

E.P. Oppenheim
author of
The Traitor.

The Betrayal

A Powerful
and Fascinating
Serial Story

(Continued.)

"I don't wish you to feel unhappy about it," I said. "I don't mind that," she answered, lifting her eyes to mine, "if it is better for you."

The door opened and Mr. Moray appeared. "Blanche was obviously annoyed," I was correspondingly relieved. "I rose at once and took my leave."

"Blanche got you to change your mind?" he said, looking at me closely. "Miss Moray hasn't tried," I answered, shaking my head. "We were talking about something else. Blanche pushed past her father and came to let me out. We stood for a moment at the open door. She pointed down the street."

"It was just there he stopped me," she said in a low voice. "He was pale, and he had such a slow, strange voice, just like a foreigner. It was in the shadow of the market-hall there. I wish I'd never seen him."

A note of self-doubt seemed to have crept into her voice. Her eyes were straining through the darkness. I forced a laugh as I lit my cigarette. "You mustn't get fanciful," I declared. "Men die every day, you know, and I fancy that this was one on his last legs. Good-night."

Her lips parted as though in an answering greeting, but it was inaudible. As I looked round at the top of the street I saw her still standing there in the little fold of yellow light, gazing across towards the old market-hall.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Wonderful Office.

On my little table lay the letter I expected, large, square, and white. I tore it open with trembling fingers. The handwriting was clear and delicate. It knew at once whose it was.

"Bowchester, Tuesday."

"Dear Mr. Duclane," "My father wishes me to say that he and Lord Chelsford will call upon you to-morrow morning, between ten and eleven o'clock. With best regards, I am,

"Yours sincerely,"

"ANGELA HARBERRY."

The letter slipped from my hands on to the table. Lord Chelsford was a Cabinet Minister and a famous man. What could he have to do with my appointment which the Duke might offer me? I read the few words over and over again. The handwriting was the very faint perfume which seemed to steal out of the envelope, a moment's swift retrospective thought, and my fancy had conjured her into actual life. She was there in the room with me, and she was with her quiet voice and movements, and that haunting, doubtful look in her eyes. What had she meant by that curious warning? What was the knowledge of the fear which inspired it? If one could only understand!

I sat down in my chair and tried to read, but the effort was useless. Directly opposite to me was the black curtain window. Every time I looked up it seemed to become once more the frame for a white evil face. At last I could bear it no longer. I rose and left the house and wandered carelessly across the marshes to where the sea washed lay strewn about, and the long waves came rolling shorewards; a wilderness now indeed of grey mists, of dark silent tongues of sea-water cleaving the land. There was no wind—no other sound than the steadfast monotonous lapping of the waves upon the sands. Along that road he had come, the faintly burning light upon my table showed where he had pressed his face against the window. Then he had wandered on, past the storm-bent trees at the farm of the road pointing landwards. A few yards further was the creek from which we had dragged him. The events of the night struggled to reconstruct themselves in my mind, and I fought against their slow coalescence. I did not wish to remember—to believe. In my heart I felt that for some hidden reason Ray was my friend. This visit of the Duke's with whatever it might portend, was without doubt inspired by him. And, on the other hand, there was the warning of Lady Angela, so earnestly expressed, so solemn, almost sad. How could I see light through all these things? How could I hope to understand?

The Duke came punctually, spruce and debonair, a small rose in his buttonhole, his wizen cheeks aglow with the smart of the stinging east wind. With him came Lord Chelsford, whose face and figure were familiar enough to me from the pages of the illustrated papers. Dark, spare, and tall, he spoke seldom, but I felt all the while the meretricious investigation of his searching eyes. The Duke, on the other hand, seemed to have thrown aside some part of his customary reserve. He spoke at greater length and with more freedom than I had heard him.

"You see, Mr. Duclane," he began, "I am not a man who makes idle promises. I am here to offer you employment, if you are open to accept a post of some importance, and also, to be frank with you, of some danger."

"If I am qualified for the post, your Grace," I answered, "I shall be only too willing to do my best. But you must excuse me if I express exactly what is in my mind. I am almost a stranger to you. I am a complete stranger to Lord Chelsford. How can you rely upon my trustworthiness? You must have so many young men to choose from who are personally known to you. Why do you come to me?"

The Duke smiled grimly. "In the first place," he said, "we are only strangers from the personal point of view, which is possibly an advantage. I have in my pocket a close record of your days since you entered the university. I know those who have been your friends, your tastes, how you have spent your time. Don't be foolish, young sir," he added sharply, as he saw the color rise in his cheeks; "you will have a trust reposed in you such as few men have ever had before. This prying into your life is from no motives of private curiosity. Wait until you hear the importance of the things which I am going to say to you."

I was impressed into silence. The Duke continued— "You have heard, my young friend," he said, "of the Committee of National Defence?"

"I have read of it," I answered.

"Good! This committee has been formed and sanctioned by the War Office in consequence of the shocking re-

lations of inefficiency which came to light during the recent war. It occurred to the Prime Minister, as I dare say it did to most of the thinking men in the country, that if our unreadiness to take the offensive was so obvious, it was possible that our defensive precautions had also been neglected. A board was therefore formed to act independently of all existing institutions, and composed chiefly of military and naval men. The Commander-in-Chief, Lord Chelsford, Colonel Ray and myself are amongst the members. Our mandate is to keep our attention solely fixed upon the defence of the country, to elaborate different schemes for repelling different methods of attack, and in short to make ourselves responsible to the country for the safety of the Empire. Every harbor on the south and east coast is supposed to be known to us, every yard of railway feeding the seaports from London, all the secret fortifications and places, south of London, capable of being held by a small force, and the various troops of any one point has been gone through into, and every possible movement and combination of the fleet. These are only a few of the things which have been on our cars, but they are sufficient for the purpose of illustration. The importance of this Board must be apparent to you; also the importance of the secrecy as regards its doings and movements."

I was fascinated by the greatness of the subject. However, I answered him as quickly as possible, and emphatically.

"The Board," the Duke continued, "has meetings in London. For the last few months we have had business of the utmost importance on hand. But on January 10, that is just six weeks ago, we came to a full stop. The Commander-in-Chief had no alternative but temporarily to dissolve the assembly. We found ourselves in a terrible and disastrous position. Lord Ronald Matheson had been acting as secretary for the Board, and he was the only man who knew the names of the twelve members of the Board, and the most honored in England. Yet twenty-four hours after our meeting a veritable report of them, with full particulars of all our schemes, was in the hands of the French Secret Service."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, startled for the moment out of my respectful silence. The Duke himself seemed affected by the revelation which he had made. He sat forward in his chair, his brows and bent head. His voice, which had been growing lower and lower, had sunk almost to a whisper. It seemed to me that he made a sign to Lord Chelsford. "Almost for the first time the man who had done little since his entrance save watch me, spoke."

"My own political career," Mr. Duclane said, "has been a long one, but I have never before found myself confronted with such a situation. Even you can doubtless realize its effect. The whole goal of our work is undone. We cannot recommence, but with different results, I am afraid, as an Englishman, to say what may happen. War between England and France would be like the great game of the two masters of equal strength—one having a secret knowledge of the other's every move. You can guess what the end of that would be. Our only hope is at once to reconnoitre our plans. We are hard at it now by day and night, but the time has arrived when we can go no further without a meeting, and the actual committee to paper and diagram of our new schemes. We have discussed the whole matter most carefully, and we have come to the following decision. We have reduced the number of the Board by half, those who have resigned, with certain exceptions, having done so by ballot. We have decided that instead of holding meetings at the War Office, they shall take place down here at the Duke's house, and so far as possible secrecy, as regards the secretariatry, is shown. Shadow of suspicion rests upon Lord Ronald, and he has temporarily lost his reason owing to the shock, and has been obliged to go to a private home. We have decided to engage some one absolutely without political connections, and whose detachment from political life must be complete. You have had a man who has been the closest of our confidants, and subject to some stringent and absolute conditions, I may say that we have decided to offer you the post."

I looked from one to the other. I have no doubt that I looked as bewildered as I felt.

"I am a complete stranger to all of you," I murmured. "I am not deserving in any way of such a position." Lord Chelsford smiled. "You undertake yourself, young man," he said, "for your college professors have wandered from the truth. It will surprise you, I admit, but I will explain a little further. At least fifty names were proposed, all of them of the highest character. Each one, however, had some possibly doubtful relative or association or custom in life. It is evident that there is treachery somewhere in the very highest quarters. These young men were sure to be brought into contact with it. Now it was Ray's idea to seek for some one wholly outside the diplomatic world, living in a spot remote from London, with a few friends as possible, who would have no sentimental objections to the surveillance of detectives. You appear to us to be suitable."

"It is a wonderful offer!" I exclaimed. "In a sense it is," Lord Chelsford exclaimed. "The remuneration, of course, will be high, but the post itself may not be a permanent one, and you will live all the time at high pressure. The Duke will place a small house at your disposal, and it will be required that you form no new acquaintances without reference to him, nor must you leave this place on any account without permission. You will virtually be a prisoner, and if certain of my suspicions are correct you may even find the post one of great physical danger. On the other hand, you will have a thousand a year salary, and a sum of five thousand pounds in two years' time if all is well."

Excitement seemed to have steadied my nerves. I forgot all the minor tragedies which had been real enough things to face only a few hours ago. I spoke calmly and decisively. "I shall count my life a small thing indeed against my fidelity," I said. He drummed idly with his forefinger upon the table. His eyes were wandering around the room absently. His face was calm and expressionless. "Very well, then," he said, "my business here is settled. I shall leave it with the Duke to acquaint you with the exact details of your work, and our arrangements."

He rose to his feet. The Duke glanced at his watch. "You have only just time for the train," he remarked. "The car shall take you there. I prefer to walk back, and I have something further to say to Mr. Duclane." Lord Chelsford took leave of me briefly. He was leaning over the table, and he fixed his eyes steadily upon me. "I am able now," he said, "to ask you a question postponed from the other day. It is concerning the man who was found dead in the creek." "His marvellous eyes noted my start," I said. "I can see that you know something. If there is any plainclothesman, you can now understand my interest when I hear of strangers in the neighborhood. I do not believe that he was a delinquent from the sea." "No," I answered. "He nodded. "Am I right," he said, "in presuming that you know he was not?" "I admit it," I said. "I know that he was not," I admitted. His fingers ceased that beating upon the table. His face became white and masklike. "Go on," he said. "I know that he came through Braster, and he asked for me. He looked in through the window of my cottage when Colonel Ray was with me. I saw no more after that until I found him dead."

"Ray left you after you had seen this man's face at the window?" "The wounds about the man's head and body. If he was not thrown up by the sea, can you explain them?" "No," I answered with a shudder. "At the instant I was not mentioned. I think that he had been seen in the village."

"It was not," I admitted. "Most of the people were at Colonel Ray's house. He spoke to one girl, a Miss Moray."

"She did not give evidence," I thought. "I said in a low tone, 'that she had better not.' 'If you have anything to say after Ray left?' he asked suddenly. 'I could have cried out, but my tongue seemed dry in my throat.' 'That was a sound idea,' he muttered. 'I fancied that it was a cry. But I could not tell. The wind was blowing, and the sea and rain! No, I could not tell.' 'You appear,' he said, 'to have discretion. I think it is a great gift. I shall look for you at eleven o'clock in the morning. I am having a large house party this week, and amongst them will be our friends. We are going further along the cliffs.' 'He left without any further farewell, and turned slowly homewards. When he reached the bend of the road he paused, and remained there for several minutes. He seemed to be measuring the distance between it and the road. He was still lingering there when I closed the door."

CHAPTER IX.

Treachery.

The Sunlight was streaming through the window when at last my pen ceased to move. I rubbed my eyes and looked out the window by half, then I saw a green-shaded lamp was burning with a sickly light. The moon had turned pale and colorless whilst I sat at my desk. I stared at the light, and then I saw a shadow, commenced to collect my papers. Immediately a dark figure rose from a couch in the farther corner of the room and approached me.

"Can I get you anything, sir?" I turned and saw a man in a servant whom the Duke had put in charge of the "Brand," my present habitation, and who remained with me always in the room while I worked, stood at my elbow.

"I would like some coffee, Grooten," I said. "I am going to walk up to the house with these papers, and I shall want a bath and some breakfast directly I get back."

"Very good, sir. It shall be ready." I folded up the sheets and maps, and placing them in an oilskin case, tied them round my body under my waistcoat. Then I withdrew all the cartridges save one from the revolver which had lain all night within easy reach of my right hand, and slipped it into my pocket. "Coffee ready, Grooten?"

"In one moment, sir." I watched him bending over the stove, pale, dark-visaged, with the subtlest of manner and the keenest of the aristocracy of servitude. My employer's confidence in him must be immense, for while he watched over me I was practically in his power.

"Have you been long with the Duke, Grooten?" I asked him. "Twenty-one years, sir. I left his Grace to go to Lord Chelsford, who took some work in London. 'Secret service' work, wasn't it, Grooten?"

"Yes, sir." "Interesting?" "Some parts of it very interesting."

I nodded and drank my coffee. Grooten was watching me with an air of respectful interest.

"You will pardon my remarking it, sir, but I hope you will try and get some sleep during the day. You are very pale this morning, sir."

I looked at the glass, and was startled at my own reflection. This was only my third day, and the responsibilities of my work were heavy upon me. My cheeks were sunken and there were black rings around my eyes.

"I will lie down when I come back, Grooten," I answered. Outside, the fresh morning wind made a sudden sweet tonic to my jaded nerves. I looked at his pale, sunken face, and I felt a momentary pang of sympathy. As I stood there, drinking it in, I became suddenly aware of light approaching footsteps. Some one was coming towards the cottage from the Park.

I did not immediately turn my head, but every nerve in my body seemed to stiffen into quivering curiosity. The pathway was a private one leading from the house only to the "Brand," and down to the creek. It was barely seven o'clock, and the footsteps were no laboring man's. I think that I knew very well who it was that came so softly down the cone-straw path.

We face one another with little of the mask of surprise. She came like a shadow, fitting between the slender tree trunks out into the sunshine, where for a moment she seemed to waver, and white eyes flashed a greeting at me. I stood cap in hand before her. It was the first time we had met since I had taken up my abode at the "Brand."

"Good-morning, Mr. Duclane," she said. "You need not look at me as though I were a ghost. I always walk before breakfast in the country."

"You look as though you had been up all night," she remarked. "I had work to finish, I told her. She nodded.

"So you would have none of my advice, Mr. Secretary," she said, softly, coming a little nearer to me. "You are already installed."

"Already at work?" I asserted. She glanced towards the "Brand." "I hope that you are comfortable," she said. "A couple of hours is short notice in which to make a place habitable."

"Grooten is a magician," I told her. "He has arranged everything," she said thoughtfully.

A white-winged bird floated over our heads and drifted away skywards. She followed it with her eyes.

"You wonder at seeing me so early," she murmured. "Don't you think that it is worth while? Nothing ever seems so sweet as this first morning breeze."

I loved gravity. She was standing bareheaded now at the edge of the cliff, watching the flight of the bird. It was delightful to see the faint pink come back to her cheeks with the sting of the wind.

"I had an idea," I said. "I had an idea in my mind that it was not wholly for her health's sake that Lady Angela walked abroad so early."

"Tell me," she said, "have you had a vision this morning?" "What, at this hour?" I exclaimed. "There are other early risers besides you and me," she said. "The spinney gate was open, so some one has passed through."

I shook my head. "I have not seen or heard a soul," I told her. "I have just finished some work, and I am on my way up to the house with it."

"You really mean it?" she persisted. "Of course I do," I answered her. "Grooten is the only person I have spoken to for at least nine hours. Why do you ask?"

"My window looks this way," she said, "and I fancied that I saw some one cross the Park while I was dressing. The spinney gate was certainly open."

"Then I fancy that it has been open all night," I declared. "For to the best of my belief no one has passed through it since I came here."

"May I walk with you to the spinney gate?" she asked. "There is something which I should very much like to ask you."

She replaced her hat, which she had been carrying in her hand, and I stood looking at her. She was looking at me with a steady gaze, and her eyes were shining with a certain intensity.

"The extreme slowness of her figure seemed accentuated by her backward pose. Yet perhaps I had not before properly appreciated its perfect gracefulness."

"I was going farther along the cliffs," she said, "but I will walk some of the way back with you. One minute."

She stood on the edge of the cliff, looking down and then the broad expanse of sand—a great untamed wilderness. I wondered for whom she was looking, but she made no question. In a few moments she rejoined me, and we turned inland.

"Well," she said, "what is it that you wish to say?" "Lady Angela," I began, "a few weeks ago there was no one whose prospects were less hopeful than mine. Thanks to your father and Colonel Ray all that has changed. To-day I have a chance of a bright and important work. Yet I cannot help always remembering this: I am holding a post which you warned me against accepting."

"Well?" "I am very curious," I said. "I have never understood your warning. I believe that you were in earnest. Was it that you believed me incapable or untrustworthy?"

"You appear to me," she murmured, "to be rather a curious person."

I bent forward and looked into her face. There was in her words a certain gleam of laughter, which became her well. She walked with slow gracefulness, her hands behind her, her head almost on a level with my own. I found myself staring at her with new interest.

"Your eyes met, and I looked away, momentarily confused. Was it my fancy, or was there a certain measure of rebuke in her cool surprise, a faint indication of her desire of it should remember that she was the Lady Angela Harberry, and I her father's secretary? I bit my lip. She should not catch me offending again, I determined."

"You must forgive me," I said stiffly, "but your warning seemed a little singular. If you do not choose to gratify my curiosity, it is of no consequence."

"I am sure that it is," she remarked, lifting her dress from the dew-laden grass on to which we had emerged. "It does not matter, does it? Only you are very young, and you know little of the world. Lord Ronald was your predecessor, and he is in a lunatic asylum. No one knows what lies behind certain unfortunate things which have happened during the last month, there is a mystery which is as yet unsolved."

I smiled. "In your heart you are thinking," I said, "that such an unsophisticated person as I am would be easy prey to whatever snares may be laid for me. Is it not so?"

She looked at me with uplifted eyebrows. "Others of more experience have been warned," she remarked calmly. "Why not you?"

"If that is a serious question," I said, "I will answer it. Perhaps my very inexperience will be my best friend."

"Yes?" "Those before me," I continued, "have thought that they knew whom to trust. I, knowing no one, cannot do so."

"Not even me," she asked, half turning her head towards me. "Not even you," I answered firmly. "A man's figure suddenly appeared on the corner of the cliff, and he gazed, wondering whence he had come."

"Here is your good friend, Colonel Ray," she remarked, with a note of banter in her tone. "What about him?" "Not even me," she asked, half turning her head towards me. "Not even you," I answered firmly. "A man's figure suddenly appeared on the corner of the cliff, and he gazed, wondering whence he had come."

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over from my elaboration at the next. Nobody is permitted to hold a pen or to make a note whilst they are being read. Afterwards I have your father's promise that not even he will ask for even a cursory glance at them. I delivered them sealed to Lord Chelsford."

Ray came up to us. His eyebrows were drawn close together, and I noticed that his boots were clogged with sand. He had the appearance of a man who had been walking far and fast.

"You keep up your good habits, Lady Angela," he said, raising his cap. "It is my only good one, so I am loth to let it go," she answered. "If you were as gallant as you appear to be, I should be glad to see you in the evening."

"You would have stopped when I called after you, and taken me for a walk."

His eyes shot dark lightning at her. "I did not hear you call," he said. "You had the appearance of a man who intended to hear nothing and see nothing," she remarked coolly. "Never mind! There will be no breakfast for an hour yet. You shall take me on to Braster Hill. Come!"

They left me at a turn in the path. I saw their heads close together in earnest conversation. I went on towards the house.

I entered by the back, and made my way across the great hall, which was still invaded by domestics with brushes and brooms. Taking a small key from my watch-chain, I unlocked the door of a room almost behind the staircase, and pushed it open. The curtains were drawn, and the room itself, therefore, almost in darkness. I carefully looked myself in, and turned up the electric light.

The apartment was a small one, and contained only a few pieces of heavy antique furniture. Behind the curtains were iron shutters. In one corner was a strong safe. I walked to it, and for the first time I permitted myself to think of the combination word. Slowly I fitted it together, and the door swung open.

There were several padlocked despatch boxes, and on a shelf above, a bundle of folded papers. I took this bundle carefully out and laid it on the table before me. I was on the point of undoing the red tape with which it was tied, when my fingers became suddenly right, started at the packet with wide-open eyes. I felt my breath come short and my brain reeling. The papers were there sure enough, but it was not at that that I was looking. It was the double 'E' in the pink tape which fascinated me.

CHAPTER X.

An Expression of Confidence. I have no exact recollection of how long I stood there, but I felt as if a while I closed the door safe, and reset the combination lock with trembling fingers. Then I searched all round, but could find no trace of any recent intruder. I undid the heavy shutter, and let in a stream of sunshine. Outside, Ray and Lady Angela were strolling up and down the terrace. I watched the latter with a steady gaze, and her head was elegantly poised on her slender neck, her face mostly turned towards her companion, to whom she was talking earnestly. Even at this distance I seemed to catch the inspiring flash of her dark eyes, to follow the words which fell from her lips so gravely. And as I watched a new idea came to me. I turned slowly away and went in search of the Duke.

I found him sitting fully dressed in an ante-room leading from his bedroom, and with a great pile of letters before him, and an empty postbag. He was leaning forward, his elbow upon the table, his head resting upon his right hand. Engrossed as I was with my own treacherous discovery, I was yet powerfully impressed by his unfamiliar appearance.

His face was expressive enough, his frowning contempt, but he said nothing for a moment, during which his eyes met mine mercilessly.

"So you find the work too hard, eh?" he asked. "The work is just what I should have chosen, your Grace," I answered. "I like hard work, and I expected it. The trouble is that I have succeeded no better than Lord Ronald."

My words were evidently a shock to him. He half opened his lips, but closed them again. I saw the hand which he raised to his forehead shake.

"What do you mean, Duclane?" he asked. "The safe in the study has been opened during the night," I said. "Our map of the secret fortifications on the Surrey downs and plans for a camp at Guilford have been examined."

"How do you know this?" "I tied the red tape round them in a peculiar way. It has been undone and retied, and the papers have been put back in a different order."

(Continued on page nine.)

SMUGGLERS CAUGHT. Canadian Ladies Held Up by Customs Officers at Windsor.

Windsor, Ont., Oct. 20.—Three ladies living in Chatham and two ladies from St. Thomas purchased coats in Detroit on Thursday and were spotted by customs officers when they stepped out of the ferry. The coats were confiscated. A London woman was found to be wearing three suits of fleece-lined underwear which she was attempting to smuggle over. These goods were also seized.

Charlotteville, P. E. I., Oct. 20.—Hon. George Simpson of Bay View, member of the provincial government, nominated this summer as the Liberal candidate for the House of Commons, is dangerously ill with blood poisoning arising from a scratch on his hand. It is expected, an arm will have to be amputated in hope of saving his life.

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