

lung herself on Mrs. Pengarvan's broad bosom in a passion of tears. And Lance's mother knew that if the sacrifice was necessary the proud girl was prepared to make it for the man she loved.

CHAPTER XVII.

Rogues in Council.

MR. SIMON TREHAWKE ordered his starveling clerk to dust a chair for his principal client, who had just been ushered into the mouldy office.

"And if anyone calls say I'm not in," he added.

Wilson Polgleaze hardly waited till they were alone. "I have been to The Tower and sprung my terms on her ladyship," he began. "She tried a bluff—two bluffs, in fact—but I can see I've fair got her on toast. She'll have me rather than let Lance Pengarvan swing."

The crippled attorney eyed his visitor with calculating shrewdness. "You are a little anxious about one or both of those bluffs—want to consult me about it?" he suggested slyly.

"Well, yes, you old wizard—that's about the size of it. One of 'em doesn't count, so long as you stand by me. They've got hold of Marigold Craze, or Marigold has got hold of them, and they threatened me with that little marriage scene we acted last January. I simply laughed at 'em, denied the whole thing, and defied them to get evidence."

"A sound position to take up," the lawyer rubbed his skinny hands. "And the other, and as I assume, more serious bluff? I frankly confess I do not like the term in connection with such a very charming young lady."

"Cut all that out, you old ghoul," rejoined Wilson rudely. "I want you to advise me—not to pull my leg. It has to do with the dad's death, and—well—I'm on rather ticklish ground there."

"Ah!" And Mr. Trehawke's exclamation was little more than a sigh. Whether it was the brevity or the tone of it was not clear, but it stung the client into sudden fury.

"What the h—ll do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing; nothing at all. Except that I am interested to learn how that sad event into a weapon of defence against you. I should have thought that her relations with Captain Pengarvan would have induced reticence on that painful subject."

Wilson Polgleaze regarded his legal adviser with a scowling scrutiny, and absolving him of hidden meanings allowed himself to be pacified. "So it ought to have, but women are all fools," he assented. "It wasn't Miss Carlyon, but Mrs. Pengarvan, who raised that point. She said that I should be accessory to the—er—the murder, because I hadn't produced my evidence sooner. I turned it off all right, but it seemed a nasty one. I don't want to stand in the dock alongside Lance Pengarvan—if it comes to having him run in."

Trehawke laughed as genially as it was possible to him. "Like dancing on hot bricks, isn't it?" he said. "I can advise you better when I know exactly how you stand with Grylls. The Superintendent isn't quite the semi-paternal pantaloons he poses for. He's got a bit up his sleeve."

"I readied him to the rights—the very next day," Wilson replied eagerly. "I told him about my finding Pengarvan at The Tower, engaged in making a contraband shipment, when he ought to have been miles away at sea—enough, I should have thought, to give him a straight clue. With a little sense he ought to see that Pengarvan had plenty of motive to kill dad, if he was up to. Dad probably had. He was as cute as they make 'em. The line Grylls should take is that when Pengarvan called at the office before sailing, dad taxed him with it and sacked him. Then Master Lance did him in, see?"

"A plausible theory," Trehawke admitted, stroking his ill-shaven chin. "But you have sailed perilously near the wind, sir, in keeping it back from the Super. However, it's not too late to rectify the omission. My advice is to go to Grylls, and tell him that this

has just occurred to you. That ought to put you right in case it's necessary to proceed to extremities with Captain Pengarvan."

"It won't come to that," chuckled Polgleaze. "Miss Hilda will climb down sure enough, but I wanted to be on the safe side. It wouldn't suit me, or you either, to be cross-examined by some young spark in wig and gown over the mud that would be raked up."

"An unpleasant process," the attorney assented dryly. "More so for you than for me, I expect, seeing how you've been in the public eye, while I have always hid my light under a bushel. But see here, sir, we mustn't forget the weak spot in your armour. From what you told me the other day, I understand that you had a cable saying 'The Lodestar' had been searched at sea and no arms found on her. That does away with the motive you attribute to Pengarvan."

"He must have chucked them overboard when the Guyacan gunboat tackled him," said Polgleaze.

"Very probably, but where's your proof of his having done so? No, as it stands, I doubt if Grylls would move in the matter. Can't you find a paper in your father's handwriting which would be evidence that he had discovered Pengarvan's game? You needn't show it to Grylls yet. Fill him up with your theory as aforesaid, and keep the documentary evidence in case it's wanted."

Wilson Polgleaze regarded his legal adviser with a cunning and admiring grin. "My Jeminy, Simon," he chuckled, "but you're a sharp old file. Yes, I think I can find that paper. My dad's fist wasn't a hard one to copy, and I've got a sort of hereditary turn for holding the pen the same way. Thanks, Trehawke, you've given me just the tips I wanted."

"There's one thing more," the lawyer arrested his client's eager departure. "There wouldn't be any harm in showing that little paper to the ladies at The Tower quite soon. You want to marry the girl, and we both want to keep the late lamented Mr. Polgleaze's death out of the courts."

"I see what you mean. It will just crush the last resistance out of her." With which Wilson Polgleaze rushed out of the shabby office for the nearest of his many "houses of call." He had put in a good morning's work, and he needed a drink badly. Somehow in these days of his prosperity he needed a good many more than formerly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Trouble.

THE day after the visit of Wilson Polgleaze to St. Ruman's Tower, the ladies received confirmation of one of the statements in the form of a letter from Lance. It had been written from Santa Barbara a week after the arrival of "The Lodestar," and it announced the failure of the secret enterprise, owing to the suspected treachery of Wilson Polgleaze, and mentioned the recall of the steamer before the completion of her voyage to other ports. There was no allusion in it to the murder of Jacob Polgleaze or to the death in battle of Antonio Diaz, of which at the time of writing Lance had not been informed.

The dominant note of the letter was burning indignation against Wilson Polgleaze, penned with all the young sailor's wealth of denunciation, and with many expressions such as "getting square on the cur."

The outstanding feature of the communication, which the writer's mother and sweetheart read with mingled joy and dismay, was that as the mail steamer did not leave Santa Barbara for another ten days, and had many West Indian ports to call at, he would be home about a week after the receipt of his letter. His orders were to sail direct for Falmouth as soon as he had discharged his cargo, and, allowing for the slower speed of "The Lodestar," he thought he had calculated his arrival correctly.

"We shall need all our courage, dear," said Mrs. Pengarvan as she folded up the letter when Hilda had read it. "But every line of that, and every line that's left out of it, proclaims my boy's innocence of what that crawling toad insinuated."

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