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A Prince of Sinners, Etc.

THE BETRAYAL

A Powerful
and
Fascinating Serial Story.

CHAPTER XXV—Continued.

"Then reconstruct them," she said. "You are far too young to speak with such a note of finality."

"Some day," I answered, "I suppose I shall. At present I am content to live on amongst the fragments. One needs only imagination. The things one dreams about are always more beautiful and perhaps more satisfying than the things one does."

Again our eyes met, and I fancied that this time she was looking a little frightened. At any rate she knew. I was sure of that.

"What an ineffective sort of proceeding!" she murmured.

A creek separated us for a few minutes. When we came together again I asked her a question.

"There is something, Lady Angela," I said, "which, if you would forgive the impertinence of it, I should very much liketo ask you."

She moved her head slowly, as though giving a tacit consent. But I do not think that she was quite prepared for what I asked her.

"When are you going to marry Colonel Ray?"

She looked at me quickly, almost furtively, and I saw that her cheeks were flushed. There was a look in her eyes, too, which I could not fathom.

"The date is not decided yet," she said. "You know there is some talk of trouble in Egypt, and if so he might have to leave on a moment's notice."

"It will not be, at any rate, before the autumn, then?" I persisted.

"No!"

I drew a little breath of relief. I was reckless whether she heard it or not. Suddenly she paused.

"Who is that?" she asked.

I recognized him at once, a small grey figure, standing on the top of a sandhill a little way of, and regarding us steadily. It was the Duke.

"Your father!" I said.

We quickened our pace. If Lady Angela was in any way discomposed she showed no sign of it. She waved her hand, and the Duke solemnly removed his hat.

"I am so glad that he has come down before the others," she said. "I am longing to have a talk with him. And I don't believe he knows anything about Blenavon. No, he's far too cheerful."

She went straight up to him and passed her arm through his. He greeted me stiffly, but not unkindly.

"I am so glad that you have come," she said. "If I had not heard I should have telegraphed to you. I've seen it in all the papers."

"You approve?" I heard him ask quietly.

"Approve is not the word," she declared eagerly. It is magnificent."

"I wonder," he asked, "if you realize what it means?"

"It simply doesn't matter," she answered, with a delightful smile. "I can make my own dresses, if you like. Annette is a shocking nuisance to me."

"I am afraid," he remarked, with an odd little smile, "that Blenavon will scarcely regard the matter in the same light."

"Bother Blenavon!" she answered lightly. "I suppose you know that he's gone off abroad somewhere?"

"I had a hurried line from him with information to that effect," the Duke answered. "I think that it would have been more respectful if he had called to see me on his way through London."

I heard her sigh of relief.

"Now, tell me," she begged, "where shall we begin? Cowes, Homburg, town house, or Annette? I'm ready."

The Duke looked at her for a moment as I had never seen him look at any living person.

"You must not exaggerate to yourself the importance of this affair, Angela," he said. "I do not think we need interfere for the present with any existing arrangements."

She took his arm, and they walked on ahead to the clearing in front of my cottage, talking earnestly together. I had no clue to the meaning of those first few sentences which had passed between them. And needless to say, I now lingered far enough behind to be out of earshot. When they reached the turn in the path they halted and waited for me.

"I am anxious for a few minutes' conversation inside with you, Ducaine, the Duke said. "Angela, you had better perhaps not wait for me."

She nodded her farewell, a brief imperious little gesture, it seemed to me, with very little of kindliness in it. Then the Duke followed me into my sitting-room. I waited anxiously to hear what he had to say.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Noblesse Oblige"

The Duke selected my most comfortable easy chair and remained silent for several minutes, looking thoughtfully out of the window. Notwithstanding the fresh color, which he seldom lost, and the trim perfection of his dress, I could see at once tha tthere was a change in him. The lines about his mouth were deeper, his eyes had lost much of their keen brightness. I found myself wondering whether, after all, some suspicion of Lord Blenavon's doings had found its way to him.

"You are well forward with your work, I trust, Mr. Ducaine?" he said at last.

"It is completed, your Grace," I answered.

"The proposed subway fortifications as well as the new battery stations?"

"Yes, your Grace."

"What about the maps?"

"I have done them also to the best of my ability, sir," I answered. "I am not a very expert draughtsman, I am afraid, but these are at least accurate. If you would care to look them over, the yare in the library safe."

"And the code word?"

In accordance with our usual custom, I scribbled it upon a piece of paper, and held it for a moment before his eyes. Then I carefully destroyed it.

"Tomorrow," he said, "perhaps tonight, we have some railway men coming down to thoroughly discuss the most efficient method of moving troops from Aldershot and London to different points and to inaugurate a fresh system. You had better hold yourself in readiness to come up to the house at any moment. They are business men, and their time is valuable. They will probably want to work from the moment of their arrival until they go."

"Very good, your Grace," I answered.

He turned his head and looked at me for a moment reflectively.

"You remember our conversation at the War Office, Mr. Ducaine?"

"Yes, your Grace."

"I do not wish you to have a false impression as to my meaning at that time," he said coldly. "I do not, I have never, doubted your trustworthiness. My feeling was, and is, that you are somewhat young and of an impetuous disposition for a post of such importance. That feeling was increased, of course, by the fact that I considered your story with reference to the Prince of Malors improbable to the last degree. In justice to you," he continued more slowly, "I must now admit the possibility that your description of that incident may after all be in accordance with the facts. Certain facts have come to my knowledge which tend somewhat in that direction. I shall consider it a favor, therefore, if you will consider my remarks at that interview retracted."

"I thank your Grace very much," I answered.

"With reference to the other matter," he continued, "there my opinion remains unaltered. I do not believe that the papers in the safe were touched after you yourself deposited them there, and I consider your statement to the contrary a most unfortunate one. But the fact remains that you have done your work faithfully, and the Council is satisfied with your services. That being so, you may rely upon it that any feeling I may have in the matter I shall keep to myself."

I would have expressed my gratitude to him, but he checked me.

"There is," he said, one other, a more personal matter, concerning which I desired a few words with you. I have had a visit from a relative of yours who is also an old friend of my own.

"You have nothing to gain by the harboring of ancient grievances," the Duke replied. "I have always known Sir Michael as a just if a somewhat stern man. Please, however, do not look upon me in any way as a would-be mediator. My interest in this matter ceases with the delivery of that letter."

"In any case," I said, "I am very much obliged to you for your advice and for bringing me this letter."

I refer to Sir Michael Trogoldy."

I looked at him in amazement. I was, in fact, so surprised that I said nothing at all.

"Sir Michael, it seems, has been making inquiries about you, and learned of your present position," the Duke continued. "He asked me certain questions which I was glad to be able to answer on your behalf. He also entrusted me with a note, which I have here in my pocket."

He produced it and laid it upon the table. I made no movement to take it.

"The details of your family history," the Duke said, "are unknown to me. But if the advice of an old man is in any way acceptable to you, I should strongly recommend you to accept any offer of friendship which Sir Michael may make. He is an old man, and he is possessed of considerable wealth. Further, I gather that you are his nearest relative.

"Sir Michael was very cruel to my mother, sir," I said slowly.

The Duke rose to his feet. I followed him to the door.

"By-the-bye," the Duke said, pausing on the threshold. "I fear that we may lose the help of Colonel Ray upon the Council. There are rumors of serious trouble in the Soudan, and if these are in any way substantinted, he will be certainly sent there. Good afternoon, Mr. Ducaine."

"Good afternoon, your Grace."

So he left me, stiff, formal, having satisfied his conscience, though I felt in my heart that his opinion of me, once formed, was not likely to be changed. Directly I was alone I opened my uncle's letter.

"127 Grosvenor Square,
"London, W.

"Dear Guy:—

"It has been on my mind more than once during the last few years—ever since, in fact, I heard of you at college—to write and inform myself as to your prospects in life. You are the son of my only sister, although I regret to say that you are the son also of a man who disgraced himself and his profession. You have a claim upon me which you have made no effort to press. Perhaps I do not think the worse of you for that. In any case, I wish you to accept an allowance of which my lawyers will advise you, and if you will call upon me when you are in town I shall be glad to make your acquaintance. I may say that it was a pleasure to me to learn that you have succeeded in obtaining a responsible and honorable post.

"I am, yours sincerely,
"MICHAEL TROGOLDY."

I took pen and paper, and answered his letter at once.

"My Dear Sir Michael,—

"As I am your nephew, and I understand, almost your nearest relative, I see no reason why I should not accept the allowance which you are good enough to offer me. I shall also be glad to come and see you next time I am in London, if it is your wish.

"Yours sincerely,
"GUY DUCAINE."

Grooton brought in me tea, also a London morning paper which he had secured in the village.

"I thought that you might be interested in the news about the Duke, sir," he said respectfully.

"What news, Grooton?" I asked, stretching out my hand for the paper.

"You will find a leading article on the second page, sir, and another in the money news. It reads quite extraordinary, sir."

I opened the paper eagerly. I read every word of the leading article, which was entitled "Noblesse Oblige," and all the paragraphs in the money column. What I read did not surprise me in the least when once I had read the circumstances. It was just what I should have expected from the Duke. It seemed that he had lent his name to the prospectus of a company formed for the purpose of working some worthless patent designed to revolutionize the silk weaving trade. The Duke's reason for going on the board was purely philanthropic. He had hoped to restore an ancient industry in a decaying neighborhood. The whole thing turned out to be a swindle. One angry shareholder stated plainly at the meeting that he had taken his shares on account of the Duke's name upon the prospectus, and hinted ugly things. The Duke had risen calmly in his place. He assured them that he fully recognized his responsibilities in the matter. If the person who had last spoken was in earnest when he stated that the Duke's name had induced him to take shares in the company, then he was prepared to relieve him of those shares at the price which he had paid for them. Further, if there was any other persons who were able honestly to say that the name of the Duke of Rowchester upon the prospectus had induced them to invest their money in this concern, his offer extended also to them.

There were roars of applause, wild enthusiasm. It was magnificent, but the lowest estimate of what it would cost the Duke was a hundred thousand pounds.

I put down the paper, and my cheeks were flushed with enthusiasm. I think that if the Duke had been there at that moment I could have kissed his hand. I passed with much less interest to the letter which Grooton had brought in with the paper. It was from a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn, and it informed me, in a few precise sentences, that they had the authority of their client, Sir Michael Trogoldy, to pay me yearly the sum of five hundred pounds.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Friend or Enemy

There came no summons from Rowchester, and I dined alone. I must have dozed over my after-dinner cigarette, for at first that soft rapping seemed to come to me from a long way off. Then I sat up in my chair with a start. My cigarette had burnt out, my coffee was cold. I had been asleep, and outside some one was knocking at my front door.

I had sent Grooton to the village with letters, and I was alone in the place. I sprang from my chair just as the handle of the door was turned and a woman stepped quietly in. She was wrapped from head to foot in a long cloak, and she was thickly veiled. But I knew her at once. It was Mrs. Smith-Lessing.

My first impulse was one of anger. It seemed to me that she was taking advantage of the sympathy which Ray's brutality during our last interview had forced from me. I spoke to her coldly, almost angrily.

"Mrs. Smith-Lessing," I said, "I regret that I cannot receive you here. My position just now does not allow me to receive visitors."

She simply raised her veil and sank into the nearest chair. I was staggered when I saw her face. It was positively haggard, and her eyes were burning. She looked at me almost with horror.

"I had to come," she said. "I could not keep away a moment longer. Tell me the truth, Guy Ducaine. The truth, mind!" she repeated, fearfully.

"What do you mean?" I asked, bewildered. "I do not understand you."

"Tell me the truth about that man who came to see you on the seventh of January."

I shook my head.

"I have nothing to tell you," I said firmly. "When I found him on the marshes he was dead. I did not hear till afterwards that he had ever asked for me."

"This is the truth?" she asked eagerly.

"It is the truth!" I answered.

I could see the relief shine in her face. She was still anxious, however.

"Is it true," she asked, "that you told a girl in the village, Blanche Moyat, to keep secret the fact that this man inquired in the village for the way to your cottage?"

"That also is true," I admitted. "She did not tell me until afterwards, and I saw no purpose in publishing the fact that the man had been on his way to see me."

"You have been very foolish," she said. "You have quarrelled with the girl, She is telling this against you, and there will be trouble."

"I cannot help it," I answered. "I never spoke to the man. I saw nothing of him until I found him dead."

"Guy!" she cried, "this is an awful thing. I am not sure, but I believe that the man was your father."

As often as the thought had come to me I had thrust it away. This time, however, there was no escape. The whole hideous scene spread itself out again before my eyes. I saw the doubled-up body, limp and nerveless. I felt again the thrill of horror with which one looks for the first time on death. The mockery of the sunlight filling the air, gleaming far and wide upon the creek-riven marshes and wet sands, the singing of the birds, the slow tramp of the wagon horses. All these things went to fill up that one terrible picture. I looked at the woman opposite to me, and in her face was some reflection of the horror which I as surely felt.

"For your sake," she murmured, "we must find out how he met with his death."

"The verdict was Found drowned," I murmured.

"People will change their opinions now," she answered. "Besides, you and I know that he was not drowned."

"You are sure of that?" I asked.

"Quite," she answered. "He had letters with him, I know, and papers for you. Besides, he always had with him a number of trifles by which he could have been identified. When he was searched at the police station his pockets were empty. He had been robbed. Guy, he had, as I have had, one unflinching, relentless enemy. Tell me, was Colonel Ray in Braster at the time?"

"No," I answered hoarsely. "I cannot tell you. I will have no more to do with it. The matter is over—let it rest."

"But, my poor boy," she said quietly, "it will not be allowed to rest. Can't you see that this girl's statement does away with the theory that he was washed up from the sea? He met with his death there on the sands. He left Braster to visit you, and he was found within a few yards of your cottage dead, and with marks of violence upon him. You will be suspected, perhaps charged. It is inevitable. Now tell me the truth. Was Mostyn Ray in Braster at the time?"

"He lectured that night in the village," I answered.

Her eyes gleamed with a strange fire.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed. "I have him at last, then. I saw him falter when I spoke of your father. Guy, I will save you, but I would give the rest of my days to bring this home to Mostyn Ray."

I shook my head.

"You will never do it," I declared. "There might be suspicion, but there will never be any proof. If there was any murder done at all, it was done without witnesses."

"We shall see about that," she muttered. "There is what you call circumstantial evidence. It has hanged people before now."

We remained silent for several moments. All this time she was watching me.

"Guy," she said softly, "you are very like what he was—at your age."

Her cloak had fallen back. She was wearing a black evening gown with a string of pearls around her neck. The excitement had given her a faint color, and something like tears softened her eyes as she looked across at me. But the more I looked at her the more anxious I was to see her no more. Her words reminded me of the past. I remembered that it was she who had been my father's evil genius, she who had brought this terrible disgrace upon him, and this cloud over my own life. I rose to my feet.

"I do not wish to ask for any favors from you," I said, "but I will ask you to remember that if you are seen here I shall certainly lose my post."

"What does it matter?" she answered contemptuously. "I am not a rich woman, Guy, but I know how to earn money. Mostyn Ray would not believe it, perhaps, but I loved your father. Yours has been a miserable little life. Come with me, and I promise that I will show you how to make it great. You have no relatives or any ties. I promise you that I will be a model stepmother."

I looked at her, bewildered.

"It is not possible for me to do anything of the sort," I told her. "I do not wish to seem unkind, but nothing in this world would induce me to consider such a thing for a moment. I have chosen my life and the manner of it. Do you think that I can ever forget that you and my father between you broke my mother's heart, and made it necessary for me to be brought up without friends, ashamed of my name and of my history? One does not forget these things. I bear you no ill, but I wish that you would go away."

She sat there quietly, listening to me.

"Guy," she said, when I had finished, "all that you speak of happened many years ago. There is forgiveness for everybody, isn't there. You and I are almost alone in the world. I want to be your friend. You might find me a more powerful one than you think. Try me! I will make your future mine. You shall have your own way in all things. I know the hills and the valleys of life, the underneath and the matchless places. If you accept my offer you will never regret it. I can be a faithful friend or a relentless enemy. Between you and me, Guy, there can be no middle course. I want to be your friend. Don't make me your enemy."

The woman puzzles me. She had every appearance of being in earnest. Let the things which she proposed were absurd.

"This is folly," I answered her. "I cannot count it anything else. Do you suppose that I want to creep through life at a woman's apron-strings? I am old enough, and strong enough, I hope, to think and act for myself. My career is my own, to make or to mar. I do not wish for enmity from any one, but your friendship I cannot accept. Our ways lie apart—a long way apart."

"Do not be too sure of that," she said quietly. "I think that you and I may come together again very soon, and it is possible that you may need my help."

"All that I need now," I answered impatiently, "is your absence."

She rose at once from her chair.

"Very well," she said, "I will go. Only let me warn you that I am a persistent woman. I think that it will not be very long before you will see things differently. Will you shake hands with me, Guy?"

Her small white fingers came hesitatingly out from under her cloak. I did not stop to think to what my action might commit me, whether indeed it was seemly that I should accept any measure of friendship from this woman. I took her hand and held it for a moment in mine.

"You cannot go back alone," I said, doubtfully, as I opened the door.

"I have a servant waiting close by," she answered, "and I am not at all afraid. Think over what I have said to you—and good-bye."

She drew her cloak around her and flitted away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Woman's Tongue.

Grooton returned a few minutes later from the village. He begged the favor of a few words with me. He was a man of impassive features and singular quietness of demeanor. Yet it was obvious that something had happened to disturb him.

"I think it only right, sir, that you should know of the reports which are circulating in the neighborhood," he said, fixing his dark grave eyes respectfully upon me. "I called for a few minutes at the inn, and made it my business to listen."

"Do these reports concern me, Grooton?" I asked.

"They do, sir."

"Go ahead, then," I told him.

"They refer also, sir," he said, "to the man who was found dead near the cottage where you used to live in January last. He was supposed to have been washed up from the sea, but it has recently been stated that he was seen, on the evening of the day before his body was found, in the village, and it is also stated that he inquired from a certain person as to the whereabouts of your cottage. He set out with the intention of calling upon you, and he was found dead in the morning by you, sir, within a hundred yards of where you were living."

"Anything else, Grooton?"

"There is a lot of foolish talk sir. He is said to have been a relative of yours with whom you were not on good terms, and the young lady who has just given this information to the police through her father states that she has remained silent up to now at your request."

"I am supposed, then," I said, "to be concerned in this fellow's death?"

"I have heard that opinion openly expressed, sir," Grooton assented, respectfully.

I nodded.

"Thank you, Grooton," I said. "I shall be prepared then for anything that may happen. If you hear anything further let me know."

"I shall not fail to do so, sir," he answered.

He bowed and withdrew. Then as I lit my pipe and resumed my seat it suddenly occurred to me that the man who was chiefly concerned in this matter should at least be warned. I sat down at my desk and wrote to Ray. I had scarcely finished when I heard footsteps outside, followed by an imperious knocking at my front door. I opened it at once. The Duke and Lady Angela entered. I saw at once from her disturbed expression that something had happened.

The Duke wore a long cape over his dinner clothes, and he had evidently walked fast. He looked at me sharply as I rose to my feet.

"Mr. Ducaine," he said, "I have come to ask you to explain the sudden departure of my son for abroad."

I was taken aback, and I dare say I showed it.

"I have already told Lady Angela—all that I know," I said.

"My daughter's story," the Duke answered, "is incoherent. It tells me only enough to make me sure that something is being concealed."

I glanced at Lady Angela. She was looking white and troubled.

"I have told my father," she said, "all that I know."

"Then I must discover the rest for myself," the Duke replied. "I know that Blenavon is uncertain and unstable to a degree. When I heard that he had left for the Continent, I was not particularly surprised or interested. I have only just discovered the manner of his leaving. It puts an entirely different complexion upon the affair. I understood that he left with Colonel Ray without luggage or explanations of any sort. His own servant had no warning, and was left behind. My daughter informs me that such information as she has she gained from you. I require you to supplement it."

"I am afraid that the only person who can enlighten you further, sir, is Colonel Ray," I answered. "I understood you to say, I believe, that he would be here shortly."

"I insist upon it," the Duke said sternly, "that you tell me what you know at once and without further prevarication."

I was in a dilemma from which there seeme dto be no escape. Lady Angela had seated herself in my easy chair and was keeping her face averted from me. The Duke stood between us.

"I know very little, sir, except what I overheard," I declared. "Colonel Ray was, I believe, responsible for Lord Blenavon's abrupt departure, and I would rather that your information came from him."

"Colonel Ray is not here, and you are," the Duke answered. "Remember that I am no trifler with words. I have said that I insist. I repeat it!"

There seemed to be no escape for me. Lady Angela remained silent, the Duke was plainly insistent. I did not dare to trifle with him.

"Very good, your Grace," I said, "I will tell you what I know. It dates from last Monday, when you will remember that I was in London to attend a meeting of the Council."

"Go on!"

"I returned here by the last train, bringing with me the notes and instructions taken at that meeting. Outside Braster Grange an attack was made upon me, evidently with the intention of securing these. I escaped, with the assistance of Colonel Ray, who had come down from London by the same train unknown to me."

"Well?"

"The attack was made from the grounds of Braster Grange. It seems that Lord Blenavon spent the night there. The next morning Colonel Ray insisted upon my accompanying him to Braster Grange. Lord Blenavon was still there, and we saw him. He was suffering from wounds such as in the darkness I had inflicted upon my assailant of the night before."

It seemed to me that even then the Duke would not, or could not, understand. His brows were knitted into a heavy frown, and he was evidently following my story with close attention. But exactly where I was going to lead, he seemed to have no idea.

"The tenant of Braster Grange," I continued, "is a Mrs. Smith-Lessing, whom Colonel Ray has told me is a servant of the French secret police. I am afraid that Lord Blenavon has been a good deal under her influence.."

Then the Duke blazed out, which was very much what I expected from him. Horror, amazement, and scornful disbelief were all expressed in his transfigured face and angry words.

"Blenavon! My son! The confederate of a French spy! What nonsense! Who dares to suggest such a thing? Angela—I—I beg your pardon."

He stopped short, making an effort to regain his self-control. He continued in a more collected manner, but his voice still shook with inexpressible scorn.

"Angela," he said, turning to her, "is it within your knowledge that Blenavon had any acquaintance with this person?"

I think that her face might well have answered him: very white it was, and very sorrowful.

"Blenavon met Mrs. Smith-Lessing, I believe, at Bordighera," she said. "I have seen them together several times."

"Here?" the Duke said sharply.

"Yes, I have seen them riding on the sands, and Blenavon dined there on the night—Mr. Ducaine has been speaking of."

"Blenavon is a fool!" the Duke said. "This is to my mind convincing proof that he was ignorant of this woman's antecedents. At the worst he probably regarded her as an ordinary adventuress. As for the rest, I look upon it as the most extraordinary mare's nest which the mind of man could possibly conceive. Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Ducaine, that Colonel Ray went so far as charge Blenavon to his face with being in league with this person?"

"He certainly did, sir."

"And Blenavon? Oh, Ray is mad, stark mad!"

"Your son denied it, sir," I answered.

"Denied it! Of course he did. What followed?"

"Colonel Ray was very forcible and very imperative, sir," I answered. "He insisted upon Lord Blenavon leaving England at once."

"Well?"

"Lord Blenavon consented to do so, sir," I said quietly.

I saw the veins in the Duke's forehead stand out like whipcord. He began a sentence and left it unfinished. He was in that condition when words are impotent.

"Can you tell me, Mr. Ducaine," he asked, "what possible argument Colonel Ray could have made use of to induce my son to consent to this extraordinary proceeding!"

"I know no more about the matter, your Grace," I answered. "Perhaps Lord Blenavon felt that his intimacy with Mrs. Smith-Lessing had compromised him—that appearances were against him——"

"Pshaw!" the Duke interrupted. "Blenavon's intrigues are foolish enough, but they are beside the mark. I want to know what further argument or inducement Colonel Ray used. I understand neither why Ray desired to get rid of my son, nor why my son obeyed his ridiculous request."

"Colonel Ray will doubtless have some further explanation to offer you, sir," I said.

"He had better," the Duke answered grimly. "I shall wire him to come here at once. With your permission, Mr. Ducaine, I will sit down for a moment. This affair has shaken me."

Indeed, as the excitement passed away, I could see that he was looking ill and worn. Lady Angela made him take the easy chair, and he accepted a liqueur glass full of brandy which I poured out. He remained for several minutes sipping it and looking thoughtfully into the fire. He seemed to me to have aged a dozen years. The brisk alertness of his manner had all departed. He was an old man, limp and querulous.

"This unfortunate affair, Mr. Ducaine," he said, looking up at last, "remains of course between ourselves and Ray—and the woman."

"It is unnecessary for you to ask me that, sir," I answered quietly. "Colonel Ray will doubtless have some explanation. He is a man of vigorous temper, and I fancy that Lord Blenavon was not quite himself."

The Duke rose to his feet.

"If you are ready, Angela," he said, "we will not detain Mr. Ducaine further."

"You will allow me to walk with you to the house, sir," I begged.

He shook his head.

"I am quite recovered, I thank you," he said. "My daughter will give me her arm I let them out myself and held the lamp over my head to light them on their way. With slow uncertain steps, and leaning heavily upon Lady Angela's arm, I watched him disappear in the blackness of the plantation.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Link in the Chain.

Practically for three days and three nights the Council sat continually. There was no pretence now at recreation, no other guests. We worked, all of us from the Duke downwards, unflaggingly and with very little respite. When at last the end came, my padlocked notebook, with its hundreds of pages of hieroglyphics, held the principal material for three schemes of coast defence, each one considered separately and supported by a mass of detail as to transport, commissariat, and many minor points.

The principal members of the Council departed by special train early on Monday morning. I myself, a little dizzy and hot-eyed, walked across the park an hour after dawn, and flung myself upon my bed with a deep sigh of relief. Before I had closed my eyes, however, Grooton appeared with apologies for his dishabille.

"I have been up to the house twice, sir," he said, "but they would not let me see you or even send in a message. I thought it only right to let you know at once, sir, that the police have been rummaging about. They had what they called a search warrant, I believe. I came up to the house immediately, but I could not induce any of the servants to bring word in to you. Mr. Jesson, the Duke's own man, told me that it was as much as his place was worth to allow any one to enter the library."

"All right, Grooton," I muttered. "Hang the police!"

I believe he said something else, but I never heard it. I was already fast asleep.

* * * * *

About mid-day I was awakened by the dazzling sunshine which seemed to fill the room. I called for a bath, dressed, and made an excellent breakfast. Then I brought out my notebook and prepared for work. I had scarcely dipped my pen in the ink, however, when a shadow darkened the window. I looked up quickly. It was Ray.

He entered without knocking, and I saw at once that he was in a strange condition. He scarcely greeted me, but sank into my easy chair, and drawing out his pipe began to fill it. Then I saw what I had never seen before. His fingers were shaking.

"Boy," he said, "have you any wine?"

"The Duke sent me some claret," I answered. "Will that do?"

"Ay!"

I summoned Grooton and ordered the wine and some biscuits. Ray was a man who ate and drank sparingly. Yet he filled a tumbler and drank it straight off.

"You and I," he remarked, "are the only two who sat the whole show out. It was a grind, wasn't it?"

"It was," I answered, "but I have slept, and I feel none the worse for it. Lord Chelsford carried us on splendidly. There is solid work here," I said; "something worth the planning."

I touched my notebook almost affectionately for the work was fascinating now that it had attained coherent form. Ray smoked on and said nothing for several minutes. Then he looked up at me.

"Have you- a spare bedroom, Ducaine?"

"One or two," I answered. "They are not all furnished, but one at any rate is decent."

"Will you put me up for a day—perhaps two?"

He answered my unspoken question.

"Of course," I answered, but——"

"The Duke-has turned me out," he said grimly. "Who would have suspected the old man of such folly? He believes in Blenavon. I told him the plain truth, and he told me that I was a liar."

"I thought that he would be difficult to convince," I remarked.

"He has all the magnificent pig-headedness of his race," Ray answered. Blenavon is Blenavon, and he can do no wrong. He would summon him home again, but fortunately the young man himself is no fool. He will not come. You told Lady Angela?"

"Everything."

"She believed you?"

"I think that she did," I answered. His face softened.

"The Duke showed me from the door himself," he said. "You will not object to my sending a note to Lady Angela by your servant?"

"Make whatever use of him you choose," I answered. "There are pen and ink and notepaper upon the table."

Then I settled down to my work. Ray wrote his note, and went upstairs to sleep. In an hour's time he was down again. There was black rims under his eyes, and I could see at once that he had had no rest. Grooton had brought his bag from the house, and a note from Lady Angela. He read it with unchanging face, and placed it carefully in his coat pocket.

"I am off to the village to send some telegrams," he said, "and afterwards I shall go on for a walk."

"What about lunch?" I asked, glancing at the clock.

"None for me," he answered. "Some tea at four o'clock, if I may have it. I will be back by then."

He swung off, and I was thankful, for my work demanded my whole attention and very careful thought. At a few minutes after four he returned, and Grooton brought us some tea. Directly we were alone Ray looked across at me with a black frown upon his face.

"You know what they are saying in the village about you, young man?"

"I can guess," I answered.

"Who is this girl, Blanche Moyat?"

"A farmer's daughter," I answered. "It seems that I paid her too much or too little attention, I am not sure which. At any rate, she has an imaginary grievance against me, and this is the result."

"She tells the truth?"

"I have not heard her story," I answered, "but it is true that I encouraged her to suppress the fact that she had seen the man in the village, and that he had asked for me."

"What folly!"

"Perhaps," I answered. "You see, I thought that a verdict of 'found drowned' would save trouble."

"This accursed woman at the Grange is in it, I know," Ray remarked, slowly filling his pipe. "I wonder if she knew that I was about? That would give her a zest for the job."

"She knows that you were at Braster at the time," I said. "It was the night of your lecture."

Ray began to blow out dense clouds of smoke.

"We're safe," he said thoughtfully, "both of us. There's just a link in the chain missing."

"The police have been here with a warrant in search of that link," I remarked.

"They'll never find it, for it's in my pocket," he remarked grimly.

"Colonel Ray," I said, suddenly nerving myself to risk his anger, "there is a question which I must ask you."

I saw his lips come firmly together. He neither encouraged nor checked me.

"Who was that man?"

"You are better ignorant."

"Was it my father?"

If he did not answer my question, it at least seemed to suggest something to him.

"Has that woman been here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"She believes that it was your father?"

"She does."

He removed his pipe from his teeth and looked at it thoughtfully.

"Ah!" he said.

"You have not answered my question," I reminded him.

"Nor am I going to," he replied coolly. "You know already as much as is good for you."

He rose and threw open the door of my cottage. For several moments he stood bareheaded, looking up towards the house, looking and listening. He glanced at his watch, and walked several times backwards and forwards from the edge of the cliff to my door. Then he same in for his hat and stick.

"I am going down to the sea," he said. "If Lady Angela comes, will you call me? I shall not be out of hearing."

"You are expecting her?" I asked, looking down at my work.

"Yes. It was necessary for me to see her somewhere, so I asked her to come here. Perhaps the Duke has found out and stopped her. Anyhow, call me if she comes."

He stepped outside, and I heard him scrambling down the cliff. I set my teeth and turned to my work. It was a hard thing to have my little room, with its store of memories, turned into a meeting-place for these two. I at least would take care to be far enough away. And then I began wondering whether she would come. I was still wondering when I heard her footsteps.

She came in unaccustomed garb to me. She wore a grey dress of some sort of soft material, and a large black hat with feathers. Her skirts were gathered up in her hand, and I heard the jingling of harness at the corner of the avenue where her carriage was waiting. I opened the door, and she entered with a soft swish of silk and a gentle rustling. The room seemed instantly full of perfume of Neapolitan violets, a great bunch of which were in her bosom.

She looked swiftly around, and I fancied that it was a relief to her to find me alone.

"Is Colonel Ray here?" she asked.

"He is waiting for you," I answered, "on the sands. I promised to call him directly you came."

I moved toward the door, but she checked me with an imperative gesture.

"Wait," she said.

I came slowly back and stood by my table. She was sitting with her hands clasped together, looking into the fire. She looked very girlish and frail.

"I want to think—for a moment," she said. "Everything seems confusion. My father has commanded me to break my engagement with Colonel Ray."

I remained silent What was there, indeed, for me to say?

"In my heart," she went on slowly, "I know that my father is wrong and that Colonel Ray is right. He has simply done his duty. Blenavon was being sorely tempted. He is better away—out of the country. Oh, I am sure of that."

"Colonel Ray has done what he believed to be his duty," I said slowly. "It is hard that he should suffer for that."

"Often," she murmured, "one has to suffer for doing the right thing. My father has made himself a poor man because of his sense of what was right. I do not know what to do."

(To Be Continued.)

Friday, November 2, 1906

HT VESSELS DUE THIS WEEK

ess of Japan and Shinano Maru Sail for Orient Today

REL COMMANDER RELIEVED

Lihn Comes to Be Re-ssed---Tees Returns From West Coast

ge steamers are expected in port this week. Today the R. M. S. ss of Japan will arrive about rom Vancouver, bound for Yoko- and the usual ports en route to ong with the "Overseas Mail," e Japanese steamer Shinano Maru expected from Seattle for Hong- ia the same ports. Both steam- ve a full cargo. It was necessary ve part of the cargo offered for mpress liner on the dock at Van- . The delay of the Monteagle, was scheduled to sail on Novem- at Hongkong, to make repairs e of injuries sustained during the n, has resulted in a glut of . The Empress of Japan will large complement of passengers, om about 120, mostly steerage, mbark here. The steamer will ne of the largest complements of e carried for some time, over 900 The Japanese liner will have her passengers Mr. Haseba, a ent Japanese member of parlia- who has been traveling in the States. wing the two outward bound o sail today the Japanese liner Maru is expected from Yoko- omorrow, and the steamers Bes- lar and Elleric, large freighters, due. The Bessie Dollar left te, Japan, on October 12, and due with 600 tons of sulphur, ed to Victoria chemical works. leric is coming from Cape Nome. essie Dollar was to have taken a Chinese coolies to Guayamas contractors engaged in building exican Central railway, but ow- some disagreement with the ai Taotais the Chinese were ta- the vessel at Shanghai and the was later cancelled. The then proceeded to North Japan sulphur for Victoria. big white liner Ningchow is due w from Liverpool, via the Ori- th several hundred tons of gen- rgo for this port. It is expected l proceed to Tacoma after dis- ing her steerage passengers at rt, and will return to discharge eight and load the outward ship- Other steamers on the way are ent liners Tartar of the C. P. and Lyra of the Boston Tugboat y, both of which are expected rday from Yokohama.

. NEWCOMBE RELIEVED.

From Ottawa Says Kestrel's aster May Be Dismissed.

Ottawa despatch to the Times ay said: "It is reported here to- t Capt. Newcombe, of the Kes- to be dismissed, and that Capt. n will take his place temporar- is the outcome of the inquiry ome time ago by Mr. Roy of the ent of marine, into the purchase lies for the Kestrel. he session of parliament, G. E. called attention to the high er head which the Kestrel's sup- ost the Dominion. An inquiry at Vancouver, and after ex- ns from the captain it is said e dismissal was decided upon. partment has no information to the subject. The one to be ad- ill be the captain, and that will me days."

James Gaudin, local agent of stated last evening that no ad- d been received by him in this Capt. Walbran has not been of any appointment. Kestrel is now absent on a trip e Rupert, Maple Bay and Clay- ith E. S. Busby on board, to ex- those ports with a view to blishment of sub-ports of entry.

TO BE RECLASSED.

isa Lihn, Formerly the Aus- lia, to Be Surveyed Today.

hip Eliza Lihn, which arrived on n Royal Roads from Antofagas- charter to load a cargo of lum- Chemainus mills for a return to the Chilian port, will prob- reclassed here. T. G. Mitchell, surveyor, will make a prelimin- ey today, and Capt. Pundt, her will then decide whether the ves- be surveyed for re-classification. a Lihn when last here some ago, was known as the British stralia. She was sold at Anto- to Mr. Lihn, a prominent ship- of that port, who renamed the honor of his wife.

OM THE WEST COAST.

turns With Many Passen- rs—Wreckage Reported.

r Tees, Capt. Townsend, rived from Quatsino and way the west coast of Vancouver Sunday at midnight, brought ssengers, sixty in all, including of loggers, miners, and others. sealing vessels were spoken, the , Capt. Heater, with 690 seal- the Carrie C. W., Capt. Mac- th 520 skins, at Nootwa; and Siewerd, Capt. McKiel, all of re previously reported. On Sun- Victoria, last of the "white" to reach port, came in with 539 he steamer Zillah May arrived with 208 skins. ees passed within a hundred the wreck of the barkentine hen going into Clo-oose on her d trip on Sunday. The vessel a sorry-looking appearance, masts all gone, and the star- pounded out. The sens pour- gh the vessel and spouting out e side like waterfalls. Capt. thought the vessel would soon. Some canned goods, 700 which was loaded on the vessel, g washed ashore, together with of wreckage.