

The Grand Babylon Hotel

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

(Continued from Yesterday.)

SYNOPSIS.
The Grand Babylon Hotel, London, headed Felix Babylon, proprietor, the reigning power are: Jules, head waiter; Miss Spencer, baroness clerk, and the renowned chef, Rocco. Anne, the favorite of Jules to supply a dinner of steak and ham—on the table at the table. His daughter, Helen, or "Nella," as she is called, Theodore Racksale, New York millionaire, buys the hotel, reorders the increased salary, and reorders steak and ham. Felix Babylon tells Racksale that he will probably resist his purchase for the hotel, being the haunt of royalty and aristocracy, attracts also plotters and mischief makers. Returning to the table, Racksale finds a plate set for Reginald Dimmock, acquaintance of Nella's, and English companion of Prince Arbert of Posen, visiting uncle of the reigning Grand Duke Eugen. In a mirror Racksale sees Jules wink at Dimmock. From Dimmock they learn that Prince Eugen is to arrive next day on business concerning his marriage settlement. Late that night Racksale sees Jules stealthily enter the room, reappear, and remove a white ribbon from the door handle. It is alarmed to see that the room is No. 111, Nella's room. He threatens Jules with a revolver, and on being taken to 111, finds it occupied by Dimmock, who tells him he changed rooms. Nella, who tells him he had been thrown through the window, Racksale apologizes. Next morning he learns that Miss Spencer has left, and Nella insists upon taking her place. He dismisses Jules and forbids him to re-enter the hotel. Prince Arbert, whom Nella has met traveling incognito, arrives, Racksale returns and finds that Dimmock has dropped dead. That night a Mr. and Mrs. Sampson Levi give a ball in the gold room. From a small room above the balcony Racksale and Nella see Jules, falling to find him on the balcony. Racksale returns and tells him in the little room above and asks him to leave. Next morning the body of Reginald Dimmock is missing. Arbert confides to Nella that Eugen has disappeared, she tells him of that happened at the hotel and that she believes that Dimmock was temporarily disloyal and lost his life because he was a Yankee. She urges him to go to the emperor and tell him all the facts. She pleads for her friendship and her own. A "Baroness Zerinski" whom Nella eventually recognizes as Miss Spencer, enters the dining room. Nella sees her take a folded paper out of her bag, she pleads for her involvement in the mystery. The baroness leaves suddenly, and as her trunk was loaded for Ostend, Nella tells her to go to her house, and tells her: "I have come about the murder of Reginald Dimmock, the disappearance of his corpse, and the disappearance of Prince Eugen of Posen."

PART FIVE.

CHAPTER IV Continued.

Miss Spencer's eyes gleamed, and she stood up and moved swiftly to the mantelpiece. "You may be a Yankee, but you're a fool," she said. She took hold of a bell rope.

"Don't ring that bell if you value your life," said Nella calmly, and with the words she pulled from her pocket a very neat and dainty little revolver.

This was simple bluff on Nella's part, and she trembled lest Miss Spencer should perceive that it was simple bluff. Happily for her Miss Spencer belonged to that order of women who have every sort of courage except physical courage. Nella perceived that, fact. "You had better sit down now," she said, "and I will ask you a few questions."

And Miss Spencer obediently sat down, rather white, and trying to screw her lips into a formal smile.

"Why did you leave the Grand Babylon that night?" Nella began her examination.

"I had orders to, Miss Racksale."

"Whose orders?"

"Well, I'm—I'm—the fact is, I'm a married woman and it was my husband's orders."

"Who is your husband?"

"Tom Jackson—Jules, you know, head waiter at the Grand Babylon."

"So Jules' real name is Tom Jackson. Why did he want you to leave without giving notice?"

"He wished me to come over here to Ostend. Something had gone wrong."

from which they were hastening and she could just distinguish a lighthouse and a great white irregular dome, which she recognized as the Kursaal. So she was leaving Ostend. Nella tried to sit straight in the deck chair, but discovered that she had been tied to it by means of a piece of broad webbing. Just at that moment a man came up from below, clad in irremovable blue, with a peak yachting cap. "Good morning," he said. "Beautiful sunrise, isn't it?"

"You?" she exclaimed. "You, Mr. Thomas Jackson, if that is your name? Loose me from this chair and I will talk to you."

"With pleasure," he replied. "I had forgotten that to prevent you from falling, I had secured you to the chair," and with a quick movement he unfastened the band.

"Now," she said, fronting him, "what is the meaning of this?"

"You fainted," he replied imperturbably. "Perhaps you don't remember. The man offered her a deck chair with a characteristic gesture. Nella was obliged to acknowledge, in spite of herself, that the fellow had distinction, an air of breeding. No one would have guessed that for 20 years he had been a hotel waiter. His long, lithe figure and easy, careless carriage seemed to be the figure and carriage of an aristocrat, and his voice was quiet, restrained and authoritative.

"That has nothing to do with my being carried off in this yacht of yours."

"It is not my yacht," he said, "but that is a minor detail. As to the more important matter, forgive me that I remind you that only a few hours ago you were threatening a lady in my house with a revolver."

"Then it was your house?"

"Why not? May I possess a house?"

"I must request you to put the yacht about at once, instantly, and take me back." She tried to speak firmly.

"Ah!" he said, "I'm afraid that's impossible. I didn't put out to sea with the intention of returning at once, instantly. In the last words he gave a faint imitation of her tone.

"When I do get back," she said, "when my father gets to know of this affair, it will be an exceedingly bad day for you, Mr. Jackson."

"But supposing your father doesn't hear of it—"

"Supposing you never get back?"

"Do you mean, then, to have my murder on your conscience?"

"Talking of murder," he said, "you came very near to murdering my

friend, Miss Spencer. At least, so she tells me."

"Is Miss Spencer on board?" Nella asked, seeing perhaps a faint ray of hope in the possible presence of a woman.

"Miss Spencer is not on board. There is no one on board except you and myself and a crew—a very discreet crew, I may add."

"I will have nothing more to say to you. You must take your own course."

"I will tell you what I propose to do. I propose to escort you to a place of safety, and to keep you there till my operations are concluded, and the possibility of interference entirely removed."

His eyes roved over her face. Her superb beauty overcame him. "Ah," he said, "what a wife you would make!" He put a hand on her shoulder. As she shrank back with an involuntary scream, a figure sprang out of the dinghy a few feet away. With a single blow, neatly directed to Mr. Jackson's ear, Mr. Jackson was stretched on the deck.

Prince Arbert of Posen stood over him with a revolver.

"Don't be alarmed," said the prince to Nella.

"Mr. Sampson Levi wishes to see you, sir." These words, spoken by a servant to Theodore Racksale, aroused the millionaire from a reverie which had been the reverse of pleasant. The great stock broker of the "Kaffir Circus" entered with a simple unassuming air. He was a rather short, florid man. "Mr. Racksale, I believe—Mr. Theodore Racksale. "Proud to meet you, sir."

"Good day," said Racksale briefly. "To what do I owe the pleasure—"

"I expect your time is limited," answered Sampson Levi. "Anyhow, mine is, and so I'll come straight to the point, Mr. Racksale. The other night I had a ball in this hotel. I don't like balls, but they're useful to me, and my little wife likes 'em, and so we give 'em. Now, I've nothing to say against the hotel management as regards that ball, but what I want to know is this—why did you have a private detective among my guests?"

"A private detective?" exclaimed Racksale.

"Yes," Mr. Sampson Levi said firmly.

"It is a small matter, I know, and I dare say you think you've got a right as proprietor of the show, to do what you like in that line; but I've called to tell you that I object."

"My dear Mr. Levi," said Racksale, "I assure you that, having let the gold room for a private entertainment, I should never dream of doing what you suggest."

"There was a gent present at my ball that I didn't ask. I was told by someone that he was one of your waiters, but I didn't believe that."

"Perhaps I can throw some light on this mystery," said Racksale. "That man was a former waiter at this hotel. I dismissed Jules. I ordered him never to enter the Babylon again. But on that evening I encountered him here—not in the Gold room, but in the hotel itself. I asked him to explain his presence, and he stated he was your guest. That is all I know of the matter."

"This is perfectly satisfactory to me," Mr. Sampson Levi said, after a pause. "I only wanted an explanation, and I've got it. Good day and thank you."

With his hand on the handle of the door, Mr. Levi stopped, and gazing at Theodore Racksale with a shrewd, quizzical expression, remarked: "Strange things been going on here lately, eh?"

The two men looked very hard at each other for several seconds. "Yes,"

Racksale assented. "Know anything about them?"

"Well—no, not exactly," said Mr. Levi. "But I had a fancy you and I might be useful to each other; I had a kind of fancy to that effect."

"Come back and sit down again, Mr. Levi," Racksale said. "Now how can we be of service to each other? If you'll put your cards on the table, I'll ditto with mine."

"Agreed," said Mr. Sampson Levi. "I'll begin by explaining my interest in your hotel. I have been expecting to receive a summons from a certain Prince Eugen of Posen to attend him here, and that summons hasn't arrived. It appears that Prince Eugen hasn't come to London at all. Now, I could have taken my dying day that he would have been here yesterday at the latest."

"Why were you so sure?"

"Question for question," said Levi. "Let's clear the ground first, Mr. Racksale. Why did you buy this hotel? And what is the next move to be?"

"There is no next move," answered Racksale candidly. "And I will tell you why I bought the hotel; there need be no secret about it. I bought it because of a whim."

(Continued in The Morning Bee.)

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