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The Lash of Circumstance

BY Harry Irving Greene Author of "Yosonde of the Wilderness"

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The next morning another strange thing had happened. I was dressing for the day at my customary hour for arising, when suddenly the house-keeper's knuckles fell upon the door in a series of nervous taps. She almost never came to the upper floor before the breakfast hour, and I before therefore searched her face with some curiosity as I told her that she might enter. She immediately burst forth in an excited volley.

Began interrogating him as to his own movements since we had last foregathered. But when it came to that he had little to say, and at first seemed disinclined to part with even that. Later on, as we ate, however, he became a trifle more communicative. Under the influence of coffee he began to make bolder and more satisfactory replies to my quizzing, but if he had learned anything of importance he did not betray it. Since the day upon which he had taken an active interest in the case and I had heard his low whistle at the mention of Mackay's name, curiosity had filled my mind as to what his remarks would be in that direction.

"Oh, Mr. Tom, the house has been burglarized again in the night. What on earth are we coming to with such people prowling all around in the darkness? I never was so frightened in my life. I declare I nearly fell in a faint when I discovered it. Please come with me and with my necktie still dangling from my hand, I followed Dumfoundedly from my hand, I followed her slight figure as she climbed down the front stairs, waddled through the dining-room and kitchen and then, one foot at a time, descending the steep stairs that led to the basement. There was only one door entering from the outside into these lower regions, and that was never used—in fact, had been bolted ever since my occupancy of the premises. The aperture in the side of the house through which the coal supply was dumped from the drive into the bin was protected by an iron grating, which was always carefully locked after such an operation, and the low windows which admitted light to the furnace room had fixed iron bars on the outside. The police, LeDuc and myself had gone over this region thoroughly in our search and had found that the locks had not been tampered with nor the gratings disturbed. The dust and the rust had proven that beyond contention. Now, to my amazement, I saw that the door had been forced by some powerful instrument that had torn the receiving socket for the bolt bodily from its fastenings. My hair arose with a cold tingling of my scalp, much as it might have done had I been suddenly confronted by some uncanny object in the dead of night.

"And the door at the head of the stairs which leads from here into the kitchen, was that disturbed?" I asked her, as my first sensations faded. She was panting from excitement and the haste of her movements. "No, the door was locked and just as I left it last night with the key still on the inside. He could not have gone up higher than the head of the basement stairs. I just happened to remember that I had left a broom down here yesterday, and when I came down after it I noticed this door right away. Who on earth do you suppose could have done it?" She was wringing her hands weakly, the perspiration of nervousness popping from her forehead.

Being in total darkness myself, I made no attempt to enlighten her as I carefully examined the place. Outside of the scanty supply of coal that remained from last winter's supply, the basement contained little save an accumulation of odds and ends and an old chest of mine that contained articles that I had stored away years before. However, I still retained the key to it, and I now opened it and made a careful inspection of its interior. So far as I could discover by a minute scrutiny the articles within it had remained untouched since I had last placed them there, and satisfied on that point, I shut and locked it again without having as yet received the faintest ray of light to assist my search. I must have spent at least half an hour in my examination of the place, and my questions of the house-keeper, but at the end of that time, was compelled to give up with absolutely nothing learned that I had not known to start with. Another thing that perplexed me somewhat was as to whether or not I should inform my uncle of this new crime. I did not see that anything would be gained by telling him, while it would most certainly agitate him and lead to further outbursts; therefore, I decided to leave him in ignorance of it, and requested Mrs. Tebbets to do the same. I also decided to see LeDuc and get his opinion on the matter, and repairing the outraged doors as best I could with hammer, boards and nails, and soothing the housekeeper by my assurances that the incident was a triviality to which she need pay no further attention, I went upstairs and sat down to my breakfast with Uncle Abner as usual. But an hour later when I had reached my office I telephoned the detective with the request that he meet me at the noon hour. He readily assented, and I then went about my daily work.

He met me at luncheon, and I explained the matter to him without prelude. He looked serious minded as I finished. "What do you think of it, I asked. In his abstraction he delayed his reply for perhaps 30 seconds. "It seems peculiar. But I am more inclined to consider it as a separate and distinct offence rather than as an aftermath of the original happening. Further than that I don't believe I have any theory to advance as yet. However, it may all come out in the final solution, provided there is one, and in the meantime I would dismiss it from my mind if I were you. If you find that difficult, you may look upon it in this light. If I remember, we had a sharp shower last night—the thunder awoke me. It is not unreasonable to assume that some back-yard prowler, caught in the storm, may have forced his way in merely to secure a dry nest in which to sleep." While I did not take much stock in that explanation, and so informed him, I added, that being in a receptive mood, I would file it in my mind for future reference, and then his last qu

ing skyward in the eccentric ways with which a kite mounts in a gale, and within a fortnight I found myself richer by thousands added to thousands. The glittering heights of fortune seemingly hung close over me; the end of the rainbow with its great bag of gold was within mathematical striking distance; and taking greater chances than ever for the sake of greater gains, I plunged wildly as I restaked my winnings on every throw. And day by day the Midas touch was mine, and I won, won, won. Then, grown money reckless by my constant success, I permitted myself another piece of extravagance for the allurements of the woman I loved and the greater opportunities it would give me to be with her. I bought a handsome motor-car upon which I had had my eyes for some time, housing it in a public garage, and telling nobody but her that I had purchased it. I took Mrs. Dace out on the first evening after I had mastered my new acquisition for a long ride country-ward. The weather was ideal, and we sped along to the soft whirr of the machine, with the soft night air fanning our faces. It had long been understood between us that she was to carefully guard all my confidences, and I kept a few things from her. Excitedly I spoke of my increasing wealth and magnificent prospects. Her arm slipped under mine. "Good, good," she cried, with a schoolgirl's enthusiasm. "I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart. It makes me happy to know about it. I told you that I should exercise my sobriety to command your success. When you win I feel that I have won also."

Her tacit confession that she considered herself as a close partner of mine, and that she was backing me to the winning of a prize which we should share together in the long time to come, combined with the delicious sense of comradeship awakened by her arm pressure, became as an intoxicant. In that moment I would have pawned my soul to have possessed her. I threw my arms about her and pressed her to my breast almost fiercely. "My God, how I love you, Mattie. Tell me that you will marry me—you must," I cried, as I found her lips and drained them as a drunkard drains his cup. Her arms hung upon my shoulder; her upturned lips seemed to be clinging to mine; I could feel the ebb and swell of her bosom so closely as she drew to me, and in that position I held her until a slight warning swerve of the machine temporarily restored me my sanity. I quickly removed my right arm and clutched the wheel, but still kept the other round her waist, as I begged her in the name of my great passion to make me the happiest man on earth by her answer. Impassioned I recalled to her my long nights and days of torture when I was half sick with despair of ever possessing her. For the first time since our acquaintance began, she was visibly agitated by my pleadings. "You say that you love me with all this great love and tell me that I must answer to your question, Tom, dear," she said, very softly. "Very well, I will answer you. I will marry you upon one condition."

"And that?" I cried wildly, feeling myself grow weak in the suspense. "That you will importune me now to fix the date. You must leave that entirely to my discretion. When I think the right time has come I will manage in some way to let you know that I am ready. Until then you must be patient with me like the dear boy that you have always"

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goes out to Mr. James Brown and family on account of the death of Mrs. Brown on Saturday last. Your Priceville correspondent thinks things have been coming our way of late, by the Globe supplying us with free kindling, and a news item into the bargain. The stormy weather last week gave him a great lift with his budget, but didn't provide the heating. Election matters are very quiet here. Everybody seems to calmly realize that we have a good Government, and a right good representative in Dr. Jamieson, and feel that everything is o.k. But they must all turn out on the 11th, and express it by ballot, or exactly the opposite might be the result.

The Orange brethren of Varney L.O.L. were down to Holstein last week and organized a lodge there. A number of right good citizens joined, who will do credit to the Order.

The Blyth's Corner scribe says those wild geese that were down his way had not the Gander for a leader. No, unfortunately for them they had not, but when they passed us about two o'clock, they looked as if they could go safely themselves, but they went down to Normanby, and took a few turns around with the Weathercock of that place, and returned again in a more wandering kind of way, and that too, just at night. Which convinces us more than ever that anything going to him for guidance will soon become bewildered and benighted. Mr. Ben. Woods held his annual raffle a week ago. As we were

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