



CHAPTER XXVII.—(Continued.)

Mr. Marsh positively gasped, as if the weight of the accusation had taken his breath away. He glanced at the accuser. She looked, with her flaming eyes and resolute face, very much in earnest; but still he felt that he must not be borne down by mere glibness of assertion.

"It is a good old principle of our English law, mademoiselle, that a man is to be considered innocent until he has been proved guilty. Now, all I have seen of Sir Richard, and all I have heard of him, except from yourself, is very much to his credit. If you want me to change my opinion you must give me proofs."

"You shall have them," said Glitka.

"You are, as I believe, that you admitted in conversation with Superintendent Swann," said the London merchant, "the writer of the anonymous letter which I received in town. You are also a bitter enemy of Sir Richard's?"

"Yes, because I loved him," interrupted the Hungarian girl, with her dark eyes blazing out like those of a hurt wild beast that turns on the hunter. "I was his promised bride—we were betrothed, and he threw me off. Yes, I hate the man! Now hear me."

And in rapid, burning words Lady Thorsdale's maid related how she had, in the room habitually occupied by Sir Richard Mortmain at Thorsdale Hall, discovered in a drawer the compromising letter signed "Rufus Crouch," which had first caused him to send her own anonymous communication to Mr. Marsh himself in London.

"Here it is!" she said, as she thrust it into the dry-salter's hand. He read it, not without many an inward twinge of mortification and annoyance.

"The base hypocrite!" he exclaimed; "the rascally dissembler! Why, his scoundrel of a confederate had apprised him of the exact amount of my ward's fortune weeks before he came to make a boast of his disinterested intentions to me! May I keep this letter, mademoiselle? You will be rewarded, I need not say, for your help in unmasking an imposter."

"Reward me—give me money—your sovereigns and your banknotes, perhaps," retorted Glitka, with a hard fierce laugh. "Yes, that would be well for one of your English maids, but I have only one reward to seek! Now, sir, listen. The letter I have placed in your hands will, I hope, prove the ruin of the designs of him to whom it was sent. But I have a new weapon wherewith to strike at that hard, pitiless heart."

And then, rapidly and volubly as before, she narrated how she had chanced to overhear, in that portion of the shrubbery at Thorsdale which bordered on the park, through which there was a public right of way, a conversation between Sir Richard Mortmain and an ill-looking ruffian, whom she easily identified with the writer of the threatening letter. She had no hesitation in saying that she had played the spy on her employer's brother whenever her duties rendered it possible, prompted by jealousy and resentment, and on this occasion she had overheard, herself unperceived, a portion of what was said.

"He, Crouch, menaced Sir Richard always. He said, he said, him to the gods, and the prison, if he could the commonwealth and the commonwealth thief. And the great, proud gentleman spoke the ruffian fair, and gave gold, and promised much. He had won over Mr. Marsh, Miss Mowbray's guardian, so he said, and should have his influence on his side. And Crouch was to have his share of the young lady's fortune; I did not hear much, but they bargained."

Mr. Marsh drove back to Woodburn Parsonage with very different feelings from those which he had previously entertained toward the titled suitor for Violet Mowbray's hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Well met, Sir R.," said a horse, deep voice, at the sound of which the baronet winced impatiently; "I was on my way to Helston, to look you up, but perhaps out on the high-road we can chat more conveniently."

The baronet turned to confront Rufus Crouch. There was an unlooked-for look of sullen ferocity in the fellow's bloodshot eyes, which told of gin lately imbibed. In his hand was a heavy blackthorn stick, gnarled and fresh-cut.

"What do you want with me, you fool?" demanded the baronet.

Rufus glared at him. "I want a precious lot, Sir R." he said, referring to the ex-gold-digger, after a pause, during which it seemed as though he were meditating whether or not to spring, like some savage dog, at the throat of his aristocratic acquaintance. I want to be rid of this cur, life, and out of this rotten country, and back to old Australia, but as a master this time, mind ye, not a man. But, to set up, I require my share of the swag."

"Of what swag, my talkative friend, do you want your share?" asked the baronet, with much asperity.

"Why, of the heaviest seventy thousand pounds—what else?" gruffly rejoined the ex-gold-digger; "and mind, Sir R., not one rap less than twenty-five thousand—not twenty—will satisfy yours truly, and—"

"You do!" broke in Sir Richard, "you may keep your higgling back till the market is open. That Will-o'-the-wisp of the big sum of ready money that lured me down here, is as very a Jack-o'-lantern as ever led a silly swain into a quagmire. Even if the girl has a right to this money—"

"True as death and taxes she has, Sir R.," protested Crouch, looking serious.

"Even then we don't live in a country where your ladies can be married against their will," retorted the baronet. "Your heiress, I tell you, turns out to be of less malleable stuff than we supposed, and her money is as much out of my reach as it were fifty fathoms deep beneath the sea. She insults me—won't see me—will have none of me—even though I have duped that old dotard of a dry salter, the guardian, into buckling up my cause. I'm sure there's some young lover."

"And I can give a shrewd guess, Sir R., as to who the young chap is," interrupted Crouch. "I'll stake anything it's that beggarly upstart, Don. I heard he had been caught spooning and mooning with Miss Violet. I heard he had been forbid the house, down at the parson's. He's what the girls call handsome, and—"

"I know he is," said Sir Richard, with an accent of conviction, and with a bitter laugh, "and I wish him—dead!"

"Now, hark to me, Sir R.," exclaimed Crouch drawing near, and speaking ear-

Downton and Gresford—was what our French neighbors describe as a personage, quite as great a man, so far as wealth and pedigree went, as Lord Thorsdale, with whom he was somehow remotely connected by ties of kindred.

The Earl was a childless widower. He was still of middle age. He was clever enough had he preferred it, to have made a figure in our home politics, and rich enough, had he so pleased, to have been noted in London society. As it was, much of his life had been spent officially or unofficially on the continent.

"Will you join the grouse shooters, Wyvern, to-morrow?" his brother earl had asked, when first the visitor arrived.

"I have not fired a gun for years—except a rifle at some battue in Austria," Lord Wyvern had smirkingly replied; "but if there is to be an expedition, I will accompany the lookers-on willingly enough."

(To be continued.)

Know All About Law Questions.

In one of the big down-town office buildings, tenanted principally by lawyers, a reporter rode down in an elevator with two boys, who, to judge from their conversation, were budding limbs of the law. One of them was about 15 years of age, and the other perhaps a couple of years his senior.

"I had that judgment opened this morning," remarked the younger of the two, flecking the ashes from a cigarette, "but I thought Giegerich was a little slow about it."

"Ya-as," drawled the other, "it's certainly a great bore to have to spend so much time in court. Remember my bond and mortgage case in the Supreme? Well, it was enough to try anybody's patience. The trouble with some of your judges, Frank, is that they don't know the rudiments of landlord and tenant law. I cited P. Bubbles. Bubbles, and it knocked him out. Where are you bound?"

"O, I've got a little corporation matter, kept in check usually by habit and self-discipline, but he had much to annoy him that day, and now the pent-up volcano blazed up into flame."

"You cur!" he exclaimed; "you low-born bound! you dare, dare you, to threaten a gentleman?"

And with his gold-mounted riding whip, he dealt Rufus two sharp cuts across the face.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The immediate effect upon Crouch of the stinging blows he had received was to make the ex-gold-digger and possible bush-ranger stand as still as if he had been some hideous effigy of a man made of stone. But then his native ferocity awoke, and it was with a yell like that of a wild beast that the ruffian sprang forward, clutched the bridle of Sir Richard's gallant horse, and forced him back upon his haunches. The terrified horse snorted and reared arrow-straight, and fell back with a crash upon his rider. Stunned by the shock, the baronet lay helpless.

"I'll pay you, Sir R.," growled Crouch, whirling up his club, and dealing a furlong stroke at Sir Richard's prostrate head.

"Hold there! stop!" cried a ringing, clear young voice, as the sound of hurrying feet was heard; and the would-be murderer, club in hand, wheeled round, to find himself face to face with the man whom, of all men, he hated and feared the most—the youth whose skill and courage had saved him from the Soldier's Slough—Don.

"Don't interfere with me, youngster, if you can't keep a whole skin and bones unbroken!" said Crouch, brandishing his cudgel.

"I am interfering, comrade," replied Don resolutely, but with no sign of ill-temper, "to save you from yourself."

"Try the heft of it!" growled Crouch, savagely, as he lifted the club, and struck at Don with all his force. But Don, whose eyes were quick and his movements agile, eluded the blow, sprang forward, and had closed with the gold digger in a moment.

"Now I've got you, my Jemmy Jessamy fine gentleman!" muttered Rufus, as the grapple began, for in all his many meditations concerning the ruffian, Don had always felt assured that at close quarters he was by far the stronger of the two. Then—Crouch never afterward could realize how the brawny man felt that he was snatched up from the ground like a tree suddenly uprooted, and next he fell with a crash upon the earth.

"Your wisest plan, mate, is to take yourself off," said Don, "and, if you have any conscience left, to be thankful that you have been saved from a great crime, and the hangman's noose as its penalty. I am sorry to be harsh with a jet-burner, but I am more sorry to find that one of our company could deserve it. Now go!"

"Don't you dare to accuse Sir Richard Mortmain, who was so strikingly unwell!" he said, clutching the baronet's shoulder.

"Yes, it's all right. I was a trifle dizzy at the first, but I'm quite right now."

"Say, I am interfering, comrade," replied Don resolutely, but with no sign of ill-temper, "to save you from yourself."

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