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Under False Colors

Lord Somerton's Ally.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"The Blairwood Park carriage!"

Landlord Bingley announced, "and there's Miss Sterne and her maid in it. Stretton, the gamekeeper, is going to marry Annette Moffatt, the maid, and everybody knows the butler was sweet on her. Now he's going to land Stretton money to furnish it with, only to get him into trouble. Ha! sir! I see that you're looking at Miss Elsie. Isn't she a sweet and beautiful young lady, and as good as she is beautiful! She's had a slight trouble lately, sir—what with Sir John's illness, and his sudden determination to rush off to India again. Poor gentleman! I do hear that he had a sunstroke out there, and the doctor thinks he'll never live to come back."

Mr. Castlemon did not pay much attention to Bingley's gossip, but stared at Miss Sterne like one fascinated.

As the carriage rolled by she turned her eyes upon him for a brief moment, and he shrank back with a groan, exclaiming:

"Heavens! How like—how like! It might be her spirit!"

"How ill she looks, poor girl!" Bingley commented, "I'll kill her if anything happens to Sir John. It is said that Lord Somerton wants to marry her, but there's some talk of a handsome young fellow from London being the favored one."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Castlemon, thoughtfully.

"Here comes my boy at last," the landlord continued, "and ain't he hurrying! There, sir, I'll leave you to your business, and bless you a thousand times for what you have promised to do for me and mine. I haven't had a wink of sleep for a week, but let Mr. Kemp show up again with his sauce!"

He walked away as his son laid Lord Somerton's reply in Mr. Castlemon's hand.

"This is it:

Rather surprised and annoyed, but I suppose that I must humor you. Will call at the Blairwood Arms" at three o'clock to-day.

SOMERTON.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Three o'clock! I am much obliged to you, my lord. Annoyed, are you? You mean that you are afraid!"

James Castlemon smiled grimly, and then called the landlord to him.

"Mr. Bingley," he said, "the Earl of Somerton will honor me with a visit this afternoon, and as I have a good deal to say to him, I shall be obliged if you will grant me the exclusive use of your parlor until my business with him is concluded."

"Of course, sir," replied the delighted Bingley, "and it won't be the first

time that the nobility have met under my roof. It shall be cleaned up and dusted, and a bit of fire put in the grate to make it look cheerful."

"I would like to take possession in an hour, Bingley, as I have some writing to do, and it is quite possible that I shall want you to witness something. His lordship has owed me a big debt for services rendered until I can wait no longer. You see these rich men are careless of us poor ones."

He laughed a little, and laid twenty-pound notes on the table, adding:

"Now you can settle with Mr. Kemp, the gentlemanly butler, and never think of repayment until you have made your fortune!"

"Oh, sir!"

There were tears in Landlord Bingley's eyes, and his heart jumped into his throat.

"I am your debtor forever! If I can do anything for you, sir, even to risking my life, only let me know. Kemp is coming again to-day. He swore that he was going for his lawyer to get possession of my house and goods."

"Let him come," said Castlemon. "You are safe from him now."

"We waved his hand in an imperious manner. The landlord had not seen this action before, and he muttered:

"I know he's a gentleman, if he is shabbily dressed. He's been used to command and to being obeyed, too. It's queer that Lord Somerton owes him so much money."

"The private parlor was soon ready for Mr. Castlemon, with a supply of liquors and cigars on a convenient table, and he bustled himself with writing materials until luncheon was announced at one o'clock.

In the meanwhile, Mr. Kemp had been with his attorney, and a man to remain in possession.

"When I paid him, sir, he nearly had fit," and Bingley, "and the missus didn't let him off light, neither!"

Mr. Castlemon was much affected by the happiness of the little household.

"This is my first kind action," he told himself, "but it will take years of such deeds to save my awakening conscience. I shall ever have to be on guard against myself unless I lapse into the old sinful groove. What a weakling I am!"

He went to his seat at the door, and thought of Elsie Sterne's lovely flower-like face. He had only to close his eyes, and it was easy to fancy himself young again; ambitious, hopeful, with the wide world before him, and Love his guiding star!

He ground his teeth in agony of spirit. He cursed his own folly!

A few minutes before the time appointed to meet Lord Somerton, he retired to the parlor, after indulging in a copious draught of brandy.

This soothed his quivering nerves, and when my lord appeared, immaculately, a smile upon his small, dark face, James Castlemon greeted him easily.

He threw himself negligently into a lounging-chair, remarking, blandly:

"I observe that you have speedily made yourself at home with the money I gave you."

"And both wine and cigars are exceptionally good, my lord," Castlemon rejoined, "I assured myself of that before daring to have them in readiness for so distinguished a guest as yourself. You see, the landlord of this house has been a gentleman's gentleman in his day, and knows a thing or two!"

He closed the door and turned the key in the lock, the Earl of Somerton watching him with a gathering frown.

"I he shot come here, sir," he said, haughtily, "to drink wine or smoke

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cigars with you. Our relations are strictly of a business nature, and upon that basis must remain.

"Exactly," replied Castlemon. "Now this is coming to the point at once. My documents are ready, and all I need is your signature, accompanied by a check for two thousand, five hundred."

My lord smiled wickedly.

"I have not come here to fence with you, Mr. Castlemon, but I am not so mad as to put my hand to any document until it has been approved by my legal adviser, I am not to be led to the slaughter like a lamb. I require one week to say yea or nay. Surely that will not be too long?"

Castlemon paced the floor for a minute; then he replied:

"I have turned matters well over in my mind, Lord Somerton, and while I am willing to wait one week for the approval of the draft I made, I refuse to wait one day for the balance of the hush money agreed upon between us. If you will sit still, I will briefly outline my position, and satisfy you concerning what you are pleased to term my antecedents."

He refreshed himself from a decanter containing his favorite beverage, while his lordship idly tapped one of the heels of his patent-leather shoes with a walking cane, watching his companion the while from the corners of his snaky eyes.

Castlemon lighted a cigar, and disposed himself comfortably in an easy-chair.

"My lord," he began, "we are both striving for a prize, and if I did not believe that your intentions were strictly honorable toward Miss Sterne, my efforts should be directed into another channel, though the chances of success are infinitesimal! You may sneer at me as you will; but I am not best to all sense of feeling. I am a human creature, perhaps, but there is less of the vulture in me since I have seen the sweet face of Miss Elsie Sterne."

Somerton glanced at him a swift, inquiring glance.

"I knew Miss Sterne's mother," the man went on, "and I loved her with a passion equal to that which you feel for her child. This mad, hopeless love of mine was my undoing—was the ruin of a brother officer, Harry Campbell, the man who afterward married the sister of Sir John Sterne out of mere spite."

He laughed bitterly, and gazed at the end of his cigar.

"I see that you are interested, my lord, and I am telling you what no man has ever heard from my lips before. Yes, Jack Sterne, Harry Campbell and I passionately adored beautiful Elsie Mervin, the daughter of our colonel. We were a trio of good-looking fellows, but Campbell was a reckless soldier of fortune, whose reputation as a gambler and rogue increased by leaps and bounds when society knew that he was in the race for the favors of Elsie Mervin."

"Though loving Miss Mervin, as only young men whose veins are full of fire can love, I early dropped out of the race, because I had not the faintest chance of winning her. The colonel was dead against me, and his daughter only pitied me. In a moment of pique, I married a clergyman's daughter, and deserted her six months afterward. I have only recently discovered that my injured wife still lives, and that she gave birth to a child a few months after I was gone. (To be continued.)"

The Pursuit of Happiness

Dorothy Dix discusses an Ever-Lasting Question.

Throughout life the unending search of humanity is for happiness. Few find it but we all go on searching for it, looking, looking, looking for the joy in life, the peace, the rest, the contentment that we seldom discover.

Whence comes this blessing that money cannot buy?

Once I had a talk with a famous actress who had retired from the stage at the zenith of her professional career. I said to her: "You are the happiest woman I know. What is the secret of happiness?"

"The secret of happiness," she replied, "consists in finding out what you want and then having the courage to take it. Most people have no idea of what they really desire in life. They are like children in a toy shop, who clutch first at one thing and then drop it for another with brighter and more alluring colours, and throw that away for something else until, at last, they come empty-handed out of the shop."

"You see this illustrated in the restless people who have a thousand fads. They are crazy on motoring one season and live on the golf links the next. They fall from profession to profession, and even change old husbands and wives for new."

"Such people are never satisfied, never happy, because they do not know what they want. They have no idea of the shape and form of the thing they seek, and they would pass it by if they stumbled over it."

"The first secret of happiness is to find out what you want. The next is to have the courage to take what you want. This is not easy to do. It is so much simpler to follow the line of least resistance and to do the thing that is customary to do, and that you are in the habit of doing, instead of breaking away and doing the thing that you want to do yourself."

"I have been happy because I knew what I wanted and that I had the courage to resist all the money temptations that have been offered me to go back to it."

I asked another woman, a woman who has had, as we say, a hard life, yet who wears the smile that never comes off, what was the secret of happiness.

"The determination to be happy," she replied, "the fierce determination that you won't let fate beat you and crush you; that you won't grope in your own fears, but that somehow, you will fight out of the shadow into the sunshine."

"I have known the heartbreak of an unhappy marriage. I have known poverty and sickness and struggle and anxiety, but through it all I never wavered in my determination to be happy. I never let myself get morbid or better or suspicious."

"I made a cult of happiness. I looked for it everywhere and found it everywhere. I made a game of poverty that had more thrills in it than many a millionaire finds in a palace. I made up my mind that it was going to take the things I had, and so I had the things I liked."

"There are a lot of things in life

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over which you have either to laugh or cry. I laugh, and that's my secret of happiness."

I asked a third woman the same question. "Uselessness," she replied. "Only those who never seek their own happiness find it."

Which of the three was right?

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