POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2033

THE LAW OF THE LAND

By FRED M. WHITE

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CHAPTER XXIII.

Fencing.

Ralph came back much sooner than Charteris had expected. Barca had gone to his own room for a moment, so that it was necessary to wait. Ralph was not sorry, for there were several things he wanted to say to his friend. Charteris smiled impatiently.

"I shall be safe here for five minutes," Ralph said. "But you have not yet told me how you got here. I thought ——"

"My dear chap, there is no reason for you to think at all just at present," Dick said with some irritation. "That comes in my department. Everything is going perfectly well, and will continue to do so if you will only do as you are told. And if you must know how I got here, why I came down in a borrowed motor."

"Which means that you have somebody to help you."

"Nothing of the kind. Driving a good car is not exactly a matter of genius. It is my cue to make certain people believe that I am still in London. Hence the car, which is at present hidden behind a laurel hedge just at the top of the drive. Do you think you could manage to drive the car?"

Ralph replied that he thought he could if necessary. At one time the possession of a car had been one of his ambitions. Now that he was in a position to purchase one he was not so keen. He had gone so far as to try one, so that he was not altogether ignorant of its working.

"But what nonsense I am talking," he said. "Fancy me with all these horrors hanging over my head drivelling over the possession of a motor!"

Charteris shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Here you go again," he said. "And yet you pride yourself on the possession of an imagination! Couldn't you fancy some way out of the difficulty? If you were the hero of one of your own stories you could grasp the situation eagerly enough. You think that you stand in a position of terrible danger. I say that your position is nothing of the kind. In less than a week you will be holding up your head again and regarding yourself as one of the most fortunate men alive. Bad as things look—"

"You have said too much or not enough, Dick," Ralph whispered hoarsely. "You are going to tell me exactly where I stand, and then—"

"I am going to tell you nothing," Dick said curtly. "My dear fellow, you are not to be trusted—your nerves are too stringy for that. If I told you all that I had found out your face would betray you to Barca instantly. And there is danger here—a real live danger. You don't realize what a desperate character Barca is. He possesses certain of Nature's secrets. That renders him a force to deal with. He would not hesitate to put me out of the way if he knew everything, and do it in such a way that I should appear to have died a natural death. Fortunately the fellow has one weak spot in his armor—the passionate love for a woman. On that weak spot I have concentrated all my force. And I am going to win, Ralph; make no mistake about that. At present I dare not tell you what I have discovered."

"Perhaps you are right," Ralph admitted. "What do you want me to do?"

"Draw your cheque, the cheque you came for, and give it to Barca. I know a good deal that has been going on between you during the last hour, for I have been listening. I got in by means of the small window over the leads beyond the big corridor. And Barca has taken the very course that I thought he would take. If you only knew everything, he has let you off far more lightly than he meant to. By the pretty scheme in its entirety it is intended to bleed you of half your fortune, which, after all, would be nobody's fault but your own. To let you into a bit of a secret, the £5,000 is not for Barca, but for Kate Lingen, who needs money terribly. For the present Barca has abandoned his own big enterprise to help Kate out of the hole. . . . But I am wasting time talking like this. There is a little thing that I am going to ask you to do presently. You are not to worry about me, for I shall be all right. What you have to do is to invent some excuse for getting Barca out of his bedroom. I don't mean that you are to try to get into the room; that is the last thing I want you to do. Entice him into the corridor, or down here, anywhere you like, and detain him for ten minutes. I shall not be far off, and you will be perfectly safe in letting Barca go again at the end of the stipulated time."

"I daresay I can manage that," Ralph muttered.

"My dear fellow, you must manage it; the thing is essential. Now what accommodation have you placed at Barca's disposal upstairs?"

"He has a suite of rooms. There is a bedroom and sitting room and a small bath room. He particularly desired the bath room, for he uses a lot of water in his experiments, and has to saturate some of his chemicals. Why do you ask?"

"Never mind that. I am not impelled by idle curiosity. The bath room is at the back of the sitting room, I suppose. Is there another way from the suite?"

"Of course there is. The bath room opens on to the servants' staircase, so that the maids can get in and out without using the main corridor."

"Good!" Dick muttered. "Better than I expected. And now there is no need for me to detain you any longer. Go back to Barca, and behave as if nothing had happened. What an absent-minded fellow you are—you are actually going without the cheque."

Ralph sat down at the table and scribbled off the cheque. He wondered if Barca would be uneasy at his long absence. As he looked at the clock he saw that he had been in the library only a few minutes. Barca lay back in an armchair smoking a cigar. He seemed to be on peculiarly good terms with himself; evidently nothing had aroused his suspicions.

"As impulse to take the man by the throat and choke the life out of him for the moment. He was glowing in his face. What he felt like this, he looked at him curiously.

"There is your cheque. Seem me I ask In your would think that I had been blackmailing you to hear you speak. And this is all the thanks I get for giving you the plot of a most interesting and original novel!"

"There is no question about the plot," Ralph said bitterly. "You may lay the flattering unction to your soul, if you like, that the plot is so interesting that I am going to begin the story without delay. Hence, I am desirous of being alone in the house to do so."

"Very good. As a matter of fact, I shall not trouble you after tomorrow, as I am going to Paris for some time. I only hope that the book may be a success—in which case you will not refuse me a share of the royalties."

There was no mistaking the meaning of the speech. Barca was telling Ralph as plainly as possible that the cheque was merely a payment on account. Barca had proved beyond doubt that he knew all about the attack on Holt and its sequel. He had almost told Ralph that it was he who had been instrumental in removing all traces of the crime. He shared the guilty secret and had every intention of making money out of it. Ralph forgot Charteris for the moment, he forgot what golden promises the latter held out to him. He could only see now that he was in the hands of this scoundrel.

He would have to go on suffering like this for years; there was no help for it. Barca would be free to come and go as he liked; his demands would grow more extravagant with the progress of time. And he had put it all so cleverly that Ralph could not lay his hands upon one weak spot in the programme. He felt utterly helpless and cast down.

"I fancy I understand what you mean," he said. "We will discuss that at another time. And now as it is getting late, I think I will go to bed. I am not feeling very well."

"You don't look it," Barca said pointedly. "You will be all the better for a turn between the sheets. As for myself, I shall probably work all night. I have reached a very interesting stage in my experiments. Later I will show you what I have done."

The speaker tossed the end of his cigar into the grate and proceeded to light his candle. He must go to bed without another word. After a short interval, Ralph followed. He had for the moment almost forgotten the fact that Dick was in the house. The latter he found still seated in the big armchair in the library patiently waiting the trend of events. Ralph noticed that one of the windows leading to the garden was open.

"Did Barca suspect anything, do you think?" Charteris asked.

"I should say not," Ralph replied. "I forgot all about you directly I got back into the dining room. To see the fellow smiling there and to feel the way in which he was dragging hush money from me fairly maddened me. For two pins I could have taken him by that long lean throat of his and strangled him. Perhaps he saw something in the expression of my face, for he smiled as if his thoughts pleased him. On the whole, he suspected nothing."

"I'm glad to hear that," Dick muttered in tones of relief. "Your face is so expressive that I was almost afraid to trust you. Now there is one little thing I have to say to you. How are you going to get Barca out of the room?"

"I haven't thought of that as yet. There will be plenty of time after I go to bed. I shall treat that affair as I should a problem in one of my own stories. I think you may leave me to work that in a natural and artistic manner."

"Yes, I fancy you are to be trusted as far as that," Dick said presently. "The rest of the business you can leave entirely to me. And now I want to tell you where you can find the motor car that I borrowed especially for the occasion. It is at the top of the drive behind that big clump of Portuguese laurels, where the rustic seat is. You know where I mean?"

"I know exactly where you mean. But what has the car got to do with it?"

"The car has a great deal to do with it, as you will see by-and-by. It is more than probable that you will have to undertake a journey in that car before morning. That is why I ask if you understand the management of the thing. But all that is in the air at present. Now you go to bed as if nothing had happened and leave me here. Keep your eye on your watch for an hour. I shall want that hour very badly; in that time many things are going to happen. On the whole, it would perhaps be the best thing if I gave you a signal. I'll come round under your window and throw up a handful of gravel when I am quite ready. Before this time tomorrow I can promise that you will take a very different view of life."

"I hope so," Ralph said wearily. "It is certainly not worth living at present. You are a very good fellow, Dick, and from the bottom of my heart I thank you. But I cannot see how you can save me from the misery and remorse that are part of my existence now."

"Nous verrons," Dick chuckled. "Now you trot off to bed and keep your ears open for the signal. And now is there anything more that I can tell you? I think you ought to be quite satisfied with things as they are, for I am certain that there is not a single loophole for Barca to wiggle through."

Still Ralph hesitated. He did not wish to be disloyal to his friend; he did not wish to utter a single word in the way of criticism. But, at the same time, he felt that Dick might have been a little more communicative in the matter.

"I can only hope and pray that it will turn out exactly as you say," he said. "It is all very well for you to take this cheery view of the state of affairs, but try to put yourself in my place just for a moment. Rather than endure the state of suspense much longer, I would cheerfully go off to Stonehouse and make a clean breast of the whole thing, and leave myself to the tender mercy of the authorities there. I tell you it would be a positive relief to me to do that. If you are a man of strong imagination—"

"Well, so I am," Dick said. "I have imagined a great deal lately. Fortunately for you, my dreams have come true. For instance, I have a vision that everything is going to put itself right in a day or two, and that when the mystery is explained you will wonder how it is that you did not see it before. Now, will you go off to bed, or do you mean to stand gaping there all night? Besides, a certain amount of rest will do you good."

"Rest," Ralph said bitterly. "I have almost forgotten the meaning of the word. I dare not take to drugs to deaden my remorse, for madness lies that way. Still, perhaps if I were mad I should be happier than I am now. My frame of mind—"

"Hang your frame of mind," Dick exclaimed. "I don't want to seem unfeeling, really you are getting on my nerves. Now, stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A Strange Message.

For one hour by the clock Ralph sat in his bedroom deeply immersed in his own painful thoughts. Try as he would, it was impossible to extract much consolation from Dick's cryptic utterances. Stephen Holt was dead and he had killed him. And Barca knew all about it. Barca had adapted the whole scheme to his own advantage, as he always did. Perhaps that clever scoundrel had actually seen the crime committed.

But there was no one to speculate on that. Dick was trying to solve the painful problem, and Dick had to be backed up loyally. It was time to put dreary speculation on one side and think of action. How was Barca to be lured from his bedroom without attracting his suspicions? That was the one object that Ralph had to gain now.

He resolutely put everything else out of his mind. How was the thing to be done? How would he have managed it had both Dick and Barca simply been characters in fiction? The thing came to him almost as soon as he gave proper consideration to it. It would be so easy to pretend that burglars were in the house.

The signal came at length so unexpectedly that Ralph fairly jumped. He crossed over to the window and stood with his figure in the shadow of the blind. He waved his hands, and a little smothered exclamation came in reply. A moment later and Ralph was creeping along in the direction of Barca's room. He tapped gently on the panels, but no reply came, though Ralph could see a light shining under the edge of the door. It was just possible that Barca had gone to sleep and left his lamp burning. Again Ralph tapped, but no reply came. In the deadly silence of the place and the darkness of night the horror was all the more intensified. And yet it was imperative that Ralph should stay there without giving the least sign till the time came to act.

"I must try to forget all about it," he murmured. "I must concentrate my mind on something else."

He began to think of Enid, of the happy days that were gone apparently beyond recall. He could see the girl's face now as he had noted it the last time they met. He wondered if she was really sorry for him as she had appeared to be.

This was better, at any rate, than communing in the darkness with his own painful forebodings. The house was intensely silent, so quiet indeed that Ralph could hear a mouse behind the wainscot nibbling at a bit of biscuit. Outside from somewhere came, the bleat of a lamb, and then two or three notes of the nightingale.

Ralph had heard the nightingale the first day he had ever passed at Abbey Close. He remembered vividly how he had sat at dinner with the windows open, dreaming of the happy future before him. But it was no time to think of that. He had to act now; he was in the corridor creeping along once more in the direction of Barca's room and trying to summon the courage which was ebbing out through his finger tips.

"I won't be frightened," Ralph said. "And yet what a pitiful coward I am. To think that when Dick is working so hard for me——"

He set his teeth together. Once more he tapped at Barca's door. No response came, nothing but the scratching of the mouse behind the wainscot. Standing there under the velvety pall, the heavy weight of night, it seemed to Ralph's red hot imagination that he could hear the sound of voices. It actually sounded like a noise that came from within Barca's room. Then Ralph tapped again a little more loudly and had his hand on the handle of the door. It was locked.

Surely he was not mistaken now, he was certain that he could hear the confused shuffle of feet on the other side of the locked door. He could hear, too, a muffled sound as if an inner door had been shut very gently. A moment later and Barca stood there, looking a little weary and dishevelled, Ralph thought. His face was paler than ever.

"What on earth do you want?" he asked with some show of irritability. This weakness was so unusual in Barca that Ralph became all the more suspicious. "As this is the last night I am likely to spend under your roof, you might as well leave me to conduct my experiment in peace. How long have you been here?"

There was suspicion, almost fear, in the question, as Ralph did not fail to notice. Obviously it was his policy to pacify Barca for the moment.

"I am very sorry," he said. "I have only just come. I could not sleep. I have been sitting in the darkness thinking over all sorts of things. And it seemed to me that there was somebody in the house. I heard a window open downstairs somewhere and footsteps. I want you to come with me and see what is wrong. I see you have taken your boots off. Come at once and make a close investigation of the premises."

Barca hesitated, but only for a moment. He had not the least suspicion that there was anything underlying the request that Ralph had made to him. And to refuse would savor of cowardice. Ralph repeated his request. It seemed to him that Barca was downright angry. Ralph sincerely hoped that the sudden display of passion on this man's part was not going to ruin their scheme.

"Did ever anybody see such a man?" Barca said. "This imagination of yours is all very well in its way, but if it is going to affect your nervous system in this fashion the sooner you take advice the better. Do you really believe there are burglars in the house, or are you suffering from hysteria like an overwrought woman? Go back to bed and forget all about it. Tomorrow you can go and buy a couple of bloodhounds and engage a night watchman. It is evident that you are not cut out to live in a country house."

"Then you are not coming?" Ralph asked feebly.

"Why should I come? I am as busy as I can be, and here you blunder in, upsetting the whole train of thought and leaving me to start my problem all over again. Go and look for the fellow yourself, and if you find him you can whistle. Then I can come down and see what is best to be done."

Ralph pulled himself together. He fully realized that the situation was getting desperate. By fair means or foul it was necessary to get Barca to accompany him.

"All right," he said. "If you are afraid."

Barca came forward hotly, flushed with the accusation. His door was flung wide open, so that the interior was exposed to view. It was a thoughtless thing to do, but Barca was angry and annoyed.

Ralph looked in quickly. In that passing view he managed to see that all the bottles and utensils were scattered all over the table; he had just a glimpse of the brilliantly lighted room. In one corner stood a pair of boots, and Ralph noticed how stained and muddy they were. They were too large for Barca, too. Ralph thought of the voices he had heard just now, and in some way connected them with the boots.

But he appeared to heed nothing. He caught Barca by the shoulder and tried to bring him along the corridor. The latter turned and took the key from the room door and was proceeding to lock it from the outside. Ralph burst into an impatient exclamation. He had not expected an action like this. It came to him quite suddenly that the reason why Barca was to be lured out of his room was for the very purpose of Dick's getting inside.

"What on earth are you doing?" Ralph asked. "What are you afraid of? Do you suppose that our friend the burglar is going to hide under your bed for the purpose of murdering you? I did not regard you as a coward of that type, Barca."

Barca's brown, lean face flushed hotly. With a kind of laugh he passed down the corridor by Ralph's side, leaving the door of his room wide open. Almost immediately a figure came from behind a suit of armor and darted into the lighted bedroom. But neither Ralph nor Barca noticed this. They went on their way down the stairs until they came at length to the library. It was pitch dark, but they could hear the curtain over one of the windows flitting in the breeze.

"Exactly what I told you," Ralph whispered. "I was certain that I heard a window open. It is plain that the burglar got in this way. That being so, it is equally certain that he will leave by the same exit. All we have to do is to sit down here and wait patiently till he is ready to depart with his booty."

Ralph spoke quite calmly. He was not feeling the least trace of excitement now. The longer he and Barca stayed there, the better it would be for Dick's investigation. For a long time they sat there in silence waiting to see what was going to happen. But finally it was from the outside of the house that the sign came. There was the crunch of footsteps on the gravel, and the knocking on the front door.

"Probably a policeman," Ralph suggested. "He has seen something suspicious, and has come to give us warning of what has happened. If this is so we can change our plan of campaign, Barca; we can leave the policeman to guard the exit whilst we investigate the house systematically. I'll go and let the fellow in."

Very quietly Ralph opened the front door. Naturally, he had not the faintest expectation of seeing a policeman, taking into consideration the fact that the alleged burglar was no more than a figment of his own imagination. He did not know what to expect. At any rate, he did not expect to see the figure of Dick Charteris covered from head to foot with dust and dirt, and with a gaping wound, from which the blood was flowing, on his forehead.

"Why, Dick?" Ralph cried. "What is the matter? Do you mean to say—"

Dick clapped his hand over Ralph's mouth. He held it thus for a moment. He looked sick and white and dizzy, but his eyes had lost none of their grim determination. He was evidently collecting his energies for some supreme effort.

"Didn't expect to see me here at this hour of night?" he said loudly. "Fact is, I have had a bit of an accident with my motor car. I was coming down late from London alone and I ran over something in the road—looked like a dead dog or something of that kind. Anyway I came to grief and the car on the top of me. I left the car in the ditch and struggled to reach home. But I couldn't quite manage it, so I decided to come here and knock you up, old chap. Where is that scoundrel, Barca?"

The last words were uttered in a thrilling whisper. Dick had paused as if to get breath.

"In the library waiting with me to catch the burglar invented by myself with a view to getting our friend out of his room," Ralph whispered in reply. "But what—"

"A little accident," Dick's answering whisper came. My plan very nearly went wrong, but it's all right now. That story of the burglar will save me. It's impossible for me to tell you at present what has happened. But Barca is a doctor and he will attend to me. I am going to make the best of my misfortunes. My dear fellow, I am rather more hurt than I had imagined. Go and ask Barca to come and see me. Go and fetch him out of his bedroom and say I am here. Never mind his experiments."

The latter part of the speech was loud and breathless. Ralph had no difficulty in recognising the fact that Dick meant Barca to hear. As a matter of fact, the man of science had heard and was already standing in the doorway.

"Is there anything that I can do for you?" he asked. "You seem to have had a nasty spill. But I don't suppose you are very much hurt or your voice would not be so strong. I should say that he has frightened the burglar away, Kingsmill."

"No doubt about that," Ralph laughed. "We were burglar-hunting when you came along, Dick. The fellow seems to have come in through the library window, for we found it open. But he must have got clear of the premises by this time. I'll go and light the lamps in the dining-room so that Barca can attend you."

There was no sham or pretence about Dick's injuries. His face was very pale, the blood from the cut forehead was trickling down his features. After warm water had been applied and brandy administered Dick declared that he felt better.

"I've got some strapping and bandages in my room," Barca said. "I'll go and get them. There is nothing very much the matter. In a day or two you will be quite yourself again."

Barca came back presently with the bandages in his hand. He had been so quick that Dick had had no time to explain what had happened.

"Your burglar has gone," Barca explained. "He has been in my bedroom. I know that because the window is wide open and there are marks on the window ledge where he escaped by slipping down the ivy. At any rate, he has gone now."

Ralph was puzzled. There had been no burglar. And yet somebody had been in Barca's room and had made his escape with the friendly aid of the ivy. Ralph glanced across at Dick, who favored him with a rapid and pregnant wink.

"Oh! hang your burglar," he exclaimed. "The fellow has gone, and there is an end of him. Incidentally he has done me a good turn, because if you had not been up I should probably have had some difficulty in making you fellows hear, and I was pretty well finished when I had that brandy. What I want you to do, Ralph, is to take a note as far as my place for me. It will be daylight before very long, and if anybody sees that motor they will probably go over to the Park and report that I am killed or something of that kind. Give me a sheet of paper and a pencil. That's all I want."

Barca demurred at the suggestion. But Dick insisted. Rather slowly and painfully he managed to pencil a few words on the paper and then fold it together.

In a hurried, scrambling kind of way, he thrust it into Ralph's palm. The squeeze of his fingers evidently meant something.

"Now you be off at once and leave me to the tender mercies of Barca," Dick said. "He will look after me till you come back. I don't think that I have any more to say. And do not alarm my people too much; break it gently."

Ralph passed out into the hall with the letter in his hand. As he glanced at it he saw to his surprise that it was addressed to him and that it bore the words "Open it now." He opened out the sheet and read the contents of the pencil scrawl:

"No need to go near the Park. Take the motor and go to Stonehouse and call on the chief of police there. Tell him that I am at Abbey Close and that I expect him here as soon as possible. He is expecting a message like this!"

CHAPTER XXV.

Drawing the Net.

It was maddening to be left in the dark like this. It seemed to Ralph that Dick Charteris might have taken him into his confidence. And yet perhaps Dick had reason on his side, for Ralph's strong point did not lie in the concealment of his feelings. And behind it all was the new feeling of hope that had come to him.

Dick had promised great things, he had gone as far as to state that in a day or two everything would be as it had been before. And yet that seemed utterly illogical and impossible. It was impossible, for instance, to bring back the dead. And Stephen Holt was dead, as Ralph knew to his bitter cost. Ralph could see the man as he lay there at his feet in the dining room at Abbey Close. And unless a miracle happened, things could not be as before.

And yet, wild as it seemed, a strange feeling of hope was rising in Ralph. He knew how strong and resolute Dick was, how clear his vision, how well-balanced his mind. Nor was Dick Charteris in the habit of playing the mountebank; he had not embarked upon all these alarms and excursions for nothing. Certainly it would be better to do as Dick had suggested and go to Stonehouse without delay. The orders were curt and stringent enough, and there was the motor car behind the laurel hedge sufficiently far from the house not to be heard. With a little trouble Ralph got the thing in motion.

The lamps had not been extinguished, so there was no delay in lighting up. Without the fear of traps before his eyes, Ralph skimmed over the dark, deserted ground until he came at length to the outskirts of the town. Here he slowed down, for anything like trouble now might prove fatal to Charteris' delicately-laid schemes. Nevertheless, Ralph was feeling sore that Dick should be using him in this fashion. It was as if he had been a child, untrustworthy and incapable of undertaking responsibility.

Still, the thing could not be helped, and having embarked upon his errand he resolved to see it out to the end.

"I must trust him," he told himself. "And yet in some matters Dick is as foolish as myself. It seems almost incredible that he can get me out of a mess like this. Why, I could not invent a solution of this mystery in work of fiction, even though I should have the advantage of being able to adopt my characters to suit the situation."

Ralph was quite correct there. For more than once lately he had conceived the wild idea of working the whole thing out in the shape of a novel, with himself for hero of the story. And yet, try as he would, he could not hit upon a satisfactory way of bringing the dead man back to life again, and therefore he had been forced to abandon the idea. He wondered now what Enid would say if she could see him, or if she knew anything of his errand.

He put all these visionary ideas out of his head, however, and began carefully to ponder over Dick's instructions. The lights of Stonehouse were approaching, and already he had passed one or two wayfarers coming from the town. It was some relief to him at length to feel that he was getting exceedingly near to his destination. The police station winked one solitary eye of light into the road, and Ralph was a little surprised to find more than one officer inside. The Chief Constable, Captain Ford, rose from a chair where he had been reading a paper, and nodded to Ralph. Evidently the latter had been expected.

"I am not in the least surprised to see you," he said. Ford was a younger son of one of the local county families, and as such was on intimate terms with most good people. It was not the first time that he and Ralph had met. "I had an express letter from Charteris a few hours ago from London. Have you seen him lately?"

"He is at my house," Ralph explained. "He came down very late in the car that I have outside at the present moment. Charteris's movements are full of mystery; he has not troubled to confide in me, except to say that I was to come here and tell you that everything was ready. What does it all mean, Ford?"

"I am afraid I am not at liberty to say," Ford explained. "Charteris has his own way of doing things, he is a mystery in some respects. I had a warrant tonight for the arrest of a certain person, and directly after it came a message from Charteris saying that he would let me know very soon where the individual in question was to be found. I can't even tell you why Charteris is interested in this arrest; all I know is that I was to stay here and wait till I heard from him."

"There is always a great deal of method in Charteris's madness," Ralph said. "Though a stranger might have deemed him a little queer lately. But we are wasting time. Perhaps you will tell me what is going to happen next?"

"That's comparatively easy," Ford laughed as he pitched the end of his cigarette into the fireplace and rose from his chair. "It is a very strange thing that you should come here without having the least idea what is going to take place before the night is over. You must know Charteris exceedingly well to trust him as implicitly as you appear to have done."

Ralph flushed a little, for it seemed to him that Ford was adopting a somewhat jocular tone, quite out of keeping with the circumstances of the case. At the some time, he made up his mind not to lose his temper, and his laugh was just as genial as that of Ford. He turned to the latter and laughed again.

"Charteris has a way with him," he said. "And when he has made up his mind to a thing it is very difficult to change him. I daresay you have found that. This is the first time I have ever been engaged with him in a bit of detective work, and I hope it will be the last, for, between ourselves, this kind of thing is quite out of my line. But, seriously, do you think that Charteris is capable of taking a thing like this into his hands and carrying it to a successful issue?"

"Indeed I do," Ford said earnestly. "I know that a prophet has no honor in his own country, and I daresay you look upon Charteris as more or less of a foolish enthusiast. In that you are wholly mistaken. For my part, I look upon him as an extremely brilliant fellow, and if I were in his place I should be filling a responsible post in Scotland Yard. That is my candid opinion of the man."

"Then I am on safe ground," Ralph smiled.

"Indeed, you are, much as you may doubt it. Of course, it is not for me to say why Charteris is so anxious to effect the arrest of my prospective prisoner; but tht fact remains. He has gone out of his way to help me, and I am infinitely obliged to him. So far as I can gather, the arrest is going to take place close to your home."

"Really?" Ralph cried. "Well, I am more in the dark than ever. What is the plan of campaign?"

"We are going as far as your place in the motor car; that is, you and me, and two of my picked men in case of accidents. I expected to see you in that very car for all those minute instructions are laid down in the express letter I told you about."

"But Dick is ill," Ralph protested. "He met with some kind of accident. When I left home he was being attended by a guest of mine who very fortunately happens to be a doctor. He was pretty badly shaken."

Captain Ford shrugged his shoulders.

"Part of the comedy, perhaps," he suggested. "The fact is Charteris has a perfect passion for playing the amateur detective. I've got one or two men here who have served in the D division of the Metropolitan Police. Charteris spends a bit of leisure with them when they are off duty. He does not waste much time with me, as my experience has not been great. But Sergeant Curtis, who comes with me tonight, says that Charteris would have made a big reputation at the 'Yard.' I expect that 'accident' will prove to be part of the scheme."

It was possible, Ralph admitted, though the misfortune was very realistic. Still, Dick was nothing if not original in his way of doing things. A little time later and the motor was on its way back to Abbey Close, with a couple of plain clothes men in the tonneau behind. Ralph pulled up at the spot where he had started. They waited for a little time to see what was going to happen. Then a form emerged from the bushes and Dick Charteris stood before them.

He looked very pale and shaky in the flare of the lamps; his bandaged head gave him a gruesome appearance, not belied by the glitter of his eyes.

"So far everything is going very well," he said. "Ford, I am glad to see you. I daresay you have been wondering why I interfered in the matter."

"Well, I was a little astonished," Ford admitted. "A special messenger came down from Scotland Yard with a warrant for the arrest of Mr.—"

"Say a certain person," Dick snapped out. "No need to mention names as yet. I don't want you to spoil my 'curtain.'"

"All right. I got that warrant. I am bound to confess that the name on it surprised me. But I will not go into that. My first question naturally is: Why is the warrant brought to me? I am told it is because the person named was quite lately in this locality. I could not deny it, because I had met him close by. I immediately sent an officer over to his lodgings in Stonehouse, only to find that he had left altogether. As soon as I made that discovery I got your express letter saying that you can help me to make the arrest and that I am to hold myself at your disposal. But how the Dickens—"

"Stop a minute," Charteris interrupted. "To a certain extent I will explain. Later I will apologize for making a catspaw of you. I know all about that warrant, for the simple reason that I was the means of getting it issued. Everything will be explained in good time. Your man is close by, Ford, but there is something to be done first. Will you be so good as to stay here till I give the signal? The signal will come from the house and will be the pulling aside of the farthest blind in the dining room. You can see the windows from here. When you get the sign walk into the house and announce your errand. It will not be in vain."

Ford shrugged his shoulders. After all, Charteris was by way of being a friend of his, and he knew his people at home. And he was going to effect his purpose. Added to this, the curiosity of the Chief of the Stonehouse police was now thoroughly aroused.

"Very well," he said with a good-natured laugh. "I'll do as you ask. It is a lovely night, and a cigarette or two under the trees will not come amiss. Only don't be longer than you can help, as I have to go to Castleford by an early train tomorrow."

(To be continued.)

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EVELYN THAW DENIES SEVERAL STORIES

Hasn't Asked $1,000,000 as Price of Annulling Marriage — Hasn't Seen Husband Lately.

New York, Feb. 29—Mrs. Evelyn Thaw denied today that she demanded $1,000,000 or that she had any offer of money to induce her to consent to an annulment of her marriage to Harry Thaw. Mrs. Thaw added: "There has been no conference of lawyers and there will not be any. I have never been approached by any lawyer on the subject of divorce or separation, and you can say positively that there is not an atom of truth in these rumors. I have received no offer of money to consent to anything, and have made no demand for money.

"Yes it is true that I have not been to Mattewan to see Harry in three weeks. That is because I have been ill with the grippe. I have not been out of the house except to take a drive."

"Is it true that detectives are following you?" she was asked.

"It is not true. Mr. Dougherty wrote to me assuring me that he had no detectives engaged in following me, and that the story was untrue."

SHIPPING SEED GRAIN FROM EASTERN CANADA TO THE NORTHWEST

Toronto, March 1—A Winnipeg despatch says: Grain is now commencing to move again and for the first time in the history of Canada, the Northwest is receiving grain from the east. Yesterday 10,000 bushels No. 2 white oats and a large shipment of seed wheat was sent west by the Canadian Northern Railway. It is stated a large amount of grain will be shipped west from here.

The despatch also reports great activity on Grand Trunk Pacific construction, large gangs of men being put to work as fast as they can be secured in the vicinity of Saskatoon and Portage La Prairie.

MAKE TROUSERS AT TUPPENCE A PAIR

Hardships of Seamstresses in London Sweatshops

Labor Till Daybreak --- Cheap Shirts Put Together for Sixpence a Dozen--Starving Women Pawn Material Given Them for Shirt Making in Order to Get Food.

The New York Herald has received the following cable despatch from London: In an interview today J. J. Mallon, secretary of the National Anti-Sweating League, cited a number of instances of sweating which had recently come to his notice. Appalling cases, he says, are continually occurring in factories and in homes, particularly in the cheap tailoring trade.

A terrible story has just been told to a coroner in the East End. A trousers finisher created a sensation in court by saying that she got two pence a pair. She had often worked until 4 o'clock in the morning to get a crust of bread. She had to fetch her work and take it back again.

An officer of the Anti-Sweating League had found that a trouser worker labored very often from daybreak until she no longer was able to see the garment upon which she was engaged and she earned five shillings a week. When food was lacking she sustained herself entirely upon weak tea, which she sometimes drank to the extent of fourteen cups a day. At night her covering was the trousers which were being finished. With much plying of the needle the worker's hands had become mis-shapen.

Shirt making is equally as bad in some of its branches, and in Woolwich cheap shirts are made for as little as sixpence a dozen. Again and again one hears of poor seamstresses who have pawned the material given them for shirt-making to get food.

"In homes in East London there are a number of comparatively small trades in respect to which there is much sweating. The brush worker for filling a thousand holes with bristles, which she has first to pack into appropriate bundles and then secure with wire, gets sixpence halfpenny.

The bill against sweating which the league has been promoting has passed its second reading in the commons and will probably become law this year.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The opinions of correspondents are not necessarily those of The Telegraph. This newspaper does not undertake to publish all or any of the letters received. Unsigned communications will not be noticed. Write on one side of paper only. Communications must be plainly written; otherwise they will be rejected. Stamps should be enclosed if return of manuscript is desired in case it is not used. The name and address of the writer should be sent with every letter as evidence of good faith.—Ed. Telegraph.]

THE L. O. A.—A LETTER FROM DR. A. W. MACRAE.

To the Editor of The Telegraph:

Sir,—The members of the Loyal Orange Association are frequently, and I believe unjustly, charged with intolerance and religious bigotry. The principles of the association as set out in its constitution and ritual, which years ago were brought before the British parliament, calls for equal rights to all—special privileges to none, and at the same time urges the members to grant to Roman Catholics the same freedom in the exercise of their religious rites that they desire for themselves. As you are doubtless aware, the attendance of His Majesty King Edward VII. at the memorial service held at St. James' Roman Catholic church in London, in memory of the late King of Portugal, provoked a bitter attack upon his majesty by the London Protestant Alliance. The Sentinel is the Canadian organ of the Orange Association, with a regular circulation of more than 15,000. This paper, in its issue of Feb. 20, 1908, properly reflexes Orange sentiment: with respect to this incident the Sentinel, under the caption "Intolerance Rebuked," says:

"Much is being made in some circles of the visit of King Edward and Queen Alexandra to St. James' Roman Catholic church on the occasion of the memorial service to King Carlos of Portugal. The London Protestant Alliance passed a resolution of protest. Surely there could be no violation of law of good taste in the King and Queen attending such a memorial service. Would it not have been a violation of ordinary royal etiquette and of common courtesy not to have attended? . . . A better way is to go straight ahead doing the manly, charitable thing without a thought of following a bad precedent. That is simply what the King did. He acted naturally, and like a Christian gentleman, and in doing so administered a rebuke to those who are intolerant."

The above quoted utterance of the Orange organ in Canada should set at rest the unjust charges brought against this body by many who are ignorant of the truly tolerant sentiment inculcated in Orange lodges.

Yours faithfully,
ALEXANDER W. MACRAE.
St. John, Feb. 29, '08.

MAYOR CHESTNUT BY ACCLAMATION IN FREDERICTON

Fredericton, March 2—C. Fred Chestnut is now mayor of Fredericton, having been elected to that office today by acclamation. He is one of Fredericton's most public-spirited citizens and has had sufficient experience in civic politics to amply qualify him for the mayoralty. Joseph Walker and W. E. Farrel were elected aldermen for Carleton ward by acclamation. The candidates nominated in other wards are as follows:

Wellington—Ald. Hooper, Ald. Oldham, Moses Mitchell.

St. Anns—Ald. Everett, A. B. Kitchen, Ald. Kelly.

Queens—Ald. Moore, Ald. Jewett, D. E. Crowe, D. J. Shea.

Kings—Ald. Dougherty, W. G. Clark, J. J. F. Winslow.

All indications go to show that the council to be chosen next week will be a decided improvement on the present body.

Another Royal Babe Expected.

Madrid, March 1—It is officially announced that the accouchement of Queen Victoria is expected about the end of July.