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CHAPTER VIII.
 THE PRELIMINARY TRIAL.

"He is outside the court—he is one of the witnesses, your worship," said Jobson, looking pompously around.

Lord St. Germain motioned with his hand.

"Mr. Normanby approached and laid his hand on the prisoner's arm and asked him to give himself up quietly; he was quiet for a little while, and Mr. Normanby, after a conversation with Mr. Morgan—which I did not hear—asked the prisoner if he had a hare about him. The prisoner put his hand to his bosom and refused to answer. Mr. Normanby asked him again where he had been and what he was doing in the woods at that hour of the night."

"In the evening—at seven o'clock," murmured Mr. Woodhouse.

"And the prisoner refused to tell him—said it was no business of his—then spurred the horse over some of the men and dashed off."

"Got clear away?" asked Mr. Woodhouse, with surprise.

"Yes," said the keeper. "Clear away, my lord, and we followed him, but he dodged us, and we came back part of the way."

"Why?" asked Sir Edwin.

"Because Mr. Morgan said we were not to arrest him at the Hall, your worship."

"But why not?" asked Mr. Woodhouse, in surprise.

"Mr. Morgan's reason, I believe, your worship, was that the affair would annoy Sir Edwin, and create a disturbance. Besides, we had no warrant, your worship."

"But, surely—" broke in Sir Ed-

win, starting up from the table, then checked himself suddenly.

The abrupt pause was not lost upon the magistrates, and the prisoner seemed suddenly to assume an interest in the proceedings.

"We returned at half past nine o'clock with the constable."

"This is evidence of the arrest, and should have been taken first," said the clerk. "Have you the hare?"

Jobson produced a hare, which was handed up to the bench. The magistrates examined it in silence.

"Have you any questions to ask the witness?" said Mr. Woodhouse to Reuben.

Reuben turned to the keeper, who shifted his gaze uneasily before those steady eyes.

"You say," said Reuben, "that the time when you saw me first was seven."

"Seven, or about that."

"And that I was creeping through the bushes?"

"Yes."

"How did you manage to see me—as you say—take a hare from a snare at that time in the evening, and in a dark plantation?"

"I saw you," said Chigwell. "My eyes are good."

"Better than man's ever were," said Reuben, with a look of scorn. "One more question. Is it usual for poachers to attack the game in the Grange woods on horseback?"

"You must answer the prisoner," said the clerk, as Chigwell hesitated.

"No, it is not usual," he said, "but I've had to do with poachers before, and anything artful wouldn't surprise me."

Reuben inclined his head and turned away. Mr. Normanby was then called, and he told in clear and succinct fashion his share in the matter and the profound silence. As he related the incident of the hare which Reuben was supposed to have had concealed in his bosom, the charge of poaching seemed clearly proved, and Sir Edwin looked more troubled than he had done before.

Why had Reuben refused to be searched—and why should he refuse to give an account of his business on Sir Edwin's horse and in the plantation?

Reuben asked no questions of Mr. Normanby, and then the witnesses for the assault came up. The bandages looked ominous, and as each man told his version of the desperate fight, the case against the accused seemed black indeed. Reuben, pale and blood-stained, appeared in the eyes of all to be a callous, hardened scoundrel, who held men's lives and limbs as matters of no moment.

Black as the case was, Reuben appeared as self-possessed and calmly indifferent as at the opening. Lord St. Germain, addressing him, said:

"You have heard the witnesses;

what have you to say in your defence?"

Reuben fixed his eyes on his lordship's face, as he replied resolutely: "My defence is that most of those men who have witnessed against me have spoken falsely—why, I cannot say; I have done them no harm. Yesterday I had business of my own—quite my own—at Woolney, and I—"

"For which you stole or borrowed Sir Edwin's horse," put in Mr. Woodhouse sternly.

"For which I took Sir Edwin's horse," assented Reuben. "On my return from Woolney, I rode through the Grange woods and stopped at the ale house for a draft of ale for my horse. While I was resting him, I heard two gentlemen talking close by, and that I might not overhear them, I rode off."

"Very delicate sensibility, indeed!" sneered Mr. Verner to his son in the gallery.

"A few yards beyond the old man Mr. Morgan Verner stopped me, and accused me of poaching."

He paused, and Lord St. Germain looked up.

"Well, why do you stop?"

"I have nothing more to say in my defence, my lord. I struck the man, I dare say. I am not used to being put up by a crowd like a wild beast; if I have hurt any of them so bad as they say, I am sorry. Why did they stop me? What wrong had I done?"

"You heard the first witness," said Mr. Woodhouse. "He saw you take the hare. Why did you refuse to be searched?"

"Why should they search me?" asked Reuben calmly.

"You had something concealed in your bosom; it was suspicious, and they expected to find a snare. What was there?"

Reuben did not answer, and Mr. Woodhouse said to Lord St. Germain: "Better send the case for trial. I don't feel clear about it, do you?"

"No," said Lord St. Germain. "I cannot understand it. The keeper years ago saw him take the hare, so I suppose the accused is guilty of the poaching, as he undoubtedly is of the assault."

"I fear so," agreed Mr. Woodhouse.

"I, under the circumstances—"

began Lord St. Germain—then he stopped, for Sir Edwin Seymour had uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise as his eyes, which had been busy at the end of the court, had caught sight of a face he knew, that of Olive's maid, Topsy, very pale, and fresh from a fit of weeping. The girl pushed her way through the crowded court.

CHAPTER IX.
 TWO NEW WITNESSES.

The bustle and movement attracted Reuben's attention, and he looked around. Immediately, a change came over his whole demeanor, which, from the extreme of indifference and composure, changed to anxiety and impatience.

"My lord—your lordship," he said, in a quick, low voice, "I withdraw my defence—and I plead guilty—guilty to all—everything."

A murmur of astonishment ran through the court. Lord St. Germain stared at him and then at Topsy, who, flushed and nervous, was pressing forward to the witness box.

"What is this?" said Mr. Woodhouse. "What does the girl want?"

"A witness for the defence, your worship," said Jobson reluctantly.

"I don't want any witness," said Reuben promptly, with a significant look at Topsy, who seemed to be afraid to meet his eye, and kept her face turned away. "She is no witness for me—she knows nothing of the matter. How should she?"

Topsy gave a sharp sob, and then spoke out:

"Yes, I do."

"Let her be sworn," said Lord St. Germain firmly.

Topsy was assisted into the witness box, and the Testament given to her; but before she could get through the few words, Reuben broke in again:

"My lord, it is necessary that this girl should give evidence which I do not desire, and will not accept in my defence? I plead guilty, my lord, and demand my sentence."

"Be quiet," said Lord St. Germain. "The court desires to hear this witness."

"But," broke in poor Reuben, "—"

"Silence," repeated Lord St. Germain. "You must keep silence. Now, my girl, please tell us what you know of the affair. What is your name?"

"Topsy Curtis," said Topsy, in a faint voice; then, plucking up courage she blurted out her story.

"This young man didn't go poaching, gentlemen. He took master's horse, it's true; but it wasn't to go poaching, my lord, askin' your pardon for being so bold."

Reuben, with a wild hope, that he might gain her silence by appealing to her duty, said quickly:

"My lord, this witness may have been put forward by my enemies. She will do me more harm than good, indeed she will! My lord, have I not a right—I am an ignorant man—but I think I have a right to refuse her as a witness on my behalf."

The speech made a profound effect on the court, and more upon poor Topsy, who stared at Reuben with open mouth, as if she thought that he had gone out of his mind.

Mr. Woodhouse whispered to Lord St. Germain.

"The fellow is right, and he is not so ignorant. We can take her evidence for the prosecution, however. Shall we do so?"

At that moment another commotion occurred, as there appeared in the body of the court no less a person than Miss Seymour, leaning on the arm of the lawyer, Mr. Worsley. Topsy, seeing her mistress, turned, and—utterly regardless of the magistrates—said pleadingly:

"Please, miss, it isn't my fault; he won't let me speak."

Olive, upon whose face was a bright blush, turned to Reuben, and her cheeks paled as she met his eyes, which said, as plainly as eyes could say:

"Trust to me. I am as silent as the grave."

"Do I understand that Miss Seymour wishes to give evidence?" said Lord St. Germain, bowing low to Olive.

"I do," said Olive.

"You must leave the court then, please, while this witness is being examined," he added courteously.

"We can take Miss Seymour's evidence first," said Mr. Woodhouse, who was becoming intensely interested in the turn of events.

Reuben turned to Olive with a reproachful look; but she appeared not to notice it, and left the court.

"Now," said Lord St. Germain to Topsy, "let us hear your story, my good girl."

(To be continued.)

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War News

Messages Received Previous to

WAR REVIEW.

Various reports continued from Russia with regard to the operations of the revolutionary anti-revolutionary forces in their struggle for supremacy, but the make it is impossible to get an accurate idea as to which side the controversy is in the case. Meanwhile preliminary negotiations between Bolshevik revolutionaries and delegates of the Allies are in progress at Brest. Real negotiations having in view bringing about of peace and consequent retirement of the Allies my as a belligerent against the Allies are expected to begin Tuesday. The German and Foreign Ministers, both astute politicians are speeding towards Litovsk to take part in the negotiations in the battle of wits which will place. It probably is not out of the realm of reason to infer that the Allies allied representatives will be to disadvantage in dealing with the men of the calibre the Bolsheviks have present to plead their case.

On the battle fronts except north of Italy are military operations of great magnitude ensuing snow and had weather generally brought fighting almost to a still on the west front in Flanders in Belgium, except for small operations by outposts and reciprocal bombardments. On the Italian front around Monte Solarolo the Germans again have taken a serious offensive, throwing the

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