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Woodville, P. O.

IN FOR LIFE!

A man and a woman standing together in the corner of a prison cell in the city of Philadelphia. Three or four gaolers near the door, with their eyes turned away.

Mary, it is a year to-day since we were married. To think that I may not be respited ever even long enough to look upon that little child of ours that will be born so soon! Oh, God! It seems too much! 'Tis more than human heart can bear!

He clasped the woman tighter and tears, long garnered throughout a long trial and imprisonment, unshed till now, rained on her neck.

John—dear John! she whispers, and I can only look to God now.

Her eyes are dull, but unspeakably sweet with womanly endurance. She presses his face against her shoulder, and smoothes his hair with a touch that carries him back to the honeymoon of a year ago.

God knows you are innocent, she continues. I believe you are innocent. When our child is born, I will train it up, so help me, God! to love and reverence its father's name. Perhaps, you will be pardoned; perhaps, your innocence will be established, and you released. I cannot believe God will allow the innocent to suffer a life long imprisonment, and the guilty to escape.

At this moment a gaoler steps forward and taps the man on the shoulder, with the two words, time's up!

One moment's dead silence, and in that moment the husband and wife of one year's time have said good-bye, never to look upon each other's face on earth again.

In three minutes more, the close van waiting at the side gate of the city prison, has rattled off, bearing the manacled prisoner, his head bowed on his breast. The gaolers have vanished. The unconscious wife, who has been seized with fainting fits, and removed to the matron's room in the female department of the prison, gives no signs of life.

At nightfall, a close carriage stopped at the little postern in the prison wall. A plain but richly dressed woman, deeply veiled, alights and rings the bell at the porter's lodge. She wishes to see the matron, but is informed the hour is too late, and she must return to-morrow.

But Mrs. Barling, continues the lady, without raising her veil, the wife of the man who was sentenced to imprisonment for life, for the murder of Gabriel Marks, where is she?

The porter opens an inch wider the door, which he has hitherto held as though to shut it in the lady's face, and responds with the one word, Dead!

One moment, for heaven's sake! pleads the woman, putting forth a hand that has money in it. When did she die? How?

I will tell you, ma'am says the porter, his great hand sweeping swiftly over the little outstretched palm and leaving it empty. She died this afternoon in giving birth to a child—a boy.

And the child? continues the lady.

Was taken an hour since to the Foundling Hospital, and admitted.

A suppressed sound, an inarticulate sob, an incoherent word or two is heard beneath the veil. A moment more, the lady has re-entered her carriage, and it has rolled away.

All day long the landscape has been happy with the green gladness of warm June. All day long the waters have made their murmuring music, the woods have breathed their pleasant fragrance, and the school children have laughed and sung and played.

The porter looked for one moment after the vanishing carriage, and then at the two coins in his hand. As he pockets them he sees they are gold; but he does not see that the denomination is that of Portuguese doubloons.

Mr. Gilmore was a retired lawyer of great repute, and celebrated for two possessions. One of them was a large fortune, which his enemies said he had acquired through an ambiguous connection with the criminal courts; and the other was a very sweet and lovely daughter, the sole stay and solace of his widowerhood.

One June morning, father and daughter were sitting together in his large handsomely furnished front parlour, when the following conversation ensued:

Alice, my dear, let us have a few words together about—you know whom. You need not blush. I have never urged you to marry, as some fathers would. Neither do I want to keep you selfishly, all to myself. I think my views concerning you are very unselfish and moderate, and kind and good. Three things I require in a husband for you. First, that he should love you a second, that he should be able to support you in style equal to that in which you have been brought up; third, that his family should be respectable. The first of these conditions, Lemuel fulfils. I am prepossessed in his favour; and as much as I know of him, believe him to be a fine young man. But how much do we know of him! Simply that he does not know his real name, that the name he goes by is that of his foster-parents; and that neither know himself nor do they, before they died, and left him all their money. He has behaved in a manly and straightforward way in admitting this. The people who adopted him may have been conscientious, but they were certainly imprudent in telling him the truth. They did it for the best, but certainly they would have saved three persons—him, you, and me, Alice, a world of trouble, had they kept their own counsel. The moment Lemuel proves to me that his family is unobjectionable, that moment, Alice, and not till then, I give my consent for you to become his wife.—He is coming this morning, you say, to learn his fate. I shall tell him frankly, my dear, what I have told you.

He drew her to him, and she kissed his cheek.

I know you mean it all for the best, she whispered, her cheek reposing upon his.—But, oh, father, promise me that, if I cannot marry him, you will not urge me to marry any one else?

Child, I promise you that. I have never crossed you in anything else, but I feel it my duty to cross you in this. And now, my dear, read that over again, he continued, pointing to a passage in the morning's newspaper. Read that passage over again that I interrupted you in, when I began to talk. It don't seem possible.

And Alice re-read the following passage—

The report we gave credence to last week, that John Barling, who twenty two years ago was sentenced to imprisonment for life for the murder of Gabriel Marks, had been pardoned, is in every particular true. Precisely one month ago, the Governor's pardon was read to him in his prison cell; twenty years of unnecessary suffering having been consumed in the discovery that the evidence against him was insufficient. Barling has disappeared from this part of the country, where he had a few fast friends, and his present whereabouts is unknown.

The last words were scarcely uttered when the parlour door was opened, and a servant with a hesitating and embarrassing manner, showed in a stranger.

Certainly a respectable individual, though his bearing aspect were strangely decomposed. Once across the threshold he grasped the handle of the door, and shut the servant out. The movement was so singular that Mr. Gilmore started to his feet, and Alice clutched her father's arm.

A change came over the intruder. His hands could be seen to tremble, and he turned very pale.

Excuse me, he said, feebly; I am ill, and I have walked very far. Will you let me take a seat?

Alice was about to place him a chair, but her father restrained her.

Leave us alone my dear, a little while, he whispered. This person, if I am not mistaken, would like to see me on business.

And he waved his hand towards an arm-chair, in which the stranger seated himself. In another moment, Alice, with one questioning glance at her father, quitted the room, and the two were left alone, facing each other, and looking straight into one another's eyes.

There was a long pause, and then Mr. Gilmore re-seated himself and drew a long breath.

You recognize me, after all these years? said the visitor, at last, leaning his wan face wearily on his hand, and speaking in a sunken voice, from which hate seemed to die out, and left only the ashes of utter hopelessness. You need not answer me. I see that you recognize me, John Barling, sentenced to imprisonment for life, on the charge of murdering Gabriel Marks.

All that is past, said Mr. Gilmore, picking up some animation. You are pardoned; your innocence is established—established, at least, in the eyes of all your friends, who have been interceding in your behalf. Why do you come to me?

You stated my case once, said Barling, when you acted as counsel for my defence. Listen and let me state it now. About twenty two years ago, when I was scarcely of age, my wife and I—we were just married then—came to this country from England. We were very poor; but during the first six months of poverty here we managed to make a few humble friends, and it is to those few friends' exertions, continued through twenty years' changes of office with different Governors, that I owe my liberty to-day. One friend, however, I made, who is the innocent cause of all this trouble; and that friend was Gabriel Marks, the man whom I was accused of having murdered. He was a diamond-merchant by profession, but he also had an interest in other kinds of business; and he procured me a situation as subscription agent or canvasser for an illustrated edition of the Bible, to be printed in parts. I might have made money at it, but, as you may remember, my intimacy with him lasted for only ten short days, during which time we were much together. The last time I saw Gabriel Marks alive was as we were crossing, at half past ten at night, in the ferry boat that plied between Philadelphia and Camden, where we lived. I had met him in Philadelphia, in Chestnut street. He had bought a box of Havana cigars, and we went on board the ferry boat together. Just before the boat left the wharf, he asked me to hold the box for a moment, and left the cabin. The boat started; it reached the wharf at Camden; Marks had not returned. Whilst the boat was being fastened to the pier, I asked the ferry master whether such a man as Marks had passed out. The ferry master said he had not noticed. Thinking that for some inexplicable reason Marks might have gone ahead, I walked quickly up to the house where he lodged with us and asked whether he had returned. He had not. And the next thing I heard of him was that his dead body had been found on the beach, ten or fifteen miles from Philadelphia, on the western shore of the Delaware. I was the last person seen with him. I was poor and powerless in a foreign land. Mark's friends were rich and influential. Every circumstance in my favor was ignored. Lawyers, and judges and jurymen overlooked facts which proved it impossible that I should have committed the deed. To have murdered him and left his body where it was found and to have been home within one hour from the time it was proved I met him in Chestnut street was a physical impossibility. Nothing belonging to him was found with me excepting the cigars he handed me on the ferry boat. No witness was filed on my behalf. You, who played the farce of ap-

pearing in my defence, contented yourself with objecting to the jurisdiction of the Court. The very judge was ignorant of the law that should have guided his conduct, and he sentenced me to death, not knowing that he had power only to seal me to the State prison, there to await the Governor's decision. And had the will of the Court been carried out I should have been in eternity twenty years ago. Would to God I had.

For all that you have suffered, Mr. Barling, said the imperturbable lawyer, I am truly sorry, but, remember, you have not yet proved your innocence to me or to the world.

Perhaps I shall before I close, said Barling, in the same humble and broken tones, and without a flash of indignation which might have been expected. But whether I do or not, that is not the chief purpose for which I visit you this morning. Listen! you are a widower. So am I. My wife died the very day I began my term of sentence, in giving birth to a child I never saw. All through this twenty years of working and waiting—waiting or death, the only release I expected—I have mourned over that little child and his mother; and fancied how she would keep her parting vow to me, and bring him up to love and reverence his guiltless father's name. So, twenty years have passed away—how, I leave you to imagine—without one whisper ever being borne into me where they were or how they lived. One month ago I was pardoned. The announcement stunned me for some moments. After that my first inquiries were for my wife and child. The turkeys who had been in the prison when I entered it had all passed away. The matron was dead. The porter had been discharged for misconduct years ago; but I managed to find out, by patient enquiry, where he was living, in apparent penury and extreme old age. I had done a great deal of extra work during my prison life, and earned for myself a pretty little sum of money. With this I purchased the necessities to make a decent appearance, and commenced the other search, of which I shall presently have more to say. In the first place, after great diligence and much inquiry, I found the aged porter, and from him I learned that my wife had died on the very day I began the term of my imprisonment, and that the boy had been sent to the Foundling Hospital. That was a great blow to me. To think that I should have dreamed of my little child's face for twenty long years and have suddenly had such a great hope placed before me, and then to have it dashed away again forever. Well, sir, I just crossed my hands then, and said I had nothing more to do or suffer in God's world, but just to lie down and die, if death would come to me. But the ex-porter told me something else. He was ill, friendless and deserted, and I suppose that made him penitent. It appears that he had grown to be a great miser, but feeling himself near his end and seeing how broken spirited I was, he made me open a bag of money, hid beneath his pillow, and take some; I did so; and among the coins were two pieces of gold, which after the lapse of twenty years, I recognized immediately. They were Portuguese doubloons, curiously marked, and I recognized them as the same which Gabriel Marks had put into his pocket in my presence on the evening when I last saw him.

At these unexpected words, Mr. Gilmore shifted his position, folded his arms, and looked into John Barling's face with glowing interest.

I recognized them from a curious habit Gabriel Marks had of marking every coin that came into his possession. To make a long story short, I forced the history of these doubtful doubloons from the dying ex-porter. On the evening of the day my wife died, a lady, deeply veiled, drove up to the prison gate, and enquired first for the matron, whom, she was informed, she could not see, and then for my wife and the newborn child. On being told of the death of one, and the admission of the other into the Foundling Hospital, she appeared much affected, and drove away again, imprudently leaving these doubloons as a doctee in the porter's hands.

Again Mr. Gilmore shifted his position, and with his hands upon his knees, stared with culminating interest into John Barling's face.

With all the saving I had, I immediately proceeded to work, and engaged the services of a detective to unravel the tangle of this twenty years' mystery. I must choose another time to carry you through all the intricacies we threaded. This much we have discovered:—That the woman who handed the doubloons to the porter is at present living in quiet splendor in a distant city; a well preserved and fine looking woman still; that she has in her possession many valuable diamonds that once belonged to him; that knowing me to be guiltless and seized with monetary remorse, she visited the prison that evening, at her own risk, with the intention of befriending in some way, my wife or child, and that, with that singular want of common prudence which has distinguished so many great criminals, she left in the porter's hands the very evidence of her guilt. In short, if this woman, in whose toils Marks had got involved, unknown to me, during my brief intimacy with him, did not commit the deed herself, her agents did.

John Barling paused, amazed by the look on Mr. Gilmore's face. The latter got up, his features twitching, and extending his hand to his visitor, said, I am what the world calls a hard man, Mr. Barling, but you have shaken me to-day as I was never shaken in my life before. If anything I can do for you now will help to recompense you for these twenty years of needless suffering, command me freely.

I do not know whether you can or not. I was led here with a dim sort of feeling that perhaps you could. Listen to me for a few

[CONCLUDED ON EIGHTH PAGE.]