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## The Dog Star

BY Cecil Stanton AND Heath McShoo

He awaited his wife's arrival with impatience. He thought she looked pale and worn out when he met her at the station, but then she had come straight through from Venice, and the journey was a long and trying one.

She went to her own rooms at once, and asked that her dinner might be served there. However, when her dinner was served in her boudoir she hardly touched it. She had changed into a loose gown of white lace, and against the soft material her face looked pale, not with the pallor of fatigue, but with the grey whiteness of stone. On her brow, too, and in the lines about her mouth was the seal of a weariness greater than that of the flesh.

Monk knocked at the door. He was agitated at her pallor. "Dearest, you are not well," he cried. "Let me get you something. I can't bear to see you like this. The journey has been too much for you. You must go to bed at once."

"But you have something to say to me," she protested.

"No, no, really, I'm all right. You said it was something very important."

"So it is. But most unpleasant, darling! It is about that scoundrel Van Ost—the B.I.R.C. You have never seen that man in your life, have you, dear?"

She looked up at him. Her strange, nut-brown eyes were soft and misty, full of an immense self-reproach. She did not speak.

"Dearest, you must not mind my asking you," he went on; reading blank incredulity in her gaze. "The fact is, he has been using your name. Do not be afraid, I am going to punish him as he deserves."

"Using my name?" she asked. Her voice sounded dreamy.

"Yes, darling. He has been here, oh, how can I repeat what he said to me. It is too monstrous! He has tried to implicate you, my darling, in his infamous, odious, hellish conspiracy. He had the unheard-of effrontery to say that you held the bulk of the shares in the B.I.R.C. under different names. Can you imagine such a thing? Merely to repeat his lies burns my tongue. Of course, the man must be mad—raving mad. But he said it, and he must be made to eat his words."

Theodora had not sat down; she was standing facing her husband. Suddenly he saw her begin to sway from side to side; her eyes were closed; on her cheeks was the pallor of death.

Monk caught her by the arms and dragged her to a sofa. She was a tall woman, and heavy for him to carry. In a few moments she opened her eyes. She sat up and looked at him with a strange, weary smile. She said all wearily:

"I may as well tell you the truth," she said. She spoke as if nothing mattered, as if she had reached the end of all things.

"The truth," he repeated. The two little sharp words came from between his lips like a pistol shot. "Then there is something?"

Theodora nodded.

"There is a great deal. It is true about the B.I.R.C."

"What is true?"

"That I hold the shares."

Glare Monk did not behave in any of the several ways that he might have been expected to. He was not struck dumb; neither did he refuse to believe his ears; nor did he realize instantly the meaning of this confession and heap abuse and denunciation upon his wife.

He merely stood quite still in front of Theodora, a small man, with ice grown as grey as his hair and eyes, and hewn, to all semblance, out of a block of marble. Granite his hands became, too; those fussy little hands that, as a rule, were never still.

"You hold the shares," he said. There was no longer any jerkiness in his voice. It was restrained and quiet and deadly monotonous. "It is really true? That scoundrel did not lie to me? You hold the shares in those different names? You are the person we have been trying to discover—you, my wife! You are the person who has been growing rich at the price of men's liberties and men's blood? You are the person I have been accused of being? I suppose there is something wrong with me, isn't there, Theodora? Your voice tells me that this is true; I see it in your face. But there must be something wrong."

"No," she said, "I am all that you say."

"You have been this man's accomplice? That painted devil and you—you—the emphasis on the word was frightful—have been working together, making a hell for your brother men, so that you might grow rich?"

"Yes," she said, in a subdued voice, "I suppose that is true. I never thought about it before."

"Had you not enough money?" There was heartbreak in the monotonous voice. "Have I not given you enough? Couldn't you have asked me?"

"I don't know," she said. "No, I don't suppose I had enough. I wanted more. I spent a great deal. I have spent nearly all I have made. I lived such a different life in London. You didn't know; you never troubled about what I spent there."

"You might have asked me."

"I dare say." She folded her hands in her crossed knees and bent forward, as if her back were burdened with an intolerable fatigue. "I tell you I didn't think."

"You must have been filled with a diabolical lust of cruelty. The monomaniac you grew harsh. You ought to have been my master. You

must have known that I would have given you anything. And yet you speculated in men's lives. You stained my honor. You were the means of bringing these unjust accusations against me—you, my wife, whom I worshipped!" His voice dropped a tone; he spoke very slowly and rather vaguely, as if he were talking aloud. "And I," he said, "would not have dared to mention an unpleasant thing to you—I would have taken any trouble, I would have given anything to keep from you the knowledge of all dark and dreadful things."

"Oh, I know all that," she interrupted in a low voice.

"And yet all the time you were the accomplice of that unspeakable brute! You were associated with him; you must have met him and seen him, let him touch your hand. You delighted to breathe the same air, with physically and morally polluted yourself, you polluted me—good God, you have polluted all women!" The last words were strong, forceful, full of a great loathing. "You have been working against me behind my back. God, I have been scouring the earth for my arch-enemy; I have taken a great oath that when I find him I shall not have done with him until he lies before me stripped of everything that makes life worth living, a beggar, a pariah, a broken wreck, praying for mercy that no one in the whole world would ever show him. And I have found my arch-enemy—and it is you, my wife!"

Silence fell. More than he had said in that final speech Monk would never be able to say on earth with his mortal tongue. In it was contained the last agony, the cry of a soul stricken to death, betrayed, deceived, sold by the being on whom it had spent its utmost devotion.

Theodora's beautiful white face had fallen into her hands. Monk came a little nearer to her and looked down with stony gaze on the rich tawny curls that covered her head.

"He said he went to Venice to see you," he said sternly. "Is that true?"

"Yes," came the muffled reply. "I sent for him. I wanted to sell out everything."

"Why? Because you were afraid of discovery?"

After a moment's hesitation she lifted her face and said, "Yes."

"Do not be afraid. You shall not be discovered. I would not have the world think of you as I do."

She saw herself in something of the same light. Two big tears forced themselves through her lids and rolled down her cheeks. Monk saw them.

"Why do you cry?"

"I don't know."

"You are not sorry, are you?"

"I am sorry to hurt you, Glare."

"I don't think so. What you have lost that I gave you was nothing that you valued. I see that now. I was blind before. I thought my worship meant something to you. Why did you do it?"

"What?"

"At the beginning—why did you do it? Will you try to explain, if you are not too tired? I want to know; I want to try to understand."

He was just, even in this final extremity. Justice was one of his most salient characteristics.

"I don't think I can explain," she answered. "At first, I think I liked the excitement of gambling. And I did want money, Glare. I didn't like to ask you because you have such different ideas. You are one of the richest men in the world, and yet you spend nothing. You would have been aghast at the money I spent. So I began to speculate a little on my own account. I bought and sold, and I did very well. I don't know why rubber shares attracted me particularly. I suppose because of your connection with the rubber trade, and because I had got to learn something about it from hearing you talk to people. Then, in Ostend, I came across Van Ost. He introduced himself to me. I was under the impression then that you knew him. He induced me to speculate in the B.I.R.C. shares. I made a great deal of money, and, acting under his advice, bought more and more of the shares. Van Ost did everything; I simply grew rich."

"Your good business head did not tell you," he put in quietly, "that the man was simply getting you into his power?"

"I didn't think, I tell you," she answered. "Even when the rumors began to be spread about the methods of the company—getting the rubber and other things—I didn't think. I looked upon it as inevitable. I had heard Van Ost speak of the natives as something less than animals."

"And when did you begin to think?"

"When Van Ost induced me to forge your name to the papers," she answered.

He gave expression to no surprise.

"You did that—at his bidding?" was all he said.

"I had to," she replied. "I had gone too far. I had learned meanwhile what you and the world in general thought of the company. I knew that you would never forgive me if you discovered the part I had played in it. Van Ost threatened to tell you everything if I didn't do as he wished."

"But you forged my name."

"I had to. I was in Van Ost's power. It was a net I was enmeshed in; I couldn't cut my way out; I had to make the best of it."

"So, all this time," said Monk, "you could have spoken. There need have been no secret, no mystery; you could have spoken."

"How could I?" she asked. "It would have ruined me."

"You preferred to ruin me."

"Ah, you are so big, so powerful. I knew that in the end you would conquer. You are not ruined."

"Not in the eyes of the world," he said, with an extraordinary solemnity. "But I would far rather I were ruined in the eyes of the world—than this."

He began to pace up and down the room.

"Who opened my safe?" he asked.

"I did," she said.

"You took the papers?"

"Yes. I knew you would guess that. It's no good keeping it from you. I was afraid that you would find out who had forged your name."

"Then it was a lie about Lorton?"

"Yes."

"He never took them?"

"No."

"How did you get the key?"

"I pretended that I had lost the key of my jewel case, and borrowed his keys. He was dining with me. I see you had asked him for that purpose?"

"Yes," she slipped the key of the safe off the ring, and returned the others to him. He never noticed it."

"Of course not. No man could ever have thought of that. And so you lied to me about Lorton?"

"To save myself. I couldn't help it."

"No, I suppose not. It's no good doing things by halves. And Lorton, of course, never gave you away."

Monk had resumed his pacing of the room. Presently he brought it to a stop in front of her once more.

"Why have you told me this?" he asked.

Theodora was leaning her head back against the pile of blue cushions. There was neither shame nor regret on her face.

"I don't know," she said.

"You have just told me that, once before, you chose to become a criminal rather than to let me know what you had done. Why do you tell me now?"

"I don't know," she said again. "I suppose," she added, "I felt that it would be impossible to keep the secret much longer."

"And the papers?" he asked suddenly. "What became of them?"

"They have been destroyed."

"How many of them?"

"All of them."

"They were stolen from Drake as well?"

"They were not stolen—they were bought from him," she said wearily.

"And what do you want to do?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"About your shares? Do you mean to keep them?"

"No, I want to sell them. But Van Ost wouldn't buy them."

"He will now. It will be made worth his while," said Monk calmly.

Again silence reigned. Monk was evidently at a loss what to say. He seemed about to leave her. He had walked up to the door when, suddenly, he started, stood still for a second, and almost ran back to where she was sitting. His face was convulsed with indescribable emotions.

"When you took the papers from my safe," he cried, "did you take those others, too, concerning Peter?"

"Yes," she said.

"That was how you learned the story?"

"Then it was another lie when you told me that Lorton had told you?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't he know the truth?"

"So far as I am aware," she said, "he hasn't the faintest idea."

"Why did you tell me that lie?"

"I was angry with Lorton because he threatened to give me away. Glare, what on earth is the matter with you?"

Monk had clutched hold of a chair to steady himself. His face was ghastly; he was tugging at his collar. "Good God in Heaven," he muttered thickly, "if it should be too late!"

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

Uriah, the Hittite

Glare Monk stood absolutely still for a few moments. His wife watched him, wondering whether her confession had robbed him of his senses. One hand was upraised. It twitched convulsively, opening and shutting. So did his mouth. His eyes were opened wide, as if they gazed upon some vision of horror. He muttered to himself several times:

"If it should be too late! If it should be too late!"

Then he turned, and, without another word to his wife, rushed out of the room.

He rushed down to his study and set bells ringing and servants hurrying to attend to his needs. Someone was to go round to the garage and tell the chauffeur to bring the car round at once. A cablegram was to be taken down to the Central Telegraph Office and dispatched to Lagos immediately. Whatever happened, the message must go through at once. It was of the utmost importance.

He wrote it out—Moriarty, Lagos. And then the words in his own private code, that he carried in his mind, and which had never been written out, and that only the blind Moriarty understood, when it was read out to him by his secretary. Only Moriarty, out of all the world, could decipher those nonsensical-sounding words.

This is how the cablegram ran, decoded:

"Great mistake. Call back man at once. He is to return to England safe and sound. Not a moment to lose. Spare no pains or money. He must return."—Monk.

The car was ready when the coded message had been plainly written out by the trembling hand of the man who realized that he had sent a man to his death for nothing. The cablegram was borne away in the swift-car to the telegraph office. With it went a message from Monk to the superintendent that the cablegram was of the greatest importance and must be got through that night.

(Continued next Saturday.)

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