

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET.

Millions of Mischief.

By HEADON HILL.

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

JANET'S NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER XII.

In the London Express.

I have been asked to set down here the experiences which I went through in those days after Arthur's almost miraculous appearance at Totland, when I was already mourning him as lost to me for ever. I need not dwell on the shock it was to meet him suddenly, in the company of that terrible Herzog, on the green walk overlooking the sea amid a crowd of holiday-makers, or on what happened subsequently down to my departure in search of the mysterious Danvers Crane. Nor do I ask your pity for a girl trying to stand before a brave, true lover and a shameful death. That I know I shall have in my case. But what I do implore is your forgiveness for the stupid blunders that I made, and for the nearly fatal mistake of underrating my opponent's dangerous cunning.

When this crisis swooped upon me I had seen very little of what the world calls "life," most of my time and care having been devoted to my dear, cross father in our small house at Bayswater till I met Arthur at a dance given by a mutual friend. Our acquaintance quickly ripened into love that was all too soon clouded by the tragedy of his arrest and sentence, followed by days that were a waking nightmare, soled only by Muriel Crawshaw's tender sympathy. Without that I must have died, I think.

I mention this to show what a helpless, hopeless sort of person I was to start on such a quest, with every moment of value, and Arthur's life in the balance. While, hardly less in importance, was the vital necessity of proving Arthur's innocence so that Lord Alphington might be warned against the unknown enemies, of whom Herzog was the figurehead. In truth was I a broken reed to lean on, and I could only console myself that a broken reed was better than none at all.

I didn't have to wait till I reached London for the magnitude of my task to be brought home to me. Refreshed by the breezy trip across the Solent, I had accomplished the short train journey from Lymington to the busy junction at Brockenhurst without adventure, and having crossed from the branch to the main line platform, found that the London express was not due for ten minutes. I was standing before the bookstall, idly reading the contents bills, when, to my horror, a sneering voice whispered at my ear—

"Still interested in the escaped murderer, Miss Chilmark?"

Turning quickly, I was confronted by Roger Marske, whom I had seen at Totland, in the company of Lord Alphington and Lady Muriel walking away from the steamer in which I had crossed—the very man to whom my vague suspicions pointed. He must have come on board at the last moment, and have kept out of my way during the passage and on the landing-stage at Lymington. Why should he have acted on such sudden impulse? To pit his cunning against my feeble wits, and thwart the enterprise on which I had embarked? That was the only construction that my brain could put upon it, and it appalled while in some degree it cheered me. The correctness of my surmise would be presumptive evidence of his guilt.

"Escaped murderer!" I exclaimed, pretending not to take him seriously. "What should make you think I had such morbid interests, Mr. Marske?"

He laughed harshly. "The subtle art of deduction," he said. "Your friend, Lady Muriel, was keen on getting hold of the newspaper on the day I escorted her down from London to the Isle of Wight—the day after Rivington's escape—and she explained it by telling me that she expected a vicarious interest, don't you know. A friend of hers was worrying about the fellow, and as you have been so much with her lately, I concluded it was you."

"Thank God, not treachery, but only discretion, on dear Muriel's part. I could never have forgiven her if she had repeated the secret I had confided to her—in this quarter of all others."

"It is certainly not in the direction of an escaped murderer that my interest lies," I said, accepting his challenge in the emphasis I put on the important adjective as I looked him full in the eyes. "The moment the words had passed my lips I was conscious of their rashness, inasmuch as they would confirm his suspicion. If this man was really at the other end of the thin skein I held I had most effectually put him on his guard."

But if that was the case, he at least showed no trace of it. There was no alarm in the smile with which he received my foolishly significant disclaimer, or in the slight shrug of his well-knit shoulders. Dismissing the subject with an airy wave of his hand, he asked if I was going to London, and, if so, for how long. The politeness of his words was belied by the insolence in his eyes, but feeling that I had gone

too far already, I answered carelessly—

"Yes, I am going to London—to look at a house which my father is thinking of taking. But I hope to be back at Totland Bay in a day or two."

He crossed his black moustache thoughtfully, and, murmuring a few commonplace remarks about his pleasure at my speedy return, he raised his hat and moved away. A few minutes passed, and then the express from Bournemouth to London rolled in its two great gilded Pullman coaches in the centre.

I had a second-class ticket, and in an intuitive fear that Mr. Marske might annoy me on the journey I gave him the chance, I entered a compartment in which there was but one vacant seat. Turning to close the door, I had reason to rejoice at my precaution. Roger Marske had been close at my heels, and the scowl on his face was eloquent of his disappointment that the carriage was full.

When the train started I surveyed my fellow passengers in a vain attempt to divine whether I was to enjoy the security of their company for the whole of the journey. The majority of them belonged to the same party—father, mother, three daughters, and a schoolboy. But though it was easy to gather from their chatter that they were returning from a holiday at Bournemouth, they made no mention of their destination. If they should get out at Southampton or Basingstoke—the only two stoppages—there would be plenty of room for Mr. Marske. If the remaining three passengers got out too I should be alone with him, were he to assail the compartment again.

The train sped through the bosky glades of the New Forest, and, sure enough, at Southampton West, the paterfamilias and his brood filed out, leaving me in fear that I was to be deserted except by two feeble old ladies. The one remaining passenger, wearing, as he did, a mercantile marine uniform, must certainly be booked for the great seaport. But, no; when Roger Marske leaped into the compartment just as the train began to glide from the station the sailor was still sitting motionless in his corner, his head hidden by his newspaper. He would be available for protection, if protection should become necessary.

Roger Marske, after a brief glance at the old ladies and a longer scrutiny of the uniformed figure in the corner, carried off his invasion of the compartment with an impudent assumption of having been separated from me at Brockenhurst as much to

my chagrin as his own.

"So sorry, Miss Chilmark, but you saw that my defection was unavoidable—one of the mischances of railway travelling in this benighted country," he laughed as he took the seat opposite mine. "It is better than I had hoped, however. I was afraid that that happily-departed family battalion would deprive me of your society all the way to town."

Now there were two things I was for the moment dreading above all others—being left alone with this man in a train that only stopped at long intervals, and being followed by him when I left the terminus at Waterloo. Unless the two old ladies and the sailor all got out at Basingstoke I was secure from the former source of uneasiness, and I therefore thought it wise to begin to prepare, the ground for avoiding the second and greater evil. On arriving in London I wanted to go at once to the address in High street, Notting Hill, where, according to Sarah Lovon, the mysterious Danvers Crane had received Clara Rivington's letters but it was vitally imperative that I should pursue that investigation without Roger Marske's knowledge. If the detestable persistence with which he had thrust his presence on me gave me the opportunity of throwing dust in his eyes I should not altogether regret his intrusion.

"As you are here I may as well make use of you," I said. "I came away in such a hurry that I had no time to look out my route! How does one get from Waterloo to the Harrow district?"

He appeared to weigh the question deeply, knitting his brows at the landscape fleeting past the windows.

"It depends to some extent on where you are going to stay while you are in town," he replied after a pause. "You would wish to go there first, I presume, to leave your luggage?"

This was turning the tables on me at the start, for he asked the one piece of information which of all others I must conceal. I had intended to stay the night at the house of an old servant who had set up a lodging-house in Bloomsbury, but I could not tell him that. My refuge must be kept sacred at the cost of prevarication, if not of a downright lie. Surely my cause—the cause of Arthur's safety—justified deceit.

Inspired by a sudden idea, which would enable me to blend truth with the requisite amount of mendacity, I replied: "I thought of going to the Great Western Hotel at Paddington Station, but I have not finally decided. That would be handy for Harrow, would it not?"

He showed his white teeth in an enigmatic smile. "Most convenient," he said, eyeing me in the same strange manner. "In that case all you have to do is to drive from Waterloo to your hotel, and then go on to your destination by the District Railway from Praed Street."

I thanked him as artlessly as I could and changed the subject to harmless topics, not at all confident that I had deceived him as to the motive for my journey, and all the while oppressed with a sense that he was waiting. Waiting for what? To murder me if I was left alone with him at Basingstoke? If he was in

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truth the subject of poor Clara Rivington's cabalistic words, there would be nothing preposterous in my apprehensions.

The clacking wheels formed a fitting accompaniment to the aimless chatter with which I tried to cover my suspense, and then, all too soon there was a break in the rhythmical clang, and I knew that steam was being shut off for the stop at Basingstoke. Almost at the same moment, after the manner of their kind the two old ladies showed signs of agitation. They jumped up and began to collect their possessions from the rack, leaving no doubt that they were about to quit the train. But the mercantile marine officer sat motionless in his corner, and the paper which had obscured his features, having dropped to his knees, he was revealed as fast asleep.

As soon as the train drew up at the platform the old ladies descended but the sailor sat still, breathing with the regularity of sound slumber. Five minutes were allowed for refreshments, and I hoped against hope that Mr. Marske would go to the buffet, and so enable me, without need for excuse, to fly to another carriage. But he retained his seat, staring blankly at the bustle on the platform till four out of five minutes were gone and carriage doors began to slam. Then he leaned over and tapped the sleeping man on the knee.

"Pardon me, sir," he said as the sailor awoke with a start. "It struck me that the attractions of the drowsy god might be causing you to pass your destination. This is Basingstoke."

The sleeper sat up and rubbed his eyes, "Basingstoke!" he cried with a stifled oath. "My ship sails at five this afternoon, and I ought to have got out at Southampton."

(To be continued.)

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IN TELEGRAPHIC AND GENERAL NEWS THE TIMES LEADS.

NEW ROLE FOR
MISS ANGLIN.
Talented Canadian Actress Will Portray the Character of a Thief.

New York, Dec. 29.—Instead of being frightened from their plan to dramatize "In the Bishop's Carriage" by the similarity of its theme to that of "Leah Kleschna," Leibler & Co., are making active preparations for a production of the resultant play, and it now looks as if Margaret Anglin would get the principal part.

If Miss Anglin does not get the part the perversity of fate will come in for a large share of comment, because she once might have obtained the highly successful "Leah Kleschna" had she been so inclined.

The first manager to whom C. M. S. McLellan offered "Leah Kleschna" last spring declared almost instantly that he would accept the play if he could induce Miss Anglin to appear in it. The actress, however, was already under contract with Frank L. Perley, who had obtained an option on "The Eternal City," and did not regard the proposition favorably.

As all who have read "In the Bishop's Carriage" know, the principal character is that of a thief, like Leah Kleschna. The girl, after picking a pocket, jumps into a bishop's carriage standing nearby, hoping to escape the detectives. When the good bishop enters the carriage a moment later and finds the young woman apparently asleep on the seat, the plot develops rapidly.

Liebler & Co. have control of the dramatic rights for some time, but only within the last few days have they obtained a satisfactory dramatization. In making the story over for stage purposes the authors have departed from the novel in various instances. The play will open with a prologue.

Whether negotiations with Frank L. Perley, upon Miss Anglin's behalf, for this play have reached the stage of a contract could not be learned positively.

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