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A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER IX.

HORACE BYRD.

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Degraw, getting excited. "Is there—"

But Byrd with a gesture stopped all questioning.

"I let my thoughts out somewhat carelessly," he acknowledged. "Montelli is, undoubtedly, what the Portuguese describes him to be. I only wished to make sure. Do you think you could, by a few strokes, give me an idea of his face?"

Degraw shook his head.

"I fear my impressions are too vague," said he. "But let me have that paper." And taking the note which he had previously given to Byrd, he attempted, by a few lines on its back, to give some idea of the Italian's features. He succeeded imperfectly, while Byrd, who was no mean artist himself, employed his time of waiting by roughly, but not inaccurately, copying into his note-book the face of the signorina.

"For my own use," he explained, showing it to the wondering Degraw. And taking the other sketch, he buttoned them both up in his pocket, with a look that forbade further questioning. "And now, good-bye," said he. "As soon as I get hold of anything definite I will let you know. Till then be easy. Remember that twenty detectives besides myself are on the track of the unknown man who seems to be making all this mischief."

"Wait, don't go, Byrd, till you have made one thing clear to me. You have hinted to me that you thought that Montelli and he might be one and the same. If so, the signorina would be but one of the several involved in a plot, of which, I dare say, even you do not know either the motive or workings."

"You are not far wrong."

"But the two victims of this plot have died?"

"Natural deaths, Degraw."

"Sure of one and as sure of the other as I can be, till after the autopsy that will be made to-day."

"But—"

"Go to the inquest, Degraw. It will take up your mind and keep you on too great impatience. I will write you, in two days, whether I have news or not."

But the artist was not yet ready to see the other go.

"I want to give my opinion," said he, "before I say good-bye. I do not think that Montelli is interested in any one but the signorina, and as for this unknown, I do not think he is near as much to be feared as the deceiving Portuguese."

"We will see, we will see. Meanwhile, every minute that I linger here puts off by so much time the hour of her discovery."

"Then go; I would not detain you another minute." And as eager not to see the detective depart as he had been to detain him, he fairly pushed him toward the door.

"Why, whom have you here?" he asked, pointing to the picture which Degraw had denominated "The Poet's Dream." "It looks as if you had been trying to paint Miss Aspinwall."

"Miss Aspinwall?"

"Old Lemuel Aspinwall's daughter, the beauty of upper Fifth Avenue."

"Well, perhaps I have. Do you recognize the face?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I am much obliged to you. I have always wished to know my model's name. I saw her in a crowd, and this is the result. But I never found any one before who could tell me who she is. Not that I have made any strenuous efforts to find out, for, you see, the picture is not yet off my easel."

"Well, I congratulate you, it is a beautiful painting, but—"

Degraw stopped him just at the door.

"Your knowledge of the original of this picture has given another interest to it. Miss Aspinwall—since you say that is her name—is the lady whom I saw strewn in flowers over the signorina, when I first went into the room."

"You don't say so. Well, I must hear about that."

"There is not much to hear. We interchanged no words, for I was too much astonished at her presence to

be master of my usual self-possession, while she was only too glad to escape from the room and what must have seemed to her my somewhat importunate gaze."

"But she is a friend of Signorina Valdi; must be, or she would not have been showing her such an attention."

"I do not think she is a friend. The signorina, whom I questioned on the subject, said she did not know who she was, but thought she must be a pupil of her old master, who had formerly shown a secret interest in her."

"Well, I am glad to have located this person. Something may come out of it. Who can tell? It is often the most unlikely clues that lead to the desired knowledge."

And, with a bow and good-bye, Byrd finally disappeared.

Early in the afternoon, Hamilton Degraw went out to buy a paper. Turning at once to the local news column, he found that the autopsy in which he was interested had taken place, with the result prophesied by Byrd. It was a great relief, for had the girl been found to be the victim of violence, he would not have had a minute's rest in regard to the signorina, notwithstanding his opinion in regard to Montelli. Of the plot or conspiracy of which he had heard while at Police Headquarters, there was no mention, the authorities, for once, having succeeded in baffling the reporters in regard to a matter which it was desirable for the present to keep secret. But of the Signorina Valdi, he found this trace in one corner of the great paper:

"The report which was current this morning concerning the death of Signorina Valdi, whose disastrous attempt to sing the role of Margherita will be remembered by many of our readers, has been proven false. She is not dead, but absent, having left her late apartments at 391 East—street for other quarters at present unknown."

Calmed in a measure, the artist went back to his studio. There were yet hours and days to wait before he could hope to get any decided news.

CHAPTER X.

MISS ROGERS OF DETROIT.

Mr. Gryce's intuitions were seldom at fault. He had said to Mr. Byrd that the unknown would not be found with the heiress who had fled from Miss Hadden's school, and behold! within the course of the next day, came word from Miss Hadden herself that Miss Rogers had returned to the school with the crestfallen air of one who had suffered a great disappointment.

The inspector at once notified Mr. Gryce, and advised him to visit Miss Rogers and see if he could not obtain as would from her such particulars of her late escape as would assist them in determining upon the identity of the gentleman who had insisted that the elderly detective, who was both by nature and appearance eminently adapted for this work, at once departed for Miss Hadden's school, where, after a short interview with his mistress, he was admitted to a small apartment, where he was requested to await the appearance of Miss Rogers. The delay was short. In a few minutes, a young lady entered in whom he had no difficulty in recognizing the somewhat pretty and decidedly witty girl in whose erratic adventures he at present took so strong an interest.

"Miss Rogers, I believe," said he, with an air at once respectful and encouraging.

"Oh, who are you?" she asked, changing in a moment from the half-petish, half-coquettish creature he had seen enter into a woman both startled and frightened.

"I am your friend to begin with," was his reassuring reply; "and next, I am an old man who has seen much of life and who has a world of compassion for those who have as yet all their experiences before them."

She had not sat down, and was standing before him in an attitude that betokened more readiness for fight than desire to listen. "But you are a stranger," she declared; "I do not even know your name. Why do you speak to me of compassion? I was not aware—" Her voice broke; she was too young and inexperienced to be a good actress.

"I speak of the compassion," said he, "because of all griefs we mortals are called upon to endure, that of losing confidence in our friends is at once the deepest and the keenest. I know that you have suffered such a loss. No, do not go. I have something of too much importance to say to you to depart without hearing it."

He looked so benevolent and smiled so reassuringly that she immediately took courage. Flinging caution to the winds, she gasped out in sudden excitement:

"Have you brought me a message from him? Does he regret—" She paused. Ignorant as she was of life, she felt that she was on the point of compromising herself. "You do not

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answer," she pettishly exclaimed. "I have made a mistake; let me go."

She was not a beautiful girl, attractive as many considered her who saw nothing but her dazzling complexion and the abundant masses of her light brown hair. But she was a spoiled one, and at this moment bore herself so haughtily that she looked almost unrecognizable to the shrewd old detective.

But he was no novice in interviews of this kind. Smiling quietly, he remarked, with his accustomed air of benevolence:

"I do not answer because I dread your displeasure. I have no message from the gentleman to whom you allude, but I have one for him. If he calls upon you, as he may, please ask him how many ladies of the name of Rogers he has made himself agreeable to, lately; and if he does not recollect at that, ask him how many more he hopes to bring into the police courts before he is summoned there himself."

To be continued.

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SEAMEN'S LIST.

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