

The Castle of Lies

BY ARTHUR HENDY VESSEY
(Copyright, 1906, by DUFFLETON & COMPANY)

CHAPTER XXXI.—Continued.

"Then where?" I demanded impatiently.

"It must be from one of the windows of the story below."

"Well, we shall soon see."

I poised myself to climb through the window on the broad stone gutter, along which Captain Forbes must have made his way. Then I hesitated.

"What! You are afraid!" cried the woman fiercely. "If so, I will go myself."

"No, I am not afraid," I replied with deliberation. "I am wondering what they will think when they come from the oratory presently, to find me gone. She will think that I am your accomplice."

"I can easily tell the truth."

"They will scarcely believe you. Shall I, or shall I not, tell them of Ferdinand's danger?"

"But will they believe you? While you hesitate Prince Ferdinand may be assassinated. Is this a time for explanations? Say that the fools persist in misunderstanding you, it is only a question of an hour or two at the most before you may tell the truth. Go, and I swear by the cause I hold sacred that if you save him the honor of Sir Mortimer Brett shall yet be saved."

"You have promised much already only to deceive me," I said gloomily.

"But I swear it! They are coming; I heard the door of the oratory open."

I hesitated no longer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I Escape from the Tower.

I clung to my precarious support, lying prostrate on the broad stone gutter. The roar of the swirling river beat at my senses confusedly; the giddy height made my head swim. Something of the horror I had felt in rounding the overhanging shoulder of the mountain with Willoughby that fatal day came to me now.

But presently that giddiness passed. The extraordinary promise of Madame de Varnier rang in my ears. How it was possible for her to explain away Sir Mortimer's damning words if the letters were genuine, I could not see. But this had been a day of miracles.

Slowly I made my way toward the first of the flanking towers. The wind struck me with redoubled force as I turned the corner. I heard the ensign above fluttering loudly in the gale.

I looked up. I could see it now. It floated bravely in the spanking breeze. The moon, shining squarely on it, made it even possible for me to distinguish its design. It was the national flag of England, the royal arms in its center. Then I remembered the quotation from the Blue Book I had read early in the morning just before Captain Forbes had signaled to Helena.

"The flag to be used by His Majesty's Diplomatic Servants, whether on shore or embarked on boats, is the Union, with the Royal Arms in the center thereof, surrounded by a green garland."

There was a grim irony in this flag flying proudly over the chateau in which Sir Mortimer lay dead. But if Madame de Varnier had spoken the truth in protesting that she did not know that the flag had been raised, why had Dr. Starva caused it to be flown?

The strange perplexity Madame de Varnier had shown when she had heard the flutter of the flag occurred to me now. Was it by any chance a signal—a signal as dread a portent as the double stamp? If that were true, I might discount Dr. Starva's plans materially when I lowered it presently.

I had reached my goal now. For some minutes I was compelled to lie inactive, however; for the flag, bellying in the gale, made it impossible for me to grasp the cords.

As I lay there impatient, waiting my chance, I glanced below. I could see plainly the ladder of stones, as Madame de Varnier had called it, the ragged edges of the granite sparkling brightly in the moonlight. I leaned over as far as I dared; they extended as far as I could see.

As my eye traveled the line to the terrace below, the door of the great hall opened. A flood of light irradiated a portion of the terrace. I saw distinctly two figures conversing a moment at the doorway. One of these figures entered the chateau again, but the other, and I had recognized Dr. Starva by his great bulk before the door was shut, stole across the terrace and entered a brougham that stood waiting.

As the carriage disappeared under the covered archway of the passage leading to the village street I made renewed efforts to reach the cords. I could readily guess Dr. Starva's mission. He had gone to meet Prince Ferdinand at the station. Heaven knows how eager I was to be one of the reception committee!

When at last I had caught one of the cords, I severed it thoughtlessly with my penknife. I had not counted on the strength necessary to hold so large a flag. The cord slipped from my hand, I expected the flag to fall and reached out frantically for the other rope. But in some way the rope had severed, and to which the flag was not fastened, became entangled in the pulley and the flag, falling halfway down the pole, remained at half-mast.

I now reached up as far as I could, standing on the stone gutter. I was about to sever the other cord, that to which the flag was fastened, when it occurred to me to attempt to disengage the ropes from their fastening at the window below. I was completely successful. I estimated that I had now a length of at least 50 feet.

When I had plaited the cords doubled, and knotted them at intervals to prevent them from slipping through my hand, I made a loophole to slip

over the last stone of my ladder when I should reach it. Then taking the cord between my teeth, I lowered myself cautiously over the gutter.

The wind was still blowing in fitful gusts. I had been reluctant to avail myself of the few extra feet of rope necessary to keep the flag aloft. I fastened the end of the cord about the stone gutter, leaving the flag still flying at half-mast. There seemed a certain aptness that my carelessness in cutting the rope had seen to it that the dead ambassador be fittingly honored.

It seemed ages before my feet touched the first block of granite projecting from the smooth masonry. But once on my way the first part of my descent was made with no great difficulty.

The roar of the river sounded nearer and nearer. I was more than halfway down now. The numbness had passed from my arm; I was more confident; I tried to hasten my progress.

Step by step I neared the terrace. And when I had reached it? The excitement of the escape, Madame de Varnier's vehement importunity, had engrossed my attention so far. The descent itself had seemed so hazardous that the confronting of Dr. Starva had been forgotten. But how was I to conquer him unarmed? Not by force certainly. Strategy must be my ally.

Suddenly the perspiration broke out on my forehead. I had felt for my next step, and it was missing. Frantically my feet reached down

terrace. It sounded nearer. A man, muffled in a cloak, came to the edge of the band of moonlight. He also was listening. Presently he stole softly to the parapet, and looked down at the village. Neither of us spoke until he had resumed his seat before the great portal of the chateau.

"Who is he?" I whispered.

Locke led me out of hearing, hugging the wall.

"You know as well as I. Now, then, for our deferred talk. This morning I asked you for some explanation of your extraordinary conduct. You chose not to give it me. Well, I mean to have it now. Come, what is this errand that sends you flying through the air for a hundred feet at the risk of your neck? It appears to be pressing."

I was still struggling for my breath. It was not physical fatigue that made me tremble so much as sheer despair at the hopelessness of disarming Locke's hostility and suspicions in the precious minutes that remained. At any moment now Dr. Starva might be returning.

"The death-mask!" I began incoherently. "Prince Ferdinand—"

His grasp tightened. He drew me roughly toward him in his surprise.

"The death-mask! What of it?"

"Starva has lured Prince Ferdinand to the chateau. Already he has gone to meet him at the station. When he returns with him here—"

"Ferdinand comes to meet Sir Mortimer."

"Sir Mortimer, man, is dead."

"Dead! And you have undertaken to fill his place? It is very considerate of you."

His voice vibrated with distrust. But I tried to keep my temper.

"If Ferdinand enters that door with Starva he will never leave it alive, unless help is summoned."

For a moment Locke's suspicions wavered. I had spoken with a solemnity that touched even his skepticism.

"And who has told you this?" he asked slowly.

"Madame de Varnier, the Countess Sarahoff."

"Ah, your friend of the kursaal Where is she?"

"Haddon!" He cried.

I pointed upward.

"In the tower there. The four of us—Captain Forbes, Miss Brett, that woman, and myself—were trapped by Dr. Starva. Don't you see, it was to clear the field for action—to leave him free to accomplish his frightful work unmolested? Locke, this is no time for talk. One of us must conceal himself in the hall there; the other summon help. Are you armed?"

"Rather," he answered grimly. "It is that fact that should show you the uselessness of struggling."

"You have called me a fool more than once," I cried bitterly. "But you are a hundred times a fool that you are blind to the need of action."

"All in good time, my friend. I have still a question or two to ask. If Captain Forbes is imprisoned in the tower there, why did he permit you to play the hero alone? Why is he not with you? Have you pulled the wool over his eyes as you did over the eyes of Miss Brett? It seems to me a little remarkable that he should trust a man who has tricked him more than once."

Locke's cool question staggered me. I had no intention of lying, but my hesitancy did not lessen his growing distrust of my motives.

"There was no more time to explain things to him than there is to you. Besides, he would not have believed me," I muttered.

"As I do not believe you," he answered with some sternness. "As I shall not believe you until you take pains to make things a little more clear. The Countess Sarahoff it is who tells you of the peril of Prince Ferdinand. She takes you into her confidence; that in itself scarcely strengthens my trust of you. But this

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Prince Ferdinand Comes to the Chateau.

"Locke," I panted, leaning breathless against the wall, "for God's sake let me go. It is a matter of life or death."

"Gently—not so loud."

Again his hand was placed at my mouth. He pulled me back into the shadow of an angle of the wall. He listened intently.

There was a heavy footfall on the

terrace. It sounded nearer. A man, muffled in a cloak, came to the edge of the band of moonlight. He also was listening. Presently he stole softly to the parapet, and looked down at the village. Neither of us spoke until he had resumed his seat before the great portal of the chateau.

"Who is he?" I whispered.

Locke led me out of hearing, hugging the wall.

"You know as well as I. Now, then, for our deferred talk. This morning I asked you for some explanation of your extraordinary conduct. You chose not to give it me. Well, I mean to have it now. Come, what is this errand that sends you flying through the air for a hundred feet at the risk of your neck? It appears to be pressing."

I was still struggling for my breath. It was not physical fatigue that made me tremble so much as sheer despair at the hopelessness of disarming Locke's hostility and suspicions in the precious minutes that remained. At any moment now Dr. Starva might be returning.

"The death-mask!" I began incoherently. "Prince Ferdinand—"

His grasp tightened. He drew me roughly toward him in his surprise.

"The death-mask! What of it?"

"Starva has lured Prince Ferdinand to the chateau. Already he has gone to meet him at the station. When he returns with him here—"

"Ferdinand comes to meet Sir Mortimer."

"Sir Mortimer, man, is dead."

"Dead! And you have undertaken to fill his place? It is very considerate of you."

His voice vibrated with distrust. But I tried to keep my temper.

"If Ferdinand enters that door with Starva he will never leave it alive, unless help is summoned."

For a moment Locke's suspicions wavered. I had spoken with a solemnity that touched even his skepticism.

"And who has told you this?" he asked slowly.

"Madame de Varnier, the Countess Sarahoff."

"Ah, your friend of the kursaal Where is she?"

"Haddon!" He cried.

I pointed upward.

"In the tower there. The four of us—Captain Forbes, Miss Brett, that woman, and myself—were trapped by Dr. Starva. Don't you see, it was to clear the field for action—to leave him free to accomplish his frightful work unmolested? Locke, this is no time for talk. One of us must conceal himself in the hall there; the other summon help. Are you armed?"

"Rather," he answered grimly. "It is that fact that should show you the uselessness of struggling."

"You have called me a fool more than once," I cried bitterly. "But you are a hundred times a fool that you are blind to the need of action."

"All in good time, my friend. I have still a question or two to ask. If Captain Forbes is imprisoned in the tower there, why did he permit you to play the hero alone? Why is he not with you? Have you pulled the wool over his eyes as you did over the eyes of Miss Brett? It seems to me a little remarkable that he should trust a man who has tricked him more than once."

Locke's cool question staggered me. I had no intention of lying, but my hesitancy did not lessen his growing distrust of my motives.

"There was no more time to explain things to him than there is to you. Besides, he would not have believed me," I muttered.

"As I do not believe you," he answered with some sternness. "As I shall not believe you until you take pains to make things a little more clear. The Countess Sarahoff it is who tells you of the peril of Prince Ferdinand. She takes you into her confidence; that in itself scarcely strengthens my trust of you. But this

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Prince Ferdinand Comes to the Chateau.

"Locke," I panted, leaning breathless against the wall, "for God's sake let me go. It is a matter of life or death."

"Gently—not so loud."

Again his hand was placed at my mouth. He pulled me back into the shadow of an angle of the wall. He listened intently.

There was a heavy footfall on the

terrace. It sounded nearer. A man, muffled in a cloak, came to the edge of the band of moonlight. He also was listening. Presently he stole softly to the parapet, and looked down at the village. Neither of us spoke until he had resumed his seat before the great portal of the chateau.

"Who is he?" I whispered.

Locke led me out of hearing, hugging the wall.

"You know as well as I. Now, then, for our deferred talk. This morning I asked you for some explanation of your extraordinary conduct. You chose not to give it me. Well, I mean to have it now. Come, what is this errand that sends you flying through the air for a hundred feet at the risk of your neck? It appears to be pressing."

I was still struggling for my breath. It was not physical fatigue that made me tremble so much as sheer despair at the hopelessness of disarming Locke's hostility and suspicions in the precious minutes that remained. At any moment now Dr. Starva might be returning.

"The death-mask!" I began incoherently. "Prince Ferdinand—"

His grasp tightened. He drew me roughly toward him in his surprise.

"The death-mask! What of it?"

"Starva has lured Prince Ferdinand to the chateau. Already he has gone to meet him at the station. When he returns with him here—"

"Ferdinand comes to meet Sir Mortimer."

"Sir Mortimer, man, is dead."

"Dead! And you have undertaken to fill his place? It is very considerate of you."

His voice vibrated with distrust. But I tried to keep my temper.

"If Ferdinand enters that door with Starva he will never leave it alive, unless help is summoned."

For a moment Locke's suspicions wavered. I had spoken with a solemnity that touched even his skepticism.

"And who has told you this?" he asked slowly.

"Madame de Varnier, the Countess Sarahoff."

"Ah, your friend of the kursaal Where is she?"

"Haddon!" He cried.

I pointed upward.

"In the tower there. The four of us—Captain Forbes, Miss Brett, that woman, and myself—were trapped by Dr. Starva. Don't you see, it was to clear the field for action—to leave him free to accomplish his frightful work unmolested? Locke, this is no time for talk. One of us must conceal himself in the hall there; the other summon help. Are you armed?"

"Rather," he answered grimly. "It is that fact that should show you the uselessness of struggling."

"You have called me a fool more than once," I cried bitterly. "But you are a hundred times a fool that you are blind to the need of action."

"All in good time, my friend. I have still a question or two to ask. If Captain Forbes is imprisoned in the tower there, why did he permit you to play the hero alone? Why is he not with you? Have you pulled the wool over his eyes as you did over the eyes of Miss Brett? It seems to me a little remarkable that he should trust a man who has tricked him more than once."

Locke's cool question staggered me. I had no intention of lying, but my hesitancy did not lessen his growing distrust of my motives.

"There was no more time to explain things to him than there is to you. Besides, he would not have believed me," I muttered.

"As I do not believe you," he answered with some sternness. "As I shall not believe you until you take pains to make things a little more clear. The Countess Sarahoff it is who tells you of the peril of Prince Ferdinand. She takes you into her confidence; that in itself scarcely strengthens my trust of you. But this

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Prince Ferdinand Comes to the Chateau.

"Locke," I panted, leaning breathless against the wall, "for God's sake let me go. It is a matter of life or death."

"Gently—not so loud."

Again his hand was placed at my mouth. He pulled me back into the shadow of an angle of the wall. He listened intently.

There was a heavy footfall on the

terrace. It sounded nearer. A man, muffled in a cloak, came to the edge of the band of moonlight. He also was listening. Presently he stole softly to the parapet, and looked down at the village. Neither of us spoke until he had resumed his seat before the great portal of the chateau.

"Who is he?" I whispered.

Locke led me out of hearing, hugging the wall.

"You know as well as I. Now, then, for our deferred talk. This morning I asked you for some explanation of your extraordinary conduct. You chose not to give it me. Well, I mean to have it now. Come, what is this errand that sends you flying through the air for a hundred feet at the risk of your neck? It appears to be pressing."

I was still struggling for my breath. It was not physical fatigue that made me tremble so much as sheer despair at the hopelessness of disarming Locke's hostility and suspicions in the precious minutes that remained. At any moment now Dr. Starva might be returning.

"The death-mask!" I began incoherently. "Prince Ferdinand—"

His grasp tightened. He drew me roughly toward him in his surprise.

"The death-mask! What of it?"

"Starva has lured Prince Ferdinand to the chateau. Already he has gone to meet him at the station. When he returns with him here—"

"Ferdinand comes to meet Sir Mortimer."

"Sir Mortimer, man, is dead."

"Dead! And you have undertaken to fill his place? It is very considerate of you."

His voice vibrated with distrust. But I tried to keep my temper.

"If Ferdinand enters that door with Starva he will never leave it alive, unless help is summoned."

For a moment Locke's suspicions wavered. I had spoken with a solemnity that touched even his skepticism.

"And who has told you this?" he asked slowly.

"Madame de Varnier, the Countess Sarahoff."

"Ah, your friend of the kursaal Where is she?"

"Haddon!" He cried.

I pointed upward.

"In the tower there. The four of us—Captain Forbes, Miss Brett, that woman, and myself—were trapped by Dr. Starva. Don't you see, it was to clear the field for action—to leave him free to accomplish his frightful work unmolested? Locke, this is no time for talk. One of us must conceal himself in the hall there; the other summon help. Are you armed?"

"Rather," he answered grimly. "It is that fact that should show you the uselessness of struggling."

"You have called me a fool more than once," I cried bitterly. "But you are a hundred times a fool that you are blind to the need of action."

"All in good time, my friend. I have still a question or two to ask. If Captain Forbes is imprisoned in the tower there, why did he permit you to play the hero alone? Why is he not with you? Have you pulled the wool over his eyes as you did over the eyes of Miss Brett? It seems to me a little remarkable that he should trust a man who has tricked him more than once."

Locke's cool question staggered me. I had no intention of lying, but my hesitancy did not lessen his growing distrust of my motives.

"There was no more time to explain things to him than there is to you. Besides, he would not have believed me," I muttered.

"As I do not believe you," he answered with some sternness. "As I shall not believe you until you take pains to make things a little more clear. The Countess Sarahoff it is who tells you of the peril of Prince Ferdinand. She takes you into her confidence; that in itself scarcely strengthens my trust of you. But this

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Prince Ferdinand Comes to the Chateau.

"Locke," I panted, leaning breathless against the wall, "for God's sake let me go. It is a matter of life or death."

"Gently—not so loud."

Again his hand was placed at my mouth. He pulled me back into the shadow of an angle of the wall. He listened intently.

There was a heavy footfall on the

terrace. It sounded nearer. A man, muffled in a cloak, came to the edge of the band of moonlight. He also was listening. Presently he stole softly to the parapet, and looked down at the village. Neither of us spoke until he had resumed his seat before the great portal of the chateau.

"Who is he?" I whispered.

Locke led me out of hearing, hugging the wall.

"You know as well as I. Now, then, for our deferred talk. This morning I asked you for some explanation of your extraordinary conduct. You chose not to give it me. Well, I mean to have it now. Come, what is this errand that sends you flying through the air for a hundred feet at the risk of your neck? It appears to be pressing."

I was still struggling for my breath. It was not physical fatigue that made me tremble so much as sheer despair at the hopelessness of disarming Locke's hostility and suspicions in the precious minutes that remained. At any moment now Dr. Starva might be returning.

"The death-mask!" I began incoherently. "Prince Ferdinand—"

His grasp tightened. He drew me roughly toward him in his surprise.

"The death-mask! What of it?"

"Starva has lured Prince Ferdinand to the chateau. Already he has gone to meet him at the station. When he returns with him here—"

"Ferdinand comes to meet Sir Mortimer."

"Sir Mortimer, man, is dead."

"Dead! And you have undertaken to fill his place? It is very considerate of you."

His voice vibrated with distrust. But I tried to keep my temper.

"If Ferdinand enters that door with Starva he will never leave it alive, unless help is summoned."

For a moment Locke's suspicions wavered. I had spoken with a solemnity that touched even his skepticism.

"And who has told you this?" he asked slowly.

"Madame de Varnier, the Countess Sarahoff."

"Ah, your friend of the kursaal Where is she?"

"Haddon!" He cried.

I pointed upward.

"In the tower there. The four of us—Captain Forbes, Miss Brett, that woman, and myself—were trapped by Dr. Starva. Don't you see, it was to clear the field for action—to leave him free to accomplish his frightful work unmolested? Locke, this is no time for talk. One of us must conceal himself in the hall there; the other summon help. Are you armed?"

"Rather," he answered grimly. "It is that fact that should show you the uselessness of struggling."

"You have called me a fool more than once," I cried bitterly. "But you are a hundred times a fool that you are blind to the need of action."

"All in good time, my friend. I have still a question or two to ask. If Captain Forbes is imprisoned in the tower there, why did he permit you to play the hero alone? Why is he not with you? Have you pulled the wool over his eyes as you did over the eyes of Miss Brett? It seems to me a little remarkable that he should trust a man who has tricked him more than once."

Locke's cool question staggered me. I had no intention of lying, but my hesitancy did not lessen his growing distrust of my motives.

"There was no more time to explain things to him than there is to you. Besides, he would not have believed me," I muttered.

"As I do not believe you," he answered with some sternness. "As I shall not believe you until you take pains to make things a little more clear. The Countess Sarahoff it is who tells you of the peril of Prince Ferdinand. She takes you into her confidence; that in itself scarcely strengthens my trust of you. But this

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Prince Ferdinand Comes to the Chateau.

"Locke," I panted, leaning breathless against the wall, "for God's sake let me go. It is a matter of life or death."

"Gently—not so loud."

Again his hand was placed at my mouth. He pulled me back into the shadow of an angle of the wall. He listened intently.

There was a heavy footfall on the

terrace. It sounded nearer. A man, muffled in a cloak, came to the edge of the band of moonlight. He also was listening. Presently he stole softly to the parapet, and looked down at the village. Neither of us spoke until he had resumed