

THE UNKNOWN MR. KENT

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"But Kent! Kent! Are you mad?" demanded the king. "Time! Time is against us. You don't know what is happening! What do you think of this?" he cried, thrusting a paper toward the American.

"Kent took it, said, 'Have a seat, your majesty,' and read. It was a proclamation with all official seals and form, calling upon the inhabitants, and especially those employed in the manganese mines, to assemble in the market place, at 11 o'clock of that day, where communications of the utmost importance to their welfare and the welfare of the state would be made. Kent read it slowly to himself, gave a wry twist to his mouth, and looked at his visitor.

"I observe," he said, with quiet meaning, "that it does not end quite as royal decrees customarily do. It does not bear the words 'God save the King.'"

The king, who had been twisting impatiently on his chair, exclaimed, "No, it doesn't. I noted that point."

"When did this appear?" the American asked, recalling the hour when the attack had been made on him.

"It was posted up by the chancellor's orders between one and two o'clock this morning. The guard told me so."

"The guard, then, was friendly?"

"Yes, and very much distressed. He apologized to me, and said that he could not obey his orders; that he could not understand. I called him inside and closed the door, and told him to tell me all he knew. He did. He says that Provarsk has won over some of those adventurers he first brought here, and that they have been talking to all the others in the guard room."

"Did this man get any inkling of Provarsk's intentions?"

"Yes. Enough to cause him and all the others that are loyal to be highly alarmed. These passed the word around that they believed they could best serve the throne and you by obeying up to a certain point. They wish to know what to do."

"But Provarsk's intentions?" interrupted Kent, bringing the king back to the point.

"Provarsk is going to announce this morning that the mining concession has been turned over to him, wrested from you and John Rhodes, in behalf of the people by him, and he will promise that hereafter the profits shall be shared by those who do the work. After that he proposes to inflame the people to demonstrate in force and demand of me that a like course shall be pursued with all other state holdings, and that those which the state does not completely own shall be returned to the original or minority owners to be run hereafter without state interference. My guard gathered all this from stray talk made by Provarsk's henchmen, who, already certain of success, are beginning to boast of the authority they are going to have."

"Kent's eyes glowed with interest.

"That guard of yours," he declared, "is due for a good commission after this is over. I seem to have overlooked him." He meditated for a moment, and then to the king's surprise, as if vastly relieved, leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"Amateur work, after all!" he declared. "I'm disappointed! Provarsk had me guessing, last night. I thought he was a much cleverer fighter than I had believed him to be. He always boggles in the end."

"I don't see the joke!" exclaimed the king, but more hopefully.

"Why, it is this way," explained Kent. "Plain as day now. He poses as a national benefactor, but no one would be able to tell, if he did actually get possession of the mines, what the profits are. He probably would divide up some of the profits as long as it served his purpose. And after that—!" He snapped his fingers decisively. "In the meantime he insures my being driven from Marken, and forces you to turn over everything that produces an income; also to let government controlled private industries revert to those private individuals who own the outside stock. That includes the Marken mineral springs in which he has invested every dollar he has in the world; and all he could borrow. It's so easy now that it's scarcely interesting!"

"But the people don't know that you have the concession," objected the king. "They think I still own the mines for the state, and that the profits have been turned to the redemption of the state bonds; and they are confident that after the bonds are redeemed I'm going to spend more money for the good of the state. The mine Provarsk exposes the whole affair, they will lose confidence in me and my intentions."

The American regarded the king's

"But, suppose you had never granted the concession, and that you did own the mines, free from everything?"

"As soon as your bonds have been met, I'd give them the profits—all of them! You certainly know that I do care for my people and am unselfish! I want to be just what they have thought me to be, Kent, the best king that Marken ever had! I want to be able to do again what I have done, walk out amongst them, and know that they respect me as a king, and like me as a man and a friend."

He spoke impassionedly, voicing the hunger of his mind, confessing his dream, while the American watched him kindly as an leader brother might watch the harassments of a younger one when about to tender sympathy and assistance.

"All right!" he said, bluntly. "I think we can fix that up. It may be foolish on my part—damned foolish! But a man can't pass through this world without being foolish once in a while. I'm going to give you that concession."

The king's face expressed many emotions, and among them solicitude and affection.

"But—Rhodes?" he asked excitedly. "What will Rhodes think of you?"

"I've got to take my chances of squaring it with him. Most always he does about as I want him to. I've made a lot of money for John Rhodes, one time and another, and he knows it. Besides, I am going to tell you something. The last penny that Marken owed John Rhodes, together with two per cent. interest, was paid him more than a week ago. If, after all that, he kicked, he'd be more of a dog than I ever suspected him of being."

The king, stupefied by the news that he was free from debt, gasped, but Kent disregarded him.

He got up and locked the door to make certain that he would not be disturbed, walked briskly across the room to a book case, and spoke with the proud delight of an ingenious boy. "Come here," he said. "I want to show you something. Pretty clever, I call it. My own idea. Ivan and I did most of the work. Now look over here. On this side of the room, right under the mantle—see this marble ornament? Well, it's nothing but a plain, common old American electric latch; the kind we have over home when we live on the top flat and want to open the ground floor door for a caller. Push on it!"

The king, still speechless, did so. There was a sharp click, and the book case swung away from the wall, exposing a modern safe behind it. The king's eyes were wide with curiosity. "That's the way she works," Kent exclaimed, proudly. "Thought it out myself, for emergencies. I haven't kept any papers of importance in the vault of my office for more than three months. I'd give \$100 to watch Provarsk when he opens it with the combination I gave him last night. It's quite empty."

He chuckled as he bent over and twirled the knob, pulled the heavy door open, brought out a drawer and took from it a piece of paper that the king recognized. He opened it and glanced at it to make certain of its identity, held it before the king to show what it was, and then deliberately tore it to shreds, which he threw into the fireplace and lighted.

"There goes the concession," he said, gazing at the flames. "The manganese are yours, unmortgaged, free from all debt and all obligations."

He turned with a warm smile on his face, and silenced the king, who began remonstrating.

"I'll tend to my part of it," he said. "It's up to you to do yours. Let me handle the situation here. You must rush back to your rooms, summon the heralds, get into your state glory so as to be more impressive than Solomon, and hurry down to the market place."

He consulted his watch. "You've no time to lose. If I were you I'd not let them know but that you personally summoned them. You'd better go now, and whatever you do, don't let Provarsk know you've been here."

He fairly shoved the king toward the door, hushing his protestations of gratitude with a gruff—"We can talk about all that later. Not now! Not now! Hurry!"

He carefully closed the safe and swung the book case back into its normal position, after which, for some minutes, he stood scowling thoughtfully over the garden, as if formulating new plans, and then walked slowly across to the door and opened it.

"I'd like to speak to you," he said to the guard. "Come inside."

The man hesitated, looked up and down the corridor and grinned. Kent

was secretly pleased and knew that he was not mistaken in his surmise that one who had always been ready to betray for money would go so again to the highest bidder. The man entered and closed the door behind him, with a look of cupidity in his eyes.

"You are out for money!" Kent said brusquely. "I'm going to make it worth your while to go at once, get my man Ivan and bring him here. You can tell the sentry it's Provarsk's order. If you do that within the next 15 minutes, you get 5,000 francs in gold and no one the wiser. Can you do it?"

The man took another look into the corridor, seemed satisfied, and said: "How will you pay me?"

"You know that I keep my word, don't you?" Kent retorted. "I tell you I'll pay you the minute Ivan is in this room!"

The mercenary hesitated, scratched his head and took the plunge. He ran on tiptoe down the hall. Kent hated to his secret safe, and took therefrom some rolls of coin and waited. His bribe was effective, for within the time Ivan appeared and the guard took the bribe money with a chuckle and left them.

"Ivan," Kent said in the soundless speech he employed when they were alone, "I rather think that, within a short time, Provarsk will be here and our interview may not be pleasant. Go into my dressing room there and leave the door ajar sufficiently to observe what takes place. If he gets ugly, I may need you."

"I understand," said the giant, nodding his head. "And I shall be there if needed. Is that all?"

"Yes," replied Kent, "that's all. And, Ivan, be wary of him if you do have to come out. I don't believe that man likes you! 'Pon my word I don't! And if he could, he might try to hurt you."

Ivan's mouth opened into a wide grin, as he went to Kent's dressing room and pulled the door carefully shut, save for a tiny crack. Kent paced restlessly about the room, pausing once to admire, absently, as he had done 100 times before, the intricate carvings of a huge wooden screen that formed a snug little corner. Time was moving and he wondered why Provarsk did not appear, for he confidently expected him. Had that astute gentleman discovered the counter move that was being made against him, and taken steps for its circumvention? It did not seem possible.

With brisk elation he heard a tap on the door and when the sentry entered looked expectantly over his shoulder, confident that Provarsk was there.

"Her royal highness, the Princess Eloise," announced the sentry, and the American was troubled as he bade the man open the door for her, and himself moved toward it.

She entered hurriedly and closed the door behind her. Her anxiety and excitement were marked.

"Tell me," she said, hastily advancing, "what has taken place. Karl had no time. He told me to come here and ask you. Why is there a sentry?"

"Princess Eloise," he said quietly, "I am under arrest by Provarsk's orders; but your brother and I have taken steps that will render him very harmless."

She looked at him with pronounced consternation that was augmented when he added, "Steps also that render my remaining longer in Marken unnecessary, so I shall soon be going."

"In the midst of such an emergency?"

"I do not believe it will be an emergency very long," he said, gravely. "And I do not believe that after today I shall be needed. Therefore I expect to leave Marken within a few days."

"But you can't!" she insisted, desperately.

A slow change came over his face, the change that his intimates in big affairs would have called his "Poker face," a face that would be wooden regardless of whatever depression, elation, craft or plan passed through his mind.

"Nevertheless," he replied, quietly, "I am going!"

"Surely not!" she expostulated. "I don't believe it! It's as if you were beaten—were running away!"

"Perhaps it may look that way—now," he said, watching to see the effect of his words.

The princess' distress increased. Her hands came together, and he saw that her slender fingers had interlocked as though by this grip to obtain strength for repression. He would have given all that was his to have and to have comforted, soothed, and caught them in his own strong palms reassured her, but he dared not. He had schooled himself to the knowledge that from her viewpoint he was but a capable money lender, possibly a good friend, while she was that product of nurturing and breeding, a princess royal. His rebellion at this condition brought out a trifle of that controlled savagery that made him strong.

"Why should I stay here any long-

er," he asked, "when all I came to do is done? I have paid John Rhodes every cent of his money. That was my mission, was it not? That and nothing more."

She lifted her head and regarded him with astonishment. His immobile face bespoke no inward hesitation. Nothing but calm purpose. He was inscrutable. She sustained a conflict of emotions, but all her respect and liking, so slowly upbuilt, were wounded by his words.

"I thought," she said hesitatingly, "that you had remained for something more—than that. I thought friendship, a liking for a great work, a happiness in doing something worth while, had been reasons."

He smiled but did not answer. She interpreted his silence as an admission that she had been mistaken in her estimate of him, and that he had been imbued with nothing but selfish motives. She spoke regretfully, now, and he saw that her reserve was breaking; that, tried and distressed, she was giving way.

"I thought we meant something to you, my brother and I! And I tried to be worthy of what I thought you were. I believed you to be the greatest man I had ever known! Karl would have done anything for you. I would—"

She paused, twisted her fingers still harder and then looked at him with eyes like those of a hurt child, candid, outspoken in humiliated confession. "I would have given anything to have you be my friend, as you have been Karl's." She paused, bit her lip, then impetuously clenched her hands and with sheer recklessness added, "I would have given much more—to have helped you—always. If you had failed and been beaten, honorably fighting, I would have liked to go to you, and put my hand in yours, and walk with you in defeat! I was sick of illusion—of sham royalty—of polite lies! I wanted your esteem! Yours! all of it! And now, I despise myself for it!"

She stopped, choked by her own humiliation, and looked at him; but his eyes were on the floor, his hands hanging listlessly open, his heavy shoulders and stalwart frame inert, and passive, as if all she had confessed, and all her scorn, were not capable of moving him. For a long time she stood thus, quivering, while he stood dumb before her. The chirping of birds in the sunlit gardens outside, the slow measured footsteps of the sentry in the corridor without, and that ominous, distant hum of Marken itself came to them accentuated in volume by their own silence. The echoes of her voice, like the appealing sobs of disillusionment coming from a hurt heart, died away like the last faint sounds of a requiem, like one astounded by some overwhelming surprise, he lifted his head and met her eyes. All the old bravery was gone from them. Gone, too, all the old mockery, the old readiness of response, the quick acceptance of overhanging chance. Something in their great seriousness, in their very depths, made her catch her breath. She saw that he was humbly, yet desperately, fighting to speak; that words were being sought and that none satisfied.

There was a clamorous, insolent note added to that murmuring diapason of sound that swept monotonously through the room, the sound of some one clanking his way through the outer corridor. It stormed his ears like the call of a trumpet announcing battle. It whirled him back to his own sphere of action, where men were to be met, where a fight, the fight he knew as a veteran, was imminent. His hands shot forward and caught hers, and his big body became endowed with a suggestion of bent steel, alive, ready to spring. He was the master again.

"Listen!" he commanded her, his words crowding one upon the other. "Go quickly behind that screen and sit down! Hurry! Sit there and hear what is said. Say nothing! My honor in your eyes may depend upon it—and that—is more to me than everything else in the world."

He caught her by the shoulders in his strong hands, whirled her in his bewildered, across the few steps intervening, thrust her into an easy chair behind the screen, and was out again toward the door through which Provarsk was entering and which he locked behind him. She heard Kent's voice, cool, casual, greeting his sole opponent.

"Well," it said, "I've been expecting you. Did you open that vault yet?" Provarsk laughed; but not with mirth.

"Yes, I opened it. And found just what I rather expected. Nothing."

(Continued next week.)

Didn't Mean It.
From the Toledo Blade.
The hostess had trouble in getting Mr. Harper to sing. After the song had been given, she came up with a smiling face to her guest and made this ambiguous remark: "Now, Mr. Harper, you must never tell me again that you cannot sing—I know now!"

A Gude Concert O'Herse!
From the Boston Transcript.
Edith—Would you marry a man who was your inferior?
Helen—If I marry at all.

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Not Quite.
"So they had smuggled whisky on that yachting party. This is going the limit."
"Oh, no; that is three miles out."

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Examine carefully every bottle of CASTORIA, that famous old remedy for infants and children, and see that it bears the Signature of *Dr. J. C. Watson*. In Use for Over 80 Years. Children Cry for Fletcher's Castoria

COUNTRY'S FIRST CORN MILL
Recent Discoveries Establish Its Site at a Point on the St. Croix River, Eastport, Me.

The site of what undoubtedly was the first tidewater mill on the American continent has been discovered at Red Beach, Me., where Low's brook empties into the St. Croix river at a point nearly opposite the southern end of Dohet's island, where De Monts and his men settled in the year 1604, three years before the settlement of Jamestown. In excavating for a fish pond near his summer home, R. S. McCarter of Cambridge, Mass., unearthed the unmistakable remains of an ancient dam of stone and timbers. Comparing the site with the original map of the island, authorities agreed that it must have been the site of the water mill mentioned in the old records as employed by Sieur De Monts and his men to grind their corn, being the largest stream within an area of several miles on either side of the river.

Making It Easy.
To facilitate the scheme for faking the finger-prints of infants in America, it is proposed to make the impressions in jam.—The Passing Show (London).

You can always depend upon the sincerity of a dog when he wags his tail.

The man who augurs bad luck is the worst kind of a bore.

WHERE TOMMY MADE A POINT
Remarkable That School Teacher Had Never Noticed That Quite Simple Truth Before.

Arithmetic, according to the average small boy, was simply invented in order to give teachers a good excuse for punishing their unhappy pupils. And certainly little Tommy Smith found it the unpleasant feature of his young life.

"Now, Tommy Smith," said the school teacher one morning, during the usual hour of torture, "what is the half of eight?"

"Which way, teacher?" asked the youngster cautiously.

"Which way!" replied the astonished lady. "What do you mean?"

"Well, on top or sideways, teacher?" said Tommy.

"What difference does that make?" "Why," Tommy explained, with a pitying air, "half of the top of eight is nought, but half of it sideways is three."—London Answers.

Progress.
"Has Gladys Twobble abandoned her plans to enter the movies?" "Oh, yes, Gladys is now passing through the second stage of soul development."

"Ah!" "She's thinking seriously of being a slum worker or a missionary. In another year she'll be about ready to marry some likely young fellow who is earning a decent living and settle down to a normal existence in a bungalow."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

The Autocrat.
"Do you and your wife talk politics at home?" "Never," replied Mr. Meekton. "We have a perfectly good cook." "What has that to do with it?" "We are afraid she might get into the conversation and tell us both how we'll have to vote to keep her from leaving."

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