

THE RED SEAL

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so that it would not cast a shadow, and he made his investigation in such a way that the curtain hid him from the view of anyone outside. He could tell from the general design of the "Three Crowns" that the windows on this side must look out on the stable yard. The lieutenant passed his hand along the casement. He could see nothing, as it was now quite dark outside, but his sense of touch gave him the information he desired. In the centre panel of the window, which was filled with diamond-shaped panes of glass, was a square which could be opened and shut either from outside or in. Except the handle, there was no fastening. This square was large enough to allow a full-grown person to pass in or out.

The lieutenant had made his examination with the utmost rapidity, as he did not wish to remain in Lady Aline's apartment long enough to raise the suspicions of Host Dicey and his precious wife. He crossed to the door, and in passing, Lady Aline whispered: "That window can be opened from the outside, and it cannot be secured from within. May I advise you to rest on the bed fully dressed? If, as I expect, the door can be locked on the inside, the window will be the point of attack. You may rely upon me to watch it."

Lady Aline nodded, and at the same time placed a small box in his hand. "My diamonds," she said. "They are safe with you; I have never trusted them to anyone before." Taking the jewels from her head had caused Lady Aline's beautiful black hair to fall in a cascade upon her shoulders.

"They will take my life before they get these," Reginald said as he took the box, and it was only the recollection of Katherine Allardyce which prevented him pressing his lips on the fingers his own hand touched, as the casket of diamonds passed from Lady Aline to himself.

As Reginald expected, the strong door had a lock with a key on the inside. He was quite clear now in his own mind as to what to expect.

"I must say good-night. Please remember that I shall be near you, and do not be afraid. Do not show yourself at the window, but if you and your maid can secure the handle in some way, at any rate for long enough to place you on your guard, it will be all the better. In any case, do not unlock or go through the door after you have secured it behind me. There is almost certain to be someone on the watch on that side as well."

Lady Aline replied in the same undertone: "You may trust me to do all you tell me; I am not in the least afraid. I shall have a pistol ready to help to defend myself."

Reginald cast an inquiring glance at Lady Aline, and with a gesture indicated the maid, who had been engaged in unpacking her mistress's things from a valise, with somewhat ostentatious disregard of what was going on. No doubt her French wit had gone slightly astray, and had led her to imagine that two young persons of the opposite sex could not possibly be engaged in saying good-night without some passages of the eyes, if nothing further, which it were better a discreet maid should not see.

Lady Aline smiled as she regarded Antoinette's back. "She is a brave girl, and will help me, if need be, with her voice if nothing else. I should be sorry for the man's eyes whom Antoinette saw approaching me with bad intent."

"At any rate, do not allow her to open the door. She would naturally make in that direction for assistance."

"She would not do that, I think, unless I told her; but in any case rest assured, for I will pocket the key."

Reginald nodded, bowed his adieus, and in a second was out of the room. He was only just in time, for on the landing was Madame Dicey, coming ostensibly to ask if the lady had all she required.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISITOR TO WINTER MANOR

"CATHERINE, what has come over you lately?"

Sir Francis took both his ward's hands into his, and looked with kindly, inquiring eyes into her tell-tale face.

The girl blushed to the roots of her hair. That is the worst of complexions which have a habit of registering every

phase of the deeper emotions which stir the soul.

"Nothing!" she protested. "What do you mean, uncle? I do not understand."

"Perhaps you have not remarked the symptoms. I suppose it does happen sometimes that a sufferer from some obscure disease is the last person to discover the existence, still more the cause, of the malady."

Katherine laughed. "Disease! Malady! You talk in enigmas, dear uncle. I should think there were few people further removed from such things than I am. I rowed for a couple of hours in a rough sea, with the tide running against me, only yesterday, without being tired, and I feel as fresh as a June rosebud this morning."

"You look like one, too," exclaimed the kindly old gentleman, looking at the girl with admiration. "Nevertheless, I hold to my opinion. So I will tell you the symptoms. Imprimis, restlessness. What you have said about rowing yesterday in the Shark only strengthens my case. You chose to row against the tide, you selected the hour on purpose. No one knows every mood of the channel better than you do. Why did you do that? Restlessness, Katherine, child—just restlessness. You wanted to tire your poor body out in revenge for the fact that it was the outer casket, the envelope of a perturbed spirit."

Katherine Allardyce interrupted him.

"Well, sir, who could help being disturbed? There the hay ripens, and no one attempts to cut it. The children are crying for bread, and the mother has nothing to feed them with. Where are the men? Drilling, when they should be working; or idling round the inns to hear the last news that some chance pedlar brings from the coast. The women are as bad as the men. They encourage them, and starve at home to help the cause. 'Tis the bonny Prince who will have his own ere long that is dinning in my ears every cottage I enter. Not a net is cast, though the herrings swarm in plenty, and the bass line the waters of the coast. Not a husbandman clasps the heft of his reaping hook or the handle of his scythe but to have it sharpened for quite other purposes than those for which it was made."

The girl had paled and flushed again as her eloquence mastered her. Sir Francis was not greatly moved, however, doubtless because he knew the whole story as well or better than she did.

"The second symptom," the colonel went on, just as if she had not interrupted him at all, "is forgetfulness."

"I know what you mean, uncle. I mislaid the big bunch of keys yesterday, and nothing could be got from the still-room for a couple of hours while we hunted high and low, Janet and I. I suppose she told you."

"She told me nothing, so you have yourself turned witness for the prosecution. I had to remind you three nights running that the time for my mulled wine had gone by nearly half an hour. Then Ponto—"

"Yes, I forgot his dinner. Poor old Ponto!" She patted the big mastiff's head as she spoke. The colonel and Katherine were walking down the broad drive towards the lodge gates on the Exmoor side of the park. Ponto, the oldest and most considered of all the animal dependents of the Manor, accompanied them in their walk. It was his only exercise. At other times he lay in the sunshine on the terrace, or on dark, cold days he stretched his frame out before the vast open fireplace of the entrance hall.

"One day only?" inquired Sir Francis, in a gentle, insinuating tone, which ought to have warned Katherine, if she had not been so ingrossed by these unexpected accusations, of irony lurking behind.

"Oh, yes; only yesterday, and then I am sure I should have remembered it in a very few minutes."

"The day before," Sir Francis went on in the same even tone, "Ponto waited longer, and at last he lifted up his voice and gave one long, melancholy howl. I could not find the mistress who had fed him without fail, and quite punctually for how many years? So I went and fed him myself."

Katherine leant over the dog and looked into his eyes. Then she kissed him on his broad, dun-colored brow, while she held an ear in either hand. "Forgive me, Ponto!" she whispered into those same



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