

had he asked her; but of course she was only seventeen then.

And Irish-hearted,' Mr. Hilton replied. 'I have a sort of pity for Miss Trevor,' and the speaker laughed, 'and for myself.' 'Yourself?'

'Yes. Didn't the truth come out through the breaking of my beautiful Kan-he vase? It was smashed, your know, and it was a beauty.'

Hilton laughed again lightly, as if well pleased.

## HIS OWN GREED

Three men sat before a roaring wood fire in a forester's hut, only a few perches away from the spot where the express from London to Scotland had run into an impassable snowdrift. The forester had brought forth bread and cheese for his unexpected visitors, and piled the hearth high with wood, and then retired to bed. The three men had divested themselves of their overcoats and produced pipes and tobacco, and were feeling fairly satisfied with their temporary quarters. One was a stockbroker, one a doctor, and the third a solicitor.

'This confounded snow!' the physician growled. 'It will keep us back a good three hours!'

'There is no good in grumbling,' the lawyer wisely opined. 'We may as well make the best of a bad situation. I propose we tell stories.'

'Hear, hear!' the stockbroker applauded.

'You begin,' said the doctor.

'Well,' the lawyer answered readily, 'I don't mind if I do. Dunstan Priory should not be more than three miles away.'

'What of that?' the doctor questioned.

'I was thinking of the place and of an incident that happened there. However,' the speaker filled his pipe afresh, 'I'll tell you the story. It is over twelve years since Lord Dunstan died. He had died rather suddenly, and I was summoned to the Priory. The dead man's nearest relative was a certain Harold Dunstan, a cousin. There had been little intimacy between the two men, but when I reached the Priory I found the new Lord Dunstan established there. We spent the days preceding the funeral searching in all places for a will, but none was to be found. Nor did it seem to matter much, since the next-of-kin was the one to whom the dead man would presumably have bequeathed his property and his money.'

'I don't like the man,' the village doctor confided to me when I met him on his rounds the day previous to the funeral, 'nor did the late lord. Harold Dunstan is a greedy miser.'

'I was of the same opinion myself; but I only laughed and returned to the Priory. When dinner was over Harold Dunstan, the clergyman of the parish, and I went to the room where the dead body lay in an open coffin. His valet stood beside it. On the left hand of the dead man a diamond ring flashed in the light.'

'Is the ring to be buried with him?' I inquired.

'The valet answered. It was his master's expressed desire that such should be the case, and the clergyman corroborated the statement.'

'It is a very valuable ring,' the latter said. 'I know he was offered five hundred pounds for it. But he attached some special value to it. I never saw him without the ring.'

'Should the coffin lid not be screwed down?' I suggested.

'No, no,' Harold Dunstan said. 'There will be time enough in the morning,' and after a few minutes we withdrew.

'Tis a wonder Lord Dunstan did not marry,' I said later to the clergyman. 'He was a comparatively young man when he succeeded unexpectedly to the title.'

'Yes,' he assented, 'yes. But he never seemed very happy. By the bye, is the estate entailed?'

'No,' I answered, and then I retired to my room.

'I am, and always was, a light sleeper. My bedroom was nearly opposite the room where the dead man lay. It was long past midnight when I was roused by the tread of a stealthy foot. It took me some minutes to dress, and when I stood, at length, in the corridor I fancied I saw some one vanish in the gloom of the farther end. There was a faint line of light under the door of the room opposite mine. I turned the handle and went in. The valet had a small packet in his hand, as he stood by the coffin.'

'What are you doing?' I demanded.

'The man turned round suddenly at the question, yet he showed no signs of guilt.'

'I am putting this,' he held up the packet, 'back in the coffin.'

'No,' I said, 'not until I see it.'

'It is nothing—nothing, indeed, of any consequence,' he protested, 'but I promised my master I would place it in his coffin.'

'Give it to me,' I ordered, and the valet did so with evident reluctance. 'Now,' I added, 'take off the lid.'

'The man did so. The ring was gone from the dead man's finger.'

'I thought so,' I remarked grimly. 'Where is the ring?'

'Mr. Dunstan—Lord Dunstan, I should say—took it just now. In so doing he disturbed that packet. He did not notice that it fell on the floor. I sleep in the closet adjoining.' The valet had no appearance of guilt.

'I don't believe you,' I said.

'The man shrugged his shoulders.'

'Go to his room noiselessly,' he said, 'and ask him.'

It seemed good advice, and I acted on it. With the packet in my hand and the valet at my side, I passed to Lord Dunstan's chamber. The door was slightly ajar, and I had a momentary view of his lordship critically viewing a ring by the light of a candle. I coughed, and Lord Dunstan turned hastily.

'You have the ring,' I said. 'That is all right, of course. I thought some other person had taken it.'

Lord Dunstan muttered something under his breath. To this he added the information that he didn't see why a valuable ring should be stored away in the Dunstan vault, nor yet what affair it was of mine. I agreed with the latter part of the sentence, bade him a polite good-night, and returned to my own room with the valet. The valet was an old man, and had been long in the service of his late master. I apologised for my suspicions.

'Sit down,' I said, and poked the fire to a blaze. 'Do you mind telling me what this packet contains?'

'The man took the chair I indicated.'

'No, sir,' he answered straightly. 'Indeed, I am rather glad of the opportunity of speaking.'

'I threw a shovelful of coals on the fire and took a seat. The valet began to speak.'

'My master,' he said, 'had no expectation of ever inheriting the Dunstan title or property. Quite suddenly two deaths placed him in the position of heir to the title. He was married at that time to an Irishwoman, and a Catholic.'

'Married!' I gasped. 'Lord Dunstan was not married!'

'The valet smiled.'

'He was secretly married. Some mention of his marriage presumably reached the then Lord Dunstan. He was a fanatic and a bigot, and he told my master he should never inherit the property except on condition that his wife and children should be, like himself, of the Protestant religion. My master was in a difficulty, but he had no doubt but he could persuade his wife to abandon her faith. She refused. He threatened to take their boy—there was one child—from her, and to bring him up a Protestant. I never knew the particulars. Mrs. Dunstan was young and impetuous. She fled, taking the child with her, and leaving nothing to indicate where she had gone.'

'My master kept silent,' the valet continued. 'He was furiously angry, and then he heard suddenly of the death of his wife and child. They had been drowned on their way to America. He was an altered man from that time and his life was neither very long nor happy. That packet in your possession holds some letters, the proofs of his marriage and of the birth of his child, and photographs. He asked me to place it in his coffin with him. The ring he prized so much was one belonging to his mother, which his wife had worn from the time of her marriage till her flight from him.'

'And his wife and child were drowned?' I asked.

'The valet hesitated. He might be mistaken, he said, but quite lately he thought he had seen his master's wife in London. His master was ill, and he did not like to speak. And probably he had been mistaken.'

'But he wasn't,' the lawyer concluded briskly; 'one wonders how Lord Dunstan remained ignorant. He was a hermit, to be sure. It was quite readily ascertained that his wife and son were not on board the ship referred to by the valet. His wife had allowed her husband to be deceived, so that she might keep her boy. We had some work ferreting them out. Harold Dunstan was furious, and talked of plots and intrigues, and threatened a law suit. He was better advised, however. The Irish lady and her son reside at the Priory now; and the latter is a very fine young fellow and an ideal landlord. The valet is quite a personage; and Harold Dunstan must often reflect that he owes the loss of the title and property to his own greed.'

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