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POOR DOCUMENT

The Crimson Slipper.

BY DORA LANGLOIS,

Author of "A Bolt From the Blue," "That Red-Headed Woman," "The Kiss of Judas," "The Secretary's Daughter," "Victoria's Dream," &c.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER II.

"What! another letter from Mrs. Montgomery?" Herman exclaimed as we entered our den late the following afternoon. "By Jove! Duncan, it's addressed to you. I beg your pardon," and he handed me, not without some chagrin, the envelope which he had already half opened.

"For me?" I said, carelessly. "Congratulate me. I must have made good use of my time. It's an invitation to dinner this evening, Herman. Will you come?"

"No," he answered, half-angrily. "You can make excuses for me, as the notice is so short—that is, if you're going."

"Yes, I think I shall go," I said after a moment spent in simulated hesitation, for little as I cared to go to Santhwaite Castle, much as I disliked the idea of annoying my friend, Mrs. Montgomery's letter really left me no option. Added to it was a postscript, the contents of which I had not communicated to Herman, to the effect that she really thought the article I spoke of having found must belong to her after all, and she would be very glad if I would return it, and would also bring her a bunch of the Marie Louise roses that grew on the south wall of my house.

The meaning of the two requests, one running into the other, was plain enough for a school-boy's intelligence. I was to put the little shoe into a box with some flowers, and I should then be at liberty to hand it to her without attracting attention even in a crowd.

The inquisitive Minting procured me the flowers, and Mrs. Foreman, my cook-house-keeper, turned out some ribbons from a box which proved the very thing I wanted. But when I came downstairs to start for Santhwaite with the box under my arm, Herman, who followed me to the door, exclaimed:

"What have you got there, Duncan?"

"Flowers," I answered, as coolly as possible, "for Mrs. Montgomery."

He had been ruffled, I knew, because the invitation was addressed to me instead of to himself, and his temper was not improved by the fact that he despised himself for feeling annoyed about it. His irritation betrayed him into taking a liberty with me—a thing neither of us had ever been guilty of before.

"Flowers for Mrs. Montgomery!" he said. "The man who takes flowers from Elsinore to Santhwwaite has lost all sense of proportion."

As I had expected I had to hand her the box before her guests, and I did it with the best air I could command.

I thought her husband (a stout, middle-aged man, with a dark, heavy face) glanced curiously at her as she thanked me rotundly, but immediately after he turned his attention elsewhere with the air of a man too used to these vagaries to trouble himself much about them, nor did he again notice me during the course of the evening. Instead of trusting to my honour, as she ought, and indeed ought, to have done, she insisted on further lowering herself in my eyes by whispering that she believed that her little Irish terrier Rags must have stolen the slipper and taken it out on the moor, as she couldn't account for the loss in any other way.

It was with a cheerful sense of relief that I got into my dog-cart and drove through the lodge gates of Santhwaite Castle into the high road beyond.

I was alone, and had only got about a couple of hundred yards from the gates when someone stepped suddenly from the hedge and signed to me to draw up. It was a woman, tall and finely built. Her head and face were wrapped in a shawl, and I could see nothing distinctly but her white hands with long, delicate, taper fingers.

"You are the gentleman from Elsinore?" she said.

"I am," I replied.

"Mr. Herman, or Mr. Duncan?"

"My name is Duncan."

"The footman said so," she continued, "but I thought it was the other one. Oh, Mr. Duncan, you brought it back to her tonight! Tell me, pray tell me where you found it?"

"My good girl," I answered, "I don't know what you are talking about."

"You do," she retorted, rudely. "You brought it back to her in that box with the trumpery flowers! Do you think I don't know? What did you want with flowers from Elsinore? It came in that box, and she threw it into the bottom of a cupboard, and she'll have it found tomorrow. As if that was any sort of use, when I've been looking for it since Monday night, and know it wasn't there before."

"You're talking riddles," I said, as coolly as I could, "and I think you're foolish to work yourself up like this."

"Foolish!" she retorted. "Foolish! There are others worse than me. She has got the crimson slipper back through you, but how about the stocking—the stocking? She walked in bare-foot? I've got that safe, all stained and torn. How about the thorns and the scratches on her foot? I've seen them."

"Well," I said, "if you have, I don't see why you should come to me."

"You don't understand, sir," she cried, passionately, drawing closer to me in her eagerness. "She met him that night, I'm sure she did. She has been writing to him for ever so long, without her husband's knowledge. No one—no one knows of it but me, and that night I'm sure she met him alone."

"There's a friend of yours in the case, then?" I said, coldly. "Look here, my good girl, if you're so sure about this unpleasant business, give up thinking about the man, and let matters take their course. After all, it's no business of ours."

"It is our business," she answered, with fierce anger. "It's your business, and every honest man's business, and you'll find it out when too late, if you're not careful. Mr. Duncan, he has not been seen since Monday night—he has disappeared entirely. Where did she meet him, that's the question, and what has she done with him? As true as there's a Heaven above us, I think that she has killed him! Only tell me where you found the slipper, and I can go and look for him myself."

Just for a moment the absolute conviction expressed by every tone of the girl's deep voice startled me, but I recovered myself almost immediately, for the idea was too absurd. "Go home," I said, "and wait, and don't throw your sympathy away on a man who is probably treating you very badly."

"How do you know how he is treating me?" she demanded. "He treated me well, and always would have done but for her. Will you tell me where you found it?"

"I'm not going to tell you anything," I replied, "The road is very narrow, and if you're a wise girl you'll step aside."

"I won't" she retorted. "You shall tell me or drive over me!" and with a sudden spring she wound both her hands in my reins.

The cob flinched, but I steadied him, and she narrowly escaped his hoofs. I thought it probable that if I startled him she would get out of the way; but, on the other hand, if she didn't move quickly she might be hurt.

"Very good," I said. "As you've got the horse's head, perhaps you'll see that he doesn't bolt while I light up," and dropping the reins I got out my cigar-case.

When I had a cigar well alight I resumed the reins and continued: "I want you to thoroughly understand that I am not going to drive over you, and I am not going to tell you anything. If you can afford to stay here all night, why, so can I."

She made no answer, but stood there in sullen silence holding the horse's head. The shawl, or whatever it was she wore, must have been fastened on, for though both hands were engaged it did not fall away. Her face was still nothing but a dim white oval shadowed by it.

My cigar was half-consumed before she broke the silence.

"Are you going to tell me?" she demanded.

"No, I am not," I replied. "I'm sorry you insist on tiring yourself like this."

She did not answer. When the cigar was a mere stump I threw it away, and, feeling for my case, asked civilly:

"Have I time for another?"

She let the horse's head go then with a jerk that startled him, sober as he was.

"No" she said. "I've done with you for tonight, but I've not done with either of you, for all that. I'll live to tell the world how she went to meet one man, and the other brought her back her shoe like a tame dog, and got a dog's thanks for his pains, I daresay. You can go, you cur!"

"Good-night," I said, as I gave the cob his head and dashed past her along the road.

Mrs. Montgomery, I thought, was an idiot to have worried about the shoe and never thought about the stocking. When I got to Elsinore, Minting was waiting for me. He was not only waiting, but at the door with his stable lantern alight.

"You're late, sir," he said. "But thank Heavens you've come! Me and Mrs. Foreman have been that anxious about you."

"I'm not particularly late," I responded. "But you can put the horse up and get to your bed as soon as you like, Minting."

"Bed, sir!" he exclaimed. "I'd have sat up all night, and pleased to do it to see you back safe. These here moorland roads——"

"Oh, they're all right," I answered, briefly, for I could not stand Minting as an old woman.

"You don't know, sir," he said. "You won't say that, sir, when you hear the noos. Your own neighbor, sir Roger Danvers,, has been missing since Monday, and they've found him to-day dead, sir—murdered and shot through the heart!"

"What's that you say?" I demanded, sharply. "Murdered, sir," Minting repeated impressively, with the intense satisfaction of a man who loves a horror for horror's sake.

"Missing since Monday, did you say?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, and found in his blood, lying out on the moor, our moor, sir—what you two gentlemen have been a-shooting over all the week."

I shuddered. It seemed to me that the night had turned suddenly cold.

"Put the horse up," I said, briefly, and went in.

CHAPTER III.

Herman was waiting for me in the smoking-room. He looked grave, but his ill-humour of the early evening had vanished.

"A bad business this about our neighbour Mr. Danvers," he said.

"Very," I acquiesced as I poured myself out some brandy. "But Minting must be wrong; he could not have been lying out on our moor since Monday night, or surely the dogs would have found him?"

"I believe they did find him," Herman answered, gravely. "You remember how excited they were on Tuesday at lunch time? The body was found in a little spinney near a gate giving onto his lands; and as far as I can make out we were very near that spinney then."

"Shall I get you the map, sir?" demanded Minting, who had left the cob and followed me in.

"No, no," I interrupted him hastily. "There's no necessity. I—I remember the place. Go and see to the cob."

Remember! How could I possibly forget, when it was so near that other spot marked by me with the little crimson cross.

Minting retired grudgingly with a full half-hour of talk still in him, and I looked up to meet Herman's eyes fixed gravely on me.

"About that map," he said slowly, lowering his gaze.

"Well, what about it?" I answered, dully.

"I got it to have a look," he went on, half apologetically, "when I first heard the news. I didn't think you'd mind. That red cross you have marked doesn't look well, Duncan. You're out, of course; the spot is in reality well away, but it's far too near on the map itself. Mind, I'm not asking any questions, but if you don't care to explain I think you should destroy the thing."

"I can't explain, that's the worst of it," I responded, in a broken voice. "I was a fool to mark the map. Has Minting seen it?"

"Not to my knowledge, Duncan," he replied. "Here is the map. Good-night, I'm off to bed."

"Herman," I said, eagerly, "this looks queer, I know, but I assure you—I give you my word—that I knew no more than you until I came in tonight that there had been foul play on the moor."

Herman laid his hand upon my shoulder. The pique he had shewn earlier in the day because a woman once admired, perhaps loved by him, had signalled me out for her attentions, had quite vanished. He was himself again, my good friend, and I knew that he was sincere.

"I do believe that," he answered, "without any reservation. I haven't the faintest notion what the mystery is—though perhaps I could make a guess at the central figure. I don't know how you've got mixed up in it, and I don't ask you. I only say this, remember who you're dealing with; remember that you might give your self-respect, your good repute, every penny you're worth, and your heart's blood into the bargain, and at the end you'd have nothing to shew in return—no, not so much, perhaps, as it is said some have had from the fancy of an hour."

"It's not so bad as that, Duncan," I cried, meaning him to understand that I was in no sense Mrs. Montgomery's lover. But he did not understand: of course, he thought that I implied that I had confidence in the woman.

"It's bad at the best," he said, and left me with a brief good-night.

A few minutes later I followed him to my room. His last advice had obliterated his first; like a fool I had not destroyed the map.

. . . . . .

I passed a wretched night struggling to think out something capable of making Mrs. Montgomery's presence on the moor appear a mere coincidence, and asking myself if she was guilty was not I, in keeping her secret, a sort of accessory after the crime?

That was the last thought I had for comfort before I fell asleep and began to weave grotesque explanations in my dreams; my first thought on waking was that I had slipped the map into my pocket and had not burnt it.

(To be Continued.)

A CROCODILE IN LUCK.

(Hong-Kong Post.)

A crocodile, five feet in length from tip to tail, was caught in the upper reaches of the Singapore River, some days ago. The superstitious coolies declared the saurian to be the "god of the river," and, after painting some sacred Chinese characters on its back with white paint, they put it back into the river, to the accompaniment of much cracker firing.

Piles To prove to you that Dr. Chase's Ointment is a certain and absolute cure for each and every form of itching, bleeding and protruding piles, the manufacturers have guaranteed it. See testimonials in the daily press and ask your neighbors what they think of it. You can use it and get your money back if not cured. 60c a box. at all dealers or EDMANSON, BATES & CO., Toronto.

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Read what Mrs. Wm. Castillous, Newport, Quebec, has to say about Burdock Blood Bitters:—"Last December I fell very sick after confinement, I was not able to walk for three months, and was given up to die by the doctor. My husband read of the many wonderful cures made by Burdock Blood Bitters, so procured me two bottles. After using it for about ten days, I was able to get around, and could mind my baby without help from anyone, and am now well, and able to do my own work. I told a lady friend of mine who was troubled in the same way, and she used it with equal success. I cannot too highly recommend your medicine, for I know just how good it is, and hope and wish that anyone suffering as I did will give it a trial."

SCOURING THE SEA COAST.

Shiloh's Apostle to Fit Out Three Yachts to Seek Converts.

(Portland Express.)

Rev. Frank W. Sandford, the famous Shiloh Apostle, is to go into evangelizing on a great scale according to information received by the Express. According to this report the great Holy Ghoster is to have three large yachts in commission this summer plying along the coast and gathering in converts at every available point. It will, therefore, be one of the biggest religious undertakings ever attempted along the Atlantic or other seaboard.

The Wanderer, the yacht with which Sandford began his evangelizing last season is well known at this port and has been at anchor in the harbor all winter in charge of a keeper. It was fitted up early last season into a gospel yacht and traveled all along the coast from Eastport to Portland, spending much of its time in Casco Bay meetings being held almost daily at the different villages and fishing centers.

According to the statement made by a member of the Shiloh colony to the Express Sandford has purchased two other yachts in New York, both of which are understood to be much larger than the Wanderer and these are to be used in cruising along the coast and holding meetings. It was stated that the Wanderer would not go to Palestine as it was first thought she would but instead she would continue to cruise along the Maine coast going as far east as Eastport and that in all probability the two new yachts would cover other parts of the Atlantic coast line. The Express informant was unable to give the names of the two yachts purchased as he had not been told what they were.

Rev. Mr. Sandford arrived in the city early yesterday morning and went out aboard the yacht and made arrangements for the craft to immediately be placed in commission. A crew of men is now at work on her and she will be put into the best possible condition.

I. C. R. WILL GO TO GEORGIAN BAY.

Will Have Running Rights Over the Canada Atlantic.

Ottawa, April 3.—The Intercolonial Railway will get running rights over the Canada Atlantic, when that road passes into the control of the Grand Trunk, and in this way will have a port on Georgian Bay, and a summer road between the Canadian Northwest and the seaboard.

When the Grand Trunk Railway Company's bill for taking over the Canada Atlantic, was reached in the house today, Mr. MacLean (South York), asked if the government road was going to get running rights over the Canada Atlantic.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier said that legislation would be introduced for this purpose, this session, by amending the present private bill.

Messrs. MacLean, Osler and Mr. Borden, asked for some information as to how the link between Montreal and Coteau was to be got over. The premier had not the information at his hand and the bill was allowed to stand over.

Some private bills were advanced a stage, after which the debate on the autonomy bill was resumed.

A teacher was trying to explain the meaning of the word "recuperate" to one of the pupils.

"Now, Willie," said she, "if your father worked hard all day, he would be tired and worn out, wouldn't he?"

"Yes'm."

"Then, when night comes, and his work is over for the day, what does he do?"

"That's what ma wants to know."—Moberly Democrat.

IS THERE A MATTER TO WHICH YOU THINK PUBLIC ATTENTION SHOULD BE CALLED? TELL THE TIMES ABOUT IT.

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