A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER XVI.

The adjoining room was, I found, in the front part of the house—a rather small one, lined on one side with books, but furnished more as a boudoir than a library, for there were several easy-chairs, a work-table, and a piano in a corner. At this instrument the mysterious player had on that night sat executing Chopin's "Andante Spinato" the moment before it became interrupted by some tragic and unexpected spectacle. I glanced around and noted that the furniture and carpet were worn and faded, that the books were dusty and evidently unused, and that the whole place presented an air of neglect, and had nothing whatever in keeping with the gorgeousness of the other handsome apartments.

The glasses were, as Mrs. Anson had said, lying beside the blotting-pad upon a small rosewood writing-table. I took them up, and, having made a tour of inspection, was about to leave the place, when suddenly, on the top of some books upon a shelf close to the door, I espied a small volume.

The curious incident of the birthday book occurred to me; therefore I took down the little volume and found that it really was a birthday book. No name was inscribed on the title-page as owner, but there were many names scribbled therein. In swift eagerness I turned to the page of my own birthday—the 2nd of July. It was blank.

I stood pondering with the book still in my hand. The absence of my name there proved one of two things, either I had not signed a birthday book at all, or, if I had, it was not the one I had discovered. Now, there are frequently two birthday-books in one house, therefore I resolved, ere I gave the matter reflection, to prosecute my investigations further and ascertain whether there was not a second book.

With this object I made a second tour around the room, noting the position of every article of furniture. Some music lay scattered beside the piano, and, on turning it over, I found the actual copy of Chopin's "Andante" which had been played on the night of the tragedy. The cover had been half torn away, but, on examining it closely beneath the light, I detected plainly a small smear of blood upon it.

Truly the house was one of mystery. In that room several persons had drunk champagne on that memorable night when blind Fate led me thither; in that room a woman had, according to the man's shout of alarm, been foully done to death, although of this latter fact I was not altogether sure. At any rate, however, it was plain that some tragic event had previously taken place there, as well as in that room beyond where I had reclined blind and helpless. It was strange also that the apartment should remain neglected and undusted, as though the occupants entertained some dislike to it. But I had been absent long enough, and, returning to the drawing-room with the missing glasses, handed them to Mrs. Anson.

Hickman had, in my absence, crossed to Mabel, and was sitting beside her in earnest conversation, therefore I was compelled to seat myself with my hostess and the Irritating Woman and chat with them. But ere long I contrived again to reach the side of the woman whom I adored, and to again press her for an appointment.

"It is far better for me to write to you," she answered, beneath her breath. "As I've told you, we have so many calls to make and cards to leave."

"Your mother tells me that you have a box for the Prince of Wales's on Saturday night, and has asked me to join you," I said.

Her eyes brightened, and I saw that she was delighted at the prospect. But she expressed a hope that I wouldn't be bored.

"Bored!" I echoed. "Why, I'm never bored when in your company. I fear that it's the other way about—that I bore you."

"Certainly not," she responded decisively. "I very soon contrive to give persons who are bores their conge. Mother accuses me of rudeness to them sometimes, but I assure you I really can't help being positively insulting. Has mother asked you to dine on Saturday?"

"Yes," I answered. "But shan't I see you before then?"

"No; I think it is very unlikely. We'll have a jolly evening on Saturday."

"But I enjoy immensely those walks across the Park," I blurted forth in desperation.

"And I also," she admitted with a sweet frankness. "But this week it is utterly impossible to make any arrangements."

Mention of the theatre afforded me an opportunity of putting to her a question upon which, during the past couple of hours, I had reflected deeply.

"You've, of course, been to the Exhibition at Earl's Court, living here in the immediate vicinity," I said.

"I've only been once," she answered. "Although we've had this house nearly two years, exhibitions don't appeal to me very much. I was there at night, and the gardens were prettily illuminated, I thought."

"Yes," I said. "With the exception of the gardens, there is far too much pasteboard scenic effect. I suppose you noticed that serrated line of mountains over which the eternal switchback runs? Those self-same mountains, repainted blue, grey, or purple, with tips of snow, have, within my personal knowledge, done duty as the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Rockies, and the Atlas, not counting half a dozen other notable ranges."

She laughed, slowly fanning herself the while.

By her reply I had obtained from her own lips a most important fact in the inquiry I intended now to prosecute, namely, that this house had been her home for nearly two years. Therefore it had been in Mrs. Anson's possession at the time of the tragedy.

Since the moment when I had first recognized that room as the one in which I had been present on the night of the mysterious assassination, the possibility had more than once occurred to me that Mrs. Anson might have unwittingly taken it ready furnished after the committal of the crime. Such, however, was not the fact. Mabel had asserted that for nearly two years she had lived there.

Again, even as I sat there at her side, deep in admiration of her magnificent figure in that striking toilette of coral pink, with its soft garniture of lace and chiffons, I could not help reflecting upon the curious fact that she should have recognized the dead man's pencil-case. And she had, by her silence, assented to my suggestion that he had been her lover. That little gold pencil-case that I had found in his pocket when he lay dead at that very spot where we were now sitting had been one of her love-gifts to him.

The mystery hourly grew more puzzling and bewildering. Yet so also each hour that I was at her side I fell deeper and deeper in love with her, longing always for opportunity to declare to her secret of my heart, yet ever fearing to do so lest she should turn from me.

Our unexpected meeting at Grosvenor Gate, after I had received that letter from my anonymous correspondent, combined with the startling discovery that it was actually in her house that the mysterious tragedy had been enacted, that in that very room the smart, refined young man who had been her lover had fought so fiercely for life, and had yet been struck down so unerringly, formed an enigma inscrutable and perplexing.

The mystery, however, did not for one moment cause me to waver in my affection for her. I had grown to love her fondly and devotedly; to adore her as my idol, as the one who held my whole future in her hands, therefore whatever suspicion arose within my mind—and I admit that grave suspicion did arise on many occasions—I cast it aside and fell down to worship at the shrine of her incomparable beauty.

Miss Wells's carriage was announced at last, and the Irritating Woman, tinkling and jingling, rose with a wearied sigh and took her leave, expressing her thanks for "a most delightful evening, my dear."

Mabel, mischevious as a school-girl, pulled a grimace when the music of the bangles had faded in the hall outside, at which we laughed in merry chorus.

With Hickman I remained ten minutes or so longer, then rose, also declaring that it was time we left. The grave manservant Arnold served us with whiskies and sodas in the dining-room, and, Mabel having helped me on with my covert-coat, we shook hands with our hostess and her daughter, and left in company.

The night was bright and starlit, and the air refreshing. Turning to the left after leaving the house, we came immediately to a road which gave entrance to that secluded oval called The Boltons. I looked at the name-plate, and saw it was named Gilston Road. It must have been at this corner that I had been knocked down by a passing cab when, on my first adventurous journey alone, I had wandered so far westward.

I turned back, and noticed that from the dining-room window of the house we had just left any occurrence at the corner in question could be distinctly seen. Edna had explained that she had witnessed my accident from that window, and in this particular had apparently told me the truth.

The remarkable and unexpected discoveries of that evening had produced a veritable tumult of thoughts within my brain, and as I walked with Hickman I took no note of his merry, irresponsible gossip, until he remarked—

"You're a bit preoccupied, I think. You're pondering over Mable's good looks, I suppose?"

"No," I answered, starting at this remark. Then, to excuse myself, I added, "I was thinking of other things. I really beg your pardon."

"I was asking your opinion of Mabel. Don't you think her extremely handsome?"

"Of course," I answered, trying to suppress my enthusiasm. "She's charming."

"A splendid pianist, too."

"Excellent."

"It has always been a wonder to me that she has never become engaged," he remarked. "A girl with her personal charms ought to make an excellent match."

"Has she never been engaged?" I inquired quickly, eager to learn the truth about her from this man, who was evidently an old friend of the family.

"Never actually engaged. There have been one or two little love-affairs, I've heard, but none of them was really serious."

"He'd be a lucky fellow who married her," I remarked, still striving to conceal the intense interest I felt.

"Lucky!" he echoed. "I should rather think so, in many ways. It is impossible for a girl of her beauty and nobility of character to go about without lots of fellows falling in love with her. Yet I happen to know that she holds them aloof, without even a flirtation."

I smiled at this assertion of his, and congratulated myself that I was the only exception; for had she not expressed pleasure at my companionship on her walks? But recollecting her admission that the victim of the assassin's knife had been her lover, I returned to the subject, in order to learn further facts.

"Who were the men with whom she had the minor love-affairs—any one I know?" I inquired.

"I think not, because it all occurred before they returned to live in England," he answered.

"Then you knew them abroad?"

"Slightly. We met in a casual sort of way at Pau, on the Riviera, and elsewhere."

"Both mother and daughter are alike extremely pleasant," I said. "In high spirits Mrs. Anson is sometimes almost as juvenile as Mabel."

"Quite so," he laughed. "One would never believe that she's nearly sixty. She's as vivacious and merry as a woman half her age. I've myself been surprised at her sprightliness often and often."

Again and again I endeavored to turn the conversation back to the identity of Mabel's former lover, but he either did not know or purposely refused to tell me. He spoke now and then with an intentional vagueness, as though his loyalty to the Ansons prevented him from betraying any confidences reposed in him as a friend of the family. Indeed, this cautiousness showed him to be a trustworthy man, and his character became thereby strengthened in my estimation. On first acquaintance I had instantly experienced a violent aversion to him, but now, on this walk together along the Fulham Road, I felt that we should probably end by becoming friends.

He walked with long strides and a swinging, easy gait that seemed almost military, while his air of careless merriment as he laughed and joked, smoking the choice cigar which the man had handed to him in the hall just before our departure, gave him the aspect of an easy-going man-about-town.

"I fully expect, my dear fellow," he laughed—"I fully expect that you'll be falling in love with the pretty Mabel if you're in her company very much."

"You're chaffing," I protested, echoing his laugh.

"Not at all," he asserted. "Only take care. Love-making with her is a dangerous pastime—devilish dangerous, I assure you."

"Dangerous to the man's heart—eh?"

"Yes," he responded in a vague tone, glancing at me curiously; "if you like to put it in that way."

"We had passed from the Fulham Road into the King's Road, Chelsea, and at that moment he halted suddenly at the corner of a street of high, regularly built houses, most of which were in darkness, saying—

"I live down here. Come in and have a final whisky and soda with me; then you can take a cab back to the Strand. There are cabs all night on the rank in Sloane Square."

"I fear it's too late," I protested, glancing at my watch, and finding it past one o'clock.

"No, no, my dear fellow, come along," he urged. "You'll want a drink before you get home;" and, thus persuaded, I accompanied him up the street to one of the high houses, each exactly similar to its neighbor, with a flight of hearth-stoned steps leading up to its front door, and a deep, grimy basement protected by a few yards of iron railings.

In the hall, although the gas had been extinguished, there remained a small hand-lamp alight, evidently placed there for his use. This he took, and conducted me to a front room, upon what the landlady of such a residence would term her "drawing-room floor." The house smelled close and stuffy; the furniture of the sitting-room was covered with plush which had once been crimson, but which was now sadly worn and badly moth-eaten; the threadbare carpet had been perforated in many places by hot cigarette-ends carelessly thrown down, and there was a general air of disorder about the place which seemed incongruous with my friend's smart air and general demeanour. I believed him to be a gentleman, yet found that he lived in a not over-clean lodging. To the practical Londoner, whose fate it is to live in "diggings," apartments in the neighborhood of the King's Road are notable as being both dear and dirty.

He threw off his overcoat, tossed his hat aside, and pulled up a long, comfortable wicker-chair for me. Then he opened the buffet, and took therefrom a bottle of whiskey and a couple of sodas, with which he proceeded to mix the drinks, his cigar-stump still in his mouth, even though he talked all the time, recounting some amusing stories which caused me to laugh.

I could not quite make him out. The remarks he let fall while, over our coffee, we had discussed the chances at roulette led me to the suspicion that he was a practised gambler, and here in his rooms I detected evidence that he was fond of sport, of betting, and of other games of hazard.

(To be Continued.)

Cobalt's Latest Big Flotation

The Chambers-Ferland Mining Co

Capitalization of $2,500,000·00—Par Value of Shares $1·00—300,000 Shares in Treasury.

Of all the Cobalt flotations, past and present, none has excited greater public interest than that of the Chambers-Ferland Mining Co.

Surrounded as it is by or adjacent to such famous producers as the La Rose, Nipissing and O'Brien, and having an identical formation with these properties the future of the Chambers-Ferland is assured.

The La Rose, as a glance at the accompanying map will disclose, does not surround the Chambers-Ferland, but is surrounded by the Chambers-Ferland. It is known that the La Rose has an enormous ore-body blocked out. The La Rose veins are in the heart of the Chambers-Ferland and have been picked up in this company's workings.

The Nipissing is one of the camp's greatest producers and the O'Brien shipped last year over one million dollars' worth of ore. The Province of Ontario received a quarter of a million dollars of this by reason of its royalty. In expectation of receiving similar returns and by reason of the known richness of the 124 acres of the Chambers-Ferland Co., the government of Ontario retains a 25 per cent. interest in the property.

In considering the property under review in this article, it must be remembered that this is the balance of the acreage that was stalked in the early days, when the entire Cobalt district was open to the syndicate after whom this company is named. This syndicate sold the Nipissing property. The O'Brien Mine, as is well known, is owned by Messrs. M. J. O'Brien and J. B. O'Brien and the 124 acres now owned by the Chambers-Ferland Mining Co. remained.

In the selection of this acreage the syndicate certainly made no mistake.

To the east, south and west lie the rich O'Brien and Nipissing veins and the most valuable part of the right of way lies adjacent.

The O'Brien, Nipissing and La Rose are the camp's heaviest shippers and are probably the highest producers of silver in the world.

The La Rose has undoubtedly the largest ore reserve in the camp. The O'Brien is extensively developed, so much so, that the owners of this mine have decided on the immediate erection of a large concentarting mill on its property at a cost of $120,000.

A rich vein was located on one end of the property, near the main traveled road, leading down into Kerr Lake section, and rich ore was taken out and sacked several months ago. The open cut can be seen from the road. Then followed differences with the government, all of which have since been settled.

Last year W. H. Linney, formerly superintendent at the Nipissing, was secured, as his familiarity with the Nipissing veins would have been very valuable. He started to work, but the miners' strike of last summer caused a cessation of work.

Superintendent W. H. Jeffrey, formerly of the La Rose, has since been put in charge of the mining operations and two shafts are being sunk.

Typical high grade ore, and by this is meant high-grade ore typical of Cobalt camp, has been encountered in these shafts and these shafts will be continued to depth, and by cross-cuts and drifts a vast amount of underground exploration work will be done, and in this way the rich veins already encountered on the surface and blind veins which abound in this section of the camp will be opened up and developed.

As a result the many rich veins now being worked at depth on the adjoining mines named, and which are known to run into this property, will be encountered and developed. Immediate attention will be paid to the veins definitely developed by the O'Brien, Nipissing, La Rose and Right of Way.

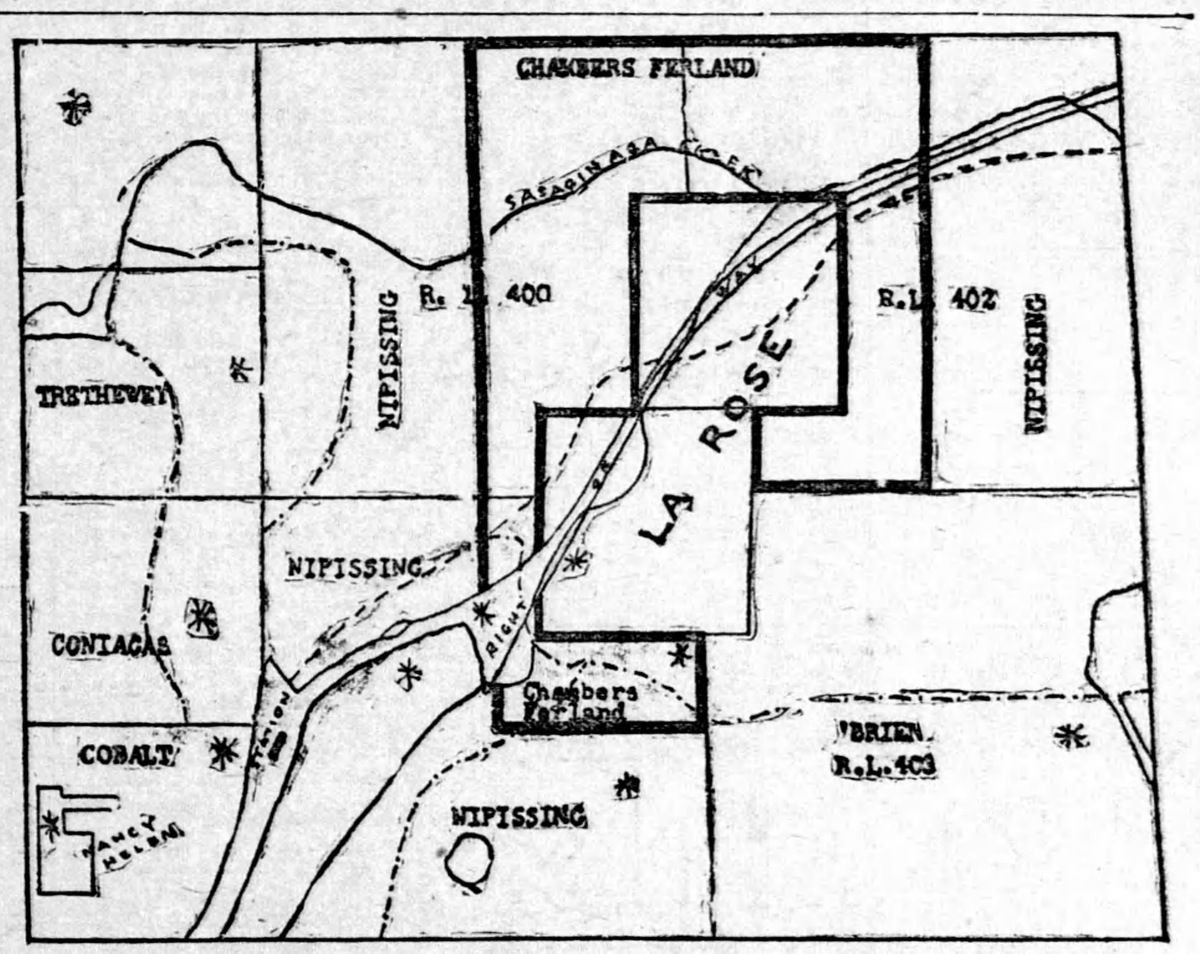
Then this company also has an acreage extending on the other side of the T. & N. O. Ry., where the Nipissing and Temiskaming & Hudson Bay Co. are working rich veins.

The emphatic statement of a well-known engineer who has examined the property is that there is "no partially developed ground in the Cobalt district better situated or has greater promise."

McCuaig Bros & Co., members of the Montreal Stock Exchange of Montreal are behind the proposition and it is well known that their clientele is always offered something good and this firm's connection with the flotation is a guarantee of its success.

A comparison of the capitalization of Chambers-Ferland with other Cobalt propositions, including the biggest dividend-payers, taking into consideration the company's superior location and large acreage, cannot fail to impress the careful investigator.

On the directorate of this new company are Messrs. William C. Chambers, Arthur Ferland, William B. Russell, R. K. Russell and R. A. Galbraith, the original owners of the property and of the Nipissing. Mr. Jeffreys is the superintendent.



Sketch of Part of the Rich Cobalt District, Showing the Chambers.—Ferland Property and Adjoining Mines.