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Stella Mordant.

—OR—

The Cruise of the "Kingfisher."

CHAPTER XLIII.

There was no sound for a moment or two, then the crowd stirred and set up a hoarse and impressive shout of amazement; the magistrates sat as if dumfounded; Stella uttered a cry, and caught Cecilia's arm.

"What—what do you say?" faltered Lord Hatherley. ("Sit still, Ralph!") for Ralph had risen with white face and staring eyes. He sank into his seat, clutching the back of Lord Hatherley's chair. "What do you say? This—this cannot be true! It—it is impossible!"

Mr. Grahame shook his head gravely.

"I understand and appreciate your astonishment, my lord; but I make the request on my own responsibility, and am fully aware of its gravity. I will add, my lord, that I hold in my hands full and indisputable proofs of the identity of my client. We shall make our claim in the proper place, at the proper time; but I submit that I am within my right in requesting that my client be described as I state."

It was useless for the usher to demand silence; and for a moment or two the noise of voices, the shuffling of feet, as the crowd swayed to and fro in its excitement, reigned supreme.

At last silence was obtained, and Lord Hatherley, rising in his agitation, held up his hand.

"Mr. Grahame—he struggled for composure—"we have the right to ask—"

"Quite so, my lord," said the counsel. "I had thought that the court would have been somewhat prepared for my announcement." He glanced at Rath. "The resemblance to the late Lord Ratton, the fact that the Lady Ratton who died on the island spoke of a strange discovery—" He made a movement with his hands, as if he were surprised at their want of acuteness. "My lord, I have here in his father's handwriting—which my friend Mr. Bulpit recognizes—in certificates whose genuineness no one could dispute, evidence that my client is indeed the claimant to this historic title. He is the son of Harold Percival, who, with his infant son, left England under family circumstances of a painful character, and was wrecked in the 'Georgia.' He, with his child, was washed ashore on the western coast of Vancouver, and died there. My client has been in ignor-

ance of his own name and rank until this moment; but his claim to the title and estates are, I hold, indisputable. My lord, I regret that we should be compelled to encumber this case with this statement, but I am only doing my duty in stating that the prisoner in the dock is the Earl of Ratton."

Ralph sprang to his feet. He was pale no longer, but crimson with fury, and the hand he extended was clenched defiantly.

"It is a lie—a conspiracy! I—" Lord Hatherley, trembling, and powerless to check the tumult, rose and caught his arm.

"For God's sake, sit down!" he cried, agitatedly. "This is not the time—the place—"

Ralph sank down, his blood-shot eyes glaring round defiantly; and the clerk whispered to the magistrates.

"The bench has no reason to refuse your application, Mr. Grahame," he said, at last. "You can choose any name you please for your client, but you act on your own responsibility."

Mr. Grahame bowed.

"I proceed with the case," he said, with splendid calm. "I call Richard Green."

The detective forced his way through the dense mass. There was an air of suppressed excitement in his manner and movements, and all saw that he held a paper in his hand.

"Richard Green, Police Officer, Intelligence Department," he began in official form, after he had sworn. "I am in charge of this case."

"Do you offer evidence against the prisoner, Mr. Green?" asked Grahame.

"No, sir."

The crowd stared in absolute silence.

"You withdraw the charge?"

"Yes, sir."

Lord Hatherley leant forward.

"I—I do not understand!" he said.

"I have obtained information, my lord, which renders a withdrawal of the charge necessary and just. My lord, I have discovered the name of the deceased woman's husband. I found the certificate in an old dress of the deceased—" went on Mr. Green, more calmly; but before he could get any farther, an interruption arose.

One of the magistrates had risen and was standing, swaying to and fro heavily. It was Ralph.

"I'm—I'm ill!" he gasped, thickly.

"Alas! I must have air! let me go! Let me get outside!"

Mr. Green made a strange movement, as if of protest, but he said nothing, and Ralph staggered out.

Green went on in the dry, metallic voice of the policeman who has the case at his fingers' ends and sees his way with perfect clearness.

"The name, my lord, is Bannister, Ralph Bannister."

A man rose from just beneath the witness-box and uttered a sharp cry. It was Workley.

"Bannister!" he cried, hoarsely.

"Bannister! I know him! He is the man who has just left the court—follow him! Arrest him! She was found dead in his woods—it is Lord Ratton!—I knew him in London—I have known all the time that his name was Bannister!"

A couple of policemen forced him into his seat and kept him there; and Green continued:

"I have traced this man Bannister through his life in London since his marriage. He deserted his wife and claimed the Ratton title. I have traced his footsteps from the spot

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where the murder was committed to his private room at the Hall. I am in possession of the coat and shirt he wore on the night of the murder, and I have other evidence which I will lay before your worship when—"

His voice was drowned by the varied cries which rose. Lord Hatherley and the other magistrates sat like images of stone. Stella, with a sob of relief, ran with outstretched hands towards the dock, and no one sought to restrain her.

Rath bent down and took her hands.

"All right, Stella!" he said, gently, soothingly. "All right! Ah, don't cry, Stella!" for the tears were running down her face; and, with the electric sympathy which stirs a crowd, the other women in the court were also weeping. In vain the usher and the police sought to restore order. Lord Hatherley rose, and some words fell from his lips, of which only one—"Discharge!"—was audible. The two policemen fell away from Rath, as Lisle and Edward rushed at him, and the crowd pressed about the dock and stared at him with half mad with frenzy and excitement.

"For God's sake, get him out—call a carriage!" cried Edward. "Oh, take care of Miss Mordant!" for the heaving mass was pressing upon her dangerously.

Rath heard the warning, and, bending down, but his great arms round her and lifted her into the dock; and at the sight of the two standing there hand in hand, a shout of satisfaction, of delight, made the old timbers of the roof ring again.

Mr. Grahame forced his way to Green.

"The man—Bannister!" he said, sharply.

Green nodded.

"He can't get away. I've my eye on him. I want to speak to Workley. Ah." He caught his breath. "He's gone! There'll be mischief! Make way there! Make way, I say!" and he fought his way towards the door with a look of apprehension on his face.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Rath and Stella found themselves outside the court and in the centre of High Street, surrounded by a vast crowd, every member of which seemed to have one desire in life—to stare at these two and to shout uproariously.

Most girls would have been frightened to death under such circumstances, but Stella was not at all alarmed. Rath's strong arm was round her, and she could feel his heart beating against hers with the steady beat of the strong man whose strength is displayed at its highest in such moments as these. She was not afraid, though there were tears in her eyes, and she laughed, from excess of joy, as the crowd pressed round them cheering and striving to shake Rath's disengaged hand.

She knew she was quite safe—Rath had in the past protected her against worse perils than a friendly mob—and she was too happy for words.

It was hard to realize that he was near her, that he, who but a few minutes ago was in such terrible danger, should be free, and not only free, but the idol of the hour; for, as is always the case, the public sentiment and sympathy had taken a swift turn, and now threatened to overwhelm him.

At last Edward managed to get at them. He was far more excited than Rath, who stood above the crowd with bare head and gravely smiling face.

"I've got the carriage, Rath—it's down this side street; there's no getting to the front. The Lisles are there, and my father—for Heaven's sake, good people, let them come; my

friend must be tired—the young lady—"

The crowd cheered all the more lustily, but they made a lane for Rath and Stella, and Edward led them to the carriage, where they were welcomed most warmly by Edward's father and by the Lisles.

How it happened, Stella never knew, but she found herself in the Lisles' carriage with Cecilia, while Rath was borne off by the Bryans. They had scarcely bidden each other "good-morning," and they had been separated in the confusion inevitable in such a scene.

Indeed, Stella scarcely realized that he was not with her, that she had been separated from him again, before she reached the Abbey and Cecilia had insisted on taking her straight to her own room.

"And now you must lie down and rest," said Cecilia.

But Stella would have none of this. "I don't want to rest. I want to talk and listen. I want to tell you everything—and hear everything. I feel as if I were in a dream. One moment my heart is aching for that poor woman, the next I am throbbing all over with joy at the thought that Rath is free—that he is near me, that I can see and speak to him. You know all that he did for me, how he saved my life on the island, and how he fought for me every hour in the day; how he watched over and protected me. Do you think there was ever any man like him—so good, so noble, so—so handsome?"

"My dear Stella, he is a hero, a Greek god—no, better than that—a man—and I have never seen his like. No wonder the people are mad about him. I shall never forget that grand, calm face of his which never for a moment showed a sign of weakness or fear, though his life appeared to be at stake, and everything was against him. You are a very lucky girl, dearest, to have such a friend, so engaged to such a man."

Stella stopped in her pacing up and down the room; the blood surged to her face, and she looked with a startled expression at Cecilia.

"I'm—I'm not engaged to him!" she faltered, almost inaudibly.

Cecilia stared at her.

"Not—not engaged to him!" she exclaimed, almost inaudibly. "Why—why! I don't understand."

"I'm not engaged to him," repeated Stella, still blushing. "He—he has never spoken a word of love to me; he was a friend, a brother—that is all."

Cecilia grew crimson.

(To be Continued.)

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Security:	Total:
First preferred stock	\$181,280,000.00
Second preferred stock	99,300,000.00
Common stock	633,802,162.00
Notes	61,375,540.16
Receiver's certificates	598,000.00
Collateral trust bonds	227,810,415.26
Equipment bonds	17,264,289.00
Car trusts	808,000.00
Debenture bonds	304,008,000.00
Mortgage bonds	1269,086,726.00
Total	\$2,576,401,342.42

These figures represent the results of the investigation by L. F. Loree, president of the Delaware & Hudson Railroad, into a subject that has heretofore not been as successfully handled. The information was determined from data collected from October, 1914, to April, 1915.

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