

A FASCINATING STORY OF MODERN LIFE

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

CHAPTER I.

THE two men stood upon the top of a bank bordering the rough road which led to the sea. They were listening to the lark, which had risen flitting from their feet a moment or so ago, and was circling now above their heads. Mantering, with a quiet smile, pointed upwards.

"There, my friend," he exclaimed, "You can listen now to arguments more eloquent than any which I could ever frame. That little creature is singing the true, uncorrupted song of life. She sings of sunshine, the buoyant air, the pure and simple joy of existence in her little heart. The things which lie behind the hills will never sadden her. Her kingdom is here, and she is content."

Borrowdean's smile was a little cynical. He was essentially of that order of men who are dwellers in cities, and even the singing of the salt breeze blowing across the marshes—marshes riven everywhere with long arms of the sea—could bring no color to his pale cheeks.

"Your little bird—a lark, I think you called it," he remarked, "may be a very eloquent prophet for the whole kingdom of her species, but the song of life for a bird and for a man are surely different things."

"Not so very different after all," Mantering answered, still watching the bird. "The longer one lives, the more clearly one recognizes the absolute universality of life."

Borrowdean shrugged his shoulders with a little gesture of impatience. He had not left London at a moment when he could be ill spared, and had travelled to this out of the way corner of the kingdom to exchange purposeless platitudes with a man whose present attitude towards life at any rate he heartily despised. He seated himself upon a half-broken rail, and lit a cigarette.

"Mantering," he said, "I do not come here to simpler cheap philosophies with you like a couple of schoolboys. I have a real life errand. I want to speak to you of great things."

Mantering moved a little uneasily. He had a very shrewd idea as to the nature of that errand.

"Of great things," he repeated slowly. "Are you in earnest, Borrowdean?"

"Because, Mantering continued, 'I have left the world of great things, as you and I used to regard them, very far behind. I cannot think of any serious subject which it would be useful or profitable for us to discuss. You understand me, Borrowdean, I am sure!'"

Borrowdean closely eyed this man who had been his friend.

"The old story still rankles then, Mantering," he said. "Has time done nothing to heal it?"

Mantering laughed easily.

"How can you think me such a child?" he exclaimed. "If Rochester himself were to come to see me he would be as welcome as you are. In fact, he is, continued, more so. 'If you could only realize, my friend, how peaceful and happy life here may be amongst the quiet places you would believe me to be right. I tell you that I can feel nothing but gratitude towards those people and those circumstances which impelled me to seek it.'"

"What should you think of that?" Borrowdean asked, watching his friend through half-closed eyes, "of those who sought to drag you from it?"

Mantering's laugh was as free and natural as the wind itself. He had bared his head, and had turned directly seawards.

"Hated, my dear Borrowdean," he declared, "if I thought that they had a single chance of success. As it is—in difference."

Borrowdean's eyebrows were raised. He held his cigarette between his fingers, and looked at it for several moments.

"Yet I am here," he said slowly, "for no other purpose."

Mantering turned and faced his friend. "All I can say is that I am sorry to hear it," he declared. "I know the sort of a man you are, Borrowdean, and I know very well that if you have come down here with something to say to me you will say it. Therefore go on. Let us have it over."

Borrowdean stood up. His tone acquired a new earnestness. He became at once more of a man. The cynical curve of his lips had vanished.

"We are on the eve of great opportunities, Mantering," he said. "Six months ago the election of the next General Election seemed assured. We seemed as far off any chance of office as a political party could be. Today the whole thing is changed. We are on the eve of a general reconstruction. It is our one great chance of this generation. I come to you as a patriot. Rochester asks you to forget."

is like God's own music. Borrowdean, I am going to say things to you which I say but once or twice in my life. I came to this country a soured man, cynical, a pessimist, a materialist by training and environment. Today I speak of a God with bowed head, for I believe that somewhere behind all those beautiful things their prototype must exist. Don't think I've turned rascal. I've never spoken like this to any one else before, and I don't think I ever shall again. Here is nature, man, the greatest force on earth, the mother, the mistress, beneficent, wonderful! You are a creature of cities. Stay with me here for a day or two, and the joy of all these things will steal into your blood. You too will know what peace is."

Borrowdean, as though unconsciously, straightened himself. If no color came to his cheeks, the light of battle was at least in his eyes. This man was speaking heresies. The words sprang to his lips.

"Peace!" he exclaimed, scornfully. "Peace is for the dead. The last reward perhaps of a breaking heart. The life of the future, militant, is the only possible existence for man. Peace is for the dead. Mantering, for Heaven's sake. You are the faintest spirit of the decadent, masquerading in the garb of a sham primitivism. Were you born in the world, do you think, to loiter through life in an idle worshipper at the altar of beauty? Who are you to dare to skulk in the quiet places, whilst the battle of life is fought by others?"

Another lark had risen almost from their feet, and circling its way upwards, was breaking into song. And below, the full spring tide was filling the pools and creeks with the softly flowing, glimmering sea water. The fishing boats, high and dry an hour ago, were passing now seaward along the silvery way. All these things Mantering was watching with rapt eyes, even whilst he listened to his companion.

"Dear friend," he said, "the world can get on very well without me, and I have no need of you. The battle that you speak of—well, I have been in it, I know, as you know. The memory of it is still a nightmare to me."

Borrowdean had the appearance of a man who sought to put restraint upon his words. He was silent for a moment, and then he spoke very deliberately.

"Mantering," he said, "do you think me wholly unsympathetic. There is a side of me which sympathizes deeply with every word which you have said. And there is another which is weary, never-searing cry must reach you even here. They are the people, the sufferers, fellow-creatures of yours, who are in the chains of humanity. You may stand aloof as you will, but you can never cut yourself wholly away from the great family of your fellows. You may hide from your responsibilities, but the burden of them will lie heavy upon your conscience, the poison will penetrate sometimes into your most jealously guarded Paradise. We are the people of the world, and I, Mantering, and I tell you that the tocsin has sounded. We need you!"

A shadow had fallen upon Mantering's face. He looked at his friend with a slightly lowered head. Nevertheless, Mantering showed no sign of faltering, though his tone was certainly grave.

"Leslie," he said, "you speak like a prophet, but believe me, my mind is made up. I have taken root here. Such words as I can do from my study is, as it always has been, at your service. But I myself have finished with actual political life. Don't press me too hard. I must seem cheerful and ungrateful, but if I listen to you for hours the result would be the same. I have finished with actual political life."

Borrowdean shrugged his shoulders despairingly. Such a man was hard to deal with.

"Mantering," he protested. "You must not, you really must not send me away like this. You speak of your written work. Don't think that I understand it. I myself honestly believe that it was those wonderful articles of yours in the Nineteenth Century which brought back to a reasonable frame of mind those who were half led away by the glamour of this new campaign. You kindled the torch, my friend, and you must bear with me to bring me to my feet, my resource. If you will not serve under Rochester, come back—and Rochester will serve under you when the times comes."

Mantering shook his head slowly. "I wish I could convince you," he said, "once and for all, that my refusal springs from a sense of duty, and not from a desire to see you prosper. I would sooner sit here, with a volume of Pater or Meredith, than this west wind blowing in my face, than I would hear myself acclaimed Prime Minister of England. Let us abandon this discussion once and for all, Borrowdean. We have arrived at a cul-de-sac, and I have spoken my last word."

Borrowdean threw his half finished cigarette into the ever-widening creek below. His face showed no sign of disappointment. Only for several moments he kept silence.

"Come," Mantering said at last. "Let us go. What an achievement! If you are resolved to get back to town to-night, we ought to be thinking about luncheon."

"Thank you," Borrowdean said. "I must return."

"They started to walk inland, but they had gone only a few yards, when Mantering, as though by a common impulse stopped. An unfamiliar sound had broken in upon the deep silence of this quiet land. Borrowdean, who was a few paces ahead, pointed to the bend in the road below, and turned towards his companion with a little gesture of cynical amusement.

"Behold," he exclaimed, "the invasion of modernity. Even your time-forgotten paradise, Mantering, has its civilizations, then. What an achievement!"

With a cloud of dust behind, and with the sun flashing upon its polished metal parts, a motor car swung into sight, and came rushing towards them. Borrowdean, the marshes there. Behind them the sea. Do you catch that breath of wind? He off your hat, man and get it into your lungs. It comes from the North and is fresh and sweet. I can walk smiles in the open, and the wind

"Behind the sandhills there," he remarked. There was a grinding of brakes. The car came to a standstill below. A woman, who sat alone in the back seat, raised her veil and looked upwards.

"Am I late?" she asked. "Clara has gone on—she told me."

She had addressed Mantering, but her eyes seemed suddenly drawn to Borrowdean. As though dazzled by the sun, she dropped her head. Borrowdean was standing as though turned to stone, perfectly rigid and motionless. His face was like a still, white mask.

"I am sorry," Mantering said, "but I have had a most unexpected visit from an old friend. May I introduce Sir Leslie Borrowdean—Mrs. Handell?"

The lady in the car bent her head, and Borrowdean performed an automatic salute. Mantering continued:

"I am afraid that I must throw myself upon your mercy! Borrowdean insists upon returning this afternoon, and I am taking him back for an early luncheon. You will find Clara and Lindsay at the golf club. May we have our foursome tomorrow?"

"Certainly! I will not keep you for a moment. I must hurry now, or the tide will be over the road."

She motioned the driver to proceed, but Borrowdean interposed.

"Mantering," he said, "I am afraid that the poison of your lotus land is beginning to work already. May I stay until tomorrow and walk round with you whilst you play your foursome? I should enjoy it immensely."

Mantering looked at his friend for a moment in amazement. Then he laughed heartily.

"By all means!" he answered, heartily. "Our foursome stands, then, Mrs. Handell. This way, Borrowdean."

The two turned away from the seaward, walking in single file along the top of the grassy bank. The woman in the car inclined her head, and motioned the driver to proceed.

CHAPTER II.

Borrowdean seemed after all to take but little interest in the game. He walked generally some distance away from the players on the top of the low bank of sandhills which fringed the sea. He was one of those men whose solitude never wears, a weaver of carefully thought out schemes, no single detail of which was ever left to chance or impulse. Such men as these were valuable to him. He bared his head to the breeze, stopped to pay the toll of the sea, and possibly those who were tapping waters, without paying the slightest attention to a scattering of the little party searching for the ball.

"I must have a few words with you before I go back," he said, nonchalantly. "I have found their way into the road like to try a motor car," she answered. "What do you want here?"

"I came to see Mantering," he said. "He is a very nice fellow, and I should like to see him. He is a very nice fellow, and I should like to see him. He is a very nice fellow, and I should like to see him."

"It would be," he remarked, smoothly, "a mistake to quarrel."

They separated, and immediately afterwards the ball was found. Soon afterwards the round was finished. Clara attributed her success to the excellence of her ball. She had been a very good player, and she had been a very good player, and she had been a very good player.

"I should be delighted," Borrowdean answered, "but perhaps Miss Mantering."

"Clara will look after me," Mantering interrupted. "Try to make an enthusiast of him, Mrs. Handell. He needs a hobby badly."

"They started off," she said, "and I should have a quarter of an hour before they can arrive."

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paying the full price to a caddy who doesn't know what a masher is."

"I will be thankful," he murmured, "for whatever you may give me—even if it should be that carnation you are wearing."

She shook her head.

"It is worth more than tenpence," she said. "Perhaps by extra diligence," he suggested. "I might deserve a little extra."

By the bye, why does your partner, Mr. Lindsey, isn't it, walk by himself all the time?"

"He probably thinks," she answered, demurely, "that I am too familiar with my caddy."

"What I am, I am," he said, earnestly. "I am glad, I said, meekly, 'that you are beginning to appreciate me.'"

As a caddy, she remarked, "you are not, I am sure, very perfect. For instance, your attention should be entirely devoted to the person whose clubs you are carrying, instead of which you talk to me."

He was almost taken aback. For a pretty girl she was really not so much of a fool as he had thought her to be. "I don't deny it," he declared.

"Ah, but I know you," she answered. "You are a politician, and you would deny anything. Don't you think her very handsome?"

Borrowdean gravely considered the matter, which was in itself a somewhat humorous thing. Sim and cred, with a long graceful neck, and a carriage of the head which somehow suggested the environment of a court, Mrs. Handell was distinctly, from a distance, a pleasant person to look upon. He nodded approvingly.

"Yes, she is good-looking," he admitted. "I have never seen a more beautiful woman."

"She has taken a house within a hundred yards of ours," Clara Mantering answered. "We all think that she is delightful."

"Is she a widow?" Borrowdean asked.

"I imagine so," she answered. "I have never heard her speak of her husband, and she is a very nice woman."

"I should think she must be very rich. Stand quiet, please. I must take great pains to get this stroke."

A wild shot from Clara's partner a few minutes later resulted in a scattering of the little party searching for the ball.

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"They started off," she said, "and I should have a quarter of an hour before they can arrive."

"This," he continued, "is not the Garden of Eden. It may be the first, but others will come who will surely recognize you."

"I must risk it," she answered. Borrowdean swung his eyelids backwards and forwards. All the time he was thinking intently.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Very nearly two months," she answered. "I must risk it," she answered.

"Quite long enough for your little idyll," he said. "Come, you know what the end of it must be. We need Mantering! Help us!"

"Not I," she answered, coolly. "You must do without him for the present."

"You are one of the ropes which holds this to this petty life—to this phylandering among the flowerpots. You are one of the ropes I want to cut. Why not indeed? I think I could do it."

"Do you want a bribe?" he asked.

"I want Mantering."

"He can belong to you none the less for belonging to us politically."

"Possibly! But I prefer him here. As a man he is admirable. Mrs. Handell and I have both believed in him. There is no limit to what he might not ask."

"He has told me a dozen times," she said, "that he never means to sit in Parliament again."

"There is no reason why he should not change his mind," Borrowdean answered. "Between us, I think that we could induce him."

"Perhaps," she answered. "Only I do not mean to try."

"We seem to have arrived at a cul-de-sac," he said, impatiently. "I wish I could make you understand that I am in deadly earnest."

"You threaten?"

"Don't call it that."

"I will tell him the truth myself."

"That," he answered, "is all that I should dare to ask. He would come to us tomorrow."

"You used not to under-rate me," she murmured, with a glance towards the mirror.

"There is no other man like Mantering," he said. "He abhors any form of deceit. He would forgive a murderer, but never a liar."

"My dear Leslie," she said, "as a friend—and a relative—"

"I am a politician."

She sat quite still, looking away from him. The peaceful noises from the village street found their way into the road like to try a motor car," she answered. "What do you want here?"

though, these rustic seats are rather a delusion, aren't they, from the point of view of comfort?"

"There shall be cushions," she declared, "for the next time I come."

He sighed.

"Ah, the next time! I dare not look forward to it. So you are interested in politics, Miss Mantering?"

"Well, I believe I am," she answered, a little doubtfully. "To tell you the truth, Sir Leslie, I am absolutely ignorant. You must live in London to be a politician, mustn't you?"

"It is necessary," he assented, "to spend some part of your time there, if you want to come into touch with the real thing."

"Then I am very interested in politics," she declared. "Please go on."

"I would rather you talked to me about the roses. You should ask your uncle to tell you all about politics. He knows far more than I do."

"More than you! But you have been a Cabinet Minister!" she exclaimed.

"So was your uncle once," he answered. "So he could be again whenever he chose."

She looked at him incredulously.

"You don't really mean that, Sir Leslie?"

"Indeed I do!" he asserted. "There was never a man within my recollection or knowledge who in so short a time made for himself a position so brilliant as your uncle. There is no man today whose written word carries so much weight with the people."

She sighed a little doubtfully.

"Then if that is so," she said, "I cannot imagine why we live down here, hundreds of miles away from everywhere. Why did he give it up? Why is he not in Parliament now?"

"It is to ask him that question, Miss Mantering," Borrowdean said, "that I am here. No wonder it seems surprising to you. It is surprising to all of us."

She looked up at him eagerly.

"You mean then that you—that his party want him to go back?" she asked.

"Assuredly!"

"You have told him this?"

"Of course! It was my mission."

"Sir Leslie, you must tell me what he said."

Borrowdean sighed.

"My dear young lady," he said, "it is rather a painful subject to me just now. Yet since you insist I will tell you. Some of the things he has said are very interesting. But he does not understand. His party—no, it is his country which needs him. He prefers to stay here, and watch the roses bloom."

They were firmly climbed upon the great ladder. You could have climbed—where you would."

A curious quietness seemed to have crept over Mantering. When he answered his voice seemed to rise scarcely above a whisper.

"My friend," he said, "it was not worth while."

Borrowdean was almost angry.

"Not worth while," he repeated, contemptuously. "Is it worth while, then, to play golf, to linger in your flower gardens, to become a dilettante student, to dream away your days in the idleness of a purely curvating culture? What is it that I heard you yourself say once, that life apart from one's fellows must always be a failure?"

"If you are right, Borrowdean," he said, "the suffering will be mine. Come, your time is short now. Perhaps you had better make adieux to my niece and Mrs. Handell."

They all came out into the drive to see him start. A curious change had come over the bright Spring day. A grey fog had drifted inland, the sunlight was obscured, the larks were silent. Borrowdean shivered a little as he turned up his coat-collar.

"So nature has her little caprices even in Paradise!" he remarked.

"It will blow over in an hour," Mantering said. "A breath of wind, and the whole thing is gone."

Borrowdean's remarks were of the briefest. He made no further allusion to the object of his visit. He departed as one who had been paying an afternoon call on a friend, and was going to his home.

Mantering remained for a few moments in the avenue, looking along the road. The sound of the horse's feet could still be heard, but the track itself was long since invisible.

"The passing of your friend," she remarked, quietly, "is almost allegorical. He has gone into the land of the living, we the ghosts, I wonder, who loiter here."

Mantering answered her without a touch of levity. He too was unusually serious.

"We have the letter part," he said. "Yet Borrowdean is one of those men who know very well how to play upon the heart of a woman. He knows how to find out the harmonies or strike the discords."

She turned away.

"I am superstitious," she murmured, with a little shiver. "I suppose that it is this ghostly mist, and this silence which has come with it. Yet I wish that your friend had stayed away from Blakeley!"

Upstairs from the window Clara also was gazing along the road where Borrowdean had disappeared. And Borrowdean himself was puzzling over a third telegram which had come from Mantering. He was to him with his own, and which, although it was clearly addressed to Mantering, had, after a few minutes' hesitation, opened. It was handed in at the Strand Post Office.

"I must see this week."

A few hours later, on his arrival in London, Borrowdean repeated this message to Mantering from the same post office, and quietly waiting for the original went down to the House.

"I cannot tell," he reported to his Chief, "whether we have succeeded or not. In a fortnight or less we shall know."

(To be continued.)

MONCTON HOTELS MAY CLOSE IF PROPRIETORS HAVE TO GO TO JAIL

Moncton, N. B., Dec. 14.—(Special).—If one month jail sentence for Scott Act violation, which, as a result of the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada yesterday, are unquestionably legal, are put into effect Moncton hotel keepers will have a hard time of it. The hotels and livery stables as well, in connection.

This is the statement made today by a prominent hotelier, who says that he has an agreement between the local hotel keepers to that effect and that a round robin is to be signed by the dealers who will go under bonds to carry out the plan. The three leading hotels will close and half a dozen smaller ones.

The first Scott Act cases for some time were before Magistrate Kay in the police court this morning when he fined the proprietors of the American and Brunswick each \$50 and costs for violation of the act.

BAD OUTLOOK.

"I want to do some Christmas shopping today, dear," said a fond wife—"that is, if the weather is favorable. What is the forecast?"

"At the other end of the table her husband, consulting his paper, read out, 'Rain, snow, thunder, lightning and floods.'—Lipsett's."

"We are better apart just now, Mantering," he said, "for I tell you frankly that I do not understand your present attitude towards life—your entire absence of all sense of moral responsibility. Are you willing to be written down in history as a philanthropist