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**THE SECRET OF PAUL FARLEY**  
— BY —  
**JOHN MARCH**  
— CHAPTER XXV —  
"SHEEP OF A CHILD OF HAST"  
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are 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 squally, 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 province, is that why he clears 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 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 maligning 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 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 momentarily 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 locking 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 reality the last 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 tries 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—Felix glad he refused, because I was not sure till then he—are you surprised, Jack, that I—like him, that I can't bear to hear anything said against him, or anyone to 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 union 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 passed to finger the pipe on the chimney-piece, looked at Hunter, and resumed reverently:  
"I don't believe chance brought him here; it was pity—I mean God's pity—that sent him into my life; and feeling so strongly as I do on that score, I will never—understand me, Jack, whatever he has done—I will never let him go. Come, is it 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 be about the bush. You shall have it without further palaver—as I said before, Farley is something of a fraud; he deceived Sir Thomas's

the matter was that Mr. Farley was unwell, Sir Johnson thought, really, genuinely ill. He had not ordered a mouthful of victuals that day, nor the previous one. The table was strewn from end to end with papers, all kinds of letters, and the gentleman said he had no room, and no time for meals, but he had disposed of several cups of tea and innumerable cigarettes. The gentleman had been much upset by a telegram advising him of the expected death of a friend. He, John, did not think the friend had died, but Mr. Farley had returned to town, and he had returned to town, and he con sidered, very ill, with a cut on his forehead and some of the flesh shot from his thumb, which he had himself dressed, having been in the army and an orderly in the military wards. Therefore, if the gentleman to whom he was speaking were a friend of Mr. Farley's, he, Johnson, thought it would be wise to persuade Mr. Farley to see a medical man, and also to take some thing in the form of nourishment—he was glad to say, as luck would have it—there was soup going at six.  
"I am a friend, a very great friend of Mr. Farley's, and if you will show me his room I will undertake to see after him."  
The man's face brightened, and he led the way immediately, stopping outside a door at the end of the hall.  
"This small sitting-room Mr. Farley engaged on his return. He said he had a quantity of work to get through and the coffee-room was not sufficiently quiet. The gas is on a little, sir; I lit it ten minutes ago; I didn't turn it up much for fear of waking Mr. Farley."  
"Thank you," the squire said, slipping a sovereign into his hand in re turn for his civility; "thank you for your kindness and attention to Mr. Farley. We will make it right later on," and turning the handle noiselessly he entered and closed the door softly on Johnson.  
The room was in semi-darkness and comfortably warm still, though the fire had burned low. The couch stood between the fireplace and the table, and Paul lay there asleep, the wounded hand in a black silk sling, and the other tucked under his head. Felix tipped across the room and bent over the couch.  
Paul awoke, alert, his nerves on the stretch, looking out for danger signs, and Paul awoke, unconscious of criticism, the muscles of his face relaxed, the emaciation, the weariness, the hollows beneath his eyes plainly visible; were totally different persons Felix had no idea he was so thin, so worn, so clearly, unmistakably, ill, and a swivel back, a month, sure, he was a plump and looked so uncommonly well. This was a revelation; Felix was gaining an insight into what Farley had suffered, what he had endured while unswervingly prosecuting the physical and mental struggle he had waged in order to attain his doubtful inglorious ends. Presently, he dropped on one knee and looked more closely at the careworn face. Paul was so still, preternaturally still, scarcely breathing, that a wave of sickening fear swept over him—great heavens! was the prize to be snatched from him within an ace of his grasp? The steady gaze, the soul's yearning, influenced the sleeper; he stirred, the heavy eyelids lifted, and the great dark eyes were fixed on the squire's face.  
"Hello, Farley!" he said, smiling suddenly; "what cheer?"  
Paul turned his feet to the floor, sat up, and stared at his visitor.  
"Have you come to stop here?" he asked anxiously, a hunted expression in his eyes.  
"No, not here," Felix returned quickly, now perfectly able to interpret the look that puzzled him at times; "I'm on the other side, just down the street, you know, Paul, at the Friar's Head. I wanted to see Hare, and I wanted to see you. I just gave Austin a look, set my traps down yonder, had a brush up, and stepped over here to ask you to come back and have a bit of dinner with me. There's turtle soup, red mullet, a broiled fowl, and a bottle of Duc de Arme, '71 vintage, to wash it down—does the menu appeal to you?"  
Paul crossed his legs, leaned back and smiled.  
"You are very kind," he said, gratefully; "very kind; but I don't feel at all peckish; in fact, I am off my feed, and," nodding at the litter on the table, "I have as much as I can get through with to-night."  
"What have you had to eat to-day?" Felix asked, seating himself on the couch and ignoring the table.  
"To eat? Oh, I don't know, anything Johnson likes to bring; I have no particular appetite."  
"What is it you are doing?" glancing at the heterogeneous mass of papers on the table.  
"Odds and ends. There are some communications from Wiseman concerning that estimate, three of Sir Thomas's speeches, some articles of my own, a Greek examination paper for Tom Hargrave, and one or two more things of a similar character."  
"What do you work on? You seem to eschew food."  
"Tea for one thing; tea is a stimulant, it pulls one together admirably, and—well, I smoke a goodish deal. You see, when one has a craving for food and the first mouthful chokes one, a cigarette comes handy. It soothes the nervous contraction of one's throat, and pacifies the wretched sensation lower down."  
"Are you trying to kill yourself?"  
"Good gracious, no! I am trying for a post under Government. There's Sir Thomas's letter about it on the table close to you, if you care to look at it."  
Instead of looking at the letter Felix looked at him, and while he gazed Paul rose, placed a lump of coal on the fire with a pair of brass tongs and remained lounging there, his back against the chimney-piece, toying with his cigarette case.  
"Do you stand a good chance?" Felix asked.  
"Medium; I have an excellent testimonial from Sir Thomas. Will you have a smoke?"  
"I wonder whether you will do me a favor?" Felix hazarded, gently drawing the proffered case from his hand.  
"I will if I can," he said, eagerly; "you know I will."  
(Continued from page 3.)

**CHAPTER XXV.**  
The Wife of His Bosom  
It was late in the afternoon, and snowing, Johnson, the friendly waiter who had assisted Paul to catch the mail train to Weyburne, stood in the hall of the "Pendennis," watching through the half-glass door the slow, feathery swirl of flakes. He was musing upon the winter's early advance, when a man of fine physique passed the iron palings, entered the gateway, and ascended the steps of the hotel.  
The stranger was the tallest and the broadest man he had ever been called upon to behold, and Johnson looked at him with interest as he pushed open the half-glass door. He was handsome, he was a decided satisfactory way. There was no shilly-shallying about it, the first glance chronicled the undisputable fact, and the second encouraged and maintained the good impression. His features were good, remarkably good; a handsome, fiery, because of the last time he peeped into the little sitting-room behind the hall the gentleman was fast asleep. The real truth of

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