



**ROYAL YEAST**  
The Earl's Son;  
—OR—  
TWO HEARTS UNITED.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Ralph remained silent. His father's belief in him touched him to the heart, but he knew that his innocence might not be so easily or quickly proved, that, on the contrary, he was in imminent peril. His silence drove the smile from the earl's face, and a covert anxiety began to show itself.

"Can you not throw any light on this mysterious affair, Ralph?" he asked. "I want you home at the Court—home!—there is so much to tell you, so much for you to do. I am old, very old, and feeble; you must take my place. The tenants must come up to the Court to meet you; there shall be public rejoicing, a dinner—I want to talk it over with you, to arrange. And Veronica—Ralph!" his voice rose and quavered with a pitiful impatience and resentment against Fate. "I have found you, and yet I cannot have you. You are imprisoned here, and I—God help me!—I am helpless! Can you throw no light whatsoever on this tragedy, do nothing to clear up this hideous mystery?"

Ralph shook his head. "No, sir, I'm afraid not," he said in a low voice, and pressing the old man's hand. "We can only be patient and trust to those who are helping us. They will do all that can be done."

"Why do they not discover the guilty person?" demanded the earl, testily. "Surely in these days, with all the modern aids to detection, they should be able to prove your innocence and liberate you. Do you suspect no one, Ralph?"

Ralph shook his head again. "No," he said. "It is a mystery to me. I have spent hours in thought—I have had plenty of time here—turning the thing this way and that, but I cannot find any solution; nor can Mr. Selby, who has made every possible enquiry. The man was a stranger in the place; Groser, of the Dog and Owl, you know, sir, where the man lodged, knows nothing about him. Burchett—ah, well, you know that Burchett would leave no stone

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turned—he can discover nothing. Mr. Whetstone—father—"

He spoke the sacred word in a low voice, and the earl started, then laid his hand upon Ralph's and looked at him with a deep tenderness.

"Yes, Ralph?"

"You will tell Burchett—and him—what you have told me? You will explain—"

"I will tell them everything, Ralph," said the earl, gravely. "All the world shall know that I would have sought your mother—my poor, loving, noble Janet!—and brought her to the Court, if I had not believed she was dead."

Ralph pressed the thin hand gratefully. "Whetstone also has been trying to solve the mystery, but he has failed like the rest—Has Fanny Mason been found?" he broke off.

"I do not know," said the earl. "But she shall be—nothing shall be neglected. Oh, Ralph, this is part of my punishment! That you should be here, here"—he looked round the cell and shuddered—"instead of at home!"

The governor came to the door. "Miss Gresham, my lord!" he said. Veronica entered. She had Ada by the hand, and the child tore herself free and, disregarding the earl, sprang to Ralph.

"Oh, Big Man, I am so glad!" she cried. "They wouldn't let me come to you—they said you'd gone away, and I cried and cried, until Veronica brought me!"

Ralph took her on his knee and kissed her and stroked her head. "But how pale 'oo look!" said Ada, scanning his face with grave intentness. "And what a 'orrid room 'oo live in! What are 'oo stayin' 'ere for? Why don't 'oo come to the 'otel where papa and Ronica and me live? It's ever so much prettier an' nicer than this!"

"I'll come presently, Ada," he said. "I'm obliged to stay here for a time, on—business."

"It must be a werry unpleasant business," she said, shrewdly; then she glanced at the earl.

"'Ooo is that old gentleman?"

"He is my father," said Ralph. "Will you go and say 'How do you do' to him, Ada?"

She got off his knee and advanced to the earl, who had been watching the two with interest.

"'Ow do 'oo do?" she said, holding out her hand. "I'm werry glad to see 'oo, if 'oo are Big Man's father."

The earl signed to Veronica to lift the child on his knee—he was too feeble to lift her himself.

"I s'pose you know who I am?" she said, looking up into the parchment-like face with a fearlessness which charmed the earl. "I'm the ickly girl Big Man saved from the fire. I was asleep in my cot, like I am allus at night, you know, and it came on drefful hot, and the room was all full of smoke, and I was afraid I was going to be burnt, and that's a drefful death, you know; and I was all stuffering and losin' my seven senses, and I saw Big Man rush into the room, and he talled out to me, 'Ada, here I am, don't be afraid!' and dreckly I 'eard his voice I wasn't no longer afraid; an' he took me in his arms, an' then my seven senses went quite away, and when they came back I was in bed. Big man had saved me from bein' burnt alive! But he got werry burnt himself, you know, and he was werry ill, oh, werry ill for twite a long time! He's better now, and more like he was when he oosed to take me out for walks and nurse me asleep in the even-ings. But what does he shut hisself up in this 'orrid place for?"

The artless prattle of the child went straight to the old man's heart and brought the tears to his eyes.

"Take her away, sir," said Ralph, rather huskily. "This is no place for a child, for anyone," he added, glancing at Veronica.

"Would you like to come for a ride in a carriage with me, Ada?" said the earl, wiping his eyes covertly. "Perhaps we shall see some shops where there are some dolls."

"Just as we oosed to do when I went out with Big Man!" said Ada, joyously.

She ran to Ralph and flinging her arms round his neck, whispered:

"Shall I go, Big man? He seems a werry nice old gentleman. But of course he must be nice if he's your father!"

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"Yes; go, Ada!" he whispered. She kissed him and returned to the earl.

"He says I may go with 'oo. And he's your son! How fond and how proud 'oo must be of him!"

"I am!" said the earl, huskily, as he held Ralph's hand.

When he had gone out, holding Ada's hand, Veronica flew into Ralph's arms.

"Oh, Ralph, Ralph! You know the truth—he has told you! I am so glad, so proud!"

Ralph pressed her to him and kissed her passionately.

"And I am glad and proud—for your sake, dearest," he said, in a low voice. "Shall I confess, Veronica, that the—the difference between us, the difference between you, nobly born, and I, just Ralph Farrington, the gamekeeper, sometimes made me unhappy?"

"No, Ralph!" she retorted, smiling at him. "I should never have suspected you of such—humility! Why, sir, you always treated me as if I were the inferior—as I was, and I always shall be dearest!"

"But, Veronica," he said, gravely, and after a pause. "I may be, I feel that I am, the earl's son, but my claim has not yet been proved. There is Mr. Talbot Denby; he is the next heir, you know, and he will have something to say to it. He does not bear me any good-will, Veronica, and he will, no doubt, dispute my claim; indeed, he will be justified in doing so."

"But he does not," said Veronica. "I have just seen him, and he spoke as if he admitted your identity and did not intend to dispute it."

Ralph frowned thoughtfully. "That's strange," he said; "Mr. Talbot has no liking for me—you remember our little set-to by the river?"

"Do you think I forget anything concerning you?" she murmured, her head resting on his breast, her eyes, with love beaming from them, turned up to his.

"It is strange that he should so readily, so promptly resign the earldom. An earldom! Heavens, I can scarcely realize it! But I am glad, dearest, for if I should be an earl, you will be a countess, and that is a fitting rank for you. Ah!" he broke off, sharply. "Here I am talking of the future as if it were all bright and assured, and—and—" He looked round the cell.

Woman-like her courage rose to cheer his momentary despondency.

"It will not be for long, Ralph," she whispered. "The truth will prevail."

"After—when it is too late!" he said, more to himself than to her; then, as if ashamed of his doubts and fears, he added, quickly: "Yes—yes! That's a good motto, dearest! The truth will prevail!"

There was a pause, then she said, hesitatingly:

"You did not know that I was out that—that night, Ralph, the night of the—the night you left?"

"No," he assented, absently.

"Yes, I was. I went to the hut, I went to see you, to tell you that I could not let you go, surrender you. I saw Burchett and learnt you had gone. And—I saw someone else."

"Yes?" he said. "Who was it?"

"It was Talbot. He was walking from the wood."

now he told me, he volunteered the information, that he had not left the terrace that night."

Ralph nodded.

"He had forgotten, I suppose," he said, still absently.

"You think it is of little, of no consequence?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Why should it be, dearest?" he said. "If he had met anyone he would have mentioned it. You are not thinking there can be any connection between Talbot Denby and the murder, are you?" he added, with a grave smile. "How could there be? They could have not known each other, could have no reason for quarrelling."

Veronica shook her head.

"No; I see there can be no connection, but—oh, Ralph, every little thing, light and trivial and irrelevant as it may seem, has weight for me. And why did he say that he did not leave the terrace that night, when I saw him—I saw him!—in the wood?"

Ralph shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't say!" he responded. "But don't let us think any more of this terrible murder, Veronica. I want to talk about yourself, what you are doing, whether you are keeping well—you look pale and harassed. Dearest, you will be ill! And that will be the worst misfortune that can happen to me. My dear, brave-hearted darling, remember 'Truth will prevail!'"

The fact that the great Earl of Lynborough had acknowledged Ralph Farrington as his son and heir ran through the county like quicksilver, penetrated to London and, of course, intensified the interest which the Lynborough murder case was exciting.

At the second examination the great London newspapers sent their special reporters, and the small court-house was crammed with people, while an excited mob surged and overflowed the street in which the building stood so that the eminent counsel from town and other persons engaged in the case had to fight their way through the mob.

Though Dr. Campbell and Talbot and even Veronica, had implored the earl to absent himself, he had himself driven down to the court and had taken a seat just below the bench for it would not have been seemly for him to sit upon the bench itself. The appearance of the bent, frail figure, with its white and haggard face, from which the dark eyes shone with a half pathetic, half fierce, and defiant expression, caused a "sensation" in the packed court; but the old man seemed quite unconscious of the interest and excitement his presence aroused and, leaning back in his chair, fixed his eyes on the dock as if he were waiting for the appearance of the prisoner.

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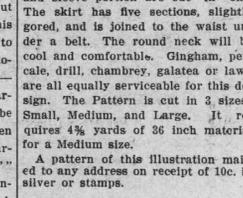
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