

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.)

CHAPTER XXII. A Strange Alliance.

It was but a fleeting vision that he had of Roger Marske, for no sooner did the ray from Herzog's lantern fall upon him than he ducked down and disappeared. It tasted long enough, however, to explain the purpose of his midnight visit, for in his mouth, carried there doubtless to free his hands for the climb, was a long dagger or Bowie knife.

I joined Herzog as he strode to the window, and peered down into the gloom, but of the intruder there was no sign. He had completely vanished, and was presumably making his way through the shrubs back to the grounds of "Ardmore."

"Humph! Clambered up by that Virginia creeper," said Herzog, shutting his window and proceeding to light the candle on the dressing table.

"I think you owe me thanks, my friend." I hated to be beholden to him, so I answered sullenly enough that I should not have been taken by surprise, as I had been wide awake and ready to give a good account of myself.

Herzog chuckled, and I noticed now that he seemed in high good-humour. "Well, well," he said; "at any rate I warned you that you would be in danger, and you profited by my advice to be vigilant. I was in two minds whether your peril would take this form or that of an incursion by police-officers. I am delighted that it came in the shape of Mr. Roger Marske, for now I can play the game with a knowledge of my opponent's cards. Just cast your eye over this telegram that I received this evening."

"I saw that it had been handed in at the Charing Cross post-office at six o'clock, and, besides the address, contained only the two words: "Business off."

"That," proceeded Herzog, as he carefully restored the message to his pocket-book, "refers to your little affair, or rather to what would have been your affair if you had been the truculent ruffian you were supposed to be. It is a prearranged signal informing me that the scheme has been abandoned. Lord Alphonso's life is no longer threatened, and personally, I rejoice, for I am not by nature a blood-thirsty man. Now I am going to be perfectly frank with you, Rivington, in the hope of tempting you to equal frankness. That telegram was sent by, or on behalf of, Sir Gideon Marske, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and one of my superiors in the unpleasantness we have

been engaged in." "Roger Marske's father?" I exclaimed, more concerned with the intimate bearing of his revelation on my own fate than with the tremendous fact that Cabinet ministers should have conspired against the life of a colleague.

"Ah, you begin to see the connection of things," Herzog said. "Yes, if Roger Marske had not been playing a lone hand, about which you will, perhaps, enlighten me presently, I should have stood in a very different relation towards you to what I do at this minute."

And depositing his heavy frame in one of Mrs. Krance's unreliable chairs while I sat on the bed, he told me the secret history of his mission to release me in order to assassinate Lord Alphonso. How, with the connivance of the Home Secretary, he had worked the business at the prison; how he had doubted my fitness for the job, almost from the first interview with me at Southampton; and how he had begun to suspect an entirely unperceived combination of private influences the moment he perceived Lady Muriel's interest in the case of the boat on the day of our arrival at Totland. It had not taken him long to specify Janet Chilmark as the "friend" mentioned by Lady Muriel, and thenceforward his aim had been, not, as I had believed, to turn me loose as a savage murderer on Lord Alphonso, but to trace out the intricacies of Roger Marske's hostility to me, as evidence by his pitiless talk on the boat.

He told me, with a fat wheeze of enjoyment, that he had arranged the excursion to Bournemouth for the express purpose of proving to himself his suspicion that Roger Marske had not only guessed my identity, but had private reasons of his own for desiring either my death or recapture.

"I had hard work to keep him quiet, there in the pine wood, and only did it by telling him the truth—that your escape had been contrived at the instance of his father, Sir Gideon," said Herzog. "I did not tell him that from that moment my allegiance to that sinful old statesman was broken, and that such wit as I possessed was to be devoted to paying off an old score against him."

"But what about the atropine business, at which I checked you the other night?" I asked. "That didn't look like sparing Lord Alphonso."

"Checked me?" Herzog sneered quite amiably. "That was all a harmless device for settling the question, upon which even then I had no certainty, whether you were really meaning to kill his lordship or not. When I gave you the supposed fatal squirt there was nothing in it but

rose-water. I was compelled to use a scent, so that when I examined it before going in I could readily ascertain whether you had, as I expected you would, wash it out and refilled the thing with pure water. So much for your checkmating, my friend."

I positively began to admire his cunning on that occasion, since it had no baser object than to give the lie to the murderous protestations with which I had sought to deceive him.

"To return to Roger Marske," he went on in more serious tone. "My own position toward the Marsks, father and son, is this. Years ago, when I was in the Inland Revenue service, I fell into an error, of which Sir Gideon took advantage to bind me to him body and soul as the doer of any dirty work he required. I had no option. I either had to become his bond-slave or go to hard labour—an alternative for which neither my habits nor my figure are adapted. Now Roger Marske by his conduct towards you, by his following your friend, Miss Chilmark, to London, still more by his intention to kill you to-night, has given himself away as deeply implicated in your affairs. Am I right that you and your plucky little sweetheart think that he ought to stand in your shoes?"

Could I trust this professor of chicanery and crime with so much as we knew of the vital secret which Janet had gone to try to probe? He read the doubt in my eyes, for he hastened to add:

"I think I am your only chance. Rivington, and probably Miss Chilmark's, too. If I knew why she went to London I might be able to help you and her, too, poor girl, if Sir Gideon Marske has allowed her to live so long."

"Sir Gideon? Roger, you mean," said I in my blundering way. "My dull wits could not grasp on the spur of the moment where Sir Gideon came in."

But Herzog's could. "You forget that telegram I had from Sir Gideon this evening, cancelling the plot against the Prime Minister," he said. "That is evidence to me that Sir Gideon has become suddenly aware of these private complications. He can only have learned of them from our friend of window-scaling proclivities, and whatever his information may be, it almost certainly includes the fact of your innocence. Does it also include a knowledge of the guilty?"

He paused and looked at me, but I made no sign as yet. Herzog went on, still more impressively; "Take my word for it, Rivington, that whatever is wrong with Miss

Chilmark, that old man is in it—up to the hilt. That attempt on you tonight shows that they have been hard hit by the girl, and that they want to silence you without recapture if possible, though, having failed with the knife they will probably fall back on the hangman's rope if we don't look sippy. And if they want to treat you like that, what sort of mercy is the girl to hope for—the girl to whom I figuratively take off my hat as a fat old terrier might do to a smart little ferret that has bolted the rat for him. Sir Gideon and Roger are my rats, Rivington, and they are on the run, but they will get clear away if you don't decide to trust me."

"You don't care a tinker's rap about me, or about Miss Chilmark," I said tentatively. "What's your motive?"

Herzog waved the cigar, which he had taken care to light, slowly to and fro, admiring the gyrations of the smoke. "Not revenge, my friend—nothing so crudely useless as that," he smiled at me. "I am an advocate for reciprocity in trade. In short, I want to reverse the lever, and have a pull over Sir Gideon, that is all; so that I may not be called upon to assist in assassinating any more Premiers with blunt instruments. But if, in the process of reversing the lever, Roger Marske gets hanged instead of you, I shall not complain."

At that I hesitated no longer, as I should have done had he professed any but a selfish purpose in serving me. The man was a monster of iniquity, but his interests so clearly ran side by side with my own in confounding the Marskes that I judged it best to clutch at the only straw held out to me. Moreover, he had guessed and wormed out so much for himself that there remained but little to confide to him but Janet's solution of my poor sister's cryptic utterance, and our hope of connecting "Danvers Crane" with Roger Marske.

Herzog listened with increasing gravity, noting down the address of Mrs. Webery at Notting Hill, and of Bloomsbury lodging-house where Janet was to sleep, but he made no comment till at the close of my narrative I pressed him for his opinion. I was as anxious for it, now that we had joined forces, as though we had been in the same camp all along.

"It is impossible even to surmise what has happened," he replied thoughtfully, as he flicked the ash from his cigar. "It seems tolerably certain that Roger Marske has either been so hard pressed by Miss Chilmark that he had to confess to Sir Gideon and seek his aid, or that the old man has nosed out the trouble for himself, through the young lady's pursuit having led her into his neighborhood. Fortunately there is a good clue, which ought to be worked at once."

"What clue?" I asked breathlessly.

"Mrs. Webery should be called on without the loss of a single hour. She will be able to say what address, if any, she gave to Miss Chilmark, and if it is anywhere in the district which Sir Gideon Marske honours with this residence, there ought to be a pretty hot scent," said Herzog. "In any

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case, the institution of inquiries round about Marske Hall, near Brentwood, might lead to discoveries. It would be quite natural for me to go there to see that old scoundrel to report to him; in fact I am rather surprised that the telegram did not contain a summons for me to wait upon him. The trouble is what to do with you."

"Do not let any considerations about me stand for a single moment in the way of your finding Miss Chilmark," I urged.

"But, my friend, it is just that that I must do if you are to be of any use to me," my new ally replied with a candour so brutal that it was bound to be genuine. "If you are caught and hanged before I can bring your alleged crime home to Roger Marske I shall never bring it home to him. I simply shouldn't be listened to if I came with the fullest proof. Every official nerve would be strained to cover up such an enormous miscarriage of justice. I know because it has been done before, my friend. No, I must put you away somewhere while I go Marske hunting; and where to put you, God only knows."

"You think, that Roger Marske having failed to finish me, they will, as you said, substitute the rope for the knife?"

(To be continued.)

OUTING FOR JANUARY.

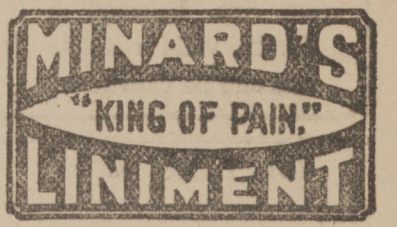
Tollie-chow. Tuck-wheet. Tuck-joey. E-kee-quay.

These are some of the songs the trained linnets of East London sing while their owners back them with goodly sums in money. It is a novel sport and well described with pen and camera by Ralph D. Paine in January OUTING. Mark Twain's Country, by Clifton Johnson, shows only too clearly that "a prophet is without honor in his own land." Some of the inhabitants seem disgusted at Mark's fame and ascribe it to his long hair and still longer drawl. The article, with its numerous illustrations, clearly shows the origin of many of the humorist's famous scenes. Ice is on the ponds, and every boy should read Skate Sailing Made Easy, which appears in this number, with many photographs of skate sails in use. How to put on Snow Shoes, by Dan Beard, also contains many hints for winter weather. An article by the late Leonidas Hubbard discusses Indoor Training for Outdoor Sports, with photographs of different ways in which this is done. Emerson Hough contributes a sketch of Kit Carson and his adventurous life, and Major Henry Romeyn tells of Long Distance Riding in the American Army, with accounts of the many hardships endured by our soldiers when the West was an untracked wilderness. Hunting in a Malay Swamp is vividly described by Caspar Whitney; it is an account of strange adventures in strange lands. The Middle West Discovers Outdoors, by H. C. Chatfield-Taylor, has many illustrations showing the leaders in this growing movement.

This month's fiction is of the best, including Saady's Santa Claus, by C. H. Claudy, and illustrated by B. Cory Kilvert; A Close Call—an episode of brand shooting—by Alexander Hunter; The Cutting of the Cards, by E. Grayton McCants, and Grigg's First Hunt, by Alford Stoddard—the last two, delightfully humorous. The regular departments include the Outdoor School and College World, Recent Outdoor events discussed by Caspar Whitney; Bench Shows and Field Trials; The Game Field; Laying up a Car for the Winter; Golf, and Photography for the Beginner.

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