

Big Ben



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The Earl's Son;

TWO HEARTS UNITED

CHAPTER XXV.

The earl smiled, a grim smile.

"And this man you suspect of murder?" he said, contemptuously.

"Yes, my lord, the evidence is so strong. If your lordship will please give me the warrant—"

The earl sighed and drew the paper towards him and was filling it in when Whetstone, who had been leaning against the table as if he were half exhausted by the strain, started and, stretching out his hand across the desk, actually almost touched the earl's hand, as if to arrest it.

"No, no!" he said, hoarsely. "Don't do it, my lord, don't do it! Let Grey—let him go to Lord Saintsbury—one of the other magistrates! I—I beg, I implore your lordship not to make out the warrant!"

The earl lowered the pen and, his face flushed and working, stared at the trembling man.

"What ails you, Whetstone?" he demanded, sternly, and yet with a strange quaver in his voice. "Why should I not? What reason—what is this young man to me that I should not issue a warrant for his apprehension?"


Talbot, who had drawn near, looking from one to the other, wiped his lips covertly and lowered his lids, and as Whetstone, apparently crushed and daunted by the earl's sternness, cowered and sank into a chair, Talbot murmured:

"My advice, too, sir! Let the matter go into someone else's hands."

The earl glared at him angrily, then with a firm hand made out the warrant.

"There it is, Grey," he said. "Do your duty, as I have done mine!"

Grey took the warrant and went out. Talbot followed him into the dining-room.



A parrot can say: "just as good." But a parrot don't know what it is talking about

Get Tally-ho Shoes

still lying in the track. But Grey and the detectives who would soon be on the spot would search every inch of the ground. He must be there first; on pretence of assisting them he must search and find the certificates which would disclose the fact that the accused was the earl's son and heir.

He set his teeth hard and looked about him with a wolfish glare.

"The game's not up yet!" he said, in a defiant whisper. "They'll hang him—the evidence is too strong—they'll hang him, they must!"

"You are Ralph Farrington?" said the commonplace-looking man who had entered the room in which the happy little group were seated. "I arrest you on a warrant."

There was a moment of silent amazement and horror, then Veronica sprang in front of Ralph as if to protect him, one arm across his breast, the other extended towards the detective. Mr. Saintsbury rose, white with consternation. Ralph was the first to speak.

"On what charge?" he asked, calmly, but in a voice that shook, naturally enough.

"Wilful murder! You are charged with the murder of James Oatway, at Lynne Court, on the night of—"

A cry broke from Veronica's lips, and she flung both her arms round his neck, then she drew back her head and looked him full in the face with a smile.

"You—you are not afraid, Ralph?" she cried, hoarsely.

He smiled down at her as he slowly put her arms from him.

"Afraid, dearest? No! Why should I be? I am innocent!"

The arrest had been made quietly, and as quietly Ralph was conveyed by the night mail to Halsey. It need not be said that Veronica, George Saintsbury, and Ada travelled by the same train. Veronica's calmness and self-possession under the terrible blow amazed even Saintsbury, who had learned to know her.

"Why should I be afraid or cast down?" she said. "I know that he is innocent, and I am sure that his innocence will be proved. Besides, they will let me," she said, very quietly. "I would distress him and make him ashamed of me, by showing him that I doubt the justice and goodness of God?"

They let her see him, as she had hoped, for a few minutes. But little was said as they clung to each other, and Veronica did not even cry.

"I will come to you whenever they will let me," she said, very quietly. "But the truth will be discovered before many days have passed—perhaps before many hours. Ah, dearest, if they would only let me go with you!"

Grey brought the news of the arrest to the Court the next morning, while the earl and Talbot were at breakfast; the old man had come down to breakfast for the first time for many years.

"He is in Halsey gaol, my lord," said Grey, after he had given an account of the arrest. "Mr. Slocombe, from London, who took him, says that he was astonishingly calm, and, of course, declared his innocence."

"Of course," said Talbot, who still looked white and haggard.

The earl glanced at him sharply.

"I'm inclined to think he's right. Is that all, Grey?" for the inspector seemed to hesitate.

"Er—I thought I ought to say, my lord, that Miss Veronica is at the Doebeck Hotel at Halsey—she and the father and the little girl Farrington rescued from the fire."

Talbot started, but the earl did not move a muscle, though his eyes grew dark.

"Is that all?"

"The examination is at two o'clock, my lord."

"I will be there, on the bench," said the earl, grimly.

"Surely you will not go, sir," put in Talbot, anxiously. "You are not fit—"

"I will be there," repeated the earl, as he dismissed Grey with a gesture of his hand.

Talbot went upstairs and rang for Gibbon, who came and stood with downcast eyes and hands hanging respectfully at his sides.

"Look out some dark clothes," said Talbot, in the coldly insolent voice with which he always addressed the

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man. "I am going to the Court to this examination."

"Yes, sir," said Gibbon. He turned to go, then hesitated, and came back. "I was thinking of asking you to let me leave your service, Mr. Denby," he said.

Talbot looked over his shoulder at him.

"Oh, you were?" he said, with a sneer. "Then abandon the thought. I do not intend to let you go. Strange as it may seem, you are of some use to me."

"I was thinking of buying a little public house that's in the market," Gibbon went on, as if he had not heard the refusal. "It is a promising investment, and I've saved a little money. Not enough, of course, but I was thinking you'd be so kind as to give me the remainder. It would be a matter of about a thousand pounds, sir."

Talbot turned on him slowly and with an angry frown.

"Are you out of your mind?" he said, contemptuously, "or have you been drinking? Get out of my sight you—you jail-bird! Ah!" as Gibbon winced and an unhealthy red stole into his pallid face. "You'd forgotten that little fact, I suppose? Well, I have not. Let me hear any further of this nonsense, and I'll kick you out and brand you for the felon you are!"

Gibbon wetted his lips with his tongue.

"Don't—don't threaten me, Mr. Denby," he said, almost pleadingly. "I—I don't want to do you any harm—I don't want to say a word—I'll keep my mouth shut as long as I'm alive, if you'll act on the square by me—"

At another time Talbot might have detected the significance of the words, and recognized the threat contained in them; but his mind was off its balance, muddled and obscured by the dull terror sat upon him. With an oath he strode to the man and struck him across the lips.

"You hound, you are drunk!" he said. "Get out of my sight and don't come into my presence till you are sober again—"

Gibbon looked as if he were about to spring upon him, then he recoiled, and with his hand to his bruised lips, left the room.

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