

The Lost Will; OR, LOVE TRIUMPHS AT LAST!

CHAPTER III.

SCARCELY anyone in the little crowd had heard Norton's cry; no one had distinguished the words; they were all intently gazing on the famous Mr. Chalfont as he made his way to his motor-car. Nora grasped her father's arm and looked at him anxiously. He seemed to be gasping for breath, fighting against an almost uncontrollable emotion; but suddenly his manner changed; he became strangely calm and self-possessed, and, as he drew back a little, he nodded to Nora reassuringly; but his eyes never moved from Mr. Chalfont's broad back. The two gentlemen entered the motor-car and were driven away, the little crowd began to melt; but Norton waited and, stepping forward, addressed the hotel porter, who stood looking after the car with a proprietorial air, as if he had staged the whole thing and was satisfied with his work.

"Can you tell me the name of that gentleman who has just driven away?" asked Norton; and, to Nora's surprise, though his voice was somewhat hoarse and strained, he was still calm.

"That's Mr. Chalfont—the great Mr. Chalfont," replied the porter, with a tolerant smile.

"The great Mr. Chalfont?" repeated Norton, as if he were learning a lesson, his eyes fixed on the porter's face. "Excuse me, I'm a stranger to London, and I never heard of the gentleman. I can see that he's somebody of importance—the crowd and the cheering—what is he?"

"What isn't he? would be a better question, and easier to answer," replied the porter, looking down with a superior smile on the giant figure and the thin, wasted face of his interlocutor. "He's a very great man indeed; just been giving a dinner. A famous City gent. You must be a stranger not to have heard of Mr. Chalfont."

"Yes; it's my fault," said Norton, almost meekly. "Do you happen to know where he lives? Excuse me for asking, but"—he glanced up with a smile of simple cunning—"I happen to be an inventor; yes, an inventor, you know, and I should like to see him."

"That's easier said than done," remarked the porter, with a shake of the head. "I don't know where his offices are, but he lives at his place in Surrey, Chertson Hall."

"Thank you, thank you," said Norton, and he allowed Nora to draw him away. His grey, set face, his strange and unnatural calmness frightened her, and she hailed a taxi-cab; he made no remonstrance, but entered at once. On the journey home he maintained an absolute silence, merely nodding in response to her anxious inquiries; he seemed lost in thought, and she noticed that the brooding, restless expression had left his face and that one of calculation and resolution had taken its place. When they reached home she got him into his chair and filled his pipe, and mixed him some whisky and water; he accepted these attentions absently, and sat smoking and gazing at the fire for some time, while she, watching him covertly, bustled herself noiselessly about the room. Presently he called to her and pointed to the chair opposite, and she sat down.

"I'm going to tell you something, Nora," he said; "something I've kept all these years—"

"Not to-night, father; you're tired and ill," she said. "Tell me in the morning, after you've had a good night's rest."

"What I'm going to tell you about," he went on, ignoring her remonstrance, "happened a long time ago, before you were born. We were out Ballarat way, your mother and me. You don't remember her; she died a few weeks after your birth. You're like her. She was a good wife to me; all through the hard times—and Heaven knows they were hard!—she never said a word of complaint. But I don't want to talk about her. It's something else. I was a prospector, and we were out, she and I, in the new gold district. That was in the early days; before they'd got mining down

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to a system; it was a rough-and-ready business then. You went out on the tramp, with your tools on your shoulder, and just chased your luck and knowledge."

He paused for a moment, his mind evidently going back and brooding over the past.

"There's a lot goes to the making up of a good prospector; it's a kind of gift; a matter of instinct; you might almost say smell. You find yourself in a gulch, one just like any other gulch, with nothing particular about it; but, before you've got a hundred yards, you know, if you're a prospector of the right sort, that there's gold there. It isn't the look of the ground, it isn't the rocks, or the colour of the banks, it's just instinct. I was in such a gulch one evening when the feeling came over me that I was going to hit it. I stopped the cart—I had your mother with me, we'd got a cart—and I pitched the tent there and then. We were down almost to the last bag of flour that night; I'd scarcely a penny in the world, but the weather was warm and we'd clothes, and food enough for a week or two, at any rate. I started prospecting the next morning and I came upon the gold, almost right away."

Nora made a murmur of sympathy. "Yes, it was there all right enough; placer, easy to get at. But I knew by what we call indications that there was a lot of it below the surface, and I was afraid that we shouldn't get at it and clear it before the news spread. Oh, we were there by ourselves," he said, answering Nora's look; "but the

news of gold spreads as soon as it's found; it's 'most as if the birds carried the news, as if it was borne on the wind; you simply can't hide it. So I wasn't surprised when, one evening, I see a man coming down the side of the mountain. He looked like a sundowner. I rested on my pick and waited for him. He was a chap about my own age, sturdy and well set up, and I spoke him well, though there was something about him, a hunted kind of look—I can't explain—which didn't take my fancy. He said he was out prospecting, like me; that he'd had no luck and was half-starving. I took him to the camp and I made a clean breast of it; it wouldn't have been any use doing otherwise; for I could see, by the way he shot his eyes at the digging, that he saw I'd struck the gold. It wasn't long before you were due, and your mother was anxious and ailing; but she made him welcome in the way of the country, and she cooked food for him; he ate like a wolf, trying not to do so; and while he ate I made my kind of plan, and I told him it while he smoked over the fire. I said I'd found the gold all right, and I offered to make him a partner; we was to share like and like from the very next day. I told him who I was and what I'd been doing; but he didn't let on much about himself; and that I didn't like, because out there, as you know, men are pretty free-spoken—unless they've got something up agin 'em."

Nora mimed him another weak glass of whisky and water and he took a drink and went on, in the same low, almost monotonous voice, as if he were repeating something he had rehearsed many times.

"I'd had fairish kind of luck before Bradshaw came—that was his name—but it set in with a rush from the very day he joined us; we got almost frightened—at least, I did—at the amount of stuff we raised; and we worked like demons all through the sweating day, and sometimes, when there was a moon, far into the night; for we both of us knew that we shouldn't have the place to ourselves for long. Besides, I was getting anxious about your mother; I wanted to take her to one of the big camps where there'd be a doctor; and one night I told him this and said that we'd have a square-up. We'd got a fortune—a big fortune—buried in a hole in the tent, and I arranged that next day we'd divide it; I'd take my share with me; he could come along too with his or he could stay on and work the diggings till your mother was well



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enough for me to bring her back. He said he thought he'd stay and look after the place. I told your mother this when I went into her tent, and she seemed pleased that Bradshaw wasn't going with us; for somehow, though she'd never said a word against him, I knew that she didn't fancy him; perhaps it was a way he had of sitting silent and brooding for hours, or that trick of his of starting and going for his revolver if he heard a sudden noise—a bit of rock tumbling down, or the cry of a bird."

Nora was leaning forward, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes looking straight before her; she was thinking of that mother whom she had never known.

"I left Bradshaw sitting smoking over the fire, and I went to bed and slept as a man sleeps when he has been working through the whole of the sweltering day with scarcely time to snatch a meal."

He paused, his face seemed to grow greyer, his lips twitched, and he bit hard on his pipe.

"When I went out in the morning, Bradshaw wasn't there; he wasn't in the living tent, nor at the diggings. He had gone."

"Gone!" echoed Nora, with the apprehension of what was coming.

"He'd taken the horse and cart; and—his voice grew hoarse and he stretched out his clenched hand—and he'd taken the gold; all but one little bag of dust, a hundred-thousandth part of the whole."

"Father!" uttered Nora, with tender pity.

"On the top of his pannikin I found a piece of paper. Here it is; I've got it still."

With a hand that shook he took an envelope of waterproof from his pocket, and drew out a dirty piece of paper.

"This is it!" He read in a low, strained voice:

"I've thought better of it, partner. I'm going on to Shallow Camp, and I'll send a doctor and a woman down; it's better for your missus than traveling in her condition. I've taken the swag because I don't mean to come back; there are reasons. You'll soon make it up. Your partner, Bradshaw."

Norton folded up the paper carefully in its wrappings and as carefully returned it to his pocket. There was silence for a moment as he sat and stared at the fire with his hollow eyes; then Nora murmured painfully: "Mother!"

(To be Continued.)

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WAR REVIEW.

British and French veterans have made another victorious and successful smash at the Hindenburg line, sweeping forward on a front of 25 miles. They went ahead several miles making many prisoners. The most important aspect of the advance is that it makes more certain the capture of St. Quentin, which the Germans have been ordered to hold at all costs. The important place is virtually surrounded on three sides and its fall seems only a matter of days. Field Marshal Haig's third and fourth armies charged the trench system occupied by the British before they were pushed back by the Teutonic flood last March. They captured in wide sectors the outer defences of the Hindenburg line. The British assault was over a front of 16 miles, from Holm west of St. Quentin to Gouzeaucourt north of Epehy. In their advance which reached a depth of more than six miles at some points, they took more than 6,000 prisoners. Not only did the blow bring nearer the capture of St. Quentin, which the Germans are struggling desperately to hold, but it went far towards wiping out the only bulge in the British line, which resembles a salient. Epehy, at the apex of the bend, has been taken, and the same fate has befallen Gouzeaucourt and Hargricourt, which stood at the ends of the wings. The importance which the Germans attached to the territory wrested from them, is indicated by the announcement that they launched determined counter-attacks as soon as they could be organized, from Hargricourt to the Osmignon Rebutel. The success of their efforts remains somewhat obscure, but it is not believed they can recover the ground they have lost. While the French advance was less spectacular than that of the British with whom they co-operated, they were equally successful in gaining their objectives. They moved forward on a front of six miles to a average depth of 1 1/2 miles, and an addition of several hundred prisoners was made to the British bag. They now hold the southern outskirts of Contescourt, less than three miles from the suburbs of St. Quentin. This city, where the troops of Von Goeben scored a great victory in 1871, is one of the buttresses of the Douai-Cambrai-St. Quentin, LaPere-Laon line, beyond which it has been announced the Germans would not fall back. With the French in the outskirts of LaPere, with St. Quentin invested, and with the British battling doggedly for Cambrai, the great Hindenburg defence system is in danger of being

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