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For Sale.

14 CHOICE AND VALUABLE... MRS. THOMAS JACKSON. formerly Mrs. Middaugh. Clinton, Ont.

For Sale.

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THE STRANGER AND THE PRINCESS

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

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[CONTINUED.]

Pleased at this, Mme. du Barry took the money and the next train to Paris. "Now, my friends, we must hurry," said Casparin. "That dog has a good start and will reach Denesia before we do. But perhaps he will not be able to warn my brother. Now I will tell you my plan. You all know the way to Trolle. I must leave you here. I shall go at once to Denesia, putting a bold face on the matter, as if I had been merely to Berlin on a pleasure



"But what, then, of me?" asked Mme. du Barry. "I shall be surprised to see the prince at home so soon. You, on the other hand, array yourselves in good clothing and go at once to my castle on the edge of the Green forest and announce yourselves as my guests, invited from Paris. I am well known in all parts of Denesia and cannot be seen plotting with inferiors. As my guests you can go and come at will and in disguise carry our plans to execution."

"Good!" said Vandal. "Your castle on the Green forest, you told me, lies due north from Ontro, the border town." "Yes. Any one can tell you." So Casparin left his hired assassins and went on to Denesia. They, in obedience to his commands, followed him there, but little less rapidly.

There was as yet no completed railroad within the limits of Denesia. Under the rule of the prince such improvements were rapidly being added to the public wealth. At that time Ontro, situated just within the border, was the terminus of a new line from German centers. Ontro, like small border towns in almost any country, was more or less lawless. Travelers rarely visited it. There were other gateways to Denesia. Those who knew best rather shunned the little town of Ontro.

The houses were few and scattering. Prosperity seemed to be somewhat of a stranger. There was but one inn and that far from imposing. Still they were hungry, and there was no diligence beyond Ontro before the following morning. They went to the inn. They had been the only passengers in the train and were therefore the only new guests at the inn.

They were received with a great show of eager hospitality. They drank and ate and felt refreshed. To pass away the time they dived in a room opening off the little public drawing room. This was a gaming room, and four men were playing at a huge uncouth billiard table. Vandal and his companions stood looking at the game.

"Well," said one of the players after a time, "this is thirsty business. Have some good beer brought—do." He spoke in the German tongue, though scarcely what would be heard in Berlin. A bell was rung, and in a short time a serving girl came in and took the order.

"To the health of the good hausfrau!" they said and drank the toast. As the waitress passed out the eyes of Vandal followed her. He suddenly nudged Reber and moved toward the door. In the poorly furnished little drawing room a tall woman sat at a table with her head bowed in her hands. She was daintily dressed for such a place.

"That is our man!" whispered Vandal to Reber. "He has heard our voices and hides his head. I know that gown. I gave it to Mme. du Barry. Ah! It is the very same, for the patterns of the flowers are in my memory. Hush! I will make sure."

Reber and Robello, the latter of whom did not hear the conversation, stood in the doorway while Vandal walked to the woman. "Madame, make me happy with a look at your face," he said, with a laugh, and, in a manner scarcely as polite as his words, he grasped her hair and bent back her head so as to see her face. A truly feminine shriek came from her, and she called a name. In an instant the astonished Vandal was on the floor, with the four billiard players on top of him, pounding him, kicking him and stabbing him in the stomach with their cues. "Scoundrel!" yelled one. "French dog!" "Call Robard!" shouted another. "Here is a rascal from France who insults the hausfrau!" And while Vandal was being well thumped Reber and Robello, never very brave, fled from the place into the dark and unknown street.

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CHAPTER X. FOUR AGAINST ONE. ROBARD, the man who kept the inn at Ontro, was a Denesian who had married a Prussian woman. These worthy people were supposed to make their living keeping the inn. The inn at Ontro sheltered such travelers as chanced to come that way and were forced to remain overnight, a thing that no traveler knowing his business ever did.

The inn also sheltered a band of robbers and cutthroats, the chief members of which were the four billiard players that had jumped upon Vandal. In response to the cries for Robard, that gentleman, a rotund and ruddy faced rascal, came puffing in. "Here, here! What is the matter? Have you lost your senses?" he demanded. "Have you no sense what ever? Is this the place to knock down travelers and take their coin? Oh! You will hang out a sign next, 'Travelers Neatly Robbed Here!'"

"Shut up, you fool!" exclaimed one of the men who sat on Vandal's head. "We are not robbing this fellow. We caught him trying to rob you." A loud laugh greeted this witty speech. "Rob me! That fellow rob me! Did he take the silver?" "Oh, no. He took nothing. But he was trying to rob you of the good hausfrau's smiles."

"Oh, oh! Such impudence! Have you not already killed the beast?" "Not quite," said another of the gang. "I feel him panting under me. However, I think killing none to heavy a punishment. What do you say, Papa Robard?" "Well, now, after all, I think we had better go slow," said a third. "The fellow has been severely punished. What did he do, after all, more than a dozen gallant gentlemen in Ontro have done? He simply admired our good Mother Robard."

"So! Well, it must have been the new gown. I tell you," said Papa Robard, "that gown is the thing to make the old woman look smart." "It was the gown!" came a struggling strangled voice from under two men. "Let me up! Let me up! I can explain!" "That is what I was about to say," added the former speaker. "Here we are thumping the life out of a man just because Frau Robard screamed. And where is she now? She fled from the scene. Give the fellow a chance to explain."

With evident reluctance they got up from Vandal's prostrate body, and he slowly and painfully got to his feet. "The devil! You fellows are brave!" he said, with a puff and groan. "Four to one! Well, I must say it is not the way we do in France." "Ho! France! I have been there," said Robard. "They don't give you a chance to explain there. The garrote; the robbery; the morgue!" "Give the fellow a chance to explain, I say!" insisted the advocate of fair play.

Vandal staggered to a chair and begged for a glass of cognac. This was brought him, and after swallowing that and gathering his wits and energies he began his explanation. "You see," he said, "I and my two companions were—where are they now? They deserted me in my need. Find the fools, I beg, or they will create a disturbance. They will run half way through Denesia telling that I am being murdered here."

The one who seemed to be the leader of the gang was as much alarmed at this as Vandal seemed to be. He at once stepped outside and gave orders to the inn with every assurance of safety. This matter having been attended to, Vandal resumed: "You see, I and my companions came from Paris in search of a young fellow who had robbed us—that is, who had robbed a friend of mine of several thousand francs."

"What is this the fellow is saying?" asked Frau Robard, who had returned when quiet was restored. She did not understand French. "I will speak German," said Vandal, who was quite a linguist in his way. "You see I and my companions came from Paris in search of a young fellow who robbed a friend of mine of several thousand francs in money, some valuables and some fine clothing. We traced the rascal to Strassburg, and then from city to city and almost through Prussia. We lost the trail at last, but the direction had steadily been toward Denesia, and, knowing that he had friends here, we believed he would make for this country."

"We knew that he left Paris in the disguise of a woman. He arrived at Strassburg in the same disguise. And now the mysterious part of it is this—that he wore a gown the counterpart of the one Frau Robard now has on. I am sure of this, and was so sure that the moment I set eyes on the gown I believed the wearer of it to be the thief."

"To make sure, I stepped up to the lady, and, thinking more than ever that I was right, rudely raised her head in order to see her face. Imagine my amazement and consternation when I beheld the sweet face of good Frau Robard. Oh, I assure you, gentlemen, it was a most grievous error on my part, and no one could regret it more than I did, especially when I felt your billiard cues ramming me in the stomach. 'Well, the evil is not so great, if the good frau can forgive me.' A look of great significance passed from Robard to the younger of the four, who was his son. 'And you say this fellow was a thief?' asked the elder Robard. 'How much did you say he stole?' It flashed into the mind of Vandal that the paltry amount of a thousand francs was not sufficient loss to cause three men to chase across Europe at an expense beyond that to recover it. 'Why, so far as we could ascertain,' he answered, 'the rascal took in money 12,000 francs, several diamond ornaments, ladies' jewelry and a fine gold watch.'

"Another flash of intelligence from old Robard to his son. 'Well, my friend,' said the old man, 'I can explain the matter of the gown very easily. There came to this inn from the train yesterday a young man who claimed to be a peddler. In fact, he had a valise, and in that valise he carried this gown, which he offered for sale. It took the fancy of my wife at once, and she made a bargain with him. She took the gown, he took the money, spent the night here and this morning departed.'

"What sort of a man? How did he look?" asked Vandal. "Oh, a young fellow. He spoke French, but I fancied he was more like those accursed English. He spoke also German to the wife."

"Smooth face, dark brown hair, good eyes?" "The same. Evidently the same. Though a thief who steals like that would not own good eyes long."

"Oh, this fellow was a good actor. He can appear to be anything." "He must be a marvel!" "He is. Which way did he go?" "Well, now, to tell the truth, I do not remember. I think he went on toward Trolle. At least he purchased a horse of me."

At this point the two frightened associates were brought in, and their eyes opened at seeing the man they had left at the bottom of a heap struggling for life now at the top of the heap with the interest and attention of all concentrated on him. "Our man has gone on toward Trolle," said Vandal. "Our friends here did not know they were letting a prize slip through their fingers. Why, there is a prize of 5,000 francs offered by the Paris police for the return of the man to them. Oh, you should have held him!"

Again that quick flash from father to son. "I suggest," said Vandal, "that, now our explanation is complete and good will be established, we drink the health of the Frau Robard and get some rest. In the morning we will continue our journey."

"I agree. I agree," said Reber and Robello. In an hour the three were in bed, and a consultation was being held below between Robard and his son. "Well, luck has at last come to us," chuckled the old villain to the younger one. "Twelve thousand francs, diamonds and a watch on him and 5,000 francs for returning him to the Paris police. But where is all that money? Six hundred francs only we found."

"Well, we took his purse, thinking that contained all his wealth. A peddler with 600 francs is a rare bird. But 12,000! Is he safe for awhile yet?" "Well, I gave him a good dose. But, God, suppose I had killed him, as I intended at first, and lost that 5,000 francs! Oh, if those three wise Frenchmen only knew their thief was asleep in this house! Well, we would have to kill them. We must not lose this prize."

From this delicate conversation it will readily be gathered that only a portion of the story told by Robard to Vandal was true. Buckford, as will be remembered, gave Mme. du Barry the slip at Strassburg. He left Strassburg by the first train toward Denesia and on the way managed to resume his natural appearance and placed the

gown of Mme. du Barry in his valise. Arriving at Ontro, he had seized the first opportunity to get rid of the gown and had presented it to the wife of his host. She, pleased with the gaudy thing, accepted it. Judging that a man who could give away a gown that was better than any his wife had ever had must have plenty of money, Robard had given the traveler a room into which he had a way of going by stealth.

In this room he and his son had crept after the unsuspecting Buckford was asleep and had drugged him heavily. They had then proceeded to rifle his clothes, till, having found his purse, they had taken it, leaving him in his stupor while they thought of a way to either explain his loss satisfactorily or kill him if he made any fuss. They had given him more of the deadly stuff than they intended, and he had slept all that night and all day. But as has already been seen, Buckford had a constitution of iron and rallied from attacks that would kill ordinary men.

He rallied from the effect of the drug, at first slowly, with a bewildering sense of trying to recall where he was. Gradually his senses came back to him, and he remembered the inn at Ontro. He felt somewhat ill, the natural effect of taking into his lungs the fumes of a stupefying drug. He lay on his bed expecting some one to come to him. He knew that in any inn—any well regulated inn—when a guest slept too long there would be an investigation.

But the hours passed and no one came. Buckford had a feeling as if he had been ill a long time. He knew that one day had elapsed since he came there, but knew not how many more. The longer he lay there the better he felt. The strength was returning to his limbs. He did not even feel the pangs of hunger. He at last got out of bed and went to the door to call some one. He found it locked.

There was another door on another side of the room. He opened that. It led into a space now evidently used as a closet, but from which, on the opposite side, another door led somewhere. This he tried, but could do nothing save push, as there was neither knob nor latch. While he was in the closet he heard voices. "The fellow is the very devil for escaping," said a voice. "First he eludes us at Paris, then at Strassburg and now at Ontro. It is a pity old Robard did not hold him. That 5,000 francs would pay for the trouble."

Buckford's heart beat rapidly. He recognized the voice of Vandal. "Has he gone to Trolle as a peddler?" asked Reber. "This is a strange game. Why did he sell the gown to that woman?" "Oh, to get money to buy the horse, I suppose. But that was a gay story about his stealing diamonds and 12,000 francs. Well, I had to say something. Three of us would not chase across all Europe for 1,000 francs."

Buckford, panting in the closet, wondered what it all meant. Evidently they were under the impression that he had gone on toward Trolle. They had also been told that he had sold the woman the gown when he had presented it to her. These things, together with his strange sensation of illness, made him suspicious. He stepped quickly back to his room and felt for his purse. It was gone. "Ah!" he said bitterly. "I have fallen among thieves again. This rascal of an innkeeper has robbed me. Now, how shall I get out of this scrape with no money and my enemies in the very house?"

He crept back to the closet. The three purmers of the thief who stole so much wealth had been given two connecting rooms. Reber and Robello occupied one, and Vandal was alone in the other. Their conversation, carried on while they were preparing for bed, was necessarily a little loud. Buckford heard it easily. "How far is Trolle from here?" Robello was asking. "When will he arrive there?"

"How old is a goose? It all depends on the horse the innkeeper sold him. If it was a good one, he can do it in two days."

"Two days! And we are a day behind him."

"Well, we will get the best horses to be had and try to overtake him. I saw some horses in the stable today—tall handsome beasts, but strong, and they looked speedy."

"The stable! Did you find a stable? This inn is the only stable I saw."

"Well, there is a stable for horses in the rear."

The conversation now ceased, and Buckford went back to his room. He was now in a thrill of excitement. He had lost his sense of illness. His mind was alert and quick. His eagerness to find a way to escape had overcome the effect of the drug.

He had taken off his clothes before retiring and now dressed himself. He then made an examination of his room. He remembered that the window looked out toward a large building, for he had seen it at the twilight hour when he had entered. This must be the stable spoken of by Vandal. He next cautiously opened the window, making as little noise as possible.

It was a dark night, there being no moon and but few stars to be seen. The great peak of the barn rose like a black mountain a short distance away. He knew that he was on the ground floor of the inn. There seemed to be the roof of a shed under him.

He was about to let himself down from the window when a key turned in the lock of his door, and he heard the voices of Robard and his son. At the same moment he heard the roistering voices of three or four half drunken fellows under his window. He was caught between two forces. To drop from the window at that moment would be to drop into their hands, Robard would at once call out, and he would be taken.

While he was debating what to do Robard and his son entered. "Ah, my friend, you have slept long," said Robard. "We feared you were ill."

"No, I was only very weary," said Buckford. The younger Robard carried a lamp. By the light of this Buckford saw a knife sticking from the pocket of the elder rascal's coat. With a leap like that of a panther, he was on the old man and tore the knife from the pocket. In another instant its point had found a soft spot between the robber's ribs. Then, with a blow from his fist that sent the younger Robard reeling and the lamp flying against the wall, Buckford ran to the window and leaped to the roof of the shed below. From this he jumped down to the ground and came plump upon the roistering party of four, who were startled at this sudden alighting of a rare bird among them.

"Ho, ho! What's this? A robber! Call Robard! Call Robard! Seize this fellow! Hold him till Robard comes!" "Fools!" cried Buckford as he saw the window of his room lighted with a red glare. "I am a guest of the inn. My lamp upset, and the house took fire. This was the only escape. Do you see?" "Fire, fire! Robard's inn is on fire!" he shouted, and, sobbed by the terrible catastrophe, they released Buckford and ran to the front of the building to gain an entrance. "Fire, fire!" Buckford could hear the alarm ringing from one end of the house to the other. Then from the window of the room he had left came screams and yells of wild rage and despair. "Murder! Robbery! He has gone! After him, you Frenchmen! The thief

They rode like the wind over the hills, you want has just set the house on fire, stabbed Robard and leaped from the window! After him!" Buckford ran as he had never run before. He found an easy entrance to the stable. Every employee who slept in or near the stable had rushed to the inn to fight the fire. He had no time to select a horse. He took the one nearest the door. Without saddle or bridle he led it forth, leaped upon its back, and as the glare from the burning building sent a gleam of light around him he dashed away, followed by the hoarse cries of rage and the pistol shots of the enraged Frenchmen and Robard's son.

Vandal, quick to grasp this opportunity, left the Denesians to fight their own fire and, calling Reber and Robello, ran to the stable and got out horses. "This time that rascal's life!" he growled. "This time, by heaven, I'll kill him!"

Three mounted much as Buckford was dashed after him. Buckford had probably three to five horses start and that start had carried him out of the sight of his pursuers. But they could hear the sullen pounding of his horse's hoofs on the hard road. They followed the sound.

It was not long before Ontro and its burning inn were left far behind. Mile after mile the horses carried their angry riders. Buckford, fleeing for his life, spared not his horse. The others, less skilled horsemen, bobbed and pounded painfully on the bare backs, but clung to the flying steeds with a tenacity that showed how eager they were to overtake and finish this American who balked them at every step.

Vandal alone controlled his horse. The others merely clung round their horses' necks and let the beasts follow in stamped the leader ridden by Vandal.

They went through little villages, all peacefully asleep. They rode like the wind through farming regions, through valleys and over hills till their overriden beasts nearly fell to the ground.

And now at last it was simply a question of the staying qualities of the horses. Had Buckford in his quick selection of the nearest horse to the door obtained a good one, or had the others, taking horses from more protected places, chanced to get hold of animals of better speed or less weariness than the one he rode?

Buckford's horse was showing signs of exhaustion. He had hoped to gain enough headway to escape from his horse and find a hiding place. But instead the steady and thunderous hoof beats of the pursuing horses grew louder and nearer.

He was now in a rough and hilly country. The road was bad, and the weary horse stumbled constantly.

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