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THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET. Millions of Mischief.

By HEADON HILL.

Author of "By a Hair's Breadth," "The Duke Decides," "A Race with Rain," Etc., Etc.

(Continued.) That vindictive speech was my justification, for the voice was the voice of Roger Marske, and I knew that I had rightly solved the meaning of Clara Rivington's last utterance.

I made no answer, and the sound of his steps receding quickly, followed by the slamming of the front door, told me that he had fled from the scene of his crime.

CHAPTER XVI. A Chapter of the Past. But my triumph would be a barren one indeed if I stood there with the door open, and the wind whistling through the cracks, and the water running down the gutter, and the snow falling on my head, and the cold biting at my ears, and the darkness of the night above me, and the thought of the man who had just fled from me, and the thought of the man who had just fled from me.

With my penknife I cut the cord from the window blind, and, reaching from the window, made a loose loop round the pipe. The other end I fastened to my wrist, to give me confidence in my climb. Then, with an unspoken prayer, I clambered out on to the sill, and, not daring to look down at the dark waters below, I swung from my foothold to the trail support of the metal tube.

It rattled and swayed ominously under the grasp of my fingers, and the clutch of my knees, and every instant I feared that it would drag the holdfast from the decayed mortar, carrying me with it into the oily flood beneath. But I kept on and upwards, thankful that girls have muscles nowadays, and at last I flung myself through the locky open window of the room from which Marske had tried to shoot me.

The room was full of smoke, warning me, as did the roar of flames in the lower part of the house, not to try to recover my breath till I was clear of the burning building. Rushing through on to the landing, I found the front stairs burning fiercely, but I discovered a second staircase, little better than a ladder, which brought me to a kitchen, whence an unlocked door gave entrance on to a yard. Hardly knowing how I got there I eventually staggered out into the lane, just as the flames licked through the front windows, and the Mill House from foundation to roof was illumined in a lurid glow.

I had no apprehension that Roger Marske would be lurking near the scene of his villainy, but the glare in the sky would assuredly bring some of the nearest dwellers upon the spot before long, and I had no desire to be detained and questioned.

them. The burning of the Mill House and the attempt on my life were minor details of the far graver accusation which I believed myself to be now in a position to bring against Roger Marske and I wished to lose not a moment in doing so.

Arthur's salvation, I was convinced, depended on my striking at the real criminal before the latter learned of my escape, and to achieve that end I must make myself scarce before the arrival of spectators.

These would come from the hamlet of Chipping Myvern, through which I had passed in the morning, and as I should probably be recognized as the person who had inquired for the Mill House, I set off in the opposite direction. It was nearly dark, my watch telling me that it was just nine o'clock.

Stumbling along the stony lane, I tried to formulate my plans, and here my inexperience, fortified by impatience for my lover's safety, led me into a grave error of judgment. I had reached a point in my investigation where I should have obtained trustworthy advice. The wisest course would have been to take train for London and consult all that happened to the solicitor who had defended Arthur at the trial. Instead of that I had hesitated between going straight to the police and laying an information with a magistrate.

After walking for over a mile, the lane brought me into a broad high road, and here, after another quarter of an hour's tramp, chance took a hand in settling the vexed question for me. I came to the lodge gates of what was evidently a large mansion, and as a light streamed from the open door of the lodge I stopped to ask my way to Brentwood.

"A master of four miles, yonder," replied an old man from the chimney corner, indicating the direction from which I had come.

So I had got to trudge four weary miles before I could disclose to official ears the tremendous secret I was carrying. I had worked myself up to think that when the authorities heard my story, a mere stroke of the pen, or some equally facile method, would restate Arthur and put Roger Marske in his place. It was galling to have to wait an hour before stifling my experiences, and the second alternative occurring to me, I asked: "Can you tell me where the nearest magistrate lives?"

The old lodgekeeper, I thought at me, queried as he replied: "You'll be a stranger, then I reckon. I'vey one knows as the master be Cheesman. Not a common five shillings or a week beak, but Cheesman o' Quarter Sessions," he added proudly. And he pointed a palsied finger to the

lights of the great house among the trees.

Thanking him for his information, I set off along the carriage drive, and it was not till I had traversed three parts of it and was leaving the park for the pleasure garden that I remembered that I ought to have inquired his master's name. Not of real importance, perhaps, but useful in gaining admission. However, the later necessity was not to arise.

As I approached the portico I caught the scent of a cigar, and glancing at the lawn in front of the mansion, saw the stooping figure of a tall man in evening dress shown up in the light that came from an open French window.

He must have been watching my arrival, for he came quickly forward with, I could not help thinking, an undue eagerness for such a magnet as his retainer had described him. But the next moment, in a high pitched, authoritative voice, he gave a simple explanation of his curiosity.

"You are the young woman from the post-office, and have a telegram for me, eh?" he inquired as he stepped from the grass on to the gravel. And he held out his hand for the non-existent message.

"No," I answered. "If I do not come from the post-office, I was given to understand at the lodge that you are a magistrate, and I want to speak to you on most important business—swear an information, I think it is called."

An exclamation that sounded like annoyance escaped him, but he stonored for it by a polite gesture towards the open French window. I could only see him indistinctly in the blend of dying daylight and a rising moon, yet I gathered an impression of capability, and the custom of command, tempered by age.

"If you will be so good as to step in here," he said, leading the way to a room which he called the study. "I shall send the servants the trouble of answering the door. This is my justice-room, but I also use it for smoking purposes after dinner."

In the gloom of the garden I had taken him for a country gentleman, disappointed that I was not the bearer of a telegram announcing the result of some race in which he was interested. Here, in the shaded lamplight of the luxurious apartment, I at once recognized my mistake. He to whom I was about to impart my accusation against Roger Marske was no sportsman in the usual acceptance of the term. He was an old man with a sallow, unwholesome complexion, suggestive of late hours and life in cities, his burning eyes under the cavernous brows

alone having defied physical decay. These he fixed upon me in a searching gaze as he seated himself at a great pedestal table, and I at once remembered what till now in my excitement I had forgotten—that the stack-pipe could be none of the tidiest.

"You look as if you had met with ill-treatment. You wish to prefer a charge of assault?" he inquired sharply, taking up a pen and drawing paper towards him.

"I wish to prefer a charge of murder, and also of attempted murder, against one Roger Marske," I answered him eagerly.

Slowly, very slowly, he replaced the pen in the tray, and, joining the tips of his fingers, bent his chin to them as he surveyed me with a perfectly sphinx-like countenance. The scrutiny lasted a full minute.

"Of murdering, and of attempting to murder, whom do you accuse—this person?" he inquired presently, in a tone that sounded unpromising. It was not altogether incredulous, but I knew not why. In putting the question he worked his face in a curious contortion that was hardly a smile, and I saw that his few remaining teeth were sharp and yellow, like an aged dog's fangs.

"I accuse him of murdering a young lady named Clara Rivington and her mother," I replied, ignoring the second and less material half of his question for the present. "The matter is urgent, because a perfectly innocent man has been convicted of the crime, and will be—will be hanged if he is recaptured." I added, nearly breaking down.

"Recaptured! The convict's name?" demanded the magistrate in his high-pitched treble, shooting a glance at me that boded ill for my cause.

"Arthur Rivington—the prisoner who escaped from Winchester Jail. You must have heard of it," said I; and then a great fear seized me that he would ask me if I had met or communicated with Arthur since his escape. I should have to lie if he did, for I could not confess to this strange-mannered, unsympathetic old man that I had seen my lover.

For the same reason my lips were sealed about the plot against Lord Alphington, which alone I could have learned from Arthur. Doubtless my name and address would be taken; it would be known that I had come from Totland Bay, and if I told of my interview with Arthur he would be traced thither before his safety was assured. But I was not called upon to lie.

"Yes," replied my interrogator drily. "I have heard of the case. Now be so good as to lay your information against this other one, who, according to this extraordinary story of yours, ought to be in the convict's shoes."

So I took a step nearer to the table and poured out my story—how I had formed the theory that Clara Rivington's last words indicated the name of her murderer, how I had started out to trace the mysterious "Danvers Crane," and how the person whose name of Marske had inspired the idea had followed and laid in wait at the address which I had connected with "Danvers Crane."

The old man ran his delicate fingers through the scanty hairs on his forehead and regarded me with keen comprehension. "Then Roger Marske was at your point of departure on this extraordinary errand?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, seeing no harm in the admission. This country justice of the peace could not possibly be aware that Arthur was in the Isle of Wight, I told myself, any more than he could have known of Roger Marske's presence there.

(To be continued.)

THE FROST SAVED HIM. Man Escapes Death in the St. Lawrence in Peculiar Manner.

Ogdensburg, N. Y., Jan. 3.—Nelson Hamie and Webb Rollins attempted to cross the St. Lawrence River in an open boat last night and were caught in floating ice. The boat was upset and crushed by the ice and Rollins was drowned. Hamie, after a struggle for life in the icy water, clung to floating ice until his clothing froze to it, and prevented him from drowning. A ferry steamer rescued him. He was badly frozen.

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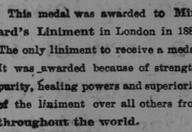
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