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THE RED CLOUD CHIEF

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FRIDAY APRIL 3, 1885.

DARK DAYS.

BY HUGH CONWAY.

Author of "Called Back."

Silently and sadly in the retirement of our room we made our preparations for the journey, which began with the morn. There was no need to encumber ourselves with much luggage. We should rest in no bed until the trial was over. What resting-place might then be Philippa's, Heaven only knew! So our package was soon made ready.

Then I wrote a letter to be given to or found by my mother in the morning. I told her that as important as it was to us to be haste to England, that Philippa had consented to see my uncle, that I would write as soon as we reached London. I gave no further explanation. I hoped she would attribute my sudden flight to the erratic nature which she often averred I possessed.

After all, the deception matured little. In a week's time nothing would matter. Grief, overwhelming grief, would be my portion; a portion which, by her affection for me and for Philippa, my poor mother would be forced to share.

All being now ready for our start, we strove to win some hours of sleep. Our efforts were made all in vain. Through that the last night we might spend together, I believe neither my wife nor myself closed an eyelid. Let me draw a veil over my wild distress and Philippa's calm acquiescence in her fate. Some grief is too sacred to describe.

Morning! Bright, broad, clear, cool, odorous morning! Our sleep came at last and at least spared us the anguish of awaking and, while for a moment glorying in the beauty of the world, to remember what this morning meant to us. Giving ourselves ample time to reach the railway station, we crept from our room, and, with eyes full of blinding tears, closed the door for ever. I pause in the center, and plucking a lovely spray from the great orange tree, kissed it and leave it in my wife. Without a word she placed it in the bosom of her dress. As she drew her mantle aside to do so, for the first time I noticed that she wore the very dress which clad her on that fatal night. Although I was utterly unstrung to the almost tropical heat through which we should have to travel, I dared not remonstrate with her. Now, of all times, her will must be my law.

Noiselessly I undid the massive studded wooden gate, which at night-time closed the entrance to the patio. Unseen, we stepped into the shady, narrow street. Our luggage was light. I could carry it with ease to the station, which was not a great distance off. We were there only too soon.

We had to wait some time ere the train, which, following the example of the late Spaniard, declines on any consideration to be hurried, made its appearance. We took our seats in a carriage. At last the dilatory train condescended to move onward. We sat side by side, and gazed in the direction of the beautiful city from which we were flying, and until we saw the very last of it, until even the great towering Giralda was lost to view. Then, and only then, I think, we fully realized to what extent we were speeding.

The next three days and nights seem now little more to me than a whirling dream. On and on we went to work out our fate over the same ground which I had traversed, with seemingly less agitated feelings, some months ago. I ground my teeth when I thought how little my strenuous and seemingly successful efforts had availed. Now, not from any omission of precaution; not because the law compelled; not by the exercise of force; but simply on account of the great datum of right and wrong, we were, of our own accord, retracing our steps to face the danger from which we had fled. Or, rather, to say of destiny!

What was money to me now? Nothing half so much as dross! It could do one thing, only one, that gold which I lavished so freely on that journey. It could assure that Philippa and I might travel as one. It could give us privacy for the time that journey lasted, that was all!

Yet, although awake, we spoke but little. Our minds, as were our bodies, as can be expressed in words. Her hand in mine, her head on my shoulder—sleeping when we could sleep, waking and sewing into each other's faces—knowing that every mile of sunny or shady country over which we passed bought us nearer to the end. And I understood then how it is that lovers who are separated by some great sorrow can kill themselves, and die smiling in each other's arms! We might have done so, but our deaths would have left to perish that stranger whom we were speeding to save.

So, as in a dream, the hours, the days, the nights, went by. We might have been traversing through the fairest scenery in the world, or through the most arid desert. I scarcely troubled to glance out of the carriage window. The world for me was inside.

It was after we left Paris—Paris, which to-day seemed all but within stone's throw of London—that I aroused myself, and bended my energies to discuss finally with Philippa our proper plan of action. I felt that my right course would be to go straight to some solicitor, tell my tale, and ask him to put matters in train. But I could not bring myself to do this. Our secret was as yet our own. Moreover, through the misery of those hours, one ray of hope had broken upon me. If Philippa could be brought to yield to my guidance, to follow my instructions, it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that we might be saved with clean hands.

"Dearest," I whispered, "to-night we shall be in London."

Her fingers tightened on mine. "And at Tewkham?" she said. "We shall be in time?"

"In ample time. But, Philippa, listen——"

"Basil, as you love me, not one word to tempt, to dissuade me!"

"Not one; but listen. Sweetest, if you will be guided by me, even now all may go well. This man——"

"The poor man who is standing in my place?"

"Yes; listen. Heaven forbid that I should tempt you. Think; he is, no doubt, a man of a lowly station in life. Philippa, I am rich, very rich."

"I do not understand you," she said, pressing her hand to her brow.

"Money will compensate for anything. Let him stand his trial. He is innocent. If there is justice in the land, he may, he must be found not guilty."

"But the agony of mind he must pass through!"

"For that I will pay him—aye and one

[illegible] He may be but a country boob, he may be a thousand miseries, would fly back to his native wealth. But, what we should do, the company of his wife, to aid, he an unknown hand [illegible] from those the day which left him under the lash of accusation. In effect, look at the matter in every light. I [illegible] you that, in my opinion, we may, not, under any circumstance, await the result of the trial."

She sighed, but made no answer. Her silence was a joy to me. It told me that my specious argument carried weight. I took her hands and kissed them. I kissed her again and again and I swore to her, that my life as well as hers depended on her yielding.

It was long before she yielded. The thought of a fellow-creature living in prison, perhaps for months, and we alone to stand in a crime before his judges, on account of a deed which she herself had done, was anguish to her noble nature. Thus, growing desperate at seeing the only plank which could save us from the wreck swamped for the sake of what, in my present mood, I was ready to believe too flimsy, I assailed a scruple, I used my last and, as I rightly judged, my most powerful argument. I told her that I owed it not only unto me, but unto her, but unto our child, that we should be free from any accusation of a crime.

Heaven forgive me for the anguish my words caused that loving heart! Philippa, even as I spoke, conceived no danger fell like a thunderbolt, sank back in her seat pale and trembling. Had I ever doubted that my wife's heart—whole love was my own—that look would have dispelled the doubt.

She prayed and besought me to leave her at the next station, to let her finish the journey and make her avenual alone. My reply was short, but sufficiently long to put all hope of my consent up to such a course out of her head. Then, for my sake, she yielded.

"On one condition—one only," she said.

"Be guided by me in this. In all else you shall do as you like."

"I must be in the court, Basil. I must hear the trial. If the worst happen, there must not be the delay of a moment; then and there I must proclaim the truth."

"You shall be at hand—close at hand. I will be present."

"No! I must be there. I must hear and see all. If the man is found guilty, I must, before his horrible sentence is pronounced, stand up and declare his innocence."

"All that could be done after, we'll."

"No; it must be done then. Basil, fancy—put yourself in his place! Nothing could alone for his anguish at hearing himself condemned to death for a crime he knows nothing of. I must be there. Promise me I shall be there, and for your sake I will do as you wish."

It was the best concession I could get. I promised. I concealed the fact that if, when sentence was pronounced, a woman rose in the body of the court, and asserted the prisoner's innocence and her own guilt, the probabilities were she would be summarily ejected. This made no difference. Let Philippa be silent; let the man be found not guilty, and the next train could bear us back to Seville.

Yes, even now there was hope!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CRIMINAL COURT.

We reached Charing Cross at 4 o'clock on the morning of September 20th. The first train by which we could get to Tewkham was timed to leave Liverpool Street at seven, so that we had an hour or two to spare for such refreshment as we cared to take, such rest as we cared to allow ourselves. What with the fatigue of continuous travel, and the dread of what this day was to bring forth, it may be easily believed that we were tolerably worn out. We were, indeed, more fitted to go to bed and sleep for a week, than to proceed upon the last stage of our dismal journey.

But there was no help for it. If we meant to be in time, we must go on by the early morning train. I begged my wife to lie down, and endeavor to snatch an hour's sleep. She refused firmly. Much of that calm which had characterized her since the moment when I broke the fatal news to her had vanished. Its place was now taken by an excitement, suppressed, but nevertheless nearly manifest to my eyes. The fear that we should not reach Tewkham in time for the trial seemed to haunt her uneasily. It was for this reason she so peremptorily refused to lie down and court sleep. She feared lest, our eyes once closed, we should, from sheer exhaustion, sleep for hours, and so miss the morning train. She was ever picturing the horror of that poor unknown man's being led from the dock, with the death sentence ringing in his ears.

So the time which elapsed before we started for Tewkham we spent in the hotel. I bespoke rooms by telegram, sent when we reached Folkestone. We make an apology for a meal; in fact, what we could get at that time of night was of itself little more than an apology. We sat all but [illegible] watching the hands of the clock, which told us how fast the precious moments were passing away. We saw the gray morning struggle with, and at last conquer, the yellow gaslight. We heard the hum of traffic growing louder and louder in the streets below us. Then we turned to make what may be fairly called our last address. Who could say that to-day my wife and I might not be parted forever?

While at the hotel I tried to obtain the file of the *Times*. I wanted to look back and see if I could find the account of magisterial proceedings against this unlucky William Evans. He must, of course, have appeared before the lesser tribunal, and could I see the account of his appearance, I should be able to judge as to the strength of the case against him. But the file was not forthcoming. Perhaps it did not exist; perhaps the sleepy-eyed Teutonic waiter did not understand what I wanted; or, still in the dark as to why suspicion should have fallen upon this innocent man, we left the hotel and drove to Liverpool Street Station.

At nine o'clock our journey was ended. We stood on the platform of Tewkham railway-station. My poor wife wore a thick black veil, so her face I could not see; but I knew it was as pale as death. Now and again her hand, which rested on my arm, pressed it convulsively. I think we were the most unhappy pair on the earth!

We were even denied the time for any more farewells or expressed regrets. The hour was chiming from the old cathedral tower. The business of the Courts, I knew, always began at ten o'clock, and considering the crowd which would most surely be attracted by so interesting a case as this trial for murder committed so many months ago, I felt sure that unless we proceeded at once to the Shirehall, our chance of gaining entrance would be but a small one. I hailed one of the close cabs which were waiting outside the station.

As I did so I felt a heavy hand laid upon my shoulder, and heard a rich, pleasant-sounding, and not unlike voice exclaim, "Basil Norris, as I'm a sinner!"

That any one should at this moment address Basil Norris in a merry way seemed a positive impossibility. I turned round almost angrily, and found myself face to face with [illegible] His was a heritage against Grant, a man full of life, as my mother, but one with whom, before I became the society of my fellow-creatures, I had been on the intimate terms. I had not seen him for a considerable time; but had heard, enough, that he was making great strides in his profession career.

In spite of my distress I returned his greeting, and grasped his hand warmly. At least it seemed a relief to find that I had a friend left in the world.

"What brings you here?" I asked.

"The only thing that could bring me to such a place—a prisoner. It was an important case on London. That's the worst of a place so near London as this one. One is tempted to spend the nights in town, which means getting up at an unholy hour in the morning. But you! Why are you here? I heard you were as rich as Midas, and living abroad in luxury."

"I have been abroad for some time. I hope to go back again very soon."

"Happy man!" he ejaculated. "I could scarcely keep the bitter smile from my lips as I thought how ill-applied were the words."

As he spoke he glanced at Philippa, whose grace and beauty of form defied the concealment attempted by thick veil and sombre garments.

"But what brings you to this sleepy old town?" continued Grant.

I hesitated for a moment. Then, thinking that truth, or at least half truth, was the best, told him I had come down to witness the trial for murder.

"I should doubt your getting into court," he said. "The morbid interest excited around here is, I am told, very great. The court is besieged by applications for tickets."

"Couldn't you help me? The fact is I have a particular reason, not merely curiosity, for wishing to be present at this trial."

"I don't think I can," said Grant. "Does your—the lady who is to go with you?"

"My cousin—yes," I said, seeing that he expected an introduction. He raised his hat, and made some courteous and pleasant remark, to which Philippa, to my surprise, replied in a calm and fitting way.

Grant knew I had no sister. I called her cousin because I had a wild hope that if the worst happened, I might be able to conceal the true relationship in which we stood, and so be permitted to give evidence on her behalf. I trusted my wife would guess that I had a good reason for this deception.

"Try and manage this for me, Grant," I said as earnestly that my friend made no further demur.

"Take me in your cab, and I will see what I can do."

During our drive to the Shirehall I asked Grant what he knew about the impending case.

"Nothing," he said frankly. "I hate murder cases—hate even to read about them. Of course I know that Sir Mervyn Ferrand will shine, and that he is in the snow for days and days. But I know no more."

"Who is to defend?"

"I don't know. I thought, from your anxiety, you must know him."

"Will he be found guilty?"

"I don't know. Stay, I heard some one who ought to be well informed, say yesterday that the case for the prosecution was most feeble. He seemed to doubt if the grand jury would return a true bill."

As I heard this I pressed Philippa's hand secretly. I felt that she was trembling.

The drive to the Shirehall occupied only a few minutes. We did not go to the public entrance, in front of which I could see a crowd of people nearly blocking up the street. We stopped at another door, and Grant, after looking round, caught sight of what appeared to be an inspector of police. He entered into a little conversation with him, the result of which was that we were given into his care.

"This is a branch of the law," whispered my friend as he bade me good-bye. "You will have to allow it by a handsome gratuity."

We followed our guide, Philippa, although walking with a firm step, leaned heavily upon my arm. I scarcely know by what door we entered that palace of justice. The stalwart policeman led us through stone corridors and passages, which resounded with the tread of our feet, and at last we found ourselves before a double swinging plain oak door, over which in old English letters was written "Criminal Court."

I felt Philippa shudder, and knew that the sight of those words brought the horror of the situation fully home to her. Mechanically I pressed a sovereign in the hand of the vestal inspector, or whatever he was; then, holding my wife's hand, I passed through the noiseless swinging door into the all but empty court.

A few policemen and other officials were lounging about. Two or three people, who had no doubt gained admittance in the same way as we had done, were seated in various corners of vantage. I led Philippa up the broad steps, and pointed to one of the hard wooden benches provided for the accommodation of the general public. These benches were raised step by step, one above another. We chose our position about half-way up, on the right-hand side of the court, Philippa, with her thick veil falling down to her chin, and so defying recognition, sank wearily into her seat. I placed myself by her side; my hand crept under the cloak she wore and held her hand.

Surely it was all a dream—a dreadful, realistic dream! I should wake and find myself under the great orange tree in that courtyard in gay Seville, my half-smoked cigar and the book which I had been lazily reading lying at my feet; my mother opposite me, laughing at my commonsense, and Philippa's grave dark eyes looking with calm everlasting love into my own. I should wake and find the cool of the evening succeeded to the glare of the afternoon. We should walk through the merry streets, lounge in the Alameda, wander through the glowing Alcazar gardens, or drive out miles and miles over the fertile smiling plains. Or I should even wake and find myself nodding over my fire in my lonely cottage, the stolid William the only human creature within hail; Philippa's return, the snowstorm, the dreadful discovery, the flight, before, the marriage, all, all a dream!

It is a kind of stupor—the temporary reaction, I suppose, consequent upon such fatigue and trouble—I stood round me, and wondered where I was.

What is this great musty building, lit from one side by large elegantly arched windows of ecclesiastical design? What are those dull gray vacant walls; that lofty ceiling, crossed and cut into small squares by dark rafters; this leaden floor, on which feet fall all but noiselessly? What are those raised boxes on either side of the building—those small railed platforms all but adjoining them, and all but adjoining that panelled oak structure at the end facing me? What is that rectangular box-shaped erection with [illegible] carved coming? Let us away from this dismal, colorless place! Let me wake and find myself amid the flowers, orange trees, the fair sights and surroundings of our Spanish home.

(*To be Continued.*)

This little item that looks so solemn was put in here to fill this column.