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The Chase of the Ruby.

By RICHARD MARSH.

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CHAPTERS OF INSTALLMENTS I to VII.—On returning home from South Africa, where he had had a vision of his uncle beaten by a stranger on a flight of steps, Guy Holland finds a letter awaiting him from his uncle's solicitor requesting an interview. The uncle has died and left a singular will behind, making Guy his heir on condition that he regains a ruby ring which his relative had parted with to Miss May Bewicke, an actress. Falling this the estate goes to his other nephew, Horace Burton. In Regent's Park, Guy meets his sweetheart, Miss Letty Broad, who dies into a passion of jealousy against Miss Bewicke, to whom Guy had formerly been engaged, and counsels him to go and demand the ring. He goes to Miss Bewicke's flat for this purpose. Over supper, Guy makes his request and is met with a refusal. Coming away he encounters first his cousin Horace Burton, and then Miss Bewicke's maid, Casata, who has a deep personal spite against his cousin. She is eager to avenge herself by aiding Guy. The plan unfolded by Casata to enable Guy to possess himself of the ring, is nothing short of burglary. He revolts from the idea, but Miss Broad again commands and he therefore pays a midnight visit to the actress' rooms. He has just discovered the ring in the drawer indicated by the maid, when Miss Bewicke unexpectedly appears, her plans being changed. She insists on his keeping his booty and he leaves, carrying the ring with him. In the street he is knocked down from behind with a blow which appears to cause fatal result, and the mysterious assailant rifles his pockets. The Flyman annexes the ring and carries it to Horace Burton and his confederate, Mr Cox, a gentleman of Hebrew origin, but it is discovered that this is not the ring sought for. Miss Broad is distracted at not meeting her lover at the appointed place, and, following the advice conveyed by a mysterious note, seeks out Miss Bewicke at Brighton.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TENDER MERCIES OF TWO LADIES.

By way of commencement Miss Broad was conscious of two things—that Miss Bewicke was looking her best; that she herself was looking her worst; at least, she was nearly certain she was looking her worst, she felt so hideous.

Miss Bewicke had a knack of walking—it came by nature, though there were those who called it a trick—which gave her a curious, and, indeed, humorous, air of importance altogether beyond anything her stature seemed to warrant. This enabled her to overwhelm men, and even women who were much taller than herself, with a grace which was positively charming. She moved across that spacious hall, looking straight at Miss Broad, as if there was nothing there; and was walking past with an apparent unconsciousness of there being anyone within a mile, though she brushed against the other's skirts as she passed, which was a little more than Miss Broad could endure. She was not going all the way to Brighton to be treated by that woman as if she were a nonentity.

"Miss Bewicke!"
The lady, who passed, turned.
"I beg your pardon?"
"Can I speak to you?"
"Speak to me?" She regarded the other with a smile which, if pretty, was impertinent. "I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure."

"I am Miss Broad."
"Broad!—Broad? I don't seem to remember."

"Perhaps you remember Mr Holland."
"Mr Holland?—Guy Holland? Oh, yes, I have good cause for remembering him."

"Mr Holland has spoken of me to you?"

"Oh, you are that Miss Broad! I have pleasure in wishing you good morning." Miss Bewicke walked off as if, so far as she was concerned, the matter was at an end; but so abrupt a termination to the interview the other would not permit.

"I am sorry to detain you, Miss Be-

wicke, but, as I have said, I wish to speak to you."

"Yes. What do you wish to say?"

"Can I not speak to you in private?"

"By all means." Miss Bewicke led the way into a sitting-room. As soon as they were in, and the door closed, before the other had a chance to open her lips, she herself began the ball. "Miss Broad, before you speak, there is something which I wish to say to you. You incited Mr Guy Holland to commit, last night, a burglary upon my premises."

If she expected the other to show signs of confusion, or to attempt denial, she was mistaken. Miss Broad did not flinch.

"I did."

"You admit it?"

"I do."

"Are you aware that in so doing you were guilty of a criminal action?"

"As to that I know nothing and care less."

"I have only to send for a policeman to have you sentenced to a term of imprisonment."

"I understand how it is you have been so successful on the stage. You really are an excellent actress. You bear yourself as if you were the injured party, while all the time you know very well that it was precisely because you had robbed him that I advised him to despoil you of your booty."

"You are perfectly aware that that is false."

"On the contrary, I am perfectly aware that it is true. Where is Mr Holland? Is he here with you?"

"Miss Broad!"

"Or did you dare to make his doing, what you know he was perfectly justified in doing, an affair of the police?"

"I came upon Guy Holland, at dead of night, engaged in robbing me, and I sent him from me with my blessing."

"Then where is he?"

"I know no more than this chair."
"Miss Bewicke, I called at your rooms this morning. I saw his walking stick upon your table. When I asked how it came there, the woman who had opened the door said, in effect, that he had left it behind in his hurry to go away with you."

"The woman! What woman?"

"She said she was your companion."

"Casata? Louise Casata never said anything so monstrous."

"Not in so many words; but that was what she intended me to understand."

"You believed it? What a high opinion you appear to have of us! Guy must be worse even than I imagined, or you, his promised wife, would not judge him with such hard judgment."

"I did not believe it; but I did believe that you called in the police last night."

"I didn't; I called in no one. I simply told him to go, and he went."

"You are laughing. You know where he is, I can see it in your face."

"Then you are indeed a seer."

"This morning, when he did not come as he promised he would, and always has done, someone gave me this. What am I to think?"

Miss Broad handed Miss Bewicke the two typewritten lines, which that lady, carefully regarded.

"Someone. Who was someone?"

"A little boy. I thought it was a message from Guy. By the time I found it wasn't, he was gone. I don't know who he was, nor from whom he came, if it wasn't from you."

"It certainly did not come from me. Miss Broad, I begin to find you amusing. I also begin to understand what it is Guy Holland perceives in you to like. You are more of a woman than I am; that is, there is in you more of the

natural savage, which, to a man of his temperament, goes to make a woman."

"I want none of your praises."

"I'm not going to give you any, or compliments either. I doubt if you're in a frame of mind to properly appreciate any sort of sleight-of-hand. Let me finish. I had an engagement for luncheon; as you have made me late for it, perhaps you will do me the honour of lunching with me here."

"No, thank you."

"Pardon me, you will."

"Excuse me, I won't."

"We shall see."

Miss Bewicke touched the bell button. Miss Broad eyed her with flaming cheeks.

"It's no use your ordering anything to eat for me, because I shan't touch. You treat me as if I were a child. I'm not a child."

"My dear Miss Broad, we are both of us women—both of us; and there are senses in which women and children are synonymous. Mr Holland was once in love with me—he was, I assure you. He is now in love with you, which fact creates between us a bond of sympathy."

"I don't see it."

"No! I do. You will. He appears to have got himself into, we will put it, a rather equivocal position. It is our bounden duty, as joint sympathisers, to get him out of it. We will discuss our bounden duty; but I never can discuss anything when I'm starving, which I am."

To the waiter who appeared Miss Bewicke gave orders for an immediate lunch for two. Miss Broad kept silence. The truth was she was not finding Miss Bewicke altogether the sort of person she expected. That little lady went on:

"I am free to confess, my dear Miss Broad; by the way, may I call you Letty?"

"No, you may not."

"Thank you; you are so sweet. As I was about to remark, my dear—Letty—the other winced, but was still—"I'm free to confess that I think it not improbable that something has happened to Mr Holland."

"You know that something has happened?"

"I don't know—I surmise. I put two and two together thus: To begin with,

I don't think that you were the only person who egged him on to felony."

Miss Broad again was speechless. She remembered Mr Holland's tale of his encounter with Miss Casata.

"There was a preciseness about his proceedings which set me thinking at the time and has kept me thinking ever since. I'm pretty shrewd, you know. Now I happen to be aware that a certain person of my acquaintance has been on too good terms with Mr Horace Burton. You have heard of Mr Horace Burton? I thought so. Such a nice young man! Now, however, this certain person is on the worst terms with Mr Horace Burton. For sufficient reasons, I assure you. She has been evolving fantastic schemes of vengeance on the deceitful wretch; she's just a little cracked, you know. To ruin Mr Horace Burton by assisting Guy Holland to deprive him of his fortune would be just the kind of notion which would commend itself to her. I fancy that that's exactly what she did do. Didn't she, my dear?"

Miss Broad was breathing a little hard. The other's keen intuition startled her.

"It was I who told him to take what was his own."

"Yes, I know, but the first suggestion did not come from you. However, so long as we understand each other that's the point. To proceed—Mr Horace Burton would be cautious that this certain person's sweetness had turned to gall and also that she was wishful to pay him out in his own coin. He might even have a notion of the form that payment was to take, having learned it from the certain person's own lips. If so, you may be quite sure that he or his friends saw Guy Holland enter my premises, if nobody else did. They saw him come out. They were to the full as anxious to obtain possession of that ruby as ever he could be. So they took it from him."

"Took it from him—with violence?"

"Do you think they could take it from him without violence—that he would hand it over practically upon request? That's not like Guy; not the Guy I knew. He'd fight for it tooth and nail himself against a regiment."

"Do you think, then, they hurt him?"

"It looks as if they did something to him. He never went home. There must have been some reason why he didn't. There is at least a possibility that it was because he couldn't."

"Do you think they—killed him?"

"Ah, now you ask too much. I should say certainly not. It would be unintentionally if they did. That would be too big a price even for Mr Horace Burton to pay. If they attacked him in fair fight, I should say that he killed someone before they did him, and that when they did it was because they had to. But the possibility is that they never let him have a chance; that they stole on him unawares and had him at their mercy before he knew that danger threatened."

"Miss Bewicke, you are so clever—so much cleverer than I—"

"My dear."

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