POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2033

THE WEIGHT OF THE CROWN

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

In the Camp of the Foe.

As it happened—though as yet the girls were ignorant of the fact—they had no need to be afraid of the Countess Saens for the present. She had been cleverly fooled by a trick, as Lechmere learnt directly he was out of the house after hearing the countess read her wire to Hunt of the Mercury. Just for a moment Hunt had suspected the King of Asturia of a further act of treachery. But no sooner was he out of the house than Prince Peretori pounced upon him. There was a keen glitter in his eyes.

"Well?" he asked. "I left you in that place yonder with a purpose. Did my bait take?"

"Oh, it was you who sent that card, then?" Lechmere exclaimed. "How did you manage to do that?"

"The idea came to me like an inspiration. We wanted the countess out of the way, and it seemed to me that I knew the exact plan for doing it. I rushed off to the queen's hotel and procured one of her incognito cards to give the thing a real air. Then I forged a message from the king asking the countess to meet him in Paris tomorrow night. All I had to do was to place the thing in the hands of a district messenger boy, and there you are! The question is, Did my bait take?"

"As the countess is at present rushing through the pages of Bradshaw, I should say that the bait had taken," Lechmere said drily. "Our fascinating friend will assuredly be off to Paris by the very first train that is available. Isn't there an early morning boat? Of course there is, seeing that I have traveled by it many times. The countess will be off in an hour. We'll just hang about here and make sure, and then we can go to bed with easy minds."

Prince Peretori laughed grimly. He lighted a cigarette and smoked it with the air of a patient man.

"We're not going to bed yet," he said. "Our task does not even begin till the countess has gone. I'll throw myself heart and soul into this business, and I don't let go now till I see it through. When the countess has gone, you and I are going to do a little burglary of our own."

"What for?" asked Lechmere. "What are we going to gain by a risk like that? "Besides, if you are after these Foreign Office papers most assuredly they are not in the countess' possession."

"No, but they are in the possession of her maid Annette," was the startling reply. "So I have at length succeeded in astonishing even the stolid Lechmere. My dear fellow, when I went into that house tonight, I found that Annette was entertaining a lover—one Robert, who is unmistakably a gentleman's servant. We must find out who Robert is, and where he comes from, because he may be very useful to us later on. But Annette has those papers, because I heard her say so. A stupid policeman picked them up and handed them to Annnette without having the least idea of their value. But the girl has, and she proposes to dispose of them for a good round sum."

"Then our course is quite easy," Lechmere said; he had quite recovered from his surprise again. "The countess will be out of the way for eight and forty hours at least. That gives us ample time to open pour-parlers with the girl for the recovery of the papers."

"And perhaps frighten her and arouse her suspicions. How can you and I approach the girl? My own good friend, it seems to me that my own way is the best. Let us get into the house and search for the papers. If they are of the slightest value, the girl has not hidden them in her box. That would be too dangerous a game, and she is clever. What do you say?"

Lechmere replied that generally he was ready for anything. It was beginning to get light as the countess, accompanied by Hunt, left the house. She was dressed in black with a dark veil, and she carried a small traveling bag in her hand. It was quite evident that the countess had given scant attention to her wardrobe on this occasion as Lechmere pointed out to his companion.

"Let's get into the house without delay," Peretori said. "It's any odds that her ladyship has not said anything to her servants and that she has not aroused the household. She is in the habit of disappearing from time to time thus when urgent business calls."

It proved exactly as Peretori had prophesied. None of the servants were about, on the table in the hall was an open note for Annette saying that her mistress had gone to Paris and that she would wire what time she was coming home again. Lechmere looked a little ironically at his companion.

"So far so good," he said. "The coast is quite clear. What do you propose to do next? You can hardly expect me to creep into Annette's bedroom like a vulgar burglar and examine the girl's possessions. That is, even if we knew where to look, which we don't."

Peretori shook his head. That was not precisely his way of doing business, he explained. He had a much better scheme than that. He proceeded to the hall door and rung the bell loudly. Lechmere looked at him in blank astonishment. He knew that Peretori was really a man of infinite resources, but his intense love of a practical joke at all times over-ruled all dictates of prudence.

"Are you mad?" Lechmere cried. "What insane folly possesses you? Why, you will have all the servants in the place down upon you at once."

"There's is a kind of proverb of yours that says 'let 'em all come.'" Peretori smiled. "I beg to remark, my dear friend, that this is not one of my escapades. I'll give the bell another ring to make sure. Ah, the rats are beginning to stir in the hole at last!"

Unmistakable sounds of motion overhead came to the ears of the listeners below. A frightened butler in a long coat and carrying a poker in his hand looked over the banisters and demanded feebly what was wrong. A footman or two hovered in sight, and there was a glimpse of petticoats hastily donned behind.

"Come down here at once, all of you," Peretori commanded. "This is a pretty thing. I come here to bring back a little ornament that the countess lost tonight, and I ring the bell and nobody even takes the trouble to reply. Then I make the discovery that everybody is in bed. I also make the discovery that the front door has not been fastened up, leaving the place absolutely to the first burglar that comes along. I may be wrong but it seemed to me that somebody crept into the house as I came up the steps. It is important that the house should be searched. Put the lights up everywhere. I will go to the top of the house and guard the fanlight leading to the roof. Now get about it at once."

Nobody demurred, nobody ventured to ask questions. There was an air of command about the speaker that shewed him as one accustomed to be obeyed. His face was very stern, but he winked at Lechmere as he proceeded to make his way up the stairs. It was a fairly long search, for the suggestion of a possible burglar in the house had given the shock of alarm that such a suggestion always produces in the women kind and they were loud in the determination that the men should search everywhere.

"And we can lock up after the kind gentlemen have gone," Annette proclaimed. "See, here is a letter from my mistress addressed to me. She has gone off to Paris suddenly by the early boat. It is one of the eccentric expeditions that the countess loves. Has anybody searched the basement?"

Nobody had searched the basement for the simple reason that nobody cared to face the task.

"Begin at the bottom and work up," sugested Lechmere with cynical amusement. "If there is a man here he can't possibly escape you if that system is adopted, as my friend guards the exit in the roof."

"Which is immediately above my bedroom," Annette said with a shudder. "Par bleu, we might have all been murdered as we lay asleep. Let the men look everywhere."

It was presently borne in upon the men servants that nobody was in the house, so that their courage rose. They no longer hunted in couples. They were near the top of the house now, they were quite certain that nobody was about when Peretori descended.

"It was either a false alarm or the man got away by the skylight," he said. "Did I understand someone to say that the countess was not returning tonight. In that case you had better see that the door is properly fastened after this gentleman and myself have gone. Good-night to you all. I will say nothing of this to the countess if you promise to be more careful in the future."

The big door closed behind Peretori and Lechmere and was properly secured this time. Lechemre turned to his companion and demanded to know what it all meant.

"Well, I think that is pretty plain," Peretori said. "Our way lies together, does it not? And I confess that I am most terribly sleepy. Oh, yes, as to my scheme. Well, I wanted to get a good idea of the servants' quarters, and where Mademoiselle Annette slept. Mightily snug quarters these maids get in these good houses. And Annette is no exception to the general rule."

"Yes, but you did not find the papers, I suppose?" Lechmere asked with some impatience.

Peretori paused to light a fresh cigarette. His face was quite grave though his eyes danced.

"Not quite," he said. "The maid was a bit too quick for me. But the papers are hidden behind a plaster cast of the Adoration of the Magi high up on the left hand side of the bedroom. I have said it!"

CHAPTER XL.

Thin Ice.

With all her loyalty and determination in the interests of her new friend, Jessie could not repress a sigh of relief once Vera Galloway was safe in the shelter of the queen's hotel. After all said and done, the events of the previous night had been exceedingly trying, and Jessie was feeling in need of a rest. Vera Galloway did not fail to notice this.

"It is impossible for me to properly thank you," she said in a voice that was very unsteady. "What I should have done without you, goodness knows. By this time the man I love would have been ruined. Charlie Maxwell would never have been able to hold up his head again. Oh, if only I had not lost the papers!"

"They will be found," Jessie said. "I feel quite sure that they will be found and you will regain possession of them. At any rate the countess is powerless for present evil. Everything is against her."

The queen came into the room at the same moment. She was kindness itself to Vera, though her face had its sternest expression. She held in her hand a copy of the Mercury. She had been reading the sensational interview carefully. Never had there been a more daring or outrageous plot. And thanks to the courage and promptitude of Lechmere it had failed.

"This thing is infamous, daring to a degree," the queen said. "But fortunately the Herald comes to our aid. And the king is already on his way to Asturia. It is only the matter of those papers. . . . Vera, I suppose I must forgive you for the trick you played on me."

"It was in a good cause," Vera smiled faintly. "You see, there were complicating interests. And yet they were absolutely identical. I wanted to save Charlie and you at the same time and but for a most distressing and unforseen accident I should have done so. But what a perfect substitute I left behind me! Could any other girl possibly have behaved like Jessie Harcourt?"

The queen forgot her anger and distress for a moment. A little time later and Jessie was walking to her lodgings, her ears tingling with pride and pleasure. She was never going to want a friend again, the way was rosy before her for the future. Ada's pale anxious face brightened and her eyes filled with tears as Jessie came in. It had been an anxious time for Ada.

"You look so strong and happy and yet so tired," she said. "Sit down in the arm-chair and tell me everything. There is something about you that suggests adventure. But you have not failed."

No, Jessie had not failed, she explained. She told Ada everything from beginning to end; she had to answer a thousand eager questions. When she mentioned the name of Ronald Hope Ada smiled demurely. That was the best news of it all.

"I am glad you and Ronald have met again." Ada said quietly. "We ought never to have left the old home without writing to him. It has been on my mind to do so frequently, but I thought perhaps that you would not like it, Jessie. Now you are going to sit there and rest whilst I run out and get some paint for those Christmas cards. I have been so miserably anxious about you that I dared not go out before. The walk will freshen me up."

Jessie nodded lazily. A delicious sense of fatigue stole over her. Her eyes closed and she fell into a half sleep. When she came to herself again Ronald was bending over her. Her face flushed as he stooped down and pressed his lips to hers. Perhaps she had been more guarded had she not been taken by surprise, for she returned the pressure.

"That was not fair," she said with a trembling smile. "You caught me unawares, Ronald."

"It isn't as if you didn't love me," he said. "You know perfectly well that we always cared for one another. And you would not have kissed me if you had not loved me, Jess. Why you disappeared in that strange manner I never could understand. What difference did the fact make that your poor father had left you penniless? I knew that he was a poor man and that I had nothing to expect but your dear self, and you were quite aware of it. Then when I go to India you disappear and, I don't hear any more of you till rumors reach me of the goddess in Bond Street. Jess, you are never going to run away from me again?"

"It does not seem so," Jessie said demurely, "especially if you hold my hand and my waist as tightly as you are holding them at the present time. But seriously, Roland—"

"That's the way to talk, seriously! Seriously, my darling Jess, don't you love me?"

"I love you with my whole heart and soul, Ronald," Jessie whispered. "I never realised how much I loved you till we came to be parted and I thought that I had lost you for ever. This time yesterday I was one of the most miserable girls in England, now I am one of the happiest."

"And you are going to marry me right away, dearest?" Hope whispered. "A quiet wedding."

"Presently," Jessie smiled. "Not so fast, if you please. I have my new friends to think of. I can't forget that but for them I might never have seen you again, Ronald. Till that business is finished I am not a free agent. Even at the present moment I am in danger of being arrested on a charge of stealing some papers from the residence of Countess Saens."

"But, my dear girl, you never so much as saw those confounded papers."

"That does not make the slightest difference. The papers were stolen from the residence of Countess Saens by a young girl answering to my description and dressed exactly as I am dressed at the present moment. If I was confronted now with the Countess' maid Annette she would identify me as the thief."

"The real thief being Miss Vera Galloway all the time, Jessie."

"Of course she is. But could I say so? Could I in my own defence go into the witness box and tell the story of my bold impersonation of Vera Galloway so that she could be free to regain those papers? Why, by so doing we admit the existence of the papers that we deny existence to at all. If any scandal arises over them. I shall have to bear it alone. Vera Galloway's share must not even be suggested. It must be asumed that I traded on my marvellous resemblance to Vera to obtain certain things from the countess."

"But this is monstrous," cried Ronald. "If it came to a matter of imprisonment—"

"I should go through with it if it did," Jessie declared quietly. "At least I should do so until it was safe to have the truth out. Countess Saens is a bitter foe when—"

"Who can do you no harm," said Ronald. "At present she is on her way to Paris. She has been lured there by a dexterous trick to keep her out of the way.

"But she might have put the matter in the hands of the police before she left?"

"Perhaps so. I had not thought of that, Jessie. It behoves you to be careful. If any attempt was made to arrest you, but I dare not think of it. If danger threatens go back to the queen. She can help you if anybody can. Hullo, here is Ada."

Ada's reception of the visitor was flattering enough. She was delighted to see Roland again, she was almost tearfully glad to find that Roland and Jessie had come to an understanding. But all the same she confessed that she was frightened. A man had accosted her on her way home with an enquiry as to the spot where Miss Jessie Harcourt lived. He had a parcel in his hand and came from the shop of Madame Malmaison. It appeared that Jessie had left some of her possessions behind and the messenger was anxious to deliver it.

"And I don't believe that he was a messenger at all," Ada said breathlessly. "He was far too prim and dark. He gave me an impression of Scotland Yard. Of course I pretended to know nothing, but I was frightened. Go and see what you think, Ronald. He is in Seymouth Street; he has a box under his arm."

Ronald departed hastily. He came back a little time later with a grim face and an uneasy air.

"I am afraid that Ada is right," he said. "The fellow has police force written all over him. I suppose the police are following up the inquiries they made last night. You must go back to the queen without delay, Jess. I fancy I have managed it. I see that there is a way out of these block of rooms in Dean Street. Go down there and stand in the doorway. Presently I shall pull up with a cab just for a second and you are to jump in. Don't lose any time. If you are arrested many questions will be asked, if you can tide over the next day you may escape altogether. I'll see what Lechmere can do."

Hope bustled away and a little time later Jessie crept down the stone stairs leading to Dean Street. She had not long to wait there, for presently a cab drove up and Ronald looked anxiously out. Like a flash Jessie was across the pavement and into the cab.

"Saved this time," Ronald muttered. "I shall leave you in Piccadilly to go back alone. Glad to see that you took the precaution to veil your features. After I have left you I'll go as far as Lechmere's rooms. I daresay we can beat those people yet."

CHAPTER XLI.

Annette At Bay.

But meanwhile Lechmere had not been idle. His steadygoing brain had not failed to see the danger arise after the matter of the countess's burglary had come into the hands of the police. And he seemed to fancy that he had discovered a way out of the difficulty. After a message to Scotland Yard making an appointment an hour later at the house of Countess Saens he had proceeded to the queen's hotel. He was a little disappointed to find that already Jessie had departed some short time.

He was about to go off in search of Jessie when she returned with her story. Lechmere smiled with the air of a man who holds the key to the situation.

"You need not be in the least alarmed," he said. "Hope was quite right when he suggested that perhaps I could help you in the matter. Not only am I going to help, but I am going to put you a long way out of the reach of the police. We are going as far as Countess Saens' house."

"I am!" Jessie exclaimed. "Why, the mere fact of my being there face to face with the countess——"

"My dear young lady, you are not going to be face to face with the countess. She has gone abroad. You will go with me in a cab, you will keep your veil down and you will wait in the drawing-room until I want you. I daresay all this sounds very abrupt, but it is quite necessary. Now come bustle along before other things come to complicate matters."

Jessie followed in a helpless kind of way. It seemed to her that she was off on another series of bewildering adventures before the last series was closed almost. But she had her previous experience to keep her courage to the sticking point and Lechmere's face gave her confidence. "When am I going to get out of this coil?" she asked with a smile.

"You are going to get out of it very quietly," Lechmere said gravely. "And after that you are going to marry my young friend Ronald Hope, whom I regard as a very lucky fellow. When the tangle itself is likely to end, Heaven only knows. The best thing that could happen to the Queen of Asturia would be the death of the king. She would know what peace meant then and the removal of the king by natural means would enable Europe to interfere and so check the designs of Russia. But here we are."

The cab stopped at length and the occupants alighted. At Lechmere's bidding, Jessie raised her veil.

"The countess is not at home?" Lechmere asked the footman. "How annoying! It is rather an urgent and private affair that Miss Vera Galloway desires to see your mistress upon. But perhaps Annette the maid will be able to answer a few questions for me. Show us into the drawing-room and send Annette to us there."

The footman bowed and showed no signs of astonishment. He was too used to strange requests and equally strange visitors to that house. He led the way gravely enough upstairs and announced that he would at once send for Annette to see Miss Galloway.

"So far, so good," Lechmere muttered. "I shall want you to see Annette a little later on, Miss Harcourt, but for the present I shall be glad if you will take your seat in the little inner drawing-room. It is just as well perhaps that you should overhear all that is said."

Jessie asked no questions, but she could not altogether repress a natural curiosity to know what was going to take place next. From where she was seated she had a perfect view of all that was going on in the large drawing-room without being seen herself. Annette came in quite self-possessed and just a little demure in the presence of the tall grey-faced stranger.

"I was told that Miss Galloway was here, M'sieu," she said. "It strikes to me, M'sieu——"

"As a matter of fact Miss Galloway is not here at all," said Lechmere coolly. "This is another young lady whom you will see all in good time, but not quite yet. I had no desire to arouse the curiosity of your fellow servants. The footman, for instance, who is a very good-looking fellow, may be a lover of yours. Ah, so there has been tender passages between you?"

"M'sieu is a gentleman and cannot be contradicted," Annette said demurely. "If you say so——"

"Oh, well. That is bad hearing, I am afraid you are a sad flirt. What a dreadful tragedy might be precipitated if this thing came to the ears of your devoted Robert."

Annette changed color and the smile died out of her eyes. She looked quite anxiously at the speaker.

"Listen to me," he said sternly. "I am disposed to help you and shield you if you help me. If we make a kind of compact together I will say nothing about those champagne suppers and I will keep my own council over certain important papers that may later on be sold for a good round sum—a sum so big, in fact, that Robert and yourself will be able to take a boarding-house. Where was it that you preferred the establishment? Ah, I have it—in Brook Street."

"M'sieu is too clever for me," she whispered. "What do you want me to do?"

"Very little. It is about a robbery here. Now it is positively absurd that Miss Galloway could be the thief as you suggested. You smile, you fancy that perhaps Miss Galloway has a double. Now it all rests on you to say whether that double is the proper person or not. If she was produced by the police and you said it was not the lady who surprised you last night, why, there would be an end of the matter—for you and Robert."

A look of quiet cunning intelligence flashed across Annette's face.

"It is plain what you mean," she said. "I quite understand. I am brought face to face with the young lady and I stare at her again and again. I study her with a puzzled frown on my face—like this—and then I say that it is not the person. I am absolutely certain of my facts. She is different, the eyes are not the same color. I know not what the eyes and hair of your friend the young lady are like, but whether they are like the missing thief's are different. See, M'sieu?"

"I see perfectly well, Annette," Lechmere smiled. "You see that man loitering on the other side of the road? Fetch him up here and say that Mr. Lechmere is waiting. He is a leading official at Scotland Yard, and I am to meet him here by appointment. Oh, by the way, where is your Robert to be found?"

"Guards Buildings," Annette whispered. "He waits on the second floor gentleman there. But you will not——"

"No, I will not," said Lechmere, passing his hand over his face to hide a smile, for he had made a further discovery. "Play your part properly and I will play mine. And now go and fetch Inspector Taske here and say that I am waiting for him."

Inspector Taske came up and Lechmere conducted him into the small drawing-room. At a sign from him Jessie raised her veil. She began to understand what was coming.

"This is Miss Jessie Harcourt," said Lechmere "daughter of my old friend, Colonel Harcourt. It has been suggested that Miss Harcourt came here last night and stole certain papers. She only found it out this morning when she—er—came out of the hospital. All this absurd bother has arisen because Miss Harcourt is exceedingly like Miss Galloway whom the maid Annette here stupidly picked out as the thief, picked her out at Merehaven House, mind you, when she was in full evening dress at a party! Then suspicions were directed to my young lady friend here, forsooth because of the likeness, and she is being tracked by your fellows, Taske. There is a strong light here, and I am going to settle the matter once and for all. Now, Annette, look very carefully at this lady and say if you have ever seen her before."

Jessie bore the scrutiny more or less firmly and haughtily because she herself had never seen Annette's face before. Everything depended upon the girl's reply. Her examination was long and careful, as if she did not want to outrage her conscience in the smallest degree. Then she shook her head.

"The likeness is great," she said. "Positively there are three young ladies almost the same. And we make mistakes—and did not you police bring a man all the way here from Australia the other day on a charge of murder only to find he was the wrong person? And he had been sworn to, ma foi. Therefore it behooves me to be careful. All the same, I can speak with confidence. If it were dark I could say that here was the thief. But in the daylight, non. Her eyes were dark, the hair very rich brown. And here the eyes are grey and the hair a lovely shade of gold. This is not the lady."

The inspector turned slightly on his heel as if he had heard quite sufficient.

"This ends the matter," he said. "I am sorry that Miss Harcourt has been molested and I will see that she is not further annoyed. I wish you good morning, sir."

The Inspector departed and at a sign from Lechmere, Jessie followed. Annette bowed demurely, but the smile on her face vanished and her eyes grew troubled as she found herself alone. Down in the street the newsboys were shouting something. Lechmere listened eagerly to hear:

"Alarming railway accident near Paris. Breakdown of a special train. Suspected outrage on the part of the French Anarchists. Serious accident to the King of Asturia. Special."

CHAPTER XLII.

The Countess Returns.

Lechmere bought a paper and read the paragraph for himself. It seemed strange that this thing should happen at a time when everybody was talking of Asturia and its rulers. First there was the sensational interview in the Mercury to set all tongues talking and then, almost before the public had grasped what had happened, the Herald came out with a flat contradiction and a dignified statement to the effect that the Mercury had been hoaxed by an impudent practical joker.

Here was an excellent chance for the evening papers and they did their best to make a good thing of it. But the more things came to be investigated the firmer became the position of the Herald. Beyond all doubt the real king had been safe at Merehaven House at the very time when his deputy was closeted with the editor of the Mercury.

And now this had come on the top of it all. There was no reason to doubt that the veritable ruler of Asturia had met with an accident, seeing that the Herald had proclaimed the fact that he was already on his way to his kingdom. Lechmere shook his head as he read.

"Is this foul play or another link in the amazing chain?" Jessie asked.

"I should say foul play," Lechmere replied. "We have a most dangerous foe to contend with. And at any hazards the king must be kept from reaching the capital just now. I should not wonder if the special train had been deliberately wrecked——"

"It makes one's heart bleed for the queen," Jessie murmured. "If she comes successfully out of this."

"She won't," said Lechmere curtly. "She is only Asturian by marriage, and the people had never really cared for her, devoted as she is to their interests. They want to get rid of the king. If he abdicates, then Russia comes in. If he were killed at this moment, Russia would still come in. But given a few days longer and Prince Alix will be in Asturia. This is the man the populace want. If they can once proclaim him, Russia is checkmated. You see how things stand?"

"It would break the heart of the queen," Jessie said.

"I think not. She would worry for a time, but her position is intolerable. The present king's life hangs on a thread, the next plunge into dissipation may kill him. And then Asturia would know the queen no longer. She would marry Maxgregor, who worships the ground she walks on, and for the first time in her life would taste real happiness. And now I shall leave you. It is necessary that I should see Prince Peretori at once."

And Lechmere hastened away in pursuit of the Prince. They missed one another by a few minutes but they met at length. Needless to say, Peretori had heard the news.

"You can see exactly what has happened," the latter said. "Countess Saens has gone off in a great hurry to see if she could prevent the king from reaching Asturia. If he reaches his capital what will happen will be this—he will be invited at once to attend a conference and place himself freely and unreservedly in the hands of his ministers. They will ask him to proclaim his abdication in favor of Prince Alix."

"I see," Lechmere said thoughtfully. "That knocks Russia out. But if the king does not get there at all?"

Peretori chuckled as if something amused him.

"The king is going to get there," he said. "He will be rather damaged by his accident, but he will get there all the same. I'll see to that."

"If you have some scheme in your mind, I should like to know what it is," Lechmere said.

"Not at present, my dear fellow. I did a very foolish thing last night and I am anxious to try and wipe it out. I calculate that I can arrive on the scene of the accident by dark tonight, by using a dispatch boat which Lord Merehaven has placed at my disposal. I am going alone and I am going to disguise myself. I may send you a telegram this evening, if I do, hold yourself in readiness to follow me. So far as my cousin and his consort are concerned, Asturia is dead. But it is not going to fall into the lap of Russia all the same."

Nothing that Lechmere could say served to break Peretori's obstinate silence. He had a plan of his own and he was going to carry it out if necessary.

"Go and see the queen," he urged, "go and see Maxgregor. Unless I am greatly mistaken in the character of the queen, she is pretty certain to follow Erno. If she does she is equally certain to make a mess of it. She must not go, and Maxgregor must prevent it. Put Maxgregor in a cab if it is possible to move him, and see that he keeps the queen here. Tell Maxgregor that I am going to put the third scheme into operation."

"You have seen Maxgregor today?" Lechmere asked in some surprise.

"Yes, I saw him early today and talked matters over. He abused me in the most shameful manner, but I had to put up with it. Good-bye."

Peretori jumped into a passing hansom and was whisked away, leaving Lechmere to his own thoughts. But Peretori's advice was singularly sound from that usually feather-headed individual, and Lechmere decided to go as far as Maxgregor's at once. Maxgregor was sitting up in bed impatiently fuming over an evening paper which lay propped up before him.

"This is a nice mess," he exclaimed. "Of course that special train was wrecked deliberately. Not that it very much matters, seeing that Peretori—but perhaps you have not seen him? You have? Good! Did he send any kind of message to me?"

"Yes," Lechmere replied. "He said that he was going to put the third programme into execution."

Maxgregor chuckled and his dark angry face relaxed. He managed to crawl out of bed, but he was still very weak and staggering. He dressed with Lechmere's assistance.

"Call a cab and take me as far as the queen's hotel," he said. "I must see her majesty alone. It is important that she keeps quiet at this junction. She must be persuaded to drive about and show herself just as if nothing had happened."

But there was nothing quiet about the queen as the two arrived at the hotel. She was pacing up and down the morning room, despite Vera Galloway's efforts to soothe her. The girl lay on a couch, for her ankle was still giving her a deal of pain.

"So you have managed to come to me, brave heart," the queen cried, as she held out both hands to Maxgregor. "What should I do without your devoted courage? Are you well enough to accompany me across the Channel? I am going at once."

"You are going to do nothing of the kind, madame," Maxgregor said sternly. "The thing is already in the most capable hands. May I beg a few words in private with you?"

The queen led the way into an inner room. Vera turned eagerly to Lechmere. Her face was pale and her eyes were heavy with the tears that she was too proud to let fall.

"Is there anything fresh to tell me?" she demanded eagerly. "I did not care to mention my private grief before the queen, who has been so good to me. But Charles Maxwell was in that train also. If there had been a bad accident, if it is to be called an accident—"

"It was no accident," Lechmere said grimly. "The thing was done deliberately. And we dare not make too many inquiries because it may arouse suspicion. Try and fix your mind on something else. It is just as imperative now as it was yesterday to regain possession of those papers you risked so much to get."

"If we could only find them," Vera sighed. "If we only knew into whose hands they had fallen!"

"Well, as a matter of fact we do know that," Lechmere said coolly. "Also we know exactly where they are. And I am going to try and obtain possession of them this very day. The mere fact of those papers coming back into our hands would go far to free Maxwell from suspicion. You follow me?"

It was quite plain that Vera followed. As much of recent events as he dared Lechmere told her. He would be back in a little time, he said, but meanwhile he was going as far as the house of Countess Saens with the object of having another talk with Annette.

Lechmere's mind was perfectly well occupied as he walked along. He had nearly reached his destination when a cab pulled up before the residence of the Countess of Saens. A tall graceful figure carefully cloaked and veiled stepped out and darted for the house without paying the cabman. Evidently the graceful figure had taken alarm at somebody in the road.

"By Jove, it's me," Lechmere muttered. "And that was the countess, for a million. Now what brings her back in a break-neck hurry like this?"

(To be continued.)

OLD ROAD HOUSE TRAGEDY RECALLED

Aged Resident of Gondola Point Witnessed Two Men Hanged for It 70 Years Ago, But Now Believes They Were Innocent.

Rothesay, June 8—The names of the old post houses in an article in The Telegraph a few days ago recalled one of the road house tragedies to that veteran village historian, Jas. S. Kierstead.

This aged gentleman—he is past his four score years—has a liking for the memory of old times and the mention of the Napier house at Gondola Point brought back to him, who all his life time has lived in that vicinity, the gay party of men and women who drove along one summer day and spent some hours having what they called a good time at the Napier house at Gondola Point. Nothing but the foundation ruins of the old hostelry remain, but even they give some idea of the generous proportions and massiveness of the structures in the days when lumber was hewed and not sawed.

This party was made up of four men and lady friends. Two of them were McMonagle and Coyle, of St. John. An early start was made for the return trip, but Kings county was different then from the present day. There was no Scott act or prohibition law. Licenses and duties were low and liquor and saloons plenty. Therefore when the party reached Ferguson's, another stopping place located at the spot now known as "The Nest," they had ceased to be funny and were quarrelsome. The proprietor was away and only an old man past ninety years of age was about the premises to wait upon the roystering callers. Whether his service was unsatisfactory or not, he displeased some of the visitors, and a row was the result. Coyle evidently took the old man's part, for he was roughly handled, but his defence did not save the servitor's life, for a blow from a bottle or a club killed him.

Justice was much prompter in those rough and ready days than now. Fights and wounds were of common occurrence, for men were quick to anger and eager and prompt to resent a slight or an expression, but for murderers there was a speedy trial and stern execution of the sentence.

The trial at Kingston was a memorable one. All St. John and Kings seemed to have a personal interest in the fate of the men whose lives were endangered by this drunkn row. The accused were ably defended, and two of them managed to escape from the gallows. Coyle was able to prove that he had lost some teeth in the row, so the jury cleared him. McMonagle and his companion were not so fortunate, and they suffered the full penalty of the law upon the public square at Kingston. The scaffold was erected within a few yards of where the Macdonald school now stands.

Mr. Kierstead says he was but a small lad, but every farm house was deserted that day to go to see the hanging. The crowd was so large that a fence had been built to keep the people from interfering with the duties of the officers. Both executions took place at the same time, and then the crowd went about their business.

That was about seventy years ago, and another incident which indicates the way punishment was meeted out in those days was impressed upon the mind of the boy listeners. He heard the high sheriff warning the county constable to be on hand on a certain day to flog two prisoners, who were then in jail. That, too, was done in public.

Years afterward Mr. Kierstead was convinced that the two men hung for the murder of the old man at Ferguson's were innocent. He was at the Spoon Island granite quarry when the stone for piers of the Suspension bridge was being cut, and one of the workmen told him of a man who was hung in Halifax who confessed to this murder—done upon his journey from St. John to Halifax by the old post road.

Hartland Man's Success.

Hartland, N. B., June 8—Mr. J. A. Aiton, who has been in the employ of the Estey & Curtic Co., of Hartland (N.B.), for some years, has just graduated from the Ontario College of Pharmacy in Toronto with first-class honors. Mr. Aiton also successfully passed the examination for the degree of Bachelor of Pharmacy, the degree of P. H. M. B. has been conferred on him by the University of Toronto, with which the Ontario College of Pharmacy is affiliated. Sabine Carr and F. A. Aiton are the only two Carleton county men who have been honored with the degree of Bachelor of Pharmacy. Mr. Aiton's many friends will be glad to know of his success.

ROUSED FROM BED BY FIRE

Pedersens, the Florists, Visited by Early Morning Blaze

HORSE WAS SINGED

Animal Kicked Its Way Out of Burning Barn--Boilers, Carriages and Other Property a Prey to Flames--Origin Unknown.

The boiler house together with contents, and the ends of four green houses at W. & K. Pedersen's horticultural establishment on the Sandy Point Road were destroyed by fire about 1.30 o'clock Saturday morning.

The total damage, it is thought, will amount at least to $1,000, and the insurance, according to one of the firm, will hardly cover the loss. Walter Pedersen's home stands in the rear of where the fire occurred, and had the wind been blowing in that direction, it is very probable that the fire would have made a clean sweep, for the means of fighting the outbreak were very incomplete.

Under the same roof where the boilers were situated was a small stable containing a horse, two carriages, a couple of sleighs, and much harness. With the exception of the horse, all was destroyed. At first it was thought that the horse had perished, but about 2 o'clock he was seen wandering along the road about 100 yards toward the city. From the animal's shoulders, the hair had been burnt off. All that remained of the tail, was just a smouldering stump.

The animal was led back to another barn, and it is believed that he will come round all right.

How the fire originated, no one seems able to tell. The boiler house, which was a long building skirting the road, was connected with the four green houses which stretched up toward the Pedersen barns and residence.

Family All Asleep.

All the members of the household had been asleep some hours. The barking of dogs, and the roar of flames aroused them and it looked as if all of the buildings would be levelled.

Everybody turned out and seizing buckets began to do what they could to get the fire under control. In order to procure water, it was necessary to run some distance along the road to the well and this made effective work doubly difficult. The wind was very slight, but had it been blowing toward the green houses, the barns and then the house would have surely caught.

Mr. Pedersen says that he thinks the fire started near the boiler, but could give no explanation as to how it came to start. One of the boilers had been but recently installed and had cost $500. Besides the loss of the two boilers, all of the garden implements and much stock was burnt.

At the rooms was a tank, capable of holding 1,000 gallons of water. There was some in this tank, but so swift was the spread of the flames that there was no opportunity of applying it, and in itself it was of but small avail in quenching the fire.

Mr. Pedersen thinks that the horse must have snapped the halter and kicked its way out. There were no marks of fire about the animal's head or neck, and, feeling his back and sides beginning to burn, he must have struggled his way to safety. The door was not of heavy boards.

Walter Pedersen, who knows the correct insurance figures, is at present in Nova Scotia. At this time of the season the fire will be a serious drawback, for a large business was being carried on. The greenhouses have not been seriously damaged, but the smoke and sparks, pouring in through the broken glass, affected the flowers to some extent.

Some one, evidently alarmed by the reflection, sent in a fire alarm from box 154 about 1.30 o'clock and gave the North End brigade a run to the corner of Paradise row and Millidge avenue.

POST OFFICE CLERKS LIKELY TO GET MORE PAY NEXT YEAR

Ottawa, June 8—Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Hon. W. Paterson and Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux received a deputation today from the outside service of interior post offices and customs departments numbering about forty, asking for increase of salaries. The premier said that his colleague presiding over those departments would look into the matter. It might be a little late this session to do anything, after the justice of their claims had been investigated, but when parliament again met the matter could be attended to.

A delegation from the outside post office service asked Mr. Lemieux to be relieved of certain examinations before getting an increase in their salaries. Certain questions had to be answered which in no way concerned their work. Mr. Lemieux said he would look carefully into the matter.

The international waterways commission will meet in Buffalo on June 26.

The senate discussed the Spain divorce case. The result was that the report of the committee, refusing the divorce, stands.

McGILL LIKELY TO MAKE MEDICAL COURSE FIVE YEARS

Montreal, June 8—Steps have been taken with a view to extending the medical course at McGill from the present four years to five years. At a meeting of the corporation of the university, held yesterday afternoon, a resolution was submitted by the medical faculty urging that this action be taken, and the corporation, after expressing approval, appointed a committee to consider ways and means.

It is probable that the proposal will go into effect in the session of 1907-1908. The extension of the course of study will be in line with the methods adopted by leading American and foreign schools of medicine, where the four years' course has been abandoned as insufficient.

Rev. G. W. Fisher, formerly one of the clergymen of the N. B. & P. E. I. Methodist conference, has been stationed at Farnham (Que.), by the Montreal Methodist conference, with which he is now connected.