



**Plot That Failed;  
Love That Would  
Not Be Denied.**

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"What this old friend of mine advises is to take the whole gang down at Penruddie by storm. Go down yourself, only dead and alive again—a regular ghost, you know—and work upon 'em."

"I see," said Leicester, sadly. "A good idea, but there still remains another and a worse point to defeat. How do you propose to overcome the villain who has worked all this mischief? I have seen him to-night again, Stumpy, and victorious, and wealthy, and triumphant—ruling the destinies of those I love, and holding them in his talons. Now I am fragile and helpless—no, not helpless, for I have you, my friend—to do battle with him."

"I should like to see this great gentleman," mused Stumpy. "I've a sort of curiosity to see a man who works the oracle so nicely as he does. When can I see him, guv'nor?"

"You can see him in another hour," looking at the clock. "If you care to mix in a crowd and watch and hang about for him. There will be plenty to tell you his name and point him out. His name is Howard Murpoint."

"Hem!" said Stumpy, "I don't mind a crowd, master. I've been in a good many. I've faced one as I don't want to see again, and that was at the Old Bailey."

He glanced at Leicester as he spoke, and muttered:

"I'll keep him alive and jaw to him, just to keep his thoughts away. They're black enough to-night."

"Yes, that was awkward, master, that was, to see the judge and all the other fellows in wigs a-staring you out of countenance, and a-trying to make you out was then you was. And to think when they gives me transportation for life! for life! that I didn't deserve it, and should never have had it but for another man."

"Another man?" repeated Leicester, half unconsciously.

"Ah!" said Stumpy, delighted to see that he had drawn Leicester from his thoughts, and throwing himself down upon the hearthrug with his knees up to his nose, so that he might continue his tale more comfortably and with his face turned from Leicester.

"Yes, all through another person. I was honest enough till I met him. I was a costermonger, a steady chap, as costers go, and I got my living, and was tolerably comfortable; but you see I was a bit proud, and they says as pride is allus one too many for you. I was very strong in the arm. Look here, guv'nor," he broke off, jumping up and seizing the poker; "I can bend that poker in two—so," and he did it, dropping on to the floor again, as if there had been no interruption.

"I was very strong, and I could do almost anything with my arms, like a monkey; and I was, of course, very much given to dropping into pubs. Sometimes they'd ask me in a friendly way to show 'em a few tricks, and I used to—such as knockin' a man from one end of the room to the other with a little tap on the nose, or lifting six chairs slung together with my elbow, and pleasin' things o' that sort. One night I was showing off in this manner at a small pub in White-chapel, and when they was closing and I was going home, very much the worse for liquor, a chap comes to me all soft and smooth, and asks me if I'd join a little party as was goin' on at his house. I said I would, and I went with him, and he was the pleasantest-spoken chap you ever see, with a soft voice like a musical snuff-box, and a pair o' eyes as looked through you and made you do what they liked. Well, I went with him, and joined his party. They was all different to him, though he warn't dressed any better than the likes o' us, but I know'd some on 'em for bein' no better than they should be, but I'd never seen him before. And his friends, when they had all got friendly like, they calls him 'General,' and whispers and nods their heads at me. O' course I see something was up, and I warn't much took about when this general, in a pretty little whisper, asks me to join his friends in a little joke on a gentleman's house in the country. I was half drunk—I swear I was, sir—and I yielded. They wanted me, being so strong in the arm, to do some climbing, and when I'd said I'd join 'em they never let me out o' their sight. Day and night that general was always in the way, purring like a cat, and 'ticing the others on. Oh! he was a false-hearted 'un, he was. Well, to cut a long story short, we does the trick, or very nearly. I spoiled it. You see, they'd made me nearly drunk before we started, and when it came to holding on to a window-grating for ten minutes, half drunk, I failed it. I come down with a run, made a clatter, and give the alarm. We was caught, every man o' us—me with a broken leg. Then there was the trial, and then the general showed his teeth. He wasn't soft-spoken then, be sure. He turned on us all in his depeche, and ruined us. He was so savage it should all a' been spoiled, and him there in the dock, through me, that in the most natural, mournful sort o' way possible he pitched a tale about me being the ring-leader and drawin' the rest on, that the jury gives me as much as it does him—transportation for life! That was my only affair, master, excepting the smuggling, and I was drove to that."

Leicester nodded.

"And you escaped?" he said.

"Yes," nodded Stumpy, with a laugh, "and there I was luckier than the general. He made a shy at it, killed a man in the attempt, but him and another chap as tried it with him was drowned off the coast. Drowned in the pitch dark! It warn't a pleasant ending, but it was better than he deserved, for of all the false, smooth-faced villains he was the worst."

Leicester seemed lost in thought. He roused suddenly and looked up at the time-piece.

"If you want to see the most successful man and the greatest rogue in London to-night, or rather this morning, you must be quick, my friend. Light your pipe and run away. While you are gone I will turn over your friend's advice, for I think I see a chance of adopting it."

"I'm off," said Stumpy, and after Leicester had directed him to the mansion, he started.

It was the night of the great ball. Fitz had made his proposal and gone home, before Stumpy had reached the house and taken up his position in the shadow of the huge portico.

The guests were coming out, and for a while Stumpy almost forgot the object of his watch in his admiration for and astonishment at the dresses and jewels. But suddenly a footman's voice called "Mrs. Mildmay's and Mr. Murpoint's carriage," and Stumpy was suddenly aroused to a sense of his purpose.

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Crouching unseen against the iron railings he could see the face of every individual as it came out into the bright light pouring from the gas lamps at the door.

In twos and threes the brilliantly dressed people came out talking, laughing, and gathering their cloaks and wraps round them.

Presently there was a little excitement in the crowd of footmen, and two or three in handsome liveries called out, "Make way, make way," and Stumpy staring with all his might saw an old lady descending the staircase leaning on the arm of a tall gentleman.

"That's the earl and Mrs. Mildmay," said a footman, who had been telling the names of the various guests to a friend near him. "And here comes Mr. Murpoint, the MP.—great man, you know—with Miss Mildmay, the heiress on his arm. Get out of the way; he don't like a crowd round the door—Here he comes."

As he spoke the dark, handsome face of Howard Murpoint came into the light.

Violet was leaning on his arm, her pale face more sad and dreamy than usual.

They stepped on to the light, and Stumpy stared for a moment, then sprang forward so close to the railings that he struck his nose a severe blow.

He stared with open mouth and distended eyes, as if he were going into a fit, and as the great individual passed him—so closely as to touch him with his clothes—he gasped for breath, and dashing the perspiration from his face, muttered hoarsely and with an air of the most tremendous amazement:

"It's the general!"

Then he set off running as hard as he could and did not stop until he had burst into the sitting-room of Leicester's lodgings.

He found Leicester dead asleep on his chair, his head resting upon his arms on the table.

The sight of his exhausted master somewhat subdued Stumpy's excitement, and as he stared down at him thoughtfully he made a resolution not to communicate his discovery to his master too suddenly.

So when Leicester awoke he said: "Been asleep, sir? Quite right. To my knowledge you haven't slept a wink for three nights."

"Well," said Leicester, "have you seen him?"

"Yes, I have," said Stumpy, evading Leicester's glance, "and a very handsome man he is. Lord! he looks as innocent as a lamb and as sweet as a sucking-pig! Quite the swell, sir; all the funkeys made as much fuss as if it was the Emperor of Russia coming out to his carriage."

"Ay," said Leicester, "the wicked flourish nowadays, Stumpy; it is bad policy to be honest. Even your friends cannot forgive you that; see how all mine have forgotten me! If I had done anything bad enough they would have remembered me, but I was passing honest and so—but no matter. I have been thinking over your advice, and I am determined to

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adopt it. Look on that table; there is a letter addressed to a solicitor whom I used to know. He was an honest man, and we shall want an honest man to help us. To-morrow you shall take that to his office, and then we'll start off to Penruddie. If we win and succeed it will not be for the last time, but if we fail I shall set sail for the tropics and leave England forever more to the rogues who rule it."

The next morning the eminent and respectable Mr. Thaxton received a short—a very short—and very mysterious letter.

"Dear Sir: If you have any desire to learn more of the mystery of Penruddie you may satisfy your curiosity to some extent by meeting the writer of this letter at the ruined chapel in Mildmay Park. Should you decide to come, make your way there to-morrow night unseen and conceal yourself behind the middle pillar near the turret, where you may see and hear much that will astonish and enlighten you."

The letter was unsigned and the handwriting was a strange one to Mr. Thaxton.

He sat and turned the letter over several times, re-read and re-read it, and at last he muttered:

"I knew that mystery would turn up again. I felt certain of it, and here it is. I will go."

Thereupon he rang the office bell and issued an order for the packing of his travelling-case.

The next day the Penruddie train bore three passengers important to this history—Mr. Thaxton, Leicester and Stumpy.

Leicester saw Mr. Thaxton alight and knew that his letter had taken effect; he carefully avoided the keen eyes of the old lawyer, and he and Stumpy cut across a field near the station and left the village behind them.

Toward midday Stumpy cut out toward the village and found a boy loafing about. He gave him a letter for Job, the carrier, and told him to take it to him and give it to him quietly.

The lad, delegated with a sixpence, tore off, and soon slipped into Job's hand this note:

"Be at the old chapel to-night at midnight. H. M."

Job read it and asked the boy who had given it to him.

The lad told him a gentleman, and described Stumpy.

Job at once concluded that the captain had disguised himself, and determined to obey the mysterious message.

The night fell dark and cheerless. Toward midnight Mr. Thaxton carefully picked his way to the old chapel, and, not without sundry shudders and quakings, took up his place behind the center pillar.

For some time the silence and awful solitude of the place was unbroken save by the whizz of the bat and the subdued screech of the owl.

Mr. Thaxton began to grow cold and shivery, and had almost decided to return to the inn when a slight noise attracted his attention and he saw a light approaching.

It was carried by a short man, whom he at once, by the aid of the light, distinguished as Job, the carrier.

Here, at least, was something tangible and corroborative of the letter.

He dared scarcely breathe, so eagerly curious was he, and he watched Job, who looked round cautiously, and at length seated himself upon the tomb and shaded his lantern.

Midnight struck in solemn, monotonous tones, and immediately there appeared a blue, misty light from among the pillars.

(To be Continued.)

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**LONDON**

LONDON, Feb. 2nd, 1915.

**ROYAL MARRIAGE PROBLEMS**

Obviously because of the war, there are at the present moment more princes and princesses of eligible marriage age than there have been for many years, but marriage is in abeyance for the time. Besides our own Princess Mary, who in the ordinary course of events would have had Royal suitors, and Princess Maud of Denmark there are a number of charming young girls of Royal birth ready for alliances. The eldest of the King of Bavaria's many daughters has, it is true, just been married, but as she had been engaged before the outbreak of war and to another German Prince—the widowed father of the young Queen of Portugal—the wedding presented few difficulties. The large number of eligible Royal bridegrooms are German. It will be hard for the to find consorts now in other countries. In Russia the Grand Duke Constantine is twenty-six, and said to be both charming and intelligent while there are six other Grand Dukes on the list, most of them very wealthy. Of these the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch is the greatest "catch." He is far removed from succession to the throne, and his name has been coupled with that of the Tsar's eldest and beautiful daughter, Roumania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro have all eligible princesses whose marriages will probably be the seal of Balkan treaties.

**WAR NOT NOW SO WHOLLY  
SORROWING.**

In London nowadays there are many small signs of natural reaction from the mood of absorption in the war. They are to be found scattered about the newspapers by careful readers. For instance, within the last week or so there has been a distinct revival of public engagements. Newspapers which dropped their daily list of meetings and so on have taken to printing them again. While the last few days public dinners have been held in London for the first time since the war began, and lecturers are no longer among the unemployed. The papers are giving more space to matters unconnected with the war, and long reports of interesting cases in the courts are now appearing. Women's pages have been reinstated in some papers, and although it was foretold that there would be no fashion shows this year, we read at great length in one paper to-day how Paris is going to alter the feminine "silhouette." This silhouette or outline seems to be developing more and more into one of the Noah's Ark figures of our childhood. Quite tight in the shoulders and sleeves it widens gradually towards the feet, so that the woman of fashion in that respect is exactly the Belgian refugee peasant in our midst to-day. Theatres are recovering from their early depression and are now beginning to put on plays which are not mere revivals. Business men are looking ahead, and hear of one enterprising firm of builders that is already making arrangements to come into operation when the war is over. They are establishing a branch in the North of France, to be ready for the time when there will be a rush of building work in re-creating the ruined towns of France and Belgium.

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