cottage, and the partition between the rooms was in some places worn through; light came between these chinks, and supplied Stumpy with an idea.

Without a word he bent down close against the wall and, in silence, motioned Leicester to get on his back.

This Leicester for some time declined to do; but as the sobbing broke out again his curiosity overcame him, and he stepped lightly on to Stumpy's back and then supported himself by clinging to one of the rough beams.

Having gained a position, he peered through one of the holes.

He was looking down into a small room, poorly furnished.

On the bed, in an attitude of abandonment, sat the boy, Jamie. His face was hidden in his hands, but his whole figure shook and quivered as he murmured, loud enough for Leicester to hear:

"This is the night he died! The very night! What makes me think of him so? It must be 'cause he was good to me—and he was good to me! He was like no one else! And now he's dead—shamefully murdered and slandered. Oh, Mr. Leicester, Mr. Leicester, if you could only come to life again and prove your innocence! It is false! You did not murder him—you couldn't, and yet—"

Then he stopped suddenly, shuddered, and looked round the room fearfully.

Then he drew himself painfully from the bed and to a box lying in the corner of the room, and opened it, and, with another shudder, took something from it.

This something he held in his hand and stared at with an evident horror

of fascination.

In his anxiety to see what the article was, Leicester nearly lost his balance, and made a slight noise.

The lad started, and the something dropped with a crash to the floor, revealing itself to be a large clasp-knife.

Leicester could scarcely believe his eyes.

Was the lad mad? or had he committed murder? Why did he sit and shudder over a clasp-knife which he kept hidden in his bedroom?

He got down and motioned Stumpy to his place.

Stumpy was just in time to see the knife hidden away, and on receiving a full account of all Leicester had seen was equally puzzled about it.

"It's very rum!" he said, shaking his head. "There's been some foul work somewhere, sir, take my word for it. What's that youngster got that knife for? It's no common one, or he wouldn't carry on like that over it. All the more reason, all this is, that we should keep dark and play a waiting game."

Then, with respectful earnestness, he implored Leicester to take some rest, and Leicester, to humour the man, who, however, much a convict, had served him honestly, yielded.

On the morrow both men were up at sunrise.

Stumpy went down to the beach, and smoked a cigarette Spanish fashion among the fishermen, to whom he chatted and listened with the greatest liveliness.

He could not, however, learn anything and returned rather disappointed.

Not so Leicester, who entered the room looking as white and stern as a ghost, and who laid a soiled sheet of paper upon the table.

"Look at that!" he said. "Stumpy, look at it!"

"Where did you get it, sir?"

"I took it from an old wall at the end of the village," said Leicester, pacing up and down.

Stumpy read it.

It was the handbill offering a hundred pounds reward for the apprehension of Leicester Dodson, charged with the willful murder of James Stirling.

No sooner had Stumpy read it than he grew alarmed.

"Some of 'em don't think you're dead," he said; "and this here's a dangerous place. That wig might blow off in the wind, and then where would you be? No, no, London's the place for us! We shan't get any more out of this yet a while, and if we stop here somebody will get suspicious. That bill's enough to make the duller chap in England sharp. A hundred pounds!"

Leicester was not loath to leave Penruddie.

The place was hateful to him now that all he loved were in London, so the next morning they paid their bill and went up to the great city.

Very changed did Leicester seem as he passed familiar places, and remembered that he must not enter them. Stranger still, he saw some familiar faces, and they passed him and did not recognize him.

In a political article he read news which astounded him.

The city article was nearly full of one name, and that—Howard Murpoint, Esq., M.P.

Leicester could not believe his eyes, and it was some time before he could realize that the villain who had entrapped and betrayed him was a man of great wealth, influence and power.

He determined to see him in his triumph and set about a way of doing it.

There was at that time a club in London to which foreigners were admitted, who could give a reference.

Leicester went there and gave the name of his father, who was well known as a merchant.

At this club, in the smoking room, he in a feigned voice conversed with several men and learned enough to astound him.

Carefully he led up to the great name, and inquired if Howard Murpoint lived in London.

"Oh, yes," said his informant, "he has two large houses, and another place down in the south—a wonderful man. There is a dinner conversation on at his place to-night."

"Indeed!" said Leicester, who felt that he would give all he possessed to be a guest.

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"Yes," said the gentleman. "A sort of gathering of the lions, you know. Open house. I have a card—two in fact, one for a friend who has discovered a new slab in Assyria. He ought to be here by now."

Just then a servant brought a letter for the gentleman.

"Hem!—can't come; just like that sort of men! I don't know whether you care for this sort of thing, but if you do there is the card."

Leicester thanked his generous acquaintance gratefully, and they dined together on the understanding that they should drop in at Howard Murpoint's house afterward.

Leicester could scarcely eat or restrain his excitement, but by an effort he managed to conceal it and assume a certain amount of indifference.

About nine o'clock they started for their conversation.

Howard Murpoint's house was magnificently lighted up and a crowd of servants were massed in the hall to receive the guests.

"Heaps of people here to-night," said Leicester's useful friend. "I'm afraid you won't thank me."

"I am anxious to see the great man," said Leicester, "and would go through a greater crush than this."

"Well, he's a great man and worth seeing," said the friend, as they entered the great salon.

Leicester thanked his generous ment at the assembled crowd of people of the very best sort, the guests of Howard Murpoint.

Where had the money come from? He left his friend a few minutes after they had entered, and made his way towards the orchestra, where a splendid band was playing.

There, in the midst of a group of lords and ladies, he heard a smooth, serene voice he remembered only too well.

He turned suddenly and came face to face with Howard Murpoint.

(To be continued.)

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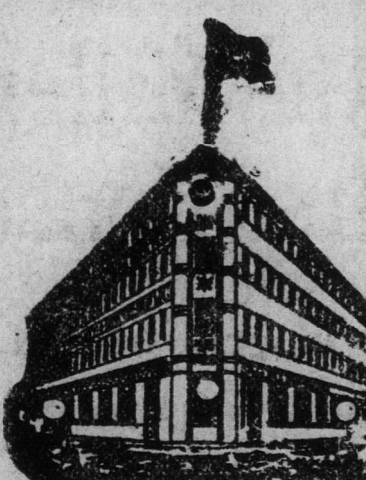
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