



Happiness At Last; —OR— Royalty Recommended.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"No," he said, "it is too large a sum. I'm afraid we are up a tree, Lady Pauline. I've just seen Mr. Mershon; he wants to see Decima. I told him that she wasn't fit, and—well, I hinted that it wouldn't be the least use his seeing her. Decie knows her own mind, and once it's made up—Ah, yes, it's all over between Mershon and her. And, well, I'm glad it is—though," he added, "there'll be the devil to pay over these bills! But I don't seem able to think of anything but poor Gaunt!" he said, aloud. "I've just met Bright. He's terrible cut up; but somehow he can't bring himself to believe that Gaunt is dead. The next in succession is a cousin of Gaunt's. He is travelling abroad just now; but Bedford and Lang have written to him. There's no end of excitement in the village. Gaunt was more popular than one would have thought; and some of the women cried when they talked to me about him. One and all absolutely decline to believe him guilty of—of—They are all very sorry for Decie's illness. She's the Lady Beautiful of the village, you know."

Lady Pauline inclined her head. "And—and it was she who egged Gaunt on to undertaking all the improvements that have been made. Poor Gaunt!"

Bobby's eyes filled with tears as he turned from the room.

The next morning Decima came down-stairs. She was very pale and thin, and very weak still, and she looked but the ghost of herself as she sat in a low chair by the fire.

"Are you sure you are strong enough to leave your room, Decima?" asked Lady Pauline; and Decima had turned her face to her with a shadowy smile.

"Yes, aunt. I—I want to take up my life again as—as if nothing had happened. They—father and Bobby—want me." Her voice broke for a moment. "I can not lie there and think, think any longer. I want something to do, something that will help me to forget. But ah! no, no; I shall never forget!"

How could it be possible for her to forget the man who had loved her, and whom she had loved with all her heart and soul; or cease to remember with anguish that he had gone to his death with the charge of murder hanging over him.

In the afternoon, as she was standing at the window, looking sadly at the bare trees swaying in the wind, she saw Mr. Mershon open the gate

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and come up the path. Her hand went to her heart, and she looked round as if for help. Lady Pauline had gone down to the village with Bobby. There was no one to help her. Well, it was a part of her burden, and she must carry it. She rang the bell.

"Tell Mr. Mershon I will see him," she said.

She did not go back to her chair, but stood by the window waiting, and the light was full upon her face as she entered.

To him she looked more lovely than ever, with the sadness in the violet-gray eyes and the ethereal pallor of the girlish face. His eyes fell before hers as she regarded him steadily, and his hand shook as he took the one she held out to him. For a moment he lost his presence of mind, and no word of the speech he had prepared would come. Then, with an effort, he mastered his emotion, and said, almost abruptly:

"You're better, Decima? I'm very glad; I—I wanted to see you. I've had an anxious time, and—and—You're sure you're better?" he broke off, raising his eyes for an instant to the white face.

"Yes," said Decima. "I'm sorry you should have been anxious, and—and I am glad you have come."

"Of course I should come, the very first moment," he said. At sight of her all his passion revived, and he felt that he would move heaven and earth to keep her. "Of course they—Lady Pauline—told me, gave me your message, but I needn't say, Decima, that I didn't attach any importance to it. You—you—very likely you didn't know what you were saying when you sent me word that—you wanted to break with me."

"Yes," said Decima; "I was quite conscious, Mr. Mershon."

Her voice was low, but its steadiness surprised ever herself.

"You were?" he said, huskily. "Then I suppose you said what you did because you thought I should be annoyed, riled at your being mixed up with—with this affair of Lord Gaunt's? Of course, I—it was very natural that I should want an explanation; that I should want to hear all about your visit to his rooms and—and what took place between you."

"Yes," said Decima calmly; "it was your right. It is so no longer. But"—she went on as he opened his lips—"I will tell you, Mr. Mershon. I will tell you, because you will then see how—how impossible it was that I should have refrained from sending you my message. I went to see Bobby—"

"I know," he said, eagerly. "—And Lord Gaunt came in." As she spoke his name her eyes closed for an instant, and her hand slid along the edge of the wall as if she were seeking some support.

"And you were together there," he said, nodding gloomily. "What—what passed between you? Don't tell me if you don't like. I'm content to let bygones be bygones, Decima."

"I will tell you," she said. Her lips were quivering, but she steeled them. "Lord Gaunt—told me that he loved me."

Mershon started, and his face went black.

"The villain!" he muttered. Decima's face grew crimson, and her eyes flashed. She turned away as if she would not say another word; then suddenly she faced him again.

"He told me that he—loved me. And I"—her voice broke for an instant, but she went on painfully—"I knew then that I had loved him for a long time. I shall love him while life lasts!"

There were no tears in her eyes, and they met his furious gaze unflinchingly, almost as if she did not see him, or had forgotten his presence.

"And you can tell me this!" he stammered, huskily. "You can confess that you love a man who was married already—a man who has committed a dastardly murder?"

Decima's hand went to her heart.

"He did not do it!" she said. "I know it!"

Mershon sneered. "Oh, I've no doubt they have kept the story from you, or as much of it as they could. You haven't read the evidence."

"Yes; every word," she said. There was a strange light in her eyes, and her voice seemed to have gained a sudden strength. "Every word; and still I say that he was innocent! I know it!"

He glanced at her angrily.

"It is a lucky thing for him that he escaped having to face a jury," he said, with a sneer.

Her lips quivered, and her eyes closed, and a low exclamation of anguish broke from her involuntarily.

"Even—even if he had lived and they had found him guilty; even if I were convinced that he had done it—"

She stopped and looked beyond him as if she did not see him.

"Well?" he demanded. She lowered her eyes to his face.

"I should love him still!" came slowly from her white lips.

Mershon's rage and jealousy overmastered him.

"You must be mad!" he said, hoarsely.

"After that shameful confession, there's nothing for me but to take myself off!" He snatched up his hat and looked toward the door; then his eyes seemed drawn toward her unwillingly.

"I—I suppose you have counted the cost of—of this rupture of our engagement?" he stammered. "You don't for-

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sum of money? Perhaps your brother—your precious brother," he sneered—"has made the consequences pretty plain to you?"

She looked at him as if she were trying to attend, to understand.

"I see you do," he said. "Well, of course, I stand by my word, and I expect you to stand by yours. I undertook, in the event of your marrying me, to take over your father's liabilities and to provide for your brother.

As the marriage is off—as you break the engagement, and—and insult me by the statement you have just made, you can't expect me to carry out my part of the contract. You can understand enough of business to comprehend that."

"Yes, I understand," she said in a low voice. "I am sorry—yes, I am sorry that I can not marry you. But I can not! It would have been hard before, but now—" She turned away as if she felt that it would be impossible for him to understand what that now meant, and Mershon, with an almost audible oath, left the room.

His dog-cart was waiting for him, and he leaped into it and drove home to The Firs at a gallop. As he tore up the steps and entered the hall, his sister came out from the drawing-room. She held a telegram in her hand, but in his fury he did not see it.

"Where are you going?" he demanded, for she had on her out-door things.

"I—I was going to The Woodhines to—to inquire for Decima—to see if she was well enough to see me," she faltered.

"Then you won't do anything of the sort!" he snarled. "You won't go there again—do you hear?"

"What—what has happened, Theodore?" she asked, timidly.

"The engagement's broken off!" he said, huskily, as he flung his hat aside and drew his hand across his sweat-crowded brow. "She's—she's behaved shamefully! She's disgraced herself! She's not fit for a decent man to marry! She—" The words seemed to choke him, and he broke off with an oath. "But I'll punish her! I'll punish her! I've got that old fool of a father of hers under my thumb—and that young ruffin, the brother, I'll punish her through them. Yes, by God! I'll have them truned out into the street within a week! I've told Gilsby to act."

"Oh, Theodore!" she faltered. "Poor child—poor child! You will not—"

"Won't I?" he broke in, with a malignant sneer. "Poor child! A pretty child! To admit, to boast, that if—if that beast were proved guilty, she'd—she'd love him still! What! do you think I'm a dog, a cur, to be kicked aside and not resent it! I'll have my revenge! I'll turn them into the street! What the devil are you crying and trembling at? Here, what's that?"

He snatched the telegram from her hand and tore open the envelope.

She was going back to the drawing-room, when she heard him utter a cry, a cry of rage and baffled fury, and she turned back.

Mershon was leaning against the wall, glaring at the telegram. He raised his head presently, and his lips moved, but no sound came. The telegram fell from his hand, and in fear and trembling, she went forward and picked it up. He did not prevent her, and she read the wire. It was from Mr. Gilsby, the lawyer, and it ran thus:

"All D's bills met. Some one has undertaken to discharge all his liabilities. Will write."

(To be continued.)

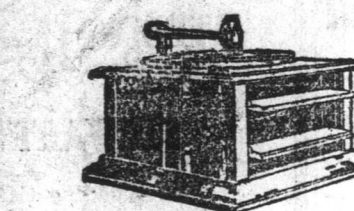
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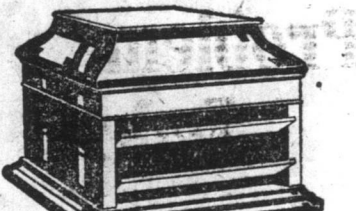
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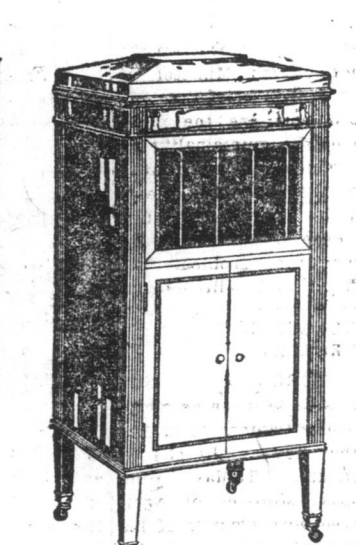
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Home-made sheets iron straight and last longer than those bought ready

For each sheet.

One-half teaspoonful of baking powder be used for the crust of each fruit pie, the upper crust will not sink in and become soggy.

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well watered. A pretty palm for a jardiniere will be the result.

Berry pies will not boil over when baking if the berries are heated and some of the juice poured off. Add a little cornstarch to the fruit.

A small white covered sofa cushion