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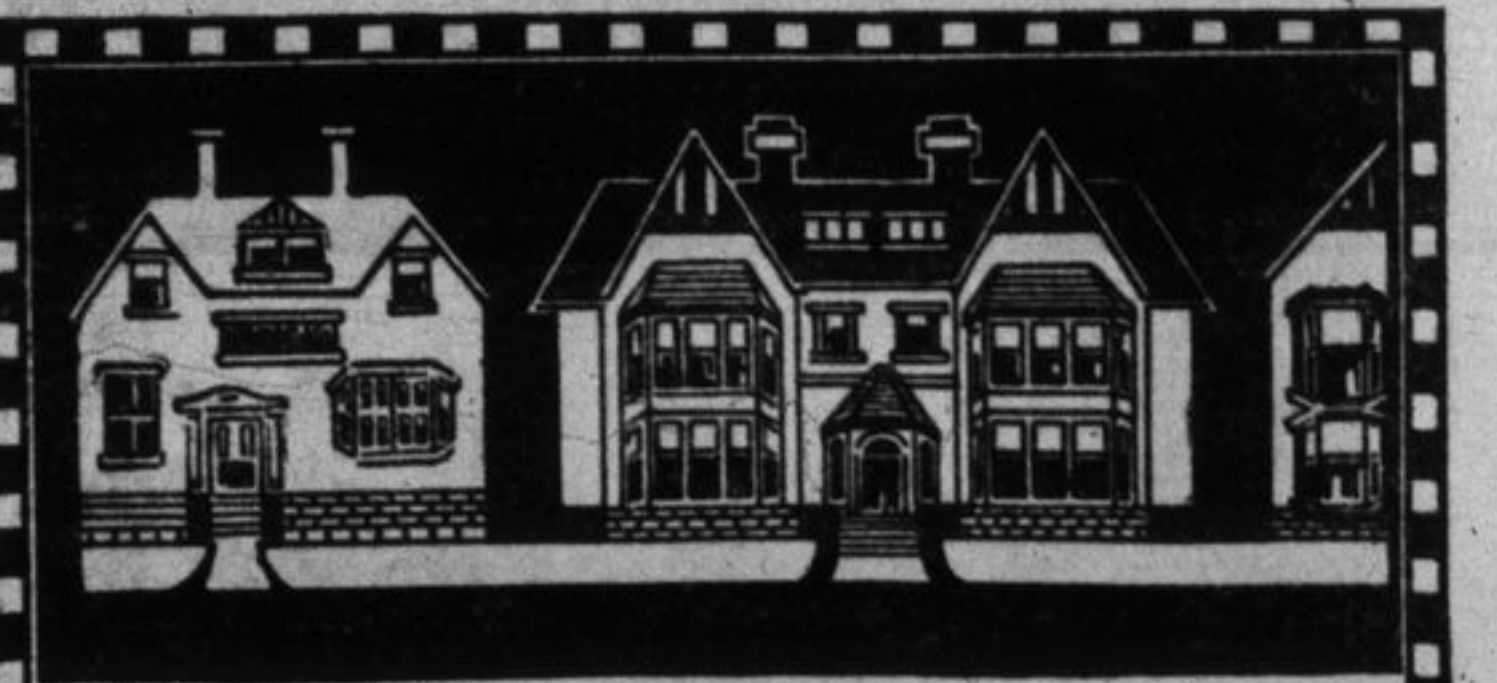
**THE SECRET OF PAUL FARLEY**  
-- BY -- **JOHN MARCH**  
Author of "A CHILD OF MANY PRAYERS," ETC.  
Supplied Exclusively in Canada by The British & Colonial Press Service, Limited.

"I don't know—why, I believe it's the Wychery boy. Pull up, doctor, I wonder what he is doing here."  
"Mother on her wedding trip, little son enjoying his spell of unrestrained liberty. Shall we give him a ride?"  
Paul assented with a lightsome laugh that pleased Hunter exceedingly, and stooping, he made a snatch at the little fellow and hoisted him up by the belt that fastened his tunic. They stood him on the cushion between them. Paul wound his arm around him, pushed back his own hat, removed his glasses, and turned his face up to the child.  
"Do you know me, chappie?" he asked eagerly; "you said you would recognize me again anywhere."  
"Yes, I know you," he answered, stroking his face, "you are the man who kissed me; you are the man who kept the goose for me."  
" Bravo!" Paul exclaimed, lifting him down. "You're a smart boy! Is mother at home?" he asked, as the child cuddled to him.  
Guy shook his head, gave vent to a hoarse laugh, and licked his hand. Paul started; the action shocked him. The contact of the little warm tongue opened up a vista of a dreary waste of childhood. With his delicate insight and fertile imagination he beheld the rough, harsh, lonely child-life, the poor little life spent outside the Larches, in the stables, in the kennels, out among the animals and brute creation, from whom he had received all that he knew of love and kindness. That this ruined piece of humanity was the instrument selected by Mrs. Wychery to accomplish any fell design, Paul never doubted for an instant. He felt he held the future, the arbiter, of Felix's fate in his arms, and in the throes of the wretched conviction the boy's head rested like a lump of lead upon his heart. The vastness of his powerlessness, his inability to meddle with what was shrouded in impenetrable mystery terrified him. There was nothing he could do but wait; with a bleeding heart for the "something" that was casting its black shadow in advance across his path. He looked from the boy's innocent face to the myriad of calm, serenely smiling stars and tried hard to believe that up above, behind that stretch of laden blue, there existed a Supreme Omnipotent Power allied to a tender, tearful Pity; a something he might depend upon, that would combat, would frustrate disaster, and prove all-sufficient for every anxious, racking fear, for every separate human need.  
They were in the private road, now belted on either side by acacia trees, and Hunter pulled close to the hedge as he perceived the Hall brougham approaching. Sir Thomas leaned from the window and shouted to Birch, who brought the greys to a standstill in masterly style beside the doctor's gig.  
"I am going to the station to meet Lady Hargrave," he said, in a voice that quavered like the speech of an old man; "I shall want to see you, Farley, on my return. I shall expect to find you in."  
"Yes, sir," he said, somewhat surprised. "I shall be in and at your service."  
The brougham sped on, and the gig came slowly out from the hedge.  
"There's something wrong," Hunter said, with conviction.  
"Yes, Sir Thomas looks as if he had received some kind of a blow. What are you going to do with the boy?"  
"Take him back to the Larches."  
"I don't expect to be able to go to London to-night, but I will hurry off early to-morrow. I'll get down here. Thank you, good-night. Take care of the poor, wee chap, and above all, sir, take care—keep in touch with Felix."  
Hunter waved his whip, gave a reassuring answer, turned his trap carefully round and was soon out of sight. Paul finished the journey with an easy, swinging gait, and entering the library to seek for letters, found James on his knees tending the fire.  
"Something has happened since I went out; may I know what it is, James?"  
"You are very good, sir; you always are. It's the master, sir, he's sorely troubled, and I'm afraid you can't bear his burden for him. He's a good master. I was brought up with him, as you may say, having lived page with Sir Thomas's father. We were boys together, you see, sir. I grew up a young man along side of Mr. Tom. I've known and entered into most of his joys and sorrows, sir, and a trouble like this weighs on me like as though it were my very own."  
"May you tell me the trouble?"  
"You are bound to know it, sir; it's the young lady—Miss Judith," he said in a sudden bewildering fright. "Has she—has she done anything to—James, you know what I mean—I don't like to put it into words."  
"No, sir; no, no," he said, terrified at the expression on Paul's face. "She has threatened to, but the Lord send it mayn't come to that."  
Paul took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead.  
"It's her reputation, sir; she's sold her reputation."  
"Reputation be hanged!" he exclaimed, unloading his overcharged heart. "I beg your pardon, James," he added immediately, grasping the man's hand, "but I am so awfully relieved, I—well—I couldn't tell what had happened."  
"It might be worse, but it's bad enough. I've always heard, sir, the reputation of a young lady in Miss Judith's station is very delicate and easily smirched. It's like a bank, sir, the least breath of suspicion or doubt that all's not exactly square brings about a panic, and it's out-and-out ruin or years of uphill work to recover the public confidence."  
"Reputations are not so easily damaged nowadays, James," he said, smil-

ing, and turning over the letters. "Woman has walked so completely into man's sphere, and they are working so naturally and equably, shoulder to shoulder on the same plane in life that it's difficult to lay down a boundary line where one sex may step over and the other not."  
James looked, smiled, and left the room with an enlightened air, although he was not altogether convinced of the efficacy of the sentiment. Paul read, answered, and filed the letters with marvelous celerity and commenced to unlock the drawer containing the electioneering documents, when Sir Thomas's well-known step sounded in the hall outside. He looked up hastily in time to see the baronet close and lock the library door.  
"I don't wish to be disturbed," he said in answer to Paul's look of surprise. "I want a word with you, and it must be alone—absolutely private and confidential."  
The fresh face showed hollow in the lamp light, the clear eyes looked bleared, the strong heavy voice sounded subdued and quavering. The man's whole demeanor had obviously undergone a flagrant change. He seemed feeble and timid, not sure of himself, and his troubled eyes had an imploring expression in them when they met Paul's.  
"You are not well, sir," he said, drawing his own special chair to the fire; "will you sit here?"  
Sir Thomas dropped into it, thankful for the substantial support it afforded his trembling limbs.  
"Can you bring to mind, Farley, the day we discussed Judith's infatuation for you? Do you remember?" he proceeded, as Paul bowed in answer, "do you remember me saying I would never allow a daughter of mine to marry a man in your position, of your social status, and precarious antecedents?"  
Paul, leaning on the writing-table staring at him, bowed again.  
"Well, I retract that statement. If you have the least regard for Judith, a spark of feeling for her that she can fan into a flame, I shall be willing, proud, pleased, to welcome you as my son-in-law."  
"No; don't answer on the spur of the moment; take time to consider, to inspect the advantages accruing from such a position. You are ambitious, you have your eyes on a Ministerial secretaryship, but my influence can carry you considerably beyond that. I have found out who supplied the 'Times' with those half-dozen articles which caused that furore; consequently, my son-in-law and the man who wrote them is competent to fill any post the country will be willing anxious to offer him. I wish to be quite plain, straight, and honest with you. I had hoped this mania of Judith's would wear itself out in time. A while back I thought she intended to content herself with Peilham, but the unfortunate relapse, this recrudescence of the mania, has swept her off her balance. Still, given what she desires, I believe the child will be a mentally healthy as you or I, and Judith really is a nice, pretty, loveable girl. This interview is somewhat humiliating to me, and goes against the grain, Farley, but I promised Judith I would make an endeavor to stifle this additional trouble under a fund of pleasurable excitement. Accordingly he decided to visit the Haymarket and see Madame Bernhardt in 'La Tosca' the next night."  
"CHAPTER XXIV."  
La Tosca  
Rowena Wychery, deliciously happy, lay smiling in a velvet fauteuil, her voluptuous beauty enhanced by the negligence of a tea-gown, which was in itself a charm.  
At her desire they occupied a private room at the Cecil, and Rowena was judiciously employing the twilight rolling cigarettes for Hare, who lounged opposite to her, his satinslipped feet on the rail of the fender. She was radiant with health and beauty, with lambent life and laughter, her heart tingling with keener thrills of love and anticipated pleasure. A delicious perfume exuded with her every movement; it floated away on the warm atmosphere, carrying an ethereal essence of her living, breathing beauty to the soul of the quiet man watching her.  
With the advent of the waiter, the afternoon tea, and the glare of the electric light, she rose, pushed her chair back, and shook out the folds of her silken skirts.  
"Tea, darling?" she asked, carelessly, casting a handful of cigarettes into his lap as she door closed.  
Hare stood up, threw the remainder of his cigar into the fire and stretched himself lazily.  
"I never saw you smoke a cigar, Paul, until yesterday—or the day before that—was it, or the day before that?—I mean the day we were married, dear?"  
"It was the day before that, Rowena. It is difficult to know what has become of this week; we have let the days and hours race ahead or lag behind just as they pleased; we have taken no account of time; we have just breathed, lived and loved."  
"Do you care for a cup, Paul?" she asked, laying a hand on his knee and pointing the teapot in mid air with the other.  
"Not much," he answered, smiling; "but I'll have some if you want me to be sociable."  
She set the teapot down, sprang up and moved the table into the centre of the room.  
"You don't care for it, dearest, and I am not going to make a martyr of you. I would rather have one midget of a kiss from you than all the tea and dainties in Christendom."  
She pushed him back into his seat, dropped gracefully at his feet, curled her arms round his knees, and turned her wondrous face to him.  
(To be continued.)

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