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Maddolena's Story AND The Cameo Bracelet.

CHAPTER I.

"Father, you are killing me," he said, so faintly that Sir George retraced his steps, and bent over him in alarm.

"My dear, dear boy, what do you mean? What have I done?"

The thin fingers of the invalid closed on his own with feverish haste.

"I cannot bear this suspense. If you go away and leave me a prey to the horrors your looks have conjured up, I shall go mad. Tell me the worst if you love me, and I will endure it."

"Even if it be ruin" his father hoarsely asked.

"I think so. Yes," he added, the next moment. "Even that may be borne if there is no disgrace."

"Mercy!—oh! my son, mercy!"

A film came across Charlie Ormsby's sight as those words were gasped in his ears, and at first he was so completely stunned that speech seemed to have left him.

But when he saw that Sir George had dropped on his knee beside his chair, and was bowing his head in the deepest abasement, all the filial love that had hitherto received no shock, nor jar, revived, and his arm was thrown caressingly over the shoulders of the kneeling man.

"Father, take courage. Whatever it is, we'll meet it together; only let's spare mother and Lil if we can."

"But can we?—can we?" groaned Sir George. "It is of them I am thinking. Effingham is tenacious of his honor. Will he wed my daughter when my name is in the mouth of every gossip, and branded with a crime?"

"I cannot believe that my father ever committed one deliberately," his son replied.

"Ay; but though you do me this justice, others will not. It happened in this way, Charlie: Years and years ago, when I was a gay and thoughtless

youth, spending more than the income allowed me by my father, and therefore frequently getting into debt, a friend as rash as myself introduced me to some money lenders. Of course, my affairs became more involved after I fell into their clutches; in fact, I went deeper and deeper in the mire, until they entangled me in a transaction so nefarious, that, conscience-stricken at my own folly, I went to my father, made a clean breast of it, and entreated the good old man to supply me with the money to settle the claims of the scoundrels who had been making me their tool and their victim."

"Did he do this?" asked Charlie, eagerly.

"Yes. When he had overcome his anger at my conduct, he complied and came to town with me. But the wily fellow who had me in his clutches evaded us, whether in revenge for a slight I had put upon him, or because he thought it would pay better to hold the bill in terror over me, I know not; and as time went on, I ceased to feel uneasy about it. But now, after the lapse of all these years, I receive a request for the payment of the original sum, with enormous interest."

"It cannot be demanded. The law bars any such claim."

"As the law might, Charlie; but this letter hints that if I attempt to avail myself of the statute of limitations, all the circumstances of the affair will be made public. Can I submit to have all the evil deeds of my youth laid bare—the weakness that made me the dupe of craftier men, construed into deliberate guilt—my

son's good name tarnished, and my child's marriage broken off, and her hopes blighted because her father is held up to the world as a forger and a villain?"

"Hush—hush!" exclaimed the younger Ormsby, writhing with mental pain. "This must—this shall be avoided! Be calm, father. There is surely a way out of the difficulty if we set ourselves to find it. You hint that revenge must have led the fellow to act in this manner? How did you offend him?"

"Turned my back upon him, when, on the strength of having discounted some bills for me, he presumed to claim my acquaintance at the opera."

"Scarcely offense enough to induce a man to forego his rights all these years for the very doubtful chance of annoying you now. Think again, sir."

Sir George leaned his head on his hand, and pondered a while.

"No. I cannot recall anything else, I heard, or fancied I heard, that Hat-then Goldring was dead; but the report must have been a false one!"

"Matthew! Are you sure the fellow's name was Matthew? The signature here," and Charlie pointed to the letter which his father had laid on his knee, "is Lucas."

"Perhaps my memory is at fault," said Sir George. "However, this is of but slight import compared with the fact that the demand is made and that it would be ruin to meet it."

"And yet if we would avoid the publicity we dread, it must be met," his son reminded him.

"But how—but how? Lily's marriage and the payment of her dower drains me of what ready money I had. Gracious Heaven! this is too terrible a blow for living man to bear!" and Sir George was starting up with a frantic gesture, but his son's feeble grasp was on his arm and restrained him. Charlie Ormsby was beginning to find the scene too much for his small modicum of strength, and that he must bring it to a close.

"My mother will be here directly, sir, and—give me some water, pray; she must not be alarmed without a cause. Go away, or your agitation will betray you."

"And you, Charlie? Are you not equally unnerved? What will she say if she discovers that I have permitted you to take on yourself the burden of my anxieties?"

"Pshaw! it will not surprise her to find me prostrated; but, father, you must see this man—this Goldring; not to make terms with him yet—that must be done cautiously, and under the advice of a lawyer who will bind him down to hold to his bargain—but to learn what he really intends to be at."

"You have a clearer head than I have," Sir George murmured, "but you are setting me a most detestable task. How shall I be able to keep my temper with the scoundrel who has been lying in wait for an opportunity to crush me?"

"If you think you cannot be temperate and wary, there is no resource but to send Thaxter & Vellum to treat with the fellow."

"The baronet winced at the proposal; how could he make such a confession as it would involve to the highly-respectable solicitors who were now employed in drawing up his daughter's marriage settlements?"

"I suppose you are right, I shall have to do myself; but if he should prove very extortionate, what shall I do? I cannot consent to burden the property that should descend to you intact."

Charles Ormsby laughed bitterly. "As if it signified to a dying man! Save the name, father; there's my mother and Lil to be thought of; don't let disgrace touch them, but let the rest go."

"In my boy worse?" demanded Lady Ormsby, who had just entered the room, and was started at finding her husband leaning in a despondent attitude over the invalid's chair.

With a reassuring smile, Charlie put out his hands to her, and, signing to his father to leave them, he drew his mother nearer and nearer till he could lay his head on her bosom. He was suffering intensely; perhaps it is not too much to say that he had received a shock that would influence the remainder of his life, whether long or short: He had loved his father with a reverential affection that young men nowadays rarely bestow upon their parents; and to learn that Sir George had committed a deed that he, with his still higher sense of honor, would have shrunk from, both shocked and stung him.

"Something has distressed you, my son," Lady Ormsby exclaimed. "Surely you have not been disputing with your father?"

"Not I, mamma, ma," he answered, with forced gaiety. "I am only—what shall I call it?—hipped this morning; in the humor to yearn for a little of your petting, and to think that there's so little in this world worth having that it's quite as well my stay in it promises to be a brief one."

"You break my heart when you say such things as these, mon sie," the lady sobbed. But Charles Ormsby did not answer. His head lay more heavily on its resting place, for he had fainted, and it was some days before he was able to quit his own chamber again.

His indignation growing hotter and fiercer as he left the presence of his son, Sir George Ormsby, with the letter in his pocket that had evoked it, quitted the house directly, and walked to the nearest cab stand.

The demand of his strange creditor was written from an out-of-the-way city square—one of those queer little nooks which we sometimes light upon in the rear of some busy thoroughfare, and that has the air of having grown moldy with age and disuse. Yet the tall houses in the small quadrangle, whose centre was blocked up with an ugly and decaying church, had been built for a wealthier class than now tenanted them. The rooms were lofty, the oaken staircases broad and handsome; and where shabbily-dressed, Jewish-looking men now shuffled to and fro, gayly-attired city dames and topkissed beaux had once played their brief parts.

(To be continued.)

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Old Country Miners to
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ANOTHER COAL CRISIS IS EXPECTED EARLY IN THE NEW YEAR.

LONDON—(Canadian Press)—This country expects another coal crisis in the New Year. The Miners' Federation, as already announced, has ordered a ballot to be taken among the miners as to the advisability of terminating the existing wage agreement. The miners invariably vote according to the desires of the Federation, and the Federation now advises them to vote for termination.

If the vote is in favor of termination of the agreement, as expected, three months' notice will then be given, and the interim will be spent in preliminary negotiations. The outlook for these negotiations ending satisfactorily would not be very hopeful, for when once the Miners' Federation once starts moving towards drastic action it gathers a momentum that is almost impossible to arrest.

The conflict, if it actually breaks, will come just about the time of the introduction of the budget in the House of Commons, which truly will make a time of real testing, if the Labor Party is at the head of the Government. Under the present agreement the minimum wage of the miners forms a first charge on the mining industry, whether the minimum is earned or not. The coal mine owners find themselves out of pocket in paying this, while on the other hand, the miners, owing to the general bad trade, have been kept so long on the minimum wage, that they have become tired out and want a change.

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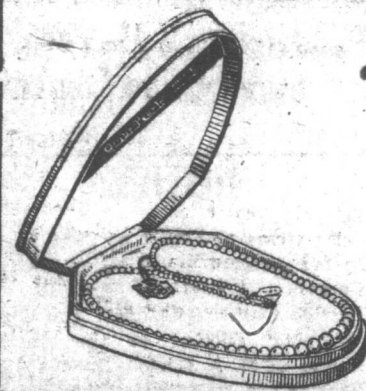
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