

No Trumps

By H. B. MARRIOTT WATSON.

WORD DE LYS laid down the third paper, and meditatively lit a cigarette. He had plunged into the frolic lightly, and now he had come to a point at which he must either go on or turn his back upon a fascinating opening. In the agony column of the first of the newspapers lying on his table was an advertisement which he had marked in red. It ran thus:

F.C. Most urgently begged to communicate.

Doris. F.C. he recalled, had arrested his passing eye, as being the initials of his Christian and his family name—Francis Charnian. That, he supposed was why he had answered the advertisement. In the agony column of the second paper, published two days later, appeared this:

Doris. Will keep appointment anywhere.

F.C. That was his, de Lys's, plunge into some affair that obviously did not belong to him. Yet Doris had begged F.C. to communicate, and F.C. had communicated. There was nothing immoral or crooked in this, he reflected. That brought him to advertisement number three, which was as follows:

F.C. Serpentine Bridge, eight thirty tonight.

Doris. He sat meditating for a few minutes, and then he rose, looked out on the spring sunshine in the square, and dismissed the matter from his mind. After all, it was ten o'clock of an April morning, and time was not made to be wasted. He spent the day agreeably, dined lightly and early at home, and by eight o'clock was in the street in the twilight. He walked all the way through Knightsbridge and by Hyde Park until he came to Queen's Gate. Then he turned off into the park where the road divides it from Kensington Gardens and leads over the Serpentine. It was by this time fairly dark, but the lamps were lit, and he could make out the figure of a man leaning over the bridge as he approached it, though he could determine no more than this. Cabs rattled by; an electric bromide, well lighted, flashed past with a pleasant tinkle of bells. He took up his station by one corner of the bridge and waited events with watchful eyes.

Now, under the lamplight, he could make out the man's figure more clearly, leaning as it was, well over toward the water below. But it was not a man of whom he was in search. His glance passed on and tried to pierce the obscurity of the bridge. He could see one corner of the bridge opposite, but there were two corners beyond; he moved slowly a pace. No one was visible on the bridge save the bent figure; he moved back to his former position, and taking out a watch, struck it and examined his watch. It was twenty-five minutes to nine. Suddenly, with the extinguishing of the match, the flare of which had darkened all about him, a man appeared out of nowhere, and stood by him. It was not the figure on the bridge, which was still crouching there.

"F.C.," asked the newcomer, in a low voice. "I don't suppose you're Doris?" said de Lys, examining him as carefully as he might in the darkness.

"No, but I am come from her," said the stranger quickly. "If you are F.C. will you please come with me?"

"One moment," said de Lys, as the other was moving off. "What guarantee have I that you come from Doris?"

"For one thing, the fact that I am here," said the man abruptly. "For another—this." As he spoke he held out an unglazed band, on a finger of which was a ring.

He Lys went through the form of looking over as if to inspect it, and was about to express himself as satisfied when a whim entered his head. "Yes, I see," he said, "but, pardon me, I think I ought to have charge of that." "Why, what?" There seemed a certain anger in the stranger's speaking tone, but he passed. "Very well," he said after a moment's hesitation. "You shall have it, and return it to the proper quarter."

He drew the ring from his finger, and de Lys slipped it on his own.

"Now, I am ready," he announced. They walked in silence to the street,

when the stranger hailed a cab. The lights of the street had revealed to de Lys some facts about his conductor. For one thing, he was a man of fifty, spare and gray, and he was obviously a gentleman. In the cab he made out other things, as, for example, that the stranger's lips were narrow, and his eyes hard and curiously lighted; his jaw full and firm for so slight a head. He turned on de Lys as the latter was making these observations.

"You do not ask me any questions," he said abruptly.

"No; why should I?" said de Lys. "You are taking me to Doris."

Something like a frown ruffled the other's brow, and after a little he spoke again. "You don't ask me who I am?"

"Perhaps I know—or can guess," seemed a safe answer, and was the safer for its pendant. "If I am going to Doris nothing matters."

Again the elderly stranger seemed perturbed. He drummed his fingers on the window for a moment, and then suddenly withdrew his hand, and sat back as if he had come to a conclusion. De Lys watched him out of eyes that seemed to be busy elsewhere and followed his example of silence. He had a certain misgiving and a much greater wonder. He had not been able to overhear the directions given to the cabman, and he occupied himself with an endeavor to trace the way they were taking.



"I am willing to repair my mistake," he said. "I am willing to pay." "Pay," she echoed wildly, and was suddenly silent, lost in grief.

He identified the main streets at first, but lost his bearings presently in a maze of Kensington Roads. He only knew vaguely that they must be somewhere in the centre of the garden district of Kensington. Then the cab drew up, and his guide got out. De Lys followed, and mounted the steps which led to the door of a considerable house. The door banged loud behind him as the stranger closed it.

"I think," he said with that firm equableness which he had shown before, "that this will be the best place."

De Lys followed him through one large room into a smaller one beyond, both of which were softly lighted.

"Sit down, please," said the stranger. "A little conversation is, I fancy, necessary between us, Mr. Channing."

"My dear sir," replied de Lys politely. "I am quite sure that what you fancy you usually obtain. I am quite ready—as a preliminary, of course, to Doris."

His host, if he may be so called, bent critical brows at this rejoinder. "I am," he began with a certain pomposity, "John Swainson."

"Indeed!" murmured de Lys, seeing that the pause emphasized the importance of this announcement.

"I suppose I am plain enough," said Mr. Swainson sharply. "I am Miss Graham's guardian—or rather I was until, under the conditions of her father's will, she attained the age of twenty-five last December."

De Lys was under-tooled to murmur that it would be a privilege to be a ward of Mr. Swainson's.

"Come, sir, we are not here to speak flippancies or to beat about the bush," said Swainson.

"I understood I was here to see Doris," complained de Lys mildly.

Mr. Swainson examined him under lowered brows, but seemed to find some puzzle. "You are either," said he sullenly, "a remarkably shameless young man or a wonderful fool."

"It never does," said de Lys, shaking his head, "to decide too rashly."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Swainson bluntly, "and I hope to get sufficient evidence for a decision before you and I part. Let me tell you frankly then that you have been brought here under a pretence."

De Lys slapped his knee vigorously. "Hanged if I didn't suspect it!" he exclaimed cheerfully.

"You have been brought here," pursued Mr. Swainson, who was obviously embarrassed by this interjection, but who stuck tenaciously to his task, "by a contrivance of mine which I think is fully justified by the circumstances of what I regard as a scandalous case."

"Oh, come, sir," protested de Lys, who was anxious to know more of his position.

"I repeat, scandalous, and I might have made the word stronger," said Mr. Swainson. "Before I broach my object let me put it thus: Last year about this time my ward, Miss Graham, makes your acquaintance while on a visit to Edinburgh. She is still my ward at the time, and I made inquiries. I find you to be a member of an apparently respectable firm in the city, and I have nothing to say. Though I have not set eyes on you until this moment, Mr. Channing, I should have had nothing to say at this moment, had it not been for what is well known to both of us." He came to a pause. De Lys wished with all his heart that he would say what was well known to both of them.

he thrilled. But, as usual with him, he dallied with predicament.

"Would not that be compounding a felony?" he asked after due consideration.

Mr. Swainson shrugged his shoulders. "I am not much concerned with technical terms if I can save an unfortunate young woman from her folly."

"And this letter?" inquired de Lys softly.

"Ah!" Mr. Swainson's eyes narrowed on him. "It will be a letter addressed to Miss Graham which I shall post myself to-night."

"A letter of renunciation?" suggested de Lys.

"More that that," said the older man grimly, "of confession."

"Ah! then Doris believes in me still."

De Lys got that out, and the flash of annoyance in the other's eyes told him he was right. He accepted himself in the position and in the personality of Frederick Channing; he began to be eager for Frederick Channing to be innocent. All his forces were ready to be arrayed against the enemy and on behalf of Doris. If only he knew the details of Frederick Channing's supposed and alleged crime!

"Miss Graham's opinion on matters of business is hardly one on which to pin much faith," said her ex-guardian coldly.

De Lys mused. There were the elements of a pretty tangle here, and he turned them over. On one thing he was determined—not to give any answer until he had seen Doris. He made this clear forthwith.

"You put me in a difficult position," he said at last. "My decision affects two lives and for all time. I should like time to consider; and I think you will see that it is only fair that Miss Graham should be considered in this."

"Good heavens, man, am I not considering her, first and last?" burst out Mr. Swainson, and checked himself.

"Very well," he went on slowly, "I dare say it is better she knew. I will see her and bring her to you."

"I think it would be better if we consulted alone," suggested de Lys.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Swainson shortly, and went out. He was gone ten minutes, during which the prisoner made a cursory tour of his room, examining books and inspecting pictures to acquaint himself, if possible, with the characters and tastes of the inmates. In the centre of the room was a card-table with a box of cards open. The click of the door arrested him in the midst of this occupation, and Mr. Swainson re-entered, holding the door open for a handsome girl in evening dress. She was of average height, rather slight, and quick and dark of eye; and her pallor at this moment was intense. It was evident that Mr. Swainson had been explaining the situation to her. Her bosom was agitated with emotion. But as she swung in behind her guardian she stared, started, and exclaimed.

"This—this isn't Mr. Channing."

De Lys made no movement, and Mr. Swainson's glance went back from him to her.

"Well," he said dryly, "he came here as Mr. Channing, and does not seem anxious to disclaim the identity, which in the circumstances is rather remarkable."

"No, no, Mr. Swainson, I assure you there is a mistake. It is not—not Mr. Channing." She turned to him emotionally.

It was evident he did not credit her for a moment. He snidled sourly. "What do you say to that, sir?" he asked de Lys.

"I never contradict a lady," said de Lys. "But perhaps, if you would permit us a private interview, we might advance a stage farther in this interesting drama."

Mr. Swainson looked from one to the other. It was clear he thought he held the trump cards, and that by leaving them together he hoped the woman would persuade the man to accept safety. At any rate he slid from the room, peeping on the threshold only to call his prisoner's attention to the alternative. It was sufficiently dramatic to satisfy de Lys. Voices arose and issued through the opened door, voices from below—the rumble of male voices.

"You know the choice," he said. "I think I can give you twenty minutes."

The door shut him out, and the girl who had stood staring at de Lys, spoke vehemently as it did. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I should like to know myself who I am, and what I have done," said he in a friendly way.

"You answered this—this advertisement," she began tempestuously.

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