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—OR—

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CHAPTER XXII.  
DAYS OF ANGUISH.

Reginald Dartmouth drew back. The old man's shriveled hand caught the candle and, with a cry of rage, flung it full at his mocking face. "Burn the other—the other—you thief!" he shrieked. "You'd rob the lad! You'd—"

"Silence!" hissed Reginald Dartmouth, his quick ears catching the sound of footsteps in the hall. "Silence, you old fool!" he repeated, approaching the bed and thrusting the will into his breast beside the other. "Burn the other—you thief!" gasped the old man, striking out wildly. "You—thief—"

The footsteps came closer. In another moment the person would hear the old man's cries and all would be lost! With a glance as black as a fiend's Reginald clutched the old man's throat as he opened his livid lips for another shriek and, choking back the sound, forced him onto the pillow. Then, as the old man's eyes turned up to him with a threatening glare of impotent hate, and the death rattle rang in the throat beneath his hand, he plucked the first will from his coat, glancing at it by the light of the fire, and, as the footsteps halted outside the door, thrust it under the pillow.

Then he picked up the candle and, with a cry of alarm, hurried toward the door. "The doctor and Mrs. Lucas entered. 'Quick—quick!' he cried, breath-

half-spoken question. "I—I am sorry—I shall never forgive myself as long as I live—but I had fallen asleep. I have had little or no rest for the last few nights; indeed, have scarcely been out of the saddle, and the stillness and heat of the room overcame me."

He looked full of remorse, and spoke in a tone of such self-reproach that the doctor said, emphatically: "You have no cause to feel the matter so acutely, Captain Dartmouth; you could have done nothing if you had been awake. None of us could. It was a fit, a sudden and fatal fit."

And he turned toward the bed again and helped Mrs. Lucas cover the silent, stone-like face with the sheet.

"A fit," repeated the captain, in a hollow voice. "I heard him call; indeed, his shriek, which you must have heard coming up the stairs, woke me—woke me so suddenly that, as I sprang forward, I knocked over the candle, and was coming to call for lights and assistance as you entered."

The doctor nodded. He was rather struck by the precise way in which the captain made the statement, but had no suspicions. "Poor fellow! Unused to such scenes he blames himself for having fallen asleep," he thought; then said, aloud: "The shock has unnerved you a little, Captain Dartmouth. I think if I were you—that is, I should advise—ahem!—that you went out for a little air—ahem!"

"Yes," assented the captain, absent-ly. "I think I will. I am rather out of it."

And he rose from the chair into which he had sunk and left the room. When he reached the door he turned.

"If you want me, I shall be in the dining-room or on the terrace."

"Very well," said the doctor. Mrs. Lucas could not speak for sobbing.

And the captain, with a heavy sigh, went slowly down the stairs. The servants were crowding at the bottom of the staircase, talking and asking each other questions in suppressed and awe-stricken voices.

They stood back respectfully as Reginald came down, and looked at his white face.

Simmons, the butler, came up to him.

"Is the squire worse, sir?" he asked, with a husky voice.

"It is all over—my uncle is dead, Simmons," replied the captain, in a solemn tone. And the old man, who had stood behind the other old man's chair for forty years, turned away with a sudden, child-like sob, while the other servants, most of them long in the Darrell service, burst into tears.

Captain Dartmouth passed them and went out on the terrace, and there, safe from prying eyes, gave way to his emotion.

But it was not the emotion of grief; for, when he drew his hands from before his eyes, it was to feel, with a stealthy gesture, if the paper within his breast was safe; and, instead of sorrow, his face bore a look of supreme triumph.

In a moment, however, the smile of satisfaction gave place to a look of cautious cunning, and, with his hands touching the last will and testament of Harry Darrell, he looked round thoughtfully.

"This must be got rid of," he muttered, "and at once. But where? Throw it in the fire in the dining-room? No. The old woman, or one of the crazy pack of idiots, will be running all over the house and some one will smell the burning paper, or perhaps see it, and get an inkling of the game. No; I can not burn it. Not a room in the house is safe. Where, then?" He thought for a moment or two with painful intensity, then his brow cleared.

"Of course," he muttered; "the very place!" and with a slow and dejected step he walked down the steps and went in the direction of the shrubbery.

The Dale and the Warren had been bound together in ties of affection and esteem for too many years to allow Rebecca to harbor her just indignation and anger one minute after the tidings of the squire's illness were brought to her.

Like most timid women, when her spirit had flashed up into the blaze which had scorched the poor, blundering, worldly-minded master of the Dale, she had forgotten her weakness,

and timidity and, as it were, cast aside her identity. She was no longer Miss Rebecca Goodman, timid, shrinking, and diffident, but a woman slighted and wronged; for such a gentle woman as Rebecca, though she could bear an injury done to herself, could not endure an ill done to those she loved. She had loved Hugh; she had loved Grace; and the squire, through his narrow-mindedness and morose, overbearing temper, had driven them both from the Dale to wander homeless and helpless.

Had it been in his power the squire might have served her so and timid Rebecca would not have raised her voice in entreaty, much less indignation; but her very gentleness and tenderness of heart lent her courage and spirit when those she loved were concerned.

She knew when she saw the squire's white face and heard the rap of his stick on the marble hall that the old friendship between Dale and Warren was over for all time, and in the midst of her paroxysm of anger, and for the whole night following, she regretted and mourned over it; but she had spoken nothing but the truth and would not unsay it.

Her courage did not desert her even after the squire, who had been the indirect cause of it, had gone. She started two of the grooms off to search for the missing, Grace, and sent the butler, up to London to hunt there, charging him to spare no expense or trouble in his endeavor to recover the poor girl.

Then Rebecca sat down to mourn for Hugh, Grace, and the old friendship of the Dale.

She was a very good little woman, and maybe our readers will have learned to like her by this time; but they will not wonder that in that dark hour she wished herself dead. All the wealth of the Warren could not give her Hugh, Grace, or the squire's friendship, and she was miserable.

The days passed and stray rumors reached her that the squire was ill; but she did not think him any worse than usual. She never remembered him without periodical attacks of the gout, and thought this was nothing more than an ordinary attack, intensified by his trouble about Grace. (To be Continued.)

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