POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2033



# THE LAW OF THE LAND

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CHAPTER XVII—(Continued.)

"Don't promise anything," Dick said. "Perform instead. I'll find you the money to send that last article back to Mr. Vandernort, and I don't suppose you will hear any more about it. And now I shall be glad if we can come to business. There are several things to do yet, and the first thing is to find where Barca is. He came up from Abbey Close this morning hurriedly after receiving his letters. If you don't mind, I'll stay here and entertain the child whilst you go out and ascertain where Barca is. I want to know whether or not he has seen Mrs. Lingen this morning. Come back and tell me that, and then I'll give you your immediate instructions."

Dick was engaged for a full hour or more in the destruction of the toy fort before Clarkson returned with the information that Barca was at his rooms and declined to see anybody. Moreover, Kate Lingen had been there, too, and she had fared no better than anybody else.

"So he refused even to see her," Dick cried. "Oh, this is splendid. Everything is working beautifully for us now, but I had not anticipated anything quite so good as this. Now you stay where you are while I go round to my rooms and look at my letters. I will be back in about half an hour, and unless I am very greatly mistaken—but, of course, you don't know anything about that."

Dick rushed off to his own rooms, where he found a pile of correspondence awaiting him. He read two letters slowly and carefully; he sat down to think them over with the aid of a cigarette. He had barely finished before his man came in with a telegram. The message was short and to the point:

"Can I see you this morning? Very important.—Kate."

With a smile of peculiar satisfaction, Dick read the message, then he changed into a frock coat and a top hat, and went gaily off to call upon the disconsolate Mrs. Lingen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Poison Works.

For some little time Dick sat in the cosy drawing room waiting for his hostess. She arrived presently, looking exceedingly quiet and subdued, and not in the least like her usual self. So far as Dick could judge, she had been weeping real tears, a phenomenon which none of her friends had ever had the chance of seeing before. She placed her slim white hand into Dick's palm and a deep sigh escaped her. With an effort Dick preserved his gravity.

"Well, this is exceedingly good of you," he said, "and really I feel quite flattered. But, tell me, why did you pick me out to share your confidences?"

Kate Lingen laughed in spite of herself. It was useless to keep up any pretensions in the presence of Dick Charteris.

"Perhaps because you know me so well," she said. "And you must give me this credit, Dick. Whatever my faults in your eyes may be, I never tried to humbug you."

"Oh, because it was useless," Dick laughed. "And you did try it on when we were first acquainted. In fact, you couldn't help it. You are bound to make love to every man who comes along. I verily believe you would try your hand on a saint."

"I should be glad of the chance," Kate Lingen laughed. "Wouldn't it be fun to see the poor, dear man gradually stepping down from his pedestal and becoming human? But, Dick, I must be serious. I have got myself into a frightful mess, and Richard Barca promised to get me out of it. He faithfully promised he would do so last night, and when I went round to his rooms to call upon him this morning he refused to see me. Now what do you think of a man who treats his promised wife in that fashion?"

A wild laugh rose to Dick's lips, but he suppressed it.

"So, you are going to marry Richard Barca after all?" he asked. "You have given it careful consideration, and you have come to the conclusion that he is the one man for you. Now that your decision is arrived at, you feel quite certain that Barca has been the fortunate possessor of your heart from the first. That being so, you are naturally distressed to find yourself treated in this contemptuous fashion. Do you want me to go and see Barca for you?"

"I wish you would be serious," Mrs. Lingen said with a frown. "I don't know what I am going to do now, unless you can lend me the money which I require."

"My dear woman, I haven't got it. Don't you know that my father is only a landed proprietor? If he were one of the modern type of millionaires it would be a different matter. It is not the slightest use looking to me for assistance. And, indeed, you have only got yourself to blame for the position in which you find yourself today. But, tell me, how did Barca propose to help you?"

"He had a little scheme," Kate Lingen said eagerly. "He was quite sure that he could get a large sum of money from——"

The speaker paused and bit her lip, suddenly realising that she was on the verge of an indiscretion. She would have been startled had she known what was passing in Dick's mind at that moment.

"If Barca told you he would get it, you may depend upon it that he will do so. There is nothing of the vainglorious braggart about Richard Barca. I suppose you have spoilt everything in the way you do ruin most things. Barca is an exceedingly jealous man, and I happen to know that he is passionately fond of you. He would do anything for you, even at the sacrifice of his life's ambitions. His love is the one touch of humanity in an otherwise cold, unfeeling nature. But the man is furiously jealous, all the more so because he does not trust you. Not to put too fine a point upon it, you are not to be trusted, if you don't mind my saying to."

"Oh, I know that," Kate Lingen said candidly. "I can't help flirting, and that is why, last night——"

The woman paused and bit her lip again, and Dick laughed outright. His amusement showed itself in his face.

"Go on," he said. "You need not be afraid to tell me. I knew that Arthur Mostyn was in town again, and that he had returned from the Cape better-looking than ever, more fascinating than ever. Now any woman you might have married would have kept you in order, but, frankly, he has no money, and he is as reckless a gambler he is hopelessly impecunious. One afternoon, and you and he took you to Monte Carlo here to supper. Barca must wonder why he is doing."

"But how can he know?" Mrs. Lingen asked.

"Oh, my dear child, what a question from a woman of the world. As I said before, Barca trusts nobody, not even yourself. Of course, he had you watched. Indeed, it is just the sort of thing that he would do. He was always jealous of Mostyn, like the rest of your admirers. And if you will persist in perpetrating these little indiscretions, you must take the consequences. If you want my advice, I should go round to see Barca again and wait till he comes out. I have no doubt you will be able to manage him, and afterwards share the money which he is going to get from Mr. —— I mean from the man whose name you so discreetly withheld just now."

Dick rose and took up his hat, as if the interview were at an end. Everything was going exactly as he could have wished. He was quite ready to let circumstances take care of themselves. He shook hands with his fair hostess and took his departure, leaving her to her own troubled thoughts. She rose from her chair presently and lighted a cigarette. The fascinating smile left her lips, she looked quite drawn and haggard now that she was alone.

"What a fool I am," she told herself. "How stupid of me not to have felt that Richard would have had a watch put on my movements. And it would have been easy to put Mostyn off. I had only to plead another engagement and promise to see him some day next week. But Dick's advice was quite correct. It would be foolish to give up the struggle like this, and I will make one more attempt to see Richard. I must dress myself carefully for the part—something dark and funeral-looking, I fancy."

Despite the gravity of the situation, Kate Lingen smiled to herself as she thought of the coming comedy. Even her debts and difficulties were forgotten at the prospect of a little play after her own heart. She danced gaily up to her dressing room, calling for her maid as she went. The little French woman came demurely into the room. There were very few secrets that Kate had from her, and she appreciated the situation as soon as Mrs. Lingen broached it.

"So you see what a terrible mess I am in, Marie," she said. "I have estranged the love of the only man I ever cared for for a mere adventurer like Mostyn. Just think of it."

"Ah, fine man, Mr. Mostyn," Marie said. "If he were rich, it is a poor chance that Mr. Barca would have. Now, let me see, madame, a black dress with a rather low blouse, also black and pearls round the neck. Then a large picture hat and a veil with the complexion made nice and pallid and marks which suggest tears under the eyes. As to the rest, madame can manage for herself, nobody better. I can see you with those eyes turned up imploringly."

Kate Lingen laughed heartily at the vision which Marie's lively imagination had conjured up.

"I declare you are a perfect genius," she said, "and I will put myself absolutely into your hands for you to dress me as you please. Only you must not go too far, Marie."

"Oh, I will not go too far, madame. We are both of us nothing if not artistic. There shall be no exaggeration, no suggestion of the stage. We will convey the impression that though we have been wrong we have not lost our self-respect."

Kate Lingen looked with approbation at the slender figure reflected in the looking-glass half an hour later. She was more than satisfied with her maid's handiwork.

"Absolutely perfect," she said. "I will give you five pounds for this. At least, I would give you five pounds if I had it. When the ship comes into port you shall not be forgotten. And now, will you be good enough to call me a cab? No, on second thoughts, I won't have a cab. I'll walk. It looks better and strikes one as being far more in keeping with the character."

For some hour or more Kate Lingen walked up and down outside the house where Barca's rooms were situated. Then her patience was rewarded at length, for he came out and walked rapidly down the road. Almost timidly the woman accosted him. She looked absolutely downcast and disheartened, but behind her demure lips the laughter lay. Not even Barca had the slightest suspicion of how she was enjoying the situation. That she was going to be successful she did not for a moment doubt. Nevertheless, the thing was artistically done, as if the very thread of her existence depended upon its success. Barca could feel how the hand on his arm trembled.

"Well, what do you want?" he said harshly. "Did you not get my message just now?"

"Of course, I got your message, but I waited, feeling sure that you would come out before long. And what have I done that you should treat me in this fashion?"

"Just as if you didn't know," Barca growled. "No sooner was my back turned than you begin at once——"

"Richard, you are positively jealous. Oh, I did not expect you would pay yourself so poor a compliment as this. You are thinking about Mostyn. He came to see me yesterday after his long absence, and he took me to the theatre. After that I could do no less than ask him to supper, and because I do this you treat me in this disgraceful fashion. It would have been far better if I had adhered to my resolution and refused to become your wife. I could never be happy with a man of your jealous disposition and I came to tell you that this morning. You had promised to get me out of my difficulties, but now, of course, I cannot ask you to do that. My pride would prevent me. I daresay I shall manage to get through somehow or another, and probably in time I shall forget you. Of course, you will not try to see me again; it is far better that we should not meet any more. Not that I bear any malice, Richard, not but what I will be a friend to you in case you need one. Now let us shake hands and say good-bye."

Kate Lingen's words were low and thrilling, her voice trembled, and the real tears rose to her eyes. It was a consummate piece of acting, and the woman was perfectly well aware of it. Barca hesitated just a moment fighting against his own cool common-sense. Yet he was thrilled and swayed, and the passion that filled him rose and overflowed its banks. He held the slim, shaking hands in a grip that was forcible and painful.

"Come inside," he said hoarsely. "I cannot let you go like this. I am a fool, a double-dyed fool for my pains, and I am making care for myself with my eyes wide open. I wish to Heaven I had never seen you, that I had never come under your influence. But I can't get away from my destiny; it is futile to try."

Kate Lingen sighed gently. She had won her battle much more easily than she had anticipated, and it required all her art to keep the look of triumph from her face. A few moments later she was lying back in a comfortable armchair listening to what Barca had to say. He paced impatiently up and down the room, and seemed to be struggling to keep something to himself.

"We must go on as we are," he said. "In fact, we are bound to go on as we are. You shall have all the money you require; indeed, you would have had it before now but for the fact that I had a fool to deal with—a fool whose impatience and headstrong folly has nearly ruined everything. I should have struck the first blow last night, only the idiot in question rendered any definite action on my part dangerous. Perhaps tonight or tomorrow night I shall be able to move once more, but on that head I cannot speak definitely till this evening. I wonder if I dare trust you."

Kate Lingley's big eyes were turned up imploringly.

"Of course you can trust me," she whispered. "You can trust me with anything. What is this great secret, and from whence do you expect to obtain the large sums of money that you were looking forward to? Tell me, I must know, Richard. I insist upon knowing."

Again Barca hesitated, then he strode across the room and caught the woman by the wrists in a grip that was painful. As he bent down his dark eyes gleamed forbiddingly.

"Very well," he said, "I am going to do a foolish thing, a thing that I cannot help when you look at me like that. And if you betray me, if you forget that there are limits to my patience—but that threat does not frighten you. Now listen."

CHAPTER XIX.

Playing the Game.

Kate Lingen bent her head attentively to hear, but Barca appeared to have changed his mind again. The woman shrugged her shoulders in a petulant sort of way. She knew precisely the class of man she had to deal with. Then she waited for him to speak.

"I am the prince of fools," he said. "Do you know what I am in a position to do? For the last ten years I have been working night and day on one of the most stupendous discoveries ever made. I could revolutionise the whole theory of surgery. I should be a great man, people would point to me as I walk down the street, riches and honors would be showered upon me."

"How delightful!" Kate Lingen said. "Do you really mean to say you have attained all that? It would be very nice to be the wife of such a man. And if it is as you describe, there must be a great deal of money behind it."

"Oh, money, money," Barca said impatiently, "you are always thinking about money. Have you one idea about anything else?"

"There is nothing else," Kate observed. "It is everything. Without money life to me would lose all its charm."

"For money's own sake, I care nothing," Barca replied. "I only need it so that I may sit down in peace and quietness and work out the problems I love so well. In any other country but England a man like myself could go to the Government and demand the means to live whilst the important experiments are going on. As it is, you may slave and starve working in the interests of humanity and only get pitied as a fool for your pains. Or, perhaps, some man, some thick-headed dolt with a little money, comes along and buys for a mere pittance the child of your brain. That is what I mean, that is the sort of life I have been leading. I am not a coward, as you know, I possess no nervous imagination, but there is always one dread before my mind. Suppose I had a long illness, or suppose I met with a bad accident? What would become of me? How should I manage to live till I was able to resume my work? Why, I should have to part with some of my secrets merely to keep body and soul together. And that is why I am not going to lose the opportunity which fortune has placed in my way. It would be folly to spare Ralph Kingsmill now that I am in a position to command his purse."

The woman looked up quickly. She did not feel in the least sorry for Ralph. She would have deprived him of the last penny without compunction. She was anxious to know where this power came in. For Barca spoke as if he had only to raise his hand and the whole of Ralph's money would fall at his feet.

"Do you really mean to say," the woman cried, "that you have got a hold upon him? Oh, this is a good joke. The immaculate and high-minded Ralph Kingsmill has actually committed a crime, has he? Well, I hope you will punish him, even if only for his shabby treatment of me."

Barca appeared to be amused at something. It was not often that he smiled, but his thoughts evidently pleased him now.

"I don't think I had better tell you," he said. "On mature consideration I will not tell you. You must rest content with sharing the plunder. For many years to come Ralph Kingsmill is likely to prove our banker. And if once you knew what my hold upon him is it would be a secret no longer. No, no, my dear Kate, I am fool enough to love you with a passion which is utterly beyond my control, but I don't trust you, as you are perfectly well aware. You are quite capable of throwing me over at the last moment, and working the market for yourself. So long as I can give you what you require there is no reason to worry about the rest."

A greedy look came into Kate Lingen's blue eyes; expansive visions began to rise before her.

"But is it really true?" she asked. "Can you get from Ralph Kingsmill all the money you require?"

"Have I not said so already? And if you want any proof of my statement—"

"Oh, yes. It is absolutely necessary. Have you not already promised me great things? You know what my requirements are and how soon they must be filled. But how am I to be certain that you are not exaggerating? Last night—"

"Last night was unfortunate," Barca said impatiently. "Circumstances were too strong for me, and I had to wait."

"Then why wait any longer? Come back to me with the money in your hand, and then I can believe you. Why not go down again this evening? My dear Richard, you do not seem to recognise how perilously near to the edge of the precipice I am. If you did, I am sure you would not keep me any longer in suspense."

"Very well," Barca said after a long pause. "I think I can manage it tonight. And, unless I am vastly mistaken, I shall call upon you tomorrow morning and literally fill your pockets with gold. What do you say to that?"

Kate Lingen's soft manner vanished; she jumped to her feet and fairly danced round the room.

"Splendid," she cried. "Now you are talking. But you must bring me a lot of money, Richard—great piles of sovereigns and banknotes, so that I can fairly revel in the feeling that I am rich at last. Let me have ten thousand pounds. I have never seen such a heap. It has always been my ambition to have the spending of ten thousands pounds all at once. Now won't you promise me, Richard? I know you will."

The speaker ceased to dance about the room. She came up to Barca and placed her hands on his shoulders, and then she raised her face and kissed him. She could feel the man thrill under the caress and rejoiced in her power over him.

"When you treat me like that," he said hoarsely, "I will do anything you like. But let us have just a little patience. We must not scare our bird, for Ralph Kingsmill is capable of desperate things if driven too far. You must put up with a smaller sum than that for the present, but I can safely promise that you shall have your ten thousand pounds before long. With that be satisfied."

"You will go down tonight," Kate Lingen cried. "Promise me that you will go down tonight."

"Very well," Barca said, "I'll promise. And now you really must leave me because I have many things to do. And if you should dare to play me false after all this——"

Kate Lingen smiled reproachfully. She had the measure of the man by her side; she knew exactly how far to let him go and where to pull him in. Her thoughts were pleasing ones as she walked homewards a little time later. All her troubles were at an end, and she need have no fear for the future. She danced up to her bedroom and flung the big hat and veil aside.

"Madame has been successful," the maid said. "Of course, you would be. Perhaps you would like me to change your dress for something that looks a little less sad?"

"By all means," Kate said gaily. "The poor thing has served its purpose and now we can lay it aside. But there is going to be no more frivolity in the future, Marie. Behold in me the affianced wife of a distinguished man of science, who is not the sort of man to stand any nonsense."

"Dr. Barca," Marie said, with the suspicion of a sneer. "Truly, madame might have done better than that."

"Oh, dear no, Marie. Let me tell you that Dr. Barca has come into a fortune. He has suddenly become very rich; he has made a discovery which will bring him in more money than one knows what to do with. So I have decided to be his wife. Of course, that need not interfere with my little amusements. This afternoon I will get you to take a note round to Mr. Mostyn asking him to dine here. We will have the best dinner that money can procure; we will try to forget the man of science for the moment. Then, tomorrow, I will turn over a new leaf and live in the most discreet way for the future."

"Never," Marie laughed. "It is not discretion that suits you, madame. Perhaps a deal of trouble will arise over this determination of yours, but then that only renders the situation piquant. And as to Mr. Mostyn, he is worth a score of your men of science. There is something like a man for you."

Kate Lingen dismissed the chattering maid at length and sat down to think the situation over. On the whole, she was not quite so pleased with herself as she might have been. She had managed to patch up her quarrel with Barca; she felt pretty sure now that she was going to get from him the money necessary to make her position secure. But, on the other hand, she had tied herself down with a promise which Barca was sure to enforce. He would never consent to a second loan until she was his wife. Kate Lingen was by no means a fool, and she knew perfectly well why Barca had refused the big loan she had suggested. He was going to let her have just enough to keep her out of trouble, but no more cash would be forthcoming until the wedding ceremony was an accomplished fact. Still, it was good to know that the danger was averted, and, as she sat smoking her cigarette, the buoyancy of her nature reasserted itself.

"I think it will be safe this time," she murmured. "Richard will be out of the way tonight, and I must see Mostyn, even if it is only for the last time."

Meanwhile, Barca was making his preparations for the coming campaign. He would go down to Abbey Close by the last train and have it out with Ralph Kingsmill. There was not going to be any of the ordinary blackmailing methods about his system; he had thought out a much more artistic scheme than that. He was still putting the finishing touches to it when a servant came up with the announcement that a gentleman named Clarkson desired to see Dr. Barca for a moment.

Barca's brows contracted and the look in his eyes was not good to see. He hesitated just a moment, then bade the servant bring the visitor upstairs. He turned away from the Bradshaw in front of him as Clarkson entered the room.

"Well," he demanded, "and what do you want? Why do you come here worrying me? If you think to get anything out of me, you have come to the wrong man. I know you to be a broken-down journalist. It is no secret that you are prepared to do anything for money. You think you have got hold of something which is likely to be profitable to you, but let me tell you that you have made a great mistake. And now, if you don't clear out of my place, I'll take the law in my hands and kick you down stairs."

Clarkson smiled at the vehemence of the speech. He was feeling on absolutely safe ground now; he knew of the power which he had left behind him. There was no fear in his heart.

"Don't you think you are talking a little bit at random?" he said. "And as to my being a broken-down journalist, can you honestly say that I look like one?"

For the first time Barca paid his visitor the compliment of glancing in his direction. He was bound to confess that Clarkson was not in the least like the person with whom he had compared him. He looked smart and clean, his hair and moustache were trimmed, he wore a well-fitting frock coat, and had every other appearance of prosperity. The furtive glance in his eyes had vanished, he held his head square and erect, and looked Barca in the face without flinching.

"Perhaps not," Barca admitted. "Evidently you have found somebody upon whose credulity—"

"Now don't go too far," Clarkson said in a cool, steady voice. "Don't go too far, or maybe I shall have to silence you in another fashion. As a matter of fact, I am imposing upon the credulity of nobody. I am what some people might call a brand from the burning. In other words, I have had the chance for which I have been looking so long and have become a respectable member of society again. I don't suppose that interests you in the slightest."

"It doesn't," Barca sneered. "Especially as the fit of respectability is only likely to be temporary."

"We shall see. Anyway, it is no business of yours. But before I quit my old life it is necessary that I shall rid myself of certain obligations, one of which concerns Stephen Holt. I must see him before long and that is why I am here now. I want to know if you will tell me where I can find him."

"How the devil should I know?" Barca cried passionately. "Why do you come pestering me about that blackguard? He may be alive or he may be dead for all I know or care. And if you only came to me with the news that he had departed this life I should be delighted to hear it. I am certain that it would save me a great many loans in the future."

"You do not seem to have much opinion of your future brother-in-law," Clarkson said. "But all this is beside the question. I have asked you where I can find Stephen Holt, and you say you don't know. Is that your final answer?"

"Of course it is. What more can I say?"

"Well, then, I suppose I must apply to another quarter," Clarkson said mysteriously. "It is very unfortunate that you can't tell me this, because it is necessary that I should see Holt without delay. No doubt I shall be able to ascertain what I want to know by going down to Abbey Close tonight."

Barca started slightly. There was a hidden meaning under Clarkson's words, and he did not fail to detect it.

"Who is likely to enlighten you down there?" he asked.

"Oh, there are more persons than one," Clarkson responded. "For instance, there is the mysterious gentleman who smokes cigarettes and prefers to pass his time in the bedroom which Mr. Kingsmill allows you to occupy at Abbey Close. I have no doubt if I call on this person he will tell me all I want to know about Stephen Holt. I'll go down tomorrow and see."

CHAPTER XX.

A Neat Stratagem.

Cool as he was, Barca writhed a little under Clarkson's steady gaze. He would have liked to ask a few questions, but Clarkson had already turned to the door as if the interview were closed. And before Barca would make up his mind what to say next, his visitor had vanished.

"Now, what the dickens is the meaning of it all?" Barca muttered. "Why does that chap come and bother me to know where Holt is? He must know something definite or his manner would not be so assured. And yet he says and does nothing which leads one to suppose that he is after the plunder. He must have somebody behind him, somebody who has paid his debts and redeemed his wardrobe, and, at any rate for the present, has made him a respectable member of society. I must make it my business to find out who is behind this fellow. But, first of all, I must go down to Abbey Close immediately. The source of the danger has been removed. After that, I shall be able to tackle Mr. Jim Clarkson and the mysterious figure behind him. Really, I ought to be much obliged to him for warning me. Still, he must keep for the present."

Meanwhile, Clarkson had gone on his way in the direction of Dick Charteris's rooms. He found the latter eagerly awaiting him and thirsting for details.

"Well," he asked, "how did it turn out?"

"It was exceedingly brief," Clarkson smiled. "Our friend Barca was in a very bad temper about something, and his words were more forcible than polite. Just as I had anticipated, he told me that he had heard nothing more about Holt, nor did he want to. When I insisted, he became more or less abusive. Then I said exactly what you told me to say—that it was my intention to go down to Abbey Close and see if I could not get the information required from a mysterious individual who was concealed in Dr. Barca's bedroom."

"And that fetched him, I expect" Dick laughed.

"Oh, yes, that fetched him right enough. I had hit the right nail on the head, and he could not conceal his chagrin. Depend upon it Dr. Barca will not lose the opportunity of going down to Abbey Close tonight."

"So I have calculated," Dick said. "I have more or less prepared the ground, and now I think I can run the risk of sending a telegram to Kingsmill, saying that he is pretty sure to see Barca before bedtime. You have done exceedingly well, and I am greatly obliged to you. I have got the telegram already written out, and perhaps you will be good enough to dispatch it for me. Then you can come back in about an hour's time after I have seen Mr. Vandernort; in fact, it will be far better if you see that gentleman and explain your position to him. He is a typical hard-headed American business man, but at bottom he is by no means a bad sort, and you need not anticipate any trouble with him. After all, it is only playing the game properly for you to meet him face to face."

"Certainly I will do it," Clarkson said. 'And I hope it will be the last humiliating experience I shall ever have."

The speaker departed with the telegram, and Dick sat down to await the coming of Mr. Vandernort. The American arrived presently alert and eager to hear what Dick had to say.

"I guess I got your letter," he said. "And now, Mr. Charteris, what is all this about? Somebody who calls himself Stephen Holt comes along and walks off with all my daughter's jewelry, and almost before we realize our loss, you turn up, a perfect stranger, and make yourself master of the situation. Seems to me that you would have done better on our side of the water than this. For you have a cool, level head of your own, and no mistake."

"That is very good of you," Dick laughed. "But, you see, I was rather fortunate in having all the cards in my hand. I was fortunate, also, in having to deal with a gentleman like yourself, who does not care to rush off to the police every time he has some little loss. By the way, you have had the whole of Miss Vandernort's jewels back, haven't you?"

"All but one item," Vandernort explained. "They came with an anonymous letter saying that the missing trinket would be returned as soon as possible. But say, Mr. Charteris, why did you want me yesterday morning to apply for a warrant for the arrest of Stephen Holt, when we know pretty well that he was not the thief at all?"

"We were not certain of that," Dick said demurely. "A man professing to be Mr. Holt called at your place and took the stuff, and you are perfectly justified in going to Scotland Yard and asking for that warrant. As a matter of fact, I may tell you between ourselves that the jewelry was stolen by a man named Clarkson, an acquaintance of Holt, who impersonated his friend for that occasion only. Now if you will have a little patience with me, I want to tell you a great deal about this Clarkson, because he has been more or less unfortunate all his life, and is now making a really sincere effort to obtain an honest living. I think that after you have heard his story you will not be inclined to take any proceedings against him. Perhaps I had better get to the point."

"Fire away," Vandernort said cheerfully. "I suppose you won't mind if I smoke while you are talking?"

Dick plunged into his narrative at once, and long before he had finished the story of Clarkson and his child he had the pleasure of seeing that he was making the right impression on his visitor. There were other matters that Dick had to introduce, and duing the long narrative the listener's attention never flagged for a moment.

"Well, I should smile," Vandernort said when the story was finished. "I never heard a more extraordinary yarn than that, even in a Western newspaper. You have done pretty well, Mr. Charteris, and I wish you well through this business. I see now what a clever move it was of yours to get me to issue that warrant for Holt's arrest. It enables you to force the hand of this fellow Barca, and save your future brother-in-law at the same time. And you needn't worry about Clarkson, I am not going out of my way to stop him from getting an honest living. There is only one thing I regret, and that is that I can't come down with you and see the fun. I suppose, in the circumstances, that would hardly do?"

"Well, it is rather a family matter," Dick said. "But the very next time I am up in town I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon you and telling you all about it. It seems to me that you have had a narrow escape as well as the rest of us."

The American's face grew hard just for a moment.

"I see what you are driving at," he said. "There is no getting away from the fact that Stephen Holt had been paying a lot of attention to my daughter, and I am quite sure that she was growing exceedingly fond of him. We might never have found out the man's true character if this Clarkson hadn't come along and walked off with the jewels. But for that, and your opportune appearance, I have not the slightest doubt that Holt would have married my girl sooner or later, much against my wishes as it might have been."

"But you would have prevented that," Dick said.

"Young man, there you display a lamentable ignorance of the typical American girl," Vandernort said solemnly. "We call ourselves a free and independent race, but the married men in America are nothing of the kind. Directly a man has a wife and family, especially if the family consists of daughters, it is his bounded duty to spend the rest of his life working like a galley slave so that they may enjoy themselves. It matters little how his health suffers, or how he needs a holiday, he has just got to go on till he drops in his tracks. He has no right to ask a single question, he has no right to expostulate on the score of extravagance, he hardly even has the right to live. And do you suppose that a self-respecting American girl will ask her father's consent to the marriage between herself and the man of her choice? No, sir. That father would consider himself lucky if he got off with a dowry which was less than half his fortune. If you had not come along and given the show away, my little girl would have married Holt, and I should have had to grin and bear it."

"You have my profound sympathy," Dick said gravely. "But here is Clarkson coming up the stairs."

Clarkson came into the room and hesitated as he saw the visitor standing there. Dick came forward and laid his hand on Clarkson's shoulder. Then he drew him forward.

"This is Mr. Vandernort," he said. "I have told him your story from start to finish without concealing anything, and without saying anything in your favor. I think you will not have anything to fear as far as Mr. Vandernort is concerned."

"I guess not," Vandernort said. "It seems to me that you are rather a young man to take it lying down as you have done."

"I am not going to take it lying down any more, sir," Clarkson responded. "I ought to apologize most humbly to you for my behaviour. I have to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness and clemency. But somehow the words do not come easy; they have a false and insincere ring about them.

"Clarkson is a bit of a stylist," Dick laughed. "Like all true literary men, he has a nice feeling for the proper meaning of words."

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter," Vandernort said. "You seem to have sent everything back to me without any prompting on the part of anybody. That is a point in your favor. We won't say anything about the missing trinket, for I have had more than the value of that out of this little entertainment. And now, Mr. Clarkson, if you should ever be tempted to cross the water, I daresay that I could find something for you——"

"That is very good and kind," Clarkson said quietly. "I know many men in my position who have tried their fortunes successfully in America, but that is not quite my idea. I intend to live everything down in the country where I was bred and born. I will not be content till I have recovered my lost self-respect and the respect of others. I want those people who have turned from me with proper contempt to come and shake hands with me and feel that I am on the same level with them again. It is a big task, but I am going to attempt it, and I feel certain that I shall succeed."

"That you will," Vandernort said heartily. "And let me be the first man to shake hands with you and let you feel that you are on his level once more. And now I must be going. These little amusements are all very well in their way, but I must not forget that I am a workingman with a daughter behind me who keeps me up to the collar. Let me know how matters go, Mr. Charteris."

Dick promised that he would do so, and the American vanished as if he had not a moment to spare. Dick turned to Clarkson and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"You are well out of that," he said. "And now we can forget all about it. Still, there is a good deal to be done, and not much time to spare. What you have to do now is to keep a close eye upon Barca and let me know as soon as he makes a move. I don't suppose he will do anything till very late tonight; still he may, and we can't be too careful. Keep a close eye on his lodgings, and as soon as anything definite transpires, go to the nearest telephone call office and ring me up here. There is nothing more for the present, so far as I can see."

Clarkson departed on his errand, and Dick set himself down with as much patience as he could command to wait for events. The afternoon dragged slowly on, and evening came at length without any sign from Clarkson. It was quite late before Dick despatched a second telegram to Ralph. There was some little risk in doing so, but he wanted to make assurance doubly sure. The clock was close on the hour of ten before there came a sharp tingle of the telephone and Dick took down the receiver.

"Is that you?" came Clarkson's voice. "Barca has just sent for a cab. He is going down to Abbey Close by the last train. Is there any more that I can do for you tonight?"

Dick responded curtly that there was not. He would see Clarkson in the morning; then he proceeded to put a few things together, rang the bell, and his man answered the summons. His message was short and to the point.

"I am going down home," he said. "Will you go round to Shorter's and tell them to have the motor here in half an hour? I shall require no assistance. I am going to drive myself."

(To be continued.)

## INVALID PRIEST BURNED TO DEATH FROM SPARK OF PIPE

Three Rivers, Que., Feb. 23—Abbe Elie Blais met his death Saturday afternoon under peculiar circumstances. The reverend gentleman, who suffered from paralysis, was a patient at the St. Joseph's Hospital. It is supposed he was enjoying his after-dinner pipe, and fell asleep letting the pipe fall, which set fire to his clothes. When assistance reached him life was almost extinct, his face, head and shoulders being badly burned. He died shortly afterwards. Deceased was 58 years of age and was born in Yamachiche.

## HON. MR. LaBILLOIS INJURED IN WRECK

Moncton, Feb. 22—This morning about 8 o'clock No. 36 train from Campbellton collided with a branch train at Dalhousie Junction, caused by the main line switch being turned to the branch track. Two cars of the branch train went over the dump and two cars of No. 36 went off the track. Hon. C. H. LaBillois, who was aboard the branch line, was slightly injured.

This will Keep the Boy on the Farm

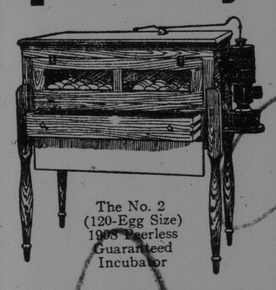
It Will Give Him a Real Start in Life

QUIT worrying about how you're going to "give the boy a better chance in life than his father had." Let up wondering how you're going to manage to give him a start. Fix it so he can make his own start—and have fun doing it. He will stay on the farm if you go at it the right way.

This way:

Any normal, healthy boy likes to "fool 'round" with live things—chickens for instance. Make him work at it and he'll tire of it quick. But give him a little business of his own,—set him to raising chickens on his own hook,—and he won't let up till he makes a success of it.

I can arrange the whole thing for you,—teach your boy how to succeed at poultry-raising for profit,—show him where to save work and worry doing it,—stand right back of him and coach him along,—and find him a good, quick-cash buyer who will pay the highest prices for all the poultry he raises or the eggs he can sell.



The No. 2 (120-Egg Size) 1908 Peerless Guaranteed Incubator

In a word, I will make a BUSINESS poultryman of your boy,—and I don't want a cent for doing it. I want you, for your part, just to help give the boy a start,—like this:

Send for my free book—"When Poultry Pays." That will give you an idea of what there really is in up-to-date poultry raising,—of how much money anybody with hustle and gumption can get out of it.

And the book will tell you what kind of an outfit will get the most money out of poultry, quickest and easiest, and surest,—my Peerless outfit,—the Peerless Guaranteed Incubator, and the Peerless Brooder.

Then I will tell you just how

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you can get an outfit for your boy—either the big size (200 eggs in the incubator—200 chicks in the brooder) or the minor size—(120 and 120)—Without paying a cent on the outfit until a year from now. By the time that first payment is due, the outfit will have earned far more than it cost, and the boy will know enough about the poultry-raising game to want to stick to it.

I know plenty of young folks who are earning their college money this way—and learning hard business sense as well—learning things that will make them succeed in other lines later in life.

I can show you why that's so. Write to me and ask me why the Peerless makes a worth-while present that will earn the biggest kind of dividends for you and for the boy,—or for the girl, for that matter. Get the free book.

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