

THE MAN IN POSSESSION.

IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

As I quietly glided across the entrance lobby of Briteleigh Hall, in the wake of Mrs. Stokes and the housekeeper, I looked about hurriedly for some place within which I could conceal myself for a few minutes. The scullery door stood open. There was no one within the room. I stepped in, and gently closing the door, waited patiently, listening for the unloading of the remainder of the linen and the departure of Mrs. Stokes. What she thought of my sudden disappearance I am unable to state. She did not, however, to my knowledge, express openly any manifestation of surprise. Perhaps she feared that if she did so, it might implicate her in some unpleasant affair, and therefore wisely chose to be silent; or, more probably, thought that I was, as she expressed it, "a friend of the family," stealing upon them unawares.

Watching my opportunity when the coast seemed clear, I stealthily sallied forth, and made for the entrance hall and for the principal staircase. Probably the dog had not been unchained, for I neither saw nor heard anything of him. On reaching the first landing, I observed a door partly open. The room was superbly furnished. "The drawing-room," said I to myself. Within, in an easy chair, sat a gentleman considerably past middle age, but tall and robust. The first glance at his countenance revealed a compound of the repulsive and the cunning, mingled with deep traces of continuous dissipation. He was reading a newspaper. I hesitated a moment, and then stepped boldly into the room. He looked up with an impatient expression of surprise and annoyance.

"Mr. Wintock. I presume?" making a low bow.

"What do you want here, fellow?" he replied, starting to his feet. "How dare you intrude into a gentleman's mansion and private apartment after this fashion?"

"Very sorry to discommode you, sir, but business is business, though it's sometimes rather unpleasant. I am here on the part of Mr. Warley." And then I briefly explained the nature of my commission and showed him my authority.

He got into a towering passion, and turning to the mantelpiece, rang the bell violently. "You sneaking, pottingfogging bumpstiff, leave my house this instant. Here, Benetti!"—raising his voice—"Benetti, you rascal, I want you! Martha, loose the dog!"

Quietly walking to the door, I shut it, turned the key, and set my back against it.

Mr. Wintock seized the heavy drawing-room poker and advanced towards me. "You scoundrel! unlock that door; and stand out of the way this instant, or I'll smash—"

"Oh, if that's your game, governor, you had better not try it on," I interrupted, drawing one of my pocket companions and just showing him the muzzle; for my blood began to warm. "I don't want to do anything uncomfortable, but you know self-preservation is the first law of nature. If you are going to knock a hole in my cranium, I shall try and drill one in yours. Not a perfectly legal act, perhaps, but certainly expedient under the circumstances. Now, sir," I continued, "it's no use your getting into a passion with me, because I'm only an agent, you see, and obliged to do the bidding of my superiors. Besides, you will only make matters worse."

The first outbreak of passion over, he calmed down a little. "Well, that's true," he replied, "as far as it goes. And how on earth you contrived to get in I can't imagine."

"All stratagems, sir, are fair in war, you know."

"Did you get in through one of my people?"

"No sir, I did not."

"Hem!" he muttered to himself; "I am glad there are no traitors in the camp. They need not have been so sharp with me," he continued, addressing me. "The money will be paid without fail in a week at the latest."

"Extremely glad to hear it indeed, sir. I sincerely hope it will. In that case you need not care about me troubling you for a few days. I don't wish to interfere with your family arrangements in any way, or to do anything inconsistent with my duty. Lodge me comfortably and feed me fairly, and you'll scarcely know I'm here. I'm used to this sort of thing, sir; you need not mind me in the least, I assure you."

He had put down the poker and was leaning against the mantelpiece. Someone tried the door, and then tapped. "Did you ring, sir?" It was Martha's voice.

I unlocked the door and stepped behind it.

Mr. Wintock stepped across the room and opened it. "Come again in a quarter of an hour."

"Very well, sir."

Martha retraced her steps down stairs.

"Now, Mr. —"

"Meredith, sir, at your service."

"Mr. Meredith, then, as you seem to be a reasonable fellow, perhaps, all things considered, it will be as well to waive my first intention of pitching you headlong out of the window, and try to accommodate you during your brief stay as well as our humble and limited means will permit." He said this with an air of chagrin and sarcasm that told plainly how much he was irritated at being overmatched. "Meanwhile, you shall, as you request, lodge well and be fed well until you take your august departure."

Some further conversation, relative to the matter in hand, followed; and after a short time, he rang again for Martha, who, after a brief colloquy received instructions to conduct me to the apartment I was for the nonce to occupy.

"Mr. Meredith," he said, as I was bowing myself out of the room, "there is one thing I should wish you to understand. We are very quiet people, and dislike being disturbed at night. The dog has usually the range of the house after ten o'clock. It would be as well to keep your room after that hour till the servants are about in the morning. He is an extremely savage beast, and some accident might occur."

"Indeed, Mr. Wintock? Then would it not be advisable, to avoid all risk, to keep

him constantly chained up?" I laid my hand carelessly on my breast pocket as I spoke.

He understood the hint, and replied good humoredly: "Well, well; perhaps it would. Martha, tell Benetti to see to it."

"He meditates a moonlight departure," thought I, as I left the drawing room. "We shall see," and I resolved to be more than ordinarily vigilant.

The room allotted for my temporary accommodation was in an upper story, in an angle of the building overlooking the most pleasant part of the park, and on the opposite side of that more immediately tenanted by the family. It was comfortably furnished, and my meals were regularly and liberally served. I did not, however, get much repose. My chief cantion, "to sleep with one eye open," Mr. Wintock's behaviour at our first meeting, and especially his hint about the dog; together with the jealous suspicion with which Benetti evidently watched my every movement whenever I left my apartment—determined me to keep on the alert. It was my custom to remain the greater part of the night in my room, sometimes with a light, oftener without one, and as the weather was tolerably warm, not unfrequently with the window open. What sleep I had was chiefly snatches in the day time.

It was on the fifth night after establishing myself in my quarters at the Hall, and the great clock had struck the solemn hour of twelve. The house was wrapped in silence; not a sound seemed to break the stillness of the night. I had been reading, and overcome either by the lassitude consequent upon being shut up for several days, or the drowsiness attendant upon a protracted period of watchfulness, or perhaps by both, had dropped off into a dreamy doze. On the other side of the room—a capacious one—and opposite the centre table at which I was sitting, hung a large mirror; behind me was the door, shielded by a very handsome screen covered with richly ornamental oriental designs. Something partially roused me, and I looked up in that half-conscious, half-somniferous state subsequent to what is denominated as "forty winks." My candle was flickering in the socket. By its varying and fast decreasing light stood dimly revealed in the reflection of the mirror before me the vision of a haggard female face, peering at me intently around the extreme fold of the screen, which reached to within a yard of my chair. Such an expression I had never before seen on mortal physiognomy, nor ever wish to see again. Long raven black hair hung dishevelled over a face, pale and haggard; the bloodless lips closed over the clenched teeth with desperate resolution; the brilliant flashing eyes glittered with an almost maniacal light; yet, distorted as were the features, they still bore traces of singular beauty. For the first time since entering the Hall, the strange story of the "white face," which I had heard at the *Three Nags*, flashed across my memory. For a moment, sense and reason seemed to reel, and I had well nigh fallen from my chair. Suddenly the lips parted in an attempt to speak, and the figure extended its attenuated arm, as if to touch me. At the same moment, a brawny hand was placed over its mouth and it was forcibly dragged, or rather lifted back behind the screen just as my expiring candle ruffled for an instant and shot up its last bright gleam of flame. They all was darkness.

Springing to my feet, I rushed to the door, overturning both chair and screen in my haste. There was neither trace nor sound of anyone near my chamber. The lofty staircase, the long passages, were silent and deserted. It was with sensations not to be described that I returned to my room, lighted a fresh candle, and sat watching and listening eagerly the remaining part of the night; but nothing further occurred. Nor was there the next day, on the part of the inmates, the most trifling indication that anything unusual had occurred. I forbore to ask any questions, and kept my own counsel, determining, however, as far as possible, to unravel the mystery.

With this purpose in mind I resolved not to confine myself so closely to my room as heretofore. Of the supernatural I did not for a moment dream; but it did strike me that the face said to be occasionally seen at the windows, and which had certainly appeared to me, might possibly be a clever device, in the one case to frighten unwelcome visitors from the premises, in the other to bring about my own speedy departure. Yet that dark, sinewy hand—unless the whole thing were a delusion on my part—evidently coerced and prevented the intention of the figure. Then, again, it occurred to me that possibly it might be some insane member of the family, whom it was desirable to keep secluded, and yet not necessary to send away to an asylum, and who had during the night broken away from restraint. If so, what right had I to interfere, or to intrude upon Mr. Wintock's private affairs? I could not satisfy myself, and waited in a fever of excitement for some clue to guide me. So intently absorbed did I become, so nervously anxious to discover the locality of my mysterious visitant, that I almost forgot the special business upon which I was engaged.

The next few nights passed without any further interruption on my privacy. My overwrought feelings gradually cooled down and I began to question within myself whether or not the whole transaction was not a creation of my own imagination, a horrible nightmare, consequent upon the uneasy position in which I had sat and dozed. Dispassionate reasoning had almost brought me to this conclusion, when all doubts were solved by what shortly afterwards occurred.

Though of course I had the liberty of the whole house, which to a certain extent I availed myself of, it was my custom, at intervals during the day, to stand for a while at the opened window of my room, to inhale, for health's sake, the fresh country air wafted over the demesne of that noble park. My room had indeed two windows; but one of these only looked out upon a receding angle of the house, a few feet distant; the other, at which I generally stood, commanded a view of the whole park. Rural scenery is to me at all times an exquisite delight. I have stood for hours at that ancient Gothic window, gazing upon the grand old trees and broad expanse of sward, decked with bright spring flowers, and listening with enthusiasm to the melody of the countless merry song birds that broke upon the stillness of that dreary mansion.

One evening, just at dusk, I was leaning out, watching the fading twilight, and deep-

ly intent upon the liquid music of a couple of nightingales, which had taken up their abode in a cluster of trees not far from the house, and were warbling their ravishing strains with thrilling effect in the solemn stillness of that deserted park. As I listened to them, some tiny scraps of a material of fine texture, apparently cut or torn from a lady's dress, dropped fluttering past me from above. On looking up, I beheld—attached to an improvised line of the same material, consisting of strips tied together, and which was evidently let down from an upper window—a white pocket handkerchief loosely folded. I could just discern a hand signalling me to secure the handkerchief. Though startled, I lost not a moment in doing so. The line was withdrawn, and the hand immediately disappeared. Shutting the window, I struck a light, and sat down in no little haste to ascertain what this might mean. On opening the handkerchief I found the interior covered with writing in large characters, not inscribed with pen or pencil, but seemingly traced with a piece of coal or a portion of burnt stick. With some difficulty, I deciphered the writing, as follows:

SIR,—I beseech you to pity and aid an unfortunate lady, imprisoned in her own house, and deprived of her rightful property by the grossest villainy. If you are a gentleman, be the instrument of my release. Next room but one to the roof—same size and arrangement of windows as your own—locked in.

MARIA WINTOCK.

"Then the tale I heard at the *Three Nags* has some foundation after all," I inwardly exclaimed, as every nerve trembled with excitement. Refolding the handkerchief, I leaned back in my chair to cogitate upon this strange communication. "The Hall is indeed haunted, yet by no spirit, but a being of flesh and blood. This is no maniac's epistle; nor was the apparition in my room a freak of imagination. No wonder the young lady disappeared so suddenly. Ah, Mr. Wintock, that is your scheme, is it?—a prisoner till she accepts the hand of your worthless, profligate son, and then her fortune will be a nice plum to relieve you from your difficulties. I wonder you have not killed her outright; but I suppose that would not serve your purpose. Help you, poor lady? Yes; that Jack Meredith will, scapegrace as he has been, if he has but half a chance. But how?"

Ay, how? There was the rub. My duty forbade me to leave the house for assistance and if I did so, I might not be able to effect an entrance again; and supposing this gained, might she not in the meantime be spirited away far beyond the risk of discovery? Should I resort to open violence, the odds were terribly against me. George Wintock, doubtless a strong, active fellow in ripe manhood; his father, an antagonist by no means to be despised; and that brutal looking Italian, who seemed to possess the strength of a second Hercules. That scheme would not work. What should I do? How communicate with my fair and oppressed correspondent?

After some consideration, it occurred to me that unless prevented, she would doubtless be on the watch for some kind of reply, and that I might avail myself of the same method of communication which she had tried with success. Taking out my pocket-book, and tearing from it a dozen leaves, I wrote on one of them as follows:

MADAM,—I am only a bailiff in possession but heartily at your service. I will be at the window to-morrow night when the Hall clock strikes ten. Tell me how I can assist you. If you are prevented communicating with me then, let the little scraps fall as before as soon as an opportunity offers. I will keep a sharp look out.—Your obedient servant,

J. MEREDITH.

Tying this and the blank leaves, along with a piece of stout twine for her use in future communications, in a roll with one of my pencils, and extinguishing my candle, I reopened the window. All was quiet without; and attaching her white handkerchief to the end of my walking stick, I thrust it out, and waved it backwards and forwards several times. The signal was perceived, the casement above was softly opened, and the line was again let down. Looping my note safely to the line, I had the satisfaction of seeing it ascend to its destination. It was eagerly clutched by the occupant above; her window was again softly closed; and I retired, but not to sleep, for every sense was straining with tumultuous excitement.

On the following evening, faithful to my promise, I was at the window a few minutes before ten. As the Hall clock boomed the last stroke, I felt a small roll of paper secure in my hand, and as before, retired to peruse it.

GENEROUS SIR—I am most wretched. Oh, help me, for the love of humanity! I am threatened with the most horrible fate, unless I consent to be dragged into a union with the younger Wintock, whom I utterly loathe; or to make over the greater part of my property to him and his father. They have more than once hinted at immuring me in a private lunatic asylum for life. Such things have been done. At times I feel as if I really were insane. Can you not procure assistance, and free me from these wretches? Surely the law is sufficiently powerful to protect you in aiding a defenceless, but grossly abused and oppressed lady. I have now been here several years, and hope is all but extinguished. They have kept me constantly locked up in my room since the night I succeeded in reaching yours, as I had hoped undetected. Previous to then, I was only confined to the upper suite of apartments. I entreat you not to desert me. Oh, contrive some means of setting me free; and earn the everlasting gratitude of

M. WINTOCK.

P.S.—I will let down for your reply at this time to-morrow evening, unless prevented.—Beware of Benetti!

"Well," thought I, "this is an adventure. But how is it to be accomplished?" After much consideration I fancied that I had hit upon a scheme, and determined to communicate it to Miss Wintock, and, if she thought it feasible, put in practice without any delay. It met with her approbation, and we at once proceeded to execute it. The plan, however, required delicate handling, with courage, calmness and resolution to

carry it out. I told her the nature of the responsibility I should incur in deserting my post; but she urged me to undertake her release at all hazards, promising herself to liquidate any liabilities which might arise in consequence, so soon as she should be restored to the outer world and able to assume the disposition of her property. She had been detained a prisoner in the Hall since she was seventeen years of age. She had now just turned twenty-one. Her guardian had therefore no longer any legal authority over her. I felt that the urgency and peculiarity of the case would insure me lenient judgment, if not condonation for my breach of trust, in the minds of all right thinking men.

"Be ready at two to-morrow morning," was my last billet, forwarded in the usual manner, "while the Wintocks are probably asleep. Keep up your courage, and leave the rest to me."

I choose the hour of two o'clock in the morning for attempting the rescue of the young lady, as having the greatest chance of success; for notwithstanding Mr. Wintock's hint that the family dialkod being disturbed at night, I had discovered that both he and his son were in the habit of spending some part of it from home—where, I cannot say, but probably in some kind of dissipation. Both went out about nine o'clock. Mr. Wintock usually returned about one. His son was much more uncertain.

I have said that the entire edifice, and especially the roofs, were of very irregular build, and that my room was situated at an angle of the house. On the other side of the angle was a suite of rooms but little used. The window of one of them being exactly on a level with Miss Wintock's and about six feet distant from it, and to which room I discovered I could find access. Immediately above the room in question was a lumber-room, with a ladder from the door to the trap-door opening out upon the roof. Carefully watching an opportunity the next day, I slipped into the lumber-room, in which, among other things were a number of tools of various descriptions, and armed myself with a couple of stout screw drivers, with which I returned after noting that the ladder might easily be removed.

A little before two o'clock found me cautiously issuing from my apartment and stealthily creeping towards this part of the building. I did not much fear any alarm from the dog, as during my stay he had been kept chained up in the outer part of the mansion. I suppose Mr. Wintock had profited by my hint respecting the animal. Possessing myself of the ladder, I very quietly removed it to the room whose window I have described as being opposite to and on a level with Miss Wintock's. The next were moments of breathless anxiety and suspense. Slowly opening the window I waved my own white handkerchief—the signal agreed upon between us—and her window was then as noiselessly raised. I then proceeded to push the ladder very gently across until it rested upon the sill of hers, forming a narrow ledge from window to window. She was at her post, and grasping the top staff held it firmly. Seating myself astride, I gradually shifted a few inches at a time until I reached her. The Hall clock struck two as I stepped softly into her room, immediately withdrawing the ladder and closing the window. She was greatly agitated, and trembled violently. Taking my hand in both her own, she whispered a few words of impassioned thanks; and then we addressed ourselves to the task of getting out of and away from the house silently and safely. This we both felt would be no easy matter; for not only was the door of her own room locked, but also that of the room into which it opened, and through which we must pass before gaining the corridor which led to the staircase. Force I dare not use, because of the noise; and indeed it would have been difficult to force the doors, as both were of stout oak. Hence my provision of the screwdrivers.

The screws were rusted with age, and I was too little skilled in carpentry to work in the dark. I therefore lighted a candle I had brought with me, and labored heavily for about an hour, Miss Wintock bending over me to aid me with her light, until her long raven hair rested carelessly on my shoulder, she holding and shading the candle with my hat, lest its reflection should betray us to anyone out of doors, as George Wintock in his return home from his midnight revels might observe it in crossing the park. At length I was successful; the last screw of the second door yielded. Extinguishing the light, we paused a few minutes to listen, and then stepped softly into the dark corridor, I leading the van pistol in hand, and Miss Wintock leaning heavily on my arm.

Along the corridor and down the richly carpeted staircase we went on tiptoe and with bated breath, lest the echoes of that gloomy old mansion should arouse her jailers. Every instant we expected the dog to give tongue. The night was cloudy; but suddenly the moon emerged from behind a cloud, and for a few seconds illumined the sombreness of the antique entrance hall. I felt Miss Wintock start and shudder, press my arm and cling closer to me, with the confidence of a very child. It made my heart leap, and every drop of blood in my veins thrilled with a feeling of rapturous delight, hitherto unknown to me. I seemed for a moment to have the strength of twenty men, and almost longed to do battle on her behalf. We stood for a moment in the hall, undecided whether to try one of the long passages, or at once seek egress by the principal entrance. We chose the latter. Softly we passed across the polished oaken floor, and I began slowly and with extreme caution to undo the fastenings. Gently, one by one, each bolt and bar was withdrawn, the huge lock was turned, and the ponderous door swung heavily upon its hinges. Greatly exhilarated at our success, I turned to my companion with a whispered word of encouragement on my lips, when an unseen enemy struck me a tremendous blow on the head, driving me through the open door way like a ball from a wicket, and felling me like a log upon the gravel walk beyond. At the same instant a succession of piercing shrieks, so heartrending and despairing burst from Miss Wintock, that it seemed as if her reason was passing away in a continuation of convulsive efforts to regain her liberty.

How long I lay insensible upon the cold gravel walk I cannot say, but it could not have been many minutes. Probably my assailant was for the time too fully occupied

in securing the re-captured lady to be able to inflict any further injury on me. When I regained consciousness, the moon was obscured, and it was intensely dark, not a star being visible. Bruised, sore, and bleeding, I gathered myself up as best I could, and endeavored to collect my thoughts. But in what manner to act for the best, puzzled me. Should I wait till dawn, then hasten to the village, and endeavour assistance in rescuing the young lady? For several reasons, I discarded this idea. Besides, I had in fact deserted my duty, and in justice to my employer, ought never to have attempted leaving the house. What was I to do?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Russian Refugees.

When the Ohio and Mississippi train from Cincinnati arrived in Louisville, Ky., recently, four queer looking citizens stepped off. They didn't seem to know where they were, or what they came for. One of them, a red-beard'd, rough-looking old fellow, with a face of an Israelite, stepped up to a reporter and in broken English asked where Fifth and Market was. The reporter happened to be going up that way, and told the old fellow that he would show them the way. Walking up the street with him, they fell into conversation, and after a time the stranger became confidential. He said his name was Saboski, with three unpronounceable given names. He talked in abominable English, and it was with the utmost difficulty and only with the most liberal guessing that he could be understood. His story was rather a strange one.

Saboski said that he and his three friends came from Cincinnati, where they had been stopping a week or more with a gentleman named Levi. They came to Cincinnati from New York, and to New York from London. They were Russian Jews, and had passed through all the fearful persecutions of last winter. Saboski said he and his friends had come from a little village in southern Russia, about forty miles south of Odessa. He was a grain merchant there, and when the troubles began was in a prosperous condition, and in a fair way to make a good living. His description of the outrages that were perpetrated on the people was short, but graphic. He said, in his broken English that he couldn't bear to think of those horrors. It seemed like an awful nightmare to him. The peasants came into the little village from all the neighboring counties on the 14th of February last, about mid-day. They were five or six hundred strong, and swarmed about the little place drinking bad liquor and swearing vengeance against the Jews. The local authorities were either afraid to interfere or sympathize with the mob, for they made no effort to suppress the disorder. When the peasants had become sufficiently drunk to be ready for any outrage, they attacked a Hebrew gardener and knocked him down. He was left for dead, then they turned on the others. There were about two hundred Hebrews in the little village, and when the storm broke they huddled together in Saboski's store for protection. They had no weapons of any kind with them, and could only wait and pray. The house was set fire to, and they were driven out. The peasants seem to have been mad with rage and crazed with liquor. They knocked women and children on the head like sheep, and some of the miserable wretches were cast back into the burning house. Some of the bolder men made a desperate defense of their lives, but they were overwhelmed and massacred. Many of the women were first outraged and then murdered. The outrages that were practiced on the helpless women were too filthy and too ghastly to describe. Nothing that fiendish ingenuity could suggest was neglected. Saboski's wife was murdered before his eyes, and he himself has now a scar across his right temple, which shows how near he came to following her. About 130 were killed or maimed for life, and the balance were forced to leave home and country and fly to foreign lands. Saboski and his three companions made their way to Odessa, but had to lie in concealment, as the excitement was at fever heat there. They went to Berlin, where they were well cared for and then sent to London, whence they were shipped to New York by the Russian Relief Society. They are on their way to Birmingham, Ala., where they have friends. They are honest-looking men, but the shadow of a great calamity is on their faces, and they have a cowed, frightened look that is pitiable.

A Cool Tramp and a Cool Maiden.

A well-known printer's family met with a singular experience on Monday. The daughter answered a knock at the door. An old tramp asked for "a bite." She didn't like his looks, and told him so, and he left. Shortly after his disappearance a neighbor's daughter came in and told the printer's daughter that the latter's clothes (an entire washing) had just been stolen by the man she had turned from the door; that he had taken all down and done them up in a bundle before asking for the bite, and lugged them off at his leisure. The two young ladies started in pursuit. At the Southport depot they learned that the bundle and the man went down the railroad. They followed, and soon overtook him.

"We want those clothes you stole from us!" said the printer's daughter.

"H'm! Well, I don't know but you can have 'em," said he, coolly turning over the bundle.

"There's a shirt or wrapper missing," said she, after looking them over; "now what have you done with that?"

"Got it on!" said the tramp, opening his vest to prove it.

"Well, off with it, then!" said the plucky maiden.

"What! here?"

The maiden paused, in a predicament.

A gentleman friend was near, and she hailed him, telling all about the trouble.

The gentleman friend took the tramp into the bushes near the engine works and got the shirt.—*Elmira Advertiser.*

George A. Smith, of Hartford, saw a runaway horse coming on the street, and, as the flying animal dashed past, seized the rear of the sleigh, jumped in, grasped the reins and in two minutes the horse was jogging quietly along with a dead man driving him. Heart disease, incited by the sudden exertion, had killed the man in a minute.