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A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SECRET PROTECTORS.

"I don't know about that," exclaimed Mr. Gryce. "He may make an attempt to satisfy his hatred, but I don't think it will amount to much more. An hour ago, I thought myself a tired man, but somehow I feel remarkably fresh and vigorous just as present."

The two Degraws said nothing, but their eyes gleamed and their steps rang ominously on the sidewalk.

When they arrived at Miss Aspinwall's house, they halted. As the hour for retirement had long passed, they expected to find the premises darkened and the gates closed, and they were not disappointed. Nowhere, in house or grounds, was there any light visible. All was dark and all was quiet.

"What shall we do?" queried Mr. Degraw, of Cleveland. "We have scarcely excuse enough for arousing the house, and yet—"

"I have already matured my plan," interposed Mr. Gryce, firmly. "We must arouse the house, at least sufficiently to procure ourselves an interview with Miss Aspinwall. If—"

and here he turned to the artist—"Mr. Degraw thinks he can send her a message without unduly alarming her, let him do so. As the servants know him, it will, perhaps, be better for him to show his face at the door than for us. What do you think, Sir?"

"That it will be well enough for me to try," was the artist's rejoinder. "If James comes to the door, we are all right; he is discreet and will indulge in no unnecessary remarks; but if it is one of the other servants, I cannot promise as much."

"There is always risk in every-

thing," remarked Mr. Gryce. "Risk, and let us hope that it will be James who answers the summons."

The artist obeyed, giving that sharp double ring which always suggests a telegram, while Mr. Gryce improved the opportunity to post his remaining companions in positions he thought best calculated to command a full view of the house, placing Mr. Degraw in a cluster of trees near the front door and Byrd in an arbor that overlooked both the back of the house and that side of it containing, as he had been told, the room occupied by Miss Rogers. He himself intended to accompany the artist, if they were so fortunate as to gain an entrance at this late hour.

The summons, which had sounded only too loud and shrill, brought more than one head to the windows above, but when the door was opened, it was James they saw, and to him Mr. Degraw found it possible to say:

"Don't be alarmed, James. I do not want to disturb the house, but I have a message for Miss Aspinwall that will not keep till morning. Will you ask her to come down?"

The servant, who had been valet to his mistress's father, bowed without a shade of surprise on his respectful face; and ushering the two gentlemen in, carefully shut the door and glided away on his mission. As there was a faint light burning in the hall, they were not left entirely in darkness, a fact for which they were thankful when a few minutes later they heard a faint foot-fall approach, and beheld sooner than they had expected, the slight and elegant form of Miss Aspinwall descending the stairs, clad in a loose gown of flowering silk, but otherwise in the same trim in which Mr. Degraw had observed her early in the evening.

"Oh," she cried, hurriedly advancing, "what has occurred?"

Mr. Degraw, smiling, pointed to the library, whose door stood invitingly open.

"May we enter?" he asked.

She looked first at the artist, then at his companion.

"The house is not on fire, then?" she naively remarked.

And becoming to James, who had followed her at a distance, she commanded him to light the lamp on the library table.

But the detective, coming forward, observed:

"I think I would make no extra lights. What we request—if you will pardon the intrusion, ryadam—is leave to watch this house. I am Mr. Gryce of the New York detective force, and I have been led to think, from circumstance unnecessary to state at this moment, that one of your guests runs some danger to-night from an unscrupulous man who has, or thinks he has, a motive for her death. If, therefore, you do not object to my guardianship, I should like to play the part of her protector, a part which, as this gentleman here will tell you, is no new one for me to assume."

"An! and the guest—"

She only needed one look at Mr. Degraw to know who it was.

"It is Miss Rogers, no doubt."

"Yes, madam; a lady whom I have not seen, but who claims my interest from her name and the peril in which she stands."

"And does she share your fears?" pursued the lady, with a side-glance at Mr. Degraw, full of sympathetic feeling.

"I think not," responded the latter, eagerly. "Nor are my fears just what they were a few hours ago. Miss Aspinwall. Then I doubted Mr. Degraw's designs, now I doubt only those of his valet. The former has proved himself all we had a right to expect from Mr. Morris' recommendation, while the latter has given token of being a most desperate villain, with intentions of the worst, not only against his master and myself, but against the innocent signorina, who, as Miss Rogers, stands, as he supposes in the way of an abominable scheme of his by which he hopes to reach an incredible amount of money."

"His valet?" she repeated, "his valet? I do not know that I remember his valet. Is he the man who has made the trouble in New York, of which you have told me?"

"I will," she said, and proceeded to point out the door of the signorina's room, after which she explained that beside the main staircase leading down at the left, there was a smaller one at the end of the hall, which, being in a direct line between a certain side entrance and the various bedrooms of the house, was more employed by her guests than the one in front. Then she left him, and, after placing the candle on the table, he had pointed out, proceeded with careful steps to the signorina's door, upon which she slightly knocked.

A hurried movement answered her from within. Then a step sounded on the floor, and the signorina pantingly cried, from behind the door:

"Who is it?"

"Henry," was the reply. "I am lonesome and nervous, Jenny; will you not share my bed with me?"

"Oh," cried the signorina, opening the door and disclosing herself in her evening apparel. "I am nervous and agitated too. I should be but sorry company. See! I have not even gone to bed."

Miss Aspinwall, who had not been in bed either, as her hair and ornaments showed, flushed softly and turned her face partially away. But the other did not notice. She was in a tremor and peered out into the hall over Miss Aspinwall's shoulder, as if some hint of the fear which had infused itself into the mind of others had ventured at last to disturb her own.

"Who is that? What do I hear?" she suddenly asked, in a muffled, yet penetrating voice.

Miss Aspinwall, starting, glanced behind her. There was nothing to be seen, not even in the quarter where the detective stood.

"I do not hear anything," she replied.

"That shows you how nervous I am," half laughed the signorina. "I do not understand it, but I think I never felt as I do to-night. I am only fit to sit on the edge of my bed and cry."

"Then that is the best reason in the world why we should be together. I cannot go leaving you here awake, and you cannot wish to see me go, knowing that I should be constantly anxious about you."

"But you don't know how peculiar I am," murmured the signorina, shrinking back and trembling excessively. "I have spells when only solitude can relieve me. Such a one is upon me to-night. If I should go into your room I should be tempted to shriek aloud, I have so little control over myself when I am nervous."



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spacious that it was carpeted and furnished like a room. Over the front door there was a recess holding a desk, and this was made still more of a retreat by a wide curtain swung across it. Toward this spot Mr. Gryce at once drew.

"This is good vantage-ground," he commented. "By drawing the curtain so, I can see everything without being seen; only you must take this lighted candle away and place it on that small table down in the hall."

"I will," she said, and proceeded to point out the door of the signorina's room, after which she explained that beside the main staircase leading down at the left, there was a smaller one at the end of the hall, which, being in a direct line between a certain side entrance and the various bedrooms of the house, was more employed by her guests than the one in front. Then she left him, and, after placing the candle on the table, he had pointed out, proceeded with careful steps to the signorina's door, upon which she slightly knocked.

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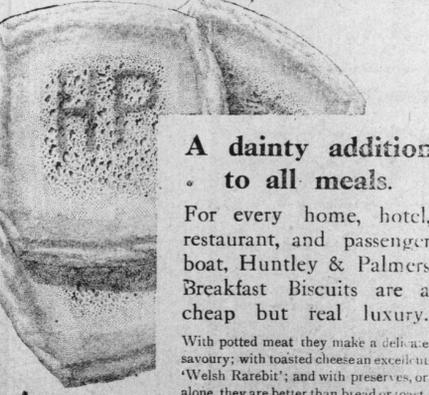
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UNCLAIMED LETTERS, REMAINING IN G. P. to Jan. 1st, 1912.

A Adams, Miss Hilda, Pennywell Road	B Baird, Samuel, Briddle, John, Carter's Hill	C Clarke, Miss Ella, care Gen'l Delivery	D Dawson, Mrs. Wm., care Gen'l Delivery	E Edwards, F. J., Crosbie Hotel	F Freak, Ulrich, care Mrs. Stevenson	G Gardner, Const., care Royal Stores	H Hickman, Miss Annie, care Gen'l Delivery	I Ingram, Miss L. V., care Gen'l Delivery	J James, Miss Nellie, care Gen'l Delivery	K Kelly, James, care Gen'l Delivery	L Lefeller, J. B. E., Lidstone, Willie, care George's Street	M Maddox, Miss Annie, care Mrs. Budden	N Norris, Absalom J., care G. P. O.	O O'Brien, Miss M. J., care G. P. O.	P Perry, H. care G.P.O.	Q Quinn, John, care G.P.O.	R Rennie, Mrs. C. M., retd. care Mrs. G. P. O.	S Sparks, Mrs. S., care G. P. O.	T Taylor, Guy, card, care G. P. O.	U Upton, Mrs. J. E., care G. P. O.	V Vernon, Mrs. J. E., care G. P. O.	W Walsh, Lawrence, care G. P. O.	X Xmas, Mrs. J. E., care G. P. O.	Y Young, G. W., care G. P. O.	Z Zetser, Mrs. J. E., care G. P. O.
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SEAMEN'S LIST.

A Aronson, s. s. Atherton	B Baker, s. s. Atherton	C Carter, s. s. Atherton	D Dunn, s. s. Atherton	E Eaton, s. s. Atherton	F Fleming, s. s. Atherton	G Gibson, s. s. Atherton	H Hart, s. s. Atherton	I Ingram, s. s. Atherton	J James, s. s. Atherton	K Kelly, s. s. Atherton	L Lefeller, s. s. Atherton	M Maddox, s. s. Atherton	N Norris, s. s. Atherton	O O'Brien, s. s. Atherton	P Perry, s. s. Atherton	Q Quinn, s. s. Atherton	R Rennie, s. s. Atherton	S Sparks, s. s. Atherton	T Taylor, s. s. Atherton	U Upton, s. s. Atherton	V Vernon, s. s. Atherton	W Walsh, s. s. Atherton	X Xmas, s. s. Atherton	Y Young, s. s. Atherton	Z Zetser, s. s. Atherton
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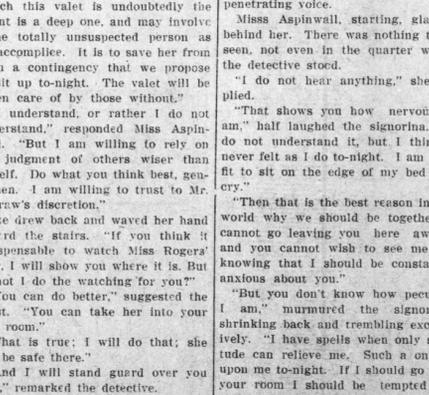
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