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May 6.

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## THE PRICE OF SILENCE

—BY—

Mark Darran

John Smith rose slowly from his chair, and his eyes were like points of steel.

"Out of here—before I kick you out!" he thundered.

So threatening was his attitude that the prince started back and snatched a revolver from the bosom of his coat. He might as well have saved himself the trouble, for John Smith was too quick for him. His right fist swung upwards, caught the Indian's wrist clean on the bone, and the weapon fell to the floor.

John Smith flung the door open, then his arms went round the Indian, and he fairly flung him out into the passage.

The man scrambled to his feet and made a bolt for the door, where his attendants were waiting. With his hand on the handle he paused and looked back, and his dark face was terribly evil in expression.

"You will be sorry for that!" he snarled.

"I am sorry now," John Smith answered coldly—"for scolding my hands with you."

Lady Minter's pretty drawing-room was more crowded than usual, and for the excellent reason that it was known that Prince Rani Singra had honored her by consenting to stay at her house. The Berkeley Square incident had already travelled widely, and it is more than a little probable that more than one man or woman, good-hearted enough in the ordinary way, wished that there had been no rescue. Naturally, the story had taken many forms, the versions ranging from an attack by one of his own attendants, who had suddenly gone mad, to an attempted theft of his valuable jewels by a armed swindler who had contrived to get in to the ball.

One curious thing might have been noticed at Lady Minter's, and that was that there was not one woman present who had ever had her fortune told by the Indian prince. As a matter of fact, it almost seemed that once was enough for most men or women, for they never went to him again unless actually picked out by him. Then, with something of the air of doves going into the cage of a snake, they obeyed without demur.

Lady Minter's face was white, despite the bright way in which she gossiped with the women who were present, and her eyes never left the corner where, seated on a pile of cushions, was Prince Rani Singra.

His dark face still looked a trifle pale—if that is possible—and there was a certain restlessness in his eyes which was not usually to be noticed there.

Lady Minter crossed the room, and it was curious to notice that her manner was almost humble as she addressed the man she was befriending.

"I have told my friends that you are not nearly well enough to tell their fortunes to-day," she said rather quickly, with a forced laugh. "What would Dr. Mellor say for allowing me to let you work your brain so soon?"

The smile that curled the prince's lips was not pleasant to look upon, and his eyes held Lady Minter's with a curious intensity.

"They shall not be disappointed," he answered quickly. "Already my servants have arranged the little room across the passage."

"But the fatigue," Lady Minter protested, though feebly.

Prince Rani Singra rose from his pile of cushions, and with his hand lightly on her arm led Lady Minter from the room. There was a smile on his face, but as the door closed behind them it vanished, and his mouth snarled like that of a wild beast.

"You fool!" he whispered. "What would you do?"

"Oh, this cannot go on!" the woman answered, shakily. "I cannot see you in this house forcing my friends to secrets from them."

"They should have no secrets," the Indian sneered.

"Surely you have had enough money?" Lady Minter ventured. "This blackmail!"

The man thrust a hand brutally over her mouth, and his eyes blazed.

"Say that again, and, by Krishna, your husband will know that the jewels you wear are false, and that the real ones have been pawned to pay your debts at bridge." The man laughed mirthlessly, almost noiselessly. "It would please him, would it, to think that the historical gems—"

A servant came along the passage, and Prince Rani Singra drew his face back and moved towards a room opposite.

"May I suggest that you send Mrs. Beemish in first?"

"Yes," Lady Minter answered, but her lips formed the word rather than gave utterance to it.

Prince Rani Singra pushed open the door of the room and entered. The blinds had been drawn over the windows, the heavy curtains had been pulled close, so that there was little light. On a small Oriental table in the centre of the room burned a little fire in a brass bowl, a curiously pungent smell arising from it. Beside this stood a saucer containing some dark liquid, and pens, ink, and paper.

"Vashti!" the prince said in Hindustani.

The taller of the two native servants, a man with wild eyes and a thin, cadaverous face, bowed low.

"My lord?" he asked humbly.

"To-day there must be no failure!" the Indian went on sharply.

"Many rupees have I paid you, but when you return to India you will be a great man among your people. Yet the other day you failed to learn that which I desired."

"The brain is not a horse, my lord," Vashti answered, with a touch of

spirit; "for it will not make it work the faster."

There was a footstep outside the door, and Prince Rani Singra dropped hastily upon a pile of cushions, just before the door opened to admit a tall, handsome woman of about fifty years of age. She stood hesitating on the threshold, evidently more than half inclined to retreat.

"Oh, don't be silly!" a girl's voice said. "I'm told it's just lovely! Do go in!"

"It is well that you have come early, Mrs. Beemish," the Indian said in a soft voice. "Yesterday I was much shaken, so that to-day my power is not great. What would you have?"

"Then perhaps I had better not trouble you?" Mrs. Beemish said hastily.

Avastha, the shorter of the two attendants, stepped noiselessly forward, picked up the saucer of dark liquid from the table, and held it out to the woman.

She took it mechanically, looking into it wonderingly, something of the fascination of the unknown taking possession of her.

In the gloom Prince Rani Singra watched her with eager eyes, while Vashti's eyes fairly glowed as they never left her face.

"What would you have?" the prince asked again, and softly drew towards him one of the sheets of paper that lay on the table.

"Tell me if there is happiness in the future?" the woman asked, with a touch of eagerness.

"Then look into the bowl."

The woman's eyes were fixed intently on the dark liquid, but she saw nothing there.

Vashti moved slightly, but his eyes never left her face, which began to change curiously in expression. All the time seemed to go out of it, and it became fixed and rigid.

"What is it that is troubling you?"

It was the prince who asked the question.

"There is nothing—" Mrs. Beemish began, but stopped abruptly.

For a few seconds she was silent, and when she continued she spoke slowly and haltingly, so that the Indian had no difficulty in taking her words down on paper.

"Why has Dick told it?" she said.

"He knows that I would have got the money for him somehow. But to have out his father's name to that bill. I know he meant no harm, thinking that he would be able to meet it. His father will never forgive him—never!"

"How much is it?" Prince Rani Singra asked, and his voice was shaking with excitement.

"Two thousand pounds."

As a cat Prince Rani Singra stepped forward and laid the paper on the table. Then he took the saucer of fluid from the woman, and placed a pen in her hand.

"Sign it!" he ordered.

Just for a moment Mrs. Beemish seemed to hesitate, then the pen moved across the paper.

With a laugh of triumph the Indian turned and waved his hand to Vashti. Instantly the light died out of the man's eyes, and at the same moment the woman looked up and passed a hand nervously across her eyes.

"Why, I—I saw nothing," she said, with a hysterical laugh.

"Yet you have written it down," Prince Rani Singra answered her softly, and at the same time drew the blinds from the window, so that the light came into the room. "Read what you have written."

Mrs. Beemish picked up the sheet of paper, on which her signature was still wet; then a cry of fear broke from her.

"No, no!" she cried. "It's a lie—about Dick!"

The prince snatched the paper away from the woman, as if fearing that she might destroy it.

"In that case, it doesn't matter if I show it to the others," he said carelessly. "I don't suppose they would tell your husband—though news has a way of travelling."

Mrs. Beemish swayed as though she would have fallen, but steadied herself by gripping the edge of the table.

"Give me that paper," she said harshly.

The Indian read the contents of it with great care, then looked up and met the woman's eyes.

"What a wicked world," he sneered.

Mrs. Beemish stepped forward, as if in her desperation she would strike the man.

"I have heard strange things of you," she said huskily; "and I have noticed that where you have been unhappiness has followed. Now I know why, you blackmailer. You live by prying into people's secrets, by taking into the light—"

"No," Prince Rani Singra interrupted, with a laugh. "I can always keep secrets—at a price."

Mrs. Beemish raised her head proudly, though there was a despairing expression in her eyes.

"The price?" she asked.

"Two thousand pounds," the Indian answered readily. "You see my consultations are not expensive—no more, in fact, than the little—er—indiscretion of your son."

"I haven't so much," Mrs. Beemish sobbed.

"I can wait," the Indian assured her blandly. "I think you had better return to the others."

Like a woman in a dream, Mrs. Beemish moved towards the door, opened it, and stepped out into the passage. As she did so a man brushed past her and entered the room, closing the door behind him.

Prince Rani Singra swung round from the window, where he had been standing reading the paper again, and tried to thrust it under his robe. At sight of his visitor he gave vent to a cry of fear, for it was John Smith, dressed in conventional morning-coat, a silk hat in one hand and a maula cane in the other.

"You do not often have men visitors," John Smith said coolly. "It must be quite a change to you."

The Indian stood with the paper crushed in his hand, making a great effort to pull himself together.

"Nor do I want them," he answered harshly.

He made a motion as if to pull the heavy curtain across the window, but John Smith gripped it and tore it down, so that the room was flooded with light. Then he stood with his back to the wall, so that neither of the Indian attendants, who looked ugly, could see at him from behind.

(To Be Continued.)

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Value for prices charged.

BETTER TIMES IN IRELAND  
TEMPERANCE AND PROGRESS

(Continued from page two.)

standard tends steadily to rise with the increased purchasing capacity. I was stepping along pretty fast through a southern town the other day for fear of missing a train, when I heard some one following at equal speed. As it was plain his speed must be in some way related to mine I waited. He was going to the same train and had put on the extra burst of speed simply out of desire to let me know I need not hurry so much.

So we walked together and I was able to repay his thoughtfulness by expressing some reassuring views about home rule in reply to his diffident questioning. On the way we passed a number of women wearing the sony hooded cloak which has long been a badge of station with the Munster women and which certainly quenches it over the more common shawl. One looked so young, I asked my companion whether the women wore the cloak before they were married.

"Sure they don't, sir," he laughed. "Before they marry it's hats out of the shop they wear nowadays."

And, indeed, the millinery displays had been striking enough to attract the note even of the casual male. As the tendency to substitute the hat for the shawl runs through the whole range of wants it is no wonder the shopkeepers are in good humor.

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marketing at the town fair had been concluded. Very often the basis of it was in the fact that the farmer left home at dawn and did without food till his return at dark. Now, men who notice such things told me, an hour after the fair closes you'll hardly see a farmer in the streets. They are all off to their farms again.

And it hasn't stopped there either. They are organizing the temperance movement on the grand scale as they did in Father Matthew's day. There is to be a national conference in Dublin one of these days and the conference is being financed in every Catholic parish in Ireland by the issue of cards at a penny, half of which is for local expenses and the rest to indemnify delegates.

I don't think it is increased earning power and stability of conditions that accounts for this altogether, although that underlies it. The temperance movement is only one of a series going on now, each as distinct as a separate finger but all fitting in together as naturally as the fingers of two hands. Home rule, the Gaelic revival, the volunteers, the industrial propaganda, cottage industries, temperance, education, agricultural organization, all have in them something of the vision which uncovered the Purple Spears. The Irish are bent on building character on the foundation of their new-found prosperity. They think that is the biggest thing they can do just now for Ireland. And when you hear them say so, especially the young ones, you realize that when this is said all's said.

A ROMANTIC GIRL.  
"What's the matter, girly?"  
"Why I often read of ashes of roses and was trying to manufacture some. But the mean things will not burn."

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