

The Pelham Affair by Louis Tracy.

(Continued from Yesterday.)

"And—next time—really think you should be accompanied by your legal adviser, to whom you can give a full account of all that passed this morning."

"Very well. But what does all this lead to?"

"Some exceedingly grave charges, obviously, if these statements are substantiated."

"The only serious witness is Police-Captain Sheridan. What does he allege against Karl von Holding?"

"I prefer to go through my notes carefully before advancing another inch. I am sure that is the best course for all concerned."

"The baronet rose. "Look here," he said impressively, "I'll keep my word, and remain at your disposal for a week—no longer."

"He strode to the door, which Pridoux opened. "Let me guide you to your car," he said.

"I really don't think I need your assistance."

"But you do, most urgently."

"As they passed together along an echoing corridor, Sir Arthur looked at the little man with a flicker of amusement on his face."

"Candidly," he said, "you fellows have altered all my preconceived opinions of Scotland Yard."

"You strike me as being what Corporal Jenkins would describe as blamy on the crumple."

"We are," agreed Pridoux. "Too close association with eminent factors is not good for any man. Even you, who are superb, have discovered that."

"What the devil are you driving at now?"

"Here is the lift. We can't talk shop now. For instance, those people in the reception-room stuck to lawn-tennis while we were there, but you ought to have heard their tongues wagging after we left."

"Indeed, who were they?"

"Three were officers of Sir Arthur Pelham's battalion during the first two years of the war, one was his house-master at Eton, and the lady dame during the dear boy's residence."

"You have a marvelous memory for names—although you affected not to be able to remember Somers's or mine—and a perfectly uncanny faculty for assimilating useful data, but it is quite impossible that you should recognize complete strangers unless they wear labels."

"The baronet was pulling on his gloves. He attended solely to that operation until the two were standing in the courtyard, and Tomlinson had brought the car up. He was thinking intently, and hardly noticed that Pridoux had ushered him into the limousine with marked politeness."

"When he was inside, the detective leaned through the window. "I may never see you again," he said, still in the most cordial tone, "so I want to congratulate you on the magnificent way in which you carried off today's ordeal."

"Are you quitting this case, then?" the other could not help asking.

"No. It will continue to absorb me for many days, if not weeks."

"I wish you would stop speaking in enigmas. I have enough to worry me without trying to disentangle your meaning from your words."

"I'll endeavor to be as direct and plain-spoken as the judge who will sentence you to penal servitude for life."

"Raymond Carr ruined my life by murdering Lady Pelham. You certainly should not have bolted to Scotland that morning. No one should ever go to Scotland without the best of reasons. The outcome was that I had many uninterrupted hours in which to search Lady Pelham's rooms."

"That old German woman, despite the racial obsession which permitted her to recognize you as her dead son, was nevertheless a mother. When her hands were forced by the agents of the Hauptquartierstab, she gathered the photographs of her son, ranging from babyhood to his guards' captaincy, and locked them away. She also made some remarkable memoranda—in case of future trouble. In a word, she meant to keep the whip-lash over you while she lived. She was a conceited, dogged Teuton, and tried to force you to marry Elise, some girl from Nuremberg. You, thinking more broadly, saw that marriage with a sure-enough fraulein would be fool-

as the right kind of wife. You were quite right. I suppose you felt safe in committing bigamy, but surely you must have felt a sinking in the stomach when Sheridan walked in, and you realized that he could, and will, produce the wife and child you desecrated in Chicago in 1914."

"The eyes of the two men met in a soul-searching glance. Tomlinson, waiting for orders, sat like a block of wood."

"At last von Holding broke a silence of nearly a minute. "Why do you tell me these things?" he said, and his full, reasonable voice showed no tremors."

"Because you are, at least, a brave man, and one respects that quality even in an enemy."

"Suppose I insist on seeing the deputy commissioner?"

"What will be arrested at once. I had a devil of a job to secure you this chance."

"Chance?"

"Of course. What else is it?"

"Come with me. Let us talk matters over."

"Absolutely useless. I have gone much too far as it is. By the way, give me that little black book as a souvenir."

"No. Kindly tell Tomlinson to drive up Whitehall."

"Pridoux obeyed, though never taking his eyes off the man in the limousine. Von Holding noticed this, and smiled."

"What good would it be? It's too late, anyhow," he said.

"Then Pridoux did a strange thing. He actually lifted his hat to one who had cost England more in blood and treasure than any other German. He watched the car swing out of the courtyard, and turn in the direction of Whitehall. Some specks of matter which resembled burnt paper fluttered through a window. The detective swore vexedly:

"Sacre nom d'un pipe!" he growled. "He's destroying that pocketbook page by page. But I had to sacrifice something. It would make a terrific case, and every sob-sister in Great Britain would have believed in him."

"Besides, one can never trust the law."

"A motorcyclist whirred by. He, also, had business in Whitehall. He remained fifty yards or more behind von Holding's car, and he too saw the black fragments eddying in the breeze. Suddenly there was a noise slightly more strident than the back-firing of a cylinder, and Tomlinson brought the limousine to a halt. He stepped out, and drove straight to Charles Cross Hospital. Turn just beyond the station. The accident entrance faces you then."

"The suicide of Sir Arthur Pelham gave London a new thrill. Some of the newspapers attributed it to grief for the death of his mother, to whom he was devotedly attached. Moreover, it was suggested by a well-disposed coroner that the baronet might have sustained undetected injuries to his brain when wounded by a shell at Loos."

"Pridoux received the telephone message from the hospital, and dashed with the news to the deputy commissioner's office, still discussing the strange case with Somers and Sheridan. Of course, it was shocking that any man should take his own life, but the deputy commissioner was philosophical."

"It is better so," he said. "We would have been compelled to arrest him next time, and the time and trouble needed to secure a conviction would be simply incalculable."

"It was a great stunt!" sighed Sheridan. "Geel! I was counting on another four thousand miles' run to the trial."

"I suppose there is no doubt that von Holding is actually dead?" commented the deputy commissioner.

"Sheridan says he blew the top of his head off, sir."

Somers gave Pridoux a weighing underlook. They went out together. "Did you say much to him, Charles?" he almost whispered.

"Just the few necessary words. He took the verdict like a white man."

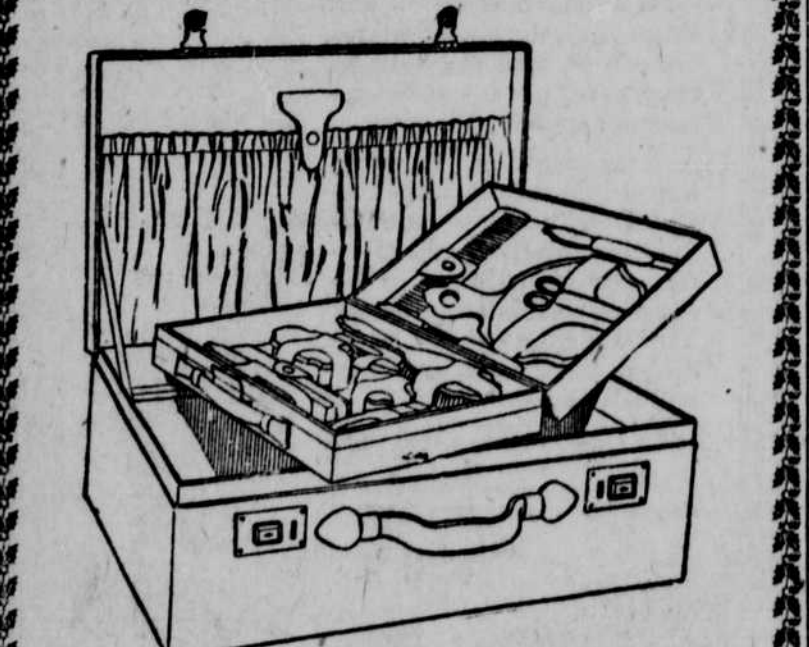
Somers drew a deep breath. "Well, I'm glad it's over," he said. "Our nice young deputy was scared stiff. He's positively frightened of question-time in the House of Commons. . . . However, one must eat though the heavens fall. I wonder if those soldier-boys are at their clubs?"

"Of course, they are! Let's walk along, Whitehall and through the Park."

"The chief sought no reasons for taking that particular route. Neither man spoke again until they were crossing the horse guards' parade."

"Will you explain to Pelham?"

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were no longer useful, had them sent out of the country as undesirable aliens.

Arthur married his Phyllis towards the end of July, at Lyndhurst, of course. He obtained the court's permission to call with his bride and the orange-growing syndicate to South Africa a month later. They were becoming quite attached to their plantation when a cablegram from the solicitors in April brought them home. Cedar Lodge was sold, and paid the widow Flanagan live here? Anyhow, cheer up, old scout. It isn't your funeral."

Pelham hurried to the entrance hall when their names were sent in.

"This is quite an agreeable surprise," he said.

"We thought that, perhaps, you would like to see us, Sir Arthur," said Somers.

Something in the manner of the two men warned the other that the use of the title was the heavy-handed bit of humor.

"More tragedy?" he murmured.

The late Sir Arthur Pelham met with a fatal accident in Whitehall half an hour ago, and was dead before he could be taken to the Charles Cross hospital.

"Is that the whole story?"

"Not by five acts," broke in Pridoux. "But it will carry you safely through lunch. The chief is starving. Look at him!"

Pridoux's active wits were running far ahead of events. As they climbed the stairs to find Drummer and Jameson, he linked a hand in Pelham's arm.

"There is only one thing I wish to see now," he chirped. "I want to be present when the family lawyers hear of this mixup. I don't suppose the estate will be out of the courts for twelve solid months, so the faces of two or three worthy gentlemen will present a fine blend of anxious thought with a preliminary estimate of the total costs."

Phyllis Daunt positively refused to allow her prospective husband to do other than take formal possession of Cedar Lodge.

"I wouldn't live there again if the walls were solid gold," she vowed, "unless, that is, I was allowed to pull them down and build hospitals with the proceeds. That house will ever be a place of ghosts, and nasty ghosts, too."

They were discussing matters in the Woods' garden at Lyndhurst. As Pridoux foresaw, the legal complications were interminable. The estate, was not entailed, but Lady Pelham had a life interest with the remainder to her son, and a judge in chambers took some convincing that the astounding story told by Pelham's lawyer was true. This meant that Siwinski and Pascari (the woman was of no account) became important witnesses once more, so the police treated them leniently, and when they

were never detected. And, just think of it—the whole fabric of crime collapsed from the instant ex-Corporal Jenkins met my train at Victoria. Suppose, to avoid speech-making, we all join in drinking his health! Luckily, he has a taste for poultry-rearing, so he is now being trained to look after a farm my wife will buy in the New Forest. Henry Wood arranged this and other things for us per Christmas. Long may Jenkins flourish!"

"May his eggs be the biggest and his pullets the fattest in Hampshire!" added Pridoux. "I say nothing about cockerels in the presence of my respected Chief, whose crow will be heard as far away as Chicago at the police conference next October."

"No, no," said Somers hastily. "I have recommended the commissioner to send you as a delegate."

"You fat lump!" shrieked Pridoux. "You blubious adiposity! Why, every gigantic cop in the United States

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