



## CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

"Shall we go to the hotel?" queried Prescott.

"What for?" demanded his companion, sharply.

"To divide the money, of course."

"Eh? frowned the other. "Oh, yes, certainly. We divide, as agreed. No, I am not going to venture near the hotel. I am afraid—"

"Of a woman!" sneered Prescott, "with the money gained, never fear the result."

"You don't know her!" gasped the impostor, with a timid glance all about him, as if fearful that some wraith would suddenly block his path. "Any way, we will shake the dust of the village from our feet, sure, and Dalton. I want to meet my friend, Paul Dalton, at a cabin in the woods. Come on. Soon as we reach a retired spot I'll divide the money."

Ralph Prescott's heart beat high with hope and avarice. He had failed in most of his plans, but the very material fact of money, at least, was tangibly in sight at least.

Just beyond the village, near a little grove, the impostor halted.

"It's moonlight," he said, "and we can see to count the money. You do me half, eh?"

"We agree on half."

The impostor peered sharply about them. He made a faint as if to take the wallet from his pocket.

"Here you are," he said, with his breath quickening.

Ralph Prescott put forth his hands, as if to receive the money he had so coveted.

The next minute they went to his head, he uttered a wild cry and staggered back.

For, with the swiftness of lightning, the man he had made an accomplice had drawn some blunt instrument from his pocket. A heavy blow on the temple repeated stretched Prescott senseless at his feet.

"Lil' there!" he hissed malevolently.

"Half! ha! ha! I have plotted too deeply for the fortune to give it away. No, mine, all mine! Such sneaks as you deserve a traitor's reward."

Paul Dalton and his watch from his pocket—ever his purpose he took. Betrayed, robbed, deserted, Ralph Prescott would awake to find that crime had brought him his own true recompence.

Then the shallow-hearted villain darted through the thicket, carrying with him the results of evil scheming, making off with the booty, to obtain which he had ruthlessly trampled on human lives and human hearts.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LAST.

Lawyer Drew fled away his papers, closed up his desk and lit his pipe, ready for a comfortable smoke, after his two visitors, Ralph Prescott and the impostor, had left him.

He felt very placid, for the assured heir of the Forsythe legacy had paid him an extra large fee to expedite matters.

A ring at the door-bell, followed by the hurried parley of some new visitor with the servant, interrupted the lawyer's pleasant reveries, however, a moment later, and almost immediately the tramping footsteps down the hall preceded a rude intrusion into the room.

There stood a man, pale, unkempt, wild-eyed—so closely the prototype of the man who had just left that room with a royal fortune surrendered to his charge that the lawyer stared in amazement.

"Why, Mr. Dalton!" he ejaculated, rising abruptly and staring wonderingly at his visitor. "You have returned? something has happened?"

"Returned? No, I have not been here before to-night."

"Too late!" gasp'd the now comer. "He has been here. I feared it. Mr. Drew, do you not know me?"

"Why, yes, I—" stammered the lawyer.

"I am Paul Dalton; not the Paul Dalton who has taken my place and represented my identity for the past week, but the Paul Dalton you knew of old—the superintendent of Maple Leaf Farm."

"Then the other?"

"Was an impostor."

Lawyer Drew's jaws fell. The awful truth suddenly dawned upon his astounded mind, and it paralyzed his faculties completely.

"Yes, went on Paul Dalton, rapidly, "you have, in the view of the deep plot, a scheme to unglamorously snare the Forsythe fortune, while I have been a drugged, bound prisoner. To-night I overpowered and bound my jailer and hurried here, but too late to prevent the consummation of an iniquitous project between Ralph Prescott and the man who resembles me."

"Remarkably. He must be a brother, a close relative?"

"It matters not. I cannot expose him here now. Quick! how much of a start has he got of me! He must be overtaken, he must despoil his ill-gotten booty, he must tell me what he has done with my wife—my darling, precious Ruth!"

"I can answer that question!"

A clear, confident voice uttered the words. Just about to advance toward the door, Paul Dalton recoiled as a dark, pale, sad-faced woman crossed its threshold. The eyes were, too, regarded her in open-mouthed wonder.

"Isabel!" exclaimed the startled and bewildered Paul Dalton. "Isabel!"

"Yes, Paul, the wronged, persecuted wife of your enemy, the woman who, at last realizing all the noble sacrifice of your life, has determined, be the cost what it may, that you shall wreak your happiness no further, to enrich and shield a consummate scoundrel, my husband though he be!"

"What does this mean?" gasped the overwhelmed lawyer.

"I will tell you," rang out the woman's voice.

"Isabel, I forbid you!" interrupted Paul Dalton, sternly.

"No, I shall disobey you," returned the woman, firmly. "Too long you have

## CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

The hand of the impostor clutched the breast pocket containing the precious wallet at the peremptory words of his deserted wife.

Then, with a wild glance about him, he made a movement of precipitate flight.

The woman never moved. She simply repeated the ominous mandate.

"Stop! I warn you, Paul Dalton. You know I never tell a lie. Take one more step, and I am prepared to prevent a new wrong. I will kill you before you shall reap the reward of your awful wickedness!"

The hand under the cloak moved significantly. The man shuddered; his hair crisp'd; his blood chilled. He knew she was a broken-hearted, desperate woman.

His fingers held with baffled hate as he gazed at her.

"Then take it!" he hissed, as he drew forth the wallet.

She reached out her hand, but uttered a startled cry as she realized in a flash that the acquisitive words of the scoundrel were employed solely to throw her off her guard.

For he gave her a violent push back toward the edge of the yawning ravine.

The woman did not, however, lose her presence of mind.

With one hand she clutched the wallet and tore it from her husband's grasp. With the other she stayed a fatal descent into the cavernous darkness of the yawning void, three feet away.

Her would-be executioner was less fortunate. His violent movement caused him to lose his balance; his wild struggle to gain the coveted pocketbook cost him dear.

He stumbled and fell. A cry of horror rent the woman's lips as his struggling form disappeared over the edge of the cliff and was swallowed up in the black darkness of the ravine.

She listened with bated breath for some sound or cry, but none came. Then, thrilled, appalled, she sped from the spot.

Reaching the first cottage, she summoned help. An old farmer and his hired man accompanied her to the ravine. There, lying across a moss-covered rock, they found the broken body of her husband.

He was still alive, and they bore him to the village. Placed under a doctor's care, he was nursed by his wronged but faithful wife until morning.

At earliest dawn, a bedraggled, limping form stole into Ridgeton and to Maple Leaf Farm.

It was the baffled schemer, Ralph Prescott. Before noon, taking with him the entire contents of Farmer John's strong box, he sneaked out of the village.

That village never heard of him again for two years, then it was to learn that no further injury should come to this man. I warned him; he refused to heed me. Now he shall suffer the consequences of his crime, Paul Dalton, I rescued your wife to-day! she is!"

Ruth Dalton appeared at the library door. There was a mutual cry of joy, and husband and wife were reunited in one another's arms.

"Wait here!" ordered Isabel. "I know where my husband has gone. I will find him—I will right the great wrong of the past—if I follow him half the world over!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE WHITE MOONLIGHT.

Ralph Prescott lay where he had been left robed and insensible in the white moonlight, while his assailant sped away from the spot with the fleetness of a deer, and the guilty bearing of a criminal escaping from the hands of justice.

The false Paul Dalton's breath came quick, and his manner showed that he was not yet altogether sanguine of leaving the country without some trouble.

He feared Prescott, revived and hot on his trail with all the vengeful persistency of a baffled accomplice; he dreaded the anger of his deserted wife, whose written warning and subsequent silence were more impressive than spoken words.

"Not here," answered Isabel, softly, "but at your proper home—Maple Leaf Farm. Ruth, I have told your father all the story of your husband's nobleness, of the evil deeds of his favorite, Ralph Prescott, and he is broken-hearted over the injustice he has done. He is here to ask forgiveness and take you and your husband back to Maple Leaf Farm."

Rugged old Farmer John was a contrite, tearful man in that room a minute later.

The happy man as, with his daughter and her husband, he returned to the old home that had been so cheerful with them.

He knew the truth from the false now, the poor metal from the dross, and knew, too, that his future would be bright and peaceful, assured of the love and devotion of Hearts of Gold.

Once more the golden grain is waving over the broad, fertile acres; once more Ruth's happy face beams from the homestead door, and once more, blessed by the love of Paul, the sisterly devotion of Isabel, and the tender care of old Farmer John, she is the Heiress of Maple Leaf Farm.

## MIDNIGHT MUSIC.

There was no response to this evidently agreed-on signal, and he entered the doleful structure and proceeded to light a lantern, which, with a lot of other traps, lay on the floor in one corner of the gloomy place.

From among these he selected a suit of clothes, a false beard, a pair of blue spectacles, and other articles likely to be of use in making up a disguise.

When he had donned them they gave him an appearance scarcely according with the fugitive of a few minutes previous.

"I fancy no one will recognize me in this disguise even if pursuit is made," he chuckled confidently. "The money? Yes, that is all safe. Ah! it was worth the battle, and victory perches on my banner, and I have won the day. A royal fortune! With Newcombe to cooperate with me, we can double it at some foreign gambling place."

He gloated over the well-filled pocket-book for some time, then, securing it in an inner pocket, he paced the floor of the old hut restlessly.

An hour went by, and he glanced at his watch—Ralph Prescott's—his time-piece now, he told himself, with a hilarious laugh, as he pictured the discomfiture of the plotter when he regained his senses.

"Strange that Newcombe does not come," he murmured, impatiently, at last, extinguishing the lantern, and going to the door of the hut.

Another hour went by, and he started from the spot.

"I can't. I won't risk trouble by remaining here or going in search of Newcombe," he muttered, determinedly. "He had his cue to be here. He is not here, so I leave the country alone. With an abundance of money I can find an equally shrewd partner in Europe."

"Yes," continued the guest, "I got up and leaned out of the window to listen. It was a pretty air they played, although I did not recognize it."

"What a delightful custom you have here," he said, "of chiming the bells at midnight!"

His host and hostess looked at him in silence, wondering if he had taken leave of his senses.

"Yes," continued the guest, "I got up and leaned out of the window to listen. It was a pretty air they played, although I did not recognize it."

"Stop!"

Clear as a clarion note the mandate rang forth.

"Isabel!" gasped the startled plotter.

"Yes—I have found you."

"What—what do you want?" stammered the abashed impostor.

A white, shapeless hand was extended from the folds of the long, dark cloak that enveloped the woman's form.

"Only inanimate things appear to be

endowed with reason. For instance, a collar button knows when a fellow has a sore thumb, and improves the occasion to refuse to do duty."

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