

**John
Gresham's
Girl**
by
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CHAPTER XIII**Freedom at Last**

When Sir John went to the drawing room in search of Lucy, he found her sitting there, strained and waiting. She sprang up as he came in, asking:

"Well?" on a sharp note of anxiety.

"Lucy, dear, he's terribly broken up. . . . He's a fine boy at heart, Lucy. . . . I could wish that things were. . . . He broke off, evidently tremendously wrung by the emotion he had seen in Lee and felt himself.

"I must go to him, dad," cried Lucy, her lips quivering. . . . She started for the door, but he stopped her.

"Lucy, he. . . . he asked me not to let you go to him. . . . He doesn't want to see you, dear. . . ."

She turned and faced him, her eyes wide and full of pain.

"He asked you. . . . Dad, is that true? . . . He really doesn't want to see me?" There was a cry in those words that Sir John missed.

"Yes, he said that, and, Lucy, he meant it. . . . Come home with me now, darling. . . . It is really best."

The anxiety and wretchedness of the next few days were awful. Lucy couldn't sleep for wondering what Jim was doing. . . . How he was, and what he was thinking and planning. . . . And she could not think out anything clearly, because all this put her into such a state of confusion. One thought contradicted another. One emotion was at war with the next. She endured four days of it, and then went to the flat in an endeavor to see him.

There, to her complete amazement, she found Perry St. Abb. But she did not find Jim.

"He's gone away," St. Abb told her. "He went yesterday, and I don't know where. . . . Nor when he'll be back."

"Perry," she cried, looking at him with wide, tragic eyes. "He. . . . he hasn't gone. . . . for. . . . for good, has he?"

"No, of course not," she soothed her. "That isn't like him, is it?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know. Everything's so. . . . confusing. . . ."

She swallowed back the tears that were threatening. Then: "Perry, what made you come back to him? Had you heard. . . . ?" She broke off.

"Not until he told me," she answered. "I had been badly on my conscience. I'd judged and deserted him. I felt that I'd ratted; and that's far from being a jolly feeling. What you said the day I left, haunted me a good deal. So I came back two days ago. He thought I'd heard of his official exoneration, but I hadn't heard a syllable of it; nor of his imprisonment or anything. . . . I just came back because I'd realized that I'd condemned him, knowing nothing. . . . I don't applaud the Linforths business but I do understand it. . . . St. Abb's young, engaging face was very serious; his voice intensely earnest. It was, perhaps, one of the longest speeches he'd ever made in all his life. . . . He seemed to become aware of that, and smiled a touch self-consciously as he added, with a hint of the old airiness: "So I suggested that if he wanted a man Friday again, I was ready to come and spread my footprints all over this highly polished flat of his. . . . what?"

A little laugh jarred from her. It was a great relief to him to hear it. The sight of her pale, strained face; the sound of her lifeless voice, cut him badly.

"As for his being away now," he added cheerfully, "I don't honestly think it means much. Just that he wanted to be by himself. . . . out of town. . . . Or something. . . . Really, you mustn't worry about that. . . ."

"No," she said, as bravely as she could. "I suppose I mustn't. It's a little difficult, sometimes. . . . She stopped, and caught a 'sharp' little breath. Then added, in a new tone: 'Did he mention Jocelyn?'

"Not in detail. But enough to make me think she'd been busy in her own rather infernal way. I saw her yesterday and had a talk with her. It was a heart-to-heart, with masks well off. I can tell you. . . ."

"I shall leave it at that then. Good-bye, Perry; and. . . . and thanks for coming back to him. . . . Her voice shook badly, and he suddenly couldn't trust his own. They parted in silence.

When she got back to her father, her white face and unhappy eyes told him that something had happened even before she broke out:

"Dad, he's gone. . . . He went yesterday, and Perry doesn't know where he's gone to, nor when he'll be back or anything. . . . Tears threatened but she forced them back. "Oh, I knew I ought to have stayed with him that day!" she cried out, after a moment. Sir John was startled. Jim had promised not to go away without letting him know.

Somehow, he had thought that he would keep his word.

"He promised not to hide away. . . . Not to bolt, as he expressed it. . . . Lucy, I believe him, somehow. . . . He won't. . . . bolt, dear. . . . He's done a lot that I'm furious about, but he'll keep his word, you'll see."

And he was right. Another two days went by, and then Lucy had a telephone call from Perry St. Abb.

"I've heard from the boss," he told her, evidently very much relieved himself. "He's gone down into Hertford. Self. "He's gone down into Hertford. I knew there was some perfectly simple explanation."

"Bless you, Perry," she said, a shake of emotion in her voice. "Just stick to him."

"You can bet your life I will," he answered genuinely. She thanked him, and set down the receiver. Her hand was shaking, and hot tears were running down her face. As she turned away, she saw her father coming toward her with a letter in his hand.

"From Jim," he told her. "He doesn't give an address but tells me that if I want to know where he is I can find out from St. Abb. So you see my dear, I was right. He hasn't. . . . bolted. . . ."

"What has he written to you for?" she asked.

"About my taking over Linforths. He says that he is not going to have anything more to do with it, and is arranging to make over his control of it to me. . . ."

"Anything more?" asked Lucy, who did not find the question of business the most important one just at that moment.

"Only that he has gone away for a while, as he wants to think things over, and clear his mind as to his next steps. . . . he has suffered. Lucy. . . ."

"Yes," she broke out passionately, and we went yachting, and let it happen!" She caught a breath. "Dad," she added suddenly, "I'm going to him. I don't care if he said a hundred times over that he didn't want to see me. . . . I'm going to him. Now. This minute. . . . This is just breaking my heart. . . ."

He came plumping across the room to her, crying out. . . .

"Lucy. . . . Lucy. . . . And was on his knees before her, his arms around her girlish slenderness, clinging to her as a man might cling to his one hope of salvation.

"It is true, Lucy?" he said presently, his voice very low and shaken. "True that you can love me after all I've done? True that you can let me love you. . . ."

"There was never anything truer," she answered him.

"But I've been so unpardonable to you. So brutal. I've even tried to cheapen your love. . . . Oh, Lucy, that night at Newstreller will take a lot of forgetting!"

She raised a quick hand, and covered his mouth to stop the words.

"Jim, when did you know first that. . . . well, that it was going to be awfully difficult to go on hating me. . . ."

"Looking back, I don't believe I ever did hate you," he confessed. "It was always easy enough to take you in my arms; easy enough to kiss your lips. . . . Ah, God, how ashamed it makes me!"

"Don't let it. Face it, as something that has been a. . . . mighty bad dream; Jim; and then, cut it out and begin again from now. . . . But tell it all, so that everything is square. . . ."

"I know I was just sheer mad when you wouldn't come near me, those first few days. . . . I felt just utterly outcast, and yet fought against your power to make me feel so. . . . And when you told me to. . . . give way to it. . . ."

"He drew a breath and added: "You were thinking of Jocelyn, I suppose. . . ."

"Yes, she'd told me that you had always loved her. . . ."

"And, me, that you had gone to Ames! I can't tell you what that meant to me. . . . I stood it for two whole ghastly days. . . ."

"And then came to me. . . . Jim, I don't know whether to be angry with her, or thankful to her. . . ."

"She whispered. "At least she showed me that you loved me. . . ."

"Lucy," he said, out of a tiny silence. "Be young again. Be that young, sweet thing that first put her hand into mine. . . . That angel thing I. . . . I killed. . . . with the telling of those awful truths. . . . that first evening. . . ."

His voice was badly shaken.

"You love me, Jim; don't you?" she asked softly, her lips curved to the tenderest imaginable smile. He stood motionless for the space of a breath, then turned away and put the length of the room between them before he faced her again and said:

"Jim. . . ."

One word, but it brought him starting up to his feet, and smothered crying from his lips.

She came toward him slowly, half shyly; but at a closer sight of his face, pale and ravaged with the emotional turmoil he had gone through, her shyness dropped from her, and she saw something that the confusion of doubts and fears had obscured from her; something she had not been sure of, since she had last seen him. . . .

"You love me, Jim; don't you?" she asked softly, her lips curved to the tenderest imaginable smile. He stood motionless for the space of a breath, then turned away and put the length of the room between them before he faced her again and said:

"Yes."

"I love you, too," she answered. There was silence again. Then:

"I love you enough to know that I mustn't let you love me," he said.

"And I love you enough to know that you can't stop me," she said.

He went on quickly:

"I've done some things that you could never really overlook. Never really forgive. . . . Looking back, it's like a dream, and a mighty bad one. . . ."

He drew a deep breath, and squared his shoulders slightly before going on: "You may think that you would forgive them. . . . But I don't believe that you ever really could. . . ."

"Suppose," she said, very quietly, "that I have, already?" Just for a fleeting moment, their eyes met across the room. Then she added: "Or suppose, rather, that I realize that it has been a dream and a. . . . Oh, a mighty bad one, Jim; but suppose I know that, being a dream, it therefore has nothing to do with real, waking life? Nothing, I mean, that could possibly come between your love for me and mine for you; if yours is anything like as big as mine. . . . Suppose I know all that? Doesn't it make a difference? Suppose I realize that it isn't a question of forgiveness at all, but just a recognition of something that has been and is past. . . . Doesn't all that make a difference? Doesn't it wipe out all question of whether I will, or won't forgive in the future?"

"I told your father that I would do everything in my power to put things as right as they may be put, for you. . . . There is one thing I can give you. . . ."

"And that is?"

"Your freedom."

"Jim, do you really love me?" she asked, after a moment.

And again he answered briefly:

"God's in his heaven. . . ."

She came to him, radiant in her happiness. "All's right with the world," she finished for him.

He looked at her with worshiping eyes. . . . Then raised his head suddenly and laughed: a ringing, triumphant sound:

"God's in his heaven. . . ."

She came to him, radiant in her happiness. "All's right with the world," she finished for him.

And yet you can offer me my freedom?"

"Oh, Lucy," he broke out: "I love you enough. . . . even enough. . . . to let you go!"

Her voice came to him, very low and still, as she said:

"Jim, do you love me enough. . . . even enough. . . . to let me stay?"

"Stay," he said, shakily, "with me? After all that has happened?"

"Yes."

"Remember, I shall not be rich any more. . . . I am making over my

share in Linforths to your father. . . ."

"Then we won't be rich. We'll just be—awfully happy, instead."

He laughed unsteadily. "How could I let you? You who have lived in the middle of money all your life! To say nothing of having a mighty heap of your own. . . ."

"I haven't got it now," she answered quickly. "I gave it to dad to help Gresham's along a bit so you see I'm poor, too. . . ."

"He uttered a cry as he turned on his heel and strolled out of the window.

"So you did work against me, after all," he said slowly.

"Against you? No, dear. For you, I couldn't let you succeed. . . . Too gaudy a defeat, really. . . . Aren't you sure of that yourself?"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. I didn't know that it was your money. . . . Doesn't it set an insurmountable barrier between us?"

"Coud more money do such a thing? Could it be powerful enough? Besides, on the contrary, if you are going to poor again, it makes us equal. . . ."

Without turning he said:

"You are breaking down all my resolution. . . . I shall have no strength against you. . . ."

"You never should have strength against me, Jim."

The rebuke was very gently made. He turned and saw that her arms were stretched out toward him. . . .

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"Jim, when did you know first that you were left by her death just before she was nine, won her unusual friends in her day and a peculiar sort of fame ever since. A statue of Pet Marjorie was set up just last year in her birthplace, Kirkcaldy, Scotland, and she is mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography as one whose "life is probably the shortest to be recorded in these volumes, yet one of the most charming characters."

"Pet Marjorie," Sir Walter Scott called her, little Marjorie Fleming who lived near him in Edinburgh, whose whimsical personality and astonishing literary career began when she was six and ended by her death just before she was nine, won her unusual friends in her day and a peculiar sort of fame ever since. A statue of Pet Marjorie was set up just last year in her birthplace, Kirkcaldy, Scotland, and she is mentioned in the Dictionary of National Biography as one whose "life is probably the shortest to be recorded in these volumes, yet one of the most charming characters."

"Pet Marjorie Fleming was born in 1803. When she was just turning six the family moved to Edinburgh and Marjorie took up writing and commenced her famous friendship with Scott. Part of the Waverley novels were written with Pet Marjorie on the author's knee. Sometimes she would amuse him by reciting long passages from Shakespeare; at others they would tramp together across the fields while Scott's dog Maudie scampered joyously about them.

Marjorie has left us a number of letters recording her childlike observations and philosophy, an epic in verse concerning Mary Queen of Scots, whose royalty she upheld even while she condemned her morals, and her journal written between the ages of six and eight containing more observations on life and a number of poems, all of which were recently republished for the modern reader. Pet Marjorie died of measles in 1811.

"REBECCA"

"How do you like your Rebecca?"

"I wrote Sir Walter Scott to Washington Irving in the letter accompanying his gift of one of the first copies of 'Ivanhoe' off the press. 'Does the Rebecca I have pictured here compare well with the pattern given?'

"The pattern" from which