

astonished. But you look troubled and worried, and not a bit like your usual self. If there is any way I can help you I shall be delighted."

Lady Loxton smiled for the first time. Evidently she had not the slightest suspicion of Vera's object, and even Alonzo no longer regarded Vera with a hostile glance.

"We are in trouble," Lady Loxton said. "It is the old story of the pitcher that goes once too often to the well. We were in that Brighton business and somebody unfortunately recognized us. So we came here on the chance of finding one of those fishing boats in which we could get over to Holland. We thought we could hide here until the opportunity came."

"Ah, I am afraid I don't know anything at all about that," Vera said. "It is out of my line altogether. And now let me get you something to eat. I am sure you must need it. Oh, no trouble. I have only to ring the bell."

The bell was answered a moment or two later. But the man standing there was not the caretaker, but Hallett.

#### CHAPTER XLVIII.

##### Beyond the Power of Evil.

WITH an oath Alonzo flung aside the cigarette he had lighted and jumped to his feet. He had seen the trap like a flash, and he moved a pace forward as if he would have fallen on Vera and choked the life out of her. It was maddening to be fooled by a child like that, to be deluded by her smiles and innocence. It was all very well to sneer over many a wise man who had been snared by Lady Loxton's artlessness, but it was quite another matter now that the same weapons were turned upon himself. And, moreover, he was not armed. He had always despised the class of spy who travelled with a revolver in his pocket. And he knew too the determined character of the man who stood there smiling grimly in the doorway.

"You have done exceedingly well, Miss Leroux," Hallett said. "Let me congratulate you on the way you have managed this little affair. Will you kindly sit down, Senor Alonzo. You will gain nothing by violence. Lady Loxton, I regret to say that you are my prisoner. A few days ago I arrested Mrs. Blair Allison in this very room. I might as well tell you that she and her husband are both in custody, as also are Allison's confederates. It was very unfortunate that you should come here."

Lady Loxton showed her teeth in a brilliant smile. She could not forget her blandishments even now.

"We came to see our friends," she said.

"No doubt," Hallett replied. "But the real reason why you came here was because you were recognized in connection with that Brighton affair, and you were astute enough to see that your career in England was finished. You will stay here till tomorrow, when you will both be handed over to the police. As doubtless you have both been here before you are aware of those armoured turrets in the roof. They will make two very efficient cells, where you will be perfectly safe till the morning. Now, Lady Loxton, will you please go first. Senor Alonzo after you."

Alonzo crept along unwillingly into the hall. He glared round him with some desperate idea of escape in his mind, but the sight of the caretaker standing there stolidly fingering a revolver caused him to change his mind. A moment or two later and the two spies were locked securely away in the steel-lined turret bedrooms which no doubt had been erected at some time as a possible platform for machine guns. Vera breathed more freely when the keys were turned upon them and they were powerless for further harm.

"That was well done," Hallett said. "Uncommonly well done. We are making a bigger bag than I anticipated."

"It was a pure accident," Vera said. "I cannot see how I can take any praise from it. They were so easily deceived, and you came back just at the right time. I do hope everything is going well outside."

"Splendidly," Hallett explained.

"Nothing could be better. That last message of your's has done the trick beautifully. In addition to the four fishing smacks we have lured in a ship which would be rather difficult to describe. She is a sort of combination between a hospital craft and a mission vessel flying the flags of all nations. She has been hanging about for weeks and nobody seems to have had the slightest suspicion of her. But the last hour Inchcliffe has been cruising about in one of his motor boats picking up a heap of information. It was he who suggested that I should fish for the stranger with one of the code signals, and your last message was responded to at once. Now the whole lot are there together in the bay, and almost at any moment the crews may come here for instructions. Our idea is to tackle them one by one as they come in and lay them out. There won't be more than thirty of them altogether, and we have got plenty of room for them in the big turret bedroom, where they will be as safe as if they were in York jail. And that reminds me that this will be no place for you, Miss Vera. You had better let my man here escort you back to the castle—

"Oh, I must stay," Vera said. "I should like to see the finish of this thing. You never know if my services might be useful."

HALLETT demurred, but finally gave way, much against his better judgment. He was half disposed to argue the point further when the front door opened and the others came in.

They looked smiling and confident enough, they had the air of men who have done big things.

"So all goes well?" Hallett asked.

"Couldn't be better," Inchcliffe said. "That third signal of yours did the trick, I mean the one about the mines. I left Montague and the other two at the foot of the cliff just by the side of the caves, and as I set off on my little trip round the smacks I caught a glimpse of a boat coming in. There was only one man in it, and I felt quite sure that he was coming to get those mines ready. Montague will tell you what happened afterwards."

"We spotted the beggar all right," Montague took up the story. "We followed him across the sands and saw him enter one of the caves. He produced a lantern, after which, with the aid of a lever, he lifted a spring trap and a lot of big rocks flung back on hinges and disclosed a cavern beyond. Really a most ingenious affair, but that's not the point. Inside the cave were quite a hundred mines all ready for use. Then we dropped on our man, who showed fight. We did not want any noise of revolvers, so we promptly shot him and put an end to that game. Oh, yes, we killed him right enough. Then Inchcliffe came back and expounded a little idea of his own. We filled up his motor-boat and the spy's boat with mines, and for the last hour we have been doing a little laying of our own."

"Rather a dangerous game," Hallett observed.

"It might be in less expert hands than mine," Inchcliffe said coolly. "But I know what I am doing, as you will see presently. When my little programme comes off there won't be any of those mines left to damage anybody."

Hallett let it go at that. He knew that in Inchcliffe he had an ally who could read the sea and who understood the strategic side of it like an open book. Moreover, there was no time to argue, for at any moment the crews of the smacks and the sham hospital ship might be arriving for their instructions.

"We can discuss the point later," Hallett said. "Meanwhile it seems to me that I can hear steps on the gravel outside. You are all armed, aren't you? Good! Open the door."

The caretaker flung the door back and four men slouched in. By the way they advanced it was evident that this was by no means their first visit, for they made straight for the dining-room quite unaware of the fact that they were flanked by six resolute armed men. They turned sharply as Hallett spoke.

(To be continued.)



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