

Thoroughbreds.

By W. A. FRASER

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

When they had passed the edge of the village, Crane said, "I doubt if you would have shaken hands with Mr. Mortimer if you knew—"

"I do know of this terrible thing," she answered. "I shook hands with him because I believe him innocent."

"You know more than that we do." It was not a sneer. It was too delicately veiled for detection; the words were uttered in a tone of hopeful inquiry.

"Mr. Mortimer could not steal—it is impossible." "Give me sufficient grounds for your faith? Do you happen to know who took the money? For it was stolen."

"The girl did not answer at once. At first her stand had simply been one of impatience in the man she had conjured into a hero of all that was good and noble."

"She had not cast about for extenuating evidence; she had not asked herself who the guilty man was; her faith told her it was morally impossible for Mortimer to become a thief."

"Now Crane's deadening more material than his first deadening effects of Alan's accusation, started her mind on a train of thought dealing with motive and possibilities."

"She knew that Alan had lost money on Lucretia; that he had felt so sure of Crane's horse winning that he had sought a loan from her to recoup his losses by backing the Dutchman."

"Upon the continued silence, Crane grew restless; the girl, almost oblivious of his presence, deep in the pathology of the crime, gave no sign of a desire to pursue the discussion."

"Of course I am anxious to clear the young man if he is innocent," hazarded Crane, to draw her gently back into the influence that he felt must be of profit to himself."

Allis answered his observation—she distinctly felt the vibration of pain in her voice—with a startling depth of analytical discernment:

"While I believe in Mortimer's innocence and will always believe in it, I am afraid that he has drawn such a web of circumstantial evidence about him trying to shield some other—that—that—it is too terrible!" she broke off passionately.

"He is innocent. For God's sake, Mr. Crane—she took the reins in her whip hand and put her left arm pleadingly—"

"for God's sake, for his mother's sake, save him. You can do it—you can believe that he is innocent and stop everything. The money has been paid back."

"It isn't that, Miss Allis—" his voice was so cuttingly even after the erratic jump of her own—"in a bank one must not have a dishonest person. We must investigate to the end, and then clear himself by fastening the crime upon the perpetrator."

"He will never do that; he cannot, if he would." "What can I do then, Miss Allis? But why shouldn't he?"

"Can't you see that you do not understand the man? He commenced by shielding some one else, and he will carry it through to the bitter end."

"I am afraid there was no one to shield but himself. Everything came to this. The money was locked up, he had the keys, no one touched them—except your brother Alan, and that but for a minute—but if any suspicion could attach to your brother it is all dissipated by Mortimer's subsequent actions."

"Even hint to the man's contingency, but if Mortimer is innocent then your brother must be the guilty one."

"He expected the girl to denounce indignantly such a possibility; he was surprised that she remained silent. Her non-retortation of this deduction told him as conclusively as though she had uttered a word of objection that she thought Alan had taken the money and Mortimer was shielding him."

"It was but a phase of blind love; it was the faith the woman place in men they love of which he had read and scoffed at."

"Against all evidence, he was holding this man honest, believing her brother the thief."

"Surely a love like that was worth winning; no price was too great to pay. Her very faith in Mortimer—through which she sought to save him by inspiring Crane, determined the latter to crush utterly the love who stood between him and this great love."

"Intensity of hate, or love, or cupidly, never drew Crane out of his inherent diplomacy; he took refuge behind the brother of Allis."

"You see," with kindness, and his voice modulated soft with fondness, "I can't save Mortimer except at the expense of Alan—you would not have me do that. Besides it is impossible. The evidence seems as clear as noonday."

"If you bring this home to Mr. Mortimer, you will punish him, arrest him!" "That would be the usual course."

"She had taken her hand off her arm; now she replaced it, and he could feel the strong fingers press as though she would hold him to her will."

"You will not do this," she said; "for my sake you will not!"

"You ask this of me, and it is for your sake!"

"Yes; if there is no other way—if Mr. Mortimer, innocent, must take upon himself this crime, then for my sake you will not punish him."

"The gray eyes were violet-black in their intensity." "If I promise—He had been going to ask for reward, but she broke in, saying: "You will keep your word, and I will thank you."

"Nothing more is that all!"

The magnetism of the intensified eyes broke down his reserve; he slipped back twenty years in a second. Love touched him with a fire—crane and his sister. Cold, passionate Philip Crane spoke in tongue, unfamiliar as it was to him, that carried conviction to the girl—just the conviction that he was in earnest, that he was possessed of a humanizing love.

even for Mortimer, he would use his wealth. He pleaded his cause like a strong man, and when he spoke of a failure because of her preference for Mortimer, an acridly crept into his voice that she knew meant ruin for all time for whomever he had the power to ruin, or felt disposed to.

"I am sorry, Mr. Crane," she began conventionally, "I am sorry, I couldn't marry a man without loving him. What you have just told me must win regard for you because I know that you feel strongly, and I think any woman should take an offer of honest love as the greatest of all commitments."

"But I don't even ask for your love now," he interrupted.

"Ah, but you should. You shouldn't marry a woman unless she loved you. At any rate, I feel that way about it. Of course, if there were a chance of my coming to care for you in that way, we could wait, but it would be deceiving you to give hope."

"Is it because you care for Mortimer?" he asked.

"I think it is. I suppose if I am to help him I must be quite honest with you. I do not want to talk about it, it seems so sacred. I have even spoken less to Mr. Mortimer of love," she added with a painful attempt at a smile. "You have said that you care for me, Mr. Crane, and I believe you have been generous to my father also. Now you promise me something just for the sake of this regard? I suppose it is impossible to prove Mr. Mortimer's innocence—" she felt her own helplessness, and who else could or would care to accomplish it—"but it is in your power to reason to him. Won't you take my word that he is innocent and stop everything? As you say, either Mr. Mortimer or Alan must be suspected, and if it were brought home to my brother, it would crush me, and my mother and father."

"What can I do?"

"Just nothing. I know Mr. Mortimer has determined to accept the disgrace, and he will go away. You can make his load as light as possible, for my sake."

Though it was to Crane's best interests, he pretended to consent to the pure chivalry that you ask," he said, "is very little. I would a thousand times more for you. There is nothing you could ask of me that would not give me more pleasure than anything else in my barren life. But I could not bear to see you wedded to Mortimer. He is not worthy—you are too good for him. I do not say this because he seems more fortunate, but I love you and want to see you happy."

"The girl was like a slim poplar. The strong wind of Crane's eager pleading and seeming generosity slayer her from her right attitude, only to spring back again, to stand straight and beautiful, true to her love and faith in Mortimer."

"You are kind to me," she said simply; "I wish I could repay you."

"Perhaps some day I may get a reward out of all proportion to this small service."

She looked fair into his eyes, and on her lips hovered a weak, plaintive, winsome smile, as though she was wishing that he could accept the inevitable, and take her regard, her gratitude, her good opinion of him, and not wed himself to a chimeria which would bring only weariness of spirit in return for his goodness."

"Now find this \$1,000 note for me," he said; "take trouble over it; get help if necessary; go to every bookmaker that was in line that day. If you find the note, exchange other money for it and bring it to me."

"There may be a chance," commented Farrell, scratching his fat pop mediatively. "The fellows like to keep these big bills, they're easier in the pocket than a whole basket of flimsties. There was get-away-after, an' they wouldn't be payin' out much. I'll make a play for it."

The next afternoon Farrell reported at Crane's rooms with the rescued note in his possession. He had been successful.

"I give a dozen of 'em a turn," he said, "before I run against Jimmie Farrell. He had it smuggled away next his chest among a lot of yellow backs, good Dutchman money."

"Does he know who he bet it?"

"Not his name—some stranger; he'd know him if he saw him, he says."

Crane grasped this new idea with avidity, the scent was indeed getting hot. Why not take Farrell down to Brookfield to identify Mortimer? Crane had expected the searching for evidence would be a tedious matter; his fortunate star was guiding him straight and with rapidity to the goal he sought.

"I'm much obliged to you," he said to Farrell, "I won't trouble you further; I'll see Farrell myself. Give me his address."

That evening Crane saw Farrell. "There was a little crooked work over that thousand Faust got from you," he said, "an' if you could find time to go with me for an hour's run into the country, I think you could identify the guilty party."

"I can go with you," Farrell answered, "but it's just a chance in a thousand. I should be on the block down at Sheepshead, but to tell you the truth the hot pace the backers set me at Brooklyn knocked me out a bit. I'm going to take a breather for a few days an' lay again 'em next week. Yes, I'll go Mr. Crane."

In the morning the two journeyed to Brookfield.

"I won't go to the bank with you," Crane said, "I wish you would go it alone. You may make any excuse you like or none at all. Just see if the man you got this note from is behind the rail. I'll wait at the hotel."

In fifteen minutes Crane was joined by Farrell.

"Well," he asked.

"He's there, right enough."

"A short, dark little chap" questioned Crane hesitatingly, putting Alan Porter forward as a feeler.

"No. A tall fellow with a mustache."

"You are sure?"

"Dead sure unless he's got a double or a twin brother."

Crane felt that at last he had got incontrovertible proof; evidence that would satisfy even Allis Porter. His experienced eye knocked Alan Porter out a bit. I'm going to take a breather for a few days an' lay again 'em next week. Yes, I'll go Mr. Crane."

In the meantime you can investigate cautiously," Crane said, "and keep quite to yourself any new evidence that may turn up. So far as Mr. Mortimer is concerned, the matter is quite closed."

CHAPTER XXIX.

Crane returned to New York, his mind working smoothly to the hum of the busy wheels beneath his coach.

ing. So he had a possible means of identifying the man who had taken the money. Immediately upon his arrival in New York, Crane telephoned for Faust, asking him to bring his betting sheet for the last day of the Brooklyn meet. When Faust arrived at Crane's quarters, the latter said: "I want to trace a \$1,000 note number B 67,483. I think it was bet on the Brooklyn Derby, probably on my horse."

Faust consulted his betting sheet, Crane looking over his shoulder.

"I didn't have no thousand on that race," he said.

"What are those figures?" asked Crane, pointing to two consecutive numbers of one thousand each.

"That was the other way about," answered Faust; "that was pay. A thousand to one hundred twice over Lausanne. I think it must have been more stable money, for the guy that took it was like a big kid; he didn't know enough to pick a winner in a thousand years."

The coincidence of this amount with the win he attributed to Mortimer, appealed to Crane's fancy. "Do you remember the man who made this bet, then?" he asked.

"Yes, sure thing. There was two of them, as you see. I remember him because it took some explainin' to get the bet through his head. He was a soft mark for a bunco steerer. I've seen some fresh kids playin' the horses, but he had 'em all beat to a standstill. It must a been first time luck with him, for he cashed."

"Can you describe him?"

The cherub drew an ornate verbal picture, florid in its descriptive phraseology, but

As they walked slowly toward the station Crane met abruptly the girl who was just then so much in his thoughts. Her sudden appearance quite startled him, though it was purely accidental. She had come in to do some shopping, she explained, after Crane's greeting.

Farrell continued on when his companion stopped. A sudden determination to tell the girl what he had unearthed took quick possession of Crane. His fine sense of reasoning told him that though she professed positive faith in Mortimer she must have moments of wavering; it seemed only human. Perhaps fate had put this new weapon in his hands to turn the battle.

He began by assuring her that he had prosecuted the inquiry simply through a desire to establish the innocence of either Mortimer or her brother, or, if possible, both.

"You understand," he said, quite simply, "that Alan is like a brother—" he was going to say "son," but it struck him as being inadvisable; it aged him. He related how he had traced the stolen note, how he had discovered it, down and how, without guidance from him Farrell had gone into the bank and had identified Mortimer as the man who had bet the money.

They were walking toward the station, unconscious of physical taint, this terrible interest had drawn the girl Crane's way.

"Perhaps Alan," he said, seeking furtively for a look into the drooping face.

The bright sun struck a sparkle of light from something that shot downward and

"What?" asked Crane, from his tangled tangle.

"That high roller in the bank."

"Oh! I can't say yet what it will lead to." Crane's caution always asserted itself.

"Well, I've been thinking it over. That's the guy right enough, but when it comes to swearing to a man's identity in court, it's just a bit ticklish."

Crane frowned. He disliked men who hedged. He always planned first, then plunged; evidently his companion had planned first, and was now verifying his plans.

Farrell continued. "You see what I mean?"

"I don't," answered Crane, shortly.

"You will if you wait," advised Farrell, a tinge of asperity in his tone. "I'm makin' a book, say. All the blazin' idiots in Christendom is climbin' over me wantin' to know what I'll lay this, and what I'll lay that. They're like a lot of blasted mosquitoes. A rounder comes up an' makes a bet; if it's small prabs I don't twig his mug at all, but just grabs the dough an' calls his number. He may be Rockefeller or a tough from the Bowery, it don't make no difference to me; all I want is his goods an' his number, see? But a better of the right sort slips in an' taps me for odds to a thousand. Nat'rally I'm interested, because he parts with the thousand as though it was his heart's blood. I size him up. There ain't no time for the writin' down of my marks, though most like I could point him out in a crowd, an' say that's the rooster. But a postin' a judge stood up another man that looked pretty much like him an' asked me to swear one

of the guys into ten years Sing Sing, p'raps I'd waken. Mistaken identity is like grabbin' the cash in a bank an' a jack, an' playin' 'em for three."

"Which means, if I understand it, that you're guessing at the man—that I've given you all this trouble for nothing." Crane wished that Farrell had kept his doubts to himself; the case had been made strong by his first decision, and now the devil of uncertainty would destroy the value of identification.

"Not by a jugful!" ejaculated Farrell. "I'm just tellin' you this to show you that we've got to make it complete—we've got to get collateral to back up my pickin'."

"You mean—someone else—to identify him also?"

"No, not just that, but that's not a bad thought. My clerk, Ned Hagen, must have noticed him, too. I mean that the better's badge number will be in line with that bet, an' you can probably find out the number of the badge his booster wore."

An inspiration, started into being by Farrell's words, came to Crane. Why had he not thought of that before? Still, it didn't matter. The badge number, Mortimer's number, would be in Faust's book, where he had been entered; the \$100 Mortimer put on Lausanne. He could compare this with the number in Farrell's book; no doubt he would agree; then indeed the chain would be completed to the last link. No man on earth could question that evidence.

"It's a good idea, Farrell," he said.

"Bet yer life, it's clear 'Pinkerton. You'd better come round to my place tomorrow about 10, and we'll look it up."

"I'll come," Crane answered.

CHAPTER XXX.

The old bay horse Allis Porter always drove, that carried her back to Ringwood after her interview with Crane, must have thought the millennium for driving horses had surely come. Even the ambition to urge the patriarch beyond his complacent, irritating dog-trot was crushed out of her by the terrible new evidence that Crane had brought to bear testimony against her lover.

"I didn't mean this," the girl moaned to herself. In her intensity of grief her thoughts became audible in expressed words.

"Oh, God!" she pleaded to the fields that lay in the silent rapture of summer content, "strengthen me against all this finissem. You don't do it, George—you couldn't. You couldn't! And Alan! my poor, weak brother, why can't you have courage and clear Mortimer?"

The evening before, Alan had been out at Ringwood, and Allis had made a final endeavor to get him to clear Mortimer's name by confessing to the truth to Crane. On her knees she had pleaded with her brother. The boy had fiercely disclaimed all complicity; protested his own innocence with vehemence, and denounced Mortimer as worse than a thief in having poisoned her mind against him.

In his assumed anger Alan had disclosed Mortimer's treachery—as he called it—and crime, to her mother. Small wonder that Allis's hour of trial was a dark one. She had been so much in love with her brother, that she had enabled her to carry Lausanne to victory was now tried a thousand fold more severely. It seemed all that was left her, just her courage and her faith; they had stood out successfully against all denunciation of Lausanne, and with God's help she would have held her true to the man she loved.

Even a snail's pace lands him somewhere finally, and the unassailed bay, with a premonition of supper hovering obscurely in his lazy mind, finally consented to arrive at Ringwood house.

Allis went to the tea table by her father's side, fearing to get his hearing. She dreaded her mother's questioning eyes. What could he said in Mortimer's defense or in her own? Nothing; she could only wait.

A square old-fashioned wooden clock on the mantelpiece of the sitting room, when just dried off seven yellow hours, when

aplanish in the dust. The girl was crying. "I'm sorry," he offered as atonement. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told you; it's too brutal."

The head drooped still lower.

"I shouldn't have spoken had it not been for your brother's sake. I didn't mean to. It was fate drew you across my path just now. Though it is cruel, it is better that you should know. No man has a right to deceive you; you are too good. It is this very constancy and goodness that has taught me to love you."

"Don't," she pleaded, "I can't bear it just now. Please don't say that; don't talk of anything. Can't you see—can't you understand?"

"Yes, I know. You are suffering, but it is unjust; you are not fair to yourself. If this man would steal money, what difference would love make to him? He would be as unfaithful to you as he has been to his trust in the bank. You must consider yourself—you must give him up—you can't link your young, beautiful life to a man who is only saved from the penitentiary because of your influence."

"Don't talk that way, Mr. Crane, please do just now. Please don't say that; don't say you are right, but what difference does it all make to me? You know what love is like, you say it has come to you now. My heart tells me that Mortimer is guiltless. The time has been so short that he has had no chance to clear himself. If I didn't believe in him, I wouldn't love him, but I still love him, and so I believe in him. I can't help it—I don't want to help it; I simply go on having faith in him, and my love doesn't falter. Can't you understand what a terrible thing it would be even if I were to consent to become your wife? I know it would please my mother. But if afterwards this other man was found to be innocent, wouldn't your life be embittered—wouldn't it be terrible for you to be tied to a woman who loved another man?"

"But it is impossible that he is innocent, or will ever be thought so."

"And I know that he is innocent."

"Your judgment must tell you that this is only fancy."

"My heart tells me that he is not guilty of this crime. My heart is still true to him, so shall I decide against myself? Don't stab me to death with words of Mortimer's guilt—has no effect, and only gives me pain. I must wait—we must all wait, just wait. There is no harm in waiting, the truth comes out at last. But you will keep your promise?" she said, lifting her eyes to his face.

"Yes, I meant no harm to Mortimer in searching for this evidence; it was only to clear your brother."

They had come to the station by now.

"Would you like to speak to Mr. Farrell?" Crane asked. "You are taking my word."

"No. A tall fellow with a mustache."

"You are sure?"

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In the morning the two journeyed to Brookfield.

"I won't go to the bank with you," Crane said, "I wish you would go it alone. You may make any excuse you like or none at all. Just see if the man you got this note from is behind the rail. I'll wait at the hotel."

In fifteen minutes Crane was joined by Farrell.

the faint echo of his music was drowned by the crunch of gravel; there was the quick click of somebody coming up the drive; then the wooden steps gave hollow notice. The visitor's advent was announced again by the brass knocker on the front door.

"I'll go," said Allis, as her mother rose. The girl knew who it was that knocked, not because of any name reason, she simply knew that it was Mortimer.

When she opened the door, he stepped back hesitatingly. Was he not a criminal? Was he not about to leave his position because of this?

"Come in," she said quietly; "I am glad you have come."

"Shall I? I just want to speak to you for a minute; I said I would come. We can talk here on the veranda, can't we?"

"I would rather you came inside; there is no reason why you should not."

"If you don't mind, I should like to be alone with you."

"Very well, come into this front room; we shall not be disturbed."

"I am going away," he began; "I can't stay here."

"You have done nothing—nothing to clear yourself?"

"Nothing."

"And you won't?"

"No."

"Is this wise?"

"It's the only course left me."

There was a silence for a long minute. They were both standing. The girl broke the stillness.

"I am glad you have come, because I can tell you again that I know you are innocent. I know it, because my heart repeats it a thousand times a day. I listen to the small voice and I hear nothing else."

"You never waver—you never doubt?"

"Never."

"You never will?"

"Never."

"Then I don't care. Other men have had their misfortunes thrust upon them and have stood it without complaining, have had less to solace them than you have given me now, and I would have a good deal complained. Some day perhaps you will know that I am worthy of your faith—God grant that the knowledge brings you no fresh misery—there, forgive me, I have said too much; I am even now a coward. If you will say good-by, I'll go."

"Good-by, my hero." She raised her face, down which were trickling many tears, and held out her hand, brokenly, as one searches in the dark, for the faintly was swimming about her, and just faintly she could see this man's strong face coming to her out of the gloom like the face of a god. He took her hand. "Good-by," he said; "if fate wills it that my innocence be known some time, may I come back? Will you wait, believing in me for a little?"

"Forever."

"Allis—" It was the first time, he had ever called her Allis. It broke down the last faint girlish restraint.

He drew her to him by the hand he still clasped, and put his strong arms about her. What mattered it now that he had been falsely accused—what mattered it to either of them that he must accept the grim penalty of his endeavor? With them, in the soft gloom was nothing but love, and faith and innocence, and within the strong arms a sense of absolute security, as though the false accusing world had been snuffed, beaten down and the victory theirs, love.

He raised the girl's face and kissed it. "Let God witness that I press your pure lips in innocence," he said, "and in this pledge I love you forever and ever."

"Amen," came from Allis involuntarily. It sounded to them both like the benediction of a high priest.

He repeated mechanically, "Amen." To speak again would have been sacrilege.

He put her from him gently, turned away and walked quickly from the house.

(To Be Continued.)

Ante Room Echoes

November 20, Thursday is the date for the ceremonial session of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of Tangle Temple, and that session will be the most ambitious undertaking ever prepared by the temple, for it will be in the nature of an entertainment to the members of imperial council, and will be the first ceremonial session to be held since the elevation of Colonel Alkin to the position of imperial potentate. It is not known at this time how many of the members of the imperial council will be present, but invitations will be sent to all of them and it is hoped that the entire council will be present.

The prospect is for a large number of candidates for honors of nobility and the members are arranging to give them the time of their lives before the heads of the order in the United States. The work will be done at the Masonic temple, but the banquet will not be given in the usual banquet hall, as it is not believed that it will hold the crowd which will be present. At the last session it was impossible for all of the members present to sit at the tables.

It is a good promise to be much larger than the last, which was the largest in the history of Tangle temple. It has been suggested that the banquet be spread at the Woodmen hall in the Crouse block and that it be given on a Saturday night.

Mount Calvary commandery, Knights Templar, is making preparations for the advancement of a large class. Applications are on hand from thirty-two persons who desire honors of knighthood, and the evening of their initiation may be made a red-letter day for the order.

Nebraska lodge No. 1, Knights of Pythias, is preparing for a season of activity. During the warm weather there has been but little rank work, but the rank team will be busy from now on; the number of applications on file, and as soon as they are acted upon, active work in conferring ranks will be resumed. All members of the team should be in attendance at the convention, Monday, Oct. 27th, as the work for the coming season has been outlined and arranged by the master of work.

The lodge is also preparing for an entertainment to be held on the occasion of its anniversary, November 19th, and it is also proposed to hold regular monthly entertainments, at