The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER LII.—(Continued.)

"A trick," he gasped. "The light was put out. For Heaven's sake, Heritage, don't get brooding over those fancies of yours now. I tell you the thing was done deliberately. Here, if you are too weak or feeble, give the knife to me."

The request had a sting in it. With an effort Heritage pulled himself together.

"No," he said, firmly, "I'll do it. It was a cruel, dastardly trick to play upon me, but I quite see now that it was a trick. Only it's going to make a man of me instead."

Bell nodded. His eyes were blazing, but he said nothing. He watched Heritage at work with stern approval. Nothing could have been more scientific, more skilful. It seemed a long time to David, looking on, but it was a mere matter of minutes.

"Finished," Heritage said, with a triumphant thrill. "And successful."

"And another second would have seen an end of our man," Bell said. He's coming round again. Get those bandages on, Heritage. I'll look after the mess. Give him the drug. I want him to sleep for a good long time."

"Will he be sensible to-morrow?" David asked.

"I'll pledge my reputation upon it," Bell said. "Hadn't you better telephone down to your electrician to come and see to those lights? I see the fuse in the meter is intact; it is only on the one circuit that they have gone."

Van Sneck opened his eyes and stared languidly about him. In a clear, weak, yet wholly sensible voice he asked where he was, and then lapsed into slumber. A little later and he lay snug and still in bed. There was a look of the deepest pleasure in the eyes of Heritage.

"I've saved him and he's saved me," he said. "But it was touch and go for both of us when that light failed. But for Bell I fancied that I should have fainted. And then it came to me that it was some trick, and my nerve returned."

"Never to leave again," Bell said. "It tried you high, and found you not wanting."

"Heaven be praised," Heritage murmured. "But how was it done?"

Bell's face was stern as he took the kitchen candlestick from the table and went in the direction of the dining-room.

"Come with me, and I'll explain," he said, curtly.

The dining-room was in pitchy darkness, for the lights there had been on the short circuit; indeed, the lights on the ground-floor had all failed with the exception of the hall, which fortunately had been on another circuit. The fact had saved Van Sneck's life, for if Bell had not speedily used that one live wire the patient must have perished.

Henson looked up from his sofa with a start and a smile.

"I am afraid I must have been asleep," he said, languidly.

"Liar," Bell thundered. "You have been plotting murder. And but for a mere accident the plot would have been successful. You have worked out the whole thing in your mind; you came here on purpose. You came here to stifle the light at the very moment when we were operating on Van Sneck. You thought that all the lights on the floor would be on the same circuit; you have been here before."

"Are you mad?" Henson gasped. "When have I been here before——"

"The night that you lured Van Sneck here by a forged letter and left him for dead."

Henson gasped, his lips moved, but no words came from them.

"You have a little knowledge of electricity," Bell went on. "And you saw your way pretty clear to spoil our operation to-night. You get that idea from yonder wall-plug into which goes that plunger of the reading lamp on the cabinet yonder. At the critical moment all you had to do was to dip your fingers in water and press the tips of them against the live wire in the wall-plug. You did so, and immediately the wires fired all over the circuit and plunged us in darkness. But the hall light remained sound, and Van Sneck was saved. If it is any consolation to you, he will be as sensible as any of us to-morrow."

Henson had risen to his feet, pale and trembling. He protested, but it was all in vain. Bell approached the china wall-plug and pointed to it.

"Hold the candle down," he said. "There! You can see that the surface is still wet, there is water in the holes now, and some of it has trickled down the distemper on the wall. You ought to be shot where you stand, murderous dog."

Henson protested, with some dignity. It was all so much Greek to him, he said. He had been sleeping so quietly that he had not seen the light fail. Bell cut him short.

"Get out," he cried. "Go away; you poison the air that honest men breathe, and you are as fit and well as I am. Why don't you pitch him into the street, Steel? Why don't you telephone to Marley at the police-station and say that the Huddersfield swindler is here? Oh, if you only knew what an effort it is to keep my hands off him!"

Henson made for the door with alacrity. A moment later and he was in the street dazed, confused, and baffled, and with the conviction strong upon him that he had failed in his great coup. Van Sneck would be sensible to-morrow—he would speak. And then——

But he dared not think of that at present. He wanted all his nerve and courage now. He had just one last chance, one single opportunity of making money, and then he must get out of the country without delay. He almost wished now that he had not been quite so precipitate in the matter of James Merritt. That humble tool might have been of great advantage to him at this moment. But Merritt had threatened to be troublesome and must be got out of the way. But, then, the police had not picked Merritt up yet. Was it possible that Merritt had found out that——

But Henson did not care to think of that, either. He would go back to the quiet lodgings he had taken in Kemp Town for a day or two, he would change his clothes and walk over to Longdean Grange, and it would go hard if he failed to get a cheque from the misguided lady there. If he were quick he could be there by eleven o'clock.

He passed into his little room. He started back to see a man sleeping in his arm-chair. Then the man, disturbed by the noise of the newcomer, opened his eyes. And those eyes were gleaming with a glow that filled Henson's heart with horrible dread. It was Merritt who sat opposite him, and it was Merritt whose eyes told Henson that he knew of the latter's black treachery. Henson was face to face with death, and he knew it.

He turned and fled for his life; he scudded along the streets, past the hospital and up towards the downs, with Merritt after him. The start was not long, but it was sufficient. Merritt took the wrong turn, and, with a heart beating fast and hard, Henson climbed upwards. It was a long time before his courage came back to him. He did not feel really easy in his mind until he had passed the lodge-gates at Longdean Grange, where he was fortunate enough, after a call or two, to rouse up Williams.

The latter came with more alacrity than usual. There was a queer grin on his face and a suggestion of laughter in his eyes.

"There seems to be a lot of light about," Henson cried. "Take me up to the house and don't let anybody know I am here. Your mistress gone to bed?"

"She's in the drawing-room," Williams said, "singing. And Miss Enid's there. I am sure they will be glad to see you, sir."

Henson doubted it, but made no reply. There was a clatter of voices in the drawing-room, a chatter of a lightsomeness that Henson had never heard before. Well, he would soon settle all that. He passed quietly into the room, then stood in puzzled fear and amazement.

"Our dear nephew," said a cool, sarcastic voice. "Come in, sir, come in. This is quite charming. Well, my sweet philanthropist and most engaging gentleman, and what may we have the pleasure of doing for you to-night?"

"Lord Littimer?" Henson gasped. "Lord Littimer here?"

CHAPTER LIII.

Bell gave a gesture of relief as the door closed upon Henson. Heritage looked like a man who does not quite understand.

"I haven't quite got the hang of it yet," he said. "Was that done for my benefit?"

"Of course it was," Bell replied. "Henson found out that Van Sneck was here, as he was certain to do sooner or later. He comes here to make inquiries and finds you; also he comes to spy out the land. Now, without being much of a gambler, I'm willing to stake a large sum that he introduced the subject of your old trouble?"

"He invariably did that," Heritage admitted.

"Naturally. That was part of the game. And you told him that you had got over your illness and that you were going to do the operation. And you told him how. Where were you when the little conversation between Henson and yourself took place?"

"He was asked into the dining-room."

"And then you told him everything. Directly Henson fell upon that wall-plug he knew how to act. He made up his mind that the electric light should fail at a critical moment. Hence the dramatic 'accident' with the cycle. Once Henson had got into the house the rest was easy. He had only to wet his fingers and press them hard against the two wires in the wall-plug and out pops the light, in consequence of the fuses blowing out. I don't know where Henson learnt the trick, but I do know that I was a fool not to think of it. You see, the hall light being dropped through the floor above was on another circuit. If it hadn't been we should have had our trouble with Van Sneck for nothing."

"He would have died?" David asked.

The two doctors nodded significantly.

"What a poisonous scoundrel he is!" David cried. "Miss Chris Henson does not hesitate to say that he was more or less instrumental in removing two people who helped her and her sister to defeat Henson, and now he makes two attacks on Van Sneck's life. Really, we ought to inform the police what has happened and have him arrested before he can do any further mischief. Penal servitude for life would about fit the case."

Van Sneck was jealously guarded by Heritage and Bell for the next few hours. He awoke the next morning little the worse for the operation. His eyes were clear now; the restless, eager look had gone from them.

"Where am I?" he demanded. "What has happened?"

Bell explained briefly. As he spoke his anxiety passed away. He saw that Van Sneck was following quite intelligently and rationally.

"I remember coming here," the Dutchman said. "I can't recall the rest just now. I feel like a man who is trying to piece the fragments of a dream together."

"You'll have it all right in an hour or two," Bell said, with an encouraging smile. "Meanwhile your breakfast is ready. Yes, you can smoke afterwards if you like. And then you shall tell me all about Reginald Henson. As a matter of fact, we know all about it now."

"Oh," Van Sneck said, blankly. "You do, eh?"

"Yes, even to the history of the second Rembrandt, and the reason why Henson stabbed you and gave you that crack over the head. If you tell me the truth you are safe; if you don't—why, you stand a chance of joining Henson in the dock."

Bell went off, leaving Van Sneck to digest this speech at his leisure. Van Sneck lay back on his bed propped up with pillows, and smoked many cigarettes before he expressed a desire to see Bell again. The latter came in with Steel; Heritage had gone elsewhere.

"This gentleman is Mr. Steel?" Van Sneck suggested.

Bell responded somewhat drily that it was. "But I see you are going to tell us everything," he went on. "That being so, suppose you begin at the beginning. When you sold that copy of the 'Crimson Blind' to Lord Littimer had you the other copy?"

"Ach, you have got to the bottom of things, it seems," Van Sneck gurgled.

"Yes, and I have saved your life, foolish as it might seem," Bell replied. "You came very near to losing it the second attempt last night at Henson's hands. Henson is done for, played out, burst up. We can arrest him on half-a-dozen charges when we please. We can have you arrested any time on a charge of conspiracy over those pictures——"

"Of which I am innocent; I swear it," Van Sneck said, solemnly. "Those two Rembrandts—they fell into my hands by what you call a slice of good luck. I am working hand in glove with Henson at the time, and show him them. I suggest Lord Littimer as a purchaser. He would, perhaps, buy the two, which would be a little fortune for me. Then Henson, he says, 'Don't you be a fool, Van Sneck. Suppress the other: say nothing about it. You get as much from Littimer for the one as you get for the two, because Lord Littimer thinks it unique.'"

"That idea commended itself to a curio dealer?" Bell suggested drily.

"But yes," Van Sneck said eagerly. "Later on we disclose the other and get a second big price. And Lord Littimer he buy the first copy for a long price."

"After which you discreetly disappear," said Steel. "Did you steal those pictures?"

"No," Van Sneck said, indignantly. "They came to me in the way of honest business—a poor workman who knows nothing of their value, and takes fifteen marks for them."

"Honest merchant," David murmured. "Pray go on."

"I had to go away. Some youthful foolishness over some garnets raked up after many years. The police came down upon me so suddenly that I got away with the skin of my teeth. I leave the other Rembrandt, everything, behind me. I do not know that Henson he give me away so that he can steal the other Rembrandt."

"So you have found that out?" said Bell. "Who told you?"

"I learn that not so long ago. I learn it from a scoundrel called Merritt, a tool of Henson. He tells me to go to Littimer Castle to steal the Rembrandt for Henson, because Dr. Bell, he find my Rembrandt. Then I what you call pump Merritt, and he tells me all about the supposed robbery at Amsterdam and what was found in the portmanteau of good Dr. Bell yonder. Then I go to Henson and tell him what I find out, and he laughs. Mind you, that was after I came here from Paris on business for Henson."

"About the time you bought that diamond-mounted cigar-case?" David asked, quietly.

(To be Continued.)

PAY DAYS FOR ROYALTY

MANNER IN WHICH MONARCHS ARE PAID.

How the Sovereigns of European Nations Receive Their Allowances.

The Emperor of Russia, for instance, says Pearson's Weekly, is the only European sovereign who is entitled to draw on the revenues of the country over which he rules whenever he pleases and to almost an unlimited extent.

All the vast sums accruing from various forms of taxation in Russia are banked to the credit of two officials named the Imperial Treasurers, who discharge all the liabilities of the Russian Government.

The Czar, however, has the first call upon the money paid into the imperial treasury and draws upon it whenever he wishes by simply directing the treasury officials to lodge so much money to his private account, giving them a voucher for the amount.

Under the Russian constitution the Czar is entitled to receive a seventh share of the revenue of the country, and though he, as a matter of fact, never draws upon the treasury to this extent, the Emperor of Russia is yet by far the best paid and wealthiest of European monarchs.

THE EMPEROR OF GERMANY

is in receipt of a salary of $500,000 per annum from the State, but His Imperial Majesty has, of course, many other ways of supplementing this pay, which would be a very poor one for the sovereign of a great Power.

The salary is paid into the Emperor's private banking account twice a year, the check for it being signed by no fewer than seven officials, and is finally indorsed by the Kaiser himself.

The Emperor also receives a "military and naval" allowance, which amounts to a big sum, and the expenses in connection with the maintenance of the royal household at Potsdam are paid quarterly by the State treasury.

King Edward receives a quarterly check from the Paymaster-General for his salary as monarch; the check is what is known as a negotiable receipt, and is sent to the keeper of the privy purse, by whom it is signed on behalf of the King, and then lodged to the credit of his Majesty's private banking account.

THE EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA

is put to some personal inconvenience before he can obtain his salary to the love of maintaining ancient customs and ceremonies that prevail in the Austrian court.

On the 1st of June and 1st of December the Austrian monarch pays a visit to the office of the State treasury, where he is received by three officials. One of these officials then reads out a document to the monarch, reminding him of the many duties he owes to the State, and exhorting to the faithful performance of the same. The document concludes with a mention of the amount of money that the Emperor is entitled to receive from the State to maintain him in a position of such great dignity becomingly.

The Emperor is then asked if the amount is sufficient, and on his replying to the question in the affirmative, is given a receipt to sign for the money, which is, in due course, lodged to the credit of the imperial account.

THE KING OF PORTUGAL'S

salary is never paid to him direct, but is vested in the care of three officials, upon whom the King can draw whenever he requires money.

This is an arrangement to which the King of Portugal has a distinct objection, but as it is a very old established custom his Majesty would probably have some difficulty in having it altered.

Each of the three purse keepers, as these officials are called, receives £500 per annum, which the King of Portugal has to pay out of his own pocket, so that the arrangement costs the King £1,500 a year, which could be very easily saved by the dismissal of such entirely needless officials as the purse keepers.

The Sultan of Turkey has no allowance or salary; he simply informs the Grand Vizier when he wants money, and that official has to see that the amount required is forthcoming promptly, otherwise it is more than likely he might lose his head.

GIANTS IN GREENLAND.

Christian Jensen, who has just returned from a year's voyage in the Arctic seas, reports that while his vessel was trading on the south-west coast of Greenland there arrived from the interior a party of giants, the shortest of whom was 7ft. in height and the tallest 9ft. They had the copper-colored complexions and the features of North American Indians.

LARGEST SEAT OF LEARNING.

The Year-Book of the German Universities, just published, makes it clear that Berlin University is the most numerously attended seat of learning in the world. It contains 7,774 matriculated and 1,330 non-matriculated students. All the States of Germany, and every country in Europe, from Norway to Sicily, from Ireland to Russia, are represented in its class-rooms.

YOUNG FOLKS

COUNTED IN.

The three new acquaintances, each engulfed in a huge rocker, sat side by side on the veranda of the little hotel. Before them lay the lake, gray under the shadow of a passing cloud and the heavy fringe of pines along the shore.

Lawrence and Teddy had known each other for two days, but Annabel was an arrival of the morning.

"She's only a girl," Lawrence had said, "and her name's silly, but we'll try her, and if she can do things and knows lots, like boys, we'll count her in, and ask her to catch turtles with us, shall we, Teddy?"

There were no other children at the hotel, and the two boys were eager to find a worthy playmate.

Lawrence, by virtue of being the oldest, conducted the examination. "Can you row?" he asked.

"M-hm," answered Annabel, indifferently.

"Can you swim?"

"Yes." Annabel swayed her head gently to rock the chair.

"I've swam in Lake Superior," said Lawrence, proudly.

"I've swum in Miller's Lake and in this lake," chimed in Teddy, eagerly.

"Swam," corrected Lawrence.

"Yes, swam," assented Teddy. "Where have you swum, Annabel?"

"Lots of places," returned the little girl. "I used to in the Atlantic Ocean when I was littler, and once, a year ago, in Great Salt Lake."

"Oo-oo!" said Lawrence. "Is that lake salty, the way they say?"

Annabel nodded. Evidently Lawrence must make the advances.

"Couldn't you tell about it?" he suggested.

"Why, certainly," said Annabel, politely. "Mama and papa and Frankie and I were at Salt Lake City for a day, and we took the cars and went to the lake. You have to ride over white ground, where the lake was once. It is all salty. The lake has—receded, mama says."

"Why did it?" asked Teddy, bluntly.

"It evaporated."

Lawrence and Teddy exchanged puzzled glances.

"That means the sun dried it up," explained Annabel.

"This one doesn't dry up," said Teddy, skeptically. "I've been here lots of summers."

"Well, this has an outlet. The steamer passes it. You remember. I saw it when I came.'

"Oh, yes."

"Well, Great Salt Lake hasn't any outlet, and the sun dries the water up and leaves the salt, lots of it."

"Didn't it smart your eyes?"

"I didn't put my eyes in," said Annabel. "You see it isn't deep at all. We waded out a long way, several blocks, I guess, and it didn't come up to our necks, and only just came above papa's knees. It was very warm, the water was, almost hot, and felt so good. You can float on it. It has so much salt in it you can't go down, and we sort of paddled along on our stomachs, with our heads sticking up. It's real sticky, and we had caps on our heads to keep our hair from getting sticky. Mama had a big bath-towel wound round her head.

"We spattered each other and shut our eyes, and when the water dried off our faces there were white patches of salt. The sand under the water is gray, such a nice, clean gray. I brought some home in a bottle. There's a long bath-house with lots of dressing-rooms in it, hundreds, I guess, and there's a fresh-water spray in each one, so you can take a nice shower-bath when you come out, and get the sticky off."

Each boy hung over the arm of his chair nearest the middle chair, and listened in wonderment. Annabel leaned back idly and told her story like the finished little traveller that she was. "Have you studied percentage?" she asked.

Even Lawrence shook his head without a word.

"It's sixteen per cent. salt," she said, "and that's a great deal. Papa told me. They think that once it was lots bigger'n it is now, twenty times. They think, you know, that in time there won't be any lake left."

"Oo-oo!" said Lawrence.

And "O my!" said Teddy.

Annabel leaned forward, somewhat excited by the appreciation of her auditors. "It'll be all evaporated, you know, and if you boys want to go swimming in it you'd better go quick!"

Lawrence looked at Teddy, and when he caught his eye gave a significant nod. Then he turned to Annabel, politely. "Will you go and catch turtles with us?" he said.

RED-BLIND MARINES.

The most common form of color blindness is an inability to distinguish red. Last year thirty-four officers and would-be officers of the British mercantile marine service failed on their color tests, twenty-three being red-blind and the remainder unable to distinguish green. The 4,600 candidates for certificates were also submitted to the form vision tests, and twenty-two of them failed to distinguish the form of the object submitted.