



**For Her Sake;**  
—OR—  
**The Murder in Furness Wood.**

CHAPTER XXIX

It was in the conservatory, where the lamps glimmered starlike among the green leaves and rare blooms, that Sir Leslie found Diana. She had retired thither to think over the gratification of her father's greatest desire—the object for which he had sacrificed his happiness and hers. She wanted also to think of Sir Leslie; and the conservatory offered a quiet retreat.

She went in, and, drawing off her gloves, dipped her hands in the water of a bubbling fountain. It cooled and refreshed her. She was standing there still when Sir Leslie found her, looking more than usually statuesque and queenly in her dress of deadwhite silk and rich lace, with diamonds round her shapely throat and well-formed neck.

"I have found you, Diana!" he cried, drawing one of her hands from the fountain and watching the water drop from her fingers. "You promised me five minutes to-night."

"I did," said Diana, bending her lovely face over the water. "I wonder," she added, irrelevantly, "what the charm of falling water is? No matter whether it be a glorious cascade that dashes from rock to rock, or a little ripple like this, all the music in the world seems to lie in it. I wonder what is the charm?"

"There are charms more potent and wonderful than that," he said, with a meaning look.

He drew nearer to her as he spoke. Diana's proud eyes drooped, the lovely face was bent over the fountain. She looked a prize that any man might lay down his life to win, and in truth Sir Leslie would have given his. He loved her with all the force of a heart awakened to the knowledge of love for the first time. At that moment several of the dancers, entering to seek the cool and quiet of the conservatory, prevented him from saying all that was uppermost in his thoughts; but Diana read it in the handsome knightly face bent over her—read the love and the wish to tell it, and the self-restraint that was so full of respect for her. He half raised the pretty hand that he clasped.

"Diana," he said, "you have a beautiful ring on that finger; I wonder, if I asked for it, whether you would give it to me?"

She looked at it. It was a diamond ring, one that her father had given to her as a birthday present.

"It would be of no use to you," she answered. "Do you not see that it is a lady's ring?"

"That would not matter. Would you give it to me, Diana, if I asked for it?" Diana was silent for a moment, looking irresolutely at the jewel that flashed on her finger. Then she answered:

"Yes, I would give it to you, if you really wished it."

Sir Leslie forced a smile; but his face was pale with emotion.

"I shall hope to ask you for more than the ring, Diana; and you—oh, my darling, you will not be angry?"

"I shall never be angry with you," she said. "I could not be if I tried."

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How it happened she never knew, and Sir Leslie was never clear about it—whether her lovely eyes looked at him and lured him on, whether her beautiful head, with its crown of fair hair, drooped near him, or whether the sweet face was so close to his that it was quite irresistible—but the Baronet, with a murmur of passionate words, bent down and kissed her. In that one sacred kiss his heart went out to her forever.

The silence of a great emotion came over her. It seemed to her that that kiss was as solemn as any betrothal; it was the first kiss that any man had laid upon her lips. She had as a child embraced Sir Royal and Richard in her loving girlish fashion, but there had never been any other feeling than one of affectionate brotherly regard. This was the first kiss given her by the man she loved, and it seemed to Diana that it consecrated her to him.

"My darling!" he cried, his face flushed and his lips trembling with emotion. "Oh, Diana, you would give me your ring! My beautiful queen, would you give me yourself?"

There was a sound of a laughing voice near, the rustle of a silken dress, and Diana fled, blushing, her heart beating fast, her whole soul full of new and ecstatic delight; he loved her, and her dream had come true!

CHAPTER XXX

Blushing, happy Diana fled. There was music in her heart to which she must listen, and she wished to dwell upon this happiness which had taken her captive. She longed for a brief interval of solitude so that she might comprehend this new emotion that had entered her soul. Her heart had never throbbed with such a joyous sensation before. If this were love, then welcome love, for it had crowned her life with a bliss she had never before known! In that hour she did not even remember the name of Scarsdale; she thought only of her knightly lover.

"I will retire into the fernery," said Diana to herself, "and thank Heaven. The most blessed gift in this life is that of perfect love."

True, he had not asked her to be his wife; he would have done so but for the sound of a laughing voice, and a rustle of a silken dress. But he would do so, and she knew what her answer would be. Oh, happy life—oh, happy love!

She would not go back yet to the music-room or to the drawing-room, or go out upon the terrace, where in the gray shadows she saw so many figures fitting to and fro; she wished to commune with her own thoughts. Truly the poet said:

"There's nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream."

Oh, happy life that held such sweet love—for it had touched her that evening and quickened all that was noblest and truest in her! She went quickly through the suite of rooms that led to the grounds beyond. The sound of music and laughter followed her. But she wanted to be away from every one, so she hastened to the fernery. This was one of her favorite spots—cool, green, and beautiful, with the sound of falling water always there.

Peter Cameron had spared nothing on his hobbies, and the fernery was one of them. It contained perhaps the choicest collection of ferns in England, and the arrangement of the rocky crevices and ferns had been placed in the most picturesque spots, lamps glimmered in the midst of the foliage. Diana loved the place; it was so dear to her as the stone terrace or the rose garden.

She went straight to the seat in the midst of the ferns, where she had sat at times talking to her father or Sir Royal, where she had read some of her favorite books, where she had wept her most bitter tears when the news of her father's marriage reached her. There she now thanked Heaven for this blessed gift of a good man's love.

As Diana rose from her seat among the ferns and prepared to return to the drawing-room, two figures suddenly appeared in the entrance, and she heard Lady Cameron's voice. Had it been any other person, Diana would have stepped forward and laughingly accounted for being there; but when she saw the Duchess with her stepmother, she retired into a remote corner, where she hoped to be unobserved, intending, when they had passed, to hasten away. She could not meet them with her new sweet love springing in her heart, these women who, she felt, disliked her; she could not meet them while her eyes were bright

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with happy grateful tears. She stood silent and motionless, waiting for them to depart.

But, to her horror, they drew nearer, and halted against the very opening in which she was concealed. She could not step forward then; she would rather have died than let them know she was there. Lady Cameron was speaking.

"I think this is the finest part of the conservatory. I knew your Grace would like to see it, as you are so fond of ferns."

"It is very beautiful," said the Duchess, "and I really think, my dear Lady Cameron, that you are to be congratulated. You have a magnificent place."

Diana longed to cry out, "I am here!" she longed to get away. She did not wish to hear what they had to say; but flight was impossible now.

"Yes, it is magnificent enough," said Lady Cameron; "and Mr. Cameron is very kind to me."

"One can put up with a few drawbacks to be mistress of such a place and such a fortune."

"I hope soon to have things in order," said Lady Cameron, with a sigh of fatigue. "I could not tell you in what state I found the place after the reign of that foolish, capricious girl."

"She is both capricious and ill bred," remarked the Duchess.

"Dreadfully so," assented Lady Cameron. "The one great aim of her life is to be original, and she quite fails in it."

The hot color flushed into Diana's face and her heart beat with indignation as these words fell upon her ears. She knew they were not true—that she was not capricious, and that she had governed well and wisely.

"I think she is an arrant flirt, too," observed the Duchess, sneeringly. "She wants to make a conquest of Sir Leslie, I am sure."

"And half a dozen more," said Lady

Cameron. "Certainly, the girl is a great drawback to my marriage; but, then, I hope to get her settled shortly, and thus rid myself of her. None of us like her; my girls thoroughly detest her; and her father, I believe, is growing tired of her proud, willful ways. I am sure he does not feel one half the affection for her that he did."

"Though the words were utterly false, they pierced the very heart of the girl who heard them. She covered her ears with her hands, and tried to shut out all sound; but the thin, clear voice of the Duchess reached her.

"I suppose," her Grace was saying, "that at his death she will have Fereness?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Lady Cameron. "Unfortunately there is no moving him. I have tried my best, in the most delicate way, to induce him to leave the estate to me; but he is quite stubborn on the point, and I have not been able to move him. He will give to each of my daughters a good dowry. I have gained much by my marriage; but my girls were at first quite unwilling to associate with Miss Cameron."

"I am not surprised at it," said the Duchess, calmly. "Of course, for your sake, Hermione, because we are such old friends and you wished it so much, we have made the acquaintance of these people; for your sake only we shall keep it up. But father and daughter are alike intolerable to me. I dislike equally his servility and her independence. But for you we should never have recognized them; the Duke was quite decided on the point."

"I hate the girl!" exclaimed Lady Cameron. "I try to keep peace; but, if I had my own way, she should leave here at once."

And then, to Diana's infinite relief, she heard the rustle of the rich dresses as the two women passed on.

(To be Continued.)

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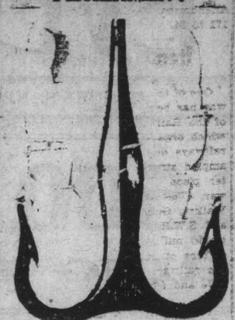
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