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A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

From Happy Hours.

CHAPTER II.

But the very noticeable ornament, which would have been distinguishable even in a dim light, was not discoverable by the most careful search.

Roger's father sank into a chair quite overcome.

"Now, Roger, what is the meaning of this?" asked he, severely.

"I cannot imagine what has become of it, father. I am only certain that no one came in here to take it," said Roger.

"Then what am I to think?" repeated his father, in a more solemn tone than before.

But even yet Roger did not grasp the terrible fact that his father suspected him. The boy was bewildered, but he did not dream that his honesty could be questioned.

"I tell you what, Roger," said his father, in an awful tone, "you must give me back that jewel, or I can no longer regard you as a son of mine."

"Give back the jewel! Father, you surely do not dare to think that I have stolen it?" exclaimed the boy, beside himself with indignation, his eyes ablaze, his breath coming fast.

"Yes, that is what I do think, Roger," replied his father severely. "You are always getting into debt, and the temptation was too great for you."

For one moment the lad faced his father, then dashed from the room like one frantic.

Thirteen years had passed since the above painful scene between Mr. Selford and his only son—sad years at Selford Court, for Roger had fled from his home, and whether he was dead or living no one knew.

"What could it be, Netta, which made him go away?" May Lynne, the vicar's daughter, would often ask of Roger's sister, now grown up, when the two were alone. But to this inquiry, Netta could give no answer.

May was quite a beauty, and an immense favorite with Roger's father, and years ago, from the time when she was five years old and Roger, a big boy of nine, had kissed her under the mistletoe, he had called her "his little wife." But a late the years had gone on, dying out and coming in, but no Roger had reappeared to renew that childish fond entreaty, yet beautiful May had not forgotten her old playmate.

To-night, the anniversary of Roger's flight, she had come up to the Court, as she often did, to cheer Mr. Selford, who, years before that terrible evening when the Indian jewel had disappeared, had been left a widower.

As May hurriedly crossed the hall, her foot slipped on the marble and she would have fallen had not the new butler, Crewe, chanced to be passing and respectfully put out his arm to save her.

"I trust you are not hurt, miss," said the man, with much concern.
 "Oh, no, thank you, Crewe," replied the young lady, blushing, she knew not why. Then she added, confusedly, "I hope you have not taken in the squire's tea, as I wish to have that pleasure this evening."
 "No, miss. I went to the study

with letters. The squire seems quite bowed down to-night, miss."

"Is he not well?"

"He thinks of his son, miss. The squire is suffering from grief, I fear."

"How do you know, Crewe? You were not here when young Mr. Selford went away, for you have not been six months in the family."

"That's true, miss. But do you suppose such a thing as Mr. Roger's disappearance could occur and not be talked of far and wide? I had heard all about the squire's disagreement with his son, and of his son's flight, long before I came here."

"Ah, I understand. Yes, everybody must have heard the sad story," remarked Miss Lynne, with concern. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, she asked: "You never heard the reason of Mr. Roger's flight from home, did you, Crewe?"

"I guessed it, miss."

"Oh, tell me—tell me what it was!" cried she, eagerly.

"Well, miss, as I believe, Mr. Selford accused his son of stealing a very precious ornament, worth thousands of pounds, and his son was so indignant that he rushed away from home and went abroad."

"Heavens! Is that the cause? But Roger Selford never took that jewel! I need no proof to assure me of that," exclaimed the girl, her cheeks aglow.

"You are right, miss, and it would give him new life to know that you still believed in him."

"Oh! you must know him!" cried May, bursting into tears. "It is like news from the dead to have seen some one who has known him. But the dreadful accusation must be disproved. Has the jewel never been found?"

"Never; and, undoubtedly, the loss was strangely mysterious. It was taken out of the case to show Mr. Roger, and left in his care for a few moments while Mr. Selford spoke to some one in the hall. When he returned, the ornament had vanished, though Mr. Roger had never moved from the rug, and the jewel lay on the table, a cloth having been hastily thrown over it. The cloth and every possible place, was thoroughly searched, but the jewel was hopelessly gone!"

"I never heard so strange a story!" said May. "Still, nothing would make me believe that Mr. Roger Selford could be guilty of dishonorable thing."

"I am a good deal consoled for all I have undergone to hear you say that. Oh, May, look at me! Cannot you recognize in this disguise your old playmate? Won't you be silent for his sake?"

"May, you have been crying! What is the matter, my dear?" said the squire, as she entered his study a little while afterwards.

"It is about Roger!" faltered the girl. "It is thirteen years ago to-night that he went away. Oh, squire, perhaps there is something unexplained, so do not refuse to tell me all!"

"Ah, no, May. But to you, whom I always thought would be my daughter, I will speak the truth. You shall hear all." And, bending forward, he whispered, in cautious tones, the tale she had so lately heard from the disguised Roger himself.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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