

PITCHERY - BIDGERY.

The Turnout of the Long, Long Lane.

BY MONSIEUR DEMOLIN.

CHAPTER III.

FACE TO FACE.

On the same evening Potts left the bank at about five o'clock, and went up to the Hall with John. He was more gloomy, and abstracted. The great question now before him was how to deal with Smithers & Co. Should he write to them or go and see them, or what? How could he satisfy their claims, which he knew would now be presented? Involved in thoughts like these he entered the Hall, and followed by John, went to the dining room, where father and son sat down to refresh themselves over a bottle of brandy.

They had not been seated half an hour before the noise of carriage wheels was heard; and on looking out they saw a dog cart drawn by two magnificent horses, which drove swiftly up to the portico. A gentleman dismounted, and throwing the reins to his servant, came up the steps. The stranger was of medium size, with an aristocratic air, remarkably regular features of pure Grecian outline, and deep, black, lustrous eyes. His brow was dark and stern, and clouded over by a gloomy frown.

'Who the devil is he?' cried Potts. 'That porter! I told him to let no one in to-day.' 'I believe the porter's playing fast and loose with us. But, by Jove! do you see that fellow's eyes? Do you know who else has such eyes?' 'No.' 'Old Smithers.'

'Then this is old Smithers?' 'Yes.' 'Yes; or else the devil,' said John harshly. 'I begin to have an idea,' he continued. 'I've been thinking about this for some time.' 'What is it?' 'Old Smithers had those eyes. That last chap that drew the forty thousand out of you kept his eyes covered. Here comes this fellow with the same eyes. I begin to trace a connection between them.'

'Doth! Old Smithers is old enough to be this man's grandfather.' 'Did you ever happen to notice that old Smithers hadn't a wrinkle in his face?' 'What do you mean?' 'Oh, nothing—only his hair mightn't have been natural; that's all.' 'Potts and John exchanged glances, and nothing was said for some time. 'Perhaps this Smithers & Son have been at the bottom of all this,' continued John. 'They are the only ones who could have been strong enough.'

'But why should they?' 'John shook his head.' 'Despard or Langhetti may have got them to do it. Perhaps that girl did it. Smithers & Co. will make money enough out of the speculation to pay them. As for me and you, I begin to have a general but a very accurate idea of ruin. You are getting a pretty nice price for your shares, and you will give me time to breathe.' Before this conversation had ended the stranger had entered and had gone up to the drawing room. The servant came down to announce him.

'What name?' asked Potts. 'He didn't give any.' 'Potts looked perplexed.' 'Come now,' said John. 'This fellow has overreached himself at last. He's come here; perhaps it won't be so easy for him to get out. I'll have all the servants ready. Do you keep up your spirits. Don't get frightened, but be plucky. Bull him, and when the time comes ring the bell, and I'll march in with all the servants.'

Potts looked for a moment at his son with a glance of deep admiration. 'Johnnie, you've got more sense in your little finger than I have in my whole body. Yes; we've got this fellow, whoever he is; and if he turns out to be what I suspect, then we'll spring the trap on him, and he'll learn what it is to play with edged tools.'

With these words Potts departed, and ascending the stairs, entered the drawing room. The stranger was standing looking out of one of the windows. His attitude brought back to Potts' recollection the scene which had once occurred there, when old Smithers was holding Beatrice in his arms. The recollection of this scene showed a flood of light on Potts' mind. He recalled it with a savage exultation. Perhaps they were the same, as John said;—perhaps not, not so assuredly they must be the same.

'It's a lie!' cried Potts, while his face grew white. 'At sea,' continued the other, ringing the changes in on this one word, 'at sea' he heard the ship to which you had brought him—the Vishnu!

Potts was like a man fascinated by some horrid specter. He looked fixedly at his interlocutor. His jaw fell. 'There he died,' said the stranger. 'Who caused his death? Will you answer?' 'With a tremendous effort Potts again recovered command of himself. 'You've been reading up old papers,' replied he, in a stammering voice. 'You've got a lot of stuff in your head which you think will frighten me. You've come to the wrong shop. But in spite of your threats, the pale face and nervous manner of Potts showed how deep was his agitation. 'I myself was on board the Vishnu,' said the other.

'Yes, I.' 'Yes, I.' 'Then you must have been present at the Vishnu went down twenty years ago.' 'I was on board of the Vishnu, and I saw Colonel Despard.' 'The manner of the speaker's voice seemed to inspire the tones of the speaker; they thrilled through the coarse, brutal nature of the listener. 'I saw Colonel Despard,' continued the speaker. 'You lie!' cried Potts, roused by terror and horror, to a fierce pitch of excitement.

'I saw Colonel Despard,' continued the stranger for the third time, 'on board the Vishnu in the Indian Sea. I learned from him his story.' He paused. 'Then,' cried Potts, quickly, to whom there suddenly came an idea which brought a courage with it, 'then, if you saw him, what concern is it of mine? He was alive then, and the Despard murder never took place.' 'Despard or Langhetti may have got them to do it. Perhaps that girl did it. Smithers & Co. will make money enough out of the speculation to pay them. As for me and you, I begin to have a general but a very accurate idea of ruin. You are getting a pretty nice price for your shares, and you will give me time to breathe.'

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'He has met with an accident. Is there a doctor in the place? Send your servant to see.' 'Beatrice hurried in and returned with a servant. 'We will first lift him out,' said Despard. 'Oh yes! Bring him in!' cried Beatrice, who was in an agony of suspense. 'She hurried after them to the wagon. They lifted Langhetti out and took him into a room which Beatrice showed them. They tenderly laid him on the bed. Meanwhile the servant had hurried off for a doctor. Let him come, said Beatrice, sitting by his bedside; she kissed the brow of the almost unconscious sufferer, and tried in every possible way to revive him. The doctor soon arrived, dressed his wounds, and left directions for his care, which consisted chiefly in constant watchfulness. 'What do you think?' he asked, despondently, with an oath, and sank down into a deep despair. 'No; you don't mean that,' said the other. 'For I have some London policemen at the inn, and I might like best to hand you over to them, charges which you can easily imagine. You don't wish me to do so, I think. You prefer being charged to being chained up in a cage, or sent to Botany Bay, I suppose? Still, if you prefer it, I will at once arrange an interview between yourself and these gentlemen, and you may be transported for crime.'

Despard next wrote a letter to Mrs. Thornton. He told her about Langhetti, and urged her to come on immediately and bring Edith with her. Then he returned to the cottage and wished to sit up with Langhetti. Beatrice, however, would not let him. She said that no one should deprive her of the place by his bedside. Despard remained, however, and the two devoted equal attention to the sufferer. Langhetti spoke only once. He was so faint that his voice was scarce audible. Beatrice put her ear close to his mouth. 'What is it?' asked Despard. 'I don't know,' said Beatrice. 'I have written for her,' said Despard. Beatrice whispered that to Langhetti. An ecstatic smile passed over his face. 'It is well,' he murmured.

CHAPTER LIV. THE WORM TURNS. Potts departed from the Hall in deep dejection. This tremendous power of his enemy had been shown all along; and now that this enemy turned out to be Louis Brandon, he felt as though some supernatural being had taken up arms against him. He had been all along against Fate. It was with some such feeling as this that he left Brandon Hall forever. All of his grand projects had broken down, suddenly and utterly. He had not a ray of hope left of ever regaining the position which he had held, and which he had lost. He was thrust back to the obscurity from which he had emerged. After about a quarter of an hour they returned, and Potts handed over to the stranger some papers. He looked at them carefully, and put them in his pocket. He then gave Potts the cord. Potts looked at it in an abstract way, and said nothing. 'You must leave this hall to-night,' said the stranger sternly, 'and your son. I remain here.'

'Leave the hall?' gasped Potts. 'Yes.' 'For a moment he stood overwhelmed. He looked at Potts, who nodded his head slowly. 'You've got to do it, dad,' said he. 'Potts turned away at the stranger. He shook his clenched fist at him. 'Dad—you!' he cried. 'Are you satisfied yet? I know you. I'll pay you up. What complaint have you against me, I'd like to know? I never injured you. You don't know me, or you wouldn't say that?' 'I do,' said Potts. 'I've several other people. I've had the pleasure of an extended intercourse with you. For I'm not only Smithers & Co., but I'm also Despard, Hendricks, American merchants. I'm also Bigelow, Higginson & Co., solicitors to Smithers & Co. Besides, I'm your London broker, your stock speculator, your man who doesn't know me after all. As he said this Potts and John exchanged glances of wonder. 'Potts,' cried Despard, 'I humbly beg to enquire! Who are you? What have you against me? Who are you? Who?' 'And he gazed with intense curiosity upon the calm face of the stranger, who, in his turn, looked upon him with the air of one who was gazing from a superior height some feeble creature far beneath him. 'Who am I? he repeated. 'Who? I am the one who has ruined you. I am the one who has injured you so deeply that what I have done to you is nothing in comparison. Who are you?' cried Potts, with feverish impatience. 'It's a lie. I never injured you. I never saw you before till you came yourself to trouble me. Those whom I have injured are all those except that person, the son-of-a-bitch.'

'There are others.' 'There are others,' said Potts, with some fearful discovery dawning upon him. 'You know me now,' cried the stranger, 'I see it in your face.' 'No,' said Potts. 'I don't know you. I never saw you before till you came yourself to trouble me. Those whom I have injured are all those except that person, the son-of-a-bitch.'

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'I will lay down my life for you, said Potts. 'I don't want your life, returned Potts. 'I want his.' 'You shall have it, exclaimed Potts. Potts said no more. He handed Potts his purse in silence. The latter took it without a word. Potts then went toward the bank, and Potts stood alone in the road. TO BE CONTINUED.

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