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THE BETRAYAL

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CHAPTER XY.

Two Fair Callers.

After three days the house party at Rowchester was somewhat unexpectedly broken up. Lord Chelsford departed early one morning by special train, and the Duke himself and the remainder of his guests left for London later in the day. I remained behind with three weeks' work, and a fear which never left me by day or by night. Yet the relief of solitude after the mysteries of the last few days was in itself a thing to be thankful for.

For nine days I spoke with no one save Grooton. For an hour every afternoon, and for rather longer at night, I walked on the cliffs or the sands. Here on these lonely stretches of empty land I met no one, saw no living thing save the seagulls. It was almost like a corner of some forgotten land. These walks, and an occasional few hours' reading, were my sole recreation.

It was late in the afternoon when I saw a shadow pass my window, and immediately afterwards there was a timid knock at the door. Grooton had gone on his daily pilgrimage with letters to the village, so I was obliged to open it myself. To my surprise it was Blanche Moyat who stood upon the threshold. She laughed a little nervously.

"I'm no ghost, Mr. Ducaine," she said, "and I shan't bite!"

"Forgive me," I answered. "I was hard at work and your knock startled me. Please come in.

I ushered her into my sitting room. She was wearing what I recognized as her best clothes, and not being entirely at her ease she talked loudly and rapidly.

"Such a stranger as you are, Mr. Ducaine," she exclaimed. "Fancy, it's getting on for a month since we any of us saw a sign of you, and I'm sure never a week used to pass but father'd be be looking for you to drop in. We heard that you were living here all by yourself, and this morning mother said, perhaps he's ill. We tried to get father to come up and see, but he's off to Downham market today, and goodness knows when he'd find time if we left it to him. So I thought I'd come and find out for myself."

"I am quite well, thanks, Miss Moyat," I answered, "but very busy. The Duke has been giving me some work to do, and he has lent me this cottage, so that I shall be close at hand. I should have looked you up the first time I came to Brastor, but as a matter of fact I have not been there since the night of my lecture."

She was nervously playing with the fastening of her umbrella, and it seemed to me that her silence was purposeful. I ventured some remark about the weather, when she interrupted routhlessly.

"It's a mile and a half to our house from here," she said, "not a step farther. I don't see why you shouldn't have made a purpose journey."

I ignored the reproach in her eyes, as I had every right to do. But I began to understand the reason of her nervousness and her best clothes, and I prayed for Grooton's return.

"If I had had an evening to myself," I said, "I should certainly have paid your father a visit. But as it happens, the Duke has required me at the house every night while he was here, and he has left me enongh work to do to keep me busy night and day till he comes back."

She looked down upon the floor.

"I had to come and see you," she said in a low tone. "Sometimes I can't sleep for thinking of it. I feel that I haven't done right."

I knew, of course, what she meant.

"I thought we had talked all that out long ago," I answered, a little wearily. "You would have been very foolish if you had acted differently. I don't see how else you could have acted."

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "We were always brought up very particular—especially about telling the truth."

"Well, you haven't said anything that wasn't the truth," I reminded her.

"Oh, I don't know. I haven't said what I ought to say," she declared. "It seems all right when you are with me, and talk about it," she continued slowly, rising her eyes to mine. "It's when I don't see you for weeks and weeks that it seems to get on my mind, and I get afraid. I don't understand it, I don't understand it even now."

"Don't understand what?" I repeated.

She looked around. Her air of troubled mystery was only half assumed.

"How that man died!" she whispered.

"I can assure you that I did not kill him, if that is what you mean," I told her coolly. "The matter is over and done with. I think that you are very foolish to give it another thought."

She shuddered.

"Men can forget those things easier," she said. Perhaps he had a wife and children. Perhaps they are wondering all this time what has become of him."

"People die away from their homes and families every day, every hour," I answered. "It is only morbid to brood over one particular example."

"Father would never forgive me if he knew," she murmured, irrelevantly. "He hates us to do anything underhand."

I heard Grooton return with a sigh of relief.

"You will have some tea," I suggested.

She shook her head and stood up. I did not press her.

"No, I won't," she said. "I am sorry I came. I don't understand you, Mr. Ducaine. You seem to have changed altogether just these last few weeks. I can see that you are dying to get rid of me now, but you were glad enough to see me, or at any rate you pretended to be, once."

My breath was a little taken away. I looked at her in surprise. Her cheeks flushed, her voice had shaken with something more like anger than any form of pathos. I was at a loss how to answer her, and while I hesitated the interruption which I had been praying for came, though from a strange quarter. My door was pushed a few inches open, and I heard Lady Angela's clear young voice.

"Are you there, Mr. Ducaine? May I come in?"

Before I could answer she stood upon the threshold. I saw the delightful little smile fade from her lips as she looked in. She hesitated, and seemed for a moment about to retreat.

"Please come in, Lady Angela," I begged, eagerly.

She came slowly forward.

"I must apologize for my abominable country manners," she said, resting the tips of her fingers for a momeht in mine. "I saw your door was not latched, and it never occurred to me to knock."

"It was not necessary," I assured her. "A front door which does not boast a knocker or a bell must expect to be taken liberties with. But it is a great surprise to see you here. I had no idea that anyone was at Rowchester, or expected there, except Lord Blenavon. Has the Duke returned?"

She shook her head.

"I came down alone," she answered. "I found London dull. Let me see, I am sure that I know your face, do I not?" she added, turning to Blanche Moyat with a smile. "You live in Brastor, surely?"

"I am Miss Moyat," Blanche answered quietly.

"Of course. Dear me! I ought to have recognized you. We have been neighbors for a good many years."

"I will wish you good afternoon, Mr. Ducaine," Blanche said, turning to me. "Good afternoon—your Ladyship," she added a little awkwardly.

I opened the door for her.

"I will come down and see your father the first evening I have to spare," I said. "I hope you will tell him for me that I should have been before, but for the luxury of having some work to do."

"I will tell him," she said almost inaudibly.

"And thank you very much for coming to inquire after me," I added. "Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Ducaine."

I closed the door. Lady Angela was lounging in my easy chair with a slight smile upon her lips.

"Two lady callers in one afternoon, Mr. Ducaine," she remarked quietly. "You will lose your head, I am afraid."

"I can assure you," Lady Angela," I answered, "that there is not the slightest fear of such a catastrophe."

She sat looking meditatively into the fire, swinging her dog-skin gloves in her hands. She wore a plain pearl grey walking dress and deerstalker hat with a single quill in it. The severe but immaculate simplicity of her toilette might have been designed to accentuate the barbarities of Blanche Moyat's cheap finery.

"I understood that you would be in town for at least three weeks," I remarked.

"I trust that his Grace is well."

"I trust that he is," she answered. "I see nothing of him in London. He has company meetings and political work every moment of his time. I do not believe that there is any one who works harder."

"He has, at least," I remarked, "the compensation of success."

"You are wondering, I suppose," she said, looking up at me quickly, "what has brought me back again so soon."

"I certainly did not expect you," I admitted.

She rose abruptly.

"Come outside," she said, "and I will show you. Bring your hat."

We passed into the March twilight. She lead the way down the cliff and towards the great silent stretch of salt marshes. An evening wind, sharp with brine, was blowing in from the ocean, stirring the surface of the long creeks into silent ripples, and bending landwards with thin streaks of white smoke rising amongst the red-tiled roofs of the village. I felt the delicate sting of it upon my cheeks. Lady Angela half closed her eyes as she turned her face seawards.

"I came for this," she murmured. "There is nothing like it anywhere else."

We stood there in silence for several long minutes. Then she turned at me with a little sigh.

"I am content," she said. "Will you come up and dine with us tonight? Blenavon will be there, you know."

I hesitated.

"I am afraid it is rather a bother you to leave your work," she continued, "but I am not offering you idle hospitality. I really want you to come."

"In that case," I answered, "of course I shall be delighted."

She pointed to Brastor Grange away on the other side of the village. I noticed for the first time that it was all lit up.

"Have you heard anything of our new neighbors?" she asked.

"Only their names," I answered. "I did not even know that they had arrived."

"There is only a woman, I believe," she said. "I have met her abroad, and I dislike her—greatly. I hear that my brother spends most of his time with her, and that he has dined there for the last three nights. It is not safe or wise for him, for many reasons. I want to stop it. That is why I have asked you to come to us."

"It is quite sufficient," I told her. "If you want me for any reason I will come. I am two days ahead of my work."

We threaded our way amongst the creeks. All the time the salt wind blew upon us, and the smell of fresh seaweed seemed to fill the air with ozone. Just as we came in sight of the road we heard the thunder of hoofs behind. We turned around. It was Blenavon, riding side by side with a lady who was a stranger to me. Her figure was slim but elegant. I caught a glimpse of her face as they flashed by, and it puzzled me. Her hair was almost straw colored, her complexion was negative, her features were certainly not good. Yet there was something about her attractive, something which set me guessing at once as to the color of her eyes, the quality of her voice, if she should speak. Blenavon reigned in his horse.

"So you have turned up, Angela," he remarked, looking at her a little nervously. "You remember Mrs. Smith-Lessing, don't you—down at Bordighera, you know?"

Angela shook her head, but she never glanced towards the woman who sat there with expectant smile.

"I am afraid that I do not," she said. "I remember a good many things about Bordighera, but—not Mrs. Smith-Lessing. woman's horse, but I did not dare to look into her face. Blenavon, with a smothered oath and a black look at his sister, galloped after her. I rejoined Lady Angela, who was already in the road.

"Dear me," she said, "what a magnificent nerve that woman must have! To dare to imagine that I should receive her! Why, I shall see you at dinner-time, Blenavon. I have some messages for you."

I saw the whip come down upon the she is known in every capital in Europe—a police spy, a creature whose brains and body and soul are to be bought by any one's gold."

"What on earth can such a woman want here?" I remarked.

"In hiding, very likely," Lady Angela remarked. "Or perhaps she may be an additional complication for you."

I laughed a little scornfully.

"You, too, are getting suspicious," I declared. "The Prince and Mrs. Smith-Lessing are a strong combination."

"Be careful then that they are not too strong for you," she answered, smiling. "I have heard a famous boast of Mrs. Smith-Lessing's, that never a man nor a lock has yet resisted her."

I thought of her face as I had seen it in the half light—a faint impression of delicate colorlessness, and for the life of me I could not help a little shiver. Lady Angela looked at me in surprise.

"Are you cold?" she asked. "Let us walk more quickly."

"It is always cold at this time in the evening," I remarked. "It is the mist coming up from the marshes. One feels it at unexpected moments."

"I am not going to take you any farther," she declared, "especially as you are coming up tonight. Eight o'clock, remember. Go and salve your conscience with some work."

I protested, but she was firm. So I stood by the gate and watched her slim young figure disappear in the gathering shadows.

An evening wind, sharp with brine, was blowing in from the ocean.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lady Angela's Engagement.

I dined that night at Rowchester. Lord Blenavon was sulky, and Lady Angela was only fitfully gay. It was not altogether a cheerful party. Lady Angela left us the moment Blenavon produced his cigarette-case.

"Do not stay too long, Mr. Ducaine," she said, as I held the door open for her. "I want a lesson at billiards."

I bowed and returned to my seat. Blenavon was leaning back in his chair, smoking thoughtfully.

"My sister," he remarked, looking up at the ceiling and speaking as though to himself, "would make an admirable heroine for the psychological novelist. She is a bundle of fancies; one can never rely upon what she is going to do. What other girl in the world would get engaged on the Thursday, and come down here on the Friday to think it over—leaving, of course, her fiance in town Doesn't that strike you as singular?"

"Is it," I asked calmly, "a genuine case?"

Lord Blenavon nodded.

"I do not think that it is a secret," he said, helping himself to wine and passing the decanter. "She has made up her mind at last to marry Mostyn Ray. The affair has been hanging about for more than a year. In fact, I think that there was something said about it before Ray went abroad. Personally, I think that he is too old. I don't mind saying so to you, because that has been my opinion all along. However, I suppose it is all settled now."

I kept my eyes fixed upon the wineglass in front of me, but the things which I saw, no four walls had ever enclosed. One moment the rush of the sea was in my ears, another I was lying upon the little horse-hair couch in my sitting-room. I felt her soft white fingers upon my pulse and forehead. Again I saw her leaning down from the saddle of her great brown horse, and heard her voice, slow, emotionless, yet always with its strange power to play upon my heartstrings. And yet, while the grey seas of despair were closing over my head, I sat there with a stereotyped smile upon my lips, fingering carelessly the stem of my wineglass, unwilling guest of an unwilling host. I do not know how long we sat there in silence, but it seemed to me an eternity, for all the time I knew that Blenavon was watching me. I felt like a victim upon the rack, whilst he, the executioner, held the cords. I do not think, however, that he learnt anything from my face.

With a little shrug of the shoulders he abandoned the subject.

"By-the-bye, Ducaine," he said. "I hope you won't mind my asking you a rather personal question."

"If it is only personal," I answered quietly, "not at all. As you know, I may not discuss any subject connected with my work."

"Quite so! I only want to know whether your secretarial duties begin and end with your work on the Council of Defence, or are you at all in my father's confidence as regards his private affairs."

"I am temporary secretary to the Council of Defence only, Lord Blenavon," I answered. "I know nothing whatever of your father's private affairs. He has his own man of business."

I am not sure whether he believed me. He cracked some walnuts and commenced peeling them.

"My father will never listen to me," he said, "but I feel sure that he makes a mistake in becoming a director of all these companies. Politics should be quite sufficient to engross his time, and the money cannot be so much of an object to him. I don't suppose his holdings are large, but I am quite sure that one or two of those Australian gold mines are dicky, and you know he was an enormous holder of Chartereds, and wouldn't sell, worse luck! Of course I'm not afraid of his losing in the long run, but it isn't exactly a dignified thing to be associated with these concerns that aren't exactly A1. His name might lead people into speculations who couldn't altogether afford it."

"I know nothing whatever of these matters," I answered, "but from what I have seen of your father I should imagine that he is remarkably able to guard his own interests."

Blenavon nodded.

"I suppose that is true," he muttered. "But when he is already a rich man, with very simple tastes, I am rather surprised that he should care to meddle with such things."

"Playing at commerce," I remarked, "has become rather a hoppy with men of leisure lately."

"And women, too," Blenavon assented. "Rather an ugly hopvy, I call it."

A servant entered and addressed Blenavon.

"The cariage is at the door, your Lordship," he announced.

Blenavon glanced at his watch and rose.

"I shall have to ask you to excuse me, Ducaine," he said. "I was to have dined out tonight, and I must go and make my peace. Another glass of wine?"

"I rose at once.

"Nothing more, thank you," I said. "I will just say good-night to your sister."

"She's probably in the drawing-room," he remarked. "If not, I will make your excuses when I see her."

Blenavon hurried out. A few moments later I heard the wheels of his carriage pass the long front of the house and turn down the avenue. I lingered for a moment where I was. The small oak table at which we had dined seemed like an oasis of color in the midst of an atmosphere of gloom. The room was large and lofty, and the lighting was altogether inadequate. From the walls there frowned through the shadows the warlike faces of generations of Rowcheseters. At the farther end of the apartment four armed giants stood grim and ghostlike in the twilight, which seemed to supply their empty frames with the presentment of actual warriors. I looked down upon the table, all agleam with flowers, and fruit, and silver, over which shone the red glow of the shaded lamps. Exactly opposite to me in that chair now pushed carelessly back, she had sat, so close that my hand could have touched hers at any moment, so close that I had been able to wonder more than ever before at the marvellous whiteness of her skin, the perfection of her small, finely-shaped features, the strange sphinxlike expression of her face, always suggestive of some great self-restraint, mysterious, and subtly stimulating. And as I stood there she seemed again to be occupying the chair, at first a faint shadowy presence, but gaining with every second shape and outline, until I could scarcely persuade myself that it was not she who sat there, she whose eyes more than once during dinner-time had looked into mine with that curious and instinctive demand for sympathy, even as regards the things of the moment, the passing jest, the most transitory of emotions. A few minutes ago I had felt that I knew her better than ever before in my life, and now the chair was empty. My heart was beating at the imaginary presence of the vainest of shadows. She was going to marry Colonel Mostyn Ray.

And then I stood as though suddenly turned to stone. Before me were the great front windows of the castle. Beyond, eastwards, stretched the salt marshes, the salt marshes riven with creeks. Once more my unwilling hands touched that huddled-up heap of extinct humanity. I saw the dead face, which the sun could never warm again, and I felt the hands, cold, clammy, horrible. Ray was a soldier, and life and death had become phrases to him; but I—it was the first dead man I had ever seen, and the horror of it was cold in my blood. Ray had murdered him, fought with him, perhaps, but killed him. What would she say if she knew? Would his hands be clean to her, or would the horror rise up like a red wall between them?

"Will you take coffee, sir?"

I set my teeth and turned slowly round. I even took the cup from the tray without spilling it.

"What liqueur may I bring you, sir?" the man asked.

"Brandy," I answered.

In a few minutes I was laughing at myself, not quite naturally, perhaps, but only I could know that. I was getting to be a morbid, nervous person. It was the solitude! I must get away from it all before long. Fate had been playing strange tricks with me. Life, which a few months ago had been a cold and barren thing, was suddenly pressed to my lips, a fantastic, intoxicating mixture. I had drawn enough poison into my veins. I would have no more. I swore it.

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I tried to leave the castle unnoticed, but the place was alive with servants. One of them hurried up to me as I tried to reach my hat and coat.

"Her ladyship desired me to say that she was in the billiard room, sir," he announced.

"Will you tell Lady Angela—" and then I stopped. The door of the billiard room was open, and Lady Angela stood there, the outline of her figure sharply defined against a flood of light. She had a cue in her hand, and she looked across at me. "You are a long time, Mr. Ducaine. I am waiting for you to give me a lesson at billiards."

I crossed the hall to her side.

"I thought as Lord Blenavon had gone out—"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"That you would evade your duty, which is clearly to stay and entertain your hostess."

She closed the door and glanced at me curiously.

"What has happened to you?" she asked. "You look as though you had been with ghosts.'

"Is it so impossible?" I asked, moving a little nearer to the huge log fire. "What company is more terrifying than the company of our dead thoughts and dead hopes and dead memories?"

"Really, I am afraid that Blenavon must have been a very depressing companion!" she said, leaning her elbow upon the broad mantelpiece.

It was absurd! I tried to shake myself free from the miseries of the last hour.

"I am afraid it must have been the other way," I said, "for your brother has gone out."

"Yes," she said quietly, "he has gone to that woman at Brastor Grange. I wish I knew what brought her into this part of the country."

I looked round at the billiard table.

"Did you mean that you would like a game," I asked. "I am rather out of practice, but I used to fancy myself a little."

"I have no doubt," she answered, sinking into a low chair, "that you are an excellent player, but I am willing to take it for granted. I do not wish to play billiards. Draw that chair up to the fire and talk to me."

It was of all things what I wished to avoid that night. But there was no escape. I obeyed her.

"What your brother has told me is, I presume, no secret," I said. "I am to wish you happiness, am I not "

She looked up at me in quick surprise.

"Did Blenavon tell you—"

"That you had promised to marry Col. Mostyn Ray. Yes."

"That is very strange," she said thoughtfully. "Blenavon is not as a rule needlessly communicative, and at present it is almost a secret."

"Nevertheless," I said, turning slowly towards her, "I presume that it is true."

"It is perfectly true," she answered.

There was silence between us for several minutes. One of the footmen came softly in to see whether we required a marker, and finding us talking, withdrew. I was determined that the onus of further speech should remain with her.

"You are surprised?" she asked at last.

"Very."

"And why?"

"I scarcely know," I answered, "except that I have never associated the thought of marriage with Colonel Ray, and he is very much older than you."

"Yes, he is a great deal older," she answered. "I think that his history has been rather a sad one. He was in love for many years with a woman who married—some one else. I have always felt sorry for him ever since I was a little girl."

"Dou you know who that woman was?"

"I have never heard her name," she answered.

I found courage to lift my eyes and look at her.

"May I ask when you are going to be married "

Her eyes fell. The question did not seem to please her.

"I do not know," she said. "We have not spoken of that yet. Everything is very vague."

"Colonel Ray is coming down here, of course?" I remarked.

"Not to my knowledge," she declared. "Not at any rate until the next meeting of the council. I shall be back in town before then."

"I begin to believe," I said, with a grim smile, "that you brother was right."

"My brother right?"

"He finds you enigmatic! You become engaged to a man one today, and you leave him the next—without apparent reason."

She was obviously disturbed. A slight wave of trouble passed over her face. Her eyes failed to meet mine.

"That I cannot altogether explain to you," she said. "There are reasons why I should come, but apart from them this place is very dear to me. I think that whenever anything has happened to me I have wanted to be here. You are a man, and you will not altogether understand this."

"Why not?" I protested. "We, too, have our sentiment, the sentiment of places as well as of people. If I could choose where to die I think that it would be here, with my windows wide open and the roar of the incoming tide in my ears."

"For a young man," she remarked, looking across at me, "I should consider you rather a morbid person."

"There are times," I answered, "when I feel inclined to agree with you. Tonight is one of them."

"That," she said coolly, "is unfortunate. You have been over-working."

"I am worried by a problem." I told her. "Tell me, are you a great believer in the sanctity of human life?"

"What a question!" she murmured. "My own life, at any rate, seems to me to be a terribly important thing."

"Suppose you had a friend," I said, "who was one night attacked in a quiet spot by a man who sought his life, say, for the purpose of robbery. Your friend was the stronger and easily defended himself. Then he saw that his antagonist was a man of ill repute, an evil doer, a man whose presence upon the earth did good to no one. So he took him by the throat and deliberately crushed the life out of him. Was your friend a murderer?"

She smiled at me—that quiet, introspective smile which I knew so well.

"Does the end justify the means? No, of course not. I should have been very sorry for my friend; but if indeed there is a Creator, it is He alone who has the power to take back what He has given."

"Your friend, then——"

"Don't call him that!"

I rose up and moved towards the door. I think that she saw something in my face which checked any attempt she might have made to detain me.

"You must forgive me," I said. "I cannot stay."

She said nothing. I looked back at her from the door. Her eyes were fixed upon me, a little distended, full of mute questioning. I only shook my head. So I left her and passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XVII.

More Treachery.

There followed for me a period of unremitting hard work, days during which I never left my desk save at such hours when I knew that the chances of meeting any one scarcely existed. Several times I saw Lady Angela from my window on the sands below, threading her way across the marshes to the sea. Once she passed my window very slowly, and with a quick backward glance as she turned to descend the cliff. But I sat still with clenched teeth. I had nailed down my resolutions, I had determined to hold fast to such threads of my common sense as remained. Only in the nighttime, when sleep mocked me and all hope of escape was futile, was I forced to grapple with this newborn monster of folly. It drove me up across the Park to where the house, black and lightless, rose a dark incongruous mass above the trees, down to the sea, where the wind came booming across the bare country northwards, and the spray leaped white and phosphorescent into the night like flakes of wind-hurled snow. I stood as close to the sea as I dared, and I prayed. Once I saw morning lighten the mass of clouds eastwards, and the grey dawn break over the empty waters. I heard the winds die away, and I watched the sea grow calm. Far across on the horizon there was faint glimmer of cold sunlight. Then I went back to my broken rest. It was my solitude in those days which drove me to seek peace or some measure of it from these things.

At last a break came, a summons to London to a meeting of the council. I was just able to catch my train and reach the war office at the appointed time. There were two hours of important work, and I noticed a general air of gravity on the faces of every one present. After it was over Ray came to my side.

"Ducaine," he said, "Lord Chelsford wishes to speak to you for a few moments. Come this way."

He led me into a small, barely furnished room, with high windows and only one door. It was empty when we entered it. Ray looked at me as he closed the door, and I fancied that for him his expression was not unfriendly.

"Ducaine," he said, "there has been some more of this damned leakage. Chelsford will ask you questions. Answer him simply, but tell him everything—everything, you understand."

"I should not dream of any concealment," I answered.

"Of course not! But it is possible—Ah!"

He broke off and remained listening. There was the sound of a quick footstep in the hall.

"Now you will understand what I mean," he whispered. "Remember!"

It was not Chelsford, but the Duke, who entered and greeted me cordially. With a farewell nod to me Ray disappeared. The Duke looked round and watched him close the door. The nhe turned to me.

"Ducaine," he said, "a copy of our proposed camp at Winchester, and the fortifications on Bedler's Hill, has reached Paris."

"Your Grace," I answered, "it was I who pointed out to you that our papers dealing with those matters had been tampered with. I am waiting now to be cross-questioned by Lord Chelsford. I have done all that is humanly possible. It goes without saying that my resignation is yours whenever you choose to ask for it."

The Duke sat down and looked at me thoughtfully.

"Ducaine," he said, "I believe in you."

I drew a little breath of relief. The Duke was a hard man and a man of few words. I felt that in making that speech he had departed a great deal from his usual course of action, and I knew that he meant it.

"I am very much obliged to your Grace," I answered.

"I think," he continued, "that Lord Chelsford and in fact all the others are inclined to accept you on my estimate. We all of us feel that we are the victims of some unique and very marvellous piece of roguery on the part of some one or other. I believe myself that we are on the eve of a discovery."

"Thank heaven!" I murmured.

"We shall only succeed in unravelling this mystery," the Duke continued deliberately, "by very cautious and delicate manoeuvring. I have an idea which I propose to carry out. But its success depends largely upon you."

"Upon me?" I repeated, amazed.

"Exactly! Upon your common sense and judgment."

The Duke paused to listen for a moment. Then he continued, speaking very slowly, and leaning over towards me——

"Lord Chelsford proposes for his own satisfaction to cross-examine you. It occurs to me that you will probably tell him of your fancied disturbance of those papers in the safe, and of your little adventure with the Prince of Malors."

I looked at him in surprise.

"Have they not all been told of this?" I asked.

"No."

There was a moment's dead silence. I was a little staggered. The Duke remained imperturable.

"They have not been told," he repeated. "No one has been told. The matter was one for my discretion, and I exercised it."

There seemed to be no remark which I could make, so I kept silence.

"We have discussed this matter before," the Duke said, "and my firm conviction is that you were mistaken. That safe could only have been opened by yourself, Ray, or myself. I think I am justified in saying that neither of us did open it."

"Nevertheless the safe was opened," I objected.

"Those were the very papers, copies of which have found their way to Paris."

"Exactly,' the Duke answered. "Only you must remember that every member of the Board was sufficiently acquainted with their contents to have sent those particulars to Paris, without opening the safe for a further investigation of them. Any statement of your suspicion would only result in attention being diverted from the proper quarters to members of my household. I believe that even if your are right, even if those papers were disturbed, it was done simply to throw dust in your eyes. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, your Grace," I answered.

"Lord Chelsford, if you were able to convince him, would most certainly be misled in this direction. That is why I have kept your report to myself. That is why my advice to you now is to say nothing about your imagined displacement of those papers. That is my advice. You understand?"

"Yes, your Grace," I repeated.

"With regard to the Prince of Malors," the Duke continued, "my firm conviction is that you were mistaken. Malors is not a politician. He has nothing whatever to gain or lose in this matter. He is a member of one of the most ancient houses of Europe, a house which for generations has been closely connected with my own. I absolutely decline to believe that whilst under my roof a Malors could lower himself to the level of a common spy. Such an accusation brought against him would be regarded as a blot upon my hospitality. Further, it would mean the breaking off of my ancient ties of friendship. I am very anxious, therefore, that you should bring yourself to accept my view as to this episode also."

"Your Grace," I answered, "you ask me very hard things."

He looked at me with his clear cold eyes.

"Surely not too hard, Mr. Ducaine," he said. "I ask you to accept my judgment. Consider for a moment. You are a young man, little more than a boy. I for forty years have been a servant of my country, both in the field and as a lawmaker. I am a Cabinet Minister. I have a life-long experience of men and their ways. My judgment in this matter is that you were mistaken, and much mischief is likely to ensue if the Prince of Malors should find himself an object of suspicion amongst us."

"Your Grace," I said, "forgive me, but why do you not say these things to the Board, or to Lord Chelsford and Colonel Ray after they have heard my story?"

"Because," the Duke answered, "I have no confidence in the judgment of either of them. Both in their way are excellent men, but they are of this new generation, who do not probe beneath the surface, who form their opinions only from the obvious. It is possible that after hearing your story they might consider the problem solved. I am, at any rate, convinced that they would commence a search for its solution in altogether wrong quarters."

"Your Grace," I said firmly, "I am very sorry indeed that I cannot take your advice. I think it most important that Lord Chelsford should know that those papers were tampered with. And as regards the Prince of Malors, whatever his motive may have been, I discovered him in the act of perusing the documents relating to the subway of Portsmouth. I cannot possibly withold my knowledge of these things from Lord Chelsford. In fact I think it is most important tnat he should know of them."

The Duke rose slowly to his feet. He showed no sign of anger.

"If you prefer your own judgment to mine, Mr. Ducaine," he said, "I have no more to say. I have taken you into my confidence, and I have endeavored to show you your most politic course of behaviour. If your views are so far opposed, you must not consider it an injustice if I decide that a person of more judgment is required successfully to conduct the duties of secretary to the Council."

"I can only thank your Grace for your past kindness," I answered with a sinking heart.

He looked across at me with still cold eyes.

"Do not misunderstand me," he said. "I do not dismiss you. I shall leave that to the Board. If my colleagues are favorably disposed towards you I shall not interfere. Only so far as I am concerned you must take your chance."

"I quite understand your Grace," I declared. "I think that you are treating me very fairly.'

The Duke leaned back in his chair.

"Here they come!" he remarked.

(To be continued.)

FELL FROM BRIDGE

Workman Injured at Nauwigewauk and Brought to Hospital Here.

A young man named Mitchell De Lisle met with a severe accident early Tuesday afternoon. He was working on a bridge over the Hammond river near Nauwigewauk, and fell through onto a raft below. The distance was about thirty feet.

He was made as comfortable as possible in a sleeping car used by the bridge crew, and when the suburban train for St. John came along he was placed on board. The suburban reached here about 3.30 o'clock and from the station Mr. DeLisle was conveyed to the hospital.

To the Methodist Conference.

The following is from the official list of delegates to the General Conference of the Methodist Church, the first session to be held at St. James Church, Montreal, on September 12, 1906.

NEW BRUNSWICK AND P. E. ISLAND CONFERENCE.

Ministers—Revs. Wm. Dobson, Charlottetown, P. E. I.; C. H. Paisley, D. D., Sackville, N. B.; Howard Sprague, D. D., St John, N. B.; T. Marshall, St. John, N. B.; George Steele, Belque, P. E. I.; Wm. Harrison, Cornwall, P. E. I.; E. Evans, D. D., Hampton, N. B.; J. A. Rogers, D. D., Sussex, N. B.; J. A. Crisp, St. John, N. B.

Laymen—Messrs. Henry Smith, Charlottetown, P. E. I.; James R. Inch, LL. D., Fredericton, N. B.; David Allison, LL. D., Sackville, N. B.; W. D. Baskin, St. John, N. B.; J. M. Fripp, Woodstock, N. B.; J. H. White, St. John, N. B.; Alfred Rowley, Marysville, N. B.; E. R. Machum, St. John, N. B.; H. T. Pickering, Stanley Bridge, P. E. I.

NOVA SCOTIA CONFERENCE

Ministers—Revs. W. H. Heartz, D. D. Yarmouth; Benj. Hills, Mill Village; David Hickey, Port Hawkesbury, C. B.; David W. Johnson, Windsor; John Craig, Aylesford; Byron C. Borden, D. D., Sackville, N. B.; George F. Johnson, B. A., Burlington; W. W. Andrews, LL. D., Sackville, N. B.; S. F. Huestis, D. D., Halifax; Wm. Brown, Lawrencetown.

Laymen—Judge Chesley, Lunenburg; Messrs. W. B. MacCoy, Halifax; Chas. Smith, Amherst; S. C. Mullhall, Middleton; W. P. Moffatt, North Sydney, C. B. B. McLellan, Truro; E. R. Gilmore, Sydney Mines, C. B.; W. S. Whitman, Hantsport; W. B. Sankine, Halifax; R. B. Dakine, Windsor.

The greatest depth at which gold has as yet been excavated from the earth is 1,200 feet (about three fourths of a mile), at the New Chums mine, Australia.

CASTORIA
For Infants and Children.
The Kind You Have Always Bought
Bears the Signature of Chas. H. Fletcher