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HONOUR.

Colonel Meredith Marlowe, white-haired, but clean-limbed and upright despite his sixty-eight years, surveyed his visitor with an approving eye. Conway Forbes, a young man of 29, was a strikingly handsome specimen of English manhood, and one who might be relied upon at all times to carry out his obligations fearlessly and without favour.

The old soldier was able to guess pretty well what the young man had come to talk about, but he did nothing to help him with the subject.

Indeed, it rather amused him to see Forbes struggling to find an opening.

"I have chosen this opportunity of coming to see you because your daughter Dorothy is at present staying away from home with some friends," began the young man after a while, and finding his words obviously with an effort. "It is about her that I wish to speak to you, sir."

"Fire away then, Forbes," said the colonel encouragingly.

"Well, sir," went on Conway, moistening his lips, "I love Dorothy very dearly, and, although I have not spoken to her about such matters, I have been bold enough to hope that she cares for me a little in return. I have come to you, sir, to seek your permission to ask your daughter to become my wife."

The old man sighed. "I will not pretend that your request has come as a surprise to me, Forbes," he replied, with some sign of emotion, "and of all the men I have met I do not think there is anyone whom I would sooner have as my son-in-law. At the same time my child's happiness is my dearest care, and you will understand that I must be quite satisfied concerning yourself before I entrust her to your charge."

"I understand that," replied the young man promptly, "and that is why I want to speak frankly. As regards my financial position, I do not think you will complain of that. I have a business of my own which brings me in a certain income of twelve hundred a year, and I think I shall be able to promise that Dorothy need want for nothing in the way of personal comforts."

"That is satisfactory enough," agreed the colonel readily. "I am convinced, too, that you will make still further headway in your business."

"Thank you," said the young man. "But that is not all, sir. I think it is necessary, too, that you should know all there is to know about myself and my antecedents."

"They are beyond reproach, I am sure," remarked Marlowe, his brow clouding faintly with suspicion. "So far as I am myself concerned," continued Forbes, "I do not think that I have ever willingly been guilty of a dishonourable or dishonest action. But nine years ago my father was sentenced to 3 years' penal servitude for embezzlement, and died in prison."

At this candid confession Colonel Marlowe drew back with an expression of indignant horror. For a moment he stood there, his grey eyes ablaze, and Conway Forbes read in them a death sentence upon all his fondest hopes.

"You need say no more, Forbes," said the old man at last. "In view of your confession I will never consent to my daughter's marriage to you."

Conway Forbes received the decree bravely, even though it struck his heart a blow that left it stunned.

"I am not responsible for the sins of my father," was all he said.

"You are not responsible, but you must suffer for them," returned the stern old man. "I am sorry for you, but nothing will alter my decision. When a man is without honour the taint is in the blood."

Conway Forbes remained silent. "There is no excuse for a man who goes wrong. A man who steals or who preys upon society in any way is not deserving of sympathy," declared the old man firmly. "He knows well enough the difference between right and wrong, and must be punished without mercy if he takes what he thinks to be the easier way."

"There are many men who are good by accident," said Conway quietly. "They have never been tempted, and so they have had no chance of taking a step in the wrong direction; others are beset with temptation all their lives, and some are not strong enough to fight against it."

The colonel drew himself up haughtily. "A man of honour will conquer any temptation," he avowed. "Do you suppose I have never been tempted in my life? Yet I come of a family whose honour is unsullied, and I would sooner die than cast the faintest shadow of shame upon the name which I bear. A Marlowe has never disgraced his name, and a Marlowe never will."

The evening had been drawing in while they spoke, and the room in which they stood was lighted only by the pale light of the rising moon.

"My daughter and I are all that remain of our stock," repeated the old man, "and I can never allow her to be linked to a man whose name is less clean than our own."

"Very well, sir," answered Forbes, in a steady tone, "I bow to your decisions, and I give you my word that never without your consent will I attempt to speak to Dorothy again. I love her too well to bring the slightest shadow of shame or sorrow into her life."

"I accept your promise," said Colonel Marlowe. "I am very sorry, because under other circumstances, I would have welcomed a man like you to take the place of my own boy."

As he spoke he looked up at a picture which hung upon the wall.

"That is my son," he went on, "and he was a true Marlowe if ever there was one. He died in France, and since my boy could not be spared I should ask for nothing better than that he should have died as he did. His end is another addition to the records of our glorious family."

The old man choked back a sob then crossed the room and opened the French windows. The cool evening air coming across the open moor seemed to restore some of his old equanimity, and he quickly overcame the emotion which the mention of his son had caused him.

And while he stood there his keen eyes caught sight of something moving in the bushes a few yards away.

He said nothing, but turning into the room opened the drawer of his desk and took out a revolver. With the hand that held the weapon thrust into the pocket of his dinner-jacket, he walked calmly out through the window again and casually made his way in the direction of the bush in which he had seen the moving object.

Conway Forbes, who had seen nothing, watched the old man wonderingly.

"Now stand up and show yourself," called out the colonel suddenly, as he held the revolver loosely in his hand.

Instantly a figure rose from the bush. The man was dressed in the hideous clothes of a convict.

"Now walk in front of me and get into that room!" ordered the colonel. "Don't try any tricks, for I know how to deal with your sort."

The convict led the way sheepishly into the room. Arriving there, he turned about, and the moonlight fell upon his begrimed face.

The hand that held the revolver opened, and the weapon fell with a thud to the carpet. Then, with a great sob which shook his frame, the old man fell back and buried his face in his hands to shut out the spectacle of the pale, dusty features.

"Great Heaven!" he cried piteously. "Ronald—my son!"

II.

Conway Forbes, standing back in the shadow, took in the scene, and his heart overflowed with pity for the crushed pride of the old man.

With a great effort Colonel Marlowe uncovered his face and looked steadily at the convict son who stood before him in all his shame.

"I thought you were dead, Ronald," he said at last.

"Dead beat, that's about all," returned the other hoarsely. "The false report of my death was very convenient, because it saved me from being kicked out of my regiment for cheating at cards."

"Oh Heaven!" gasped the colonel. "Would I had been struck down before I lived to see this day!"

The convict's lip twitched slightly, but he bit it, and then forced a dry laugh

from his throat.

"Come, don't waste time! I want some money to help me and a pal to get away. Every minute is precious. You don't understand the position I am in. I've got to get clean away from here before the warders get on my track."

His callous tone had a strange effect upon the old man, who seemed to harden strangely.

"You are right," he said. "You must make good your escape if only to give you a chance of hiding your shame in another part of the world. My son is dead to me, and I could not live knowing him to be a convict. You shall have money."

He went to his desk, and his hand did not shake as he unlocked the centre drawer of his desk and took out twenty-five pounds. He held the money out to the young man, who took it from him.

"Now go!" cried the humbled father in a voice that did not flinch. "And never let me see your face again! If you want money, write to me, but do not attempt to return here, or I may forget what you once were to me. Begone."

Again there was the faint twitching of the convict's lips, and again he forced himself to laugh. Then, turning, he strode out of the room on to the lawn of the garden.

A second later he was lost to view behind the bushes.

Paying no heed to Conway Forbes, the colonel crossed the room to where his revolver lay, and slipped it into his pocket. At the window he stopped and looked out.

The garden was bordered by a hedge, and from the window the opening leading out on to the moor was visible.

Standing there, with the moonlight bathing his set face, old Marlowe saw the outline of a broad-shouldered figure emerge from the shelter of some bushes and approach the opening.

The fugitive, who was now clasping a heavy spade in his hand, peered cautiously round to see that the way was clear. Like a startled hare he jumped back, for standing on the moor, just through the opening, was a warder.

The colonel, watching, saw the convict dart back at the sight of the warder; he saw him go forward again, and creep slowly towards the unsuspecting prison official; he saw him raise the spade to strike a coward's blow from behind.

"My God!" gasped the colonel. "Not that! You have sunk very low, Ronald, but you shall not sink to cowardly murder. Death a hundred times rather!"

As he spoke the old man snatched his revolver from his pocket and fired!

The convict flung up his arms, and pitching down on his face, lay still. Then, with a step that showed no sign of faltering, the old man went down the garden, and Conway Forbes followed him.

"Is he dead?" asked the colonel calmly.

"Yes, sir," returned the warder. "And you had not fired when you did he would undoubtedly have killed me."

The warder, who was kneeling by the side of the fallen man, turned the body over, and Colonel Marlowe looked down at the stained face.

The dead man was not his son!

The voice of the warder broke in upon his confused thoughts.

"You've done everybody a good turn by bringing this fellow down, sir, for he was one of the most desperate men from Bleakmoor. He broke away to-day with a young fellow named Denton, who seems for the time being to have given us the slip. But he's a different type of fellow altogether, and we shall get him sooner or later, for he's only a novice at the game!"

III.

Colonel Marlowe and Conway Forbes were alone together in the Library. Neither had spoken since they had come in from the garden, and Conway was only waiting until he could decently take his departure and leave the old man alone in his grief.

Still without speaking, the old man crossed to where hung the picture which a short time ago he had gazed on with such pride. His hands trembled a little as he reached up for the photograph, but there was no hesitation in his manner.

Deliberately he removed the picture from the wall, and went with it to his desk. Without a glance at the handsome face he placed it in a centre drawer, and this he locked.

Then, for the first time since that terrible interview, he looked into the face of Conway Forbes.

"If you had prayed for retribution to come to me for my words to you to-night," he said quietly, "your prayer could not have been answered more swiftly."

Conway Forbes was filled with compassion for the broken old man.

"You have suffered a terrible blow, sir," he said earnestly. "But it is your

duty to bear it bravely, and you will."

"I placed myself on a false pedestal of pride, Forbes," he said, "and Heaven has dealt a rapid and terrible judgment upon me. You have seen me humbled to the dust—you who only felt an heir-apparent heard me boasting of my family's honour. I told you that you must suffer for your father's crime because it is said that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children. Just as true is it that the sins of the children shall be borne by the parents."

The old man seemed upon the point of breaking down, but his old spirit came to his aid, and he mastered himself.

"I have learned a bitter lesson, Conway, and I see the folly of my old foolish pride. I was wrong, and I apologise to you for what I said. Will you shake hands?"

Conway Forbes gripped the hand warmly.

"You must forget what I said," went on the colonel, "because I need a son badly now. You will not fail me?"

"I will try to prove worthy," replied the young man.

IV.

The following morning Colonel Marlowe galloping over the moor on his bay mare, showed no sign of the ordeal through which he had passed over-night. His fine spirit had stood him in good stead in his time of trial.

Coming in sight of the long moorland road which made a tortuous course over the brow of the hill, the colonel reined into a walk, and, leaning forward, patted the mare's sleek neck in approval of her efforts.

He had gone on another half a dozen paces when the sound of frantic hoofbeats reached him, mingled with the cries of children.

The next moment there came in view upon the winding slope a waggone drawn by two plunging horses, and filled with children who were screaming aloud with fear of impending disaster.

The colonel was under no misapprehension as to what had happened. The horses of the waggone had bolted, and they were tearing down to their own destruction, and they were taking with them a school-party of innocent children.

The passing of years had not sapped the courage of Meredith Marlowe, and, closing his legs to his mare, he urged her into a gallop and made for the road. He had a little hope of reaching it in time to cut off the runaways, but he was out to try hard, counting his life well lost if it were lost in an attempt to save the helpless mites in the swaying vehicle.

And just as he realised that the chance was hopeless, a figure leapt up into view from a fissure in the moor and pelted to the road.

Straight at the runaways the man flung himself, and, by a combination of skill and luck, succeeded in catching the bridle of the near-side runaway.

The beast reared before the sudden onslaught, lifting the man into the air, then dropped to all fours again and tried to continue its mad way, dragging the man with it.

But he clung on frenziedly, and in the end the horse could carry on no longer. Snorting, trembling, and in a smother of foam, he came to a standstill, the other beast at once following its example.

Then and not till then, the man released his hold and sank in a heap to the road.

At this moment the colonel reached the scene, and as he sprang down from his horse he saw that the inert figure was clad in the tunic of a convict. He guessed what was revealed to him as he dragged the man from under the horse at the side of the road.

The man who had been capable of this amazing exhibition of dauntless courage was Ronald Marlowe, and the father's heart swelled with pride at the discovery.

Gently he set him down upon the sloping bank running up from the road, and as he knelt beside the prostrate form the merest flicker of the eyelids was the only sign that remained within the crushed body. Yet Marlowe felt no pain at his boy's condition. He thought only with a warming glow of the manner in which he had obtained his injuries.

He had offered all he held most dear to save that party of merry-makers from an appalling catastrophe which would have brought sorrow into a dozen homes.

And in the estimation of Colonel Marlowe no man could seek a better opportunity of proving his value in the world.

A deep moan escaped the young man's lips, and, opening his eyes, he looked up into his father's face.

"Dad!" he murmured softly.

"My dear boy!" answered the old man with a quivering lip. "I am proud of you for what you have just done. Nothing that is past matters in face of that."

Ronald Marlowe struggled up on to his elbow.

"I'm sorry, dad, that I went wrong," he said, speaking with difficulty. "I am

(Continued on page 4.)