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The Earl's Son;

TWO HEARTS UNITED.

CHAPTER XXX.

Unwittingly she let out the name. There was a movement in the crowd, it swayed to and fro, and, as every eye sprang at him as it were, Talbot rose to his feet. His face was white to the lips, but he curved them with an insolent sneer.

"I take it that the girl wrote my name on the paper," he said, slowly, contemptuously. "I will not stoop to deny the accusation. It is not the first time a loose woman has endeavored to shelter herself behind an innocent person."

Fanny's face burst with passionate indignation. "Does he—does he deny it?" she gasped, as much in amazement as indignation. "He knows it's true. He persuaded me to go with him, he promised me—and I believed him—believed him! Oh, it's the truth!" She turned to Mr. Selby, the bench with clasped hands. "Look at him, look at his face! It was Mr. Talbot Denby who took me away!"



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The crowd surged towards the spot where he stood, and muttered threateningly, for Fanny Mason had been the belle of the locality and many of the young men present had paid court to her. As they looked from her to him they remembered her as a pretty, light-hearted girl; and now—

Ralph stood sternly regarding the scoundrel—his cousin!—then swiftly his eyes went towards Veronica. She read their meaning instantly, and rising quietly went to the witness-box, took the wretched Fanny by the arm and led her out of court.

The earl had sunk back and covered his face with his hand. The magistrates gazed straight before them with disgust and indignation plainly expressed on their faces. Talbot Denby looked round for a moment or two then with a scornful, defiant shrug of the shoulders he walked to the private entrance and disappeared.

Some of the people made for the door at the same moment, but a policeman kept them back. There was some noise and confusion, and when the clerk had sternly called for silence the case was resumed.

Burchett was put into the box to prove the finding of the knife; the other evidence for the prosecution was taken, but Mr. Selby seemed to pay little or no attention. He sat with his head resting in his hand, his eyes fixed on the opposite wall as if he were lost in thought, and it was with a start he replied to the question of the bench, "Do you call any witnesses, Mr. Selby?"

"Yes, Miss Veronica Gresham." The earl started and flushed painfully, the audience drew together and for the moment forgetting Fanny's disclosure and Mr. Talbot Denby turned their eyes upon the witness-box with breathless eagerness.

There was some delay, then Veronica, having passed Fanny over to her mother with fervent beseechings for her forgiveness for the erring girl, entered the court and stepped into the box.

She was pale, but never had she looked more lovely than she did that day when she stood forth in the public eye to bear witness for the man she loved. Her eyes, calm and sweetly serene, swept the court, then rested upon Ralph with a brave, tender smile that brought the tears to the eyes of more than one of the women looking up at her.

Ralph met the look with answering tenderness and love but with something of reproach. He had prayed that this ordeal might be spared her; but now that she had met it his heart was overrunning with pride and gratitude.

Amidst an intense stillness, Mr. Selby said gently, but in a curiously absent-minded way:

"Miss Gresham, you are aware that the prisoner left the Court suddenly and, as the prosecution state, without sufficient, ordinary reasons. I will not ask you any questions, but let you make your statement unaided. You, with the other witnesses, are sworn to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Yes," she said in a low, but perfectly distinct voice. Then, in answer to the question of the bench, she said:

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cents that faltered with love and modesty, she told the story of Ralph's avowal in the arbour, her acceptance of his love, and the earl's intervention.

"And Lord Denby"—the court stirred suddenly at the "Lord Denby"—promised to leave the Court in answer to the earl's appeal to him."

"He did," she replied. "He acted nobly, as he always has done and always will do."

There was a sound of applause, and a woman's voice was heard to murmur:

"Ah, she loves him true, does Miss Veronica! 'Tis clear!"

Veronica heard the words, and a deep flush suffused her face; then she looked in the direction of the voice, and a smile, proudly sweet, shone in her beautiful eyes.

"I have another question to ask, Miss Gresham: Were you out on the night of the murder—the night Lord Denby left the Court?"

"I was," she answered, but with a somewhat startled air.

"For what purpose?" he asked, setting his lips as if, though she was Miss Gresham, of Lynne Court, he could not spare her.

The blush stained her face again.

"To see Ralph—Lord Denby," she said, her head still erect, her eyes downcast.

"To see him—why?"

"To tell him that I could not remain at the Court if he went; to—to"—her voice broke for a moment—"to ask him to marry me and take me with him."

Again there was a sound of applause, and the same woman's voice said:

"Ah, there's a brave woman for you! She stood by her man!"

"Silence!" cried the clerk; but Veronica's eyes went to the woman again.

"You did not see him?" asked Mr. Selby.

"No"—she suppressed a sigh—"he had gone."

"And you left Lynne Court the next morning?"

"I did," said Veronica in a low voice.

"Why?"

"Because I could not go on living a life of ease and luxury while he was fighting the world—I went to find him."

"And you found him—"

"As he was saving a little child from burning at the risk of his life."

A hoarse cheer arose, but was instantly suppressed.

"One question more, and the last," said Mr. Selby, with sudden sternness: "Did you see any one else that night?"

"Yes," answered Veronica, with a questioning look. Why was he asking the question?

"Where?"

The word came almost sharply.

"Between the west wood and the house."

"Who was it?" asked Mr. Selby, leaning forward, his eyes flashing from her to the bench. Veronica's eyes went towards the chair where Talbot had been sitting.

"Mr. Talbot Denby!"

Mr. Selby bowed to her as a sign that she might leave the box, then he turned swiftly to the bench.

"I call Mr. Talbot Denby!"

The usher repeated the name aloud; it was caught up by the crowd, the policeman at the door shouted it, and it was heard by Talbot himself, who stood in the doorway of the magistrate's entrance. He started and his face went pale and he half turned as if to obey the summons; then, as if impelled by a sudden fear, he turned away again and quickly passed round the corner of the building. The Lynne Court carriage was standing there, and he got in with an affectation of weariness.

"To the Court, please," he said to the footman.

No response came to the repeated shoutings of the name, and presently the inspector addressed the bench.

"Mr. Talbot Denby is not to be found, your worship."

"I ask for a remand," said Mr. Selby, swiftly.

Lord Saintsbury inclined his head.

As it was given Veronica moved towards the dock, and the crowd sympathetically made way for her.

Ralph held down his hands to her and she caught at them.

(To be Continued.)

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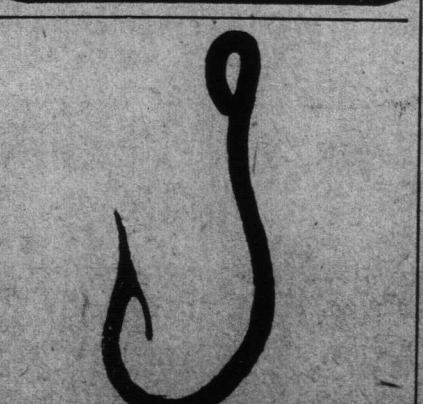
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