

The Hidden Past.

(Concluded.)

"You must be demented," Arthur Thorne stared at him as if he were indeed some madman. "Not at all," returned the other, calmly. "I will explain. I found something else last night, as well as the jewels—a paper that had slipped behind a curtain drawer, a legal document duly signed and witnessed, and drawn up in the name of the late owner of this house and property—old Mr. Silas Thorne, whose wealth you inherited. Well, the name written upon this document was that of the principal legatee, was that of the child of the dead man's once sweet heart—and this child is the woman whom you now call wife—the owner of those jewels, not your arrogant self."

Arthur said nothing. In fact, amazement robbed him of speech. Yet, after that the other might be in some matters, he spoke now with an accent of conviction that carried weight.

"If what you say is true, it can easily be proved," he said. "But my wife is absent. When she is found, it will be for her to decide your fate; but, in the meantime, I shall have you detained."

He moved over to the bell. The visitor's face had gone pale once more. He realized that Thorne would be as good as his threat. His thoughts flew with regret towards the useful little revolver which for once he had left behind him.

"Are you sure that the woman you call your wife has really any legal right to that name?"

He asked the question in a curious tone.

Arthur turned a startled face towards him.

"Merely that she went through a previous ceremony of the kind with myself, and, as you see, I am still living; nor was the marriage dissolved by any divorce proceedings."

"Liar and thief!"

The words came chokingly from Thorne's lips; but Carew waved a paper in front of him.

With staring eyes the other read through his brief writing.

"Those jewels—Carew's voice reached Arthur's ears as through some blanket that muffled sound. Now—you understand, I don't see very well how you can keep me here, and run the risk of exposing this pretty piece of bigamy. You had better let me go."

Thorne had collapsed into a chair. His legal acumen had enabled him to detect at a glance that this was no forged document, but a genuine marriage certificate. Good Heaven, Isabel had never been his wife! So that was her buried secret, guarded from him so long. A criminal's wife—not his at all, though she must have imagined him dead and herself free at the time of her marriage with himself.

Carew threw another glance at the door, then moved cautiously to the door.

III.

Days seemed to merge into days, but Arthur was unconscious of time.

He was dimly aware that he had been perilously ill—ill for weeks, perhaps months; he could not say.

But at last consciousness returned to him, and his eyes opened to behold—Isabel, his lost wife, bending over him, pity and love shining in her gaze.

"Isabel!" He spoke her name in a low whisper.

She smiled back at him, a radiant, reassuring smile.

"I was always your wife, Arthur," she murmured, divining the anxious question in his mind that his lips were almost too weak to utter. "It is true that I went through a marriage ceremony with that rogue, Gerald Carew; but I was spared the harm he had planned for me. At the very gates of the church another woman came forward, claiming him to be her husband—a claim he was unable to deny. We parted from that moment and I thought him dead."

"O my dearest!" He spoke with new life in his voice—new strength. "And I was so cruel to you, drove you from the home that was yours. I am a suppliant now. It is for you to give me pity—and even a home!"

"Not so," she spoke in clear tones. "Everything is as it was before."

"But that will—the man did not lie when he spoke of that?"

"No; but that will is destroyed. Carew brought it to me, hoping to make a further demand. But I refused to have anything to do with him, and in a rage, he did for me what I should have done for myself—placed it to burn in the fire."

"But—but it must hold good all the same."

"I do not wish it to, Arthur, give me your love, and I shall be rich once more; for don't you know love is all a woman wants—a husband's love? Only too well have I come to realize my folly in hiding from you the secret of the past."

Broad Oak Hall, the old manor-house in the valley, wore an air of festivity, for it was the young squire's birthday.

Great wreaths of evergreen were scattered in profusion through the lofty rooms and down the winding hallways. Fires crackled on every hearth, lights gleamed from every case; in a word, a night of merriment that could add to the comfort and pleasure of the many guests had been forgotten.

In the eastern drawing-room, around a cheerful fire (for the evenings were now quite cool) most of the party were assembled. Captain Gregory was telling some of his stories of the sea. Frequent bursts of appreciative laughter testified to their merit, but, strangely enough, two of the inmates of the hall showed no desire to be drawn into the charmed circle about the hearth. To one of them, Sidney Bargrave, the host, the narratives were twice-told tales, and therefore lacking in interest; the other, a young girl, a proud-featured girl of twenty, had no such excuse.

Through habitual indolence or from courtesy, perhaps, she had allowed herself to be drawn into a far-away corner of the room; but when once firmly established in a lounging chair, with Sidney Bargrave on the ottoman at her feet, her kindly mood vanished, and to his tenderly murmured speeches she turned an unwilling ear.

"Never mind," he cried, bitterly, "one of these days you may regret that you did not listen to me, for, Grace, I—"

"Hark!" she broke in, "do you not hear voices?"

"The village choir is outside," he said. "Shall I call them in?"

"What an idea, Sidney," put in an amused voice from across the room. "I gave orders that they should be well tipped, but surely you will not bring them in; unless Miss Claremont desires to see them."

"Oh, pray don't disarrange your plans, my dear Mrs. Brogden," said the girl, carelessly. "It was a mere whim of mine. I thought I should like to hear music—not piano music," she said hastily, "but something a little

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different from what I have been accustomed to."

THE MISSING SQUIRE; Or, a Birthday Disappearance.

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Go back once more, and take care that you do not return without him. I am in no mood for trifling. It is not like Sidney to frighten me thus," she went on, more to herself than to her guests. "Do you think it possible?" turning anxiously to the captain. "That any harm could have befallen him?"

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clock struck! Mrs. Brogden rose to her feet. "I cannot bear this suspense," she exclaimed, passionately. "Does the captain think we are made of marble, that we can wait here all night knowing nothing of what has happened?" "Calm yourself, my dear Mrs. Brogden," said Grace Claremont, kindly; "ill news travels fast, and we should certainly have heard of it—"

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