

Essentially

Why Not Now?

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Tale of Mystery

CHAPTER V.
A DARING ATTEMPT.

"But a reaction soon set in, and Dessie began to fear that such a victory over such a man had been won too cheaply, and that this apparently weak compliance with her terms was only meant as a cover for some much stronger move."

And she soon had a terrible proof that this was so.

When the Count did not keep his appointment for that afternoon, Mrs. Markham was first impatient, then irritable, next nervous, and lastly full of anxiety lest some accident had occurred; and she passed quickly through these different moods. Dessie could not, of course, tell her what she knew the reason to be, and that in all probability the expected visitor would not come at all. But she was certainly unprepared for what happened.

After some two hours of waiting, in which Dora shed tears more than once and seemed inclined to be hysterical, the Count was announced. He came in full of apologies to Mrs. Markham for the delay, and told copious untruths, as Dessie knew, about the cause of his lateness.

The widow was too excited and agitated by his arrival to pay any heed to the greeting between the other two. The man's nonchalant impudence was so complete that Dessie was at a

momentary loss what to do, and before she had recovered herself, he was bending over her with a grave bow. "I have brought the proofs," he whispered and then turned to speak again to Mrs. Markham.

He had scarcely arrived when afternoon tea was brought in, and with it came the young fellow who had long been in love with Dora, George Vezey. After greeting the Count in any but a cordial manner, he sat down by Dessie and lapsed into a silence so unusual that the others rallied him upon the change.

The Count, on the other hand, was all lightness of speech, jest, and compliment; so much so that Dessie was sure he had some purpose to hide, and she watched him with quiet but unrelaxing vigilance.

Something in his manner made her very suspicious of him. Presently she noticed that while insisting upon handing her a cup of tea, he stood holding it for a moment with his back to her, while he finished telling a story he had begun, and he let the spoon fall, and had to stoop, with his back still towards Dessie, in order to pick it up and replace it on the saucer. It was only a little thing, but Dessie saw that he had dropped the spoon intentionally, and believed he had done it to get an opportunity to tempt with the tea.

She knew the man was an expert in poisons; and instantly she resolved not to drink a drop of it. She stirred it slowly, pretended to taste it, and making a wry face.

"My dear Dora, what have you done with my tea? You are so excited, you have given me yours. It is all sugar. It will just suit you. Give me yours."

"Very well, dear. Give it me."

"Allow me," said the Count, quickly going to Dessie, and holding out his hand for the cup.

"Thank you, don't trouble. I am going to change my chair," answered Dessie, coolly, trying to keep the cup from him.

"Pardon me, I cannot allow that; it is a trouble," he replied, and pushing forward, he deliberately took the

cup and saucer from her, and then, as if in confusion, let them drop with a crash to the ground, uttering loud apologies and expressions of regret for his clumsiness.

A glance showed Dessie that though the cup was broken, and most of the tea spilled, there was yet enough left in the fragment of the cup, and in the saucer, for the purpose of analysis, to confirm or dissolve her suspicions.

"Oh, Dora, it is my favourite cup," she cried, and stooping took the larger half of the broken cup, poured into it what tea remained in the saucer, and, without waiting to say more hurried than it out of the room. As she was passing the Count, he made a quick movement, as if to strike the cup from her hand, under the pretence of assisting her, but she avoided him, and as she glanced into his face their eyes met, and he knew that she had discovered his daring attempt to poison her, and was escaping with the proofs of his guilt.

She knew now well enough why he had ventured to return to the house, and why he had seemed to yield so readily when they had met in the Square.

He had been to fetch the drug which he needed for the attempt on her life.

CHAPTER VI.
A RECKLESS ENEMY.

The incident had happened so suddenly, passed so quickly, and arisen out of such a commonplace circumstance, that until Dessie was alone in

her own room she did not realise fully that she had actually had a most narrow escape of losing her life.

The simple manner in which the attempt had been made, its consummate daring, and the audacity of endeavouring to poison her in a cup of tea given so openly before her friends filled her with such intense astonishment, that she could only marvel at her assailant's recklessness.

But astonishment soon gave away to fear. The man who dared such an attempt would dare anything; and Dessie longed earnestly for Tom Cheriton's return, and began to regret that she had taken her first step in his absence. She was no match for this murderer, and as she sat and eyed the broken fragile cup, with its few drops of what she believed to be a subtle poison, she grew almost afraid to be alone, and trembled and glanced about her nervously, as if expecting an attack even in her own room.

It was some minutes before she could shake off her agitation and regain any degree of self-possession. Then she emptied the contents of the cup into a small bottle, and this she carefully hid lest anyone should take it away in mistake.

After that she washed out the cup, placed it on the table that had been arranged for her writing materials, and then returned to the small drawing-room in which the incident had occurred.

"Whatever is the matter with you to-day, child?" said Mrs. Markham, as she entered. "You've been doing all sorts of curious things."

"I suppose it must be the effect of Tom's absence," answered the girl, with a smile.

"Or the result of being introduced to de Montalt," said George Vezey. "People do all sorts of things after they've been introduced to him."

This with a glance at Mrs. Markham, "I believe you have the evil eye, Count, or some such beastly thing as that."

"That is a very unpleasant as well as a very stupid thing to say, George," said Mrs. Markham, annoyed by this; but the Count laughed good humouredly and easily. He did not care a rap for the young fellow's temper; indeed he rather enjoyed it. It was not in any way likely to interfere with his plans, so he could afford to be tolerant of the other's temper.

The relations between Mrs. Markham and young Vezey were naturally strained just now. Till the Count's coming they had been virtually engaged. Vezey was good-looking, fair, slim, and well-tailored; and he rather affected the effeminate manner of a young fellow about town. But in Dessie's opinion there was more affection than effeminacy about him; and she liked him, and believed him to be much more capable than his surface manner suggested.

Mrs. Markham had been in the habit of making use of him for all conceivable purposes; and he had taken a genuine pleasure in dancing attendance upon her everywhere, and helping her in a thousand odd one ways in which an attentive man can help the woman he loves to get the most enjoyment out of life.

But the promotion of de Montalt had changed his views of things altogether. Vezey found himself deposited from his position, and took the change in very ill parts, disliking the Count proportionately. Nothing irritated him more than for Dora to take the other man's part against him.

He let the matter pass now, however, with nothing more antagonistic than an angry glance at de Montalt, who smiled more broadly as he saw it. The relations between three out of the four were thus ruffled, and the conversation lagged rather heavily

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until the two men left the house, to which they were to return later to dine.

After dinner the Count and George Vezey stayed so long over their wine and cigars that Mrs. Markham grew impatient; and when they came into the drawing-room Vezey went and sat by Dessie at one end of the long room, in one of the large bay windows.

"I hate that chappie, Miss Merrion, don't you?" he said, soon after he joined her. "I believe he's an awful bounder, and I can't for the life of me see what she sees in him. Can you?"

"Why did you introduce him?" asked Dessie.

(To be continued.)

What Alcohol Does to the System.

Alcohol has a profound effect upon the central nervous system. There are two theories with regard to its action. By some it is considered a stimulant, by others it is thought always to cause depression. Small amounts of alcohol may bring about an increased sense of well-being and a general feeling of cheerfulness which is most pronounced when the lights are bright, and the company congenial. Larger quantities induce in-coordination of speech and movement, whereas still larger quantities result in complete anesthesia which may be fatal to the individual. For the first few minutes after taking alcohol, it has been found that a larger quantity of physical work may be performed. This is followed, however by a period of depression during which the quantity of mechanical energy which may be expended by the individual is greatly reduced. The sum total of the effect is very decidedly to reduce the amount of mechanical work which can be accomplished during the day. It is on this account that alcohol is no longer given to soldiers on the march in the hope of increasing their endurance. The actual result would be quite the contrary. Experiments regarding the action of the brain after taking alcohol as compared with its action before taking alcohol have been made by Kraepelin. Typesetters were used as subjects. It was found that those who had taken alcohol made a greater number of errors and worked less rapidly than those who were abstemious. Kraepelin has found that this effect lasts as long as twenty-four hours after alcohol has been taken. Curiously enough, those who had taken alcohol thought they were doing their work to better advantage than those who had not.—Professor Graham Lusk of Cornell Medical College, in the Popular Science Monthly.

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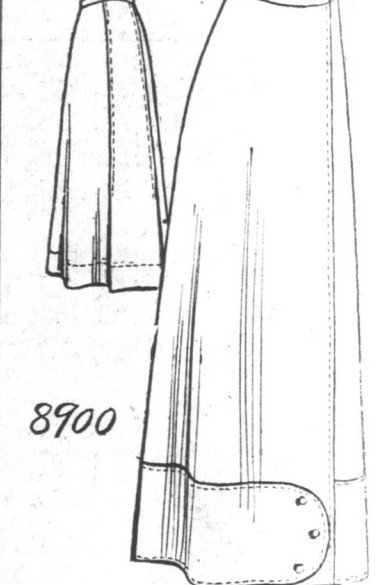
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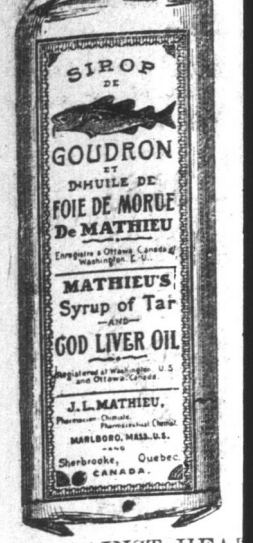
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