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The Chase of the Ruby.

By RICHARD MARSH.

Author of "The Beetle: A Mystery," "In Full Cry," "Frivolities," Etc.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

Cox appeared at the entrance. "Burton, you said that all we wanted was the ruby; that the rest of her things should go untouched."

"Well?" "The Flyman's pocketing her jewels." Mr. Burton crossed the floor.

"That won't do, Flyman. We're here on an expedition of right. We're not thieves."

"You said yourself we might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb."

"I did; and you are aware that that is not the kind of sheep I meant. On this occasion I really must ask you to be honest."

"But I never saw such shiners. Who could resist them, gov-nor? She's got enough to stock a shop. Why, if we take 'em away with us, we shan't be far out even if we don't get that blessed ruby."

"It's the ruby or nothing; also, and nothing. Put those things back."

"I've only nobbled one or two. I've got to look after myself."

"I, too, have to look after you. You know what was agreed; keep to the terms of the agreement, or, though you 'noble' every 'shiner' the lady owns, you'll be a loser. Put those things back."

There was something about Mr. Burton just then which compelled respect, of a kind, which fact the Flyman recognised. His face darkened, and, in audible tones, he grumbled. But he produced the trinkets, as requested, and replaced them one by one, on their velvet beds.

"Is that all?" "Every blouming one."

"Cox, is that all?" "Yes, I believe it is." He glanced at the open jewel-case. "No, there's a ring still missing."

The Flyman cursed. "Can't a bloke have one?"

"Not unless he wishes to pay for it more than it's worth. Come, man, look pleasant."

The Flyman did not "look pleasant;" but he restored the ring. Mr. Burton expressed approval.

"That's better. Now show yourself as keen in the right direction. Give us a proof of the 'handiness' you talked about, and find that ruby. It'll be worth to you more than all those other things."

On this point the Flyman, from his manner, seemed to have his doubts; but he continued his researches. Mr. Cox observed that they were strictly confined to what Mr. Burton had called the "right direction." Mr. Burton, returning to the locked door, pursued his meditations as he listened at the panel.

"It's odd that they're so quiet, and suggests mischief. In such a case, surely women are not quiet. Unless—unless what? That's what I should like to know."

"Burton is this the ruby?" The words came sharply from Mr. Cox, with a sudden interposition from the Flyman.

"You give me that! Don't you lay your fingers on the thing!"

"I'm only looking at it."

"You give it to me, I say."

"Burton!"

The cry was almost an appeal for help. Mr. Burton arrived to find something very like a tussle taking place. The Flyman was endeavouring to obtain possession of something which Mr. Cox was holding, and which that gentleman was doing his best to keep.

"I found it!" he cried. "Hand it over!"

"Burton! Quick! Catch!"

Mr. Cox tossed something through the air which Mr. Burton caught. He had just time to see that it was a ring,

set with a gleaming red stone, when the Flyman was upon him with an emphatic repetition of the demand he had made on Mr. Cox.

"You hand it over before I down you."

Mr. Cox explained. "I found it; he didn't. I opened the box, and it was the first thing I saw. It had nothing to do with him."

The Flyman paid no attention to the statement. He merely reiterated his request.

"Now, Mr. Burton, I don't want no patten. You fork up before there's trouble."

The young gentleman, holding his hand behind his back, was smiling in the other's face.

"Gently, Flyman. Let's know exactly where we are before we come to business." The Flyman flung himself upon him without another word. Mr. Burton never for a moment seemed to lose his self-possession. "You asst what do you suppose you're going to gain by this?"

While they struggled, the bedroom door was suddenly slammed to. There was a clicking sound. The continuation of the argument was instantly deferred; Mr. Burton hurried to the door.

"They've caught us napping; it's locked. Well, Flyman, I hope you're satisfied. Owig; to your 'handiness,' of which we have heard so much, in our turn we are trapped."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIGURES ON THE BED.

"At any rate," remarked Miss Bewicke, as, turning the key in the lock, she shut herself and Miss Broad inside the dining-room, "you can't get at us for a time."

The two girls stood and listened. They heard the handle tried; the rapping at the panel.

"You may knock and knock, but it won't be opened. He's gone. That was Horace, dear. How beautifully you knocked him down!"

"What does he want?"

"It's pretty plain. Uncle George's ruby has the attractiveness of the Holy Grail. This is another quest for it."

"But they'll find it if we stop here."

"And if we don't stop here, what do you propose to do? Fight them to the death? Nothing else will be efficacious. They're not the persons, and they're not in the mood, to stick at trifles."

"What a wretch he is! I've heard Guy speak of him, but I'd no idea he was as bad as this."

"My dear Letty, when a bad man is in a bad hole, you've no notion how bad that man can be. The question now is, can we get out through the kitchen door, or can they get through the kitchen door to us?"

"Where does that door lead to?"

"Into Louise Casata's bedroom. The beauty of the average flat is that you can always pass from any one room into any other, which, sometimes, is convenient and sometimes isn't. I'm wondering whether Louise is responsible for Horace Burton's presence here, and also where she is. I've reasons for believing that it was not her intention to go out to-night."

"I shouldn't keep such a woman about my place, if I were you."

"I don't intend to any longer. All the same, you've no idea how useful she has been. There have been times when I don't know what I should have done without her. Still, I fancy, that henceforth she and I part company." She opened the door which led into Miss Casata's room, then gave utterance to a startled exclamation. "Why, what is the matter? Letty, keep back!"

Returning to the dining-room, she leaned against the door, which she had pulled to after her, as if she needed its support. For one who was, as a rule, so completely mistress of herself, she showed strange emotion. Miss Broad stared at her askance.

"What has happened now! What's in there?"

"I don't know. Don't ask me. Let me get my breath and think, and I'll tell you all about it."

She pressed her hand against her side, as if to still the beating of her heart. She seemed unHINGED, thrown, in a second, completely off her balance. Her agitation was infectious. Probably, without her knowing it, Miss Broad's voice trembled and sank.

"Tell me—what is it?"

"Wait a minute, and I'll tell you—"

all. She made an evident effort to get the better of her infirmity. Bracing herself up against the door, the little woman looked Miss Broad straight in the face. "Letty, something terrible has happened."

"What is it?"

"I don't quite know myself; I didn't stop to look."

"Let me go and see."

"It's Miss Casata and—a man."

"A man? What man?"

"I can't say; I only saw it was a man. They're lying on the bed—so still. Oh, Letty!"

"Muy!"

Miss Broad was probably wholly unaware that she had called her companion by her Christian name. The unknown horror in the other room had laid its grip on her. She was overcome by frightful imaginings, not knowing why. She gasped out an unfinished question.

"You don't mean—"

"I don't know what I mean. I only know that there's something 'ere."

The two girls had been speaking in whispers, as if they stood in a presence which compelled hushed voices. Now, suddenly, Miss Bewicke raised her tones, extending her small palm towards the door through which they had entered.

"Oh! you wretches; wretches!"

She broke into a passion of tears.

"May, for goodness' sake, don't cry!"

"I'm not going to. I don't know why I am so silly, but, for the moment, I couldn't help it." Her sobs ceased almost as rapidly as they came. She dried her eyes. "Letty, let's go and see what's happened. I'm afraid Miss Casata's—"

dead?"

"Yes; and -- the man."

"The man?"


"They're so still. Let's go and see. Give me your hand."

Miss Broad yielded her hand. Miss Bewicke opened the door. The two peeped through.

The room was not a large one. On one side was an ordinary French bedstead. A brass railing was on the head and foot. On this railing were hung feminine odds and ends. These made it difficult for anyone standing at the door to see clearly what was on the

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