



The Lost Will; OR, LOVE TRIUMPHS AT LAST!

CHAPTER V.

"Very likely," said Chalfont grimly. "Luck hasn't been with you, Norton."

Norton glanced at his thin hands, at his worn and shabby clothes, and said nothing.

"I'm sorry," said Chalfont. "I suppose it's no use making excuses—Hold on!"—as Norton shook his head—"but just let me say this, and I won't utter another word; that I know the men were after me, I know I shouldn't get away without money. It went against the grain to rob you, believe me or not, as you like, for I'd got to like you; and more than that, there was the wife—"

"Don't you utter her name!" cried Norton, shrilly, springing from his chair and extending his claw-like hand, his manner altering with startling suddenness. "You killed her. Don't you speak of her."

Chalfont bowed his head and gripped his hands tightly.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, almost inaudibly. "I'd give a lot—but it's no use. For Heaven's sake, let us come to business. What is it you want? You can have everything for the asking; only say what it is—say what it is."

"I can have it all," said Norton. "Come to think of it, it's mine by rights—all of it, all your money, this house, everything you've got. Why shouldn't I have it?" His voice broke off.

"Why not?" said Mr. Chalfont. "Suppose you take it. It's brought little happiness to me; there's been a curse on it, I suppose. Take it! I can go back—"

"You can't; you'd be lagged," interrupted Norton, quite quietly, as if he were stating a matter of fact. "I've only got to ring that bell, to send for the police—"

"I know, I know," said Chalfont, almost indifferently. "But you don't mean to do it, or you'd have brought the police with you," he added, with naive shrewdness. "You've come to

drive a bargain with me. You mean to hold your tongue. Why, Norton, I didn't live with you all that time not to know you. You don't mean to blab on me, you don't mean to give me away. What is it you do mean?"

"Give me a drink," said Norton, pointing to the whisky.

Slowly, methodically, Chalfont filled the glass, and Norton drank the whisky and water as slowly, his eyes still fixed on Chalfont; then he coughed again and, pressing his hand on his chest, said:

"All your money wouldn't do me much good. Bradshaw, I'm booked. See? But I'm not thinking of myself. I'm not alone. I've got a girl—the child my wife died over."

Chalfont started slightly, sank into his chair, and stared at Norton's boots speechlessly; there was a hole in one, and it was like an accusing eye to Chalfont, who studied it.

"A girl!" he said, frowning thoughtfully.

"Yes, a girl," repeated Norton. "A good girl, a beautiful girl, though I say it; and she's gone through it all by my side." He looked round the room. "It's not myself I'm thinking of, but her. You can't give me back the years I've wasted, you can't repay me the misery I've borne; but you can make it right for her."

"Good!" said Chalfont, just as he would have accepted a business proposition. "You want to give you money for her—and yourself. It's easy done." He rose and went to the safe, took up his cheque-book from the drawer, then dropped it and, in its place, came forward to the table with a bundle of notes in his hand.

"There's no lack of money," he said. "Would to God I could square our account with it! Here, take this! Put it away safely. No need to count it; it's all I have now in the house for the moment; you can have more—any amount."

Norton took the notes and looked at them almost dully; he knew it was a large amount; perhaps it was too large for him to realise. Slowly, carefully, he put the notes away in an inner pocket.

"That's good enough, as far as it goes," he said. "But I want something more."

"I suppose so," said Chalfont, with a nod. "You'll bleed me to the end, I've no doubt."

"No," said Norton, thrusting his head forward. "I'm going to bleed you after the end. Do you take me, Bradshaw; do you see what's in my mind? Strange, it didn't come to me till a minute or two ago. I was trying to think what I'd bring out of you, and I couldn't make up my mind; but I've got it now. Bradshaw, I'm booked."

"Not you," said Chalfont. "I can see you've got a cold; but you and I are too tough to be knocked out by a cold. You'll live long enough to harry me into my grave."

Norton shook his head. "I'm booked," he repeated, apathetically, "and I've got to think of Nora. You've got

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to take care of her when I'm gone, Bradshaw; you've got to make a fine lady of her, as is her right—her right, mind you! For, if you'd left me that money, I should have had a start; I might have been as rich as you are—"

"We'll leave that," broke in Chalfont. "I want you to take care of your daughter. I will do so. You can trust me."

"Not a yard," said Norton, with a harsh chuckle. "I wouldn't trust you with six pence; but I've got a hold on you. I've written an account of what's happened 'twixt you and me. I'm going to give it to Nora. She'll make all square between us, if you play her false."

Chalfont drew his hand across his brow. "I think I see what you mean," he said. "You are going to place my safety, my life, in your daughter's hands."

"More than that," said Norton, with a kind of uncanny acuteness, an unexpected knowledge of the nature of the man with whom he was dealing.

"I'm going to place your reputation, your character, in her charge. See? You're a proud man, Mr. Chalfont; you've got to the top of the tree; everybody looks up to you and respects you; you'd like to leave a good name behind you, to be spoken of as—the 'great Mr. Chalfont,' him as was so liberal with his money, so good to the poor. Oh, I've read of the piles of money you've given away, and all the nice things they've said about you. You wouldn't like it to be known, after you was dead, that you were just a common thief, a murderer—"

Chalfont stretched out a hand to silence him. "There's no need to shout," he said. "Jack—I mean, there's some one upstairs, almost within hearing. He'll come down, and then—"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Besides, I haven't said I won't do what you ask."

"No; you'll do it right enough," said Norton, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "This is what you're going to do. You're going to make a will leaving every penny you've got—your houses, your lands, everything—to Nora."

There was an intense silence; with his lips drawn like a trap, Chalfont stared moodily at the hole in Norton's boot. He was thinking of that other will which lay in the safe behind him, awaiting his signature. He was going to deprive Jack, the lad he loved, of all that he had promised him. Was there no way out? For a moment the true nature of the man, which had been hidden away, smothered by prosperity, power, ease and luxury, broke out in him; there was something ominous in the eyes which he raised slowly from Norton's boot to Norton's face; for a moment only, then he dropped back in his chair. Murder would not help him; Norton's dead body would cry aloud, the truth would be known—known to all the world; and, worst of all, to—Jack.

"You've got me everywhere, Norton," he said. "I shall have to do what you want, whether I like it or not. It's a bargain."

"It's a good bargain for you," said Norton. "It's better than the galls. I might have stripped you of everything, or landed you in quod. I'm leaving you your money—I shan't want much of it. You'll take charge of Nora, treat her as your own while

you're alive, and when you're dead it will all come to her."

"That's as you say," said Chalfont. "Then, do it now," said Norton, not with feverish eagerness, but with a kind of confident doggedness; there's paper right afore you; write out the will. It won't take long; it won't need many words."

Chalfont drew his chair to the table. If he had any wild idea of deceiving Norton by an incomplete, invalid document, he thrust it from him. Norton's terms would have to be complied with to the full.

"Oh, it's easy enough," he said. He wrote slowly, steadily; then he read out what he had written:

"I, Jesse B. Chalfont, of Chertson Hall, Surrey, and 209, Copthall Buildings, in the City of London, do hereby will and bequeath everything of which I may be possessed at my death to Nora— How do you spell her name; has she any other?"

"No-o-r-a," spelt Norton, his eyes fixed intently on Chalfont's face, now set with the calmness of a business man occupied in a business transaction. "It was her mother's name; she hadn't any other."

"To Nora Norton, the daughter of my old friend and partner, Edward Norton; and I hereby appoint William Horton, my solicitor, as trustee on her behalf."

His voice ceased, and he looked waltzingly across the table at the worn and haggard face in front of him.

"Is that all? Is it set down straight and fair, so as you can't wriggle out of it?" demanded Norton, in a low voice.

"It is quite legal and valid," replied Chalfont, checking a sigh for he was thinking of that other will which the lawyer had drawn up, thinking of the young man he loved, whom this girl was going to rob. Yes, "rob" was the word; for it had been Chalfont's brain, energy, audacity, which had raised a million from the little bag of gold which he had stolen.

The wretched man before him could never have made the money of which he was now depriving Jack. "Yes, it's all right; it will stand against anything; it is as good as if it was drawn up on parchment by the best lawyer in the land."

"Then sign it and give it to me. Oh, you don't think I'd trust you? Not, mind, that you could go behind me; for Nora's got that packet—that—"

"That will do, said Chalfont sternly. "I have told you that I am acting on the square; and however it may have been in the old days, now my word is as good as my bond, as any one in the City of London will tell you. I'll sign the will now—but it would not be worth the paper it's written on."

"What do you mean?" demanded Norton, suspiciously.

"It wants two witnesses," explained Chalfont.

"Then get 'em," said Norton; "get 'em here, now and at once. I'll go behind the curtain, or step outside. I want to see 'em sign; I want that paper—I mean to have it."

He had raised his voice. Chalfont glanced up at the ceiling. He heard Jack cross the room, descend the stairs, and leave the house by the back door; he had evidently gone for a stroll. Chalfont breathed a sigh of relief.

"Better go outside," he said, and he unlocked the door.

Norton went through the window, and Chalfont rang the bell.

(To be Continued.)

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Hard days are everywhere with the Teutonic Allies. In Palestine the Turks are still but crushed; in Macedonia the Entente forces are harrying their foes and threatening their similar disaster; in France the British and French troops slowly but surely are cutting their way into the vitals of the German defensive positions, the collapse of which will result in important changes all along the western battle front, and in Eastern Siberia the Japanese have had additional rides forward in the process of reclaiming territory from the Russians. In all the theatres of the war the Entente Allies have the initiative in their hands and are pressing their advantage rigorously. The German and their allies nowhere are able to do more than stand on the defensive and in Palestine and Macedonia their efforts in this respect have proved sorry ones. From north of Jerusalem to the Sea of Galilee, the territory lying between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, the Ottoman forces have been completely annihilated. Added to the heavy casualties suffered by the Turks, hundreds of them were made prisoners and many more are wandering bewildered without leaders in the desert, eventually to be brought in to swell the greater total. At last accounts more than 25,000 of the Sultan's soldiers and 400 guns and large quantities of war stores were in British hands. To add to the demoralization of the Turkish morale, Allied aviators are carrying out successful bombing raids against Constantinople. Over a front of 80 miles in Southern Serbia, from Monastir to Lake Dorian, the Entente troops are vigorously attacking the Bulgarian and German positions ready in the swift drive at the camp a great spearhead has been pushed by the Serbians across the Isvar, Philip Rosal, severing communications with the Bulgarian army northeast of Monastir and that in the Dorian region. Unofficial reports have taken between 8,000 and 10,000 prisoners and 120 guns. In the region between Monastir and the Vardar the enemy troops are in full retreat before the Italians, French and Serbians while west of Dorian the British are steadily hammering their way forward, driving the enemy northwards towards the Bulgarian frontier. In the east the entire enemy line from Dorian to a point west of the Vardar has been evacuated. This force of the enemy with the railroad to the north severed, seemingly is in danger of enveloping movement unless it turns sharply eastward and presses into Bulgaria through the mountains. So spectacular but of vital importance has been the operation of the French and British from the south of St. Quentin to Cambrai. Both the French General Debeny and Field Marshal Haig have won highly essential ground in the manoeuvres which have as their objectives the obliteration of the Hindenburg line, the capture of St. Quentin and the turning point of the German line at Laon.

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