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A HUSBAND'S CROWN

"Not at all unlikely. And the document which would have consigned you to that retreat is still in my possession."

"You promised to hand it over to me."

"I did, and I shall keep that promise by-and-bye, Mr. Checketts—by-and-bye. In the meanwhile I shall continue to hold it as a sort of guarantee of your faithfulness to me—a curious guarantee, I admit, but a powerful one, I think. Not that I doubt you in the least. Your interests are bound up with mine. If I rise so do you, and that in proportion to my ascent. Now listen. Of course, we are both aware of the recent split between Lawrence and his father on the subject of marriage. The young man is determined and, I am convinced, will have his own way. The old man is likewise determined, but will be quite helpless to avoid defeat if Lawrence, as he will do, sets all his most tremendous threats at defiance. In the ordinary course this thing will end as such affairs always do. When Davenport finds that what is done cannot be undone, he will gradually relent, and take his son and his son's chosen wife back into favor."

"It is a safe prophecy."

"But if we could so work the oracle that this event did not occur—that Lawrence should so fatally offend and disgrace himself in the eyes of his father, as to be irredeemably alienated from him, the old man would infallibly stick to his word, and cut him off with a dollar. In that case Edith—my wife that is to be—would inherit the bulk of Davenport's vast fortune. I have been convinced, Checketts, because I want you to understand thoroughly that that is precisely what I wish to bring about."

Mr. Checketts little eyes twinkled.

"It is a splendid idea," he said; "but I don't see how it can be carried into effect."

"I have a plan," Mr. Van Blarcom, lowering his voice to a whisper. "a grand, bold plan, which with your aid is bound to succeed. The price I offer you for that assistance shall be a liberal one. On my accession, or, what comes to the same thing, on the accession of my wife to the greater part of Davenport's money, I will hand you a cheque for a hundred thousand dollars."

"Honor bright?" exclaimed Checketts, with a blaze of cupidity.

"I swear it. But I will do more, and give you a paper so worded that you may claim that sum from me in the event of our success."

"Go on, then, Mr. Van Blarcom. State your plan. I will enter into it soul and body. Here's my hand on it."

"It is very deep and very clever, I flatter myself, Checketts; but it is too long for me to enter into the bargain. We will not do more it here. Let us retire to your own sitting room, where we can talk without fear of being disturbed, and sketch the whole thing out from beginning to end."

CHAPTER IV.

True love is like the moon—it borrows its light from Heaven to shed it over one world alone.

Lawrence Davenport was putting the finishing touches to a careful toilet. A few weeks ago he would have been assisted therein by a skilled valet, who might doubtless have arranged that necktie with more consummate art, or flicked the stray particles of dust from that broadcloth coat with greater dexterity. But latterly Lawrence had dispensed with such luxurious aid as not warranted in a man of limited means. On this particular morning he felt satisfied that he had succeeded in attiring himself with an ability worthy of a supreme occasion.

And few events in life are so important as the marriage-day. It is the first step in a new path definitely selected. Whatever motives may have influenced our decision—whether guided by a pure, unfeigned affection, or impelled by wild lust even to the brutal passion, or drawn by the cold chains of mere worldly consideration—for this once the reins of our destiny seemed placed in our hands to grasp or relinquish, as best pleases us.

Lawrence had many solemn reflections mingled with his more joyous ones, as he waited for the carriage which was to convey him to the church. But never a doubt cast a shadow over them. He felt that he had chosen the high road to happiness; that whatever misfortunes the future might hold in store, he had secured one bright treasure—one source of perennial gladness—of which he could never be deprived by the world's changes.

He deeply regretted his parent's anger. For Kate's sake, more than his own, he was affected by the threatened loss of wealth and position. He would also have preferred a brilliant wedding, surrounded by friends and well-wishers, and crowned by a warm welcome to his fair bride.

He was pained when he pictured his father—whom he had duly informed of the date and place of his marriage—sitting lonely and unforgiving in chilly grandeur, and, perhaps, cursing him in bitterness of spirit. But as he thought of these things he looked forward hopefully to a time when their hands should again meet in the grasp of friendship, and the breach should be healed.

Davenport senior, finding all argument and remonstrance entirely thrown away, had finally told his son to "take himself off as soon as he liked." And Lawrence, deeply wounded by his father's obduracy, has sarcastically replied that he "was obliged for the kind permission," and departed.

From the windows of his present modest apartments he looked out frequently to congratulate himself upon the glorious June morning that heralded in what he peculiarly referred to as the "double event." And every time he glanced up and down the thoroughfare he noticed a youth of lean, cadaverous appearance, lounging aimlessly about—now at one corner, now at another, now on the other side—whose sole object seemed to be the absorption of sunshine from the ambient air. Lawrence vaguely wondered whether anybody paid that youth a salary for keeping his hand continually in his pockets, and gazing leisurely at the universe.

Presently the anxiously-expected carriage arrived.

"Two minutes late," said Lawrence to the driver, with a frown.

The man smiled. He had driven feversh bridegrooms before, and understood all their little peculiarities.

"All right, sir; we'll easily make that up on the road, sir," he replied soothingly.

As Lawrence stepped into the vehicle, and sat before it drove away, the head of the l-le and cadaverous youth appeared for a moment at the off-side window.

"Your name Davenport?" he inquired, in a whisper.

"Y-s, what do you want?"

"Here's a letter for you. There's no answer."

The carriage rolled on, and Lawrence found a plain blue envelope in his hand. There was no address or writing of any kind upon it; so that turning it over, marvelling what on earth it contained, and where the clience it came from, was not likely to solve the mystery.

"Some practical joke, I expect. I'm glad I thought of that. Fore warned is fore-armed."

If it was a practical joke, it was one of a nature that people do not often play upon one another. He drew from that envelope notes to the value of fifteen thousand dollars.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed, joyously. "It can only come from the *padre*. The old gentleman is relenting, and has sent me this magnificent present anonymously as a delicate method of intimating the fact. Dear old dad! I knew he would come round. As soon as the ceremony is over I will send him a kind, grateful telegram, and humbly inform him that Kate and I have postponed starting on our honeymoon for some hours, in the earnest hope of receiving any commands he may deem fit to send; and that we look forward to the great happiness of fulfilling his every wish, et-cetera. Oh! I shall know how to word it."

Lawrence was so elated at the speedy prospect of a reconciliation with his father that he stuffed the notes into his breast-pocket, and immediately forgot all about them.

"What an agreeable surprise it will be for Kate!" he reflected. "I shall keep the news as a tid-bit to the very last moment. How eager she will be to know why we are driving to the telegraph office! Then I shall look severe, and tell her not to pry so curiously into her husband's private affairs. Oh, there is fun ahead, and joy, and pleasure, and peace!"

Poor Lawrence!

In the Church porch he was met by Reginald Gwynne, who had that moment arrived from the West, where his regiment was then stationed, to be his friend's "best man."

"Good luck, old fellow!" greeted Reginald, warmly. "I was determined to come, although the colonel was mighty grumpy over it."

Presently the bridal party arrived.

It was the simplest of weddings. Kate was attired in a rich, fawn-colored silk robe, *à la Princesse*, remarkable chiefly for the admirable profusion to which it displayed the graces of her magnificent figure. A few sprigs of white orange blossom were the only ornaments she wore, and which Lawrence had pulled off a shrub for her as a "last extravagance" ere they were the only ornaments she wore.

Maud and Blanche, [illegible] pale blue, looked [illegible] young lovers flushed and [illegible] ment. Mrs. [illegible] chosen, but that was [illegible] chaperon, but was [illegible] that would [illegible] have given [illegible] the [illegible] on a most [illegible] matter the question had [illegible] decided.

There were no tears. Kate's features, always sweet and pensive, only gave a few shades more thoughtful when the minister's impressive voice repeated the quaint but eloquent words—

"Send Thy blessing upon these Thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in Thy name; that as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, whereof this ring given and received is a token and pledge."

When all was finished, and Kate had written her maiden name "for the last time," everybody embraced her, and even the reverend old gentleman had performed the ceremony [illegible] resist the opportunity of [illegible] cially salute, accompanied [illegible] "God keep you, my child [illegible] in the stately marriage [illegible] most thrilling kiss of all [illegible] Lawrence pressed up [illegible] fondly murmured—

"My darling—my w[illegible]

Farewell for a spa[illegible] ence shed by the orb[illegible] bright and full above [illegible] two lives. The s[illegible] clouds descend. T[illegible] be quenched sudd[illegible] may be felt in a g[illegible]

As Lawrence w[illegible] bride into his car[illegible] dusty from a jo[illegible] haste, placed he[illegible] young husband—

"Mr. Davenport, I have [illegible] a word with you [illegible]

Lawrence stared at him haughtily.

"My name is Davenport," he replied. "What is your business with me?"

"Allow me to speak with you privately for a moment—you will not regret it," insisted the stranger.

"I do not know you, sir. Whatever you have to say you may say openly before my wife and friends, or leave it until a more fitting occasion."

"Oh! very well. I thought I might spare you a disagreeable scene; but proffered services are rarely appreciated. My instructions were to be in time to prevent this marriage, if possible. Unfortunately I received them too late. Lawrence Davenport, it is my unpleasant duty to arrest you on the charge of forgery."

"Forgery!"

The terrible word was echoed incredulously by the guests. Even the coachman leant over his box and repeated it with a gasp of utter astonishment. Lawrence alone said nothing—he was white to the lips. Like the crash of doom it flashed upon him in that moment that he had in his pocket fifteen thousand dollars worth of notes, of which he could give no intelligible account. Mechanically he drew forth the envelope that contained them.

The officer, with a dexterous movement, snatched it easily from his grasp.

"That's right," he said, naturally. "I'll bear witness to your perfect willingness to surrender all documents and papers on the spot. Is there anything else you wish to hand up, or will you wait to see the inspector?"

"Look here, you have made a mistake," interrupted Reginald, "and a very serious mistake, for which I shall take care you suffer. Produce your authority, you vagabond!"

"There you are; warrant dated this morning. Oh! it's all correct; I know my business, and I won't be interfered with, so I can tell you that."

"The charge is made by—by— Good Heavens!" exclaimed Reginald, as he examined the instrument of arrest.

"By whom?" asked Lawrence, hoarsely.

"By your father! Oh! it is monstrous—impossible."

"There must be some devilish plot to ruin me!" cried Lawrence, wildly. "I can feel the net tightening round me although I cannot see the meshes."

"Well, you are not on your defense, you know; you will have plenty of time to consider that," said the officer.

"But you—you do not believe this foul accusation against me?" said Lawrence, in a tone of anguish, turning his sad eyes upon Kate, who had tightened both her arms upon his the moment she comprehended that danger threatened him.

"Believe?" she whispered, gently. "Oh! Lawrence, how can you ask such a question? If the whole world were to rise as one man to condemn you, my faith could never, never be shaken. Let the storm blow; we will resist its fury together."

He folded her to his heart.

"My love—my God-given wife! you fortify me with courage and comfort unspeakable. I will face this vile charge firmly, and fling it into the teeth of the miscreants who have hatched it."

"Do so, my brave boy. As for me I will rest neither night nor day until your unsullied honor shines forth again like the sun at noonday. Oh! I can work in your cause, Lawrence, with a power you do not dream of. I feel it born within me. Now—my natural weakness and timidity have fled—I am more than a man in the great strength of my purpose. Trust me, Lawrence. As I live I will surely find out who has done you this fearful wrong!"

There was nothing of the tragic in Kate's utterance. She spoke with a perfect conviction almost sublime. She did not permit the sharpness of her woman's agony to appear, lest it should add another pang to the suffering of her husband. Yes, even then her heart bounded at the thought. Her husband! Nobody could take away the right he had conferred upon her. And now that he was threatened by unmerited disgrace and misery she would be worthy of the name and nobility of wife. Turning to the officer, she said, quietly:

"You desire Mr. Davenport to go with you. May I ask where?"

"To the police-station, ma'm," returned the man, respectfully. He had been observing her demeanor, and placing mental notes of admiration against the word "pluck!" "If you would like to accompany me so far, ma'am, there can be no possible objection."

"I will go, too," put in Reginald.

"As you are a friend of this gentleman, I would suggest that you go to his lawyer instead," said the officer, dryly. "It's quite out of my line to give advice, but I wish to be agreeable."

"Yes, Gwynne, the man is right; I thank him," said Lawrence. "Fetch Mr. Dinnaway, of the firm of Dinnaway and Buckett, Broadway Street. Take this carriage, and follow me to the police-station as quickly as ever you can; there's a good fellow."

"And, Mr. Gwynne," whispered Kate in his ear, as he was about to depart; "tell the lawyer to bring with him the cleverest detective that money can induce to act with us. Above all things, do not fail in this. The best, the very best man he can find."

Reginald gave her a look of intelligence, and was driven off in hot haste.

Kate just waited to direct Mrs. Burton and the trembling children to return home in the remaining carriage, and then stepped into the cab, which already contained the officer and his prisoner.

Some three hours later they were joined at the station-house by Gwynne and the eminent lawyer, Mr. Dinnaway, accompanied by the celebrated detective, Bing.

"Dear me, Davenport!" began Mr. Dinnaway, shaking Lawrence sympathetically by the hand, "shocking affair this—egregious error on somebody's part—we shall clear it all up, of course—just married too—lady your wife?—sure, I'm honored—don't be afraid, madam—all will come right."

"There is a fearful conspiracy against me somewhere," said Lawrence, when this burst had subsided. "I am charged with forging my father's name to a check for fifteen thousand dollars. On my way to the church this morning a young man I do not know placed what appeared to be a letter in my hand, and I departed instantly, saying there was no answer. On opening it I found it contained notes for that amount. I was astounded at the conclusion [illegible] of desire for [illegible] part of my father, [illegible] fended by my de[illegible] a direct opposition [illegible] to the [illegible] accepted Mr. Din[illegible] to translate a [illegible] take up this [illegible] doubt of my [illegible] continued, [illegible] his most reflec[illegible] his hand.

One of the most attentive spectators of the proceedings was Detective Bing. He sat at the reporters' table, looking, with his note-book and pencil, for all the world like a "gentleman of the press." But the only bit of reporting he indulged in was to write against the name of Richard Davenport, which stood against that of Mr. John Checkett's as "wood silly." Now if the sly secretary could have peeped over Bing's shoulder and read that insignificant memorandum he would have understood at once that the detective had formed a very unfavorable opinion of him. Long before Mr. Bellerlow had completed his soul-stirring oration Bing had decided upon the course to be adopted.

"Then we can count upon your experience in helping us to unravel this horrid mystery?" exclaimed Kate, eagerly.

"Madam, I can—can," replied Bing, with a gentle unanimity bow.

Kate threw a grateful glance upon the lavonte detective.

"What is the first thing you propose to do for us, Bing?" asked the lawyer.

"Wait," said Bing. "Hear evidence; see witnesses."

"But we shall be examined to-morrow. We must say something."

"Ask for remand. Complete answer to charge," suggested Bing, in his dry fashion. Then, turning to Lawrence, he added—"Married in spite of 'em, eh? You must tell me all about that privately, by-and-bye. I am interested in romances—used to them you see. I can generally give a guess at the plot by studying the first chapter."

CHAPTER V.

A harmless dove may have a worse friend than a wise serpent.

On the following morning the examination of Lawrence Davenport took place before a well-known Police Judge.

In preferring the charge, Mr. Brawnside, for the prosecution, said that never had he had to deal with a more painful case and one which he approached with greater reluctance. The prosecutor was a gentleman whose name was spread far and wide, at home and abroad. The prisoner was his son. He (Mr. Brawnside) was thankful that it did not lie within the compass of his duty to dilate upon the previous ungrateful, wicked, obstinate, and defiant attitude which that son had assumed towards the most indulgent of fathers in matters of the deepest moment. The sad history of those family troubles might, so far as he was concerned, be buried in the profoundest oblivion. He would only explain that the prisoner's perverse course had evidently culminated in the crime with which he now stood accused, and which had aroused the righteous indignation of the prosecutor to a degree which the learned magistrate would understand when all the facts were laid before him. Without occupying the valuable time of the court by any further comments of his own, he would at once produce evidence which he felt would only be too conclusive of the prisoner's guilt, and then ask that he might be committed for trial.

Old Mr. Davenport now stepped into the witness-box. He was very pale, but there was a determined expression about the corners of his mouth, which remained unchanged by the occasional nervous twitch of his lips. He gazed fixedly before him at the wall opposite, and never once glanced at his son. His evidence ran something in this wise:

"My name is Richard Davenport. The accused is my son. On the evening of the day before yesterday my private secretary, who was filling in some checks for me in my presence, suddenly called my attention to the fact that a blank form had disappeared. It had been abstracted from the book irregularly, and its loss would not be noticed until that particular part was reached. I invariably keep my check-book in a small safe in the library. I never remember it being left out under any circumstances. There are two keys—one I have myself, the other was in the possession of my son before he quitted my roof, and may be now, for aught I know, as he never returned it, and I forgot to ask him. The reason he had a key was because I allowed him to use the lower portion of the safe for his own papers and valuables. When my secretary informed me of the loss of the blank check I immediately sent for my bankbook. I discovered thereby that the missing check had been filled in for fifteen thousand dollars, and cashed some days previously. The check produced is the one referred to. I never drew it, or was aware of it being drawn. The signature is a clever forgery. The body of the check is in the handwriting of the accused, to the best of my belief."

Mr. John Checketts, private secretary to Mr. Davenport, confirmed his employer's evidence as regards the discovery of the distracted check.

Mr. Bains, chief ledger-clerk of the United Joint-Stock Bank, proved that the check produced had been presented through a Brussels house, and duly honored. The date and endorsements would show that the check had been in circulation for over a fortnight. Mr. Bains was acquainted with prisoner's handwriting, and was of opinion that the filling-up was in that hand. The signature of the prosecutor was very closely imitate l; but he was now able to state positively that it was a forgery.

An officer in plain clothes said that he arrested the prisoner yesterday, as the latter was leaving from the doors of St. Jude's Church, where he had just been married. (Sensation.) Upon being told the charge prisoner gave up to him an envelope, which proved to contain fifteen thousand dollars in notes.

Mr. Brawnside said that that was all the evidence he proposed to offer at present, and asked the judge to commit.

A stout gentleman, who had appeared to doze at the lawyers table now woke up, and strenuously opposed that demand. The worthy judge lent a deferential ear to the would-be stout gentleman, who was the renowned Mr. Bellerlow.

Mr. Bellerlow commenced by saying that he had only just been instructed, or he would have been able at once to scatter this monstrous lie had almost said "infamous" charge to the four winds of heaven. He wished he had said "infamous," for that epithet would have best expressed his opinion on the subject. And let him remind all those parties concerned in getting up this prosecution that they would have to keep a sharp look-out, or that gentleman-dress placed in a highly disagreeable position before that very far to which they had dragged his unfortunate client.

The senile old man who had been induced to prosecute his own son must have been actuated by those who had motives far stronger than a wanton desire to steal an honorable and respected name through the mud. On a future occasion it would be his (Mr. Bellerlow's) business to expose those motives. At present he would confine himself to asking the jury to remand the case for a week, and this enable him to produce that evidence which would cover the prosecution with confusion, and send his innocent client from that court stainless, to seek redress for his wrongs before another tribunal.

Mr. Bellerlow waxed very eloquent in the course of this address, of which we have only given an outline; and no one would have suspected that he knew no more about the matter than what he had gathered from a hasty three minutes' conversation with Lawrence's solicitor just preceding.

In the end the remand was granted; but in consequence of the magnitude of the charge bail was refused.

One of the most attentive spectators of the proceedings was Detective Bing. He sat at the reporters' table, looking, with his note-book and pencil, for all the world like a "gentleman of the press." But the only bit of reporting he indulged in was to write against the name of Richard Davenport, which stood against that of Mr. John Checkett's as "wood silly." Now if the sly secretary could have peeped over Bing's shoulder and read that insignificant memorandum he would have understood at once that the detective had formed a very unfavorable opinion of him. Long before Mr. Bellerlow had completed his soul-stirring oration Bing had decided upon the course to be adopted.

"Then we can count upon your experience in helping us to unravel this horrid mystery?" exclaimed Kate, eagerly.

"Madam, I can—can," replied Bing, with a gentle unanimity bow.

Kate threw a grateful glance upon the lavonte detective.

"What is the first thing you propose to do for us, Bing?" asked the lawyer.

"Wait," said Bing. "Hear evidence; see witnesses."

"But we shall be examined to-morrow. We must say something."

"Ask for remand. Complete answer to charge," suggested Bing, in his dry fashion. Then, turning to Lawrence, he added—"Married in spite of 'em, eh? You must tell me all about that privately, by-and-bye. I am interested in romances—used to them you see. I can generally give a guess at the plot by studying the first chapter."

CHAPTER V.

A harmless dove may have a worse friend than a wise serpent.

On the following morning the examination of Lawrence Davenport took place before a well-known Police Judge.

In preferring the charge, Mr. Brawnside, for the prosecution, said that never had he had to deal with a more painful case and one which he approached with greater reluctance. The prosecutor was a gentleman whose name was spread far and wide, at home and abroad. The prisoner was his son. He (Mr. Brawnside) was thankful that it did not lie within the compass of his duty to dilate upon the previous ungrateful, wicked, obstinate, and defiant attitude which that son had assumed towards the most indulgent of fathers in matters of the deepest moment. The sad history of those family troubles might, so far as he was concerned, be buried in the profoundest oblivion. He would only explain that the prisoner's perverse course had evidently culminated in the crime with which he now stood accused, and which had aroused the righteous indignation of the prosecutor to a degree which the learned magistrate would understand when all the facts were laid before him. Without occupying the valuable time of the court by any further comments of his own, he would at once produce evidence which he felt would only be too conclusive of the prisoner's guilt, and then ask that he might be committed for trial.

Old Mr. Davenport now stepped into the witness-box. He was very pale, but there was a determined expression about the corners of his mouth, which remained unchanged by the occasional nervous twitch of his lips. He gazed fixedly before him at the wall opposite, and never once glanced at his son. His evidence ran something in this wise:

"My name is Richard Davenport. The accused is my son. On the evening of the day before yesterday my private secretary, who was filling in some checks for me in my presence, suddenly called my attention to the fact that a blank form had disappeared. It had been abstracted from the book irregularly, and its loss would not be noticed until that particular part was reached. I invariably keep my check-book in a small safe in the library. I never remember it being left out under any circumstances. There are two keys—one I have myself, the other was in the possession of my son before he quitted my roof, and may be now, for aught I know, as he never returned it, and I forgot to ask him. The reason he had a key was because I allowed him to use the lower portion of the safe for his own papers and valuables. When my secretary informed me of the loss of the blank check I immediately sent for my bankbook. I discovered thereby that the missing check had been filled in for fifteen thousand dollars, and cashed some days previously. The check produced is the one referred to. I never drew it, or was aware of it being drawn. The signature is a clever forgery. The body of the check is in the handwriting of the accused, to the best of my belief."

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