

Literature.

A MONSTROUS WRONG.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LOVER.

THE next morning, Lord St. Maur presented himself at an early hour at the Board street hotel and was shown up to the private sitting-room of Miss Wynne. The young girl, in her morning-robes was waiting to receive him. She was alone, Elsie being engaged in packing trunks in an adjoining room.

Dolores held out her hand frankly, and Lord St. Maur took it in his, but made no movement to repeat his friendly greeting of the preceding evening. And yet she seemed to him to be so fragile and delicate and child-like, and that he felt a great tenderness for her. He led her to a seat and sat down beside her, inquiring after her health and how she was getting on.

"I am coming to take you home with me," he said. "Not to my country-house just yet, but to Belgrave Square, where you can rest, and my old housekeeper will look after your comfort."

"Do you wish me to go with you, my dear?" asked Dolores.

"The earl, looking upon her soft, dark, lovely face, replied that he did."

"I had thought," said Dolores, "that I might go to some quiet village, with old Elsie, to live upon the income which Miss MacKintosh has so generously given me."

"My dear child, that is quite impossible. You are too young and—pardon me—too beautiful to live in the seclusion of a village."

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Dinner at St. Maur House was a ceremony. Dolores acquiesced herself with a good deal of self-possession that attracted her guardian's admiration. After dinner she returned to the drawing-room. The old butler and maid and her exquisite voice and her manner of singing aroused Lord St. Maur to a knowledge of the fact that her talents equalled her beauty.

"I am sorry to leave you my dear," he said, with genuine regret and a glance at the clock, "but I have an engagement this evening, and I must keep it. You can readily amuse yourself, I dare say, by looking over the house. If your want company, summon Mrs. Holly by all means."

He went out, and Dolores played softly upon the piano, not daring to summon the housekeeper. The footman who gave her master's orders was temporarily replaced as his post by a servant who did not know that the earl had gone out, and to this fact Dolores owed the sudden announcement, as the door was opened:

"Dolores! You here!" he ejaculated.

"I have searched everywhere for you, Dolores. I have been to your old pension at Sloe; I have been down to Red-curtain Farm a score of times; I have fairly hunted Mr. Watkyn; but I have found you at last—thank Heaven!"

"After the first transports of this reunion the young baronet drew Dolores to a seat upon a sofa and took her hand, saying:

"Now tell me how you happen to be here. I have been looking for you everywhere."

"Your guardian," Dolores murmured.

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ing at the old Highland castle when I asked you to become my wife? You surely have not forgotten it?"

"No, no. But it is necessary to recall a scene which was so painful," said Dolores.

"It is necessary. I assured you, upon that evening, that I loved you as I had never loved before. I desire now to repeat that assurance," and his eyes flamed.

"But I do not desire to urge my love as a claim upon you. Yet let me say that I have not given up all hope of winning you to be my wife, Dolores. I shall hope and strive for that until I win success or die."

His voice, full of determination, strangely disturbed the girl.

"Mr. Melcombe!"

"Nay, bear me out. So much I have in justice to myself. I am not here to-night as your lover, Dolores, but as your friend."

"The girl looked her surprise."

"I have written to you, Dolores, to recall that evening in which I declared to you my love," continued Melcombe. "You may remember that I said to you that you should never marry; that there was some mystery in your life that prevented even the possibility of your marriage. You gave me no clue to that mystery. After you left the room, while I was battling with my despair, I happened to notice on the table a letter you had dropped in passing out."

"A letter?" Dolores grew white to the lips.

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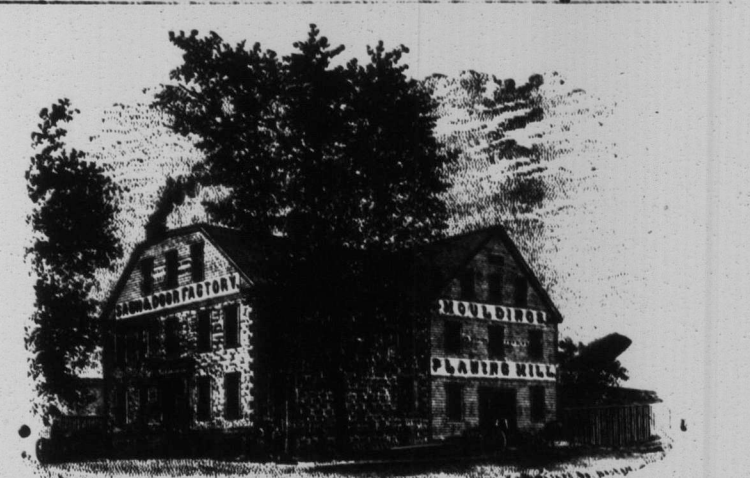
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