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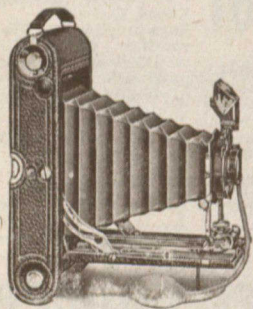
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A VOICE FROM THE HIDDEN WORLD

CONCLUDED FROM PAGE 15

"Some one has said that I am going to lecture upon theosophy," she commenced dreamily. "That is not so—theosophy is not to be taught by code and rule. Those who seek light and truth should seek it in solitude and mental isolation. The greatest of our teachers can only supply the raw material. Each must pursue for himself the dark and narrow path which leads alone to perfect understanding, to perfect light, and to the perfect knowledge of all those hidden laws and forces which mock and elude the uninitiated. To-night I am breaking the first principles laid down by those who have become the high-priests of our order. I am going to show to you all a miracle. I am going to speak with one who has been for a long while dead. You shall hear her voice; you shall hear of her life; she shall speak to you of the manner of her death. And this I do for a purpose of my own, and with no desire to make converts of any of you.

"Far away in my eastern home, amongst the mountains, I have heard her faint, sweet whisperings in my ear at the break of the day. In the gloom of twilight I have seen her dim, reproachful eyes; and in the white mists of the midnight hour, upon the hills, I have seen her sweep slowly by, sad and mournful. Yet I have not called her to me. I have waited for this; and now the thing has come. Marian! Marian! come, beloved sister! It is Astrea who calls you!"

She had raised her hands with a slow, sweeping grace, and stood for a moment perfectly motionless. Then, breaking a silence of death, sweet and low as the music of an æolian harp stirred by the faintest of summer breezes, the sound of a woman's answering voice floated upon the air:

"I am with thee, Astrea; speak."

Astrea raised her hands and answered:

"I would talk with thee for one brief moment only, of the past—of the sad days of your life upon earth. Look back with me upon our home. You have not forgotten?"

The wonderful music of that answering voice again filled the room.

"I forget nothing, Astrea. I see our fair country home and our dear parents. I see the hedges white with hawthorn blossoms, the common starred with poppies and cornflowers, and great yellow marigolds down in the marshes, and the sloping fields golden with ripe corn, and bending like waves of the sea before the summer wind. I have found peace and rest, my sister; but earth, too, is a fair place!"

"Fair for you, Marian, till a man's treachery made it black and foul. Do you remember the night when, full of joy and love, you whispered out your secret to me, and we shed tears of happiness together? Do you remember the day when, blithe and trustful, you followed your lover to London? Do you remember the bitter hour of awakening when the light died out of your life, the weary waiting, the heart-sickness, the bowed grey heads of our father and mother, hastened in their passage to the grave?"

"Too well—too well," sobbed out the answering voice. "Astrea, forbear. Question me no more."

A strange light burned in Astrea's dark eyes. Her hands were raised high above her head, and her form seemed dilated and quivering with passion.

"Marian, the man whose selfishness wrecked your life and broke our parents' hearts lives. He is great, and honoured, and respected. Say but the word and I will crush him.

The world for which he lives shall look upon his buried past; my hand shall raise the veil, my finger shall point at his shame, my voice, my testimony, shall denounce him. Think of the hour when you found yourself deserted, and with your life ruined, struggling against starvation in a garret, whilst he wandered off in ease and luxury, a willing exile. You know well that he never sought to find you after that night when you left him in horror and shame. Think of that day when at last he was forced to visit you. Remember his greeting, his dismay at your just demand; remember, Marian, remember his refusal! I will not ask you how you died, by his hand or yours; but Heaven knows that he was your murderer. Heaven's curses lighten upon him! I thirst for vengeance, my sister. Say that one word and open my lips."

There was no movement, no voice heard. Every one sat waiting, half-dazed, stricken dumb by the passion of Astrea's prayer, and dimly fearing some terrible *denouement*. The moonlight fell upon their white upturned faces, and showed more than one strong man quivering with excitement. The entertainment had grown wonderfully realistic; where would it end?

Suddenly the intense stillness was broken by the chiming of the great Abbey clock. It was midnight. Some one who stood near one of the windows threw it open, and with the rush of frosty air came the sudden glad pealing of bells from the village church. It was Christmas morn. And, mingling with the sound, yet rising clear and sweet above it, came once more the music of that spirit voice:—

"Astrea, beloved sister, in the old days we prayed together, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.' Far away, over the valleys and the hills, I seem to hear those words stealing up to me in the music of the Christmas bells. I died by my own hand, and the sin was my own. For the rest, I charge thee, Astrea, forgive—forgive."

A deep sob escaped from Lord Mauleven's lips; but in that moment of intense suspense no one, save myself, had noticed it. Astrea turned slowly round and disappeared. The lights were turned up, and the spell of silence was broken. The curtain had fallen, the play was over.

THE END.

More Flag Talk

(London Advertiser.)

THAT Toronto flag incident, in which some American visitors rode through the streets in an automobile with the Stars and Stripes rampant and a Union Jack dragging in the mud, has been taken altogether too seriously by a number of Canadian newspapers. Some of them are solemnly demanding the enactment of a law which will compel respectful treatment of our flag.

Several American states, it is pointed out, have such a law on their statute books. That is true, but can anyone recall an instance in which an American community has invoked a statute to restrain a merry group of foreigners from dishonouring the Stars and Stripes?

There are American flag fools and there are Canadian flag fools. It is conceivable that ignorant Canadian citizens would attempt in a United States city what ignorant American citizens actually accomplished in a Canadian city.