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THE

COUNTERSTROKE

By AMBROSE PRATT

Author of "Vigorous Daunt, Billionaire."

(Continued.)

"Exactly—'ah, bah' — 'tis an expressive phrase. By the way, there is a little warning I should give you before we part. Until noon tomorrow, as I have already told you, all that I possess is yours, including your liberty. But see that you are to be found at noon tomorrow! This island is small, scarce three miles square, 'tis inhabited only by my people, but it is mountainous, and you perchance might find some tempting hole to hide in. Well in that case, my Lord, you will be sought out quite leisurely, and perhaps before you are found my son-in-law will have arrived. You understand? He is a devil that man, and loves inflicting pain. If he has nothing else to do he tortures animals or insects to pass away the time. I wish to save you from his mercy (I am aware you think it is because I wish to spite him); in reality it is because you happen to be an Englishman, and I love the English. Good-night, my Lord."

"A demain, sir."

"A demain, vraiment, et a la morte." His chuckle sounded far down the corridor, even after the door had closed, and Cressingham was alone with Francine Elliott. They looked at each other silently for long, then two big tears fell splashing from the girl's eyes on to her gown.

"For heaven's sake don't weep, dear," said the man.

She stifled a sob. "It won't help us, will it, that?" and she tried to smile, but her lips trembled pitifully.

He stooped above her and kissed a loose strand of her hair. "Darling," he said brokenly, "the worst of it all is that I am powerless now to help you."

She started to her feet. "Tell me everything that has happened since we parted, tell me why I am here, why you are to die, everything!"

He did as he was bid, and two long hours were spent in the recital. Francine heard of her father's condition in dry-eyed, speechless misery; she listened throughout like one in a dream, but she heard all, understood all, and at the end, when Cressingham had no more to tell, she put her hand upon his arm and said—

"There is no hope for either you or me, Lord Francis, we are in the hands of a human tiger; escape is impossible. This tiny little island is inhabited by the Count, his grandson and a score or two of negroes and mongrel Europeans, every one of whom is a ruffian steeped in crime. I have been here now six days and have been everywhere seen everything that may be seen, and studied all the creatures that surround us. Th Count has not sought to control my actions and does not now seek to control yours, because he well knows such precautions are entirely needless. To escape we should need wings."

"Or a boat," muttered Cressingham.

"There are only two boats on the island," sighed the girl, "and they are always kept securely chained when not in use."

In another hour we shall have daylight" said the man. "I shall then explore the place—who knows, dear; some kind fate might befriend us."

The girl sighed, and said: "Then take me with you, will you please, Lord Francis. Let us spend the last few hours together that are left us."

"Us?" he queried.

"Yes, us! do you think I should care to live without—hope"

"Francine!"

"I mean it!"

"You would kill yourself?"

"Not that. I have not the courage. But you are an English gentleman. I put my life and honour in your hands. You will kill me when the last comes; promise me!"

He shook his head. "No dear. I'll not do that; you are in no immediate peril. I think, dear, they will not try to harm you in any way, they have no reason to. Besides, you must be rescued one day, soon I hope, for Perigord will never rest till he has fulfilled his mission. Moreover, I depend on you to clear my name for me, the name which that villain has tarnished. No, Francine, you must live if only for my sake."

She smiled sadly. 'My father is dying, you are about to die. What is there left in life for me?"

"Come, come dear, I haven't given up hope yet, nor shall I till the very end."

"Hope, what is that with us, Lord Francis?" A despairing effort to postpone facing the inevitable."

"While life lasts, Francine, hope is the mainspring of ambition. It gives me ambition now to work and find a way from here for both of us. It gives me wider vision and points to better days, to longer life and love—"

"Ah, you are brave—but you have not seen, you cannot understand."

"Dear, let us talk a moment of ourselves. The last time that we met you were so kind to me I dared to dream—"

"Ah, heaven—how long ago it seems!"

"Yes, long enough, and fearful things have happened in between. But Francine."

"Ah, let us rest my Lord. Soon if you think of trying to explore the place we shall have toilsome work enough to do."

She led him to a couch and seated there looked up at him. "Do you know, I feel so weary and old, so very old."

He regarded her with tender pity, but a little of reproach was in his eyes. "Too weary to remember, dear?" he asked. "I have been trying to speak to you of something that might have been, that yet perhaps might be."

"Ah, my Lord, what now matters anything?"

Love, Francine."

She sighed profoundly, and shook her head. "I loved you once, I think, perhaps I love you still, but I am miserable. Oh, my poor old father Ah, to think he is so ill, he that loved me so, and I away from him." With a sudden gasping cry she threw herself forward on he couch and great heart-breaking sobs shook her slender body violently. Cressingham watched her in silence, tears trickling down his own cheeks. His heart ached to soothe her, to help her in her great grief, but he dared not touch her, he felt himself somewhat too unworthy and the girl too sacred. But soon she grew more composed and controlling herself looked sadly up at him. "What, do men weep?" she asked, a mournful smile parting her quivering lips.

He nodded, and answered huskily, "When they see the one they love in pain, men sometimes weep."

"Ah," she sighed, "you love me, Frank?"

"Yes, dear," he said, simply.

"Sit down beside me." He obeyed. "Do you think there is any hereafter, Frank?"

"I do."

She sighed again. "I do not. I have tried, ah, so hard, to believe that somewhere beyond our ken a good God exists who will judge us when we die according to our lives on earth. But I can't, I can't, I never could. It all seems too unreasonable, too wild and fanciful. Never a shred of proof has anyone advanced to me. If God exists why does He not disclose Himself"

"He does, Francine."

"Where?"

"In hearts and lives; sweet, pure, kind, charitable hearts and lives like yours. Do you think your sweet unselfish life has been of itself without fount or purpose? It came from God, dear, and to God it will return."

"You are foolish, Frank, because you love me. I have not led a really good life. I have been a little charitable, but that was only because it pleased me to help the helpless better than to disregard their cries. Listen, Frank, I have sat by more than twenty death-beds of the poor and watched the spirits of the sufferers depart. Would you not think at solemn times like that some little sign would come? Well, I have watched and watched, filled sometimes with hope and a wish to be convinced. But no, all have died in the same dreary fashion, simply ceasing to live because disease had disjointed or destroyed the parts of their bodies whose coherence constituted life. Even from their last words, no meaning could be drawn. Some died wailing to their friends around them for help impossible to give; some in silence selfishly resigned; others praying to their God and asking mercy for their sins."

"Francine, it hurts me, dear, hearing such things from you. It sounds somehow like blasphemy, coming from your lips."

"It is blasphemy, Frank, but it is what I believe and think. I have told you these things to show you how utterly hopeless I am both in life and death."

"My poor girl, how I pity you!"

"Can you not help me, Frank?"

"I help you? I?"

"Teach me to believe as you do; give me some of your faith. I should so love to think that after death I might meet father and you again!"

"Ah, dear, I am helpless! I know so little of God or Christ. I believe in them because I was taught to believe when a child. I have never questioned that teaching, never cared to, for what is all so beautiful must be true."

"My poor Frank, you are only half a Christian! Good heavens, that there are so many millions like you! I used to despise such faith at one time, preferring my own whole-hearted paganism. But now somehow it is different. I long to to be comforted a little."

"Francine, soon it will be daylight."

"Frank, my heart is breaking; in a few hours you will die."

"Dear, you love me then? Ah, say you love me, Francine!" He bent towards her, his arms outstretched, and the girl went to him slowly, with parted lips and brilliant eyes that shone with unshed tears.

"Kiss me, Francine!" Their lips met in a long feverish caress, and slowly the color mounted to the girl's wan cheeks. The man gathered her in close embrace and held her tightly to him, not satisfied until she rested on his knees and her head reclined upon his shoulder. And she, a little comforted, looked up at him and whispered: "I have so longed to be your wife Frank. I have always loved you, dear! Ever since I have known you!"

(To be continued.)

Daily Fashion Hint for Times Readers



RECEPTION COSTUME OF VELVET.

Black velvet was used for the gown illustrated, but the model would also be effective in almost any coloring. The skirt was made in kilted style, the plaits stitched down to below the hips, and had a sweep all around. The little coat was trimmed with two-inch wide real Irish crochet lace, which was stitched under straps of velvet. These straps were cut out in square tabs on each side of the front and finished by black velvet buttons, embroidered with gold thread. The coat had a rounded peplum, attached invisibly at the waist line, and there was a narrow vest of white cloth, applied with narrow black and gold passementerie.



A MOTOR CAP IN BEAVER.

In the search for novelty that is the secret and the foundation of fashion—fashion and fashions that are eternally changing—the furrier has turned once more with a favorable glance to beaver, and to the somewhat rarer and scarcer otter. The thick and dense fur of the beaver tones in delightfully with both the fashion for smooth surfaces and with the color card, since the beaver shade is one that is highly modish in cloth and velvet—to say nothing of velveteens and curdurovs—that are worn by the fashionables this season. The large crown of the flat Tam-o-Shanter order that one sees on so many of the imported millinery models is used for this piece of motor headgear, the brim taking the approved visor form that distinguishes such apparel from that intended merely for street purposes. A little touch of trimming is attempted to relieve the flatness of the fur, this taking the form of rosettes of pale blue velvet, shading on the turquoise tints, tucked in between the crown and the brim on the left side, and running up on the crown towards the back. A curled coque plume in brown serves to harmonize the contrasting tints of fur and velvet nicely, and adds a feminine touch to the somewhat masculine shape of the model.

EMPRESS PASSED THE PILOTS AT FULL SPEED

Halifax, N. S., Nov. 27—The pilot commission have held an investigation of the report of the officers of the C. P. R. steamer Empress of Ireland that they could not get a pilot when coming into the port last Thursday night, and that the steamer was thereby delayed for more than an hour. The commission heard J. E. Dewolfe, agent of the C. P. R. at Halifax, regarding the captain's statement.

The pilots of No. 4 boat testified to have seen the C. P. R. liner go past them at a fast speed though they burned flare lights. It is understood that copies of the evidence will be sent to the marine department; also to Captain Foster of the steamer

TWENTY EIGHT LIVES LOST FROM CANADIAN STEAMER

Detroit, Mich., Nov. 27—A Free Press special from Wiarton (Ont.), says:

The coasting steamer J. H. Jones, owned by the Crawford Tug Company, a local concern, foundered off Cape Cocker Thursday afternoon and all hands were lost. The crew consisted of 12 men, all from Wiarton, and the number of passengers is estimated at 16.

The Jones, which plied between Owen Sound, Wiarton and Manitoulin Island ports, was one of the staunchest steamers on the Georgian Bay and was commanded by Capt. Crawford, a fresh water navigator of large experience. Part of the cabin, a life boat and two unidentified bodies have been found by Indians on the North Shore of the Christian Islands. Boats are now out from here, Owen Sound, Pentetanguishene and Parry Sound looking for survivors and wreckage

COMMENT OF THE BROKERS

Wall Street is Beginning to Ask What the President Will Say

"As the opening of congress draws near and monetary conditions show signs of certain improvement, Wall street is beginning to concern itself as to what the president of the United States will say in his annual message. It comes from people in close touch with the administration that his instructions to congress will be expressed in more forcible language, if such is possible, than he has ever yet used. It is understood he will lay particular stress on the continuance of corporate investigations, suggesting that they should be pushed in every direction with the utmost vigor, touches lightly on the labor question, but goes into at length the advisability of curbing growth of great fortunes and suggests the adoption of a measure of relief to overcome the monetary embarrassments occasioned by the present defective currency systems."—Watson & Co.

"The president's message a week from Monday will present the government's attitude toward corporations, and will be interesting reading in view of the lessons presented at the last election. While, as a matter of fact, nothing has yet been done by the government that has injured the intrinsic value of corporations, we think the annual message will suggest a more paternal supervision of corporations and a closer and firmer regulation of rates. The abolishment of graft and the prohibition of rebates should not be looked on with disfavor. In fact, when this whole subject is better understood Wall street will look with more favor on the government's interference in these affairs."—Carpenter, Baggot & Co.

"The development of a favorable money situation is in progress, and this should finally lead to a stronger and more active stock market. This week's money movement, however, was somewhat disappointing, though the true index, namely, money rates, indicate much more favorable conditions, whatever may be the result in tomorrow's bank statement. The security list looks strong enough to respond quickly to good leadership, or any manifestation that an advance would not be regarded unfavorably by banking interests."—Marshall, Spader & Co.

"Considering the condition of the money market it is well that the stock market should be governed by conservatism. Any effort to put prices on a much higher plane before the end of the year would be injurious. We shall probably continue to have a good trading market, with an upward trend."—Clark, Grannis & Lawrence.



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