

THE STAR, ST. JOHN N. B., SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 1907.

FOR A MILLION OF MONEY

By Arthur W. Marchmont.

(Continued.)

to know the purport of the telegram and eagerness to hear more of the conversation between the Merridews. She decided in favor of the former, and leaving her hiding place, she ran down stairs after the valet. As she reached the hall she saw that the door leading to the dining wing of the house stood open, and in an instant guessed what it meant.

Merridew was going to take the stolen papers to London, and his mother had come to fetch them. Her trick would be discovered either at once, when Merridew saw them, or later when they were delivered to the people for whom they had been obtained. There would be lively fun in the Manor then.

She caught the valet just as he was on the point of starting and affected great surprise. With a toss of her head she made as if to pass him.

"Aren't you going to speak to a fellow?" he asked.

"Shake to 'em, is it? And why should I trouble my head about a gossamer who can't see a body go out for a breath of fresh air without thimblin' all sorts of shandals and upshindals. More's the shame to 'em."

"I was jealous, Mollie. I'm jealous of the very air that kisses you."

"Jealous! Ye green-eyed thing! I should think ye are jealous, begorra!"

"It's only because I care for you so much. I'd do anything in the world for you, Mollie. I'm sorry I spoke as I did. I didn't mean anything by it. I won't do it again."

"An' it's a gill tongue ye have wid them promises."

"You try me," he protested.

"I will that same. I'm just widdin' that toudh again, and am goin' to ask off for half an hour. Take me a little walk."

"Of course I would. You know that. But I have to go out for Merridew, to take a telegram."

"Ah, now," cried Olive, shaking her head. "An' sure, didn't I know ye'd find some excuse. Go widdin' your telegram, but don't ask me to believe ye."

"It's true, as gospel. You can see it for yourself."

"Get away, widdin' your loins, just deavin' a girl, wid em."

"Here it is, Look, Look, Look. Markham Street, Mayfair, London. Bring me it up this mornin'. There can't you believe your own eyes?"

"You belaved yours too readily last night," she retorted, sharply. "I had it as partially satisfied. It looks all right," and she smiled up at him.

"It is all right, Mollie, in that sense. But it's all wrong in another. Look here, Mollie, we'll have that walk later on, and I'll tell you things that'll make you open your eyes. That is, if you answer a question I mean to put to you as I want you to answer it."

"Arrah, it's you, that's the question. How to make a body curious, Mr. Dawleigh."

"Mr. Dawleigh?" he repeated, insinuatingly.

"William," she said, dropping her voice, and her eyes after a swift glance. "That's better. Now I must be off, or he'll be mad. Not that I care. I've had enough of him and his fanfano. But I'll tell you all about it afterwards."

He went off then at a run, and Olive returned upstairs. She had learnt what she wished to know and, from Dawleigh's hints, she was to learn a good deal more. It was clear that Merridew was taking the stolen paper to Mrs. Taunton; no doubt for it to be delivered to some one else.

She learnt nothing more that mornin'. Merridew left in his motor car; as did, was therefore certain that her trick had not been discovered by him. Later on, she promised to go for a walk with Dawleigh in the evening. But in the afternoon a telegram summoned him to London; and thus the walk was postponed, and the information she had hoped to gain during it.

They did not return that day nor the next. A telegram came for Mrs. Merridew, who came home very late, but what it was Olive could not find out. She had been in a condition of great nervous restlessness ever since she had read the paragraph about the release of Purvis; and Olive could only speculate as to whether the message had any connection with that.

But on the following evening Merridew and Dawleigh returned; and from the latter Olive soon learnt enough to give her a clue to what had happened. Dawleigh was divided between furious anger at Merridew's treatment and the anxiety to get Olive to promise to marry him. She led him on very skillfully, and seeing that he was so bitter against his master, she affected to take the latter's part as a handsome, honorable gentleman, who would not be angry without a cause, and so put Dawleigh on his defence.

Then he poured out his story amid a storm of abuse from Merridew. The substitution of the dummy for the real paper had been discovered, and Merridew had not hesitated to accuse Dawleigh of the trick. Once started, the valet went on to denounce Merridew as a thoroughbred scoundrel, saying that he knew so much that his master dared not quarrel with him; and that he could force him to give him any money he chose to demand.

But Olive could get little that was definite; and considerably astonished the valet by telling him that she did not credit what he said; but that if it were all true, she would not be mixed up with anyone who talked openly about the prospects of blackmailing his master, and wound up by refusing to listen any longer, and threatening to tell Merridew what he had said, if he worried her with any more.

"We Irish stand by our masters, whether they do right or wrong, Mr. Dawleigh," she declared, with her head in the air. "An' if you don't like the service you're in, you should leave it. An' as for waitin' to get married till you've made some money in that way, it isn't Molly O'Brien who's ever be standin' by your side before the parastie. It's disappointed I am in 'em, Mr. Dawleigh; an' ye may as well know it now." And with the last thrust she left him.

That night she overheard part of a conversation between the Merridews. The mother declared that it was impossible that the paper could have been tampered with at the Manor. She told

where she had hidden it, and was positive that no one had a suspicion that any such thing was even in the house. It must have been changed while in Mrs. Taunton's keeping; or else the wrong paper had been stolen in the first instance.

Merridew was bitterly angry. He was equally positive that Mrs. Taunton had had nothing to do with it; and even hinted that his mother, in her fear at having the thing in the house, had made herself the exchange. In this strain they wrangled for an hour.

Then she asked about Purvis. He answered surlily with an oath, and said that he had seen him in the car, which would reach Purvis on leaving prison, together with money to take him across the Atlantic. But his thoughts were all of the mysterious change of the paper; and he continued to harp on the subject, repeating his belief that in some way Dawleigh had found out about it, and had served him this trick. He had always suspected the valet of being a spy on him.

All the next day this condition of strain continued. Merridew had a series of quarrels with everyone with whom he came in contact; his mother and the valet in particular. And in the afternoon, when starting for a ride in his car, he abused the chauffeur for some trifling fault, and ended by knocking the man out of the car and starting alone.

Mrs. Merridew's nervous unrest was increased by all this until she was really ill. She lay on the couch in her room, prostrate and miserable. Olive contrived to be chosen to take her tea up to her; and when she saw the miserable, hunted look in her eyes, she could almost have pitied her. The fortune which she had schemed to get had done her little good indeed, thought Olive.

"Wouldn't you have the doctor, ma'am? Or is there nuthin' I can get yet?"

"I am not ill, girl," was the cross reply. "I haven't slept for a night or two through neuralgia. That's all."

"Would I be bathin' your face again, ma'am? It did you a power o' good the last time."

"Yes, get the eau-de-cologne. She fetched it, and bathed Mrs. Merridew's forehead. "You have a gentle touch, girl, for all your roughness."

"That's what a dear old mother used to say when I rubbed her for the rheumatism, ma'am. Ah, she was a sufferer now, if you like. Was yer iver in Oireland, ma'am?"

"Don't worry me," said Mrs. Merridew, testily.

Olive went on bathing her face without speaking, and in the silence they heard the sound of wheels on the gravel of the drive.

Mrs. Merridew sprang up on the instant. "What's that. Go and see. At once. Never mind anything else. Go and see," she cried, excitedly.

"Sure, it's you, that's the question. How to make a body curious, Mr. Dawleigh."

"Mr. Dawleigh?" he repeated, insinuatingly.

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"I want to see Mrs. Merridew—Mrs. Rachel Merridew," said that man. The use of the Christian name confirmed Olive in her belief.

"What name shall I say?" asked the valet.

"Never mind my name my man. Take my message."

"I will see if my mistress can see you," and he put him into the little room where visitors of uncertain position were left to wait.

Olive went down and met the footman. "That'll be the gentleman I was to take right up to her the minute he came," she said, and waited while Purvis was fetched. She walked up in front of him.

As she opened the door, Mrs. Merridew asked eagerly: "Well, what was it?"

"Here, here is the gentleman, ma'am. This way, sir."

She made way and Purvis stepped forward.

"Well, Rachel," he said. "There was no reply. Mrs. Merridew had fallen back unconscious."

CHAPTER XLVII.

Husband and Wife.

The stroke which Olive had dealt by forcing Purvis straight into the presence of Mrs. Merridew had gone right home; and, uttering a little cry, she knelt about the unconscious woman and set about restoring her.

Purvis looked on with a grim, hard smile, then sat down and waited for the return of consciousness. "It's only a fainting fit from joy at seeing me. Let her bide a bit, my girl. She'll be round all right," he said presently.

"It's deadly ill she is, sor, she's been allin' badly this last day or two," replied Olive. "Oh, my dear mistress!"

"Ah, got wind in some way of the pleasure in store for her," he said dryly, and grinned.

"Ah, it's meself that's caused this by bringin' you up widdout warnin'!" he said. "I'm sorry, but 'ere, it's discharged I'll be."

"No you won't! I won't give you away. Perhaps you did me a good turn, not knowin' that. That'll be all right." He spoke very confidently.

When Mrs. Merridew came to herself, shuddering and trembling, Olive redoubled her attentions. Feeling, it must be confessed, a first-hand experience of Mrs. Merridew's condition, she was almost gothic and extremely uncomfortable when Mrs. Merridew thanked her in a gentle tone that she had ever known her to use.

Her agitation was almost pitiable to witness, and at the sight of Purvis, who had carefully placed himself so that he would be the first object she could see, her terror and dismay were such that she all but fainted again.

Then she sent Olive away, first telling her to say nothing of what had occurred, and that it had no connection with the stranger's presence. Olive answered with a voluble promise, and running from the room hurried to the rear.

"Take your time, Rachel," he heard Purvis say. "Get over your delight at seeing me again. We shall have lots of time to talk now."

There was a long silence. Then Mrs. Merridew asked: "Did that girl hear anything?" The tone was very low and nervous.

"Not a word. She was so scared when I forced my way up here to you that she was pretty well out of her silly senses!" He lied glibly and with the coolness of long experience.

"Why did you come here?" "That's a good one, that is. Where should I come if not home? I suppose you thought I should trot off to Chicago, eh? Satisfied you a deal better, wouldn't it?"

"How did you learn I was here?" "Does it matter? If you want to know, I heard all about you from a gentleman who is still serving his Majesty."

"The use of the Christian name confirmed Olive in her belief."

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"Not a word. She was so scared when I forced my way up here to you that she was pretty well out of her silly senses!" He lied glibly and with the coolness of long experience.

He'd better get out. The same house won't hold us two long, and I'm going to have the say so in this house; mind that."

"You had better tell him that yourself."

"Oh, I'll tell him fast enough, don't you fear. Where is he?"

"Out in his motor-car."

"Ho, his motor-car," he scoffed, in an affected tone. "He's swell, too, I suppose. Curse the young beast. I'll motor-car him, and he'll swear again."

Then another change came in his tone. "There was feeling in it as he put the next question. 'And Selma? Is she here too?'"

"No, George." She spoke with hesitation, using his name for the first time.

"And why not? Tell me; don't lie! I don't want my child good enough to be here if that swine of a son of yours is here? Don't you dare to lie to me about her, I tell you. Bring her here. There's one soft spot left in my heart, and she fills it. The only thought that ever made me waver in that resolve to have your life for your infernal treachery was Selma. Don't you dare to lie to me about Selma."

"You had better know the truth. She never knew you were her father. When you were—when you were away—"

"When I was judged through you, you mean. You may as well say it," he broke in fiercely.

"When you were convicted and I went back to the name of Merridew, I went back to the name of my father. I was poor and mine wasn't exactly the life she should know her mother was living. I am not lying, George. I did it for her sake, and she never knew right up to the time of—"

"And she paused, as if he had said to her, 'You are going to say she is dead.'"

"A moment of tense silence followed. 'Are you going to say she is dead,' he asked then in a husky tone."

"She died in Chicago, George, years and years ago. It was far better."

"The interview had lasted already so long a time that Olive had grown uneasy lest she should be missed. So she left her hiding-place and went round and knocked at the door of the room and asked if she might take away the tea things."

Mrs. Merridew had almost entirely recovered her customary composure, and was watching Purvis, who sat with his head bowed on his hands in deep emotion.

As Olive was taking away the tray, Mrs. Merridew said, "See that I am not disturbed again, and say that I wish to see Mr. Merridew here the moment he comes in."

Her last look at Purvis had enabled Olive to place the resemblance which had perplexed her before. It was Selma Hammond's face, which his father, his mother, and his sister, had all helped her memory, and she saw that once that here was something which she ought to be able to turn to good account.

After she had done the work which was waiting for her, she went up to her room and wrote a letter to Mr. Casement, urging him to find the girl as soon as possible, and have her with-in reach to be brought to the Manor the instant it became necessary.

Another thing was clear as Purvis had spoken of Mrs. Merridew as his wife, she must have married him, knowing well that she was already married to her father, supposing that that marriage had really taken place; and it was with a sinking heart that she saw how Purvis's story, so far as she had heard it, confirmed the Merridews' statement.

Everything agreed in pointing in the same direction. Indeed, the farther she probed, the stronger appeared the evidence in favor of that marriage. The photograph with its inscription, "My wife that is to be," had been the first thing to really frighten her, and now that Purvis had arrived—the event from which she had hoped so much—his account only added to her fears.

When Merridew returned, Olive could not get away to listen to the meeting without discovering herself pressed upon Olive. The circumstances were such that even a slight alarm raised in the house would frighten Merridew. But how was she to raise it, and how at the same time raise Purvis to a sense of his danger? Rack her wit as she would, no expedient occurred to her.

Merridew reached the door and stood listening to the noisy sleep of his intended victim within. As his fingers closed on the handle of the door, he felt an all but uncontrollable impulse to scream, and she had to clench her hands and press them to her bosom in the strain of that moment.

But the next instant the tension was relaxed. Either some subtle instinct had warned Purvis of his danger, or he had been shunning drunkenness in order to test Merridew, for the door was wrenched open from within and the two men stood confronting each other face to face.

Merridew staggered back in his surprise, and stared at Purvis, who faced him unabashed.

"Hullo, Gilbert, what is it?" cried Purvis, in a voice thick with drink, assumed, as Olive believed, "I had a dream that someone was trying the door," and he hiccupped and reeled against the door frame as if helpless with liquor.

Merridew's lips moved without words coming for the moment. "You cried out in your sleep, and I thought you were ill," he stammered then.

"The all right, Mollie, in that sense. But it's all wrong in another. Look here, Mollie, we'll have that walk later on, and I'll tell you things that'll make you open your eyes. That is, if you answer a question I mean to put to you as I want you to answer it."

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