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## Happiness At Last, Loyalty Recompensed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As she spoke, she looked up and down the mantel-shelf, as if she were searching for something.

"I put a long pin—a hat-pin—there," she said.

Mechanically he searched also, pushing aside the curios and ornaments. In doing so, he took up the portrait, lying face downward, and was putting it down again, when, as mechanically, he glanced at it.

"It did not start, uttered no cry, but he stood stock still and stared at the bewitching face in the silver frame, as if he had suddenly fallen under a spell. Gradually a deathly pallor spread over his face, his eyes became distended.

"Who—what?" broke from his set lips.

Decima had found the pin, and had turned to leave the room. She came back to him and looked over his shoulder.

"That portrait? Whose is it?" she asked.

She had not seen his face.


His senses seemed to be deserting him; he could not remove his eyes from the face, which, with its "beauty of the devil," seemed to smile up at him mockingly, derisively. His silence smote her, and she looked at him. A low cry broke from her lips.

"What—what is the matter?" she murmured. "What—is it?—I—I found it, saw it. Whose portrait is it?"

Though he tried to crush the answer down, it would come, as if he had lost control of his voice.

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I can not marry you. Listen—for God's sake, don't shrink from me!" for as he had taken a step toward her she had drawn back with a gesture of denial.

"Your wife! Then—then it is not I you love—you can not! It is she!"

"Love her?" He laughed with fierce bitterness. "You don't know what you say. Love? I hate, I loathe her!"

A cry broke from her lips.

"But she is your wife."

He made a gesture of despair. How could he tell her, make her understand?

"Decima, she is my wife, but I hate her! No man with a spark of manhood could do otherwise. Child, listen—don't shrink from me. Don't—don't look so, or I shall go mad. She is a bad, worthless woman. I left her. I have not seen her for years. She is nothing to me; nothing—nothing. Don't you understand? But that she is my wife I should have told you of my love long, long ago. Ah, that you understand. Come to me. Child, have pity!"

He knelt to her, and drew her hands from her face. She yielded, or rather, she did not resist, but her eyes were fixed vacantly above his head, as if she were trying to understand—and to bear—the truth.

"Decima, now that you know, you will not turn from me?"

"Your wife!" She drew one hand from his grasp and pressed it against her forehead with a piteous little gesture of helplessness, and despair. "Oh, why—why did you not tell me? Your wife!"

"My God! don't repeat it!" he cried.

"Try—try and forget it. Decima, you will not desert me; you will not draw back; I can not live without you! If you turn from me—"

He rose and caught her in his arms, for she had swayed to and fro, as if she were about to fall. But his touch seemed to give her strength to resist him, and after a moment—a moment during which he looked into her eyes—she recovered from the terrible faintness and drew herself from his arms.

"Let—let me go! ah, let me go!" she panted. "I will go! I want to go! Your wife!"

"You shall not go until you have heard me!" he said, fiercely. "Child, you don't understand, or you would not torture me. Sit down!"

"No, no!"

"Ah, but you must! You must listen. Decima—"

She stood, her hands clasped tightly, her face upraised, her eyes fixed on vacancy; and her despair almost drove him mad.

"Decima," he began again; then suddenly he stopped. There was a sound in the corridor. A voice, a woman's voice, said in clear, metallic tones:

they told me that you had left London. I feared that you had fled from us for good." which, though he did not intend, was a particularly accurate way of putting it. "I was quite out of it, I assure you, and as to Laura—" He paused and smiled at Bobby. "Well, perhaps I'd better not say how my news affected her. Mustn't tell tales out of school, eh, Deane?"

He leaned forward and touched Bobby on the knee, and Bobby grew red and hot.

"I—I had a wire from home, and had to run down suddenly."

Morgan Thorpe glanced at him sharply.

"No bad news, I trust?" he said.

"No," replied Bobby, after a moment's hesitation. "At least—well, something had gone wrong—some business; but it's all right now."

"I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid one of your people was ill," said Mr. Morgan Thorpe, with charming sympathy. "And I'm glad you are back. We missed you, my dear Deane, though you were away for so short a time. Trevor came and dined with us, but he didn't compensate us for your absence. I never saw Laura so triste and dull. You really must come round soon. What do you say to dining with us to-morrow night?"

Bobby's good resolution rose and looked at him sternly, and still more red and uncomfortable, he stammered an excuse.

"Engaged! I'm sorry, and I'm sure Laura will be. Well, we'll hope for another night. What are you going to do this afternoon? Drop in at the club and have a quiet shell out with Trevor and me."

What could Bobby say? It would have been extremely difficult for him to remark: "Look here, Thorpe, I've made a mental vow to cut you, therefore—get out!" What young man of Bobby's age and temperament could have done that? Oh, parents and guardians, when you are inclined to be hard on your erring sons and wards, I pray you remember your own youth and the temptations thereof!

"All right," he said; but there was another pause of hesitation, which, be sure, did not escape the wily tempter's notice.

"Half a moment," said Bobby, as his visitor rose to leave. "I'll—I'll take up those L.O.U.'s, Thorpe. I've got some of 'em. He went to the bureau of inland satin-wood and took out his check-book; but Morgan Thorpe waved his hand with delighted indifference.

"No need to bother about that just now, my dear Deane," he said. "Besides, I haven't the L.O.U.'s with me." They were in his pocket at that moment, of course. "And dashed if I remember what I did with them. They're at home somewhere, I dare say. Bring the check next time you come and dine with us."

Again, what could Bobby do? He could scarcely force the check upon Mr. Thorpe.

"All right," he said again. "But—but, Thorpe, I wanted to tell you—" He colored again, but the old Bobby asserted itself, and he looked Thorpe in the face squarely, and as he did so, there was an expression in his face which was singularly like that of Decima's.

"What is it, my dear boy?"

"Oh, only this; that I've made up my mind to cut cards for the future. The fact is—well, my governor has lost some money, and I can't afford—"

Morgan Thorpe seized his hand.

"My dear Deane, I'm delighted to hear you say that—not that your father has lost money, but that you are going to cut cards. It's strange, but I was just going to ask you if you'd drop gambling. I was indeed! It was on the tip of my tongue. To tell you the truth, Laura and I have been—now, you won't mind, you won't think us intrusive and impertinent, I hope, Deane—"

"No, no," said Bobby. "Go on."

"Well, we've been thinking about you—she is always ready to talk about you, you know. You must know that she—well, takes a great interest in you, and she begged me to ask you not to play."

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