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mires—a tantalising dream—an impossible—yes, an impossible—?

Then the chain of his thoughts was snapped. Every pulse of his body seemed to cease beating. He was listening. Behind, in the drawing-room, someone was talking to Esther, and the voice—what folly! He turned slowly round as one who expects to confront a ghost. Esther was standing in the window, and by her side a smooth, clean-shaven old gentleman in glasses, who smiled benevolently upon him and went on talking. What folly! He dragged himself to meet them. He was ill at ease, scarcely conscious of where he was. But he watched Esther's uncle. His manner was certainly queer, but he watched. He saw things which sent the blood rushing through his veins at fever heat.

Dinner was served at a small, round table drawn close up to the open window. The Stanmore cook was famous, and Esther's uncle had had a word or two with the butler about the wines. Nevertheless, it was an ill-balanced trio, and Stourton especially was talking all the time at random. Mr. Heslop Stanmore was quietly entertaining, but Esther was too worried at her guest's strange demeanour to find much pleasure in her uncle's conversation. She made several attempts to establish more natural relations between the two men, but without the least success. She felt all the time that there was nothing they both of them desired so much as her absence. At last she got up and left them.

"I shall give you a quarter of an hour, no more," she said, glancing at Stourton. "You can smoke where you choose here."

The butler with great care set the Chateau Yguem and port upon the table and withdrew. Then Mr. Heslop Stanmore leaned back in his chair and laughed softly.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, you have my sympathy. You have indeed. All the time you have been getting surer and surer, longing to get up and take me by the throat; and instead you have had to swallow your dinner and make polite speeches. Come, you can relieve yourself now. All your suspicions are correct. I am the little, hunchbacked lady of Hyde Park Terrace. I stole those papers—it is my profession, you see. I am very sorry indeed to have inconvenienced you; but one must live, and I am a younger son."

"Where are they?" Stourton asked between his teeth.

Mr. Heslop Stanmore shrugged his shoulders.

"My young friend," he said, "I am thankful that you did not ask me that question a few hours ago, or I might have been compelled to have resorted to subterfuge. I have had the utmost difficulty—by the by, you really ought to try this Chateau Yguem. No?—the utmost difficulty in disposing of them. I have been watched day and night, and so has Poulgasky's house. However, I have managed it at last. My niece Esther, with whom, by the by, you seem to be on remarkably good terms, is an old school-friend of Corona Poulgasky's, and I got her to enclose my papers this morning in a letter to her. The post went out, I believe," he continued, raising his wineglass and looking critically at its contents, "at four o'clock. A delivery is made in London to-night. It is just a question—rather a near thing, I should imagine—whether those papers are not already in Poulgasky's hands."

"Did Es — Miss Stanmore know what she was doing?" Stourton groaned.

"My dear fellow," her uncle demonstrated, "do you think that I should dare to give away my secrets to a child? She has not the slightest idea!"

Esther stepped suddenly in through the window. Her forehead was slightly wrinkled. She held something in her hand.

"My dear uncle, will you ever forgive me?" she exclaimed. "I started for the post, but I forgot all about my letter."

What followed was probably the most amazing thing Esther had ever witnessed. Her uncle made a spring for the letter which she held in her hand, only to find himself caught by the throat and flung back into his chair. Stourton stood over him, grim and threatening. Just in time he saw the glint of steel. The revolver fell harmlessly upon the floor; a strong hand held him like a vice. Then Ronald turned to the girl.

"Esther," he said, "will you give me that letter?"

She was very pale, but she did not hesitate for a moment.

"I do not understand why," she answered; "but if you ask for it, of course I will."

Mr. Heslop Stanmore, with Stourton's knuckles very near his throat, did not find speech easy. But he said one word!

* * * * *

They opened his wedding present a little dubiously. It was a copy of Harrison's "First Steps in Diplomacy." They looked at one another and laughed.

"I am afraid," she said, wiping the tears from her eyes, "that my uncle is a very black sheep, but he certainly has a sense of humour."

Stourton put the book carefully on one side.

"We will treasure this volume," he remarked. "Some day, when your uncle has a birthday, I will send him a little text-book I have on the art of 'Making Up.'"

"Oh, East is East."

(Victoria Colonist)

WHEN you are sunning yourself in the garden this morning, listening to the chirping of the birds as they hop from bough to bough, and observing how well the flowers are coming on, read this sentence, from a dispatch which we had yesterday morning from Charlottetown, P. E. I.: "No mail has been received from the mainland since Monday, both steamers being tied up in the ice." If it happens to rain to-day, just alter this paragraph to suit.

Coal and the Tariffs

(Manitoba Free Press.)

THE objections on this side of the international line to reciprocity in coal come from Nova Scotia. Reciprocity would open a great market in the New England States to the coal operators of that province, but they evidently prefer to be barred out of that market and have the existing duty of 53 cents per ton retained on soft coal entering Canada. The Provinces of Ontario and Quebec are extensive importers of coal, and this province is relatively a larger importer, although less than one-tenth of the total amount of soft coal used here being imported from the States. Saskatchewan, like Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, would welcome the making of soft coal, like hard coal, free from tariff taxation. Alberta does not import coal, but to some extent exports it, and would therefore welcome the opening of the United States market, which would mean that a considerable coal trade would be built up by the Alberta producers. The British Columbia coal producers, needless to say, are keen to get free entry into the United States market.

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