Tale of Mystery

CHAPTER VI.

A RECKLESS ENEMY.

(Continued.)

'Why was I an idiot, you mean? The questions are about the same in different forms. The truth is he got me out of a scrape I was a fool ever to get into. I was over in Antwerp with a rowdy American I picked up in the playrooms at Ostend, and in the course of things we got into a beastly street row. Before you could say Tommyrot, a lot of beastly-looking sailor chappies were round us, and more than one bally knife was out of its sheath. I was in a ghastly funk, I'll own, and would have given five pounds for the sight of a police Johnnie. Then this Count fellow bangs slang into the middle of the whole show, and before the beggars with the knives quite knew what was happening, he had waltzed us out of the mess, and into a place of safety. I'm bound to say he's a plucky Johnnie, and awfully handy with his fists. He floored two or three of the beggars in ripping style.'

'You shouldn't get in such places,' laughed Dessie. 'I'm bound to say it served you right. You're not to be trusted.'

'That's all right, I know. And if I could have paid the fellow a reward—a fiver, or two or three of them, for that matter — I shouldn't have cared. But he's not the sort of man you can offer coin to, don't you know, is he? Well, he froze to me, as ill luck would have it, and when he knew I was staying at Ostend, nothing would please him but to come over to the place. And then, what the dickens was I to do? How could I help it? I had to introduce him. He did the rest himself. But I'd rather have had one of those beggars' knives stuck into me than what's happened.'

He spoke quite savagely.

'But do you mean really that you know no more of the Count than you have told me, Mr. Vezey?'

'Not a syllable, except a lot of gas he himself has blown off about his estates, and family, and connections, and a lot more rot of that sort.'

'And does Dora know how little you know?'

'Oh she's got no eyes for anything but his face, and no ears except for his sickening compliments. I could kick the fellow when I hear them.'

'Why don't you, then?' said Dessie quietly.

'What good would it do?' I should get a bally hiding, and be shut out of this house for my pains.'

'And what do you yourself really think of him?'

'That he's a bounder, or worse. 'Pon my soul, I'm sometimes afraid of what I do think of him. He does such devilish odd things. Here's an instance to-night, even. After you two had left the table, we sat smoking cigarettes for a couple of minutes, and then he began to chaff me about all sorts of rot; and at last about my not being able to smoke strong cigars. He riled me; he always does. His manner's enough to do that to tell the truth. He seems to rub my hair the wrong way; and I let him run on, till he bet me a fiver I could not smoke one of his cigars with him at a sitting without leaving my chair to be sick. Of course I took him on. A fiver's a fiver, to say nothing of the pleasure of winning it from him.'

'Well?' asked Dessie, showing more interest in the incident than her companion expected.

'We lighted up, each taking a weed from his case—and strong ones they were, too I'll own—and puffed away. But before we'd been a couple of minutes at that game he put his hand to his heart, or his throat, or somewhere, and said he felt queer, and must get a box of lozenges from his great coat. I told him one of the servants could get it or bring him his coat; but that wouldn't suit him it seemed, and he went out of the room saying he'd be back in a minute. He was twenty minutes gone, if he was a second. I'd nearly finished the great black cigar he gave me when he came back; so I know how long he was. His, by the way, was scarcely touched. He said he hadn't brought the lozenges he wanted, and had been out to buy them. But his face looked as black and angry as his dress coat, and he muttered something or other about not being well, and he seemed awfully excited. When I asked him why he hadn't been smoking his cigar, he first swore, and then said I was an idiot; that he had finished his first cigar, and that was his second. But I didn't believe him though what the deuce he'd been doing I don't know.'

His hearer had a shrewd guess, but didn't express it. Instead of that she laughed and asked—

'Did he give you the 'fiver,' Mr. Vezey?'

"Yes, with some sort of rubbish about it being the cheapest and yet dearest five pounds' worth he had ever bought; I don't know what he meant."

After this answer Dessie turned the subject, and chatted about some other matters. George Vezey's thoughts were, however, all tinged with one colour—regret for having lost Mrs. Markham—and he was soon back to the same theme; but before he had been long indulging his lament, Dessie made an excuse and left him.

She could not wait any longer to verify the suspicion that had occurred to her, as to the object of the man's absence from the dinner table.

She ran up to her room, feeling much excited.

A glance at the place confirmed her suspicions. Someone had been there, turning over her things.

When she had dressed for dinner she had left everything in order. The luggage from her own rooms had been brought to the house, and she had unpacked before dressing. The books and the papers she had put back into one of the boxes—a strong iron box of German make, with a peculiar key and fastening—and the clothes and hats she had placed away in the wardrobe and drawers. She had also taken pains to set out the little table which had been placed for her writing in one of the windows. On this her writing materials lay ready—a large blotting pad which she always used and a folding desk slope.

At the right hand side of the slope close to the window she had left the broken cup.

It was gone.

Many of the things in the room had been turned over and disarranged. The drawers, in which everything had been laid tidily, had evidently been hurriedly searched, and an attempt made to put the contents back so that a superficial observation might not detect that they had been disturbed.

But to Dessie, knowing what she did, the trail of the searcher was easy to follow.

She rang the bell and questioned the maid who had charge of the room. She knew the girl well, and liked her.

"Martin I broke a teacup, and brought it here, I think, so that it could be kept. Have you seen it? I am almost sure I left it on the writing table when I went down to dinner."

"I saw it when I brought you some hot water, Miss, and when I was helping you to put your things away, and afterwards when you were dressing. I didn't see it when I came up afterwards to light the gas and make the room ready."

"When was that, Martin?"

"I was very late to-night miss. I'd only been down about five minutes or so when you rang the bell now."

"Then I must have taken it down myself without thinking about it. I suppose none of the other servants would be likely to take it away, thinking it was put out to be thrown away as it was broken?"

"No one comes into the room except myself, Miss."

"You're quite certain of that?"

"Quite positive, Miss quite," said the girl, emphatically."

"Well, of course, it's of no consequence whatever," said Dessie, pleasantly. "Only I wanted to see whether I could really be so foolish as to mean to do one thing with it and then do another. And it's quite clear I did."

"Is there anything else, Miss?" asked the maid.

"Nothing, thank you." But when the girl had closed the door behind her and gone Dessie's face grew very grave. There might be some gap in the evidence, but she was content with it and accepted it as proof that her antagonist had left his companion at the dinner table, after securing that he would stop there by making the bet with him, and had then come to her room to search for the cup containing the remnant of the poison, so that he could destroy the traces of his deed. And the frown which George Vezey had said darkened his face on his return was caused by his failure.

The bottle into which Dessie had poured the few drops of poisoned tea was a small one, and in her hurry she had thrust it right into the middle of the bed between the mattresses. She felt for it now, and a smile of triumph lighted her face as she pulled it out and held it up to the gaslight to examine it.

But as she turned to lock it away a fresh thought occurred to her. If this man meant still to try and get possession of the bottle, had she not better hide it instead of merely locking it up? This suggested to her that she should examine her locked box very closely, to ascertain whether it had been opened.

A scrutiny of the lock showed her nothing, nor when she unfastened it could she be more certain. She had put the books and papers into it in a hurry without any method, while she was not quite certain what papers she had brought with her. But the contents were jumbled together in a manner which left it quite an open question whether or not they had been tampered with in the same manner as things in the drawers, and as a result the girl determined not to put the poison there, but to find some secure hiding-place for it somewhere in the house.

This resolve alone showed how great and growing was her fear of the man who was thus proving himself so daring an antagonist. This fear was uppermost in her mind as she walked uneasily up and down the room, thinking closely what ought to be her next step in the struggle with the dangerous man who was ready to go to such desperate lengths against her in defence of his purpose.

To be continued.

Facts About Motherhood

The experience of Motherhood is a trying one to most women and marks distinctly an epoch in their lives. Not one woman in a hundred is prepared or understands how to properly care for herself. Of course nearly every woman nowadays has medical treatment at the time of child-birth, but many approach the experience with an organism unfitted for the trial of strength, and when the strain is over her system has received a shock from which it is hard to recover. Following right upon this comes the nervous strain of caring for the child, and a distinct change in the mother results.

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Anderson, S. J.
Aitken, Miss Lillie
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Axford, Philip
B
Bannister, Miss Patience, Hospital, Forest Road
Barnes, Mrs. E., retd.
Basha, S., late Birchy Cove
Berry, Patrick, grocer
Bright, Wm. J., care G. P. O.
Bishop, R., care Gen'l P. Office
Brown, Patrick, Gower Street
Butt, George, Forest Rd.
Butt, Mrs. M. A., Duggan Street
Butler, Wm., Flower Cove Road
Bartlett, Robert, Bannerman St.
Buckley, Mrs. Wm., New Gower Street
Bursey, Mrs. Wm., card
Burke, Miss May, care Jackman's
Bemister, Albert A., Gower Street
C
Crane, Roland, care Post Office
Carter, Capt. Alex.
Carter, Edwin, Duggan Street
Carey, James, Duckworth Street
Cameron, John, Plumber
Carew, A., Mullock St.
Cooney, Mrs. James, card, Water Street
Coombs, Nellie, card
Cozens, John
Connors, P. J., Care G. P. O.
Curtis, H. V., late Grand Falls
Carnell, Bert, care Reid Nfld. Co.
Cullen, Michael, St. John's
Clarke, Mrs. E., retd.
Chatman, Miss Sarah, late New York
Carew, Miss Ellen, Duckworth Street
Criff, Miss L.
Colley, Wm. E.
Cotter, D., Neagle's Hill
D
Davis, Thomas, care Gen'l P. Office
Dawley, Miss M. J., Gower Street
Delaney, F. E., late Summerville
Delaney, Miss Bessie, Military Road
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Driscoll, Mrs. C., Water Street
Dooley, Miss Josephine, card, Cochrane St.
Downs, Mr., Pennywell Road
Dawe, Miss W. S.
DeGrish Sarah, Long's Hill
E
Eagan, Mrs. Catherine, Cornwall Avenue
Elliott, S. G.
F
Fewer, M., card
Freeman, John, Government House
French, Wm. of Wm., Brazil's Square
Fitzpatrick, Miss Minnie, card
Fisher, Lizzie, retd., New Gower Street
Fisher, Robert, Pope St.
Fildian, Mrs. Wm., Water St.
Finney, Miss Kittie, Military Road
Ford, Miss A., George's St.
Flinn, Mrs. M. H.
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Fifield, Lucy
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Garland, Kenneth, St. John's
Garland, Wm.
Garner, J. A.
Graham, C. E.
Graw, John J.
Gelling, L., care Post Office
Goss, James, St. John's
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Grouchy, M., retd.
Gatherall, Ester
H
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Hamilton, John
Harlyan, Mrs. Mary, retd.
Heffley, Ira L., card
Healey, R., Blackhead
Hearn, Richard, retd.
Heffrin, Wm., card
Hillier, Minnie, late St. Lawrence
Hicqey, Mrs. Patrick, Victoria Road
Howell, Miss Violet, Hayward's Avenue
Holloway, Miss M. L., card
Houlahan, Mrs. Samuel, Gear Street
Harrie, Katie, retd.
Hansem, Sansom, Lime St.
Harvey, Mrs. C. B.
Hart, Mrs. Patrick
J
Jacobs, Miss R. Jane, LeMarchant Road
Janes, James, retd.
Janes, Mrs. J., Gower St.
Johnson, Mrs. George, George's Street
ockman, Mrs. Joseph, Water St. West
K
Kahter, C. W., Rink Co.
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Keough, Miss Ella, Sebastine Street
Kehoe, Mrs. Patrick, King's Road
Kearsey, James, Pennywell Road
Knubon, Alfred
Knox, John C.
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LeMessurier, Mrs. Alex., care General P. Office
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Martin, Miss Alice, Queen's Road
Marshall, Wm.
Maher, Nellie, Flower Hill
Martin, Gus., card
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McWhite, E. R.
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Noonan, F. J.
Noftell, Mrs. Joseph, Gower Street
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Oakley, Miss Mary, late St. Pierre
O'Neil, Miss P., card, Pope Street
Oliver, Mary
O'Rielly, Pauline, retd.
O'Neil, Peter, Blackmarsh Road
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Ryan, Enos, Moore St.
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Ryan, Miss L., Barnes' Rd.
Rendell, Mrs. Carolina, Goodview Street
Rielly, Miss Maggie, late Grand Falls
Ridout, Miss Mary, Circular Road
Ridout, Miss Mary, Alaindale Road
Ross, Mrs. M., Torring St.
Rogers, Mrs. Roland, New Gower Street
Roache, Thomas, late Cobalt, Ont.
Rodgers, Enos
Rose, W. D., West End
Ryan, Anthony, Plymouth Road
S
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Skiffington, John, or family
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Squires, Mrs. George
Squires, John S.
Squires, B. H.
T
Taylor Charles, Casey's St.
Tracey, A., retd.
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Tobin, John, slip
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Tolk, Noah, New Gower Street
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Whalen, Joseph, Fever Hospital
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Zinear, Mrs. Maud, George's Street

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