

A BID FOR FREEDOM.

By Guy Boothby.

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(Continued.)

"Well, I shall go down and make inquiries. You, Mr. Mercer, and you, Mr. Walley, had better prosecute your inquiries in other directions. What are the police doing?"

"Searching the surrounding streets," Mercer answered.

"We alighted from the cab and proceeded to the shop in question."

"I hope you can speak the language," said the General to me, "for I don't suppose the Duke can, and I am quite sure that I can't."

"I think I can be of use to you in that case," I said, "if it is not too late."

"We entered the shop, if it could be called, and were received by a greasy little Greek. He recognized the Commander-in-Chief, and bowed and scraped with a servility that made me shudder."

"I asked him what had become of the English lady who had called at his shop that morning, and for whom two gentlemen had waited outside."

"He opened his greasy hands and bowed by all he held sacred, which was the way he could not have been much, but he did not know what she wanted."

"I asked him if he knew anything about the English lady, and he said that he did not, but that he would try to find out for me."

"I translated this to him, and he said that he would try to find out for me."

"I told him that I was not a doctor, but that I was a man of business, and that I was not a doctor, but that I was a man of business."

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at all. I knew better than this, however, for the man was a Greek first and a friend afterwards.

"I am not thinking of money," he said proudly. "I am thinking of my friend, the Duke, and of the beautiful lady. For them I would do anything."

"I expressed my appreciation of his generosity and suggested that we should come to business."

"We have made inquiries at all the shops here, but we have not found the lady," he said. "But without success. No one seems to have seen her."

"Pardon, my friend," put in Manalaki. "Perhaps they would not have told you even if they had. It is not always wise to know too much, mark you, and more than when it is Ibrahim Hassan who is in the shop."

"I am still inquiring for Manalaki, but so far without success. However, one of my clerks is out looking for him now."

"I went to come to see you about Manalaki altogether, but about a matter of far more importance."

"I then told him everything connected with our trouble. He listened attentively until I had finished. Then I saw a curious expression come over his face."

"This is bad—very bad," he said, "and I am going to take advantage of the fact that you are here to tell you that I have a plan."

"I am positively certain that those two scoundrels, the Hassans, are at the bottom of it," I replied, "if they are not the actual abductors, which is more than likely."

"He began to pace the room again. Then once more he stopped and faced me."

"Look here, Gavasson," he said, "I don't like the look of this thing a little bit, and I am going to take advantage of the fact that you are here to tell you that I have a plan."

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how you call it?—ah, wife—to work, and as often as not they do. I am very good friends with my friends and they like to help me."

"The truculent air with which he said this would have been amusing at any other time. I knew of old that when he was in the mood of the day, he usually managed to obtain it either by force or fraud."

"Well, Manalaki," I asked, when he had finished, "now that you have had time to think it over, what do you suppose is best to be done?"

"Come with me tonight to a house that I will show you and we will catch the thieves. It will not be the first time that we have had some fun together, and please God, here he lifted his eyes devoutly to the ceiling, "it will not be the last."

"I knew from experience that, if he did not vouchsafe information of his own accord, it was useless to attempt to extract it from him, so I contented myself with asking at that time I should see him and where."

"Let it be outside Ze Oriental Hotel at eight o'clock," he said. "After that we will go home. I know of, and we will deal with Ibrahim Hassan and his brother, and rescue the beautiful lady."

"And do you think Valiochi had any hand in the business?" asked Maxwell.

"That we shall see later," he observed. "It will not be a good day for Valiochi if he is not a very bad day. And so I tell him."

"But may they not escape in the mean time?" I asked, referring to the Duke and his friends.

"He shook his head and gave us to understand that there were those who were watching them who would take very good care that they did not get away."

"In the case," I said, "I suppose there is nothing for it but to wait with patience we can command. Confound you, Manalaki, you know how I feel about this."

"He laid his hand upon my shoulder. "Patience, my dear friend," he said, "you must have patience. Much must be discovered before we can make a move. It will not be long for us to make a mistake."

"Very well, I will meet you at eight o'clock."

"I then said 'good-bye,' and returned to Government House, where I found my friends eagerly awaiting my coming."

"What news do you bring?" asked the Commander-in-Chief. "I asked the Duke, 'Have you anything to tell us?' For mercy's sake, man, don't keep us in suspense. We have been waiting for you, and I cannot bear much more."

"I am afraid I have not very much to tell," I replied. "But at least we are on the track of the two men whom I have been reasoning for believing to have been concerned in the business. I have arranged tonight to visit the house in which they are staying and to see if I can find out anything."

"And I pray to Heaven you may find her," said the General fervently, while the Duke took my hand and said in a broken voice, "God bless you, Gavasson, God bless you."

"But what can the reason of it all be?" asked the General. "Is it kidnapping? Kidnaping in the hope of getting a ransom? What do you think?"

"I could only shake my head. To have told them what I knew would have been impossible. I can feel the shame of my own ignorance."

"What you depend upon it that it is a case of kidnapping. Oh, my poor friend, what would I do if I were not to give to you?"

"I have taken the liberty, sir," I said, addressing myself to the last speaker, "not promising a reward to you, but I have promised me to-night, provided he manages to effect her release. I hope I did not do wrong."

"He told me anything you like," replied the Duke. "Tell him I will give him five hundred pounds if he can restore her to me."

"And I will add another hundred," said the Duke. "If he fails, I will give him five hundred pounds more."

"More than enough," I answered. "He will think himself richly rewarded. Half the amount would have been enough."

"No," protested the Duke. "Don't stint him, Mr. Gavasson. I shall never be able to make it up to you for all the trouble you have taken in this matter."

"I must beg of you not to speak of it," I replied hastily. "I am only making some little return to you for your assistance. I am not a millionaire, but I am a man of business."

"It was nearly seven o'clock by the time, and his Excellency insisted that I should dine before setting out to keep my appointment. This I did, and at a quarter of eight I was in my room, preparing myself for the evening's work. I took the precaution of slipping a revolver into my pocket, and then, at a quarter of nine, I left Government House for the town."

"It was a dark, rainy evening, with a suspicion of thunder in the air, but I paid no heed to that. I was too anxious to get to the house where I was to meet my friends."

"True to his promise, I found Manalaki waiting for me outside the Oriental Hotel. He was alone, and he was waiting for me to go in with him."

"Good," said he, "with your permission we will now proceed to business. You are armed, perhaps?"

"I have got a revolver in my pocket," I answered. "Do you imagine that I should be likely to come out a business like this without it? You ought to know me better than that by this time."

"Pardon, senior," he said, "but I was only thinking of your safety. There may be what you call big trouble to-night, and it is as well to be prepared."

"Good heavens, Manalaki!" I cried, "to hear you talk one would think I was a youngster out here for the first time. You know as well as I do that on such occasions I always go armed."

"Heeled? How that?" he asked. "What is that? I do not know it. I have got a revolver in my pocket, and I am armed."

"Ah! That is good," he remarked, with a chuckle of satisfaction. "I will have got a revolver in my pocket, and I am armed."

"He was so proud of having acquired a new expression that we had gone some two hundred and fifty yards before he spoke again. Meanwhile I could hear him muttering to himself. Then I told him of the reward the Duke and the Commander-in-Chief had offered for the recovery of the lady."

"It had no sooner been mentioned than I could tell from the expression on his face that it had taken a firm hold of his mind."

hold of him. With six hundred pounds at his back he knew that he would be in a position to commit a hundred villainies, and possibly by so doing add not only to his reputation, but also to his capital. All things taken together, and back, as they say in a certain part of the world with which I am acquainted, Manalaki was a far-seeing fellow, who knew on which side his bread was buttered, and was not disposed to drop it into the dust."

All this time we were toiling up the hill. A more wearisome climb I don't think I ever made. It was back-aching work for a man who had been without exercise for upwards of a fortnight. However, at last we turned into a narrow street—alley would be a better name for it; and any one who has had experience of Gibraltar—I don't mean the tourists, who only see the best side—will understand what I mean. I shuddered when I thought of Lady Olivia imprisoned in such a place."

"We must be quiet now, my dear friend," said Manalaki, as we reached the centre of the street. "They may be on the watch."

And so we approached the house that held all I loved in the world. As I looked at it I felt as if I could tear it down with my fingers. I had been thinking of the beautiful, delicately nurtured girl confined in such a place and in such a loathsome company."

"What do you propose doing?" I asked my companion as we approached the door. "I know the men with whom we had to deal, and was well aware that they were the last people on earth to allow themselves to be taken by surprise."

"We must first get into the house, my friend," he answered. "Then we shall see what our good friend, Ibrahim Hassan, has to say to us."

From the chuckle of satisfaction that followed this remark it became evident to me that my companion was looking forward to the opportunity of settling with Ibrahim Hassan. Personally I am not sure that I was not looking forward to doing the same, and yet, goodness knows, I had intended doing exactly what they had done."

I did not quite see how we were to obtain an entry to the house. To knock at the door and demand admission would be worse than useless; while to endeavor to force an entrance would only be to put the enemy on the alert and to afford them an opportunity of conveying their prisoner else-where."

I have since been told that what I should have done would have been to avail myself of the assistance of the authorities, but I do not desire to do so. I had been unanimously decided that, so far as possible, publicity should be avoided. If we could manage to get our hands on the door without being seen, we had been all concerned."

After casting about at the front for some time for a means of ingress, we decided to try the back of the house, which we could approach from a narrow lane. The windows on that side were barred, for obvious reasons, but I saw that the door was not locked, and was able to force an entrance. While he was at work a picture of my past life rose before me with all its haunting memories. Who could say what the next few minutes might bring forth? I stood in the shadow (and possibly you will think me a little superstitious) and did not know what I was about to do. I was full of moon watching Manalaki at work, and was struck by the dexterity with which he used his tools. No professional burglar could have been more expert at his work."

"When some five minutes had elapsed, he turned to me, and with a gesture, signified that all was ready. I then recalled the sensation of the moment when I had been told that I was not nervous. I seemed to depend on the issue of the next few minutes."

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