

A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE QUEST. (continued)

"He felt your life to be valuable. It was worth three million dollars to him and his accomplices," observed Mr. Gryce, quietly.

"What do you mean? My life worth anything to him? I cannot think you are speaking seriously."

"Listen, Mr. Degraw. In the course of our inquiries into this matter, we have lately come upon a woman living in a certain doubtful quarter of New York, whom, if you have not seen, I will characterize as possessing what is called 'beauty' and 'charm'."

"What name?" "The name is Jenny Rogers. She is called Jenny Rogers and long before we knew what was the aim of the conspiracy against the other girls bearing her name, we were convinced that such a conspiracy existed, and that she was the center of it, and that some unknown man, she believed to be the name of Hamilton Degraw, was her agent and co-worker."

"Your story betrays what the object of this plot was. To gain you millions for this base woman, other girls of her name were to be suppressed, or in some way robbed of their good name or of the opportunity to win your regard. You know I suppose, how we first became aware of the existence of this plot?"

"No; I know nothing but what you have told me and what you yourself have already told me."

"Very well, then, understand that I have spent the previous to the string of unhappy events which we have been contemplating a young man of unquestioned respectability overheard a short conversation uttered under his window, late one night, between two persons who were passing by. A woman's voice spoke first, and, these were the words he heard: 'But I am some other Jenny Rogers—' 'Mari you, some other Jenny Rogers, which we take as proving that her own name was Jenny Rogers. The answer was in a man's guttural tones: 'Never let that trouble you. In a month there will not be another young girl by the name of Jenny Rogers remaining in town. I will see to them.' Does not that show the beginning of a conspiracy? And do not the explanations you have given us prove that the aim and object of this conspiracy were the millions which have been left to you for the use and benefit of some one by the name of Jenny Rogers?"

"It does; it does; but—"

"And this threat, thus overheard, had proved to be no vain one," proceeded the detective, with an apologetic wave of the hand. "These girls have been 'seen to,' Mr. Degraw. As soon as you showed the slightest interest in any one of them, danger or dishonor has attacked her and taken her out of your reach. This I see now; an hour ago, I saw

her during the time of first inquiries. Can it be possible that she thought me capable of being attracted by such as she?"

"Such women are blinded by their vanity. Besides, she may have thought you were under compulsion to give this money to one of her name within a stated time."

"Well, it is all a mystery. I thought I had kept this affair a secret from the whole world, and now you are trying to prove to me that it has been shared by the basest and most mercenary of my kind. Why, I did not even speak to this woman!"

"I can believe it."

"Nor have I ever seen her since that time."

"I can believe that, too. She is in hiding, and knows that she has but to show herself to be arrested. Her accomplice, on the contrary, has had full swing; and if we have not found him in your valet—"

"But we have," now broke in the artist. "Why else should he have deceived me by saying he was a detective?"

"A detective?" repeated Mr. Degraw, of Cleveland.

"Yes; and thus excusing himself for the curiosity he showed over a letter which I was reading, if he has not meddled with your papers, Mr. Degraw, he certainly has shown a disposition to do so with mine."

"The scamp! And I have entrusted him with notes to Miss Rogers!"

"Did you send him to my rooms to-night?"

"No."

"Yet he has been there. Did you ever utter threats against my life?"

"Against your life, Mr. Degraw? Do I hear you rightly?"

"Yes; this man told me that I was in danger from your jealousy; swore that he had overheard you utter threats against me."

"Sir, you overwhelm me! I, the most peaceable man alive! I do not wonder you looked askance upon me. Is it necessary for me to say that this villain has belied me; that, for purposes I dare not fathom, he wished to raise an enmity between us?"

"Say, rather," returned the other, "that he aimed at driving me out of town. He did not like the surveillance I kept over Miss Rogers; it interfered with his schemes."

"True," replied the other, turning pale. "If he is the conspirator you deem him, he has another victim in prospect. Whither has the man gone? I cannot rest till I see him in custody."

"That we may hope to do soon," asserted Mr. Gryce. "Ever since we knew that the Signorina Valdi, otherwise Miss Rogers, had come to this place unprotected, we have kept a detective here to guard her. Though you do not know Mr. Byr, who understands his business too well to make himself conspicuous, he knows you and this other Mr. Degraw, and all the rest of the persons connected with this affair. That he should have suspected your valet and followed him into this other gentleman's rooms to-night (as we know he did) adds to my own conviction of your valet's guilt. My colleague is now upon this fellow's track, and if nothing unforeseen occurs, we shall presently have the pleasure of an introduction to him, under circumstances that will make his escape impossible."

"Undoubtedly."

"Was it not by his hand you sent the box of bonbons to their proper destination?"

"Good heaven! Yes."

"And has he not had ample opportunities for using your paper and stealing your cards, and thus leading the silly girl at Miss Hadden's school to think that this letter he wrote came from you?"

"Yes, if he has wit enough to concoct such a letter, and knowledge sufficient to know that it would produce the effect he desired."

"Oh, he has wit and he has knowledge, if he is the man who is acting for the intriguante I have mentioned. Though you have been too absorbed in your own affairs to be suspicious, you have doubtless not taken a step without his knowledge and surveillance."

"Mr. Degraw looked disgusted, but he simply remarked:

"You speak of the intriguante who is at the bottom of this mischief. I think I remember her, a despicable woman whom I would not think of looking at twice. I saw

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differently. Then I thought I was the author of the treason I have noted, as well as the occasion of whatever mischief has followed."

"But, with your explanation to aid us, I am now ready to transfer all my suspicions from yourself to the man you have employed as valet."

"He it is who poisoned the bonbons, wrote the letters—"

"Parlon me, but what reason have you for ascribing these iniquities to him? I am not the man to take any one, much less a low and unknown body-servant, into my confidence."

"I know; I know. But this low and unknown body-servant may have opportunities for surprising your confidence, for all that. Tell me any one else who has been near enough to you to have access to these documents of yours, and I may consent to transfer my suspicions into some new quarter."

"He has not seen my papers, but even if he has, the plot you speak of was started before he entered my employ."

"Are you sure?"

"I did not see him till after those threats you have spoken of were uttered."

"Then I am wrong or he has learned, in some way other than through these documents, the conditions under which Mr. Delaney left you his money."

"There is no other way."

"You are wrong, there must be."

"Why, how?"

"Don't ask me to answer 'why' and 'how.' Just remember that a conspiracy has been found and carried out which proves that a man and a woman living in New York knew almost as soon as you did that there was a great fortune to be angled for by a girl owning the name of 'Jenny Rogers.' Now, if this occurred before this man applied to you for the position of valet, then it is among the possibilities that he made that application on account of the knowledge he possessed of your affairs. Has not the plot prospered better since he has been in your employ?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Was it not by his hand you sent the box of bonbons to their proper destination?"

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This was encouraging yet the gentleman he addressed still showed that he was very anxious.

"And, meanwhile," he suggested, "who is watching over Miss Rogers?"

"At this question, so forcible and unexpected, the artist started and a thrill of emotion disturbed the countenance of the detective."

"If," continued their host, "a conspiracy has been formed of a nature you describe, and every girl who seems to stand in the way of its success is liable to death or dishonor, how shall we measure the peril now hanging over the head of this beautiful woman, who, as any one can see, has not only attracted my admiration, but so won my regard that no doubt can remain in my mind of any one acquainted with my purpose, of the direction which this trust-money will take when it definitely leaves my hands. Barton has been frightened and is running away, you say; but may not be the only enemy she has in town. A plot involving so much money is sure to have more than two persons concerned in it. How can we tell, then, that the woman who brushes her hair has not sworn to kill her before morning?"

"To be continued."

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Table listing unclaimed letters with columns for names, addresses, and dates. Includes entries for Adams, Miss Hilda; Andrews, Charles; Baird, Samuel; Braddie, John; Barnes, Michael; Beddcombe, Samuel; Brentnall, R.; Bell, James; Boone, Michael; Bowin, Mr.; Brophy, Mrs.; Brown, Elijah; Brown, Eli; Boone, Miss Emma; Burke, Miss Emma; Bursell, Miss Bertha; Butt, Miss Julia; Butler, Thos.; Buchanan, Ralph; Bulger, Robert; Burns, Joe; Butler, J.; Clarke, Miss Ella; Caldwell, W. T.; Clark, Miss Jessie; Clarke, Robert; Clarke, John W.; Chapman, Col.; Clarke, Miss S.; Crow, Reuben; Cliff, Robert; Christopher, H.; Cole, E. J.; Cotter, D.; Cotton, Mrs. M. M.; Colford, Wm.; Corish, Mrs. James; Coal, Herbert; Cummings, Miss Harriet; Cummings, Wm.; Coady, Miss Mary A.; Collins, Miss B. M.; Cleary, Miss Bride; Dawe, Mrs. Thomas; Day, Miss D.; Dawe, Robert; Davis, Mrs. John; Dabal, Mrs.; Dale, Miss F.; Dwyer, Mrs. J.; Dyke, Miss Sophie; Dyke, Garfield; Dwyer, Sarah Isabella; Delaney, Miss L.; Diamond, Mrs. Wm.; Dickson, T. W.; Doon, Ernest; Doon, W. D.; Dooley, Miss Josephine; Drover, James; Donovan, Herbert; Duffett, Mrs. Thos.; Dullanty, Mrs. Thos.; Duchine, Mrs. Louis; Edgecombe, Arthur; Emsley, R. J.; Edwards, F. S.; Elliott, Miss Bertha; Ellis, Mrs. South Side Rd.; Escott, James; Fagan, Miss Mary; Fleming, Miss; Feltham, Dorcas; Fitzgerald, Thos.; Fitzgerald, Const.; Ford, Mrs. Albert; Ford, Mrs. James; Fowler, Mrs. Bridget; Fowler, Mrs. James; Foy, Michael; Fraser, Alex.; Garnier, Louis; Garrett, Henry; Gardiner, Const.; Gardiner, Const.; Garland, Jos.; Gillett, Mrs. A.; Gibbons, Miss Gertrude; Gillett, Mrs. A.; Gordon, J. W.; Griffin, Miss Katie; Harasant, I.; Gillingham, Jessie; Greening, Miss G.; Gosse, Miss E. R.; Hanlin, Mrs. J. S.; Hancock, Miss Annie; Harvey, Wm.; Healey, Mrs. Jas.; Hellyer, J. S.; Helms, John; Hitchin, M. H.; Hickman, Miss Annie; Hickey, Wm.; Hodge, Bert; Hodson, A.; Hodson, A.; Hodden, Amelia A.; Holley, Alfred; Hoskins, Sarah; Hutchings, Mrs. Mary; Hunt, G. M.; Hurley, Joe; Hines, Jas.; Hynes, Jas.; Jaynes, Miss Nellie; Jermigan, Miss L. V.; James, Gordon; Jacobs, Miss A.; Jancison, Miss D. J.; Kelly, James; Kehoe, Fannie; Kennedy, Miss Beatrice; Kearley, Winnie; Kennedy, John; Kent, Miss Bella; Kennel, Miss Lillian; Keeffe, Martin; Kennedy, John; Kavanagh, Miss Maggie; Kelly, John J.; Ryan, Joseph; Ryan, J. B.; Reekes, Miss Bella; Shanamer, Levi; Fitzgerald, Denis; Fitzgerald, Frank; Gibbons, Thos.; Butler, Samuel; Schur, Lord of Avon; Sarty, Ermon; Wiseman, Edgar; Martin, D.; Churchill, Capt. James; May, James; Bennett, Walter; Braddon, Capt. R.; Evans, Henry; Brown, Capt. Ebraim; Parsons, Wesley; Petite, Capt. Henry; Savory, Wm.; Gardner, Alex.; Hobbs, Capt. R. J.; Purchase, Thos.; Vendetta; European Agency; Simplex Roofing Nails; COLIN CAMPBELL -- Distributor

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