The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XI.

"Before we go any farther," Bell said, after a long pause, "I should like to search the house from top to bottom. I've got a pretty sound theory in my head, but I don't like to leave anything to chance. We shall be pretty certain to find something."

"I am entirely in your hands," David said, wearily. "So far as I am capable of thinking out anything it seems to me that we have to find the woman."

"Cherchez la femme is a fairly sound premise in a case like this, but when we have found the woman we shall have to find the man who is at the bottom of the plot. I mean the man who is not only thwarting the woman, but giving you a pretty severe lesson as to the advisabifity of minding your own business for the future."

"Then you don't think I am being made the victim of a vile conspiracy?"

"Not by the woman, certainly. You are the victim of some fiendish counterplot by the man, who has not quite mastered what the woman is driving at. By placing you in dire peril he compels the woman to speak to save you, and thus to expose her hand."

"Then in that case I propose to sit tight," David said grimly. "I am bound to be prosecuted for robbery and attempted murder in due course. If my man dies I am in a tight place."

"And if he recovers your antagonist may be in a tighter," Bell chuckled. "And if the man gets well and that brain injury proves permanent—I mean if the man is rendered imbecile—why, we are only at the very threshold of the mystery. It seems a callous thing to say, but this is the prettiest problem I have had under my hands."

"Make the most of it," David," said, sardonically. "I daresay I should see the matter in a more rational light if I were not so directly concerned. But, if we are going to make a search of the premises, the sooner we start the better."

Upstairs there was nothing beyond certain lumber. There were dust and dirt everywhere, save in the hall and front dining-room, which, as Bell sapiently pointed out, had obviously been cleared to make ready for Steel's strange reception. Down in the housekeeper's room was a large collection of dusty furniture, and a number of pictures and engravings piled with their faces to the wall. Bell began idly to turn the latter over.

"I am a maniac on the subject of old prints," he explained. "I never see a pile without a wild longing to examine them. And, by Jove, there are some good things here. Unless I am greatly mistaken—here, Steel, pull up the blinds! Good heavens, is it possible?"

"Found a Sistine Madonna or a stray Angelo?" David asked. "Or a ghost? What is the matter? Is it another phase of the mystery?"

"The Rembrandt," Bell gasped. "Look at it, man!"

Steel bent eagerly over the engraving. An old print, an old piece of china, an antique jewel, always exercised a charm over the novelist. He had an unerring tye for that kind of thing.

"Exquisite," he cried. "A Rembrandt, of course, but I don't recollect the picture."

"The picture was destroyed by accident after Rembrandt had engraved it with his own hand." Bell proceeded to explain. He was quite coherent now, but he breathed fast and loud. "I shall proceed to give you the history of the picture presently, and more especially a history of the engraving."

"Has it any particular name?" David asked.

"Yes, we found that out. It was called 'The Crimson Blind!'"

"No getting away from the crimson blind," David murmured. "Still, I can quite imagine that to have been the name of the picture. That shutter or blind might have had a setting sun behind it, which would account for the tender warmth of the kitchen foreground and the deep gloom where the lovers are seated. By Jove, Bell, it is a magnificent piece of work. I've a special fancy for Rembrandt engravings, but I never saw one equal to that."

"And you never will," Bell replied, "save in one instance. The picture itself was painted in Rembrandt's modest lodging in the Keizerskroon Tavern after the forced sale of his paintings at that hotel in the year 1658. At that time Rembrandt was painfully poor, as his recorded tavern bills show. The same bills also disclose the fact that 'The Crimson Blind' was painted for a private customer with a condition that the subject should oe engraved as well. After one impression had been taken off the plate the picture was destroyed by a careless servant. In a sudden fit of rage, Rembrandt destroyed the plate, having, they say, only taken one impression from it."

"Then there is only one of these engravings in the world? What a find!"

"There is one other, as I know to my cost," Bell said, significantly. "Until a few days ago I never entertained the idea that there were two. Steel, you are the victim of a vile conspiracy, but it is nothing to the conspiracy which has darkened my life.

"Sooner or later I always felt that I should get to the bottom of the mystery, and now I am certain of it. And, strange as it may seem, I verily believe that you and I are hunting the same man down—that the one man is at the bottom of the two evils. But you shall hear my story presently. What we have to find out now is who was the last tenant and who is the present owner of the house. Ah, this has been a great day for me!"

Bell spoke exultingly, a great light shining in his eyes. And David sapiently asked no further questions for the present. All that he wanted to know would come in time. The next move, of course, was to visit the agent of the property.

A smart, dapper little man, looking absurdly out of place in an exceedingly spacious office, was quite ready to give every information. It was certainly true 218, Brunswick Square, was to be let at an exceedingly low rent on a repairing lease, and that the owner had a lot more property in Brigton to be let on the same torms. The lady was exceedingly rich and eccentric; indeed, by asking such low rents she was doing her best to seriously diminish her income.

"Do you know the lady at all?" Bell asked

"Not personally," the agent admitted. "So far as I can tell, the property came into the present owner's hands some years ago by inheritance. The property also included a very old house, called Longdean Grange, not far from Rottingdean, where the lady, Mrs. Henson, lives at present. Nobody ever goes there, nobody ever visits there, and to keep the place free from prying visitors a large number of savage dogs are allowed to prowl about the grounds.

Bell listened eagerly. Watching him, David could see that his eyes glinted like points of steel. There was something subtle behind all this common-place that touched the imagination of the novelist.

"Has 218 been let during the occupation of the present owner?" Bell asked.

"No," the agent replied. "But the present owner—as heir to the property—I am told, was interested in both 218 and 219, which used to be a kind of high-class convalescent home for poor clergy and the widows and daughters of poor clergy in want of a holiday. The one house was for the men and the other for the women, and both were furnished exactly alike; in fact, Mr. Gates's landlord, the tenant of 219, bought the furniture exactly as it stands when the scheme fell through."

Steel looked up swiftly. A sudden inspiration came to him.

"In that case what became of the precisely similar furniture in 218?" he asked.

"That I cannot tell you," the agent said. "That house was let as it stood to some sham philanthropist whose name I forget. The whole thing was a fraud, and the swindler only avoided arrest by leaving the country. Probably the goods were stored somewhere or perhaps seized by some creditor. But I really can't say definitely without looking the matter up. There are some books and prints now left in the house out of the wreck. We shall probably put them in a sale, only they have been overlooked. The whole lot will not fetch £5."

"Would you take £5 for them?" Bell asked.

"Gladly. Even if only to get them carted away."

Bell gravely produced a £5 note, for which he asked and received a receipt. Then he and Steel repaired to 218 once more, whence they recovered the Rembrandt, and subsequently returned the keys of the house to the agent. There was an air of repressed excitement about Bell which was not without its effect upon his companion. The cold, hard lines seemed to have faded from Bell's face; there was a brightness about him that added to his already fine physical beauty.

"And now, perhaps, you will be good enough to explain," David suggested.

"My dear fellow, it would take too long," Bell cried. Presently I am going to tell you the story of the tragedy of my life, You have doubtless wondered, as others have wondered, why I dropped out of the road when the goal was in sight. Well, your curiosity, is about to be gratified. I am going to help you, and in return you are going to help me to come back into the race again. By way of a start, you are going to aske me to come and dine with you tonight."

"At half-past seven, then. Nothing will give me greater pleasure."

"Spoken like a man and a brother. We will dine, and I will tell you my story after the house is quiet. And if I ask you to accompany me on a midnight adventure you will not say me nay?"

"Not in my present mood, at any rate. Adventure, with a dash of danger in it, suits my present mood exactly. And if there is to be physical violence, so much the better. My diplomacy may be weak, but physically I am not to be despised in a row."

"Well, we'll try and avoid the latter if possible." Bell laughed. "Still, for your satisfaction, I may say there is just the chance of a scrimmage. And now I really must go, because I have any amount of work to do for Gates. Till half-past seven au revoir."

Steel lighted a cigarette and strolled thoughtfully homewards along the front. The more he thought over the mystery the more tangled it became. And yet he felt perfectly sure that he was on the right track. The discovery that both those houses had been furnished exactly alike at one time was a most important one. And David no longer believed that he had been to No. 219 on the night of the great adventure. Then he found himself thinking about Ruth Gates's gentle face and lovely eyes, until he looked up and saw the girl before him.

"You—you wanted to speak to me?" he stammered.

"I followed you on purpose," the girl said, quietly. "I can't tell you everything, because it is not my secret to tell. But believe me everything will come out right in the end. Don't think badly of me, don't be hard and bitter because——"

"Because I am nothing of the kind," David smiled. It is impossible to look into a face like yours and doubt you. And I am certain that you are acting loyally and faithfully for the sake of others who ——"

"Yes, yes, and for your sake, too. Pray try and remember that. For your sake, too. Oh, if you only knew how I admire and esteem you! If only——"

She paused with a deep blush crimsoning her face. David caught her hand, and it seemed to him for a moment that she returned the pressure.

"Let me help you," he whispered. "Only be my friend and I will forgive everything."

She gave him a long look of her deep, velvety eyes, she flashed him a little smile, and was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

Hatherly Bell turned up at Downend Terrace gay and debonair as if he had not a single trouble in the world. His evening dress was of the smartest and he had a rose in his buttonhole. From his cab he took a square brown paper parcel, which he deposited in David's study with particular care.

He made no allusion whatever to the sterner business of the evening; he was gay and lighthearted as a child, so that Mrs. Steel sat up quite an hour later than her usual time, absolutely unconscious of the fact that she had broken a rigid rule of ten years' standing.

"Now let us go into the study and smoke a cigar," David suggested.

Bell dragged a long deck-chair into the conservatory and lighted a Massa. Steel's offer of whisky and soda was declined.

"An ideal place for a novelist who has a keen eye for the beautiful," he said. "There you have your books and pictures, your stained glass and china, and when you turn your eyes this way they are gladdened by green foliage and lovely flowers. It's hard to connect such a room with a tragedy."

"And yet the tragedy was worked out close by where you are sitting. But never mind that. Come to your story, and let me see if we can fit it into mine."

Bell took a fresh pull at his cigar and plunged into his subject.

"About seven years ago professional business took me to Amsterdam; a brilliant young medical genius who was drinking himself prematurely into his grave had some wonderful discoveries relating to brain and psychology generally, so I decided to learn what I could before it was too late. I found the young doctor to be an exceedingly good fellow, only too ready to speak of his discoveries, and there I stayed for a year. My word! what do I not owe to that misguided mind! And what a revolution he would have made in medicine and surgery had he only lived!

"Well, in Amsterdam I got to know everybody who was worth knowing—medical, artistic, social. And amongst the rest was an Englishman called Lord Littimer, his son, and an exceedingly clever nephew of his, Henson by name, who was the son's tutor. Littimer was a savant, a scholar, and a fine connoisseur as regarded pictures. He was popularly supposed to have the finest collection of old prints in England. He would travel anywhere in search of something fresh, and the rumor of some apocryphal treasure in Amsterdam had brought him thither. He and I were friends from the first, as, indeed, were the son and myself. Henson the nephew was more quiet and reserved, but fond, as I discovered, of a little secret dissipation.

"In those days I was not averse to a little life myself. I was passionately fond of all games of cards, and I am afraid that I was in the habit of gambling to a greater extent than I could afford. I don't gamble now and I don't play cards; in fact, I shall never touch a card again as long as I live. Why, you shall hear all in good time.

"We were all getting on very well together at that time when Lord Littimer's sister paid us a visit. She came accompanied by a daughter called Enid. I will not describe her, because no words of mine could do her justice. In a word, I fell over head and ears in love with Enid, and in that state I have remained ever since. Of all the crosses that I have to bear the knowledge that I love Enid and that she loves—and despises—me, is by far the heaviest. But I don't want to dwell upon that.

"We were a very happy party there until Van Sneck and Von Gulden turned up. Enid and I had come to an understanding, and, though we kept our secret, we were not going to do so for long. From the very first Von Gulden admired her. He was a handsome swaggering soldier, a good-looking, wealthy man, who had a great reputation for gallantry, and something worse. Perhaps the fellow guessed how things lay, for he never troubled to conceal his dislike and contempt for me. It is no fault of mine that I am extremely sensitive as to my personal appearance, but Von Gulden played upon it until he drove me nearly mad. He challenged me, sneeringly to certain sports wherin he knew I could not shine; he challeaged me to ecarte, where I fancied I was his master.

"Was I? Well, we had been dining that night, and perhaps too freely, for I entirely lost my head before I began the game in earnest. Those covert sneers had nearly driven me mad. To make a long story short, when I got up from the table that night I owed my opponent nearly £800, without the faintest prospect of paying a tenth part of it. I was only a poor, ambitious young man then. with my way to make in the world. Aad if that were not forthcoming in the next few days I was utterly ruined.

(To be Continued.)

MODEL WORKING VILLAGE.

Methods Used in Financing and Managing It.

A village of workers on the Birmingham acquaduct is attracting much attention in England. It has its hospital for accidents, its mission and schoolroom, its public hall and recreation room, bath-house and fire-brigade depot. It has also its canteen, which pays out of its profits the whole of the expenses of the other institutions. Here lies the solution of a problem that may show the way to the whole country.

The canteen is a municipal public-house based upon the modification of the Gothenburg system. The manager is paid a fixed salary, and has consequently no interest in pushing the sale of intoxicating liquors. The beverages dispensed are thoroughly wholesome beer and aerated waters. Only registered inhabitants are allowed to use the building, and none of these must be under eighteen years of age. Women must not enter the bar, and every night at nine o'clock the house is closed.

From the profit arising out of the canteen the cost of the day-school beyond the amounts provided by the Government grants and the local rates is defrayed, as well as that of the mission-room and recreation-room, the gymnasium, free library, recreation grounds and bathroom. Thus the results of this experiment are that, while the sum total of alcoholic drink consumption has undoubtedly been reduced, the little community has been able to derive advantages that could not otherwise have been obtainable.

The dwelling-houses themselves and the manner in which they are conducted are also very much out of the common. Built of wood, different types of huts have been provided for the various classes of workpeople, and regulations are enforced to prevent overcrowding and overcharging on the part of the hut-keepers.

As a rule, there are 1,700 men residing in the village or adjacent to it. There have been in various stages of the works as many as 2,300.

MRS. CARNEGIE'S CHARITY.

Wife of Steel Millionaire a Most Retiring Woman, of Quiet Habits.

The wife of the famous millionaire distributor of libraries is a lady who all her life has been devoted to good work.

Before her marriage, when Miss Louise Whitfield, member of a well-known New York family, she spent many hours of every day of her life helping the poor and needy of the city in which she lived.

Mr. Carnegie was already a middle-aged man when he had the good fortune to win Miss Whitfield as his wife. After some years of marriage their happiness was crowned by a little daughter, Margaret, who is brought up in as simple and healthy a manner as if she were the daughter of a well-to-do Scottish farmer rather than that of the cosmopolitan owner of millions.

Gifted with an exceptionally retiring personality, Mrs. Carnegie does not easily allow herself to be approached by the interviewer, and she is absolutely averse to ever talking about her own good deeds, though these alone might have made her known, even if she had not been the wife of one of the wealthiest men in the world.

SHOT TIGER AND LEOPARD.

An Experience With Big Game in an India Jungle.

Corporal K. D. Curtiss of the Royal Horse Artillery, Umballa, gives an interesting account of a recent Shikar expedition by himself and a comrade in the Dun, where they obtained a tiger 10 feet 11½ inches long, "properly measured," before skinning, and the larger of the two leopards 7 feet 11 inches. We got "stripes," he writes, at Raiwala, in the Dun, and the head forest guard there said that he had never heard of a longer one, but the brother of Rajah Rumber Singh had shot one 10 feet 10¾ inches. * * * * Several officers who have inspected the skin say they have never seen its equal. It has not a scratch, and the claws and whiskers are all intact.

While waiting at Patri, near Lhaksar, four of us went to Shah Mahomed's tomb, some twelve miles off, for a few days' bivouac. The second morning, about daybreak, we thought we heard a stag calling close to where we were sleeping. So S—— and I nipped out after him. I had kicked off my boots after a few moments, as I was making too much noise. On turning around the end of a big lump of currant bush I met a leopard on the same path about thirty feet off. S—— was on the far side of another patch of stuff, and the leopard was watching him, for he never heard or saw me till I shot. It was the chance of a lifetime, and I let him have it in the shoulder. S—— rushed over to see what I had fired at, but I stopped him with "mind that leopard." The latter was stone dead, however.

Later I went up to Dehra Dun and got a special permit to kill carnivora there. We got into Raiwalla on June 19. On the 24th S—— was up a tree on the riverbed, near the edge of the forest, about three-fourths of a mile from the station. He saw a big pair of feet, legs and then the head push out of the bush. He banged at it and knocked "Stripes" down. The tiger picked himself up and sprang, but missed, and went off into the jungle. S—— got down and found plenty of blood and a piece of bone as big as the end of one's thumb. We did not follow the tiger, as it was near 6 p.m., but started after him the next morning early, finding plenty of blood and traces where he had rested during the night.

Finally we lost the blood and had to crawl most of the time, so two of us covered S—— and the forest guard who were doing the tracking. I left S—— marking the lost blood and threw a circle round to the right toward where I could hear a monkey chattering in a tree. I found a small nullah about 10 feet wide and 7 feet deep. Following this up there was "Stripes" lying head on in clear view some fifty feet away, looking over his shoulder and snarling quietly at my dog. He saw us (I had the head guard with me) at the same instant that we saw him, and pulled himself together; but I was lucky enough to hit him between the eyes and knocked him down (.500 express expanding bullet). He was dead in ten minutes.

The bullet of the night before had struck over the left eye and blown the piece of bone from the skull out of the ear. He could not possibly have lived till sunset, but I thought when I turned him up that I was justified in shooting, as he looked so very much alive. I am afraid it took the edge off S——'s pleasure a bit, but he took it very nicely and he has the skin. We found the tiger not more than two hundred yards from where he was shot first.

SENTENCE SERMONS

Extraction is not giving.

Greatness comes only by growth.

Making money unmakes many men.

Gloom is never dispersed by growling.

Good cheer goes farther than cold cash.

He cannot teach who will not be taught.

Life's great opportunities are never labeled.

There is no profit in prayer for profit alone.

Facing both ways is always fleeing one way.

Religion is never strengthened by relaxation.

There is nothing Satan hates like happiness.

Long distance charity never reaches the heart.

The man who is indispensable never knows it.

A white lie may be as hard to wipe out as a black one.

One lesson of life is learning to love where we do not like.

Love is too busy encouraging to have any time to criticize.

The gospel of success is simply the worship of the god of self.

The color of the world depends on the pigment behind the eyes.

It's no use trying to shine if you won't take time to fill your lamp.

"There is a strain of sadness about wedding-bells," said the cynical bachelor. "They always affect me like the moan of the tied."

"He's still employed by that big wholesale house, isn't he?" "No; I think he's in business for himself now. He used to take an hour for lunch, and now he only takes a sare five minutes!"