The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER I.

David Steel dropped his eyes from the mirror and shuddered as a man who sees his own soul bared for the first time. And yet the mirror was in itself a thing of artistic beauty—engraved Florentine glass in a frame of deep old Flemish oak. The novelist had purchased it in Bruges, and now it stood as a joy and a thing of beauty against the full red wall over the fireplace. And Steel had glanced at himself therein and seen murder in his eyes.

He dropped into a chair with a groan for his own helplessness. Men have done that kind c' thing before when the cartridges are all gone and the bayonets are twisted and broken and the brown waves of the foe come snarling over the breastworks. And then they die doggedly with the stones in their hands, and cursing the tardy supports that brought this black shame upon them.

But Steel's was ruin of another kind. The man was a fighter to his finger-tips. He had dogged determination and splendid physical courage; he had gradually thrust his way into the front rank of living novelists, though the taste of poverty was still bitter in his mouth. And how good success was now that it had come!

People envied him. Well, that was all in the sweets of the victory. They praised his blue china, they lingered before his Oriental dishes and the choice pictures on the panelled walls. The whole thing was still a constant pleasure to Steel's artistic mind. The dark walls, the old oak and silver, the red shades, and the high, artistic fittings soothed him and pleased him, and played upon his tender imagination. And behind there was a study, filled with books and engravings, and beyond that again a conservatory, filled with the choicest blossoms. Steel could work with the passion flowers above his head and the tender grace of the tropical ferns about him, and he could reach his left hand for his telephone and call Fleet Street to his ear.

It was all unique, delightful, the dream of an artistic soul realized. Three years before David Steel had worked in an attic at a bare deal table, and his mother had £3 per week to pay for everything. Usually there was balm in this recollection.

But not to-night, Heaven help him, not to-night! Little grinning demons were dancing on the oak cornices, there were mocking lights gleaming from Cellini tankards that Steel had given far too much money for. It had not seemed to matter just at the time. If all this artistic beauty had emptied Steel's purse there was a golden stream coming. What mattered it that the local tradesmen were getting a little restless? The great expense of the novelist's life was past. In two years he would be rich. And the pathos of the thing was not lessened by the fact that it was true. In two years' time Steel would be well off. He was terribly short of ready money, but he had just finished a serial story for which he was to be paid £500 within two months of the delivery of the copy; two novels of his were respectively in their fourth and fifth editions. But these novels of his he had more or less given away, and he ground his teeth as he thought of it. Still, everything spelt prosperity. If he lived, David Steel was bound to become a rich man.

And yet he was ruined. Within twenty-four hours everything would pass out of his hands. To all practical purposes it had done so already. And all for the want of £1,000! Steel had earned twice that amount during the past twelve months, and the fruits of his labor were as balm to his soul about him. Within the next twelve months he could pay the debt three times over. He would cheerfully have taken the bill and doubled the amount for six months' delay.

And all this because he had become surety for an absconding brother. Steel had put his pride in his pocket and interviewed his creditor, a little, polite, mild-eyed financier, who meant to have his money to the uttermost farthing. At first he had been suave and sympathetic until he had discovered that Steel had debts elsewhere, and then——

Well, he had signed judgment, and to-morrow he could levy execution. Within a few hours the bottom would fall out of the universe so far as Steel was concerned. Within a few hours every butcher and baker and candlestick-maker would come abusively for his bill. Steel, who could have faced a regiment, recoiled fearfully from that. Within a week his oak and silver would have to be sold and the passion flower would wither on the walls.

Steel had not told anybody yet; the strong man had grappled with his trouble alone. Had he been a man of business he might have found some way out of the difficulty. Even his mother didn't know. She was asleep upstairs, perhaps dreaming of her son's greatness. What would the dear old mater say when she knew? Well, she had been a good mother to him, and it had been a labor of love to furnish the house for her as for himself. Perhaps there would be a few tears in those gentle eyes, but no more. Thank God, no reproaches there.

David lighted a cigarette and paced restlessly round the dining-room. Never had he appreciated its quiet beauty more than he did now. There were flowers, blood-red flowers, on the table under the graceful electric stand that Steel had designed himself. He snapped off the light as if the sight pained him, and strode into his study. For a time he stood moodily gazing at his flowers and ferns. How every leaf there was pregnant with association. There was the Moorish clock droning the midnight hour. When Steel had brought that clock——

"Ting, ting, ting. Pring, pring, pring, pring. Ting, ting, ting, ting."

But Steel heard nothing. Everything seemed as silent as the grave. It was only by a kind of inner consciousness that he knew the hour to be midnight. Midnight meant the coming of the last day. After sunrise some greasy lounger pregnant of cheap tobacco would come in and assume that he represented the sheriff, bills would be hung like banners on the outward walls, and then——

"Pring, pring, pring. Ting, ting, ting, ting, tingl ting, ting. Pring, pring, pring."

Bells, somewhere. Like the bells in the valley where the old vicarage used to stand. Steel vaguely wondered who now lived in the house where he was born. He was staring in the most absent way at his telephone, utterly unconscious of the shrill impatience of the little voice. He saw the quick pulsation of the striker and he came back to earth again.

Jefferies of the 'Weekly Messenger,' of course. Jefferies was fond of a late chat on the telephone. Steel wondered, grimly, if Jefferies would lend him £1,000. He flung himself down in a deep lounge chair and placed the receiver to his ear. By the deep, hoarse, clang of the wires, a long-distance message, assuredly.

"From London, evidently. Halloa, London! Are you there?"

London responded that it was. A clear, soft voice spoke at length.

"Is that you, Mr. Steel? Are you quite alone? Under the circumstances you are not busy to-night?"

Steel started. He had never heard the voice before. It was clear and soft and commanding, and yet there was just a suspicion of mocking irony in it.

"I'm not very busy to-night," Steel replied. "Who is speaking to me?"

"That for the present we need not go into," said the mocking voice. "As certain old-fashioned contemporaries of yours would say, 'We meet as strangers!' Stranger yet, you are quite alone!

"I am quite alone. Indeed, I am the only one up in the house."

"Good. I have told the exchange people not to ring off till I have finished with you. One advantage of telephoning at this hour is that one is tolerably free from interruption. So your mother is asleep? Have you told her what is likely to happen to you before many hours have elapsed?"

Steel made no reply for a moment. He was restless and ill at ease to-night, and it seemed just possible that his imagination was playing him strange tricks. But no. The Moorish clock in its frame of celebrities droned the quarter after twelve; the scent of the Dijon roses floated in from the conservatory.

"I have told nobody as yet," Steel said, hoarsely. "Who in the name of Heaven are you.

"That in good time. But I did not think you were a coward."

"No man has ever told me so—face to face."

"Good again. I recognise the fighting ring in your voice. If you lack certain phases of moral courage, you are a man of pluck and resource. Now, somebody who is very dear to me is at present in Brighton, not very far from your own house. She is in dire need of assistance. You also are in dire need of assistance. We can be of mutual advantage to one another."

"What do you mean by that?" Steel whispered. "I want you to help my friend, and in return I will help you. Bear in mind that I am asking you to do nothing wrong. If you will promise me to go to a certain address in Brighton to-night and see my friend, I promise that before you sleep the sum of £1,000 in Bank of England notes shall be in your possession."

No reply came from Steel. He could not have spoken at that moment for the fee-simple of Golconda. He could only hang gasping to the telephone. Many a strange and weird plot came and went in that versatile brain, but never one more wild than this. Apparently no reply was expected, for the speaker resumed:—

"I am asking you to do no wrong. You may naturally desire to know why my friend does not come to you. That must remain my secret, our secret. We are trusting you because we know you to be a gentleman, but we have enemies who are ever on the watch. All you have to do is to go to a certain place and give a certain woman information. You are thinking that this is a strange mystery. Never was anything stranger dreamt of in your philosophy. Are you agreeable?"

The mocking tone died out of the small, clear voice until it was almost pleading.

"You have taken me at a disadvantage," Steel said. "And you know——"

(To be Continued.)

HOT WEATHER DANGERS.

More little ones die during the hot months than at any other season. At this time stomach and bowel troubles assume their most dangerous form, and sometimes a few hours delay in the treatment means the loss of a little life. Baby's Own Tablets is the best medicine in the world to prevent these troubles, or to cure them if they attack the little one unexpectedly. Every mother should have a box of these Tablets in the house—their prompt use may save a child's life. Mrs. Arthur Cote, St. Fortunat, Que., says: "My little one was greatly troubled with colic and bowel trouble, but since using Baby's Own Tablets the trouble has disappeared, and she is growing nicely and has good health." These Tablets are guaranteed to contain no opiates, and are safe for a new born baby or a well grown child. Sold by all medicine dealers or sent by mail at 25 cents a box by writing the Dr. Williams Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

A Girl's Caprice

CHAPTER XVI.

"Oh, Miss Hilary, I thought ye'd nivir come! The masther is in sich a state! What wid sendin' to the door for ye ivery minit and the ould man in the study!"

"The old man in the study?"

"Yes, miss. Raal ould! The misthress tould me to stand on the hall-door-step, an' bring ye in, whin ye came, an' Misther Ker if he was wid ye. An' sure," with a merry glance from between her roguish Irish lids, "where would he be but there?"

"But"—Ker is standing a good way behind, "why, bridget?"

"Faix, I don't know, miss. Barrin' it is the ould gintleman that's the cause of it. He's from London Town, I'm thinkin'; a sort of a grand sort of law man, an' it's something about a will, I think."

It is plain that Bridget has been applying her best ear to the keyhole of the study with great effect.

Hilary's face grows disturbed. She turns round and beckons somewhat haughtily to Ker. Her face is very white.

"It appears that there is a man here, a lawyer, acquainted with my—our"—reluctantly—"aunt's will, and he wishes to see you as well as me."

"But how——?" begins Ker.

She disdains reply, however, and leads him to Jim's study.

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The interview is at an end. "The ould man" has gone back to London. He has brought strange news, however—strange enough to induce him, the second partner in the great firm, to come all the way to Ireland to explain it. A second will has been discovered, written by the old aunt, that entirely upsets the first terrible one, that would have destroyed or made the lives of two young people. This latter will is quite clear. Of the £18,000 a year, left by the old aunt, one half is to go to Hilary, the other half to Frederic Ker. There are no restrictions whatsoever.

Jim and Diana have gone to speed the old lawyer on his journey. They had begged him to spend a month, a night, a week, a day even, with them, so thankful were they for his intelligence, but all to no effect. Sadly they follow him to the door, sorry in that they can show no gratitude beyond words to the man who has delivered poor dear Hilary from her hateful dilemma. And she has been so good all through, poor darling, so anxious to do what was right (only because they had asked her), it was but an hour ago indeed that she had rebelled. She had found the task too hard for her. Now the task is at an end. Won't she be delighted!

Meantime they have left the study,—and Hilary and Ker face to face.

A deadly silence ensues, quiet reigns within this room. Ker is looking out of the window, and Hilary is trifling with a book or two on the table. She has told herself she ought to go, but still—one or two words must be spoken. One should bid even the worst people adieu when one has spent an hour or so with them. One should never be rude.

"What a fortunate turn things have taken," says she, moving the books about a little indiscriminately.

"Very."

He comes back from the window, and faces her from the other side of the table.

"Yes. We are free." Her air is quite as cold as before, yet somehow he knows that there is a change in it, a subtle change.

"Entirely free."

"I'm so glad," says Hilary, with careful dignity. "Because, once having decided that a marriage between us would be madness, I felt that perhaps I was doing you an injustice."

"It is too good of you to trouble yourself so much about me."

"I was troubled myself, too; or, perhaps, I should not have thought so much—about you. You see, my refusal to marry you meant your losing a great deal of money."

"I am not so wedded to money as you seem to imagine."

"I did not accuse you of that. I," indignantly, "only accused you of being willing to marry me without loving me."

"And what did that mean?" He almost laughs at the absurdity of her reasoning. And in truth she has lost herself a little. She makes a petulant movement, and wisely turns the conversation.

"You are going back to India, then?"

"Yes."

"At once?"

"As soon as ever I can," icily. Then, with a sudden touch of anger: "Why do you ask me? Surely you, who have arranged my movements, are the one who must know most about them."

"I?" she looks up. "I to arrange your movements?"

"Yes, you!" He goes up to her and looks her deliberately in the face. "Will you tell me you are not sending me back to India?"

"What are you saying?" says she, with an attempt at hauteur that fails her. To her horror she knows that she is trembling. "Who am I, that I should arrange your movements?"

"That is beside the question; though," with a quick look at her, "I could answer you. Will you tell me that you did not refuse me?"

"Ah! There was nothing to refuse!"

"There was me."

"You, but not your love."

"Both! Both! I swear it. I swear it now, Hilary, with a clear conscience, when there is nothing to prevent your believing it. I love you. There is no girl on earth like you, I think. I love you—speak to me!"

But Hilary cannot speak. She makes a very brave struggle, and then, suddenly, like any silly baby, her hands go up to her eyes and, to her everlasting shame, she knows that she has burst into tears.

Dear and blessed tears. They tell him all things.

Suddenly she feels herself caught in his arms. Her cheek is pressed to his. His love, on fire by reason of these tears, has now declared itself; that love, which he had half derided, has carried him past all control. Like a tide it rushes on, sweeping away all obstacles, dashing straight to the goal of its desires.

Hilary, in the midst of this whirl, loses herself a little. Instinctively she clings to him. From the very first she had felt a certain sympathy with Ker. Now she knows she loves him.

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"Now what was it all about?" asks Ker five minutes later. "I think you needn't have been so very hard on me, just becaise I happened to be a bit late."

"Oh, no. We won't talk about it any more," says Hilary, smiling at him it is true, but letting a little sigh escape her.

"Yes we will though. I can see by your eyes it is not all right yet."

"Well, I'll tell you the truth, Fred. I," blushing hotly, "didn't like to think you had found Mrs. Dyson-Moore more attractive than me."

"Mrs. Dyson-Moore! Heavens and earth! a thousand Mrs. Dyson-Moores wouldn't have kept me from you. Why, I wasn't within a mile of her all day."

"Not," faltering, "with her? Then where——?"

"I was in Cork, and that beastly train was of course slow. And—"

"Oh, Fred!" she springs to her feet. "Oh, what must you think of me?"

"I needn't tell you," laughing, "you know. I went up to Cork to get you this——" He puts his hand in his pocket. "Why?—Where? Oh, here it is!"

He pulls out a little case, opens it, and taking her hand, slips an exquisite diamond ring upon her engaged finger.

Hilary looks at him, and then, impulsively going nearer to him, lifts her head and kisses him.

"I oughtn't to take it. I oughtn't really," says she dejectedly. "I'm not worthy of it. All the time you were thinking of me, I——"

"You were thinking of me, too."

"Yes, but how?"

"Never mind, you were thinking of me. That's the great point."

"I certainly was doing that—with a vengeance! What a lovely, darling ring! Do you know, Fred, I never had a ring in all my life before."

"I'm glad of that," says Ker in a low tone. "I'm glad my first gift to you has not been forestalled."

"Your first!" she pauses, and quite a distressed change grows on her face. "Oh, not your first! Fred—my florin! That was your first! Oh! how could you throw it away like that? Do you think we shall be able to find it again?"

"If not," laughing, "I can give you another."

"Oh, no. That or no other. I'm sure I know the spot where it fell, I——" She stops short, and colors violently.

"You what?" He takes her hands and presses his lips to her palms. Perhaps he knows what is coming.

"I watched where it fell; I meant to go back and pick it up," says she bravely, but blushing until the tears come into her eyes.

"What? Even when you thought I was going away forever?"

"Yes."

"Not a bit of it," says Ker, closing his arms round her. "I'll tell you what you thought—what you knew—that nothing on earth would induce me to go away, so long as a shred of chance remained to me that you would still relent and marry me!"

"I didn't know that. No indeed. I felt sure you didn't care—that you would go!"

"Well, you know now?"

"Yes, and I wonder at it," says she, still in an extremely abased frame of mind, "considering how bad I have been to you all along."

"I am a wronged man; I acknowledge that," says Ker. "As there was to be an alteration in the will, I wish all the money had been left to me."

"How greedy of you!"

"Not at all. Greediness has nothing to do with it. But such a will would have enabled me to prove to you the truth of some words I said to you to-day. Do you remember them? You asked me if I would marry you if you had not a penny in the world, and when I said 'Yes,' you wouldn't believe me."

"How could I?" reproachfully.

"But I said it."

"Yes—but in a tone."

"I meant it, however," says he earnestly. "Though I can't prove it. You have still—a penny!"

"No. No. Only a half-penny now," says she with a delightful little glance. "And you have the other half. It is like the old broken sixpence! "Why," laughing, though a little shyly, "we must be lovers."

"For life!" says he, in a low tone. He draws her to him.

THE END

You may have observed that a bachelor can hold a baby almost as awkwardly as a woman can throw a stone.

ALL OVER THE WORLD.

Dodd's Kidney Pills Finding Their Way Into Every Civilized Country.

While Canadians are struggling to get a firmer foothold in the British markets, there is one Canadian product that has got away ahead of the agitation and now measures its market from the Baltic-washed shores of the Denmark to where the sun glints off the pyramids in the land of the Pharoahs. That purely Canadian product is Dodd's Kidney Pills.

Among the letters that come in the daily mail of The Dodd's Medicine Co., Limited, there are those marked with the stamps of almost every country in the world. A couple that came in together the other morning shows how the fame of the great Canadian Kidney Remedy has spread. One is from Denmark and the other was penned by a true son of the Prophet in the office of the Minister of Finance, Cairo, Egypt.

It is noticeable that in the case of the Egyptian Dodd's Kidney Pills were perscribed by his doctor. In this respect the doctors of the ancient home of civilization are reading a lesson in frankness to many of their brethren of the Anglo-Saxon race. The latter would probably have prescribed Dodd's Kidney Pills but used another name.

But however that may be, the fact remains that wherever men are found there is Kidney Disease; and that no matter how or where Kidney Disease is found there is a demand for Dodd's Kidney Pills—the one remedy that has never failed to cure it.

The letters referred to are as follows: They are naturally interesting reading for Canadians.

DODD'S KIDNEY PILLS IN EGYPT

The Dodd's Medicine Co., Limited,
Toronto, Ont.

Dear Sirs,—I have been suffering for some months from a Kidney Complaint. The doctor who attended me has recommended me to take your pills, "Dodd's Kidney Pills." After two boxes I got some relief. But, unfortunately, I have not been able to go on with the treatment, being unable to find any Pills in Cairo.

The Chemist who sold me the two boxes has informed me that he sent an order for some, and has been keeping me waiting for over one month. This is the reason why I am writing to you to have the goodness to send me by return of post six boxes for which I will pay as soon as I receive them from the post.

Kindly let me know at the same time where your branch agency in Egypt is to be found.

Thanking you in anticipation,

MOHAMED RACHED.
"Immeubles Libres de l'Etat",
Office of the Minister of Finance,
Cairo, Egypt.

DODD'S KIDNEY PILLS IN DENMARK.

The Dodd's Medicine Co., Limited,
Toronto, Ont.

Dear Sirs,—I want to purchase six boxes of Dodd's Kidney Pills, but I don't know exactly where to apply, at Toronto, Buffalo or London. I suppose they can be sent by express or registered mail from any of these places. Please advise me of how to proceed in order to get the pills without delay.

Yours truly,
J. P. SIMONSON,
Viborg, V, Mark,
Denmark.