

THE ST. JOHN EVENING TIMES, MONDAY, DECEMBER 19 1904.

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET. Millions of Mischief.

By HEADON HILL. Author of "By a Hair's Breadth," "The Duke's Deed," "A Race with Ruin," Etc., Etc. "And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, millions of mischief."—Julius Caesar, Act IV, Scene 1.

I could quite understand that he spoke truth in that, for the subterfuge of the warders at the prison suggested careful organization, in the preliminaries of which the principal would not have appeared. Nor was I meditating any such attempt as he hinted at, for the simple reason that without friends and without money any measure would have been only a matter of hours. No, my policy seemed to be to appear to accede to his demands in the hope that, during the fortnight's grace I might discover the missing link in the evidence necessary to secure my pardon. That he would be a difficult man to deceive as to my ultimate intentions I foresaw, but I had this in my favor, that he believed me guilty, and would not, if I played my cards well, suspect me of emulating my comparative liberty to upset the verdict of the jury.

But the question which pressed most closely was whether a fortnight, during which I should doubtless be under close surveillance, would be sufficient for my purpose. Since my arrest I had always longed for a month of absolute freedom to pursue independent inquiries, and now not only would the time be curtailed by one half, but I should be virtually in Herzog's custody. The question called for a review of the situation, to ascertain if I could extract a ray of hope therefrom. In all truth it was but the merest glimmer. As I have stated, the alleged crime for which I had been condemned was the murder by poison of my mother and my sister, Clara. The widow and daughter of a country clergyman, they had lived in a modest way in a cottage near Brockenhurst in the New Forest, to which I had been a visitor as often as my military duties as captain in the artillery would allow. One of the principal points made against me at the trial was that their deaths had occurred, at intervals of six months, during these visits, and that I was the only one who would benefit pecuniarily.

With the nurse and the doctor I had been present at the death-bed of both my dear ones—my mother's first and a little later my sister's—and it was on three disjointed words that Clara had whispered in my ear that I had built my slender hopes. Raising herself with her last effort, she had mustered strength to breathe the unmeaning words: "Man, mask, Roger." On being accused, I had mentioned this strange saying to my solicitor, who had been able to make nothing of it except that she may have alluded to a masked man whose name was Roger. In this I had agreed with him, but I had always thought that he had made no real effort to trace out the mysterious "Roger." In fact, my solicitor, like all the world save one, was, I knew, after my first interview with him, convinced of my guilt.

Could I, in a fortnight, and with the basilisk eye of my unfathomable liberator on me, run this unknown Roger to ground? Well, as the alternative was to go back to Winchester and be hanged on Thursday, I would at least make the attempt. Draining my glass, I flung the stump of my cigar into the empty grate and met Herzog's mocking gaze. I struggled not to quail under it, for I had to live up to my reputation if I was to live at all. "A desperate wretch he had called me and a desperate wretch he must continue to think me while I searched for a rift in the clouds. "Well, my noble captain; I can see that you have decided to cheat the gallows by the paradoxical method of deserving them twice over. Is it not so?" he said.

"I appear to have no option in the matter," I replied, affecting the sullen resignation that under the circumstances would have been natural to the villain he deemed me. "Pshaw! I knew all along that you being what you are, would take the sensible view, and there is this consolation—that if you are caught after crime number two you can only be hanged once," he chuckled. "And now, my friend, that is the last word I shall say to harrow you," he went on in a pleasant tone. "A little harshness was necessary to show you the futility of trying to gammon me with pleas of innocence, but having accepted the situation you shall be treated with all courtesy during our association—so long as you are true to the compact. Only so long as that. But it will be your own fault, if you do not find me a cheerful and resourceful comrade, with bowels of compassion enough to take a sporting interest in your ultimate escape. Every word this man spoke filled me with loathing and disgust. I was not sure that I did not dislike him only overtures for amity more than his hostile sneers. "Get us come to business," I said. "Who is this that I am to kill? He should be a person of some importance to warrant such elaborate preparations." Herzog took a sip from his glass and eyed me as though to discover if I was ripe for the disclosure. "Yes, he would be considered impor-

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