

Tale of Mystery

CHAPTER IX.
"I Know Your Whole Story."

"By the way, just as well not to leave too broad a trail behind me here, in the shape of evidence. I'll get back that card I gave the old frump of a housekeeper." For this purpose he went down into the housekeeper's room and engaged her in conversation, saying he should wait no longer, while he glanced about him for the card. As soon as he saw where it was he went and stood near it, and after distracting the woman's and the baronet's card that lay with it attention from his actions, he put it quietly into his pocket. Then, giving the woman a couple of shillings, he left.

"Lucky I found this in my search in her ladyship's room last night," he muttered, as he took out the card, tore it in a hundred pieces and tossed them into the gutter. "It's always well to have an eye for the possible value of little things."

He was in the act of calling a cab when he remembered that he had not lunched, and as he made a rule never to neglect any matter of personal comfort, he turned and set out in search of a restaurant that was good enough to accord with his taste.

He lunched well, and had a glass or two of good wine, tried one of the best cigars the place could offer him, abused the waiter for not giving him a better, and then, in a thoroughly comfortable frame of mind he went out, hailed a cab and was driven off to Edgecombe Square.

His main anxiety now was whether Cheriton—the lover—as he called him somewhat contemptuously in thought—would have come up in response to Dessie's telegram. "If he has, there will be a kettle of fish," he mused, "and my line will not be so clear as it might be. I don't think I have left it too late—a glance at a clock as he passed showed him the time to be nearly three o'clock—and after all, with the knowledge I have now, I need not be much troubled if she has already told him. The story will take some time in the telling, too. She's a plucky little beggar, no doubt; but she'll need all her nerve to pull her through that business. And after it's over, I don't see what the man's going to do—except hold his tongue and buy me over. Still, I'd rather deal with the girl than the man. Women lose their heads, and make mistakes so much more frequently."

From this his thoughts travelled to the woman he was pledged to marry. "Poor Dora, what a soft-headed, tender-hearted, mass of consummate vanity she is! I wonder how much money she has got. It's worth a lot to marry her and settle down—like grins in a wine glass. Sink everything. Lord, what would life be like tied to a golden doll like that—if one meant to live it conventionally. She loves me; that's one thing. That's my strong card there; and I believe her love—or at least her vanity, which makes her think I live but for her silly self—would make her stick to me through thick and thin; ay, through everything, or at least almost everything."

He smiled and showed his white even teeth, and then admitted himself in the little looking glass in the cab, and glancing out, ogled a pretty girl who was passing. Then he harked back in thought to his plans, and in this broken desultory fashion continued to muse.

He was a man of implacable purpose; but he preferred to seek it by the leaps and bounds which impulse

prompted rather than by the steady, deliberate methods of close calculation. He was capable of perpetrating any crime, however desperate and daring, almost on the spur of the moment; and he would carry through any scheme once conceived, however venturesome and hazardous. Thus he would often succeed by sheer dash and bravado, where another man of more set purpose and steady determination might fail.

He was indeed a more dangerous man to deal with than one who laid his plans with consistent forethought. It was impossible to estimate what step he would take. He had an infinite quickness in seeing and seizing an opportunity, an equal capacity in turning it to account, and a reckless readiness in the adoption of his means. But he often regarded his objects before he had gained them.

The whole of this marriage scheme was the outcome of a merely chance-encounter. He had seen George Vezev and his friend in the middle of a row with Belgian sailors, and remembering that if he remembered them he could probably turn the connection to personal advantage, he had dashed in and saved them without a thought of the danger to himself. When he had done it he began to consider how he could best make them pay the price of the service he had rendered. He followed them to Ozend, saw Mrs. Markham, read her at a glance, and forthwith resolved to marry her for the sake of her money. He succeeded almost instantly; and all was going well when Dessie Merion threatened to stop him.

To do that was to rouse all the devil in him. His first instinct was to silence her at any cost. When she had shown herself determined to balk him, he had thought no more of trying to kill her than of kicking a mad dog that threatened to bite him.

His one feeling in regard to that attempt was infinite anger that he had failed. The drug he had chosen was one that would have been exceedingly difficult to trace, and he cursed his folly for having bungled.

Meanwhile, his suspicions that the girl herself had certain things to hide in her past had been aroused, in consequence of something that had fallen from her in their first conversation; and when it was necessary to go to her room to search for the poisoned tea, he had used the opportunity to rummage her boxes for any paper or reference that would give him the clue. He had found a clue to the fact that she was the girl who got hold of the jewels that day when he had been arrested at Birmingham, and this had determined him to find out more.

This he had done in much greater detail than he had anticipated, thanks to the shrewd stroke of overhauling Dessie's rooms, and the information which had been given him by Sir Edmund Landale. He quite appreciated that man's petty and malignant scoundrelism, even while he himself resolved to make use alike of the man and his knowledge. What he had learnt had been much increased by the way it had fitted in with many other facts already in his possession; and he now felt that he was almost certain to win.

When the cab stopped at Mrs. Markham's house he jumped out and tossed the man a liberal fare—he was always generous with cabmen and all who ministered to his comfort—and ran confidently up the steps of the splendid house.

The servant, quick to recognise the rising sun and bow down to it, was very deferential, and told him that Mrs. Markham was not at home, but had left a message asking him to wait should he call in her absence.

He went in, as though he were already master of the house, and strolled into the library to smoke.

"Is Miss Merion in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "She waited in because she is expecting a visitor, sir—Mr. Cheriton."

"Good! I'm first," he thought, and then added:

"Tell her, with my compliments—stay, where is she?"

"In the small drawing-room, sir."

"Ah! I'll go to her myself. No, don't bother to announce me. I know the way well enough." And humming a gay Venetian barcarolle, he went up the magnificent staircase, and with a smile on his lips opened the door.

Dessie was sitting waiting for Tom Cheriton, and when the door opened she looked up with a glow of expectation in her face; but the light died out sharply in her disappointment at seeing that instead of the man she loved it was the man of all others she hated and feared.

She got up at once to leave the room, resolved not to remain alone with him.

"I wish to speak to you," he said, barring her path.

"I will not stay in the room with you. I don't feel safe alone." He understood the reference and laughed.

"And your instincts are about as true as they can be, too. You are not safe in a room alone with me. If you will run more danger just now in leaving the room than in stopping here."

"Nevertheless, I insist on your allowing me to pass. This is monstrous. Would you have me ring for the assistance of the servants?"

He looked at her during a long pause of silence, while she faced him, her anger bringing quick flushes to her cheeks.

"You are right. It would be monstrous to ring for the servants. It would be scandalous, grossly scandalous, for you"—he flashed a threat at her—"for you, Miss—Marlow, now, do you wish to go?"

He stood aside, opened the door, bowed low with one of his gestures of exaggerated politeness, and laid his hand to his heart.

But the mere mention of the name had conquered the girl, who all white and trembling had sunk down on the nearest chair.

"You are very foolish to drive me to give you these sharp thrusts, young lady," he said, closing the door and going near her. "Very foolish. But your self-will has to be broken here. Now you will understand that things are very different from what they were when we met this morning, and when you are sufficiently recovered to be able to hear me out I will tell you what you had better know before your expected visitor arrives—I mean Mr. Cheriton."

The mention of her lover's name was to the girl like the turn of a bayonet in a wound, and a low cry of pain escaped her.

The slight was painful even to the man who had caused the trouble. He hated the sight of sorrow, and especially was the distress of women unpleasant. It did not soften him in the slightest. Had the girl been actually dying he would still have carried out his plan. It was necessary to his project to remove this particular obstacle from his course, and he had done it.

With the use of this medicine, I soon found relief. I followed up this treatment for six months and was then quite free from rheumatism. While using Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills I also used Dr. Chase's Backache Plaster when so stiff that I could scarcely bend. They always found the weak spot and gave relief while the internal treatment was bringing about a thorough cure."

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Rheumatism Cured In 3 Weeks

By Father Morrisey's "No. 7" Tablets.

Mr. James LeB. Johnstone, a prominent member of the Citizen's Band, of Chatham, N.B., writes:—
"I contracted Rheumatism by exposure five years ago, and was ailing for two months and in great pain all the time. I got Father Morrisey's No. 7 Tablets, and took them for about three weeks, when the Rheumatism left me, and I have had no return of the pains since."
"Father Morrisey's No. 7" Tablets have a remarkable record of cures of Rheumatism and Kidney Troubles. They act directly on the Kidneys, which have become clogged with impurities and are therefore unable to free the blood of the poisons it is continually gathering from every part of the body. The tablets clear the kidneys and tone them up for their work so that they can properly purify the blood. Once the Uric Acid is taken out of the blood the agonizing pains stop, and the Rheumatism is cured. "No. 7" tablets cost 50¢ at dealer's, or from Father Morrisey Medicine Co., Ltd., Montreal, Que.

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"Tell her, with my compliments—stay, where is she?"

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