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OUT OF THE SHADOWS.

Moreton Grant, his face set in lines of grim determination, stood regarding a pretty, poorly clad girl, who sat upon a settee clasping a child in her arms.

The girl's face was pale and she was labouring under the stress of deep emotion as the man spoke.

"I believe I was always a just and reasonable father to you, and you had everything a girl could wish for," he said. "I tried to persuade you not to marry a penniless engineer, but you persisted in your madness. And now, because you realise you have made a mistake, you have come home to me!"

"Father, you know that is not true," returned Irene Lorne. "I love Jack with all my heart, and all that we have endured has only served to strengthen the bonds between us. It is not Jack's fault that his health has broken down after these years of war strain, and that he has lost his position in the firm. Then baby came, and things have gone from bad to worse."

Sobs rose in her throat and threatened to choke her, but she struggled on bravely.

"For baby's sake, I have smothered my pride, and come to ask you if you will do something to get Jack into a berth," she told him. "He is quite fit again now, but I cannot answer for him if he is out of employment much longer."

"Well, you have my answer; I refuse to do anything to help this worthless husband of yours!" declared the father grimly.

"You refuse, even though you could give Jack a position in your own business to-morrow!" cried the girl bitterly. "And you consider that just—because I have dared to marry the man I love. And because of your pride, you will allow your own child and grandchild to starve rather than give way."

She rose from the settee and moved slowly towards the door. At the door she paused, and, as she did so, Moreton Grant called her back.

"One moment, Irene," he said sharply, in the same hard tones. "I have one suggestion to make to you before you go. I cannot forget you are my daughter, although you have deceived and defied me. If you will leave this man who has ruined your life and never see him again, you and your child may come home to me, and, surrounded by every luxury, you will soon forget the greatest mistake of your life."

"Leave Jack—leave my husband!" stammered Irene incredulously.

"That is exactly what I mean!" returned Moreton Grant. "Upon those terms only will I consent to take you back as my daughter."

"It is a cowardly proposition!" exclaimed the girl hotly. "Life spent apart from my husband would not be worth living, and I would suffer poverty in all its sordidness than part from the man I love!"

Her outburst left Moreton Grant absolutely unmoved. Clasping his hands behind his back, he stood before the mantelpiece and watched the girl closely. He saw her move again to the door and he made no attempt to prevent her from passing out.

Not until the door had closed behind her did he give the slightest sign that the interview had had any effect upon him, and then he sank into an armchair and a deep sigh escaped him.

"It's hard to hold out against her pleadings!" he muttered brokenly. "But I am her father, and she should not have defied me!"

Unaware that her father had been impressed at all by her sad plight, Irene Lorne hurried to the two shabby little rooms where she lived.

An hour later, Jack Lorne returned from an all-day search for work. It needed but one glance at his white, wan face to tell Irene how the search had resulted, and she refrained from questioning him.

"Cheer up, dear old man," murmured the girl bravely. "Our luck is bound to turn soon."

"Everything seems so hopeless, little girl," answered the man in a tone of despair. "It doesn't matter about me, it's the thought of you and baby; that's what makes it so hard. Sometimes the remem-

brance of what I have brought you to nearly drives me to desperation!"

The girl slipped her arms around his neck and pressed her face against his.

"Hush, dear; you mustn't talk like that. If I had the choice again, I would do exactly as I did before," she murmured. "And while we are together nothing is too hard to bear."

"God bless you little girl, you are the truest little wife a man ever had," he answered brokenly.

There was a moment's pause, and then the girl spoke again.

"Jack, dear, I do hope you won't be angry with me," she began. "But I went to see my father to-day."

"I would not have gone, only I thought it was for the best," went on Irene Lorne quickly. "I thought he might use his influence to obtain a situation for you; but he refused. Not only that, but he so far forgot himself as to make a suggestion that was both cowardly and insulting."

Jack's grip tightened on her arm.

"Go on," he said grimly.

"He—he said that he would look after baby and me for good—if I would promise to leave you and never see you again!"

The man's jaw set, and he stared away over her shoulder.

"And what did you say to that, Irene?" he asked in a voice that sounded strangely unlike his own.

"What would you expect me to say, dear?" cried the girl in surprise. "Why, I told him that under no circumstances whatever would I part from the man who meant more than life to me!"

II.

The following morning, when Irene Lorne awoke, her husband had already left the house. This was not an unusual occurrence, for he commenced his daily search for work as soon as it was daylight. He had done so ever since the day that had followed his discharge from his previous berth.

Irene dressed herself and passed into the sitting-room. A sheet of notepaper on the table caught her eye, and she crossed to it. A puzzled expression appeared on her face as she recognised the handwriting of her husband.

"My Dear Wife,—I am going away to-day and I shall not return. I am doing this because I think it will be for the best for you and baby. Ever since the day you linked your life with mine, I have brought sorrow into your young life, and now I want you to find some of the happiness."

"Go to your father and tell him that I have gone out of your life for ever; if his promise still holds good, he can now take you back, because I shall never see you again."

"I know that you will miss me, dearest wife, for you have shown me how great your love is; but remember that you have our baby to consider, and your father's proposal means life and happiness to her."

"May Heaven bless you, little woman; I shall pray for you always."

"Your devoted husband, Jack."

As in a dream Irene Lorne allowed the message to drop to the ground, then, passing into the other room, she sank to her knees beside the tiny cot. Lifting the baby from it, she crushed the mite to her.

"Oh, my baby!" she sobbed. "Why wasn't he content to wait a little longer! Everything would have come right in time. Now—now—Oh baby, my heart is breaking!"

III.

A year had passed, and in the garden of a large house in the western suburbs of London a man crouched among the bushes.

The man was Jack Lorne, but no one would have recognised him had he been seen. A beard covered the lower part of his face, and the upper part showed traces of the privations of hunger. His clothes, old and shabby, hung loosely over his emaciated figure.

The air was heavy and oppressive, and as he stood there a low rumble in the distance was just audible, the herald of an approaching storm.

Jack Lorne smiled grimly. It was the first time he had wavered from the straight path, but sheer desperation had driven

him to the house that night. He had not tasted food for more than twenty-four hours, and it was to obtain some that he was contemplating breaking into this quiet suburban house, standing alone in its grounds.

He did not intend to touch any money—only food; and for that he was risking his liberty.

Again the thunder roared in the heavens and this time the peal was louder than the last.

"Providence is playing into my hands," murmured Jack Lorne. "My task will be easy, for in the noise of the storm nobody will hear me."

He tied a mask across the upper part of his face, emerged from his hiding-place and made a careful survey of the rooms at the back of the house. The French windows of the library offered the best chance.

He approached them, and with a knife worked upon the catches that held the window. An experienced burglar would probably have succeeded in lifting them within a few minutes, but twenty minutes elapsed before the way was open to Jack Lorne.

Cautiously he parted the heavy curtains that hung before the windows, and stepped into the room.

Standing in the doorway was a woman, holding a revolver in her right hand.

A cry of dismay broke from the lips of Jack Lorne, and he started back.

But it was not her presence there nor the fact that she held the revolver, that caused him to cry out.

It was because Jack Lorne had recognised the woman—as his wife!

He had broken into the house of her father—the house to which, for the sake of the baby, she had gone when her husband had left her.

Jack straightened himself as the woman regarded him intently. At all costs he must prevent her from guessing his identity.

"Steady, ma'am!" he mumbled in a husky voice, which it would have been impossible to recognise as his. "Don't shoot. It's a fair cop. I never argue with guns!"

"You came to steal?" inquired the girl sternly. "From your methods I should think you were a particularly bad burglar, for even amidst the noise of the thunder I heard you at the window."

"I'm not an expert yet," returned Lorne gloomily; "and from what I can see of it now, I don't look like having much chance for practice for some time."

"Why don't you try and get honest work?" asked the girl, after a pause.

Jack Lorne could not repress a bitter smile. She ought to know as well as he did how hard it was to find work.

"I've tried hard enough, Heaven knows, but I can't get any," he answered truthfully. "There's many an honest man who has searched for work for six months or more without finding it!"

As he spoke a vivid flash of blue light tore its way across the black sky outside, and instinctively the woman drew back and closed her eyes. The stormlight was followed by a deafening clap of thunder which seemed to shake the building to its foundations.

A moment later a dull reverberating roar as of falling masonry sounded from another part of the building—then all was silence.

An expression of terror came to Irene Lorne's white face, and she swayed slightly.

Jack Lorne sprang forward, and while he supported the tottering figure, a girl clad in her nightdress burst into the room.

"The lightning!" screamed the girl.

"The top floor, ma'am!"

Irene Lorne composed herself with an effort.

"Baby—!" she gasped. "Where—where is she?"

"I was on my way to her room when—the lightning came and—the—"

Irene did not wait for the girl to finish, but darted out of the room. The man caught her up before she reached the stairs, and, thrusting her aside, commenced to ascend.

He reached the top of the flight and hurried along the long corridor, and so disappeared from the sight of Irene and the nurse.

Jack Lorne came to another flight of stairs and looked up.

The way was impassable. That part of the building was entirely wrecked by the lightning, and huge mounds of plaster and timber entirely cut off the way to the upper story.

A faint cry in the distance came to the man. It was the cry of a child.

Unsteadily he made his way back to the central hall.

"There's no chance of getting her that way!" he cried. "I must try the outside."

And, dashing through the open door, he made his way through the grounds to that part of the building which had been demolished by the lightning.

At the top part of the building on the third floor, he could see the damage done.

Three rooms had been added to the building, and they were the rooms which had been set aside for the child. Two of these had entirely disappeared, while the third remained practically untouched. It was likely to collapse at any moment.

Jack Lorne stared about him quickly; then he noticed an old tree growing close to the house. Without a moment's hesitation he ran towards it, and a second later he was lost to view among the branches.

Opposite the remaining room of the three he paused, then, with an effort, he commenced to swing backwards and forwards on the stout branch. Nearer and nearer he swung, until at last he released his hold and swung from the tree towards the window.

With a crash he landed full at the pane and a few minutes later, bleeding and torn by the glass, he picked himself up. He was inside the bedroom, and a child—his child—was sitting up in its cot looking around it in fear and alarm.

The man darted across the room, and, picking up the baby, crushed her to him.

Then, realising that any moment that part of the building might give way, he wrapped up the child in a blanket and darted to the window again.

Down below he saw a small crowd of people, but even as he appeared at the window a cry went up, and barely a minute later one of the manservants was clambering up the stout oak tree towards the window.

From branch to branch scrambled the young man until he was on a level with Then, taking from his shoulders a length of rope, he grasped one end of it in his left hand.

"Catch!" he called to the waiting man, the window at which Jack Lorne stood. Lorne set the child down and waited. The man flung the rope and Jack Lorne caught it.

"Right! Let go!" he turned, and at once vanished from the window.

Tying the rope securely around the child, he lowered the precious baby down the front of the house.

Below a dozen hands were waiting to receive it, and the moment that he was quite sure that it was safe a profound sigh of relief escaped the unhappy father's lips.

Tied the rope around a large wardrobe Turning back to the room again, he standing in one corner. He crossed to the window again and as he did so he began to realise that his strength was fast failing him.

His senses were reeling, and the room seemed to be swimming around him. He was weak through want of food, and his efforts had told upon him in his feeble state.

Clutching at the rope, he lowered himself over the sill, and then, as a mist swept before his eyes, he lost his balance, and with a cry he pitched forward and fell—down—down—

When Jack Lorne opened his eyes once more his gaze fell upon the face which during the past year had ever been present in his dreams. It was the face of his beloved little wife.

For some time he laid there, and it was not until a soft kiss was imprinted on his cheek that he realised that it was indeed Irene herself, and not a dream woman who was bending over him.

"Jack dear, how glad I am that you are better at last!" she murmured. "The time has gone so slowly, and has been so full of dreadful fears. It seemed at times that you were never coming back to me out of the shadows."

"How long have I been here, dearest?" asked the man, gripping her hand which rested upon the coverlet.

"Nearly a fortnight, dear," answered the girl.

"And where am I?" went on Jack, gazing around the unfamiliar room.

"You are in the house of some friend of my father's," was the reply.

A low moan escaped the man's lips. "I didn't mean to come back; but I will go as soon as I get well enough. I owe it to your father."

Irene Lorne smiled happily.

"Dear old Jack," she whispered softly. "I have got all sorts of good news for you. Dad will never be satisfied unless you promise never to leave us again. After you went away, dear, baby and I went to dad and from that very moment he seemed to change. I think it was baby that changed him. We advertised for you, but without success, until in the end we almost gave up hope of ever finding you again. Then came that wonderful night, when you came back—sent by Providence that you might save your own baby."

The man did not answer, for his heart was too full for words. His arm passed about his wife's shoulders, and he fell, with his face pressed against his, he fell asleep—to dream of the happiness which had come to him at last.

The end.