

The Crimson Bind

By FRED. M. WHITE

CHAPTER XLVII.—(Continued.)

"You had better go along, Frank," Littlimer suggested, under his breath. "I fervently hope now that the day is far from distant when you can return altogether, but for the present your presence is dangerous. We must give that rascal Henson no cause for suspicion."

"You are quite right," Frank replied. "And I'd like to shake hands now, dad."

Littlimer put out his hand, without a word. The cool, cynical man of the world would have found it difficult to utter a syllable just then. When he looked up again he was smiling.

"Go along," he said. "You're a lucky fellow, Frank. That girl's one in a million."

A dog cart driven by Chris brought herself and her companion into Moreton Wells in an hour. Frank had struck off across country in the direction of the station. The appearance of himself in Moreton Wells on the front of a dog cart from the castle would have caused a nine days' wonder.

"Nihil what I want to impress upon you is this," said Chris. "Mr. Steel's cigar case was stolen and one belonging to Van Sneek substituted for it. The stolen one was returned to the shop from which it was purchased almost immediately, so soon, indeed, that the transaction was never entered on the books. We are pretty certain that Reginald Henson did that, and we know that he is at the bottom of the mystery. But to prevent anything happening, and to prevent our getting the case back again, Henson had to go farther. The case must be beyond our reach. Therefore, I have purchased a new one, and it is a mere coincidence that took a stranger into Lockhart's direction after Henson had been there to look at some gun metal cigar cases set in diamonds. The stranger purchased the case, and asked for it to be sent to the Metropole to 'John Smith.' With the hundreds of letters and visitors there it would be almost impossible to trace the case or the man."

"Lockhart's might help you?"

"They have as far as they can. The cigar case was sold to a tall American. Beyond that it is impossible to go."

A meaning smile dawned on Merritt's face.

"They might have taken more notice of the gentleman at Rutgers," he said. "Being a smaller shop, I'm going to admit that case and pretend it belonged to a friend of mine."

"I want you to try and buy it for me," Chris said, quietly.

Rutgers was reached at length, and after some preliminary haggling, the case was approached. Merritt took it up with a well-feigned air of astonishment.

"Why, this must have belonged to your old friend B—," he exclaimed. "It's not new?"

"No, sir," the assistant explained. "We purchased it from a gentleman who stayed for a day or two here at the Lion, a friend of Mr. Reginald Henson."

"A tall man?" said Merritt, tentatively. "Long, thin beard and slightly marked with smallpox? Gave the name of Rawlins?"

"That's the gentleman, sir. Perhaps you may like to purchase the case?"

The purchase was made in due course, and together Chris and her quaker companion returned to the castle.

"Rawlins is an American swindler of the smartest type," said Merritt. "If you get him in a corner ask him what he and Henson were doing in America some two years ago. Rawlins is in this little game for certain. But you ought to trace him by means of the Lion people. Oh, lor!"

Merritt slipped back into an entry as a little, clean-shaven man passed along the street. His eyes had a dark look of fear in them.

"They're after me," he said, huskily. "That was one of them. Excuse me, please."

Merritt darted away and flung himself into a passing cab. His face was dark with passion; the big veins stood out on his forehead like cords.

"I'll be even with him yet. If I can only catch the 4.48 at the Junction I'll be in London before them. And I'll go down to Brighton, if I have to foot it all the way, and once get there, look to yourself, Reginald Henson. A hundred pounds is a good sum to go on with. I'll kill that cur—I'll choke the life out of him. Cabby, if you get to the Junction by a quarter to five I'll give you a quid."

"The quid's as good as mine, sir," cabby said, cheerfully. "Get along, lass."

Meanwhile Chris had returned thoughtfully to the dog cart, musing over the last discovery. She felt quite satisfied with her afternoon's work. Then a new idea struck her. She crossed over to the post office and dispatched a long telegram this:

"To David Steel, 15 Dovedale terrace, Brighton.

"Go to Wale's and ascertain full description of the Ontario customer who suggested the firm should procure gun metal cigar case for him to look at. Ask if he was a tall man with a thin beard and a face slightly pock-marked. Then telephone results to me. Quite safe, as Henson is away. Great discoveries to tell you.—Christal Lee."

Chris was paid for her telegram and then drove thoughtfully homeward.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Where is Rawlins?

Lord Littlimer was greatly interested in all that Chris had to say. The whole story was confided to him after dinner. Over his coffee on the terrace he offered many shrewd suggestions.

"There is one thing wherein you have made a mistake," he said. "And that is in your idea that Henson changed his cigar cases after Miss Gates laid your vote offering on Steel's doorstep."

"How else could it be done?" Chris asked.

"My dear, the thing is quite obvious. You have already told me that Henson

was quite aware what you were going to do—at least this he knew you were going to commit Steel. Also he knew that you were going to make Steel a present, and by a little judicious eaves-dropping he contrived to glean all about the cigar case. The fellow has already admitted to your sister that he listened. How long was that before you bought the cigar case?"

"I should say it might have been a week. We had inquiries to make, you know. In the first instance we never dreamt of offering Mr. Steel money. I blushed to think of that folly."

"Well, blush a little later on when you have more time. Then Henson had a week to work out his little scheme. He knows all about the cigar case, he knows where it is going to be bought. Then he goes to Lockhart's and purchases some trifle in the shape of a cigar case; he has it packed up, yellow string and all. This is his dummy. By keeping his eyes open he gets the chance he is waiting for. Ruth Gates hadn't the faintest idea that he knew anything when she left that case for the more certain she felt that Henson. He gets her out of the way for a minute or two, he unties the parcel, and places the Van Sneek case in it. No, by Jove, he needn't have bought anything from Lockhart's. He could have only thought of that to account for the yellow string and the stamped paper that Lockhart's people use. He first takes one case out of the parcel and replaces it with another, and there you are. You may depend upon it that was the way in which it was done."

"The more Chris thought over the matter the more certain she felt that such was the case. Like most apparently wonderful things, the explanation was absurdly simple. A con-juror's most marvelous tricks are generally the easiest."

"How foolish of us not to have thought of this before," Chris said, thoughtfully. "At any rate, we know all about it now. And we know who bought the cigar case so promptly returned to Lockhart's by Henson. I should like to see this Rawlins."

"You have got to find him first," said Littlimer.

"I'm going into Moreton Wells again to-morrow to make inquiries," said Chris.

But she was saved the trouble. Once more the ever-blessed telephone stood in good stead. She was just on the point of starting for Moreton Wells when Steel called her up. Chris recognized him with a thrill of eager pleasure.

"You need not be afraid," she said. "You can speak quite freely. How is Van Sneek?"

"Very queer," David responded. "Bell hoped to have operated upon him before this, but such a course has not been deemed quite prudent. The day after to-morrow it will be, I expect. Henson has found out where Van Sneek is."

"Indeed. Has he been to see you?"

"He has been more than once on all kinds of ingenious pretences. But I didn't call you up to tell you this. We have been making inquiries at Wale's, Marley and myself. The time has come to let Marley behind the scenes a bit."

"Did Wale's people know anything about the tall American?"

"Yes, yes. A tall American with a thin beard and a faint suggestion of smallpox called about a week before the great adventure, and asked to see some gun metal diamond-mounted cigar cases—like the one in Lockhart's window."

"Did he really volunteer that remark?"

"He did, saying also that Lockhart's were too dear. Wale's hadn't got what he wanted, he promised to get some cases out of stock, which meant that they would go to the same wholesale house as Lockhart's and get some similar cases. As a matter of fact, the largeness of his tips sent round to study the case in Lockhart's window. The cases were procured on the chance of a sale, but the American never turned up again. No one returned to the shopkeeper, and things often happen to shopkeepers. And this was about a week before the night of the great adventure."

"Wait a bit, I have not quite finished yet. Now, once I had ascertained this, an important fact becomes obvious. The American didn't want a cigar case at all."

"He subsequently purchased the one returned to Lockhart's shop."

"That remark does not suggest your usual acumen. The American was preparing the ground for Van Sneek to purchase with a view to a subsequent change. You have not fully grasped the villainess of this plot yet. I went to Lockhart's and succeeded in discovering that the purchaser of the returned case was a tall American, the name of the pattern I expected. Then I traced my man to the Lion at Moreton Wells, where he had obviously gone to see Reginald Henson. From the Lion our friend went to the Royal Metropole. The hard, steady look which she had ordered and repaired to the library, where Littlimer was trying some trout flies behind a cloud of cigarette smoke.

"Thought you had gone to Moreton Wells," he said. "Been at the telephone again? A pretty nice bill I should have to pay for all those long messages of yours."

"Mr. Steel pays this time," Chris

said, gaily. "He has just given me some information that obviates the necessity of going into the town. My dear uncle, you want a change. You look tired and languid—"

"Depression of spirits and a disinclination to exercise after food. Also a morbid craving for seven to eight hours' sleep every night. What's the little game?"

"No make that," Chris laughed. "Lord Littlimer and his secretary, Miss Lee, are going to spend a few days at Scarsdale, Royal hotel, to recuperate after their literary labors."

"The air here being so poor and enervating," Littlimer said, cynically. "In other words, I suppose you have traced Rawlins to Scarsdale Sands?"

"How clever you are," said Chris, admiringly. "Wale's American and Lockhart's American, with the modest pseudonym of John Smith, are what Mrs. Malaprop would call three single gentlemen rolled into one. We are going to make the acquaintance of John Smith Rawlins."

"Oh, indeed, and when do we start, may I ask?"

Chris responded coolly that she hoped to start on the course of the day. With a great show of virtuous resignation Lord Littlimer consented.

"I have always been the best of fortune," he said, plaintively; "but I never expected to be dragged all the place at my time of life by a girl who is anxious to make me acquainted with the choicest blackguardism in the kingdom. I leave my happy home, my dog, my body, and the following week of hotel living. Well, one can only die once."

Chris bustled away to make the necessary arrangements. Some few hours later Lord Littlimer, in a dazed, confused kind of way. She had not expected anything like this; and when had Rawlins found time for those brilliant predatory schemes that she had heard of?

"Well, what do you think of them?"

Littlimer asked, when at length he and Chris were alone. "I suppose it isn't possible that you and I have made a mistake?"

"You're man here?" Littlimer asked, languidly.

"Chris indicated two people seated in a window opposite."

"There!" she whispered. "There he is. And what a pretty girl with him!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

A Chevalier of Fortune.

Littlimer put up his glass and gazed with apparent vacancy in the direction of the window. He saw a tall man with a grey beard and hair; a man who looked carefully dressed and of distinguished appearance. Littlimer was fain to admit that he would have taken him for a gentleman under any circumstances. In manner, style and speech he left nothing to be desired.

"That chap has a fortune in his face and accent," Littlimer said. "Pon my word, he is a chance acquaintance that you would do well to get to know. He is the daughter of a gentleman, and she is a fortune in her face."

"Is his daughter," Chris said. "The likeness is very strong."

"It is," Littlimer admitted. "A singularly pretty, refined girl, with quite the grand air. Her education is excellent, and she is no wonder case. And how fond they seem to be of one another! Depend upon it, Chris, whatever that man's real name is, his daughter knows nothing of it. And yet you tell me that the police—"

"Well, never mind the police, now. I can get Mr. Steel to tell Rawlins all about it. If we can't contrive to force his hand without, but with that pretty girl before my eyes I shouldn't like to do anything harsh. Up till now I have always pictured the man as a scoundrel as a man who was utterly devoid of feelings of any kind."

Dinner proceeded quietly enough. Chris having eyes for hardly anything else but Rawlins, who was seated next to her. She rose preoccupied with a little gasp, and hastily lifted a tankard of water from the table. The girl opposite her had turned pale and her dark head had drooped forward.

"I hope I'm not serious," said Chris. "Drink a little of this; it is iced."

"And they told me that Rawlins had no ice in the house," the man Rawlins muttered, as he lifted his glass. "It is one of her little fainting fits. Ah, that is better."

The man Rawlins spoke with the tenderest solicitude. The look of position which usually followed a little smile on his face as his daughter looked at him, was now a deep devotion and affection for the girl. Chris, looking on, was wondering vaguely whether or not she had made a mistake.

"Littlimer obtained our ice," she said, gradually keeping this. Oh, yes, that is Lord Littlimer over there. I am his secretary."

Littlimer strolled across himself and murmured his condolences. A little time later and the four of them were outside in the veranda taking tea together. Rawlins might have been, and no doubt was, a finished scoundrel, but he was a good fellow, and he was a gentleman. He was a man of nerve, and full of resources. All the same, Littlimer was asking himself and wondering who the man really was. By birth he must have been born a gentleman, Littlimer did not doubt for a moment.

But there was one soft spot in the man, and that was his love for his daughter. For her sake he had been travelling all over the world for years; for years he had despaired of seeing her live to womanhood. But she was gradually growing better, indeed, if she had not walked so far to-day nothing would have happened. All the time that Rawlins was talking his eyes were resting tenderly on his daughter. The hard, steady look seemed to have gone out of them altogether.

Altogether a charming and many-sided rascal, Littlimer thought. He felt fond, as he called it, of collecting such a body of specimens, and here was a new and fascinating specimen. The two men talked together till long after dark, and Rawlins never betrayed bassard or cabinet minister unbecomingly after a long period of heavy labor.

Meanwhile Chris had drawn Grace Rawlins apart from the others. The girl was quiet and self-contained, but evidently a lady. She seemed to have but few enthusiasms, but one of them was for her father. He was the most wonderful man in the world, the most kind and the most generous. He was rich; indeed, it was a good thing, or she would never have been able to see so much of the world. He had given up nearly the whole of his life to her,

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MONTHLY MEETING

Of Women's Auxiliary Society of Jubilee Hospital Held Yesterday Afternoon.

At the city hall Tuesday afternoon the regular meeting of the Women's Auxiliary Society was held, there being a large attendance. The president occupied the chair and, after the transaction of routine business, the monthly report was read as follows:

Madame President and Ladies—I have pleasure in reporting that the net share of proceeds derived from the production of "All the Comforts of Home" on the 12th and 13th of March amounted to \$188, of which one-third has been paid as agreed to the account of the Daughters of Pity. Extreme thanks are due to those friends who consented to form the cast, and who cheerfully gave so much time and service. Thanks are also due to Mrs. H. M. Hooper, the architect, for completely furnishing the stage, and to several ladies and gentlemen who undertook to sell tickets.

The auditing committee has met regularly on Fridays since the last meeting and will continue until Easter.

Your building committee had a very satisfactory meeting with the building committee of the board of directors on the 8th March. Mr. Hooper, the architect, also being present. The plans for the children's ward were thoroughly examined, and changes made where they were so far modified as to the sustaining of the cost of such a necessary purchase as the new linoleum lately supplied amounted in all to something over \$700 it is not difficult to realize the extent of the cost for all improvements so large an establishment as the hospital. At the present moment there are several crying ordinary needs, such as new roof and floors and painting, besides the urgent necessities of the hospital. It is not possible to provide and maintain the necessary additions and repairs at the hospital. As the years pass expensive repairs recur and it is often difficult to effect even these out of the ordinary income. When, occasionally, "our public" complain of the incessant call for "hospital aid" they should remember the increased "wear and tear" that happens to the hospital when the hold, and where the cost of such a necessary purchase as the new linoleum lately supplied amounted in all to something over \$700 it is not difficult to realize the extent of the cost for all improvements so large an establishment as the hospital. At the present moment there are several crying ordinary needs, such as new roof and floors and painting, besides the urgent necessities of the hospital. It is not possible to provide and maintain the necessary additions and repairs at the hospital. As the years pass expensive repairs recur and it is often difficult to effect even these out of the ordinary income. 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