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The Dictator Who Was Misunderstood

BY BERTRAM LEIGH.

PART II.

"I hate the obsequiousness of that fellow Hayward," said the downright Joyce. "No self-respecting man would bow and scrape to another. Why should any man call another even 'sir'? It only shows that men are less independent than women. It's dreadful to hear it. I wonder you allow it, John. But I suppose you had so much of it in Romario that now you can't do without it."

"I certainly had a lot of it out there, but then they are a flord lot. Besides I had a certain official dignity to keep up, and a certain amount of discipline to maintain. But, upon my soul, I think you wrong poor old Hayward; he genuinely loves me, you know—and love is apt to be hyper-bolical."

"Dignity! Discipline! I don't believe in either. They are only other names for conceit and tyranny. You were a tyrant in Romario, John, you know you were!"

"I frankly admit it, dear. I had to be. But there are tyrants and tyrants," said Malleon with a smile.

"All tyranny is immoral!"

"Romario certainly is rather conservative," said Malleon, dubiously rubbing his chin. "But it is the conservatism of the young nation, the conservatism of high spirits, the conservatism that puts more faith in a gun than in a soft word for turning away wrath. In fact," he continued, with a twinkle in his eyes, "your friends, the revolutionists, were the biggest conservatives of all. Their

conservatism was positively aboriginal!"

The Mannering twins and the Heuling crowd broke into Philistinian mirth.

"It is all very well for you to laugh," said Joyce, whose cheeks were flushed with an inward anger scarcely repressible, "but wit is a self-condemned argument against truth. And the truth is, John," she flashed out, looking him steadily between the eyes, "that while you were in Romario you were the utter personification of everything in political ideals I most abominate and despise, and I don't care who knows it!"

"Joyce!" protested Mrs. Fallo den. "How can you speak like that? The whole world is ringing with John's praises."

"Then it is all to the good that he should learn that the world isn't unanimous. We Socialists just hate all he has done, don't we, Mr. Sloane?" Sloane nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Malleon," said he. "I am sorry, but I am afraid we do."

When Malleon, in his imperturbable coolness—the coolness which had been wont to judge the psychological moments of battles to a nicety—considered that the tension had been sufficiently prolonged, he drew his cigarette case from his pocket.

"These are your favorites, Joyce," he said, and leaned over his chair, his open case, with its neat double row of white cork-tipped cigarettes, temptingly in his hand.

Without hesitation she took one and he carefully lighted it for her in silence. Then he handed his case around. Finally it came to Sloane.

"Thanks," said he, and took a gift from a Greek.

Three days later Malleon, out riding in the early evening, met with Ronald Sloane upon a bicycle.

"Hello, Sloane!" he said, reining in his horse. "I was coming to look you up later on. I hear from Miss Fallo den that you wish to see me."

Both men dismounted. Malleon hitched his reins over his arm, and Sloane, wheeling his bicycle, kept pace with him along the honeysucked country road.

"Yes, Mr. Malleon, about the meeting on Monday."

"And what has your meeting on Monday to do with me?"

"To be quite candid," he began, "I have reason to believe that during the meeting a resolution is to be passed protesting against your being invited to become our prospective candidate for Congress, on the ground that your administration in Romario was detrimental to the cause of democracy."

"Who says I am going to stand for Congress?"

"It is common knowledge, Mr. Malleon, that you are to be asked to stand."

"And that I shall accept the invitation?"

"That is the general belief."

"Well, what of it? And how does this meeting affect the matter?"

"Since Miss Fallo den is to be present, I assumed that such a resolution would be one she would be embarrassed to hear put."

"Well?"

"It need not be put, Mr. Malleon."

"I don't understand you."

They stopped as if in mutual accord and stood facing one another. Malleon's horse tossed his great head and the bridle jingled pleasantly.

"If I have your authority to inform the chairman privately beforehand that you would in any case refuse such an invitation you may be assured that the resolution would not be put," answered Sloane.

"Why should I give you any authority?"

"I think you would be well advised to do so, Mr. Malleon."

"Why?"

"I presume you have not forgotten what happened at Quilaxo," said Sloane, his eyes glittering.

"No, I have a very good memory, Mr. Sloane. Well?"

"It has never been made public in the States, I believe. It would greatly damage your reputation, Mr. Malleon."

"That would depend on how the facts were put."

"They would be put at Monday's meeting in a very bad light, I think. Private and unpublished revelations are in the hands of the chairman. But,

as I have indicated, no reference to you at all need be made on Monday."

"Tell me, Mr. Sloane, why do you make this proposition to me?" asked Malleon, stroking his horse's neck.

"Partly because of Miss Fallo den—whom I so greatly respect and whom I wish to spare any annoyance—and partly because your personal influence would undoubtedly win you the seat, but, with you out of the running, we believe we could get our man elected, and that man—to be perfectly frank—is myself."

"A double motive—I see," answered Malleon, still stroking his horse's neck. "But double motives generally bring a man to the ground, Mr. Sloane. Your proposition is very like blackmail."

"Not at all," responded the other calmly. "It is a question of strategy—a point of view that should appeal to the successful general," he added with a touch of insolence.

"Strategical or not, it is a tactical blunder, my friend. Well, I'm glad to have had this little talk with you. I now know how I stand with regard to you. We are enemies. Permit me to remind you, Mr. Sloane, that my enemies usually have a rotten time. As for your resolution—pass it and be damned to you!"

A little over a mile further on he came up with Joyce, returning homeward from a tennis party at the Heulings'. Once more dismounting, he put his arm within hers, letting the trained, docile animal—his battle horse, Child: Harold—this time follow at his heels.

"I have just seen Sloane," he said.

"Did he tell you about the resolution they intend passing at Monday's meeting?" she asked.

"So you know all about that, do you? I gathered that you didn't."

"Yes, I know all about that, John—and I thoroughly agree with it, I fear."

"Then your friend Sloane was too squeamish on your behalf."

"What do you mean?"

"He intimidated," replied Malleon with a whimsical smile, "that, in order to save you embarrassment at the meeting, the resolution need not be put if I tactfully proclaim beforehand my intention not to stand for Congress at the next election—tactfully, because of—"

"Quilaxo?"

"That, too?" said Malleon quietly.

"I am afraid Sloane is a poor diplomatist! He gives away too much to win his own hand even. Or perhaps he only thought of your public embarrassment, knowing that privately you are not embarrassed in the matter at all. Yes, he'll be a failure in Congress, if he ever gets there. He'd do better on a tub."

"What do you mean by my not being embarrassed privately. I may as well tell you that I'm both astonished and deeply troubled over that awful Quilaxo affair. So far as that is concerned, I am exceedingly embarrassed, John—embarrassed every hour I am with you."

"I thought something was between us, something more than a mere divergence in political views. There's no time like the present. Let us have it out, here and now. What is it?"

"Need you ask? You know what happened at Quilaxo as well as I do."

"Apparently not half so well, since you are ashamed of me and I am not ashamed of myself."

Possibly it was the singular glow of that evening's sunset which gave his face so unnatural a color.

(To be continued.)

Where is Heaven?

Where is Heaven? Is it not Just a friendly garden plot, Walled with stone and roofed with sun Where the days pass one by one, Not too fast and not too slow, Looking backward as they go At the beauties left behind To transport the pensive mind.

Does not Heaven begin that day When the eager heart can say, Surely God is in this place, I have seen him face to face In the loveliness of flowers, In the service of the showers, And His voice has talked to me In the sunlit apple tree.

—Bliss Carmen.

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