

to you at the Mammoth. Pray Heaven we get there in time."

"Why, what do you think can have happened?" I cried.

Robson shrugged his shoulders. "One can't tell! But think of the circumstances—an empty house—the man lured there by a lie—and a man who is thirsting for revenge! And a clever scoundrel into the bargain!"

He relapsed into silence, and I could see he was thinking hard. At last the cab turned into a secluded little avenue; it seemed strangely quiet after the noise and bustle of the High Street.

"This is Atchester Avenue," said Robson briefly. He lifted the trap in the roof and told the man to stop.

"We will walk to the house—it will attract less attention."

No. 17 stood away from the road, and the tall trees in the front garden hid the house. As we walked up the path, however, it came in view—a dismal-looking place in its present uninhabited state.

Robson led the way to the tradesmen's entrance; next to it was a window with the blinds up, showing the interior of an empty kitchen. The detective produced a knife and deftly slipped the catch back with the blade. Then he pushed it up and we scrambled in.

Stealthily we crept across the room and out into a dark passage.

Robson stopped and listened. There was not a sound to be heard.

"I think they have gone. Let's hope it is not too late." He slipped his hand into his back pocket, and I saw the shining barrel of a revolver.

We made our way up to the first floor, on a level with the hall door. There was still no sound or sign of life.

Then we went up another flight of stairs. Some workmen's tools were on the landing. All the doors to the rooms were open with the exception of one. Robson glanced at it, then uttered an exclamation.

"The keyhole!" he cried, in a low voice.

I looked and saw it was plastered over with a piece of brown paper. Robson pulled it off with his fingers. Immediately I was conscious of a strong smell.

"Charcoal!" cried Robson, excitedly. "Quick, put your shoulder to it—now with me!"

We flung ourselves against the door with all our force; it yielded with a crash, and we went reeling into the room.

The atmosphere was stifling. I saw Robson plunge across the floor to the window, pull up a shutter, and smash in a pane of glass. The next moment I felt the cool evening air enter the room. To pull open the remaining shutter was only the work of a moment. Then we looked round.

In the middle of the room was a workman's large brazier filled with burning charcoal, its bright red embers throwing a dull red glow round the room. Quite near was stretched the unconscious form of a man; one glance showed us it was young Maurice Eckstein.

Together we hauled him to the window, unrolled his collar and let him breathe the fresh air. Then Robson ran from the room and a minute later returned with a tin full of water. This he dashed into the man's face, whilst I worked his arms. At the end of two minutes he opened his eyes. I gave a gasp of relief.

"What's the matter?" he said, sleepily.

We caught him by both arms and marched him up and down the passage; he was as dead as a log at first, but at last life came into his legs. We let go of him and he stood before us looking like a drunken man. Robson dashed more water into his eyes. Eckstein looked round the room and it all came back to him.

"And they left me here to be smothered by charcoal—the scoundrels!" he cried.

"Yes, yes—but who? Tell me all about it!" cried Robson impatiently.

Gradually we got the story from him. After meeting Hensch he had driven to the empty house, wondering somewhat at his wife choosing such a time for her visit. She had the key, and he found the front door ajar. He concluded, therefore, she

was inside. He walked into the hall and called out her name. Getting no response he made his way up to the first floor. As he looked into one of the rooms he heard a slight noise behind him, and the next moment felt himself gripped by the arms. He struggled violently, and recognised one of his assailants.

"The Baron Julius Hapmarck," put in Robson.

"Yes, it was he," continued Eckstein, surprised. "I managed to catch him by the throat. Then suddenly the other man hit me a terrific blow on the head which stunned me. The next thing I remember is your waking me up a few minutes ago."

Robson looked round the room. Every chink had been carefully plastered up.

"And the workman's brazier already there—it was devilishly well arranged!" he observed.

"But I don't understand!" cried Eckstein, bewildered. "How on earth you two managed to arrive just in the nick of time?"

Robson told him the whole story.

"We haven't got quite to the end of it yet!" he continued. "Whom was it you went to see at the Grandel this afternoon?"

"The letter said an old friend was in great trouble, and would I spare half an hour," said Eckstein. "When I got there I found the Countess Theresa Larmaux. It was a trick!"

Robson looked at him narrowly. "Were you ever in love with the Countess?" he said.

Eckstein shook his head decisively. "No. Once, a long time ago, I had a hunting accident near her house, and was carried there, where I stopped for some weeks. I think she was in love with me, but I never gave her the slightest sign. In fact, afterwards, I had to avoid her."

"You refused her overtures?" said Robson.

"Yes—she offered me many inducements, but, you see, I was in love with my present wife!" he said proudly.

We all three made our way slowly down to the next floor. Suddenly Robson touched us both and put a warning finger to his lips. I listened intently, then heard a slight sound on the steps outside the front door.

The detective stepped lightly into the room on the left of the hall and we followed.

Then we heard the sound of a key being put into the door and a man entering—only one apparently. He shut the door carefully behind him and took a few steps down the hall. Robson slipped his hand into his pocket, withdrew it, then, the next moment, flung the door wide open. A short man in the hall dropped back a pace and his hand flew to his pocket.

"No, not that, please, Mr Hensch!" said Robson, covering him with his revolver.

Hensch's hand dropped tremblingly to his side. He caught sight of Eckstein and his face went pale with fright.

"The game's up, my man!" said Robson. "You'd better make the best of a bad job. Come in here and stand there against the wall!"

Hensch, with the revolver still pointing at him, obeyed.

"Now, continued the detective, in a tone of evident enjoyment, "we will hear the whole of the story, if you please, Mr Hensch?"

The story that followed made young Eckstein's hands clench, and he was for running the baron to earth there and then. However, the counsel of Robson and myself prevailed, and it ended with my going with the captain back to the Mammoth, and Robson taking charge of Hensch. Robson, by the way, had many highly interesting methods of dealing with people concerned in cases that were not coming before the police. We had decided on a plan which gave a chance of our triumph being the more complete.

And this is what happened. About nine o'clock the next morning there arrived at the hotel a distinguished-looking old, white-haired man. He had travelled all night from the Continent. Almost simultaneously the Baron Julius Hapmarck entered the vestibule of the hotel.

"Ah, my dear count! You received my wire in Paris, and have come?" he cried. "I told you I had managed to find your daughter—she is in this hotel now!"

I approached the old man and introduced myself.

"I wish to see Madame Eckstein!" he said, shortly. "Will you kindly have my card sent to her at once?"

I led them to the private room in which I had arranged that the meeting was to take place. I left them together, then made my way round to another door of the same room, which, hid by the curtain, was slightly open.

"This Eckstein man, Julius—is he here with her?" the old count was saying.

The baron approached nearer to him.

"A most extraordinary thing has happened—he has committed suicide—last night."

The old man looked at him in amazement.

"Committed suicide—does she know?" he cried.

"She must, by now. In a last letter to someone else he said he was writing at the same time to her."

"But the cause—what was it?" A ghastly smile played about the baron's mouth.

"There was another woman—a beautiful, fascinating woman—whom, years ago, he loved passionately. She married, and he tried his best to forget her. He succeeded so well that, as we know to our cost, he ran away with your daughter—my betrothed!" he said, between his teeth.

"Then, when in London, he met again the first woman, whose husband in the meantime has died. At once the passion he had for her burst forth again—but this time he was the one who was not free! He visited her at the hotel where she had been staying—pleaded with her to throw up everything and go with him. She refused and reminded him of his honour. He went away in despair. He felt he could not go back to the one—he could not have the other. In a mad fit he went down to a lonely empty house he had rented and committed suicide!"

"Coward and scoundrel!" cried the old count; then he looked up at the baron. "Ah, Julius, she would have done better to have married you!" A gleam came into Hapmarck's eyes.

"She shall now—even yet. You will take her back to the Castle, Count—let there be no escaping this time, and in a year—well, we shall see!"

I moved quickly from the door, and hurrying along the corridor, tapped at another door. Eckstein and his wife came out.

Robson joined us, and we returned to the room. I opened the door, and we all four entered.

I looked at the baron. He gave a start, and a ghastly pallor came over his face as he caught sight of Eckstein.

"You!" he gasped.

Robson advanced to the baron and stood in front of him.

"An ingenious scheme, but the inevitable mischance!" he began. "It would, perhaps, simplify matters if I were to inform you that we caught your agent, Hensch, last night. According to the instructions, he returned to the house to make sure that the charcoal had done its work, so that he might in safety post your forged letter to Captain Eckstein's wife here. He ran against us, however, and has been in my charge during the night. We duly posted his letter to you, informing you that everything had happened as had been arranged—of course it was really as we had arranged. I may add that if the matter comes into Court he is perfectly willing to turn King's evidence. It now only remains for us to decide whether it shall or not!"

The old count had been listening to Robson in amazement. I approached him and, in as short a way as possible, told him of the baron's infamy.

Hapmarck stood almost livid with rage and fear. When I had finished Robson strolled over to the door. He opened it slightly, then turned and looked at the old count.

"There are two courses open, sir—might I venture to suggest them? One is, that the Baron Julius Hapmarck walks through this door, never to enter your presence again, and that you accept Captain Eckstein as your son-in-law—the other, that I summon the police and give the baron in charge for attempted murder."

There was a moment's pause. Then the old count rose and, looking at the quaking Hapmarck, pointed to the door.

"Go!" he said, sternly.

And that is practically the end of what I call "The Tale of the Young Couple." I might add, however, that the very valuable gold watch I am now wearing bears the inscription—"To Claud Matheson, in grateful remembrance from Maurice and Stephanie," and that somewhere amongst Mr Nathaniel Robson's extensive collection of presentation jewellery can be found a handsome diamond scarf pin that came from the same quarter. I have also a pressing invitation to pay a visit to Halberg Castle whenever I have the time; perhaps I will some day when the Mammoth can spare me, which doesn't seem to be within the next week or so!

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