

SILENT LIPS

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CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

A sudden cold shook him from head to foot. Suppose—suppose Hetty in a moment of passion—of madness—had hurt her father? Suppose the Earl had heard and had used his knowledge to separate her and Lord Fanshawe? Suppose that was the reason why Hetty had disappeared?

CHAPTER VIII. They Call Her Guilty.

Geoffrey stood for a moment taken aback as Ted Sealey started incredulously into his face. "It can't be Geoffrey Clavering, surely!" he repeated.

Geoffrey made a movement as though he would have shrunk back into the shadows, and then hesitated. After all, Ted had been one of the few friends he had had when he had worked at the mill, and he was honest and faithful—the could trust him. He put out his hand.

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"Geoffrey—good gracious, it can't be Geoffrey Clavering!" he cried. "What do you mean by that?" he asked hoarsely. "What of the Lancasters?" and Ted started in surprise.

"Do you mean to say that you never heard of that?" he cried. "Why, you must have been asleep, you must have been buried in the wilds all this time not to have heard of that."

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whispering and talking—why there were even some as said that whatever it was you had done he had probably led you into it, and he was running about all over the town with Hetty Lancaster and—well—he got a bit of a bad name after you had gone, I can tell you. And on the top of it all came that black business of the Lancasters."

"What of them?" he asked hoarsely. "What of the Lancasters?" and Ted started in surprise. "Do you mean to say that you never heard of that?" he cried.

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turned for himself? Was there nobody in Oldcastle who believed in her, just as there was nobody who believed in him? But he had forgotten. Ted had been loyal. Ted's faith in himself had never faltered or wavered.

"There were only two things against her," Ted went on. "She hadn't been seen for two days, and then on the second night she came back. Molly Byrne saw her, and Bessie Merrill saw her, and a brace of people. Bessie said she came back to get her father's pardon, but it's like her to work her imagination for any one she loves, and she loved Hetty Lancaster and to this day sticks out that I'm a fool for believing her guilty. And there's one thing I can't understand about Bessie. She was that emphatic about Hetty Lancaster's innocence, and yet, lately, she's been taken up and going about with Barker's lawyer's clerk, who believes her guilty. I suppose it's like a woman, but it isn't like Bessie, somehow."

"Why, she would scarcely speak to me," Ted said, "but she would come on to me when everybody was talking about the case, and when I said that things looked black for Hetty, she declared then that if I ever doubted her she'd be long for me herself! Yet there she is now, clanking about with that dandy of a clerk at Jackson's. And I've heard him say that there is nothing really what's-ever that Hetty murdered her father. What can you make of women, Geoff? They're puzzlers for any man, I reckon; monkey puzzles I call 'em. Geoff of Satan had of 'em, every one with a bit of devil in her, and yet, lo! Geoff, the amount of angel in 'em, too, staggers a man sometimes."

"He broke off. Geoff was staring down the half empty street as though in the misty dusk he saw something that his companion did not. He turned suddenly at last. "But what was there against Hetty, after all?" he said abruptly. "There was nothing, not a suspicion of people. Why should she have done such a terrible thing as murder? There was no reason, there could have been no reason."

"There was plenty," he said, "and it would have been a bad look out for her if it hadn't been for Dr. North. For Mr. Fanshawe had forbidden Lord Fanshawe the house, had forbidden Hetty to have anything to do with him, and in a letter to the earl, which was found in his pocket, he said that it was his painful duty to have to accuse Lord Fanshawe of a crime. There was plenty of reason for the quarrel, plenty of reason for the crime."

"That stammered Geoff, "why should that have caused Hetty to—murder him?" Ted looked straight into his face. "Nobody knew what the crime was that Mr. Lancaster thought Lord Fanshawe had committed, but Lord Fanshawe's name stood for everything bad in Oldcastle just then, and if it was true, as people said, that Hetty was secretly married to him, why, what was more likely than that she should try to prevent her father from speaking out his mind?"

"But—but—murder!" cried Geoff, "and why should it have been Hetty? It might have been any one; Fanshawe, himself, perhaps. Oh, Ted, it was before heaven it couldn't have been Hetty. Ted stood silent for a moment, and then lifted his head slowly. "You'd better forget her, and all about her," he said deliberately. "She murdered him for sure, for she was seen."

"He broke off, his face clouding a little as though painful recollections overtook him, and turned away. "I came to see you," Geoffrey said, slowly, "because of some of these changes. I am back here in Oldcastle for a purpose, to find Hetty Lancaster."

"Why do you come to me?" he asked, sharply. "Because," Geoffrey replied, "I have been told that you stuck up for her when all Oldcastle was against her, because you fought for her and helped her and believed in her. I have come because I thought it possible that you might help me to find her, and prove her innocent of the thing of which she was thought guilty. I've come because all these years I haven't forgotten, because I—love her, and want her."

"Dr. North started. He watched her as she might have watched a patient, whom he suspected of disguising his symptoms. "Well, what do you want to know?" he asked.

"The truth," Geoffrey answered, abruptly. "The truth, whatever it is. I have been told that at the inquest you gave evidence in her favor, and I have been told that—that it was possible that you exaggerated for her sake. There are some folks who believe you said that Mr. Lancaster's death was caused by heart failure on purpose, because you wanted to get her off and marry her, and I want to

know the truth—the truth—whatever it is." Dr. North turned abruptly and began pacing up and down. Once he stopped and looked Geoffrey full in the face, as though he was weighing deliberately how much and how little he should tell him. When he spoke at last his voice seemed a trifle unsteady.

"She was never for me," he said huskily, "and I might have known she never could be, but there are some men who are born fools, where women are concerned, and I was one, Clavering, and I went on hoping against hope that she would have me at last, that when everybody had said she would fall back on me. For that reason I was glad when you had gone out of Oldcastle. I was even brute enough to be glad when people began to say bad things of Lord Fanshawe, and that was the reason why I fought for her tooth and nail at the inquest. And it was no good. Fanshawe came first, you next. I'm a bad bird."

Geoffrey was clutching at the arms of his chair. "But at the inquest, North, your evidence was true, it was what you believed," he cried hoarsely. "You said you had attended him for heart disease. For heaven's sake tell me that that was true." Dr. North paced slowly up and down before he replied. Then at last he came to a standstill and looked down at Geoffrey's eyes.

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have killed him by bringing on an attack." "But—you prescribed it," Geoffrey exclaimed. "Not in that form—not the poison in the glass," Dr. North said, "but whether he took any of it I can't tell. He might not have done, and for all I knew from the examination I made he might have died naturally enough. I did not go farther—I did not search his body for poison—I dared not."

"There was a dead silence for a moment. Geoffrey sat quite still in his chair. Dr. North stopped in his walk, as though staring at the carpet at his feet as though there were puzzles in the pattern of it. "If it had been any one but Hetty," he added abruptly at last, "I should have said she was guilty, but I could not, would not believe it of her. She must have been mad. Heaven knows, Clavering, she must have been mad! I think Lord Fanshawe bewitched her. Anyhow, she was never the same from the day you left Oldcastle until the day she disappeared."

"Where did she go?" Geoffrey asked. "Dr. North shook his head. "I don't know," he replied; "she was seen, as you know, by Miss Walter, who had called on some trifling matter on the night of Mr. Lancaster's death. She was either in the act of coming in or going out of his library by the window when Molly Byrne opened the door to announce Miss Walter, and directly she saw them she fled—ran away, and was never seen again in Oldcastle, neither at the inquest nor

"And she?" asked Geoffrey hoarsely. "She said she dared not," Dr. North replied. "She seemed afraid of me, as if—as if—oh, heaven forgive me for saying it, Clavering, but she behaved just as if she had been guilty of her father's death, and knew that it had only been through me and what I had done that she had gone free. I tried not to believe it, tried to believe in her, but I could not. She looked and spoke as if she felt that I must have known her to be guilty, as if I had sacrificed my honor in defending her, as though she knew—as though we both knew—that I had lied at the inquest."

Geoffrey started up from his chair and crossed to the fireplace, standing looking down with blind eyes at the dull fire that burned in the grate. "She isn't guilty," he said, sharply after a minute. "I won't believe it, I'll never believe it until I hear her confess it with her own lips. Where is she now, North?" Dr. North stared at him a little queerly. "That I don't know," he answered. "She would not tell me where she lived, and I tried to follow her and failed. I traced her to Battersea, and there lost sight of her. She managed to give me the slip, as she said she would, and I have been to London twice since then, and hunted the square, and never had even a glimpse of her."

Geoffrey turned suddenly a face that showed haggard and white in the pale light. "North, I saw her," he cried, "saw her two or three days ago in St. James' Park, on my way to— He broke off, drew in his breath sharply. He had better not reveal his identity, later on, no one must know yet that he was Geoffrey Waring, that only a day or two ago he had been presented to the King! He turned abruptly and looked squarely into Dr. North's face. "I saw her," he went on, "but I didn't for a moment dream it could be Hetty. I—I thought she was Lady Fanshawe. I thought he had married her, and that she was a great lady. I never dreamed of anything else. My voice broke. I had no idea of all this. I have been roughing it these eight years. No one must know of the wilds, in Australia, India—oh, everywhere, trying to forget England and the memory of it, and now to come back and find her under a cloud, branded—it is horrible, North, and I am either going to prove her innocent or die."

He took a step forward, his hand outstretched a few weeks, it may be in a few days, when I will have her. If she is guilty, you will never hear of me again. If she is innocent, I shall fight for her tooth and nail, and you'll help me, North?" The two men clasped hands. "You know it," said the doctor. "A few minutes later Geoffrey stood at the top of the long white steps looking down into the lighted streets. The doctor stood behind him. "I shall wait for some sign from you," he said a little unsteadily. "If you can only prove her innocent—"

"I shall!" broke in Geoffrey. "Heaven grant that you may," said the doctor, "but—"

He stopped. On the pavement below a man had come to a standstill and was looking up at them curiously. He was a pale, thin wisp of a man, with eyes that never looked out straight, but always from their corners; and he seemed subject to moods. For at first sight he had merely raised his hand to his hat in salute on seeing the doctor, but as his glance fell on Geoffrey he stopped and turned.

"Forgive me for interrupting you, doctor," he said, "but shall you be at the club tonight? I'm your man if you are." He did not look at North as he spoke, but at Geoffrey, and the doctor nodded abruptly. "That is Barker, the lawyer's clerk," he said as the man passed on. "Do you remember him?"

Involuntarily Geoffrey shrank back, and he asked North a similar question to one he had asked Ted Sealey a little while before. "I suppose he would not recognize me, would he?" he asked. "I suppose no one would?"

The doctor shook his head. "I don't want to be known," Geoffrey said. "If I am to find Hetty, I shall—and clear her, I shall have to do it quietly. You understand?"

"Yes," said North; "all right, and you can rely on me. I'll not let you down." Geoffrey turned, watching the thin figure of Barker disappear before he slipped away down the steps into the street. An hour or two later, in a quiet street, a man met North with a queer smile. "You're in luck's way, doctor," he said.

"By how?" asked North. "Why, the associate of a millionaire," said Barker. "Warning's worth cultivating, I reckon." The doctor repeated the name stupidly, and for answer Barker drew from his pocket a London paper. "Surely that was the man you were talking to you, doctor, tonight?" he said, and held out before him the picture of Geoffrey snatched on the steps of the Hotel Cecil.



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The ugly cunning deepened as he bent over the table.