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The Dead Line.

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CHAPTER XXX.

A DISTURBING DISCOVERY—A WORKINGMAN MAY BE A HUMAN BEING!

"Though authority be a stubborn bear,
Yet he is oft led by the nose with gold."
—SHAKESPEARE.

"Cursed be the social wants that sin against
the strength of youth!
Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the
living truth!"

"Cursed be the sickly forms that err from
honest nature's rule!
Cursed be the gold that gilds the straighten'd
forehead of the fool!"
—TENNYSON.

John had prepared a surprise for the members of the Church of the Millennium. He and Mrs. Delorme had persuaded Mason to consent to come to Graham quietly, appear unexpectedly at the hall Sunday afternoon, and preach. But how destiny mocks men! On that Saturday evening, at the very time when, at one extremity of the city, Mrs. Delorme was driving home from the railway station with Mason in her carriage, and while they were discussing John's plans and she was telling how delighted he would be at the preacher's coming, comrade hands were bearing to a workingman's humble home at the opposite extremity of the city John Cotterell's bleeding body. At the very moment when aunt and nephew were exchanging at the railway station their first happy greetings, a policeman's bullet tore its murderous way through the blacksmith's body close to his noble heart, and he fell.

But the half of the world which had its home at Mrs. Delorme's end of the town knew no more of the other half where the useful folk dwelt than of the inhabitants of any other foreign country. Polite society does not deem it well bred to mention disagreeable themes; besides, although he had heard of it, the shooting of John Cotterell had made but a very trifling impression upon Mr. Graham's mind—a very agreeable impression, it is true, for the incident had ended the strike and all the "hands" except John and Ruble had returned to work by the company's kind permission, some of them claiming that they had been virtually forced by Cotterell to engage in the strike after they had done all they could to oppose him; still, the occurrence was not in itself sufficiently important to make any deep impression on the general manager's mind. Of what consequence was the shooting, even were it the killing of one common clod of a shop hand, if thereby the company had got rid of a troublesome strike? The matter troubled Major Delorme still less. He saw in it nothing but one more much needed lesson to these troublesome people as to the necessity of avoiding collisions with sacred "law and order," he thought nothing at all about the man who was shot or as to what might become of him. Does any reader feel disposed to ask "law and order" what it has to say about the conduct of the policeman who had attacked John Cotterell without a shadow of legal right, and had then shot him for exercising an American citizen's right of self-defense? Why, as to that—that was different. The officer was protecting property rights, in comparison with which a mere laborer's right to his liberty or his life is not to be considered. The policeman may have been "a little hasty," it is true, but some discretion must be allowed in such cases, and to condemn his conduct in this respect would have a tendency to make other policemen "timid" when called upon to commit murder in behalf of the sacred rights of property, and thus cause hesitation when the timely butchering of a common laborer would effectually put an end to a pestiferous strike. So, not only from motives of politeness, but because of the trifling character of the incident itself, nothing was said that evening in Major Delorme's gay parlors concerning the trivial occurrence in consequence of which the angel of death was that night hovering undecided over the

bed where John Cotterell lay. Major and Mrs. Delorme, General Manager Graham and the Rev. Marshall Mason spent a very agreeable evening, and all slept peacefully at last; two of them in ignorance, the other two in forgetfulness, of the condition of the humble blacksmith whose soul was hesitating upon the brink of eternity.

Ah, Major Delorme! General Manager Graham! Has it never occurred to you that the coarsely clad laborer whose life your cherished "law and order" values so lightly is always somebody's son? is somebody's brother? that a fond, old mother—that a loving wife—may wait his coming? that there may be children who run to meet him in the evening? That common clod—that son of poverty and of toil—that mere "hand"—you slay with such reckless celerity; have you never reflected that he may have human ties? that there are hearts as human as yours, perhaps, that love that poor bit of clay with a soul in it? Ah, General Manager Graham! To-morrow you may perceive very clearly that shooting one of your shop hands may be a very serious affair after all—even to you! Perhaps it may turn out that this particular murderous assault made by "law and order" in your mighty behalf, shall cling to your memory as if the victim had been rich enough to make him a human being in your purse-proud estimation. Not a brother, of course, for you believe in "business is business," and "competition is the life of trade," and the balance of that creed, and men engaged in universal throat cutting can have no brothers, but certain discoveries may impress it upon you, arrogant general manager though you be, that the wounded blacksmith in yonder workingman's poor home was human. Perhaps the discovery may end in making you human, too. As to Major Delorme, not in *this* life, save by a miracle, can his sordid nature ever be humanized. Let him go his way, which is Satan's way—perhaps, God's way, too, for such as he.

During the evening Mrs. Delorme had apologized for Lena's non-appearance by stating that she had gone out to visit a poor family who had been wards of hers before her departure for Europe; but next morning she was not at breakfast, she was not in her room, and investigation made it certain that she had not yet returned; and Mr. Graham was uneasy. Such an occurrence was so unusual, so unlike Lena, that there must be something wrong. She was all the general manager had left him in this world. Her mother had come back from Europe only to die at home; and Lena was wearing black for her now. Mason was up early, and before breakfast had read in the morning paper a two-column account of the shooting of his friend of younger days. Major Delorme had given the account a perfunctory reading, as became so thorough a "business man;" but Graham had, for a reason which will be apparent presently, read it with the greatest earnestness. The account stated, among other things, that at Ruble's house where John had been taken, was a young woman, a "Miss Chipperwell," who seemed, from her appearance, to belong to a very different social sphere, and that it was whispered that she was the wounded man's sweetheart. Mason was greatly perturbed, and at breakfast spoke with much feeling of his acquaintance with John; said he was a remarkable man—a genius, in fact—who could have been a lawyer or preacher had he desired, but had become a workingman from deliberate choice, prompted by conscientious convictions; and declared they two had loved each other as brothers; and much more in the same strain. Delorme was bored by so much "gush" from a man of Mason's class over a common groundling, and dismissed the whole matter with the highly original observation that "law and order must

be preserved at any cost." Graham was silent and thoughtful. Mrs. Delorme, who had not read the account, was greatly agitated by what she gleaned from Mason's talk; and could scarce refrain from betraying her acquaintance with the blacksmith and her warm friendship for him. One thought monopolized Graham's mind—What had happened to Lena? Suddenly he looked up, and asked:

"By the way, Hallie, what is the name of the family Lena went to see? and where do they live? I must make some inquiry after her at once."

"Their name is Ruble. The man works in the railway shops in some capacity, and their home is somewhere in the vicinity of the shops."

"Ruble? Works in the shops?" shouted Graham. "My God, Hallie! What if it should—but, oh, no; it can't be Lena."

Mason started, for the truth flashed upon him.

"Why," asked Mrs. Delorme, innocently. "What about Lena? I do not understand."

"Lena went there—she has not come home. Have you not read? Look at this!" and he nervously thrust into her hands the crumpled morning paper, with his finger on the passage referring to "Miss Chipperwell."

Mrs. Delorme read it, and understood it perfectly; and her changing color betrayed her perturbation as she read. But she resolved to screen Lena, whatever might be the truth; and so with assumed composure remarked:

"What has this to do with Lena? I am quite sure she has no young lady acquaintance here of that name. Miss Chipperwell? No, I have never heard of such a person, and Lena tells me everything."

"But—do you not see?" demanded Graham almost fiercely. "Miss Chipperwell—may she not be—may not Lena have given that name to conceal her own?"

"That looks to me like a very far-fetched surmise. Lena's chief characteristic is her absolute candor. She cannot be induced to act, much less to utter, an untruth for any purpose, however good or desirable. Besides, this Miss Chipperwell is the wounded man's sweetheart. How could Lena Graham be in love with a shop blacksmith? The idea is preposterous. You are excited, or such a thought would not have occurred to you."

"Blacksmith?" exclaimed Graham. "Does the paper say he is a blacksmith? I didn't notice that. I thought it called him an agitator."

"The paper says nothing about his being a blacksmith," said Major Delorme, as he frowned and looked rather sharply at his wife.

Mason saw Mrs. Delorme's predicament, and in order to extricate her, ventured the remark:

"No, it was I who spoke of him as a blacksmith."

Perhaps a preacher ought to adhere to the truth with more tenacious precision than Mason did on this occasion; but Mrs. Delorme, at least, was not disposed to criticise the clerical lapse. Major Delorme had been too much bored, and Mr. Graham too much disturbed to remember precisely what Mason really had said about his friend, and so the explanation proved entirely satisfactory.

"There is some mystery here," said Graham presently. "The sweetheart story may be the reporter's invention; but I am convinced that Miss Chipperwell is Lena. I must go there at once. I cannot rest till I know what this conduct means. Such intimacy with such people is a little too much democracy for my daughter to indulge in. I shall see about it at once." And he rose from the table.

"No, do not go there. Your presence might cause a scandal. Should your notion prove correct, your recognition would at once reveal Lena's identity, which, if she be Miss Chipperwell, I am sure she is concealing for some perfectly worthy reason. Let me drive there. I am frequently seen visiting the poor, which, pardon me, I fear you are not; and my presence there would excite little remark. Besides, I am a woman, and I can ascertain the real truth, which, being a man, you never could."

"You are right, Hallie. We men are liable to make great fools of ourselves if left alone. When can you go?"

"At once. I shall meet you at din-

ner, till which time rest content, for I shall do whatever ought to be done. I bear some relationship to Lena, you know."

"True, true, Hallie. I know you will do what is for the best. But I am quite nervous; Lena is all I have left."

"If you have no serious objection, Aunt Hallie, I would like to go with you," said Mason. "As I used to know Mr. Cotterell, I might be of some service, perhaps."

"Certainly," said the Major.

"The very thing," said Graham, who had not the slightest suspicion that Mason might view favorably Lena's scandalous impropriety in "mixing up" with poor people who had got into the reprehensible habit of working for a living.

"I am sure I shall be delighted to have you go, Marshall," said Mrs. Delorme, who alone understood Mason's views. "I know nothing of the locality, and it might be very desirable to have a man around. Then, too, you are a stranger, and your relationship will excite no comment. Let us go together, by all means."

At Mrs. Delorme's suggestion, the carriage and driver were dispensed with, and Mason and she took an unostentatious phaeton instead. They arrived at Ruble's about 11 o'clock. It was Sunday, and people who were Cotterell's friends, or who were merely curious, were constantly coming and going, or collecting in little groups in the scanty front yard, at the dilapidated fence, or in the road, or in the grove opposite. The "distinguished-looking" man and the handsome woman, so unmistakably belonging to the upper world, attracted much attention as they alighted at the tumble-down gate. They were observed from the house, also; and as Mrs. Delorme stood waiting for Mason, who was seeking some object to which to hitch the horse, Lena hastened down the walk and greeted her aunt. This incident raised the curiosity of observers to an almost unendurable height; but it was not appeased by any remark the people could overhear with even hair-triggered ears. Mason soon came up, and Mrs. Delorme, speaking in a well-bred low tone, said:

"Lena, my nephew and your cousin, the Rev. Marshall Mason, of whose expected coming I told you yesterday."

"And Mr. Cotterell's friend," added Lena, as she gave Mason her hand.

"Yes, and Mr. Cotterell found him for me," said Mrs. Delorme. "How is Mr. Cotterell? Marshall and I were entirely ignorant of the dreadful affair until we learned of it from the morning paper an hour ago."

"The paper? I have not seen it, nor thought of it. They do not get it here; they are very poor, you know. But how good these poor people are!"

Then, with a look of sincere astonishment:

"Can it be possible, Aunt Hallie, that it was only yesterday you were expecting Cousin Mason? and that it was only last evening that—why, it seems to me to have been weeks ago."

"Yes, it was only yesterday. Can we see Mr. Cotterell if we go in?"

"His physicians gave very strict orders that he must not see anyone nor attempt to talk; that he must not be exposed to the danger of any kind of excitement. They have not permitted me to see him since last evening when they had just brought him here. Oh, it was so awful! He is sleeping now under the influence of some opiate."

"The physician's orders must be obeyed," said Mason. "I would not for the world endanger my friend's recovery. We can see him another time."

"Did you lodge here last night?" inquired Mrs. Delorme. "The house is so small I do not see how they could entertain an extra lodger."

"No. A young woman who teaches in the public schools and lives a few doors from here took me to stay with her; Mrs. Ruble promising to send for me in case of any change."

"How is Mr. Cotterell? You did not answer me awhile ago."

"The physician says Mr. Cotterell is in a very critical condition. Oh, it is so dreadful! And how cruel it was! And Lena, though she tried hard to avoid it, burst into tears."

Mason made excuse that he wished to mingle with some shopmen who were talking a short distance away, and left Lena and her aunt alone. They crossed the road to where there