The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XLVI.

Lord Littimer sat on the terrace shaded from the sun by an awning over his deck-chair. From his expression he seemed to be at peace with all the world. His brown, eager face had lost its usually keen, suspicious look; he smoked a cigarette lazily. Chris sat opposite him looking as little like a hardworking secretary as possible.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing for her to do. Littimer had already tired of his lady secretary idea, and had Chris not interested and amused him he would have found some means to get rid of her before now.

But she did interest and amuse and puzzle him. There was something charmingly reminiscent about the girl. She was like somebody he had once known and cared for, but for the life of him he could not think who. And when curiosity sometimes got the better of good breeding Chris would baffle him in the most engaging manner.

"Really, you are an exceedingly clever girl," he said.

"In fact, we are both exceedingly clever," Chris replied, coolly. "And yet nobody is ever quite so clever as he imagines himself to be. Do you ever make bad mistakes, Lord Littimer?"

"Sometimes," Littimer said, with a touch of cynical humor. "For instance, I married some years ago. That was bad. Then I had a son, which was worse."

"At one time you were fond of your family?"

"Well, upon my word, you are the only creature I ever met who has had the audacity to ask me that question. Yes, I was very fond of my wife and my son, and, God help me, I am fond of them still. I don't know why I talk to you like this."

"I do," Chris said, gently. "It is because unconsciously you yearn for sympathy. And you fancy you are in no way to blame; you imagine that you acted in the only way consistent with your position and dignity. You fancied that your son was a vulgar thief. And I am under the impression that Lady Littimer had money."

"She had a large fortune," Littimer said, faintly. "Miss Lee, do you know that I have a great mind to box your ears?"

Chris laughed unsteadily. She was horribly frightened, though she did not show it. She had been waiting for days to catch Littimer in this mood. And she did not feel disposed to go back now. The task must be accomplished some time.

"Lady Littimer was very rich," she went on, "and she was devoted to Frank, your son. Now, if he had wanted a large sum of money very badly, and had gone to his imother, she would have given it to him without the slightest hesitation?"

"What fond mother wouldnt?"

"I am obliged to you for conceding the point. Your son wanted money, and he robbed you when he could have had anything for the asking from his mother."

"Sounds logical," Littimer said, flippantly. "Who had the money?"

"The same man who stole Prince Rupert's ring—Reginald Henson."

Littimer dropped his cigarette and sat upright in his chair. He was keen and alert enough now. There were traces of agitation on his face.

"That is a serious accusation," he said.

"Not more serious than your accusation against your son," Chris retorted.

"Well, perhaps not," Littimer admitted. "But why do you take up Frank's cause in this way? Is there any romance budding under my unconscious eyes?"

"Now you are talking nonsense," Chris said, with just a touch of color in her cheeks. "I say, and I am going to prove when the time comes, that Reginald Henson was the thief. I am sorry to pain you, but it is absolutely necessary to go into these matters. When those foolish letters, written by a foolish girl, fell into your hands, your son vowed that he would get them back by force if necessary. He made that rash speech in hearing of Reginald Henson. Henson probably lurked about until he saw the robbery committed. Then it occurred to him that he might do a little robbery on his own account, seeing that your son would get the credit of it. The safe was open, and so he walked off with your ring and your money."

"My dear young lady, this is all mere surmise."

"So you imagine. At that time Reginald Henson had a kind of home which he was running at 218 Brunswick Square, Brighton. Lady Littimer had just relinquished a similar undertaking there. Previously Reginald Henson had a home at Huddersfield. Mind you, he didn't run either in his own name, and he kept studiously in the background. But he was desperately hard up at the time in consequence of his dissipation and extravagance, and the money he collected for his home went into his own pocket. Then the police got wind of the matter, and Reginald Henson discreetly disappeared from Brighton just in time to save himself from arrest for frauds there and at Huddersfield. A member of the Huddersfield police is in a high position at Brighton. He has recognised Reginald Henson as the man who was 'wanted' at Huddersfield. I don't know if there will be a prosecution after all these years, but there you are."

"You are speaking from authority?"

"Certainly I am. Reginald Henson, as such, is not known to Inspector Marley, but I sent the latter a photograph of Henson, and he returned it this morning with a letter to the effect that it was the man the Huddersfield police were looking for."

"What an interesting girl you are," Littimer murmured. "Always so full of surprises. Our dear Reginald is even a greater rascal tuan I took him for."

"Well, he took your money, and that saved him. He took your ring, a facsimile of which he had made before for some ingenious purpose. It came with a vengeance. Then Claire Carfax committed suicide, thanks to your indiscretion and folly."

"Go on. Rub it in. Never mind about my feelings."

"I'm not minding," Chris said, coolly. "Henson saw his game and played it boldly. I could not have told you all this yesterday, but a letter I had this morning cleared the ground wonderfully. Henson wanted to cause family differences, and he succeeded. Previously he got Dr. Bell out of the way by means of the second Rembrandt. You can't deny there is a second Rembrandt now, seeing that it is locked up in your safe. And where do you think Bell found it? Why at 218, Brunswick Square, Brighton, where Henson had to leave it seven years ago when the police were so hot upon his trail. He was fearful lest you and Bell should come together again, and that is why he came here at night to steal your Rembzandt. And yet you trusted that man blindly all the time your own son was suffering on mere suspicions. How blind you have been!"

"I'm blind still," Littimer said, curtly. "My dear young lady, I admit that you are making out a pretty strong case; indeed, I might go farther, and say that you have all my sympathy. But what you say would not be taken as evidence in a court of law. If you produce that ring, for instance—but that is at the bottom of the North Sea."

Chris took a small cardboard box from her pocket and from thence produced a ring. It was a ruby ring with black pearls on either side, and had some inscription inside.

"Look at that," she said. "It was sent to me to-day by my—by a friend of mine. It is the ring which Reginald Henson shows to Lady Littimer when he wants money from her. It was lost by Henson a night or two ago, and it fell into the hands of someone who is interested, like myself, in the exposure and disgrace of Reginald Henson."

Littimer examined the ring carefully.

"It is a wonderfully good imitation," he said, presently.

"So I am told," said Chris. "So good that it must have actually been copied from the original. Now, how could Henson have had a copy made unless he possessed the original? Will you be good enough to answer me that question, Lord Littimer?"

Littimer could do no more than gaze at the ring in his hand for some time.

"I have sworn—indeed, I am ready to swear—that the real ring was never in anybody's possession but mine from the day that Frank was a year old till it disappeared. Of course, scores of people had looked at it, Henson amongst the rest. But how did Claire Carfax——"

"Easily enough. Henson had a first copy made from a description. I don't know why; probably we shall never know why. Probably he had it done when he knew that your son and Miss Carfax had struck up a flirtation. It was he who forged a letter from Frank to Miss Carfax, inclosing the ring. By that means he hoped to create mischief which, if it had been nipped in the bud, could never have been traced to him. As matters turned out he succeeded beyond his wildest expectations. He had got the real ring, too, which was likely to prove a very useful thing in case he ever wanted to make terms. A second and a faithful copy was made—the copy you hold in your hands—to hold temptingly over Lady Littimer's head when he wanted large sums of money from her."

"The scoundrel! He gets the money, of course?"

"He does. To my certain knowledge he has had nearly £70,000. But the case is in good hands. You have only to wait a few days longer and the man will be exposed. Already, as you see, I have wound his accomplice, the Reverend James Merritt, round my finger. Of course, the idea of getting up a bazaar has all been nonsense. I am only waiting for a little further information, and then Merritt will feel the iron hand under the velvet glove. Unless I am greatly mistaken, Merritt can tell us where Prince Rupert's ring is. Already Van Sneck is in our grasp."

"Van Sneck! Is he in England?"

"He is. Did you read that strange case of a man being found half murdered in the conservatory of Mr. Steel, the novelist, in Brighton? Well, that was Van Sneck. But I can't tell you any more at present. You must wait and be content."

"Tell me one thing, and I will wait as long as you like. Who are you?"

Chris shook her head, merrily. A great relief had been taken off her mind. She had approached a delicate and difficult matter and she had succeeded beyond her expectations. That she had shaken the man opposite her sorely was evident from his face. The hardness had gone from his eyes, his lips were no longer bitter and cynical.

"I may have been guilty of a great wrong," he murmured. "All these years I may have been living under a misapprehension. And you have told me what I should never have suspected, although I have never had a high opinion of my dear Reginald. Where is my wife now?"

"She is still at Longdean Grange. You will notice a great change in her, a great and sorrowful change. But it is not too late to——"

Littimer rose and went swiftly towards the house. At any other time the action would have been rude, but Chris fully understoou. She had touched the man to the bottom of his soul, and he was anxious to hide his emotion.

"Poor man," Chris murmured. "His hard cynicism conceals a deal of suffering. But the suffering is past; we have only to wait patiently for daylight now."

Chris rose resslessly in her turn and strolled along the terrace to her favorite spot looking over the cliffs. There was nobody about; it was very hot there. The girl removed her glasses and pushed back the banded hair from her forehead. She had drawn a photograph from her pocket which she was regarding intently. She was quite heedless of the fact that somebody was coming along the cliffs towards her. She raised the photograph to her lips and kissed it tenderly.

"Poor Frank," she murmured. "Poor fellow, so weak and amiable. And yet with all your faults——"

Chris paused, and a little cry escaped her lips. Frank Littimer, looking very wild and haggard, stood before her.

"I beg your pardon," he began. "I came to see you because——"

The words died away. He staggered back, pale as the foam beating on the rocks below, his hand clutching at his left side as if there was some mortal pain there.

"Chris," he murmured. "Chris, Chris, Chris! And they told me——"

He could say no more, he could only stand there trembling from head to foot, fearful lest his mocking senses were making sport of him. Surely it was some beautiful vision he had come upon. With one unsteady hand he touched the girl's sleeve; he pressed her warm red cheeks with his fingers, and with that touch his manhood came back to him.

"Darling," he whispered, eagerly. "Dearest, what does it mean?"

Chris stood there, smiling rosily. She had not meant to betray herself; fate had done that for her, and she was not sorry. It was a cruel trick they had played upon Frank, but it had been necessary. Chris held out her hand with a loving little gesture.

(To be Continued.)

CANADA LIFE
Assurance Company

Financial Statement

58th Annual Report

ASSETS

Government, Municipal, and other Bonds, Stocks, and Debentures	$17,249,744.96
Mortgages on Real Estate	4,506,711.29
Loans on Bonds, Stocks, Etc.	368,093.66
Loans on Policies	3,504,421.18
Real Estate owned (including Company's Buildings in Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Winnipeg, St. John, N.B., and London, Eng.)	1,762,633.99
Premiums in Transit and deferred (net) and interest accrued	989,898.30
Other Assets	402,996.00
Cash on hand and in Banks	290,099.62
	$29,074,599.00

LIABILITIES

Reserve Fund Company's Standard (Hm 3% and 3½%)	$26,408,650.00
Death Claims in Course of Settlement, and Instalment Fund	237,445.23
Dividends to Policy-holders in Course of Payment	16,126.80
Reserve for Policies which may be revived	33,670.00
Other Liabilities	2,280.98
Total Surplus on Policy-holders' Account, Company's Standard	2,376,425.99
	$29,074,599.00

RECEIPTS

Premium and Annuity Income (net)	$3,043,178.15
Interest, etc.	1,204,851.50
Profits on sale of Securities	52,361.63
	$4,300,391.28

PAYMENTS

Death Claims (net)	$1,221,815.60
Matured Endowments (net)	218,857.00
Dividends paid Policy-holders (including Bonus Addition paid with Death Claims and with Matured Endowments)	207,781.12
Surrender Values paid Policy-holders	76,500.95
Paid Annuitants	23,597.01
Total paid to Policy-holders	**$1,748,551.68**
Commission, Salaries, etc.	681,292.71
Taxes, Dividends, etc.	320,126.80
Excess of Receipts over Payments	1,550,420.09
	$4,300,391.28

Net Surplus over all Liabilities (Company's Standard) $1,376,000
Net Surplus over all Liabilities (Government Standard) .. $4,326,000

GAINS IN 1904

	1904	1903	Increase
Number of applications received	7,221	6,863	358
Amount of Assurances applied for	$ 14,571,153	$13,881,960	$ 689,193
Policies issued	13,043,503	12,635,032	408,471
Policies paid for	11,211,721	10,122,139	1,089,582
Total business in force	101,805,944	95,531,110	6,274,834

The new business paid for in 1904 was greater in amount than that of any previous year in the Company's history.

A full report of the annual meeting will appear in the Company's paper, "Life Echoes."

THE LANGUAGES OF INDIA.

Among the 145 distinct languages spoken in British India are some possessing only a few hundred words, others rivaling English, as Dr. Grierson says, or Russian, as I would say, in their copiousness; some in which every word is a monosyllable, others in which some are elongated by aggluntination till they run to ten syllables, like "da-po-l-ocho-akan-tahen-tae-tin-a-e" —a Sontali word meaning: "He who belongs to him who belongs to me will continue letting himself be made to fight." Some of these divers tongues lack verb and noun, others are as complex and systematic as Greek and Latin.

GERMANY'S NEW EMPIRE.

It is twenty years since Germany began to build up a colonial empire, and the net result is that, after spending nearly $100,000,000, she has acquired more than a million square miles of territory, with a sparsely scattered German population of between five and six thousand souls—men, women, and children. Of the adult male population a third are officials or soldiers

Don't expect your friends to be stuck on your jokes if they are pointless.

The man who frankly admits that he is lazy manages to avoid a lot of hard work.