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A Great Intrigue,

Mistress of Darracourt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

For a moment the two women clung to each other in awful silence, the one in feigned, the other in real terror; then Marie stooped and picked up the vase, and, holding it at arm's length regarded it keenly.

"Yes," she murmured, with a long breath; "it is Lord Merle's! I remember it—I could swear to it. He drew my attention particularly to this one."

Susie leaned against the table with her hand pressed to her heart, and panting, her eyes fixed on the vase as if it were some living, evil thing.

"I remember it—I could swear to it!" muttered Marie, as if to herself. "Susie, you and I have found out who is the thief."

"No, no, no!" almost screamed Susie. "It—it is all a mistake, Miss Marie! I don't believe it—I won't believe it! Master Harry steal that! Master Harry!"

Marie held the vase toward her. "How did it come here?" she asked, gliding to the door and shutting it, and pulling down the blind. "How did it come here, then, Susie, and why has he gone so suddenly? My poor girl, I'm very sorry for you, but your fine Master Harry is the thief who stole the marquis' plate, and he has got the rest of it with him at this moment."

Susie, pallid with terror, fell all of a heap to the floor, and Marie Verner stood over her, still holding the vase. "What is to be done?" she said, hurriedly. "And how did he know the secret? Why, Susie—Susie!" and she shrank back.

Susie raised her swollen eyes, and looked at her fearfully.

"Oh, miss, what are you going to say?" she sobbed.

"It is not what I am going to say, it is what the marquis will say, what the judge will say, what the world will say!" she retorted, sternly. "Who told this Harry Herne the word that unlocked that plate closet? Who knew it? I and Miss Darracourt and—you!"

"Me!"

"Yes, you!" repeated Marie Verner, standing over her like an accusing angel threatening her with destruction. "You, and you only, excepting Miss Lucille and myself, knew the word. You told it to Harry Herne!"

Susie held up her trembling hand as if to ward off a blow.

Marie put the vase on the table, and looked down on her with a cruel smile of enjoyment curling her thin lips.

"Susie, I will be your friend on one condition. I like you, my poor girl, and I'm sorry for you. You must make a clean breast of it—you must tell the marquis that you did it, and perhaps he will have some pity for you and this wicked young fellow."

At last the frightened girl turned to bay.

With a spring she stood and con-

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fronted her accuser. "I make a clean breast of it! I, who never saw this thing till now—and never said a word! Confess that I helped Master Harry—betray Master Harry, who'd rather die inch by inch than touch a thing belonging to the marquis! No! You may not believe me, he may not believe me, all the world may think me as bad as you do, but I'll face 'em all! Ah, and if they send me to prison, I'll go, still crying that Master Harry's as innocent as I am!"

And, flushed and panting, she faced her tormentor.

Marie Verner saw that she had gone too far.

"It is very strange," she murmured, as if a glimmer of doubt had been produced by Susie's strenuous denial. "You swear you are innocent, Susie?"

"I will swear it; I do, miss. And I'll swear Master Harry is innocent, too."

Marie dropped into a chair. "Then how do you account for this being here?"

Susie glanced at the vase and shuddered.

"I don't know. I'm only a simple girl, Miss Marie. How can I tell? I only know and feel that Master Harry didn't bring it here."

"It doesn't matter. Here it is! You and I found it. The police will know it directly. The fact of its being here and him being seen lurking round the plate-room, will be evidence before the judge to send him to prison for life—for life, Susie! Think of that!"

Susie burst into tears, and clung to the table, convulsed with sobs.

"Oh, poor Master Harry! Poor Master Harry!" she moaned.

"They will get him of a certainty, and they'll make you a witness against him," continued Marie Verner, pitilessly. "You will be the means of sending him to penal servitude."

"I—I! Oh, Miss Marie!"

"Yes; and do you think they'll believe you when you say that you did not tell him last night? Did any one see you here with him?"

Susie put her hand to her head. "Think! think! Did any one see you?"

"Yes," sobbed Susie; "Hope saw us. Hope walked home to the Court with me."

"Ah, another link!" exclaimed Marie Verner. "They will bring Hope up to prove that you were here alone with him. Susie, how could you come? Our good name—"

Susie's sobs drowned the words.

"And the robbery was committed soon afterwards! Everything is dead against him, you see." She paused to let Susie get her breath. "And you still think Harry Herne did not do it!"

"I know he did not!" panted the poor girl.

"Then what do you think? How did this vase get here?"

"I don't know—I can't tell; unless—" She stopped and raised her white face.

"Unless what?" demanded Marie. Susie caught at her breath.

"Unless the marquis put it there himself, and meant to accuse Master Harry of it," she whispered, huskily.

Marie started: a genuine start. The innocent, simple-minded girl had hit the truth—the identical truth.

For a moment she was nonplussed, and stood eyeing the ground; then a flash came into her eyes.

"You think so, do you, Susie?"

"Yes, yes!" assented Susie, fervently. "He would do it; I know him, Miss Marie. He wouldn't stop at anything. All the people know him, and that he'd go through fire to harm any one he didn't like, for all his cold, quiet ways."

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us tell everything, and then turn it against us."

Susie uttered a moan. "My poor girl! my poor girl! Think—prison for life, for both you and him!"

Susie threw herself upon her tormentor's arm.

"Oh, Miss Marie, we are innocent, both of us. Save us, Miss Marie, save us!"

"My poor Susie, so I would if I could, but how can I? How can I? Stop, let me think. Don't speak for a moment."

She put her hand to her brow, as if she were thinking hard, and paced the room; then she stopped in front of the trembling, shivering girl.

"I have thought of a plan, Susie," she said, solemnly. "Do you think you can carry it out?"

"I don't know, miss."

"To save yourself and Harry Herne?"

"To save him I'd do anything!" said Susie, huskily.

"That's right. Now, stop crying and listen to me, every word. There is not a moment to lose. The marquis will be going to the police directly, and they will come here and find you and his vase, and all will be lost. Now, Susie, they must not find you or the vase."

"No, miss, no, no!"

"I'll take the vase and hide it," continued Marie.

"Oh, miss, how good you are!"

"I'll do it for your sake, Susie. It's a dangerous thing, and if I were caught I should be treated as they'd treat you and Harry Herne."

"Oh, miss, miss!"

"That will get rid of the vase; and now about you. You must go at once, Susie."

"Yes, miss," assented the poor girl, and she looked at the door as if she were going to start that moment.

"Wait! You must not go like that. They would soon follow you and bring you back. That would never do. That is why I want you to listen carefully."

"Yes, yes, I will listen. I'll do whatever you tell me!" panted Susie.

"You must go quietly and secretly, without any one seeing you. Now, listen. You stay here, and I will go to the Court and bring you a dark dress and an old bonnet of Mrs. Dalton's; I will put a veil with it, and you must pull it over your face, and take care to remember that you are an old woman. You must walk like one and talk like one, if you can."

but you'd better say nothing to any one unless you are obliged."

Susie moaned.

"I will dress you myself, and see that you are quite disguised and unlike your real self. Then you must walk to Silverdale Station on the branch line. Not the station here—you understand?"

"Yes, yes, miss. Silverdale. I know it. Oh, how shall I ever do it?"

"Think of Harry Herne!" said Marie Verner, encouragingly. "Remember that his safety depends on you, pluck, Susie. Why, I'd do it myself if I thought him innocent, and I begin to think he is."

"Oh, thank you for those words, Miss Marie. I'll do it, however hard it is. Go on, miss; go on."

"At Silverdale you must take a ticket for London, and when you are there take a cab and go to this address. See, I will write it down for you," and on a piece of paper she snatched up from the table she wrote an address. "She is a very kind, nice woman, and will do anything I tell her. But, of course, you mustn't stay there, Susie. London is the worst place in the world to hide in; it is full of police and detectives, and they would find you directly."

Susie moaned.

"You must go abroad. To Australia."

"The poor girl uttered a cry.

"Oh, father, father!" She seemed crushed for a moment, then she looked up with quivering lips and streaming eyes. "Yes, miss, I'll do it!—I'll do it! But Australia! Oh, poor father—poor father! I shall never see him again."

"Then Harry Herne is a lost man!" said Marie, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh, don't say that, miss! I said I'd do it; I'll go to the other end of the world, I will, indeed!"

"That's a brave girl!" murmured Marie, encouragingly; "now I'll go and get the clothes. Leave all the rest to me. I'll write to my friend and make all the arrangements."

"Yes, miss," sighed Susie; "but about money?"

"I've thought of that—I mean," she corrected herself quickly, "I happen to have some money with me. Here it is in this purse. It is fifty pounds. How thankful we ought to be that I happen to have it, Susie!"

"Yes, miss, yes! How good you are to him and me! Heaven will bless you for this, miss, mark my words!"

Marie cast down her eyes, and a faint shiver ran through her.

"I do it because I think you are both innocent, and I want to save you, Susie," she said. "But now, listen. You may meet Harry Herne—"

Susie's face cleared for a brief second.

"If you should, you must not say a word, breathe a word of this!"

Susie looked bewildered.

"No, miss."

(To be Continued.)

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