

The Castle of Lies

BY ARTHUR HENRY VEEBY

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CHAPTER XXXV.—Continued.

"That is not necessary," assured Starva. "Let all these candles be snuffed except those in the candelabrum that stands at the head of the staircase. Bring your man, Jacques, to that point and no farther. We shall see him; but he will not be able to see us."

Fortune was favoring us indeed. Locke and I silently bestirred ourselves. Now at last had come the moment for action. But still another rumbled; and still fortune favored us.

"That is all very well," objected Ignatieff. "And perhaps a traitor may strike a blow in the dark. I for one refuse to gratify the curiosity of Kuhn in this matter."

"But Starva was determined to have his way.

"To prevent that," he answered, "each of us will lay his weapons on the table at the end of the hall."

There were cries of fierce dissent. Starva silenced them with an angry gesture.

"One moment, friends," he purred. "You do not quite understand. When we first came into this room I suggested that lots should be drawn, and he who was favored with the lucky number should fire, concealed in the gloom, that none might be sure who had been chosen to snuff out Ferdinand's little soul. But since our friend Kuhn's loyalty has been questioned, it is he who shall have that honor, and with Gornj's dagger he shall do the work. And lest an accident should happen, or lest his courage should fail him, Bratinau and I will keep our revolvers. I think there is none to question our loyalty?"

Kuhn had grown frightfully pale; he trembled. But he spoke no word.

"By this arrangement," continued Starva, "the loyalty of Kuhn of Macedonia will be established. And if," he was glaring at Gingaja and Count Piteschti, "there are any mad enough to dream of disloyalty at this late hour, and harbor treachery, they will be powerless."

Starva's ruse was hailed with shouts of approval. Gornj, Ignatieff, and Gortschakoff strode to the table at the end of the hall and flung down their weapons defiantly. Gingaja reluctantly followed their example. Piteschti folded his arms defiantly, standing motionless.

"This is child's play," he muttered, with pale lips.

"Nevertheless," whispered Bratinau in his ear, "you will obey, and quickly. By all the saints, Starva, I think your plan has proved a wise one. Come, sir, we are waiting. Or are you so ignorant of the rules of etiquette that you insist in taking precedence over a king?"

With a gesture of despair Count Piteschti walked slowly to the table and left his revolver there.

"Now, friend Kuhn, we are waiting only for you," cried Starva sharply.

"I have no arms," answered the poor wretch, with a sob.

"You shall be armed presently," cried Gornj.

"Now, Jacques, you may go. Out with the candles, Gornj and Ignatieff. The rest of you remain quietly as you value your lives. You will find your man defenseless, Jacques. But if he proves troublesome, you have only to call and I will come. You have taken care of Alphonse?"

"I have put him to sleep," he chuckled.

As Jacques lifted the tapestry Locke choked him into silence. Together we carried him struggling up the hidden staircase and burst into the anteroom of the tower. Not until we had flung him breathless into the room of the safe, and had locked the door, did we answer Forbe's frenzied questions. Locke gripped his arm for silence.

"Quick, there is not a moment to lose. Have your arms?"

"No," growled Forbe, ready for action.

"In the first room to the right of the corridor," panted Madame de Varnier. "In the drawer of the cabinet near the door."

"Then come. And you two stay here. There is man's work below."

We stole silently down the stairs, Locke and myself in the lead, to the cabinet, where both Locke and I found those their revolvers.

"Do you, Capt. Forbe, make your way along the gallery until you come to the spiral staircase at the end of the hall," I commanded, briefly.

"When I appear at the main staircase with Locke, reach the hall with no delay. There is a table by the little stairway; there are arms on it; let no one approach that table until Locke or myself have reached your side. Now then, Locke, are we ready?"

We had fled silently into the corridor. Forbe sped with caution to his vantage ground. Locke was already approaching the main staircase when I seized him by the arm.

"I am going to fool Starva. I am going to call for help. He will think I am Jacques. As he comes, I shall take care of him. Bratinau is your man. Wait till he shows himself, and mind you, aim straight."

I raised my voice in a cry of distress.

"A moi, Starva!"

My trick succeeded admirably. Starva bounded up the staircase. As he showed himself in the light of the candelabrum I fired. He fell headlong without a groan. Locke stood at the head of the staircase waiting. I peered down in the darkness below. Forbe's revolver rang out again and again. The uproar was terrible.

"Kuhn! Gingaja! Piteschti! To the staircase!" I cried in French.

"That was the last I knew of our melec.

I sank gently to my knees behind

the antique rug. Bratinau's bullet had struck me.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Honor, My Sword."

I awoke to consciousness to find myself in the music room. I opened my eyes languidly. Helen was bending over me.

"What is it?" I murmured. "Yes, I remember—the fight on the staircase."

"I struggled to my feet, but sank back dizzily, my hands to my aching forehead.

"Thank God you are alive, and it is all over!" cried Helen, brokenly.

"And Ferdinand is safe?"

"Quite safe and unhurt. Already he has left the chateau. Capt. Forbe will tell you everything presently."

"I have been unconscious so long? Am I wounded? I feel no pain, only this headache and dizziness."

"A bullet grazed your temple—an eighth of an inch more—" She shuddered. "It wounded you only slightly, but you have been unconscious nearly an hour."

"My usual luck," I cried, bitterly. "It was to have been my chance; I hoped to retrieve myself; and I am winged the first shot. Fate is determined. It seems, that I shall stick to my role of coward."

"Don't, don't ever say that horrible word again!" cried Helen, passionately. "It was your shot that killed Starva. It is you who have saved Ferdinand; it is you who have saved for me the honor of my poor brother so far as the world can know. How can I ever be grateful enough?"

"Helen!" I cried, passionately, "you remember at Lucerne, on the terrace, when I told you of Willoughby's death, how he had died calling me coward. It was you that pointed out to me a way of escape—you told me how I could regain the self-respect I thought I had lost forever. It was to be a life for a life, for the life that was lost through my cowardice. I was to stand once more upright among men. Tell me, you despise me no longer?"

"Despise you!" she murmured. "If you knew how I honored you!"

"Ah, it is worth while to hear you say that. But you must say more, infinitely more than that now, dear, to satisfy me. Helen, I thought only a week ago that if I could win your respect I should be happy. But now I want your love."

"Don't!" she cried in pain. "How can you speak of love at such an hour?"

"Forgive me. What a selfish brute I am. But by the by—when time has softened your bitter pain—in happier days may I come to you?"

"Happier days!" She clasped her hands in quick despair, looking beyond me as if into a future that must be always dark for her.

"Yes," I said, passionately, "there shall yet be happier days for you and for me. Do you remember on the terrace the little beacon light in the far-off mountains? That was my star. It comforted me then; it bids me hope now; it tells me, Helen, you love me."

"Never!" She withdrew the hand I had held almost fiercely.

Her vehemence brought me rudely to my senses. I had been mad to hope. I turned slowly from her, groping my way toward the door; for my head was still throbbing furiously.

She stopped me with a cry of distress. She clung to me in her eagerness.

"You don't understand," she pleaded. "You have saved my brother's honor as far as the world can know,



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But this shame that crushes me this disgrace, can I forget it?"

"I would help you bear it."

"Mr. Haddon, we Breits have been a proud race. Our happiness we share with others. But disgrace we bear alone."

"Don't say that; you are bitter now, but—"

"If you had known me better," said Helena, quietly, "you would understand that I do not give to-morrow what I must give to-day."

When I told her of Willoughby's tragic death, I had thought it pathetic that a woman should be so strong. It was her calm courage that had first awakened my love for her. I must not complain now if she was not to be moved by my entreaties. But this question I did ask:

"If I could have proved that your brother had not, after all, shown himself false to the motto of your house, 'Honor, My Sword,' would you still have refused to listen to me?"

"Ah, if, Mr. Haddon!"

For almost the first time since I had known her she smiled; and that faint smile opened the gates of paradise to me. She would not be moved to declare her love for me, but she did love me; I was sure of it.

And then suddenly I thought of the words of the Countess Saraboff when I made my escape by the ladder of stones: "Go, and I swear by the cause I hold sacred, that, if you can save Ferdinand, the honor of Sir Mortimer shall be saved." That promise might mean little. It might mean that she would show her gratitude by refusing to make public Sir Mortimer's disgrace. Or had her words a deeper significance?

"But," I cried eagerly, "nothing is quite impossible. I repeat now what I said to you when in your grief you asked me to meet the banker, I cannot believe in your brother's guilt. I cannot conceive how a man whose integrity has been undoubted during a brilliant career should suddenly stoop to the shame of taking bribes."

A flash of hope shone in Helena's

face, only to be followed by the deepest dejection. "But there are the proofs," she said, mournfully. "I cannot, would that I could, deny my brother's writing."

"I must see Madame de Varnier. A few hours ago she held us at her mercy. But now we have the upper hand; there are many things she must explain. Where is she?"

"She left the chateau with Ferdinand half an hour ago."

"Left the chateau!" I cried, aghast.

"Why was she not held?"

"Prince Ferdinand insisted that she must go at once to Sofia. He has sent her on some secret mission. I think she must be one of his spies."

"And she left no message for me?"

"I demanded, gloomily.

"No," replied Helena, looking at me in wonder. "Why do you ask?"

"I did not tell her of Madame de Varnier's promise. I knew now that it had been given me quite recklessly to spur me to action. I was mad to expect mercy and gratitude from such a woman. She was too determined on her revenge. I remembered bitterly how she had told me in the tower

that she sacrificed friends and enemies if they proved obstacles to her plans.

"I had hoped," I answered, vaguely, "now that Ferdinand was saved, that she might in some way be able to show us that your brother's dishonor is not so great as it appears."

"But could she explain away his writing?" asked Helena mournfully.

"No; even if she feels remorse for her cruelty in seducing me, it is too late. I have eaten of the tree of knowledge, Mr. Haddon, and it is very bitter. Heaven has reversed my fate and yours. It is I who now have lost my self-respect, while you have gained."

"No," I cried, bitterly, "I have failed utterly in my task. I dared hope for too much. I have dared too greatly in dreaming that I should find happiness in this Castle of Lies."

"But," she whispered, "I, too, have dared, Ernest, and I shall not forget."

"Helena!" I crushed her hands in mine. "Even now I refuse to despair. I will find this woman though I search the earth for her. She shall tell me everything, and perhaps even now—"

"Not even your love can bring about the impossible."

"But if it could— If by a miracle your brother's honor were shown to be stainless?"

"Ah, if you could work miracles—yes," she faltered.

The door was flung open brusquely. Locke stood at the threshold, his keen glance bent cynically on me.

"So you are quite yourself again?" He concealed his embarrassment by a gruff demeanor. "So much the better; for you must be off before the dawn, my friend."

"And where?" I demanded astonished and not a little piqued at his cool assurance.

"En route for America, if you are wise."

"You are setting my destiny in a rather high-handed manner," I cried, angrily. "And will you tell me why you dispose of me so summarily?"

"Why," replied he, with a quiet laugh, "I have promoted you—"

He became suddenly serious, glancing uneasily at Helena.

"Miss Bret, Capt. Forbe and myself will accompany you to your hotel presently. Will you wait here while I say a few words to Mr. Haddon?"

"But it is not possible that you still mistrust him after to-night?" she demanded with indignation.

"No, no," he assured her. "I would spare you from embarrassment; that is all."

"Come, then," I said, shortly.

When we had reached the gallery I saw to my astonishment that the hall below was empty. I listened and there was complete silence.

"What have Forbe and yourself done with your prisoners?" I demanded. "In my perplexity I forgot to ask what Locke had meant in saying flippantly that he had promoted me."

"They are all gone but two," Locke answered coolly. He lit a cigarette, and leaning on the gallery rail stared down into the hall. "Starva and Bratinau's bodies are in the dining-rooms, but their souls have been swiftly ferried across the Styx by old Charon. Nothing reminds us of our fight except the dark stain on the staircase carpet yonder. It was a good scrap while it lasted. Your shot winged Starva, as you probably know. I settled Bratinau. Forbe peppered away in the dark, and had fair luck. The man called Go on or Geep, or something like that, got a shattered ankle, and the Serbian a rather nasty wound in the thigh. As for the rest of the gang, three of them rallied to your slogan and joined me at the staircase; the other two were easily settled with. Yes, it was a good fight, but much too short—especially for you, old chap." He shook his head deponently.

"But your prisoners?" I demanded again, irritated by his superfluous comments.

"It was Prince Ferdinand who insisted on their release."

"Their release?" I interrupted, furiously. "What incredible folly!"

"You remember that Starva and Bratinau were the only Bulgars among the conspirators, and they are dead. The two ringleaders are wounded badly enough to go to a hospital. Forbe himself has accompanied them there to see that they are not discharged until one of us is told. Practically they are prisoners. There remains Kuhn, Piteschti and Gingaja, the three men who showed that they had some instincts of humanity when it came to the crisis. The other two were arrant cowards; Ferdinand prefers to consider the three his loyal friends and two others powerless. He has set them at liberty."

"By Jove, his magnanimity or his folly will cost him dear."

"I am not so certain of that," resumed Locke, thoughtfully. "It is possible that he has made five friends of five enemies. You must remember that even if he wished to punish the conspirators he is powerless to do this without advertising to the world the intended uprising of the Balkan States."

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COMMISSIONER OF CORPORATIONS

The government department upon which devolves the duty of investigating the trusts of the country is in charge of Mr. Smith. The number of prosecutions recently instituted against various combines shows that his department has been an exceedingly busy one. Mr. Smith is a native of Massachusetts and is 32 years old.

DOG WAS TOO HASTY.

SHOWING THE ERROR OF JUMPING AT CONCLUSIONS.

Pet Thought He Was Jumping at the Conclusion of a Cat, But It Was Another Kind of Animal.

Chicago.—Doc, the prize speckled bulldog which is the joy of the younger members of the family of C. A. Plamondon, 32 Astor street, and the particular pride of his mistress, Miss Marie Plamondon, is in bad odor. He admits it in all the most expressive terms of the canine tongue and offers no excuse. From the tip of his wrinkled nose to the extremity of his stubby corkcreeper tail he is the personification of shame and disgust.

"But Doc was far from asleep. All at once he espied what he mistook to be his dearest enemy, George Payson's huge Molossus cat, moving about in the shadow of the fence which borders the Plamondon house, on the south and closed off the vacant lot on the corner. Doc's stumpy tail stiffened with eagerness as he gathered himself for a spring at the bulky tailed animal, and his legs pulled back in a snail's pace of canine joy. With a yelp he sprang from the porch and dashed at the enemy.

The meeting was brief and volcanic. The yelp of joy turned to a howl of utter woe as an overpowering eddy—that of Mephitis Americana—rose on the evening air. Doc came rushing back to the porch cowering his soul for sounds to express how he hated himself. But he found no welcoming friends. The overpowering smell had aroused a commotion among the occupants of the porch and a grand rush for indoors was made. In the melee everybody overlooked Doc, who gained the inviting open doorway two jumps ahead of the rest of the family. As the last member of the porch party cleared the threshold he caught sight of the black and white "pussy" calmly pursuing its course down the middle of the sidewalk.

Then the commotion was transferred to the interior of the Plamondon home. The house filled with the perfume of eau de Mephitis Americana as Doc dashed down the rear staircase to the kitchen and in abject misery sought cover under the kitchen stove. The problem was how to get him out. The young men of the family donned old clothes and gloves, put clothebins on their noses, pulled Doc out from his retreat, and hurried him into the back yard, where they muzzled him. He was sprayed—from a distance—with Florida water and chloride of lime.

In the meantime Mr. Plamondon and other members of the family were busy lighting incense, mosquito, and punk sticks and placing them in jars, vases and saucers throughout the house to mitigate the atmosphere. Also in the interim the upper windows of several of the houses in the neighborhood had hastily opened to discover the cause of the commotion and were as hastily closed. The whole neighborhood thought a mammoth stockyard had moved right down in its midst.

Two night watchmen and a couple of coppers were called into service to locate the intruder and put an end to his ministrations, but the task was an unwelcome one and the policemen accepted it gingerly. Reliable indications point to the fact that the little animal has taken sanctuary back of the Payson domicile.

JUDGE EMULATES SOLOMON.

Odd Trick Seen Decides Who Owns a Philadelphia Dog.

Philadelphia.—Suit over the ownership of a dog has been settled in court here in a novel manner. The plaintiff, Mrs. Mary Crane, swore the dog belonged to her. The defendant, Patrick O'Malley, asserted with equal positiveness that the animal was his, so the magistrate concluded that the dog should decide the case, and the sagacious little fellow ran to the side of the woman.

In arranging for the test the magistrate sent the woman into the street two squares from the court, and O'Malley was stationed two squares in an opposite direction. The dog, a little fox terrier, was liberated by the magistrate. Mrs. Crane stood motionless, without even holding out her arms toward the little dog, O'Malley, on the other hand, set up a loud whistling.

The dog glanced at the crowd on the sidewalk in front of the police station, and then turned its head toward O'Malley. The latter held out his hand, but the animal faced about and caught sight of Mrs. Crane. Then ended its hesitation. With a sharp bark of delight it raced away over the pavement, and the next moment was leaping about the woman.

BOY'S CASE A SAD ONE.

Utter Lack of Self-Control Said to be Due to Fall.

Los Angeles, Cal.—Representatives of church and benevolent organizations in South Pasadena called on Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bailey at their tent house near the ostrich farm to learn what is best for their son Mervin in Halley.

This is the boy with wayward tendencies who has for periods in the past few years been kept chained by the neck at intervals because he could not be controlled by his parents.

The Baileys repeated their statement that they have had Mervin at the Los Angeles detention home and at an institution for defective children in Long Beach. They found, however, that the boy was not benefited.

The only hope for improvement in his condition was held out through an offer of an expert to furnish an attendant of high character who would rear and educate the boy and win his confidence for \$150 a month. This sum is more than the parents can afford to pay.

Mervin has been blamed for a number of neighborhood pranks, from causing grass fires to scaring children and causing chickens and pet animals to disappear, but his mother says proof is usually lacking.

However, to silence neighbors' tongues she has tried every remedy from whipping to chaining to keep the boy inside of their premises.

Mervin is a bright boy of 9, of whom mental experts say there is hope of a cure provided he is carefully handled.

Because of a fall in early childhood his bump of reverence became flattened and the bump of will was abnormally developed.

This causes him to disregard what other persons tell him and to seize with and carry out with unbreakable determination any fancy which prompts him to commit certain acts.

The case has been talked of before the Merchants' association and the Humane society of South Pasadena, and committees will endeavor to find some relief for the parents as well as the boy.

Shingle Party Scared Pastor.

Middletown, N. Y.—The Rev. Thomas Livingston, pastor of the North Congregational church, received a sound drubbing after prayer meeting from about 50 young members of his congregation. The young people entered the parsonage and accented themselves. All were armed with shingles, and when their pastor entered he was set upon and a shingling was given him that he will not soon forget. The minister fought off his assailants until it dawned upon him that it was his birthday and he took the drubbing good naturedly.

Berlin Ladies Are Angry.

Adoption of "American" Mustache by Men Is the Cause.

Berlin, Germany.—Fashionable men and the beaux and the fops are wearing a scruffy mustache called indifferently "American" and "English" which would be utterly foreign in Hyde Park or on Fifth avenue.

Only a few months ago these same men were proud and happy to adorn their upper lips with a mustache cut like that which characterizes Emperor William. So patriotism may have in part, incited the storm of public criticism of the new mustache from women.

A leader of society writes to a newspaper that she will not recognize any of her acquaintances who wears "a toothbrush" on his upper lip.

"Man is naturally very ugly," another lady declares in print. "The only natural adornment he ever had was his mustache, and that he is ruthlessly mutilating now. Instead of the graceful brute ornament of the past, he is marring his face with a lot of bristles."

Yet a third woman is organizing a league of unmarried girls, each of whom pledges herself not to marry a man who sports an "English" or "American" mustache.

All the fair critics protest against the slavishness of following a foreign fashion and aver that if there is anything thoroughly national in the empire it is the German mustache.

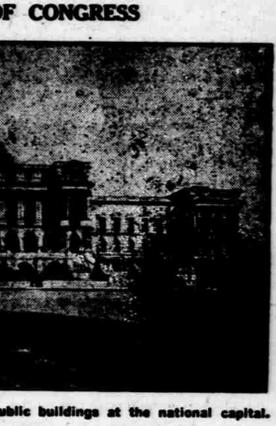
Seeking to explain this feminine outburst, a newspaper ventures to suggest "that the new mustache tickles a woman's delicate face too much." Then the paper rejects its own suggestion by saying that any mustache is better than none and quoting the old proverb:

"To kiss a man without a mustache is like eating an egg without salt."

Even Luther Burbank hasn't yet succeeded in grafting the milk weed to the strawberry plant and producing strawberries and cream.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

One of the handsomest of the public buildings at the national capital.



Poison in Mosquito Bite.

Philadelphia.—With his left arm swollen to three times its normal size, Frederick Mason, 60 years old, a foreman at the Midvale steel works, applied for treatment at the Samaritan hospital, and, according to the physicians, was treated in time to prevent amputation of the member.

A week ago, while sitting on his doorstep, Mason was bitten by a mosquito. The bite caused him much annoyance by continual itching, and it is supposed that in scratching the part it became inflamed and blood poison set in. Home remedies were applied until the arm began to swell and became very painful. This is the second time this summer that a mosquito has sent the victim to the Samaritan hospital for treatment.

His Motive.

"So you are going to lecture?"

"Yes," answered Senator Sorghum, "not that I care for the money, but it is a pleasure to get away from your stony-faced colleagues in congress and face an audience that really wants to hear you talk."

Story of South Sea Shark

He Swallows an Alarm Clock, with Most Unusual Results.

While crossing among the South sea islands 30 odd years ago in our private yacht, the Haute Flyer, we were much annoyed by a large Irish setter shark, that persisted in following the ship, says a writer in the Minneapolis Journal. During the night the shark would often climb up on deck and tip over the garbage cans. At one time Henry Williams, a sailor before the mast, was bitten on the leg by the brute. He aimed a kick at the brute, who growled, showed his teeth, and sunk his fangs into Williams' limb before leaping over the rail into the sea.

One day the cook, annoyed at his alarm clock—which persisted in going off furiously at all hours of the night—threw the timepiece overboard. The shark, always on hand for dainty tidbits from the galley, took the time of day at one gulp. For two days after that we heard the clock going in a muffled way from the interior of the surprised shark, who was often seen with one fin on his head and the other on the pit of his stomach, evidently trying to diagnose his clock case.

We were standing on the stern of the ship one evening watching the shark, who was evidently feeling pretty on him and the sailors, counting the strokes, noticed that it struck 23. When the shark heard this, he turned up and died before our eyes.