

Which Was The Heir?

(Continued.) CHAPTER XLIII.

YIELD her to me for a moment, Geoffrey,' he said. 'My dear young lady, the man you have promised to marry, the man you have known as Geoffrey Bell, is Geoffrey Bassington, clearly proved, subject to certain formalities, which no doubt Mr. Oldham will see to, to be the heir to my titles and estates. By a strange concatenation of circumstances, I am this day proved not only with an heir of whom I approve—he bowed to Geoffrey—but with a niece, whose beauty and grace I freely and frankly acknowledge. If any person of this group has cause to be satisfied, I humbly think it is myself. At any rate, I get rid of a certain humbug which has ridden rather heavily upon my shoulders—I allude to the person called Sidney Bassington, with whom Fate has been pleased to plague me for some time past. He was a terrible nightmare; I admit it. But we will dispose of him with a suitable allowance and honorarium. I have made several additions to the picture gallery lately, Miss Rasleigh. Will you honour me by inspecting them? These young people are best left alone.'

He extended his hand with courtly grace and led Eva out of the room. Geoffrey and Cottie fell into each other's arms.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE best thing I can do is to blow my brains out or take a dose of prussic acid,' Sidney Bassington muttered to himself as he hurried to the station, his knees trembling under him, his face pale as death, his hands cold as ice. He was in a miserable plight as could be well conceived, and his misery was increased with the reflection which nagged at him persistently, that if he had remembered and acted up to the old adage, 'Honesty is the best of policy,' he might at least have saved something from the ruin of his hopes, might have retained his position as a member of the great Starborough family, and—who knows?—perhaps have married Eva Rasleigh, for the earl had proved himself a liberal minded man, and out of compassion for Sidney Bassington's disappointment, would very probably have made him a large and suitable allowance.

But, like all villains, large or small, Sidney had smashed every egg in his basket, had cut the ground completely from under his feet, and sawn off the branch upon which he was sitting, at the wrong end.

He knew that the agreement that he had given Lane had been found in the pocket-book with the certificates, and that the agreement would reveal his villainy to the earl.

Then, again, most awful to contemplate! Rachel, whom he had deceived and betrayed, proved to be Lane's daughter. If Lane recovered, as he might do—for such a man had as

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many lives as a cat—he would doubtless hunt Sidney down and compel him to marry Rachel. He shuddered at the idea. Rather than marry Rachel, whom he had begun to hate, he would—well, there was scarcely anything he would not do.

When he had left Starborough a few days ago he had intended going down to her; but he had got us far from London, and had saved his conscience and softened his conscience from going to her by sending her a costly present of jewels.

He gnashed his teeth as he thought of those jewels; and as the train sped on its way he thought, with the regret of a mean soul, of many similar gifts he had bestowed upon her. Why, he must have given her many thousand pounds' worth of jewels! And then it suddenly flashed upon him that he himself had very little money left. Scarcely enough to take him out of the country; and there was nothing left for him to do but to take flight. Those jewels stuck in his throat, so to speak; and presently an idea began to form in his mind. Would it not be possible to get possession of them? There was no other way of getting money that he could see, and money he must have. But for that cursed agreement he could appeal to the earl; but with that agreement in existence, and with the earl fully acquainted with Sidney's villainy, he knew that no appeal would be of any use. Lord Starborough was just the man not only to cast him off, but to punish him. His lordship would not mind the scandal, would be utterly indifferent to it, and then there was Lane! Oh, yes, he must leave the country. But those jewels!

Where the carrion is there also are the vultures. He reached Brighton at nightfall and slunk towards his rooms, very much as Lane had slunk from the town some days previously. 'Yes, Mrs. Richards is at home, sir,' said the maid, eying him curiously—for Sidney had had no time to change his clothes or even wash himself, and he looked seedy and very different to the dapper and rather overdressed

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gentleman he had appeared when she had at last seen him.

The rain that had swept down upon him had broken off the veneer, and he looked like a shabby and out-at-elbows adventurer.

'Madame is upstairs; she doesn't seem to be very well, and she's scarcely left the house since you've been away.'

Sidney went upstairs slowly, thinking of what he should say, wondering what and how much Rachel knew of his position.

She was lying on the sofa; a half-emptied bottle of champagne was on the table, and there was an odour of eau-de-cologne and one of the drugs to which woman are, nowadays, all too ready to fly when their nerves are overstrained or they are in trouble. She raised her head, and, seeing who it was, started to her feet. Her red hair was dishevelled, her face was pale and her eyelids swollen, and she looked half-dazed from the results of the champagne or the drug—perhaps both.

'So you've come back!' she said

in a low but shrill voice, a voice all edge. 'You've come back at last. It's well you have, for I was just coming after you. Where have you been—and what have you been doing?' she added, regarding his haggard, and by no means too clean, face with suspicion and aversion.

'I've been to Starborough,' he said. 'There's trouble, Rachel—I am afraid my uncle has discovered our marriage. You are not looking well. Have you been ill?'

'Our marriage!' she echoed, ignoring his question. 'I want to speak to you about that. I want my marriage-certificate.'

'Your marriage-certificate?' he faltered, avoiding the steady, suspicious stare of her lack-lustre eyes. 'What do you want that for? You've got it, haven't you?'

'You know I haven't,' she retorted, with suppressed passion. 'You took it from me the day we were married.' 'Did I?' he said, with affected ease. 'Then I've got it somewhere about; I don't quite know where at this moment. What are you worrying about our marriage for? I tell you we are in trouble.'

'I don't care about your trouble,' she said, her hands working at her side, her eyes growing brighter with her gathering fury. 'I want you to tell me about our marriage, all about it. I want you to explain; and explain you shall! I've seen someone no matter who—and he said something, told me something that makes me think everything wasn't

Over Thirty Years!

right, that there was something wrong about our marriage. Sidney affected an air of surprise, raised his eyebrows, and shrugged his shoulders, and laughed with an assumption of easy banter. 'My dear girl, you are ill and fanciful,' he said. 'What should be wrong with our marriage? We were married by a clergyman in the proper way. You agreed with me that it was better that we shouldn't go to a registrar; in fact, you managed the whole matter as much as I did. If it wasn't for our marriage I shouldn't have got into this trouble. Who's been saying anything?' He eyed her sideways and keenly.

(To be continued.)

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Advertisement for REINDEER MILK, JERSEY CREAM, and MAYFLOWER MILK, highlighting their nutritional value and uniformity.

UNCLAIMED LETTERS REMAINING IN G. P. O. to JUNE 7th, 1910

Table listing unclaimed letters in G.P.O. by recipient name and address, organized into columns A through T.

SEAMEN'S LIST.

Table listing seamen with their names, ship names, and other details.

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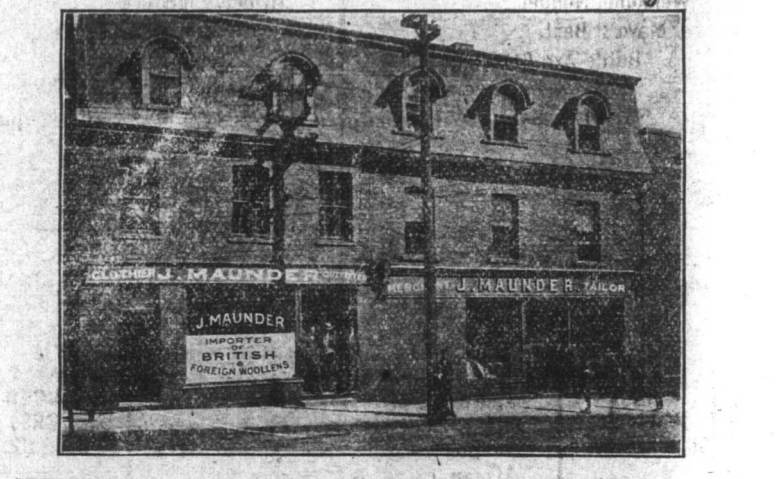
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