POOR DOCUMENT

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THE CRIMSON BLIND

By FRED. M. WHITE, Author of "The Robe of Lucifer," etc.

A story of a novel type, stirring, fascinating; the most striking success in recent fiction.

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CHAPTER LIV.—Continued

"That's a kind of Japanese passion flower," he said. "It has a lovely full-flavored scent like a mixture of violets and almonds. Smell it."

Van Sneck placed the wet dripping spray to his nose. Just for an instant it conveyed nothing to him. Then he half rose with a triumphant cry.

"Steady there," said Bell. "You mustn't get up, you know. I see you are excited. Has it come back to you again?"

"That's the scent," Van Sneck cried. "The air was full of that as I fell backwards. And Henson stood over me exactly by that cracked tile where Mr. Steel is now. Give me a moment and I shall be able to tell you everything. . . . Oh, yes, the first time I slipped on purpose. I told you I stumbled. But that was a ruse. And as I fell I took the ring from my waistcoat-pocket. . . . Let me have another sniff of that bloom. Yes, I've got it now quite clear."

"You know where the ring is?" David asked, eagerly.

"Well, not quite that. I took it from my pocket and pitched it away from me. . . . I saw it fall on to a pot covered with moss, but I can't say which pot or in which corner. I only know that I threw it over my shoulder, and that it dropped into the thick moss that lies on the top of all the pots. I laughed to myself as it fell, and I rejoiced to see that Henson knew nothing of it."

"And it is still here?" Bell demanded.

Van Sneck nodded solemnly.

"I swear it," he said. "Prince Rupert's ring is in this conservatory."

CHAPTER LV.

Kicked Out.

Reginald Henson had had more than one unpleasant surprise lately, but none so painful as the sight of Lord Littimer seated in the Longdean Grange drawing-room with the air of a man who is very much at home indeed.

The place was strangely changed, too. There was an air of neatness and order about the room that Henson had never seen before. The dust and dirt had absolutely vanished; it might have been the home of any ordinary wealthy and refined people. And all Lady Littimer's rags and patches had disappeared. She was dressed in somewhat old-fashioned style, but handsomely and well. She sat beside Littimer with a smile on her face. But the cloud seemed to have rolled from her mind; her eyes were clear, if a little frightened. From the glance that passed between Littimer and herself it was easy to see that the misunderstanding was no more.

"You are surprised to see me here?" said Littimer.

Henson stammered out something and shrank towards, the door. Littimer ordered him back again. He came with a slinking, doged air; he avoided the smiling contempt in Enid's eyes.

"My presence appears to be superfluous," he said, bitterly.

"And mine appears to be a surprise," Littimer replied. "Come, are you not glad to see me, my heir and successor? What has become of the old fawning, cringing smile? Why, if some of your future constituents could see you now they might be justified in imagining that you had done something wrong. Look at yourself."

Littimer indicated a long gilt mirror on the the opposite wall. Henson glanced at it involuntarily and dropped his eyes. Could that abject, white-faced sneak be himself? Was that the man whose fine presence and tender smile had charmed thousands? It seemed impossible.

"What have I done" he asked.

"What have you not done?" Littimer thundered. "In the first place you did your best to ruin Hatherly Bell's life. You robbed me of a picture to do so, and your friend Merritt tried to rob me again. But I have both those pictures now. You did that because you were afraid of Bell—afraid lest he should see through your base motives. And you succeeded for a time, for the coast was clear. And then you proceeded to rob me of my son by one of the most contemptible tricks ever played by one man on another. It was you who stole the money and the ring; you who brought about all that sorrow and trouble by means of a forgery. But there are other people on your track as well as my self. You were at your last gasp. You were coming to see me to sell that ring for a large sum to take you out of the country, and then you discovered that you hadn't really got the ring."

"What—what are you talking about?" Henson asked, feebly.

"Scoundrel!" Littimer cried. "Innocent and pure to the last. I know all about Van Sneck and those forgeries of Prince Rupert's ring. And I know how Van Sneck was nearly done to death in Mr. Steel's house; and I know why—good heavens! It seems impossible that I could have been deceived all these years by such a slimy, treacherous scoundrel. And I might have gone on still but for a woman—"

"A lady detective," Henson sneered. Miss Lee."

Littimer smiled. It was good, after all, to defeat and hoodwink the rascal.

"Miss Chris Henson," he said. "It never occurred to you that Miss Chris and Miss Lee were one and the same person. You never guessed. And she played with you as if you had been a child. How beautifully she exposed you over those pictures. Ah, you should have seen your face when you saw the stolen Rembrandt back again in its place. And after that you were mad enough to think that I trusted you. My dear, what shall we do with this pretty fellow?"

Lady Littimer shook her head doubtfully. It was plain that the presence of Henson disturbed her. There was just a suggestion of the old madness in her eyes.

"Send him away," she said. "Let him go."

"Send him away by all means," Littimer went on. "But letting him go is another matter. If we do the police will pick him up on other charges. There is a certain consolation in knowning that his evil career is likely to be shortened by some years. But I shall have no mercy. Scotland Yard shall know everything."

There was a cold ring in Littimer's voice and Henson of his determination to carry out his threat. The other troubles he might wriggle out of, but this one was terribly real. It was time to try conciliation.

"It will be a terrible scandal for the family, my lord," he whined.

Littimer rose to his feet. A sudden anger flared into his eyes. He was a smaller man than Henson, but the latter cowed before him.

"You dog!" he cried. "What greater scandal than that of the past few years? Does not all the world know that there is, or has been some heavy cloud over the family honor? Lord and Lady Littimer have parted, and her ladyship has gone away. That is only part of what the gossips have said. And in these domestic differences it is always the woman who suffers. Everybody always says that the woman has done something wrong. For years my wife has been under this stigma. If she had chosen to keep before the world after she left me most people would have ignored her. And you talk to me of a family scandal!"

"You will only make bad worse, my lord."

"No," Littimer cried. "I am going to make bad infinitely better. We come together again, but we say nothing of the past. And the world sneers and says the past is ignored for politic considerations. And so the public is going to know the truth, you dog. The whole facts of the case have gone to my solicitor, and by this time tomorrow a warrant will be issued against you. And I shall stand in open court and tell the whole world my story."

"In fairness to Lady Littimer," said Enid, speaking for the first time, "you could do no less."

"You were always against me," Henson snarled.

"Because I always knew you," said Enid. "And the more I knew of you the greater was my contempt. And you came here ever on the same errand—money, money, money. From first to last you have robbed my aunt of something like £70,000. And always by threats or the promise that you would some day restore the ring to the family."

"As to the ring," Henson protested, "I swear——"

"I suppose a lie more or less makes no difference to an expert like yourself," Enid went on, with cold contempt. "You took advantage of my aunt's misfortunes. Ah, she is a different woman since Lord Littimer came here. But her sorrow has crushed her down, and that forgery of the ring you dangled before her eyes deceived her."

"I never showed her the ring," Henson said, brazenly.

"And you can look me in the face and say that? One night Lady Littimer snatched it from you and ran into the garden. You followed and struggled for the ring. And Mr. David Steel, who stood close by, felled you to the earth with a blow on the side of your head. I wonder he didn't kill you. I should have done so in his place. And yet it would be a pity to hang anyone for your death. See here!"

Enid produced the ring from her pocket. Lord Littimer looked at it intently.

"Have you seen this before, my dear?" he asked his wife.

"Many a time," Lady Littimer said, sadly. "Take it away, it reminds me of too many bitter memories. Take it out of my sight."

"An excellent forgery," Littimer murmured. "A forgery calculated to deceive many experts even. I will compare it with the original by and by."

Henson listened with a sinking feeling at his heart. Was it possible, he wondered that Lord Littimer had really recovered the original? He had had hopes of getting it back even now, and making it the basis of terms of surrender. Lady Littimer snatched the ring from Littimer's grasp and threw it through the open window into the garden.

She stood up facing Henson, her head thrown back, her eyes flaming with a new resolution. It seemed hardly possible to believe that this fine, handsome woman with the white hair could be the poor demented creature that the others once had known.

"Reginald Henson, listen to me," she cried. "For your own purpose you cruelly and deliberately set out to wreck the happiness of several lives. For mere money you did this; for sheer love of dissipation you committed this crime. You nearly deprived me of my reason. I say nothing about the money, because that is nothing by comparison. But the years that are lost can never come back again. When I think of the past and the past of my poor, unhappy boy I feel that I have no forgiveness for you. If you——Oh, go away; don't stay here—go. If I had known you were coming I should have forbidden you the house. Your mere presence unnerves me. Littimer, send him away."

Littimer rose to his feet and rang the bell.

"You will be good enough to rid me of your hateful presence," he said, "at once; now go."

But Henson still stood irresolute. He fidgeted from one foot to the other. He seemed to have some trouble that he could find no expression for.

"I want to go away," he murmured. "I want to leave the country. But at the present moment I am practically penniless. If you would advance me——"

Littimer laughed aloud.

"Upon my word," he said, "your coolness is colossal. I am going to prosecute you. I am doing my best to bring you into the dock. And you ask me—me, of all men—to find you money so that you can evade justice! Have you not had enough—are you never satisfied? Williams, will you see Mr. Henson off the premises?"

The smiling Williams bowed low.

"With the greatest possible pleasure, my lord, he said. "Any further orders, my lord?"

"And he is not to come here again, you understand." Williams seemed to understand perfectly. With one backward sullen glance Henson quitted the room and passed into the night with his companion. Williams was whistling cheerfully, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"Is that how you treat a gentleman?" Henson demanded.

"I ain't a gentleman," Williams said. "Never set up to be. And I ain't a dirty rascal who has just been kicked out of a nobleman's house. Here, stop that. Try that game on again and I'll call the dogs. And don't show me any of your airs, please. I'm only a servant, but I am an honest man."

Henson stifled his anger as best he could. He was too miserable and downcast to think of much besides himself at present. Once the lodge gates were open, Williams stood aside for him to pass. The temptation was irresistible. And Henson's back was turned. With a kick of concentrated contempt and fury Williams shot Henson into the road, where he landed full on his face. His cup of humiliation was complete.

CHAPTER LVI.

White Fangs.

Henson took his weary way in the direction of Brighton. He had but a few pounds he could call his own, and not nearly enough to get away from the country, and at any moment he might be arrested. He was afraid to go back to his lodging for fear of Merritt. That Merritt would kill him if he got the chance he felt certain. And Merritt was one of those dogged, patient types who can wait any time for the gratification of their vengeance.

Merritt was pretty certain to be hanging about for his opportunity. On the whole the best thing would be to walk straight to the Central Brighton Station and take the first train in the morning to town. There he could see Gates—who as yet knew nothing—and from him it would be possible to borrow a houndred or two, and then get away. And there were others besides Gates.

Henson trudged away for a mile or so over the downs. Then he came down from the summit of the castle he was building with a rude shock to earth again. A shadow seemed to rise from the ground, a heavy clutch was on his shoulder, and a hoarse voice was in his ear.

"Got you!" the voice said. "I knew they'd kick you out yonder, and I guessed you'd sneak home across the downs. And I've fairly copped you!"

Henson's knees knocked together. Physically he was a far stronger and bigger man than Merritt, but he was taken unawares, and his nerves had been sadly shaken of late.

Merritt forced him backwards until he lay on the turf with his antagonist kneeling on his chest. He dared not struggle, he dared not exert himself. Presently he might get a chance, and if he did it would go hard with James Merritt.

"What are you going to do?" he gasped.

Merritt drew a big, jagged stone towards him with one foot.

"I'm going to bash your brains out with this," he said, hoarsely. His eyes were gleaming, and in the dim light his mouth was set like a steel trap. "I'm going to have a little chat with you first, and then down this comes on the top of your skull, and it'll smash you like a bloomin' eggshell. Your time's come, Henson. Say your prayers."

"I can't," Henson whined. "And what have I done?"

Merritt rocked heavily on the other's breastbone, almost stifling him. "Wot?" he said, scoffingly. The pleasing mixture of gin and fog in his throat rendered him more hideously hoarse than usual. "Not make up a prayer! And you a regular dab at all that game! Why, I've seen the women snivellin' like babbies when you've been ladlin' it out. Heavens, what a chap you would be on the patter! How you would kid the chaplain!"

"Merritt, you're crushing the life out of me."

Merritt ceased his rocking for a moment, and the laughter died out of his gleaming eyes.

"I don't want to be prematoor," he said. "Yes, you'd make a lovely chaplain's pet, but I can't spare you. I'm going to smash that 'ere wily brain of yours, so as it won't be useful any more. I'll teach you to put the narks on to a poor chap like myself."

"Merritt, I swear to you that I never—"

"You can swear till you're black in the face, and you can keep on swearing till you're lily-white again, and then it won't be any good. You gave me away to Taylor because you were afraid I should do you harm at Littimer Castle: That Daisy Bell of a girl there told me so."

Henson groaned. It was not the least part of his humiliation that a mere girl got the better of him in this way And what on earth had she known of Reuben Taylor? But the fact remained that she had known, and that she had warned Merritt of his danger. It was the one unpardonable crime in Henson's decalogue, the one thing Merritt could not forgive.

Hensons time was come. He did not need anyone to tell him that. Unless something in the nature of a miracle happened, he was a dead man in a few moments; and life had never seemed quite so sweet as it tasted at the present time.

"You gave me away for no reason at all," Merritt went on. "I'm a pretty bad lot, but I never rounded on a pal yet, and never shall. More than one of them have served me bad, but I always let them go their own way, and I've been a good and faithful servant to you—"

"It was not you," Henson gurgled, "that I wrote that letter about, but—"

"Chuck it," Merritt said, furiously. "Tell me any more of your lies and I'll smash your jaw in for you. It was me. I spotted Scotter in Moreton Wells within a day or two. And Mr. Scotter had come for me. And I got past Bronson in Brighton by the skin of my teeth. I turned into your lodgings under his very eyes almost. Before this time tomorrow I shall be arrested. But I'm going to have my vengeance first."

The last words came with intense deliberation. There was no mistaking their significance. Henson deemed it wise to try another tack.

"I was wrong," he said, humbly. "I am very, very sorry; I lost my nerve and got frightened, Merritt. But there is time yet. You always make more money with me than anybody else. And I'm going abroad presently."

"Oh, you're going abroad, are you?" Merritt said, slowly. "Going to travel in a Pullman car and put up at all the Courts of Europe. And I'm coming as chief secretary to the Grand Panjandrum himself. Sounds an alluring kind of programme."

"I'll give you a hundred pounds to get away with it you will—"

"Got a hundred pounds of my own in my pocket at the present moment," was the unexpected reply. "As you gave me away, consequently I gave you away to his lordship, and he planked down a hundred canaries like the swell that he is. So I don't want your company or your money. And I'm going to finish you right away."

The big stone was poised over Henson's head. He could see the jagged part, and in imagination feel it go smashing into his brain. The time for action had come. He snatched at Merritt's right arm and drew the knotted fingers down. The next instant and he had bitten Merritt's thumb to the bone. With a cry of rage and pain the stone was dropped. Henson snatched it up and fairly lifted Merritt off his chest with a blow under the chin.

Merritt rolled over on the grass, and Henson was on his feet in an instant. The great stone went down perilously near to Merritt's head. Still snarling and frothing from the pain, Merritt stumbled to his feet and dashed a blow blindly at the other.

In point of size and strength there was only one in it. Had Henson stood up to his opponent on equal terms there could only have been one issue. But his nerves were shattered, he was nothing like the man he had been two months ago. At the first onslaught he turned and fled towards the town, leaving Merritt standing there in blank amazement.

"Frightened of me," he muttered. "But this ain't the way it's going to finish."

He darted off in hot pursuit; he raced across a rising shoulder of the hill and cut off Henson's retreat. The latter turned and scurried back in the direction of Longdean Grange, with Merritt hot on his heels. He could not shake the latter off.

Merritt was plodding doggedly on, pretty sure of his prey. He was hard as nails, whereas good living and a deal of drinking, quite in a gentlemanly way, had told heavily on Henson. Unless help came unexpectedly Henson was still in dire peril. There was just a chance that a villager might be about; but Longdean was more or less a primitive place, and most of the houses there had been in darkness for hours.

His foot slipped, he stumbled, and Merritt, with a whoop of triumph, was nearly upon him. But it was only a stagger, and he was soon going again. Still, Merritt was close behind him; Henson could almost feel his hot breath on his neck. And he was breathing heavily and distressfully himself, whilst he could hear how steadily Merritt's lungs were working. He could see the lights of Longdean Grange below him; but they seemed a long way off, whilst that steady pursuit behind had something relentless and nerve-destroying about it.

They were pounding through the village now. Henson gave vent to one cry of distress, but nothing came of it but the mocking echo of his own voice from a distant belt of trees. Merritt shot out a short, sneering laugh. He had not expected flagrant cowardice like this. He made a sudden spurt forward and caught Henson by the tail of his coat.

With a howl of fear the latter tore himself away, and Merritt reeled backwards. He came down heavily over a big stone, and at the same moment Henson trod on a hedge-stake. He grabbed it up and half turned upon his foe. But the sight of Merritt's grim face was too much for him, and he turned and resumed his flight once more.

He yelled again as he reached the lodge-gates, but the only response was the barking and howling of the dogs in the thick underwood beyond. There was no help for it. Doubtless the deaf old lodge-keeper had been in bed hours ago. Even the dogs were preferable to Merritt. Henson scrambled headlong over the wall and crashed through the thickets byeond.

Merritt pulled up, panting with his exertion.

"Gone to cover," he muttered. "I don't fancy I'll follow. The dogs there might have a weakness for tearing my throat out, and Henson will keep. I'll just hang about here till daylight and wait for my gentleman. And I'll follow him to the end of the earth."

Meanwhile Henson blundered on blindly, fully under the impression that Merritt was still upon his trail. One of the hounds, a puppy three parts grown, rose and playfully pulled at his coat. It was sheer play, but at the same time it was a terrible handicap, and in his fear Henson lost all his horror of the dogs.

"Loose, you brute," he panted. "Let go, I say. Very well, take that!"

He paused and brought the heavy stake down full on the dog's muzzle. There was a snarling scream of pain, and the big pup sprang for his assailant. An old, grey hound came up and seemed to take in the situation at a glance. With a deep growl he bounded at Henson and caught him by the throat. Before the ponderous impact of that fine free spring Henson went down heavily to the ground.

"Help!" he gurgled. "Help! help! help!"

The worrying teeth had been firmly fixed, the ponderous weight pressed all the breath from Henson's distressed lungs. He gurgled once again, gave a little shuddering sigh, and the world dwindled to a thick sheet of blinding darkness.

CHAPTER LVII.

Hide-and-Seek.

Bell's professional enthusiasm got the better of his curiosity for the moment. It was a nice psychological problem. Already Steel was impulsively busy in the conservatory pulling the pots down. It was a regretful thing to have to do, but everything had to be sacrificed. David shut his teeth grimly and proceeded with his task.

"What on earth are you doing?" Bell asked, with a smile.

"Pulling the place to pieces," David responded. "I daresay I shall feel pretty sick about it later on, but the thing has to be done. Cut those wires for me, but let those creepers down as tenderly as possible. We can't get to the little pots until we have moved the big ones."

Bell coolly declined to do anything of the kind. He surveyed the two graceful banks of flowers there, the carefully trained creepers trailing so naturally and yet so artistically from the roof to the ground, and the sight pleased him.

"My dear chap," he said, "I am not going to sit here and allow you to destroy the work of so many hours. There is not the slightest reason to disturb anything. Unless I am greatly mistaken, Van Sneck will lay his hand upon the ring for us without so much as the sacrifice of a blossom."

"I don't fancy so," Van Sneck replied. "I can't remember."

"Well, you are going to," Bell said, cheerfully. "Did you ever hear of artificial memory?"

"The sort of thing you get in law courts and political speeches?" David suggested. "All the same, if you have some patent way of getting at the facts I shall be only too glad to spare my poor flowers. Their training has been a labor of love with me."

Bell smoked on quietly for some time. He toyed with the red blossoms which had so stimulated Van Sneck's recollection, then tossed a spray over to Van Sneck and suggested that the latter should put it in his button-hole.

"So as to have the fragrance with you all the time," he said.

Van Sneck obeyed quietly, remarking that the scent was very pungent. The Dutchman was restless and ill at ease; he seemed to be dissatisfied with himself—he had the air of a man who has set out with two or three extremely important matters of business and who has completely forgotten what one of them is.

"You needn't distress yourself," David said, kindly.

"I beg your pardon," Bell said, tartly. "He is to do that very same thing. Mental exercise never hurts anybody. Van Sneck is going to worry till he puzzles it out. Will you describe the ring to us?"

The Dutchman complied at considerable length. He dwelt on the beauty of the workmanship and the exceeding fineness of the black pearls; he talked with the freedom and expression of the expert. Bell permitted him to ramble on about historic rings in general. But all the same he could see that Van Sneck was far from easy in his mind. Now and then a sudden gleam came into his eyes: memory played for the fragment of a second on a certain elusive chord and was gone.

"Were you smoking the night you came here?" Bell asked, suddenly.

"Yes," Van Sneck replied, "a cigarette. Henson handed it over to me. I don't deny that I was terribly frightened. I smoked the cigarette out of bravado."

"You went into the conservatory yonder and admired the flowers," Bell observed.

Van Sneck looked up with astonishment and admiration.

"I did," he confessed. "But I don't see how you know that."

"I guessed it. It takes the brain some little time to get level to the imagination. And as soon as you came face to face with Henson you knew what was going to happen. You were a little dazed and frightened, and a little overcome by liquor into the bargain. But even then, though you were probably unconscious of it yourself, you were seeking some place to hide the ring."

"I rather believe I was," Van Sneck said, thoughtfully.

"You smoked a cigarette there. Where did you put the end?"

Van Sneck rose and went into the conservatory. He walked directly to a large pot of stephanotis in a distant corner and picked the stump of a gold-tipped cigarette from thence.

"I dropped it in there," he said. "Strange; if you had asked me that question two minutes ago I should not have been able to answer it. And now I distinctly remember pitching it in there and watching it scorch some of that beautiful lace-like moss. There is a long trail of it hanging down behind. I recollect how funnily it occurred to me, even in the midst of my danger, that the trail would look better brought over the front of the pot. Thus."

He lifted the long, graceful spiral and brought it forward. Steel nodded, approvingly.

"I came very near to dropping the ring in there," Van Sneck explained. "I had it in my fingers—I took it for the purpose from my waistcoat-pocket. Then I saw Henson's eye on me and I changed my mind. I wish I had been more sober."

Bell was examining a pot a little lower down. A piece had been chipped off, leaving a sharp, clean, red edge with a tiny tip of hair upon it.

"You fell here," he exclaimed. "Your head struck the pot. Here is a fragment of your hair on it. It is human hair beyond a doubt, and the shade matches to a nicety. After that——"

A sudden cry broke from the Dutchman.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "You have cleverly led my mind into the right direction. The only marvel is that I did not think of it before. You will find the ring in the pot where the tuberose grows. I am quite certain you will find it amongst the moss at the base."

David carefully scooped up all the loose moss from the pot and laid it on the study table. Then he shook the stuff out, and something glittering lay on the table—a heavy ring of the most exquisite and cunning workmanship, with a large gem in the centre, flanked by black pearls on either side. Van Sneck took it in his fingers lovingly.

"Here you are," he said. "Ach, the beauty! Well, you've got it now, and do you take care of it lest it falls into my hands again. If I got a chance I would steal it once more, and yet again, and again. Ah, what mischief those things cause, to be sure!"

The speaker hardly knew how much mischief the ring in question had caused, nor did his companions seek to enlighten him. David wrapped it up carefully and placed it in his pocket.

"I'm glad that is settled," he said. "And I'm glad that I didn't have to injure my flowers. Bell, you really are a most wonderful fellow."

Bell smiled with the air of a man who is well satisfied with himself. At this moment a servant came in with a message to the effect that Inspector Marley desired to see Mr. Steel on important business.

"Couldn't have come at a better time," David murmured. "Ask Mr. Marley in here."

Marley came smilingly, yet mysterious. He evinced no surprise at the sight of Van Sneck. He was, doubtless, aware of the success of the operation on the latter. He particularly desired to know where Mr. Reginald Henson was to be found.

"This is a queer place to look for him," said Steel.

"But he was here yesterday," Marley protested. "He had an accident."

"Bogus," said Steel. "We turned him out of the house. Is he wanted?"

Marley explained that he was wanted on three different charges; in fact, the inspector had the warrants in his pocket at the present moment.

"Well, it's only by good chance that you haven't got one for me," David laughed. "If you have ten minutes to spare, between Van Sneck and myself we can clear up the mystery of the diamond-mounted cigar-case for you."

Marley had the time to spare, and, indeed, he was keen enough to hear the solution of the mystery. A short explanation from David, followed by a few pithy, pertinent questions to Van Sneck, and he was perfectly satisfied.

"And yet I seemed to have an ideal case against you, Mr. Steel," he said. "Seems almost a pity to cut a career like Mr. Henson's short, does it not? Which reminds me that I am wasting time here. Any time you and Van Sneck happen to be passing the police-station the cigar-case is entirely at your disposal."

And Marley bustled off upon the errand that meant so much for Reginald Henson. He was hardly out of the house before Ruth Gates arrived. She looked a little distressed; she would not stay for a moment, she declared. Her machine was outside, and she was riding over to Longdean without delay. A note had just been sent to her from Chris.

"My uncle is in Paris," she said. "So I am going over to Longdean for a few days. Lord Littimer is there, and Frank also. The reconciliation is complete and absolute. Chris says the house is not the same now, and that she didn't imagine that it could be so cheerful. Reginald Henson——"

"My dear child, Henson is not there now."

"Well, he is. He went there last night, knowing that he was at his last gasp, with the idea of getting more money from Lady Littimer. To his great surprise he found Littimer there also. It was anything but a pleasant interview for Mr. Henson, who was finally turned out of the house. It is supposed that he came back again, for they found him this morning in the grounds with one of the dogs upon him. He is most horribly hurt, and lies at the lodge in a critical condition. I promised Chris that I would bring a message to you from Lord Littimer. He wants you and Dr. Bell to come over this afternoon and stay to dinner."

"We'll come, with pleasure," David said. "I'll go anywhere to have the chance of a quiet hour with you, Ruth. So far ours has been rather a prosaic wooing. And, besides, I shall want you to coach me up on my interview with your uncle. You have no idea how nervous I am. And at the last he might refuse to accept me for your husband."

Ruth looked up fondly into her lover's face.

"As if he could," she said, indignantly. "As if any man could find fault with you."

David drew the slender figure to his side and kissed the sweet, shy lips.

"When you are my wife," he said, "and come to take a closer and tenderer interest in my welfare——"

"Could I take a deeper interest than I do now, David?"

"Well, perhaps not. But you will find that a good many people find fault with me. You have no idea what the critics say sometimes. They declare that I am an impostor, a copyist; they say that I am——"

"Let them say what they like," Ruth laughed. "That is mere jealousy, and anybody can criticize. To me you are the greatest novelist alive."

There was only one answer to this, and Ruth broke away, declaring that she must go at once.

"But you will come this afternoon?" she said. "And you will make Lord Littimer like you. Some people say he is queer, but I call him an old darling."

"He will like me, he is bound to. I've got something, a present for him, that will render him my slave for life. Au revoir till the gloaming."

* * * * * *

The dew was rising from the grass, the silence of the perfect morning was broken by the uneasy cries of the dogs. From their strange whimpering Williams felt pretty sure that something was wrong. At most times he would have called the dogs to him and laid into them with a whip, for Williams knew no fear, and the hounds respected his firm yet kindly rule.

But Williams was in an exceptionally good temper this morning. Everything had turned out as he had hoped for and anticipated, and the literal kicking-out of Henson the previous evening was still fresh and sweet in his memory. It would be something to boast of in his declining years.

"Drat the dogs," he exclaimed. "Now, what's the matter? I had better go and see. Got a fox in a hole, perhaps! We shall have to tie 'em up in future."

Williams darted into the thicket. Then he came full upon Henson, lying on his back, with his white, unconscious face and staring eyes turned to the sky, and two great dogs fussing uneasily about him. A big pup close by had a large swelling on his head. By Henson's side lay the ash stick he had picked up when pursued by Merritt.

Williams bent over the stark, still figure and shuddered as he saw how his clothing was all torn away from the body; saw the deep wounds in the chest and throat; he could see that Henson still breathed. His loud shouts for assistance brought Frank Littimer and the lodge-keeper to the spot. Together they carried the body to the lodge and sent for the doctor.

"The case is absolutely hopeless," Walker said, after he had made his examination. "The poor fellow may linger till the morning, but I doubt if he will recognize anybody again. Does anybody know how the thing came about?"

Nobody but Merritt could have thrown any light upon the mystery, and he was far away. Williams shook his head as he thought of his parting with Henson the previous night.

"I let him out and closed the gate behind him," he said. "He must have come back for something later on and gone for the dogs. He certainly hit one of the pups over the head with a stick, and that probably set the others on to him. Nobody will ever know the rights of the business."

And nobody ever did, for Henson lingered on through the day and far into the night. At the house Lord Littimer was entertaining a party at dinner. Everything had been explained; the ring had been produced and generally admired. All was peace and happiness. They were all on the terrace in the darkness when Williams came up from the lodge.

"Is there any further news?" Lord Littimer asked.

"Yes, my lord," Williams said, quietly. "Dr. Walker has just come, and would like to see you at once. Mr. Reginald Henson died ten minutes ago."

A hush came over the hitherto noisy group. It was some little time before Lord Littimer returned. He had only to confirm the news. Reginald Henson was dead; he had escaped justice, after all.

"Well, I'm not sorry," Lady Littimer said. "It is a rare disgrace saved to the family. And there have been trouble and sorrow enough and to spare."

"But your own good name, my dear?" Lord Littimer said. "And Frank's?"

"We can live all that down, my dear husband. Frank will be too happy with Chris to care what gossips say. And Dr. Bell and Enid will be as happy as the others."

"And Ruth and myself, too," David said, quietly. "Later on I shall tell in a book how three sirens got me into a perfect sea of mischief."

"What shall you call the book?" Littimer asked.

"What better title could I have," David said, "than The Crimson Blind?"

THE END.

SALVATION ARMY OFFICERS TRANSFERRED

List of Changes Following on the Officers' Councils Just Held

Commissioner and Party Given a Farewell When He Left Last Night for Halifax--Yesterday's Closing Meetings.

The twenty-third annual congress of the Salvation Army, held in this city, was brought to a close Thursday. It has been a most successful one both in numbers attending the meetings and from the good done. A united council for bandsmen, officers and soldiers was held yesterday morning in No. 1 barracks, Charlotte street. This was followed in the afternoon by a council for men only and another for women only. The one was in charge of Col. Kyle and the other of Mrs. Coombs. A pleasant tea for the officers was served in the barracks at 5 o'clock.

The following changes were announced as a result of the commissioner's visit: Ensign Carter, to Glace Bay; Capt. March and Lieut. Pelley, to Dominion; Capts. Meickle and McMasters, to Reserve; Capt. Galway, to Port Hood; Capt. White and Taylor, to Carleton; Capts. Backus and Stairs, to Fairville; St. John 1, Capt. Taiten; St. John 3, Ensign Anderson and Lieut. Rowe; St. John 5, Lieut. Fall; Bridgetown, Capts. Grant and Turner; Dartmouth, McGillvray; Liverpool, McIver and Murtough; Chatham, McLeod and McMartin; Sussex, Head and Luther; St. Stephen, Trafton and Gray; Summerside, Munroe and Stothard; Amherst, Ensign Green and Long; Truro, Capt. McWilliams; Sackville, Janes and Denny; Fredericton, Lorrimer and Speck; North Head, Bigwell; Bridgetown, Cavanaugh; Windsor, Miller.

Commissioner and Mrs. Coombs, accompanied by Col. Pugmire, left on the late train tonight for Halifax and from that city they will go to Newfoundland.

Taffy's Property.

The recent dispute between the War Office and the Volunteers calls to mind the fact that the London Scottish Volunteer Rifle Brigade is a very clannish institution, and that to gain admission into its ranks one must either belong to Scotland or have some connection or other with the land of the heather.

Some time ago a strapping Welshman volunteered for service.

He was questioned in the usual way:

"Do you belong to Scotland?"

"No, sir."

"Do your parents belong to Scotland?"

"No, sir."

"Was your grandfather or grandmother Scotch?"

"No, sir."

"Any relatives in Scotland?"

"No, sir."

The recruiting officer was getting disheartened, but as he was a finely-built fellow and would be an acquisition to the ranks, he did not like to lose him.

"Any property in Scotland?" he asked.

Taffy considered for a minute.

"Yes, sir," he exclaimed.

"That will do, that will do," said the officer, much relieved. "You may join."

At the canteen that evening Taffy was questioned as to his Scottish property.

"Well, boys," was the reply, "I've got a pair of trousers in a pawnshop in Perth."

Favor Anglo-Cuban Treaty.

Havana, Nov. 1—The Agrarian League has voluntarily given to the committee on foreign relations of the senate and newspapers a lengthy report favoring the ratification of the Anglo-Cuban commercial treaty, disagreeing entirely with the opposition of other business organizations to the treaty and concluding with the statement that the United States has not given any proof officially or otherwise of any hostility toward the treaty. In view of the latter statement the government will be asked to publish the correspondence between the United States and Cuban governments regarding the treaty.

Toronto Banquet to R. L. Borden

Toronto, Nov. 1—The Borden Club, of this city, it is announced, has decided to invite R. L. Borden to be the guest of honor at a banquet to be given at the Queen's Hotel on December 12. The occasion will be an important one, as calculated to bring forth the first political utterances of the opposition leader in Toronto since the passing of the autonomy and parliamentary indemnity measures.

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