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**The Countess of Landon.**

CHAPTER XVIII.

Irene drew back; Seymour cursed and swore under his breath; the countess alone remained calm, and, if it may be said, almost satisfied.

"You have decided," she said in a low voice—"you have decided rightly. If you had chosen to remain, to keep him here with you, I should have known that you did not love my son."

"Spare her, mother—spare her!" groaned Royce, with mingled grief and indignation. "You forget that she is a woman like yourself! Another such speech, such taunt, and she shall not go, even now!"

"No, no," murmured Madge; "she is right; I understand. Ask her to give me time—a few days—a week."

The countess heard the broken prayer.

"In a week," she said, coldly. "I have only one word more to say: When you come to Monk Towers with your husband, it will be as the wife of Royce Landon, the son of the Earl of Landon. You will leave your past behind you. No one will remind you of it—no one shall cast it in your teeth. As far as such forgetfulness is possible, it shall be forgotten. The future rests with you—not me. Do you understand?"

Madge raised her head from Royce's breast and looked at the proud face. "Yes, I understand," she said, with a long breath. "I will do my best not to disgrace him. Be kind and—help me!"

The countess did not wince, but a job came from Irene.

"Oh, let us go now!" she murmured. "Oh, poor girl! poor girl!"

"Yes, we will go," said the countess.

She held out her hand to Madge, and Madge put hers into it shrinkingly; then the countess extended a hand to Royce.

He took it and pressed it, too agitated to speak.

She looked into his eyes with a touch of a mother's yearning in hers.

"God forgive you, Royce!" she said in a low voice, and turned away.

Seymour stood staring from one to the other in speechless fury for a moment or two; then his face changed slowly, as if the full aspect of the case were breaking in upon him, and things were not so bad, after all, as they might have been.

"At any rate, the hound is married," he muttered—"married, and so out of my way!"

He stepped forward and drew the cloak round the countess, and would have done the same office to Irene.

**THAT INEFFABLE TOUCH**



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but she drew back; then, as he offered the countess his arm, he took off his hat to Madge with an exaggerated courtesy.

"Good-night—Mrs. Landon," he said.

Irene glided up to where Royce and Madge stood, and held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Royce," she said, with downcast eyes. But she raised them as she took Madge's hand, and an infinite pity and sympathy glowed at them.

"Good-night—Madge," she whispered; and, bending forward, she touched Madge's trembling lips with her own in a sisterly kiss.

She was gone the next instant, leaving Madge throbbing and quivering under the unexpected caress.

The three—the countess, Seymour, and Irene—moved slowly into the wood and toward the carriage. The countess leaned heavily upon Seymour's arm, and presently stopped as if exhausted.

"A moment!" she panted.

Irene put her arm round her, and the countess clung to her, breathing hard. The reaction had set in, and the strain she had undergone was exacting its inevitable penalty.

"It is only a little way to the carriage, madame," murmured Irene. "Sit on this fallen tree and rest for a minute."

The countess sunk down. As she did so, Irene started and looked round. The countess glanced up at her.

"It is nothing, madame," said Irene. "I heard something move among the bracken—a rabbit."

The countess sat perfectly still for a few minutes, then she rose and took Seymour's arm.

"I am stronger now," she said, with a sigh.

As they moved away, something that was much more like Uncle Jake than a rabbit raised its head from the thick bracken, and, crouching as low as possible, followed them.

Cautiously as he moved, it was evident that he was in a great state of excitement. His hands twitched as they clutched the fern stalks as he drew himself along like a snake, and his sunken eyes shone like a couple of beads.

Every now and then he raised his head and peered at the three, but with an uncertain expression, as of doubt and incredulity.

Presently they emerged from the wood, and Uncle Jake, keeping abreast of them, saw for the first time their faces in the full light of the moon.

As he did so, notwithstanding all his caution and hitherto secrecy of movement, a cry suddenly burst from him—a cry of amazement, as his eyes rested upon the white, weary face of the countess, and of bewilderment as they turned quickly to Seymour. He lay among the undergrowth at the edge of the wood, watching them until they had crossed the strip of plain and entered the carriage. Then, as it drove off, he rose, but still keeping in the shadow of the trees, dashed his hand to his forehead, and swore excitedly.

"It isn't the drink, and I'm not mad or dreaming!" he muttered almost savagely, and yet with an under-current of exaltation in his voice. "I'm half drunk, I know, but I'm not so bad as that. It's her face, I'd swear. I'd know it among a thousand—a thousand?—a million! anywhere, any time! But he—*who is he?*"

He dashed his hand across his forehead again with a savage impatience. "My memory's falling me. I'm getting stupid and thick headed. Who is he? Now—let me think."

He sat down at the foot of a tree and stared before him in the direction the carriage had taken, and evidently badgered and spurred his brains in the effort to recall some face connected with the past—the face Seymour's resembled.

"Lord! it's as if I'd known him all my life!" he muttered, angrily. "And I can't think—I can't think. If I'd only got a drop of brandy." He looked round helplessly and drew his hand across his mouth. "It made me jump the moment I saw him—made me

jump! And his voice, too! Now—now let me be careful—let me try hard."

He stared straight before him for a minute or two, then shook his head and sighed.

"It's here one minute and gone the next, curse it! But I'm sure of her!" he chuckled. "Proud as Satan—prouder! And to think that Madge—"

He rose and leaped against the tree, laughing silently, and in a peculiarly unpleasant way.

"Lord! it's as good as a play—a play? It's better!" he exclaimed, suddenly, "for it means business! Yes, that's what it means, dear boy, Luck has been against you for a pretty tidy spell, but it's going to take a turn. Steadily!" He had stumbled over a tree-root. "Let me pull myself together a bit before I face them two young fools. I wish I hadn't taken quite so much—or I'd taken a drop more. I'll want all my brains for this job, I reckon. Steady! Now, then; the heavy father's about the style that's required for this scene, I should say—the heavy father nicely done, with a sharp eye on the youngster; for he's smart, and rather too ready with his fist. Now, then!"

He stumbled along through the wood till he gained the edge near the spot where the group had stood; then, pulling himself together, he emerged into the moonlight.

Royce and Madge were still standing where they had been left, and she was leaning on his breast, her face upturned to his. There were tears in her eyes, but they were not falling; and though a faint look of trouble lingered in her face, that of love and trust almost concealed it.

"If you will only love me," she murmured, "nothing will seem hard or difficult then. Only love me!"

"My Madge—my dearest and noblest!" he said, pressing her face to his. "Love you? If you could only see into my heart and know how well I love you and admire you! No woman in the world could have behaved more bravely, nobly, than you have done. Love you?" he laughed unsteadily. "Madge, I thought I knew you, but I was mistaken. I did not know you fully till to-night. And don't fear, Madge. You shan't be unhappy. Let them by word or look attempt to take advantage and—But they will not do that. You don't know my mother, Madge. She was at her worst to-night. She is proud—ah, well! you saw that—but she has a tender heart and—Madge, don't think worse of her than you can help. See here, dearest—why say the word, and we'll draw back even now. If you think you would be unhappy, if you would rather stay with your—our people—"

"No, no!" she said, lifting her eyes to his. "I have made up my mind. We will go! They must bear with me at first. —I will try it to—get them to love me!"

He laughed confidently.

"My brave Madge! my beautiful darling! Try! You won't have to try very hard or very long. You won't—Ah!"

She had started and looked over her shoulder, and would have torn herself away from him, for Uncle Jake was limping up in the moonlight, but Royce held her, and turned to meet him with a frown. Uncle Jake came up and looked at them with a smile, shaking his head after the fashion of the heavy father on the stage when he comes upon the pair of young lovers in the conventional arbor.

"Well, well, well!" he said, with a kind of chuckle. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish!"

Royce opened his lips, but before he could speak, Uncle Jake went on, as if he were repeating a hardy learned lesson:

"No use, my dear boy—no use! Uncle Jake is up to snuff. He's been behind the scenes, and knows all."

(To be continued.)

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**Oranges, Sweet Oranges**

We seldom stop to think what a wonderful and delicious fruit the orange is. Its "family tree" includes the lemon, the citron, and the lime, and the first oranges seem to have come from India.

They came to this cold country by way of South Italy, Spain, and Portugal, and until recent times, when millions of boxes reach us from California and Queensland, our main supply came from the South of Europe.

The sight of a Queensland or California orange ranch is one to remember, for the orange tree bears blossom and fruit simultaneously. In Europe, where orange-growing is an ancient industry, trees are to be seen whose age is reckoned by centuries. The up-to-date Colonial orange-grower clears his old trees out as soon as they begin to fall and puts young trees in their place.

Many thousands of boxes of oranges arrive at the London docks, not only from the countries already mentioned, but from the Azores, the West Indies, Tangiers, Malta, Brazil, and many other tropical and sub-tropical lands. There are nearly a hundred different varieties of orange, of which the "navel orange" is the pick; it is one of the triumphs of orange-growers that they have evolved a fruit which is seedless.

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Don't let the agony of corns destroy your comfort. Apply Blue-jay—and instantly the pain vanishes. Then the corn loosens and comes out. Does away with dangerous paring. Get Blue-jay at any drug store.

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On similar lines was the feat of a well-known magistrate in the North of England, who celebrated his seventy-second birthday by singing a song from memory for every year he had lived, and the same man broke his own record a few days later by repeating a hundred songs from memory in six hours and three-quarters.

When Miss Edith McCarthy, the famous actress, was ten, her father bribed her with a sovereign to learn the second book of "Paradise Lost." So rapidly did she perform the task that he offered her ten shillings for "Romeo and Juliet." Success followed in an amazingly short time, and he repeated the offer for "Macbeth." The future actress rattled off the lines so quickly that her father said: "This is becoming rather expensive. Next time, you shall have expenses."

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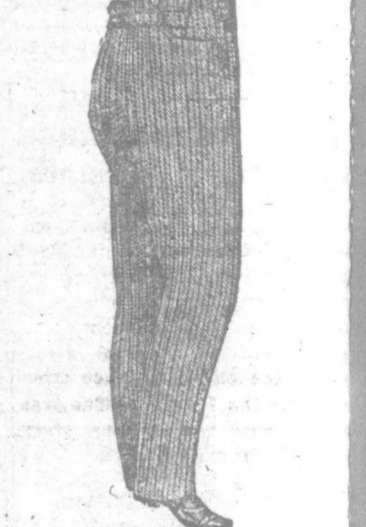
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**70c.**

**DAILY DANGERS.**

Oh I marvel, oft I wonder, that we live so long a spell, that we are not planted under rhubarb bushes in the dells; for the streets are full of motors, suffering to squash the voters faster than the Yarmouth blasters that the English grocers sell. Weather like a tyrant seizes on the weary human host, and to-day a fellow freezes and to-morrow he will roast; banking on the weather wizard he neglects to shield his grazed and is punished by the blizzard that comes whooping down the coast. And the bandits are so busy! Up and down the town they fly, scooting in a stolen Lizzie, shooting up the passers-by; bearing off their sacks of plunder to the tune of blood and thunder—'isn't it a solemn wonder that we all don't pause to bid? From the handiery escaping, we go, thankful, to our cotes;

but the deadly germs are shaping plans to get our divers goats; fatal microbes' haunt and hound us, ailments dire are all around us, and chirographers' learned confound us, bearing off our hoarded goats. Every night I am astonished that I've lived another day, that the coroner's admonished from my coop to stay away; not a gun or disk has scared me, not a fell disease has marred me, and I thank the gods who guard me, as I hit the costly hay.

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