

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.

(Continued.)

"Can we not confide everything to her, and beg her to enlist her father's sympathy?" I clutched at another straw.

But Janet, wiser than I was, pointed out the danger of such a course. However well disposed Lord Alphonson might be, he would be powerless to save me unless my innocence had been clearly established, though, as a cold and haughty statesman, hide-bound in officialism, he would probably pooh-pooh the whole story as an invention, and hand me over to the hangman. The risk was too great to be run.

"I am only a girl, Arthur, but I must fight your battle alone," my brave sweetheart went on firmly. "No one must share our secret, at any rate, till I have achieved partial success. Who is in charge of your mother's cottage in the New Forest?"

"Sarah Leven, an old servant, who was to remain till—the things had been sold by auction," I answered.

"What would be her feeling about you?"

"She was devoted to all of us, poor soul—has known me from a boy, but like most other people, she probably thinks me guilty." I replied with unjustifiable bitterness.

"Let us hope not," returned Janet gravely. "In any case I shall run over by the first boat tomorrow and explore 'The Glen,' is it not called? Ah, stand perfectly still! Look there!"

With the warning exclamation her voice sank so as to be scarcely audible, and, without moving, I followed the direction of her frightened gaze. There, standing in the middle of the roadway, the moonlight shining on his broad, fleshy face, was Herzog staring straight at the window. In our preoccupation of quick question and answer we must have relaxed our vigilance long enough for him to make a stealthy approach on his return to the house.

Had he seen us—or, rather, me? For there would be nothing to arouse his suspicions in a sight of Janet alone. At any rate he gave no sign, but stood there motionless, exercising on me a snake-like fascination till, with a visible shrug of his pertly shoulders, he abandoned his position and came swiftly and silently towards the garden gate.

"Get back to your room," Janet whispered.

I obeyed no second bidding, but at the door I paused for one breathless moment to ask:

"How shall we communicate?"

"At once," she urged. "I will find a way."

So I quickly crossed the landing and had scarcely closed my door when the stairs creaked again. A minute later I heard Herzog moving softly about in the next room.

There was nothing in Herzog's demeanour at breakfast next morning to show any diminution of his confidence in me. The undertone of sarcasm in which he sometimes indulged at my expense was entirely absent. The corporal side of him seemed to be uppermost, and he appeared to be in the lazily sensuous mood natural to a man of full habit with nothing to do but eat, drink, and enjoy himself. I could not think that he had seen me at Janet's window the night before.

"The joy of life, my dear friend, is bubbling all over me this delightful morning," he remarked, as he sat down to a dish of bacon and eggs and helped himself plentifully.

To some extent I found his good-humor infectious, for before breakfast was over I saw Janet trip down the garden path and turn towards the pier. She had evidently not swerved from her intention to search for clues at "The Glen," and was on her way to catch the first boat for Lymington. I did not expect great things for her expedition, but a forlorn hope was better than no hope at all.

"This is our last real holiday, for the Premier arrives to-morrow," said Herzog presently, as he lit a cigar. "I propose to spend it in testing a certain theory that is causing me some uneasiness. There is an excursion steamer, due to call here at eleven o'clock, for Bournemouth, returning in the afternoon. We will take the trip in her to that gay watering-place, and be as frivolous as we can, unless—"

"Unless what?" I tried to abbreviate his somewhat theatrical pause.

"Unless there is stern work to do, my friend," he concluded quietly.

"But that will only happen if my very doubtful theory proves correct."

It was all one to me how we spent the day. It was bound to be one of suspense anyhow, till Janet returned from the New Forest and found a way of apprising me of the success or failure of her journey. All that I was immediately concerned with was immunity from recapture, and for that I was relying entirely on Herzog. With this interest in the tragedy which he believed himself to be saving me for he was not likely to subject me to undue risks.

And when the London papers came in, just before we started, I learned that my risk was already greatly minimized—or, at least, postponed. A Central News telegram from Queens-town, dated the night before, was given prominence under the sensational double head-lines—

"The Escaped Murderer."  
"Off to America."

"It has been ascertained by the police that Rivington went on board the Carpathia here just before she sailed this evening. The detectives arrived a few minutes too late to effect his arrest, but the New York authorities have been informed by cable, and he will be met and detained on the arrival of the liner on the other side. In the case of a condemned criminal it is not thought that extradition formalities will be necessary."

Herzog, who had read the paragraph before handing it to me, chuckled at the visible astonishment with which I perused it.

"How was it worked?" he said in response to my mute inquiry. "You are scarcely old enough to remember the refrain of a song popular in the seventies, my young friend. It ran something like this: 'Bizzimark here, Bizzimark there. Bizzimark, Bizzimark everywhere.' Well, if you substitute Herzog for Bismarck you have it in a nutshell. I have my ramifications and resources distributed over a wide area, you see."

"This means, then, that I have a free run till the Carpathia reaches New York and the report is found to be false—say six days," said I.

"Except under a certain contingency which we go to prove, and which may require strenuous treatment," replied Herzog, taking up his soft felt hat. "Come, we will show ourselves on the cliff-walk before we go down to the pier. I have a reason for it."

At that comparatively early hour the popular promenade had few occupants besides nursemaids and their charges making their way to the beach. But conspicuous among the exceptions was Mr. Roger Marske, lounging on a seat and apparently wrapped in moody reflection. He affected not to see us, and after passing him two or three times, as the excursion steamer was approaching, we descended to the pier. I wondered, without asking to be enlightened, whether Marske was Herzog's "reason" for that preliminary stroll.

I was further exercised on that point when, just as we had taken our seats on the upper deck of the steamer, Marske came hurriedly down the pier and also boarded her. He disappeared from sight among the crowd of trippers on the lower deck, and as he did not mount to the upper deck, I saw no more of him during the hour's run. Herzog snowed no sign of having seen him at all, and as the last thing I wanted was to disclose my interest in Marske to my lynx-eyed companion, I kept my own counsel.

(To be continued.)

## A Christmas Ghost Story.

(WRITTEN FOR THE 'TIMES'.)

There have been men to whom I have told the following story who have ascribed the happenings therein to the effects of an over indulgence in strong wine. Others have muttered something of the richness of plum pudding and brandy sauce, while others still have gently insinuated something about the fatigues of travel followed by a night of uncertain repose.

Now there is no one among my numerous acquaintances who does not know that I am an abstemious man in meat and drink, and as for fatigue my constitution has become so inured to hardship that I simply laugh at a night or two spent on the train.

I must promise that I am not at all superstitious. I am a bachelor and occupy chambers in Lincoln's Inn, and in the intervals of study I take great delight in poring over the priceless collection of ancient manuscripts in the British Museum. I am not without influential friends, and for the past ten years Sir Edgar Sutton of Sutton Hall in Northumbria has invited me to spend Christmas at his place.

Of course I always accept, and usually go there for two weeks at that season. The year 1879, however, was an exception to that rule. I was very busily engaged "cramming" for an examination, and found that three or four days at most was all I could spare.

Christmas eve found me at Sutton Hall, where I met the usual hearty welcome. The house is a very large one, in which all the different styles of architecture ever known in England are exemplified. There is of course a picture gallery in the house and a banquet hall, and because this last apartment figures prominently in the story a little description will not be out of place.

It was situated at one side of the house, and although of no great length occupied the whole of it. There was a door at either end, and one about midway of the wall which led into a bedroom which I always occupied when in the house. A very deep wainscoting of black oak ran round the entire room, and four French windows which opened outwards on the terrace let the sunshine in on the long heavy mahogany table with the massive chairs. The floor was of black oak, waxed and polished to a high degree, relieved by a Persian rug scattered here and there. Ranges round the walls and between the windows were fourteen suits of armor or with ancient spears. There were no other ornaments in the room, but at either end was a huge fire-place with antique andirons.

Christmas day was enjoyed as it can only be enjoyed where open hearted hospitality prevails. All the old English customs were duly observed, and at night the party broke up at a late hour thoroughly tired but thoroughly happy.

Sir Edgar and I sat long in the banquet hall after the house had

grown quiet, smoking our cigars and talking over old times. We were old school and college chums so we had lots to talk about. We had drawn our chairs to one of the fire-places, where a huge log blazed, and as the flames rose and fell and flickered on the closed visors and spear points and glanced from the black wainscot and brass tips of the andirons, I lay back and gave myself up to the luxury of solid comfort. Presently my friend, too, grew silent, and there we sat for an hour or more. At last our cigars were out and Sir Edgar rose and simply wishing me "good-night" went to his bedroom.

I was in no mood for sleep. The fire was bright, and lighting another cigar I settled myself for another hour. My back was towards the end of the table and I had sat thus for some time when I was startled out of my reverie by the sound of voices at the table. Wonderingly I looked around to see two men seated about half way up the hall, at opposite sides of the table. I was surprised but not by any means startled. There was nothing ghostly about my visitors, and at first I merely thought a masque ball had taken place somewhere near, and these were two of the revellers who had got in to the house by mistake. They were both past the middle age, and dressed in the costume of the restoration one of them being a cavalier and the other a Puritan. Thus much I could tell from their outward appearance. Concerning their character their faces proclaimed them both to be of a resolute mind. The cavalier's face grew darker, and involuntarily as it seemed, his hand gripped towards a short dagger by his side. Seeing the action the cavalier stopped short and pledged his companion in a flowing stoup. The mirth waxed furious but through it all I could detect an undertone of distrust. Shortly afterwards the Roundhead said something which seemed to give his companion offence, I could not hear what it was, but the effect was instantaneous, and the Royalist got up and began to pace the floor with quick, nervous strides. Foolishly, as I thought, the Puritan continued his taunts. And then a fearful thing happened, for the cavalier made a rush at his friend with drawn dagger in his hand. The Puritan, though a bulky man, was nimble, and before I could cry out was on his feet and grappling with his enemy. Round and round the room they went, sometimes coming so close to where I sat that their garments almost brushed my hair, striking and parrying with a deadly viciousness that left no doubt of their enmity. The eeriest thing about the

whole business was that although both the men wore heavy boots there was no sound. The breathing was distinctly audible and the gleaming of their weapons in the flickering of the fire light was dreadful to look upon, but the very thing that was needed to give reality to the whole dreadful scene, the tramp of heavy men on the floor, was missing. I could feel the hair rising on my head, and my ears were twitching in their eagerness amid the weird silence.

All at once, one of the men stumbled, and, locked as they were they both rolled on the floor, striking at each other meanwhile with their daggers. I leaped to my feet now and ran to separate the men, but ere I could reach them a groan from the cavalier told that a vulnerable part had been reached and the duel ended. Hastily I ran and had come so close to where they lay that I could distinctly see their faces in the gloom when they disappeared.

How long I lay in a fainting condition I cannot tell. Daylight was beginning to struggle in through the tall French windows. I put out my hand instinctively on the floor when horror! I felt something wet and thick. Instantly the whole scene of the previous night came back to me and rising tremblingly, to my feet I staggered to my bedroom, where I threw myself face downwards on the bed and fainted again.

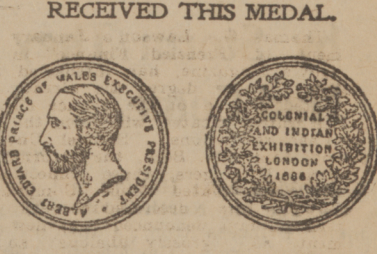
When I came to it was to find the whole house in confusion. A pool of blood had been found on the floor of the hall, which no one could account for. There were unmistakable marks of a violent struggle. Chairs were overturned and curtains pulled away, and one of them had been partially torn from its fastenings. But when my host and I were alone I told my story describing as well as I could the faces and appearance of the men.

As the narrative progressed I could see the good natured face of Sir Edgar grow troubled, and when I had ended he led me to the picture gallery where the family portraits hung.

Pausing before the picture of a cavalier he asked me if that looked anything like the man I had seen. Yes, there could be no mistaking the strong, handsome face with the passionate eyes, and I said so. He believed me, and then and there told me a piece of family history. It will not repeat it all. The strange part was that another Sir Edgar had been slain in that hall on Christmas night by one of his neighbors,

a man who held opposite political opinions. The quarrel arose during the progress of a drinking bout. If the combat was imagination the pool of blood on the floor was at least a strange circumstance.

Cleveland, Miss., Dec. 23.—Albert Thomas, the city marshal of Merigold, has been killed by a Robert Beas, a young man highly connected. Seven men have been lodged in jail at Merigold for alleged connection with the crime. Mayor Sanders is included among the prisoners. Details of the tragedy are meagre.



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