

# A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER XLV.  
WHAT HE READ.

"What should I do? Go back? It was too late. But how go forward without awakening criticism and risking discovery? Happily my training for the stage had included the study of the part of La Semmanbala, and remembering it at this critical moment, I made my body rigid, and fixed my gaze, and so passed on without pause or shrinking, though inwardly greatly agitated. For the persons who were engaged in watching me were Hilary and a stranger, whose presence awakened my keenest fears, though no thought of his being a member of the police crossed my mind.

"But this was nothing to the shock which followed, when in another moment I encountered you. This I was not prepared for, and I inwardly quailed. But instinct kept me from betraying myself. I retained my studied manner, and went by you like an apparition. But terror was in my heart, for I not only saw that for some reason all my friends were on the alert, either to surprise my secret, or give me a protection I was far from needing, but I was under the constant apprehension of Montelli making his appearance, and so provoking a conflict which might end disastrously for you. You remember how I gave you a weapon in the shape of a sharp knife, and then how I wandered into the back hall in the hope of cutting off the approach of Montelli, and thus insuring not only his own safety but your own.

"I did not meet him, though he must have been there, and I came back hopeful, and went again upstairs. But horror awaited me. When I reached my chamber door, I perceived the fierce eyes and threatening form of this dangerous man emerging from the back staircase, and though I had no fear of his keen knife, I had the detection of our secret; for I knew that Hilary and her strange companion were watching us from behind, and that he had but to drop a word or cast a look belying his seeming antagonism, for our mutual understanding to be seen, and my despicable position discovered.

"But he was too subtle to make such a mistake, or perhaps he had himself perceived the forms of Hilary and Mr. Gryce; for he increas-

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ed the fierceness of his demeanor; he even lifted his knife, and I was vaguely asking myself how he would extricate me from this position, when your friend, Mr. Byrd, extricated us both by his sudden leap upon the seeming assassin.

"In the struggle that followed, I had no time to think. My eyes met those of Montelli as his knife flew from his hand and fell at my feet; but I did not understand his look, though I picked up the knife and sought to escape with it to my room. But my fears to what he would do in his rage and disappointment drew me back. I must gain some assurance from him that he would not visit upon me the misfortune that had befallen himself. And so I had the courage to descend to where he had fallen, and look at him where he lay, and listen to the phrases he uttered, and which were, as I took it, assurances that he still had hopes for himself, and little, if any, resentment against me. But when you came forward and placed my arm in yours, his manner suddenly changed, as you will remember, and he became quite fierce. He foresaw difficulties if I had clung to you, and threatened me by word and gesture. I was glad when we were out of his sight and hearing, and was relieved rather than abashed when Mr. Gryce proposed to watch beside my door and keep me from harm's way till after I had held the promised interview with Mr. Degraw, which he and you supposed would place me beyond the malice or revenge of the persons believed to be my enemies.

"Of that interview I need say little. It was a surprise to me in more ways than one. I had not expected you to be present, and I had not looked for the proposal with which Mr. Degraw prefaced his great gift. If I had, I might have been better prepared to meet it. I could not have accepted it even if upon its acceptance had hung the wealth I now saw almost within my grasp. I had decided in the night that I would marry no man but you, and I cannot tell you how I was affected by his generosity, which left me free to bestow hand and wealth where I would.

"But you had scruples, and though I was too happy to be impatient, I felt myself robbed of some of the satisfaction which I had promised myself. Montelli's arrest troubled me, too; but that anxiety was not destined to be of long duration. Before the day had waned I was first shocked, then deliriously gladdened by the news, that he was dead, and that one of the most relentless claimants upon my wealth was taken out of my path forever.

"Not that I begrudged the money he demanded. I could have spared a million and not felt it. But I had had some initiation into business matters during the transferring of this fortune into my possession, and I foresaw that it was not going to be so easy a matter to procure two

or three hundred thousand dollars out of this estate without exciting the attention of those who had it in charge. This was the reason, likewise, why I accepted your decision with so much grace. A husband would have been inconvenient to me in those first days; an agent was bad enough. I had to deceive him, and I had to deceive Hilary. In order to meet the wants of the Portuguese, who crowded her claims doubly upon me, when she found that Montelli was dead, I was obliged to ask for large sums of money for which I could give no account, thus acquiring with my agent the name of being very extravagant, and with my friends the reputation of being strangely parsimonious. I went with Hilary to the several watering places, but I spent no money in jewels, and but little in the necessaries of life; for I looked forward to the day when you would come back to me, dearest, and I wished to be clear of all obligations, and free forever from the hateful presence of the Portuguese; for she never was long away from me after I returned to New York. In the capacity of my hair-dresser she visited me every day, and though but few words passed between us, it was well understood that a certain amount must be forthcoming every week, if I desired to preserve pleasant relations between us.

Hilary suspected nothing. She used to wonder why I persisted in dressing so plainly, and hinted, now and then, that a richer costume, or a more generous mode of living, would be more in keeping with my wealth and position; but it did not take much to turn her thoughts to nobler subjects, and I was never unduly embarrassed by her questions, or annoyed by her suggestions.

"I was happy—ah! how happy!—for I had not yet come to the full realization of what I had done, and saw nothing but complete delight in the

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future. I never doubted that you would return, or that I should pay off the Portuguese, and thus win love and freedom at once. I enjoyed my wealth, my consequence and my power, and experienced, perhaps, more delight in the contemplation of the future than I would have done if my present had been free from care, and I have been unable to gratify at once my naturally luxuriant tastes. And so the summer passed.

"Dearest, I have more than once asked myself while I have been pouring over these confessions, whether you had not required the giving up of my fortune, we should have been happily married. It adds to my grief to think we might. It makes death doubly hard to dream of what might have been, if, instead of asking the sacrifice from me of all for which I had worked so long in shame and sorrow, you had simply folded me to your breast and made me by that embrace the good woman I longed to be. But, then comes the thought that deception never prospers, and that it was in this way the God of

Whom you once spoke to me showed His disapproval of my sin and the impossibility of my hoping to reap happiness, when I had sowed for myself misery. And this thought comforts me, for it takes from my fate that factor of chance, which it is so maddening to contemplate. I die because I have sinned, not because your fancy led you to play with my love, and exact conditions, when all that my soul craved was perfect confidence on your part and a blind affection.

"The interference of Byrd in my affairs I do not understand. You may. If he has any real reason to suspect me, it must spring from the treachery of some one of those wretched associates of mine. Montelli and the Portuguese are dead, but Annetta still lives, as well as that miserable woman of my name whom I have never seen. If they have betrayed me here they do me with complaints and recriminations, and these I do not deserve. Believe it, and spare me any unnecessary reproach. What I acknowledge is bad enough. Byrd was nothing to me. From the day I bade him good-bye in Great Barrington till I saw him again in Miss Aspinwall's parlors, I did not let stop upon him a thought. But on that day he showed that he had not forgotten me.

(To be continued.)

## FEARED LOCKJAW

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## Wells to Visit America.

New York, Feb. 2.—Bombardier Wells, the heavyweight champion of England, will sail for America on March 2. Wells jumped into prominence when he defeated "Porky" Flynn the American pugilist. His backers hope to arrange for a match with Jack Johnson, while he is in this country. Wells was matched to fight Johnson in London last year, but the battle was prevented owing to strong public disapproval.

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## Bourassa Calls for Repeal of Navy Law.

Montreal, Feb. 2.—In a signed article which occupied a large part of the front page of Le Devoir, this afternoon, Henri Bourassa, the Nationalist chieftain, calls on Premier Borden to repeal the Laurier naval law and takes him to task for not having taken the matter up before now. His argument is that Lord Bessborough in his book "The Betrayal" has declared the British navy to be in a badly disorganized condition, and that, therefore, Canadian people should not have anything to do with it. He says that the only course to be followed is the repeal of the law. "Why does the Federal Government and the majority which supports it hesitate to repeal this law?" He concludes: "The election of the Premier himself, the verdict of September 21st, condemned the naval law no less than the Reciprocity agreement. If the treaty had been signed, would the Government have hesitated in demanding its annulment? What does it fear, then, in repealing this absurd law which no one wanted—sincere Imperialists no more than ardent Nationalists."

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