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# THE SECRET OF PAUL FARLEY

— BY — JOHN MARCH — (AUTHOR OF "A CHILD OF MANY PRAYERS," ETC.)  
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## CHAPTER XXX.

### Mine Own Familiar Friend

Agnes, awaiting the doctor's return, the alternating heat and cold of her excitement evaporated, stood by the parlor fire debating with herself, endeavoring to justify her attitude with regard to her recent disclosure. Had she been too precipitous? Would the difficulty have adjusted itself, been surmounted had she waited longer? The predicament obviated, entirely removed, Paul gone, his immolation inaugurated, there did not appear to be so much necessity, the situation was not so urgent that she need have broken the promise she gave him at Vilvorde.

What would Paul say when he knew? Would it spoil his career? Jack must be made to understand the importance of keeping the secret she had been forced, frightened into revealing, and prevent so much as a single breath of it spreading further. She had always meant to tell him when once they were married, because she would not care to have the secret between them, and moreover the doctor's knowledge of his identity would be beneficial to Paul if he were still at Weyberne. Jack would prove a valuable ally, he could interpose in any exigency, he could swoop down and rescue Paul from trying contingencies, such as the one that had just now presented itself. Jack must be won over, too.

"He's gone!" Dr. Hunter exclaimed, pushing open the French window and locking it after him. "Agnes, I have met with so many queer things in my time that, as a rule, I am prepared not to be surprised or take exception at the unexpected, but this beats the record of anything I ever heard or saw. If you have been made a catspaw of my dear, you have at the same time proved yourself a remarkably staunch friend."

"I have not been made a catspaw; I simply consented to hold my tongue the six months he remained in Weyberne."

"But the shrubby affair, Agnes. Had I been a young man instead of an old stager, and consequently lenient towards the frailties incidental to youth, that kissing business might have separated us."

"It brought us together, Jack. You were a dear good soul, unwilling to believe evil of two innocent young people, and you shall have your reward in this world; you shan't wait till you get to the next."

"It's a remarkable personation; how does he do it?"

"I don't know; it seems to come natural to him."

"What sort of woman does he make?"

"Pretty fair, rather charming; but that delicate, interesting cleverness loses its fatal fascination in the woman. I like him in either guise; you can't take away the learning or the rare sympathetic influence of his character."

"Yes," he acknowledged; "but, Agnes, I can scarcely believe it now. He—she, I mean—is so extremely natural and unaffected. After I read your note I criticized every detail of his appearance, every movement, every gesture; there was nothing gauche in his behavior, nothing to betray him; I could not find a flaw to color your assertion. It's really very wonderful. What is her name?"

"Jervois. Pauline Jervois, she—"

"Ah! Then it was his—her father I knew as a lad; I thought it well-nigh impossible to mistake those eyes."

With his arm round her waist he narrated the little episode of Notting Hill, of the clever young musician with the wondrous eyes, of the talent that for a short time dazzled the musical world, and Agnes was interested, deeply interested, as she remembered Paul knew nothing of his parents, and she determined to write to him, and that soon, to relate this little story of an unknown, bygone time.

"Of course," Agnes said, smiling, when he had finished, "that paper was private and confidential; I wrote it to save what I considered to be at the moment more than an awkward situation, and you will treat it as such, won't you? You will keep Paul's secret?"

"My dear Agnes, you surely don't expect me to hush up this thing?"

"Yes, I do; why not? I—I wish I had not told you."

"I wish you had not, but knowing it I should be incurring the gravest responsibility in remaining silent."

"You won't tell Felix?"

"I must. Dash it all, Agnes, I can't let Felix go fooling up to the 'Pendennis' after him now. If Farley were ill—if manifold things happened, leaked out, Felix would never forgive me; and quite right, too; I should richly deserve his contumely. It is my duty, now that it is in my power, to save Judith Hargrave's life and mind, to establish Anthony Pelham's happiness, if possible, and to break off this intimacy with Felix. Looking at the situation in all its bearings, don't you see yourself how very much to blame I should be if I did not condemn—I won't say what is evil, for your sake, but what is untrue and mischievous, what must surely lead to infinite harm, degeneracy, and disaster?"

"It will ruin his career, Jack," she said regretfully.

"And a good thing, too," he returned, laughing; "not that I intend to interfere directly with Farley, that is hardly within my province; but I shall tell Felix and Judith. I've not the face to stand by and see Felix make such an

"Felix will be very angry." "He will be annoyed; he has no more right to be angry than the rest of us; we have all been deceived, barring you, miss."

"I mean with me. I told you in preference to him because I knew I should bring about a storm of invective at his being so completely misled. I begged Paul to go; I said I was sure something dreadful would happen, but he persisted in saying he must stay until Christmas, he must fight it out, and—then, somehow, afterwards, it has been dawning on me gradually, I discovered he was in—he had become wrapped up in Felix, he—"

"He, I mean she, is more wrapped up in Felix. A nature like Farley's neither loves easily nor lightly. I pity him—her, I mean; but if I judge her rightly he will set himself the heroic task of living it down. By Jove, she looked in his—her eyes that afternoon when he—she promised Felix he would go."

"How do you think Felix will take it, Jack?" she asked, looking at the clock.

"Coolly, I fancy; it will surprise him, of course. He will show his annoyance naturally, because it will be rather a pill; but he will swallow it, make a grimace, and keep his sensations to himself."

"I think the steak and pheasant must be nearly ready. When do you propose telling Felix?"

"After breakfast. Best have the news on the top of a meal; it won't take so much effect as on an empty stomach. If you think Rose is coming after the table I will just run upstairs and warn him his services will be required to dissect that gallinaceous bird. I say, Agnes, I don't relish this job. I have a curious feeling—it must be nervousness, never experienced it before."

"I shan't stay in the room, Jack," she said, her eyes growing big.

"Oh, but you will, Agnes; you must. If Felix asks for proofs I have none. You are the only person who can substantiate what I affirm."

Agnes's eyes grew larger and darker and deeper.

"Suppose I don't," she said; "suppose I have no further recollection of that hysterical message, the gist of which was the outcome of undue excitement following a terrible tragedy."

"Do as you please, Agnes. If I make the assertion and you deny it, Felix can apply for satisfaction to Farley himself."

There was a directness and a solid meaning in his tone and look that settled any budding desire on Agnes's part to rebel. Rose set the table, touched the gong, and five minutes later brought in the breakfast. Felix took his place before the smoking bird, and carved it in profound silence. With a beating heart, and furtive glances at the moody face opposite to her, Agnes poured out the coffee, which the squire immediately rejected. He preferred a brandy and soda, causing a little welcome diversion by going to the sideboard to fetch and mix it himself. At any other time the doctor would have had something to say concerning early potatoes, but former experiences of Felix having made him sage, and, being a discreet and learned man, with the unsavory pill occupying the foreground of his mind, he tabooed the delicate subject, choosing rather to touch upon topics less likely to set up inflammation or acute irritation. For the nonce his main object was to produce harmony, perhaps he fortunate enough to elicit pleasant interest, and perchance some kind of response from Felix in due season.

With occasional help from Agnes, Hunter managed to keep the ball rolling. Felix, approving his marked ability, and seeing how impaired he appeared to be in his own discourses, propped the newspaper against the dish cover and divided his attention between his breakfast and the forecast of the new Liberal policy.

It was a curious meal. Agnes masticated her food mechanically without knowing in the least when or how she swallowed it. She wondered vaguely whether Felix was seriously displeased with Paul, and, if so, whether an exasperated condition of mind would materially help to strengthen matters. How would he take the disclosure which was creeping so near? Would they ever sit down amicably to another meal together, or—good gracious, whatever induced Jack to be so flippant just now? Why had he developed this facetiousness with Felix sitting like a death's head at the end of the table, wrapped in a fit of gloomy depression?

Happily, thank heaven, it was the last uplure of the doctor's wit. Finding no further pretext for deferring the mauve quart d'heure, he pushed his chair from the table and looked at his host. Felix rose, found his tobacco, threw himself into the armchair by the fire, and commenced filling his pipe.

"What's the programme for to-day, Felix?" Hunter asked, standing on the hearthrug surveying the squire's imperturbable air.

"I am going to the Larches in half an hour's time; I want to see Denham."

"Can I see him for you? I seem to have a clear day before me, and you are not altogether well."

"Thank you, no," he returned slowly.

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ry; "I shall want to go to London in the afternoon to see Hare, so I don't purpose staying indoors."

As Jack Hunter reckoned, Hare and Farley were one and the same individual. Felix would see Hare, no doubt, but he would not mind betting his practice on the surmise that Felix's sole intention was to go and thrash this matter out with Farley, and he, Jack, was not going to stand by and see dear old Felix play the fool any longer.

"Hare will keep; don't muddle about him, there's plenty of unpleasantness here without going to fresh fields to glean more. I—I have something to tell you, Felix, something which I ought, but am exceedingly loth, to explain. I hardly know the best way to part with it."

"Then keep it to yourself," Felix returned evenly, holding a light to his pipe and watching the tobacco ignite; "if it's so infernally unpalatable, better postpone it, Jack. In point of fact, I am in possession of quite as much stress and anxiety as I can digest at present."

"I can't very well do that; it's about Farley."

Felix looked up sharply, lowered his eyes, blew out the light, and looked up again with a straight compelling glance.

"You have something to tell me about Farley, something disagreeable, according to your preface. Is that why he cleared out in such a hurry?" "Scarcely, he had no idea I should tell you; to be correct, he is not aware I am in receipt of this piece of information."

"How did you come by it? Who has been at the pains to malign him?"

Agnes was still seated at the breakfast table behind the armchair. At the squire's question she twisted round and shook a warning finger at the doctor, accompanied by a look at once so pleading, so full of undefined dread, that Hunter felt bound to leave her in the background. He must perforce divulge the truth on his own account in the least offensive vocabulary, in the happiest, in the most sympathetic manner at his command.

"No one has malign'd him. The person from whom I heard the story wishes him well, and would rather you were not told."

"Then I think you are decidedly officious, Jack. Why are you so zealous that I should hear this slander?"

"It's not slander!"

"What is it then?"

"I don't know. It's—the fact is, Farley is a bit of a fraud, he—"

"One moment, Jack!" and Felix held up his hand; "you say Farley is not aware you know this thing?"

"I am certain he has no idea that I know it."

"In that case it is hitting from behind, stabbing him in the dark, and I refuse to hear him traduced. I refuse to hear anything you have to say against him unless he is here to defend himself."

"Nonsense, Felix; you must hear this; you must."

"I won't. I won't be made uncomfortable. Besides, whatever there is to hear I would rather he told me himself."

"But you can't ask him this, Felix. It's a curious affair; quite out of the ordinary run of events. You can't go to Farley about it. He would ten times rather I told you."

"Who else knows of this precious affair besides yourself—anyone?"

Hunter hesitated, and his eyes inadvertently wandered to Agnes.

"Oh, Agnes does," Felix exclaimed decisively; "Agnes knows. Well, come, it can't be very bad if Agnes knows."

"I did not say it was bad, I said curious, unusual; a circumstance better not mentioned to Farley. A third party's intervention is the right method to employ in this case."

"Why need I hear it at all? Look here, Jack," he said, rising and laying his pipe on the mantelpiece, a worried look coming into his pale face, "why need I be troubled with this curious, unusual circumstance, which you own is not bad and therefore not criminal? Why should I be made acquainted with anything foolish the boy has done? Farley is my friend, my familiar friend, I—in years the lad is younger than I, but that makes no difference, because in brain craft he is older, far ahead of me. He suits me in every way, he is ready with his tongue, ready with his gun, he's willing to be at my beck and call, he amuses me, he bears with me, he puts up with my beastly obstinacy and takes things as they come. We've had a hundred arguments, I've been in the wrong a hundred times, but I never remember Farley contradicting me rudely, or asserting his opinion when he knew and I knew he was in the right—the dear fellow was always in the right, though he tried not to let me know it. He's such a gentle, docile chap, only once he refused to comply with my wishes; you remember, Jack, the afternoon I wanted him to go back to town—I'm glad he refused, because I was not sure till then he—here you surprised, Jack, that I—like him, that I can't bear to hear anything said against him, or anyone try to come between us? You know the life I've lived, the solitary life spent mostly out of doors with the wind, the trees, the fields, for company; you can't be surprised I should cling to Farley, he is so wonderfully organized. Fancy that brain, Jack, brought into unison with that glorious, soul-satisfying nature of his, that strong, vigorous mind in submission on its knees, as it were, to that tender heart—a great, moist, human heart."

He paused to finger the pipe on the chimney-piece, looked at Hunter, and resumed reverently:

"I don't believe chance brought him here; it was pty—I mean God's pty—that sent him into my life; and feeling so strongly as I do on that score, I will never—I understand me, Jack, whatever he has done—I will never let him go. Come, it is worth while to strive to implant distrust, to tax my mind with unimportant, though foolish details, perhaps, concerning Farley's past when I would far rather be blissfully ignorant of them? Is it necessary, Jack?"

"It is necessary, and it's cruel kindness to beat about the bush. You shall have it without further palaver—as I said before, Farley is something of a fraud; he entered Sir Thomas's ser-

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(From the Owen Sound Advertiser)

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It seems to be another case of familiarity breeding contempt. Last year there was an epidemic of what was called "German Measles," and as it was very mild no one thought of taking any special precaution against it. This last outbreak is of a different stamp, but though the doctors recognized it at once and ordered strict treatment and precaution, many parents were unable or unwilling to see that it was at all different from the milder form. So they were not over-particular, and the result is that the disease has developed into a very serious matter. It has passed the stage where it can be treated with indifference, and it is up to the parents to see to it that the doctors' orders are carried out to the letter.

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