

Shadowed for Life,

A SOLDIER'S STORY.

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CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

That evening Joss and I rode slowly home in the moonlight, but before we struck the Raven's Nest Jocelyn had arranged to run down to Sevenoaks and see his adopted sister and Gowan at their little cottage home. She was far too independent to accept pecuniary aid, but assistance in the form of work she would be glad of.

At first I felt a little doubtful about the wisdom of such a visit just at this time, when I knew that the villain Jack, and the spies Smith and Jones, were moving heaven and earth to rake together sufficient evidence against him to secure a divorce.

If the truth had been known at this time, however, Miss Smith was getting tired of the case. She had blackmailed the now unhappy Mrs. Lloyd until she could squeeze no more money out of her. It came to my knowledge afterward that Ella had even raised money on her jewels or—somebody had done so for her, in order to satisfy the extortionate demands of the happy Smith. This vile woman and private 'tec had even sent an ultimatum to her which had well nigh driven Ella out of her mind. 'You still owe me £100,' ran this extraordinary document, 'and unless that money be paid in one week's time I shall throw the whole case up or communicate with your husband, who, when he knows all that I know, may be a more punctual paymaster than you have been.'

This ultimatum was doubtless accountable for the crime I shall have presently to speak of.

'Joss,' I said, 'remember you may be shadowed by that man Jones, whose photo I have showed you.'

I never saw my friend in so violent a passion before.

He reined his horse so suddenly up that he brought him almost on his haunches. His very eyes seemed to flash fire, as he raised his hand and arm against the moonlight sky.

'Gordon!' he cried, 'let him dare! By the heavens above us, if that scoundrel rouses the lion in my heart I will tear him from his hansom, and strangle him in the street.'

'Jocelyn,' I said, 'promise me to do nothing so wild or foolish. My whole object is to save you from the disgrace of the divorce court. You have your knowledge, good expectations from your uncle, but this, remember, would damn them forever, and he would alter his will.'

'Forgive me,' said Joss. 'I will keep my temper—it is my friend's fate.'

Next morning my friend telegraphed to Lily, saying she might expect him that afternoon. Then he started.

Was he shadowed? He soon saw that he was. He drove up one street and down another in his hansom, stopping here and there, to make sure. Then in a terrace near Hyde Park all his pent up anger seemed to find vent. He hastily stopped his hansom. The shadow was pulled up at the same time. Joss ran back towards it. It was just one by the clock, and though this street was a quiet one, it was well filled with workmen and shopkeepers hurrying home to dinner.

Arrived at the shadow hansom, he lifted up his hand and voice at the same time, and in two or three seconds he had a thoroughly representative English crowd around him. He explained who he was, told them the scoundrel crouching in that hansom was a private 'tec, a spy, and a shadow, who had ruined his happiness, and all but broken up his family.

'Cries of "Shame! Shame!" "Duck the 'tec in the Serpentine!" "Capsize the hansom!"

'Englishmen,' cried Lloyd, 'I too am an Englishman, and I'm going to thrash that scoundrel in good old British fashion.'

'A ring! A ring!'

Policemen are never at hand when wanted, and none came now.

The man Jones was half dragged out by the crowd, and being forced to fight, made a miserable show of resistance.

But Lloyd showered his blows like wintry rain, and in less than a minute he had the 'tec's head in chancery.

Lloyd was at heart a humane man, but I feared he showed but little mercy now.

Jones was never a beauty, but when our simple soldier dropped him at last on the ground, I question if his own mother would have known him. He lay there doubled up and groaning with no more strength or go in him than there is in a bath towel, and the verdict of that English crowd was—'Serve him right; down with that private 'tec and spies.'

Major Lloyd's hansom had driven for him, and he now leapt nimbly into it, and was driven away, waving his cap to the cheering mob.

About seventy yards from the corner, just at this minute, one policeman met another.

'I think,' said one, 'there's a bit of a squabble in R—Terrace.'

'Ah, well,' replied the other, 'we'll just go round and see.'

So they did, but by the time they reached the scene of the recent conflict Lloyd was far enough away, so they boldly raised the prostrate Jones and forthwith ran him in for breach of the peace.

My friend heard no more of it, but he was never shadowed by Jones again.

One word about the crime I mentioned.

Three days after my friend's return from Kent he called upon me very early in the morning.

He seemed much excited, and I could see at once that something had happened. Without saying a word he handed me a paid-up cheque for £150.

'This is a forgery,' I exclaimed, as soon as I looked at it.

'Yes,' he gasped, 'but, Merciful Father, Gordon, the handwriting, though it is meant to look like mine it is that of my wife.'

He threw himself into a chair, and clasping his hands before his face and burst into tears.

ing his hands before his face and burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXI.—'I HAVE SOWN THE TENDRIL, AND NOW I REAP THE WHIRLWIND.'

The shock received by Major Lloyd from the discovery of his wife's guilt was so great that for a time I positively feared for his reason.

In my own mind, however, I was convinced that she had been led on by an accomplice, and in this conjecture, as subsequent events proved, I was not mistaken.

I tried to soothe and comfort poor Jocelyn all I could. I even tried to make him believe that Mrs. Lloyd had written his name to the cheque, thinking that she was doing but little harm.

He never answered a word, he only sat there, looking the very image of blank and black despair.

'Come,' I said at last, 'you shall not go home. I can see you have not been in bed all night long. You shall rest in my guest's room till to-morrow, then we will dine together and forget our sorrows.'

He looked at me vacantly, then his eye wandered round the room. It was evident he did not know where he was. But he suffered himself to be led away and helped to bed. Then I composed a draught for him, and in ten minutes' time he was slumbering peacefully as a little child.

I now gave orders that the house should be kept quiet, and that no one should go near to the guest's room door. Then I mounted my mare, and hardly knowing which way I was riding, so deeply plunged in thought, I was in half an hour's time I found myself not far from the Raven's Nest.

Should I enter? Should I beat the lioness in her den? Why not? I felt very angry indeed with Mrs. Lloyd, whose unnatural conduct was slowly doing to death the dearest friend I had on earth.

The blow that he had now received was grievous to grief. For he had returned from town two days before, only to find his poor old favorite Cynthia dying. This to many may seem but a small matter, but many, on the other hand, who for long years have had as a constant companion man's best of friends, a faithful dog, will know how to appreciate Jocelyn's feelings when he found his pet was soon to leave him for ever.

The most painful thing about the case was this. Poor Cynthia had always had a warm bed in the snugest corner of the kitchen, but when she perceived she was dying, her mistress ordered two of the servants to carry her out and put her on the grass.

'We cannot have a dog die in the house,' she said.

So when Jocelyn arrived he found his honest old dog on the cold ground shivering beneath a tree.

O, then his anger knew no bounds. He found his wife out and he spoke the harshest words to her he had ever uttered in his life. Nor did she dare retaliate. Then Cynthia was carried tenderly in once more and placed on her bed and covered with a warm rug.

And her master whose voice she still knew, for she wagged her tail and licked his hand with her hot and feverish tongue, let her want for nothing now. Nor did he leave her for one moment until she sighed out her last sigh with her head upon his knee.

Byron said his heart lay 'buried in a dog's grave,' and more than he have thought the same.

I found my way into the drawing-room at the Raven's Nest, and presently Mrs. Lloyd came gliding in.

I determined I should not spare her.

'You better lock the door,' I said, 'and make sure no servants are near. I have that to say, you might not care for anyone else to listen to.'

She did what she was told in a kind of a mechanical way.

Then she advanced with gleaming and defiant eyes towards me.

'What mean you?' she said.

Her attitude was almost threatening. I determined, therefore, to fire my biggest shot first.

'I mean, Ella Lloyd,' I said firmly but slowly, as if weighing every word. 'I mean that you are a thief and a forger. Ay, cringe, and I tell you that you are all but your husband's murderer. The deed you have done has almost unseated his reason.'

'He is a drunkard!'

'You lie woman, and you know it.'

She recovered her composure now, and quickly too.

'How can you tell me that I lie,' she exclaimed, 'when for years past his life has been one of deception and lies, and you have been his accomplice. Do not deceive yourself, I know all. It was you who put that lying paragraph in the paper concerning the alleged death of his old flame Lily Andrew or Foster that he, my husband, might keep up his connection with her, unknown to me.'

'Lily Andrews is as pure as the saints in heaven,' I said, as calmly as I could. 'No judge in England would believe it after hearing the evidence that can be warped around me.'

'By your pretty friends, Miss Smith and Mr. Jones, private 'tocs; who have blackmailed and ruined scores of families in England, who are lower than the vampires who live by sucking human blood at midnight.'

'No matter, sir, my evidence is there, and I will have a divorce if there be law in the land.'

But I had one more big shot to fire, and I fired it. 'Law, Mrs. Lloyd; pardon me, madam, but thieves and convicted forgers place themselves beyond the pale of the law. You are in my power. I hold the forged cheque, and in less than three days you may find yours in a felon's dock.'

She trembled visibly now.

'You had an accomplice,' I said, 'nay, deny it not! The same man, Jack, whose

first interview with you I witnessed in this very room—'

'You witnessed that interview?'

'I did. I was behind that curtain—a position I was heartily ashamed of, but I was working in my friend's interest.'

'And Major Lloyd knows this?'

'I have never yet mentioned Jack to him. I never even made him acquainted with my discovery of that tell-tale telegram. I wish now that I had.'

She advanced her face almost close to mine; it was pale and ghastly and foam flecks stood on her blue lips, while her clenched fists were held straight down by her side.

'You devil!' she hissed. 'Jack shall kill you!'

I drew back a little, and quietly lit a cigar. When I had got it to go I turned once more towards her.

'Better come down off your high horse, madam,' I said, coolly. 'I don't scare worth sixpence. I should like to meet your Jack, I should risk the killing; but, believe me, it would be bad for Jack, for he was your accomplice; it was he that led you to commit this crime. He and your private 'tocs. Now confess, it will be better for you.'

She was mollified. She sank into a chair, and for a few minutes rocked herself to and fro.

'Come,' I said presently, 'will you give me this man, Jack's name in full and his address?'

She sprang to her feet again.

'Not to save you from—' she cried. 'I do not mention the region she named, but it is a much hotter country than Greenland.'

'Have it your own way,' I said. 'You have all but killed your husband; and now I have a duty to perform.'

I turned as it to walk away.

She followed me, trembling violently now.

'Where would you go?' she asked in a hoarse whisper.

'I am going to fetch a policeman. You will have time to dress.'

'You would not dare?'

'I shall not only dare, but do.'

I never have seen a woman collapse so quickly as Mrs. Lloyd now did.

She sunk on her knees on the carpet, the tears streaming over her face.

'Mercy, mercy, mercy!' she cried. 'Ask me not for Jack's address and I will tell you all. He is innocent. I alone am guilty. I knew not what I was doing. I have fallen into the hands of fiends. I have been led on by jealousy, which I have nursed and fostered till it has made me mad, mad, mad. I hardly know what I am saying, but I have thrown away a husband's love and respect for nothing. I have sown the tempest and now I reap the whirlwind.'

She rose quickly now and throwing herself on the sofa went off into as fine a paroxysm of hysterics as any medical man could wish to witness.

I stood quietly looking on for a time. Can this, I thought, be true repentance, and is there a chance of her now proving a good and faithful wife to my friend?

Alas! we medical men are sad unbelievers and I doubted it all.

But I unlocked the door and rang the bell.

'Call Mrs. Lloyd's maid,' I said to John. 'The lady is somewhat hysterical.'

'As soon,' I said to the girl when she entered the room, 'as your mistress is sensible and can speak, tell her I have not left the house, but will see her later on.'

I lit a fresh cigar and took a walk in the garden.

'What turn will events now take?' I remarked to myself half aloud, as I pulled a white rosebud and stuck it in my button-hole.

CHAPTER XXII.—A VERY EVENTFUL DAY.

'If you please, sir, missus is better now, and would like to see you.'

I followed the girl slowly towards the house.

Mrs. Lloyd I found still lying on the sofa, but cold-looking now, weak, and very subdued. I ordered a stimulant, to which I added a few drops out of a phial I carried in a tiny pocket emergency case. Then I told the girl she might leave us.

In matters of this kind it is best to make sure of everything, so after waiting a few minutes I reopened the door, and walked a little way along the passage to make certain she really had gone. They say walls have ears, but not half so many ears as a drawing-room door.

'Major Lloyd is ill?'

'Your husband is very ill, madam.'

'Should I—should I go to him?'

'I think not. I have given him a composing draught. He is now asleep, he may be better when he gets up. But he has received a terrible shock, and I know not what after effects it may have. You must know, Mrs. Lloyd, that he may appear perfectly well even to-morrow, but that mischievous brain symptoms might come on day or weeks afterwards.'

'The shock,' I added, 'was so entirely unexpected. Granting even that your jealousy, which, however, has no real cause, made you somewhat cross with him, nay, even cruel to him, he never could have believed you dishonest.'

'Don't, don't,' she pleaded.

'There is no reason on earth, Mrs. Lloyd

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why I should spare your feelings in this matter. I am a medical man, and given to going straight to the diagnostic points of a case. You forged that cheque, which may or may not subject you to imprisonment, or even to penal servitude.'

She shuddered a little but made no reply.

'Well, madam,' I said, rising from the chair I had placed for myself by the sofa pillow, 'well, there is no reason on earth why this interview should be prolonged. Of one thing I am certain, you had an accomplice. It is he whom I should like to run to earth.'

She half rose from the sofa now, and her gaze was fixed on my face, almost calmly, certainly unflinchingly.

'Dr. Gordon,' she said, 'you are my husband's friend if not mine—'

'Excuse me,' I interrupted, 'as Heaven is my judge, I have over deplored the sad differences between you, and would fain even yet be friendly to both.'

'You give me hope. Well, for my husband's sake let this grief and danger pass. You have power over him. You can order it so.'

On one condition, namely, that you give me the address of the man Jack.'

'Stay, stay,' she cried, 'and listen but to one sentence more. In olden times I have been told forgery was a capital offence. Then if it were so now, and there stood before me the scaffold, black and high that I should have to mount if I divulged not Jack's name, I'd walk to death and die with pleasure knowing that Jack was safe.'

'You must love him very much?'

'Hitherto,' she replied, 'I have let you rest in the presumption that Jack is really a man. How know you it is not a woman?'

'I have seen him.'

'And you judged by dress and probably by disguise?'

'Come, come, Mrs. Lloyd, you are but fooling now. You are taking refuge in subterfuge, which is unworthy of so clever a woman.'

'I shall say no more. Let fate do its work.'

'And I shall say no more—at present—except good morning.'

In a few minutes' time I was riding swiftly back to the Jungle. I suppose my mare's pace somehow kept time with my thoughts, for she appeared to fly over the ground.

Jocelyn was still asleep, and I did not disturb him. Nor did I go near the room again until within an hour of dinner-time.

I was telling his pulse, when he awoke and looked up with a smile.

He was evidently better and calmer.

Still I should consider him my patient, and had already made up my mind as to his mental treatment. Briefly stated, this should consist in an endeavour to minimise the actual weight of Mrs. Lloyd's guilt; in doing all I could to keep my friend's mind as pleasantly occupied as possible, and in keeping up and supporting the strain that grief never fails to bring to bear on a sensitive system like his.

'Ah! awake are you?' I said cheerfully.

'Well, you had a capital rest, and now you shall get up and dress; then by and bye we'll have dinner.'

He pressed his hand for a moment to his brow, as if trying to remember something. Then the smile faded from his face.

'Ah! that awful cheque!' he cried.

'You are not to think of that till after dinner. Meanwhile, I may tell you that I have been to the Nest, and have seen Mrs. Lloyd.'

'Yes, yes. Say on.'

'Well, all I'll say now is that she is not so great a sinner as we imagined.'

'Thank you. Oh, thank you, Gordon, thank you, and I thank God as well.'

'Well now, get up. I shall expect you down in half an hour.'

Several times during dinner Jocelyn would fain have led up to the subject next his heart, but I would not be drawn.

When we had retired to my wigwam, however, to enjoy our cigars and coffee, I launched out, and he listened like a delighted schoolboy to all I had to say.

Several times, indeed, he exclaimed, 'Poor Ella! Poor Ella!'

I said nothing, of course, about Jack, but I traced the history of Ella's jealousy,

and how it had led her into the hands and power of those harpies in human form, the private 'tocs. For they had robbed and blackmailed her, and finally almost driven her distraught, till in an evil moment, to save exposure, and reasoning with herself that her husband's money was also hers, she drew—I did not say forged—that unhappy cheque.

'And now,' I said, 'I have made it plain to her concerning not only the folly she has been guilty of, but even the danger she has run herself into. She is deeply penitent, Joss, and I believe that as she is wiser, so she will be a better woman from this date.'

'May God bless you,' cried my friend, holding out his hand. 'You have made me happy, happier at least, and I do believe you have saved my reason.'

'Don't you think, Gordon,' he added, 'that although obscured by jealousy, she has loved me all the time, and that she loves me still?'

O, reader, had you seen how eagerly, how hungrily I might say, he awaited my reply, you would forgive me for the lie I had to tell. May the recording angel be as lenient as you. But I hold that anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing well—even to telling a lie.

'There is no doubt my dear fellow,' I replied, 'that jealousy has obscured her love all along. Jocelyn, you ask me if she loves you still; had you seen her kneeling by the sofa and weeping. O, such tears; you would not have put the question to me now.'

The tears were in his own eyes at this moment, and he was glad to see them.

'Poor Ella!' he said once again; 'and perhaps I myself have been much to blame. True I could not behave otherwise than I did towards my adopted sister Lily, and the secrecy we maintained was maintained out of kindness to Ella. But there are many evil-minded people who would call it the secrecy of sin.'

'Well,' he continued, 'I will go to her.'

'Not to-night, Joss. You do not leave the Jungle to-night. But, happy thought, Joss, write a letter—a long, kind, forgiving letter. I'll send it with all the pleasure in the world.'

'Yes,' he cried, 'it is a thrice happy thought, and I can write many things that I might forget to say. What a long, long head you have, Gord.'

Next day was a very eventful one, and a memorable one as well. Jocelyn and I were lingering over a somewhat late breakfast when a visitor was announced.

The visitor came not to see me, but my friend.

As soon as he had read the card—'Why,' cried Jocelyn, 'it is old Mr. Maynard himself. I trust nothing has happened. But come with me, Gord. I have no secrets from you.'

I got up from the table, and with my friend entered my study, into which Mr. Maynard had been shown.

He shook hands with Joss, and bowed to me.

'I was going to the Raven's Nest,' he said, 'but was told the bird had flown. I have found the bird here, however.'

'But,' he added, 'a truce to joking. It is no time for it.'

'Pray be seated, Mr. Maynard,' said Jocelyn.

The solicitor and army agent sat down, and we took chairs beside him, waiting expectantly.

'I have,' continued Mr. M., 'an unpleasant duty to perform. I am the bearer of bad bad tidings. Your uncle—I believe you have but one?'

'Your uncle is—dead.'

My friend showed no great evidence of grief, considering the fact that he had seen little of the old man in life is not to be wondered at.

'I have also more pleasing tidings for you. Your uncle has made you his sole heir. The large estates of Knockburn in Scotland, with a rental of £5,000 a year, are therefore yours to have and to hold, or to dispose of at your pleasure.'

The color came and went in my friend's face with joy.

'Let me congratulate you, Major Lloyd, and wish you long life and health.'

He shook hands as he spoke, and I myself made haste to follow his example.

'You are, therefore, not only an English squire but a Scottish chief. Come my friend, when you visit your estates you'll have to don the kilt and tartan, and I've no doubt your tenantry will light a fire on Ben-Balloch that will be seen in every parish within a radius of thirty miles.'

I must say there was no one more happy to hear the tidings Maynard brought than I was. It was so opportune. It would, I trusted, help materially to counteract the effects of the shock he had received.

'You can't go away today,' said Jocelyn. 'You must stop and we shall luncheon with you, Gord, then drive over to the Nest to dine and sleep.'

So it was agreed.