



Stella Mordant.

The Cruise of the "Kingfisher."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Well, now you've met me, I hope you've made up your mind, Nita," he said, as ingratiatingly as he could. "I hope you see that the plan I proposed is the only one. We'll go to-morrow—I'll meet you in London."

She shook her head.

"No," she said, in a faint voice. "I have made up my mind. I will not do that."

His face darkened.

"Why not?" he asked, sharply.

"It would be of no use," she said, wearily. "Someone would be sure to recognize me, someone who knew me when we were living together, and the discovery that we had tried to deceive people would only set them talking all the more."

"But, don't you mean to tell me that I'm to own up to having been a married man?" He stopped and bit his lip as the pale face lit up with scorn.

"Yes, that is your great fear, Ralph," she said. "That is what you dread. You are ashamed of me. Wait; I know you; it is of no use your trying to deceive me. You are ashamed of me and the past. Oh, I don't blame you. It's what a man like you would feel; it's in your nature and you can't help it."

"If you've come to abuse and bully me—" he began, sullenly.

"No," she said, in a dull way, passing her hand over her brow; "I have come to make a bargain with you. Last night you offered, if I'd consent to a pretended marriage, to make a countess of me, to share your title and your money. I don't want them, Ralph. I shouldn't be happy if—if I came back to you. I should know all the time that you only lived with me because you could not help it, that you were regretting all the time that you'd married me."

"Nita, I swear—"

She shook her head and made a weary gesture with her hand.

"It's the truth, and you know it. No, I won't trouble you, Ralph. I'll go away, quite out of your life—as I have been ever since you deserted me—and I'll never come near you or claim you."

He watched her keenly, cunningly. "Sounds likely, doesn't it?" he said, with a sneer.

"I promise," she said; "and I keep my promises, Ralph. There is only one condition. I don't want any

money—I've enough, can earn enough for myself, as I have done—all I want is that you should promise, on your part, to break off with—with the young lady you were going to deceive and betray."

He started, and thrust his hands in his pockets, glowing at her under his half-closed lids.

"Oh, that's it?" he said, with the twist of his under-lip.

"Yes," she said. "I can save her and any other girl you may attempt to lure into a false marriage. I can do that, and will do it. Give me your promise. But I don't need it. You'd break it if you could; but I'll take care you don't. While I'm alive I'll watch you."

His hand became conscious of its contact with the knife, and closed over it.

"I see," he said. "You'll play the spy on me—you'll dog me day by day, and perhaps change your mind and, when you're short of money, blackmail me."

She raised her head, her scorn of him glowing in her dark eyes.

"I would rather die than touch a penny of yours, Ralph," she said, quietly. "You may go your way, do what you please, so long as you relegate the poor unhappy girl you have trapped, God knows how! for she doesn't care for you; I saw it in her face as she drove by. I've made enquiries in the town. She doesn't care for you, Ralph; she will be glad to be free."

Mechanically he had got the knife open, and his hand was closing spasmodically on the hilt.

"I want to save her from you, and I will," Nita went on in a low but resolute voice. "Yes, even if I have to go to her and tell her the truth, as I will."

The blood rushed to his head, and the trees seemed to waver, the earth to rock in the madness of his passion.

"You will, will you?" he snarled, almost inarticulately. "You will?"

Warned by the terrible look in his bloodshot eyes, by the stealthy movement of his right hand, she recoiled and uttered a faint cry.

He sprang upon her, with the knife uplifted, and stabbed at her twice, blindly, but with terrible force. One stab would have been enough, but even as she threw up her arms and fell, he struck again with mad and brutish rage, and so wildly that, as she dropped at his feet, the knife flew from his hand.

He stood above her, panting, his teeth clenched, his eyes blazing, scarcely conscious for the moment of what had happened, what he had done. Then suddenly he realized it.

"Nita!" he cried, hoarsely. "Nita! Get up! I—I didn't mean— Why did you nag at me and raise the devil in me? I didn't mean—"

Then he dropped on his knees beside her, and felt for her heart.

As he did so his hands grew wet, and he shrank back and looked from the hand to the sightless eyes upturned to the sky as if mutely denouncing him, as if appealing to Him who has said vengeance is His.

He staggered to his feet, and leaning against a tree, tried not to look at the face again; but his eyes seemed drawn to it by some irresistible power. Presently he awoke to the deadly peril in which he stood. Every moment he remained there that peril increased. He must fly, and at once. But it was some minutes before he could move, for the face held him by a loathsome fascination, and when at

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last he moved from the spot, he still looked over his shoulder at his victim.

He had not got a dozen yards before he remembered the knife, and, with a start, pulled up. He forced himself to go back for it, and searched for it with shaking hands; but he failed to find it, and with the sweat breaking from every pore, he rose and fled into the thick darkness of the wood.

The flyman had told Rath to go straight through the wood. Now, "straight" meant straight to Rath, whether a path lay before him or not, and he took a bee-line with the ease and skill of a backwoodsman. As a result of his obeying the injunction too literally, he emerged from the wood at a little hamlet called Teem, which was in exactly the opposite direction to that which he should have taken for the Court.

He went to the small inn to enquire, was informed of his mistake, and hospitably invited to rest before setting out again. As it seemed to him that there was no particular hurry, he sat down on the settle beside the fire and talked to the innkeeper. The man, after a moment, brought a patty and a mug of ale, and Rath, who was hungry, was glad enough to see them.

Absently, he took out the big knife which he had used on the island for years, and which he had brought with him as a matter of course; but as the innkeeper placed an ordinary knife and fork beside the plate, Rath shut up his knife again and put it in his pocket.

"That be a useful tool, sir," remarked the innkeeper, smilingly.

"Yes," said Rath, in his grave but pleasant fashion. "I have done a great deal of work with it."

"Have you now, sir?" commented the man, obviously surprised that a gentleman should need such a knife.

"Yes; it is an old friend, and I should be sorry to lose it."

He ate the excellent patty and drank the ale, then rose—the innkeeper eyeing him admiringly—end having paid the small sum asked started for the Court again, not at all upset by his long and futile walk. Perhaps he thought that it would be better that Edward should reach the Court before him.

He resolved to leave the wood for the high road as soon as possible, but, oddly enough, he made rather a round of it. At last he struck the path when suddenly he heard a strange sound. For a moment he thought it must be the cry of an owl or some other night bird; but there was just a doubt in his mind whether it might not be that of a human being in distress, and, as a doubt was sufficient for him, he turned and walked quickly in the direction from which the cry had proceeded, going with the unerring instinct which his strange life on the island had brought to perfection.

He had not to go far; and his foot had almost touched the body lying amongst the bracken before he saw it.

He bent over the still form and raised it in his arms; it was wet with something more than dew, and he saw—felt, rather—that she had been stabbed. He set the body down gently and struck a light, looked round keenly, and saw that the bracken had been beaten down near the body and in a line from it. He was about to call for help when he heard footsteps approaching, and calmly and easily he returned to the body and waited.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

Rath knelt beside the body and waited. There was no need for him to call out, for his quick ears had

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War News.

Messages Received Previous to 9 a.m.

OFFICIAL.

LONDON, June 21.

The Governor, Newfoundland: General French reports the occupation, north of Hooge, of 250 yards of trenches abandoned by the enemy; 213 prisoners and three machine guns were captured. Last week the electric power station at La Bassee was successfully bombarded.

The French Government reports severe fighting north of Arras. In Labyrinth, Argonne and Lorraine progress is maintained and extended at various points. A considerable number of prisoners are being taken.

The Russian Government report the enemy offensive continued on the front of the Grodek Lakes; also stubborn actions on the Dnieper front, where the Russians, at many points, inflicted great loss on the enemy, capturing in one village over 2,000 men and seven machine guns.

The Italian Government report further progress on the Isonzo.

BONAR LAW.

A MAMMOTH WAR LOAN.

LONDON, June 21.

The Commons, this afternoon, gave the National Government a blank cheque to be filled up in accordance with the expenditure of the year, 1915, asking this indefinite credit. Chancellor of the Exchequer McKenna announced that he proposed to issue a war loan, to be terminated at the option of the Government, between 1925 and 1945, for a sum, the only limit of which is to be the excess of the national expenditures for war and other services for a year over the revenue. This loan will be put out at par, and bear interest at the rate of 4 1/2%. Holders of the first war loan and of consols annuities, will be given the privilege of converting the consols into the new loan on the specified terms. Facilities for subscription are so wide that the man who has only a dollar will be able to invest as easily as the millionaire. The first to come will be the first to be served, as allotments will be made and the application list close on or before July 20.

McKenna's announcement was made in the House of Commons. He said the State would have the right to repay the loan at par in 1925, but in any case it must be repaid within thirty years. He emphasized the fact that in addition to putting forward the appeal to the patriotism of the country to use its gigantic resources to carry on the war successfully, ourselves and our Allies, holders of both the old war loan and of consols will have the right to convert their securities into the new loan, the conversion of consols to be on the basis

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