

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 1.

(Continued.)

It was not Roger Marske whom the butler presently ushered in, but, had it been, the name as it left his lips could hardly have caused me a greater shock.

"Mr. Ralph Carden," was the announcement which drew my gaze to the door in consternation, and told me that I stood on the verge of discovery. Yes, there was no shadow of doubt about it. The well-knit, sunburnt young fellow who entered was the same Ralph Carden who had joined the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in my last term there. That had been ten years ago, but we had been cadets together for three months, and he could scarcely fail to recognize me.

The removal of my moustache was really in favor of such recognition. For though it had completely changed my recent appearance, it had made me much more closely resemble what I had been in my Woolwich days.

Carden advanced rapidly into the room with many apologies for being late, giving all his attention at first to Lady Muriel and Lord Alphonso. It did not add to my comfort to perceive that my agitation was not lost upon Herzog, but I used the brief respite to brace myself, and when the ordeal came I was more prepared for it.

"Mr. Carden," said Lady Muriel, bringing him forward, "let me introduce you to Mr. Martin and his friend Doctor Babbles. You have heard of my narrow escape from drowning the other day. It was Mr. Martin who so gallantly jumped overboard and fished me out."

Ralph Carden held out his hand with frank impetuosity, born, I was to learn later, of gratitude to the man who had saved the woman he loved. Then, as his gaze met mine—I made no attempt to avert it—a spasm crossed his boyish face and the laughing eyes grew hard and cold.

Whatever feeling may have been in his mind he mastered it quickly and spoke a few words of conventional tribute to what he was pleased to call luck. But there was constraint in his voice, and I knew that if he had not actually recognized me, he had been struck by my likeness to the now notorious "murderer."

Dinner was announced at that moment, and, as the honor of escorting Lady Muriel was allotted to me as the guest of the evening, the immediate tension was relieved. Only, however, to be diverted into another channel, we were scarcely seated at table when Lady Muriel confided to me that she had had two dull days because her dear friend Miss Chilmark had been compelled to go to London unexpectedly.

"And Roger—you must have missed

Roger," Lord Alphonso chimed in rather anxiously. I thought, "Can't imagine what possessed the fellow to run off like that. He had no notion of it, I am sure, when he came down to the pier to meet me. His excuse of a telegram calling him away won't wash. No telegram was brought to him in the interval between my landing and his bolting off so unceremoniously as we were walking up."

"Mr. Marske's goings and comings are beyond me. I cannot say that I have missed him," was the rejoinder of Lady Muriel, which brought a frown to her father's brow, and such a pleased flush to Ralph Carden's cheek that even then, in my sore distress, I began to guess how matters were between these two young people.

From the general conversation that ensued I gathered that Carden was serving as a lieutenant in one of the batteries of Garrison Artillery stationed at Golden Hill Fort—the headquarters of the coast defence in that part of the island. His presence at the Premier's table was accounted for by the fact that he was a distant connection, his mother residing in the "dower-house" on one of Lord Alphonso's estates. From the mutual reminiscences they exchanged, Lady Muriel and he had evidently known each other from childhood.

Herzog was very silent during dinner, playing the part of medical attendant to a wealthy invalid to perfection. What little he said was to the point, but not calculated to attract attention. It struck me that he was aiming at effacing himself, so that in the tragedy which he believed my waistcoat pocket to hold he might be forgotten.

"And pray, Mr. Martin," said Lord Alphonso, turning to me presently with stately politeness, "what is your county when you are at home? I understand that you are not a permanent resident in this charming spot."

Herzog's foresight had provided for this emergency, and I was fairly ready with the reply that I lived in London the greater part of the year—a wide generality which my host's indifference, or politeness, deterred him from pressing to a conclusion. It was reserved for Ralph Carden to try to tempt me into particulars, and he did it with a clumsy eagerness, suggesting that he had been waiting his chance.

If you will be there in October, and will give me your address, I should much like to call upon you," he said, fixing those honest eyes of his on me from across the circular table.

Once again Herzog's previous prompting met the emergency and prevented any inconvenient research

in the London Directory. "It is very doubtful if I shall be in town in October," I replied, shuddering at the painful truth of the remark.

But if you are?" demanded my inquisitor with a rude persistence that caused Lady Muriel to turn and look at him, and Lord Alphonso to elevate his patrician brows. "In that case I shall probably be found at the Savoy Hotel; I have no permanent residence at present," was my answer, uttered in the full knowledge that it must have sounded odd, and that had I been there otherwise than as the preserver of my beautiful young hostess I should have been regarded as an undesirable acquaintance. As it was, my privilege saved me from any overt unpleasantness of the kind, except that Carden, who had leaned forward to question me, sat back now, bolt upright, and looked hard at me before going on with his dinner.

It mattered not one jot to me, but socially I must have seemed a dismal failure to Lord Alphonso and his daughter, and I have no doubt that they were making notes to that effect, while, minute by minute, the time drew near for me to face the crisis of the evening. That crisis came all too quickly with the rising of Lady Muriel, who, as she left the dining room, flung back to us the laughing command not to leave her alone too long.

When we drew together over the decanters, the butler and footman having departed, our disposition at the table was thus; I sat on Lord Alphonso's right, Carden on his left and Herzog on Carden's left, with a long gap between him and me. The result was that my actions could not be closely watched by Carden, but that Herzog, who was nearly opposite to me at the small round table, had me entirely under his observation.

The arrangement suited me admirably, for it mitigated a danger which had been entirely unforeseen when I entered the house. I had not expected to meet there a man who suspected my identity as Carden evidently did, and whose suspicions would almost certainly become open denunciation if he saw what I was about to do. It was a relief therefore, to have Carden so placed that, with the Premier between us, I was comparatively hidden from him. As for Herzog, I asked for nothing better than that he should note my every action.

Lord Alphonso passed the wine and pushed a couple of cigar boxes about making conversation the while with the cheerful air of one who is performing a duty that will soon be over. He was glad, no doubt, that

I had saved his daughter from drowning, and was honestly anxious to be civil to me, but he would have found the process more congenial if I had been—well, not preoccupied with the necessity of prolonging my life by squirting something into his glass.

The opportunity arrived when, having helped himself, he turned slightly to Carden to pass the decanter, at the same time asking his young relative's opinion of the wine. I had already removed the lid of the pill-box in my pocket, and now, quickly withdrawing the rubber tube, I stretched out the hand in which I held it concealed, as though to take a pear from a dish in the centre of the table. In doing so my hand travelled directly over my host's glass, and during its passage I squeezed the bulb, meeting Herzog's inscrutable gaze as I did so.

The next moment Herzog's face went ashy grey. By some nervous mischance I dropped the murderous contrivance into the dish of fruit. I made a frantic effort to recover it, but Carden forestalled me. His hand shot out and his sinewy fingers closed on the syringe while I was still fumbling. He began to examine it keenly, but Herzog had managed to pull himself together.

"I will trouble you to hand me that little instrument, Mr. Carden, please," he said, with cool deliberation. "It will be safer in my possession than in Mr. Martin's. He will be the first to thank me for relieving him of it, for it is my duty, undertaken at his own request, to see that he does not indulge in a certain small falling of his."

Looking puzzled, Carden reluctantly complied with the demand. Lord Alphonso, hospitably sorry that a guest should be so branded as a narcomaniac, covered my confusion with a series of grunts, and then sought consolation for the contretemps by draining his glass to the dregs.

CHAPTER XIX.

An Unwitting Champion.

Never during my enforced association with him had I greater cause to wonder at Herzog's power of control than in the moments following Lord Alphonso's draught of wine. He told me that the atropine was nearly instantaneous in its fatal effects, but there was nothing in his demeanour to show that he was in the presence of a man who might be expected to fall dead. On the contrary, he busied himself with his almonds and raisins in the detached manner of one who has had to make himself disagreeable from a sense of duty.

My own feelings at that juncture, so far as my noble host was concerned, were those of perfect complacency—for the simple reason that I knew that I had done him no injury. While dressing for dinner I had thoroughly washed out the bulbous tube, replacing the original infinitesimal contents with pure water. Hence my dismay when Herzog had asked to examine the tube on approaching the house, and my belief when he did not appear to detect that I had tampered with it. I knew that I should have to reckon with him afterwards, but I was fighting for my life hour by hour till Janet's return, and ev-

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ery minute gained was of untold value.

I argued that my terrible custodian could not, for considerations of his own safety, reveal my identity there, if he ever did it directly at all. He would have to do it in such a way as not to implicate himself, and that could not be so long as he was avowedly my companion. If he was accused of nothing more heinous he would at least be held guilty of aiding my escape from prison.

I wondered further at his marvellous concealment of emotion when a quarter of an hour had elapsed and the Premier chatted on, in no way the worse for my bungling effort of jugglery. Well, Herzog would take it out of me later no doubt, when we had retired from this august but farcical entertainment. In the meanwhile, my pretended complacency might have gained time for Janet's success.

As I sat taking an idiotic part in the perfunctory conversation necessary for the consumption of Lord Alphonso's usual modicum of port, I was more seriously concerned with Ralph Carden's attitude. There lay my most imminent danger. He sat for the most part silent, and when he spoke at all it was to his noble relative on some subject of private interest. The great man himself was probably too bored to notice the

electrical tension among his guests, but so marked was Carden's refusal to hold converse with Herzog or myself that I fully expected to spend that night in jail and to be delivered to the hangman on the morrow. (To be concluded.)

EXCHANGE OF COURTESIES.

Duke and Duchess of Connaught Get Splendid Reception in France.

New York, Jan. 5.—A Paris despatch to the Herald says: "The Duke and Duchess of Connaught, with Princess Marguerite and Victoria arrived to-day (Wednesday) at Brest on board the British cruiser Essex. The French armored battleship Massena, hoisting the flag of Vice-admiral Caillaud, and the cruiser Guichen saluted the Duke with salvos of artillery.

Admiral Caillaud paid the Duke his respects as the representative of President Loubet.

The Duke of Connaught paid visits to Admiral Caillaud and other French officials.

THE C. P. R. IS RESPONSIBLE.

Lindsay, Ont., Jan. 5.—(Special)—At the adjourned inquest into the death of Fireman Chambers, killed by an explosion on a C. P. R. locomotive, near Bobcaygeon, a week ago, Tuesday night, it was shown that the engine was patched and defective and the jury found the C. P. R. indirectly responsible for Chambers' death.

TO BE PRIVY COUNCILLORS.

Ottawa, Jan. 5.—(Special)—The statement that N. A. Balcourt and Mr. Bain had been made members of the Privy Council is somewhat premature, but they will be very shortly. The British principle is followed now in Canada and all ex-speakers get "Hon." for life.

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