

"THE GOLDEN FACE" by William Le Queux

Copyright, 1924, by The McClure Newspaper Syndicate

IX—The Man Who Was Shy

SOME months after that curious experience in Sofia, we were guests of some friends of Rayne's called Baynes, who lived at Enderby Manor, a few miles out of Winchester. The reason of our visit was somewhat obscure, yet as far as I could gather it had no connection with "business." So Rayne, Lola, and myself spent a very pleasant four days with one of the most charming families I think I have ever met.

Enderby was a beautiful old place lying back in a great park and surrounded by woods, half-way between Winchester and Romsey, and George Baynes, who had made a fortune in South America, and whose wife was a Brazilian lady, was a splendid host.

One bright afternoon Rayne had gone off somewhere with Mr. Baynes, so I found Lola and we both went for a stroll in the beautiful woods.

For a long time we chatted merrily, and of a sudden I don't exactly know how it happened—but I took her hand, and looking straight into her eyes, I declared my passion for her.

I must have taken her unawares, for she drew back with a strange, half-frightened expression. Her breath came and went in quick gasps, and when she found her tongue, she replied:

"No, George, it is impossible—quite impossible!"

"Why?" I demanded quickly. "I love you, Lola. Can you never reciprocate my affection?"

She shook her head sadly, but still allowing me to hold her soft little hand.

"You must not speak of love," she whispered. "You are an honest man who has been entrapped and compelled to act dishonestly as you do. I know it all, and I know—and she burst into tears. 'I have discovered,' she sobbed, 'that my father is a thief!'"

"We cannot help that, Lola," I said, in deep sympathy at her distress.

"No. Unfortunately we can't," she replied faintly, in a voice full of emotion. "But it would be fatal to us both if we loved each other. Surely, George, you can see that!"

"I don't see it, dearest," I exclaimed, bending and kissing her forehead on the cheek for the first time. We had halted in the forest path, and now I held her in my arms, though she resisted slightly.

"I love you, darling!" I cried. "I love you!"

"No! No!" she protested. "You must not—you cannot love me. I am only the daughter of a man who, at any moment, might be arrested—a man for whom the police would ever in search, but cannot find."

"You will not meet openly. When you've had your drink and he has seen you, you will drive a little way along the road and there await him. He does not wish to be seen with you. He's rather shy, you see!" and the pleasant man who controlled the most dangerous criminal gang in Europe smiledardonically at his instructions, and you will follow them. Take a suit-case with you, for you may be away a few days, or longer."

I wondered what devilry he had now planned. I tried to obtain from him some further details, but his replies were sharp and firm.

"Act just as I've told you, Hargrave. And please don't be so infernally inquisitive." Then, wishing me good night, he turned and left my room.

Next morning we left Enderby by train and returned to Overstow in the late afternoon.

Duperré had gone up to Glasgow upon some mysterious business—crooked without a doubt—so that night, after dining together, Rayne and I played a game of billiards.

While I was turning in, the footman tapped at the door and entered with a note.

Rayne tore it open, and as he read it, I noticed that his countenance fell. A second later I saw that he was extremely annoyed.

He rose from his chair and for a few moments hesitated. Then, in a rather thick voice, he said:

"Show him in." After the servant had gone he turned to me, and in a changed voice said: "Remain here, George. But never breathe a word of what you hear to a living soul! Remember that!"

In a few moments a well-dressed, narrow-faced, bald-headed, rather cadaverous man was shown in. He clicked his heels together and bowed with foreign politeness and with a smile upon his sinister countenance.

"I have the honor to meet Signor Rayne," he asked, with a distinctly Italian accent.

"That is my name," replied Rayne.

"Good! Then you will recognize me, and have named my letter in which I have asked for this private interview to me. You are, I believe, a certain Signor Duperré."

"I have never been to Copenhagen in my life," protested Rayne. "What do you suggest?"

"The truth; one that you know, well, signore, notwithstanding your denials. You are the man known as 'The Golden Face,' declared the stranger bitterly, pointing his finger at him. "You neither forget me nor my name, Luigi Gori, for you have much cause to remember it—you and your friend Stevenson, otherwise Duperré."

ning, and I played him a game at billiards.

In impatient curiosity I waited until next day, when punctually at six o'clock, Signor Gori was shown into a little room adjoining the great hall, and there I joined him in the capacity of a busy man's secretary.

"I much regret, Signor Gori," I said, after we had bowed, "but Mr. Rayne was called to London quite unexpectedly upon some very urgent business. He presents his apologies and asks whether you can manage to meet him in London when it is convenient to you. Will you telegraph to him?" And I gave him the address of Rayne's rooms.

"His apologies!" echoed the Italian, with a very marked accent and a gesture of ridicule. "The apologies of 'The Golden Face'! Ah! my dear friend, you are his secretary; you are not the principal in this serious affair."

"Serious? How?" I asked in pretense of ignorance, and hoping thereby to learn something.

He looked at me strangely, and his manner changed. His dark eyes seemed to search mine, and then next instant he smiled mysteriously.

"I will tell you the truth," he said. "The reason is because I have unwittingly—owing to a little lapse from the path of honesty—been made one of the tools of this man whose marvelous brain controls the actions of dozens of the most unscrupulous and dangerous thieves on the Continent. My suspicions were aroused by something a woman told me in Paris, and for many months I have been unceasing in my inquiries."

And he passed across the hall and rejoined the two smartly dressed guests, crooks, like himself, I supposed.

At half-past eight I called for Duperré's wife at the hotel, and she came down wearing a plain, dark-brown motor coat with a small, close-fitting cap to match. She was, indeed, unusually dandy in appearance.

We went through the crooked roads of Kingston and out through Surbiton towards Ditton.

Presently I pulled up before the big old seventeenth-century post-house in the long, quiet village of Ripley, once noted in the late Victorian craze of the "push-bike" as

"I'm well aware of that. But why are we meeting here?"

"She'll probably tell you," was the fellow's reply, and, at his direction, I turned the car into a narrow side road which ran for miles through woods and coppices until, at last, after passing through two small villages, we came to a wayside station dimly lit by oil lamps.

There we waited for about a quarter of an hour, when the slow train from Waterloo ran in, and from a first-class carriage there stepped a tall, well-dressed girl wearing a rich fur coat and small hat. She was evidently expecting the car to meet her, for she walked straight up to it and entered, being greeted by Madame and Houston, who were inside.

I followed the newcomer and got into the driver's seat, whereupon Madame introduced me.

The moment she opened her lips I knew she was American, and also from her speech and expressions I knew that she was a crook who moved in good society.

"We'll drive through Merrow and over to Hindhead," Houston said. "We'd better avoid the High Street of Guildford, for the police might possibly spot the car. So we'll go by the side roads. I was over there three days ago on a motor-bike, so I'll pilot you."

And then he turned to gossip merrily with the good-looking American girl, who seemed most enthusiastic concerning our mysterious adventure.

"To-night ought to bring us a clear twenty thousand pounds," he said.

"But where are we going?" asked Duperré's wife.

"Going to make an unexpected call upon old Bethmeyer," she replied.

"Bethmeyer!" I exclaimed. "What, old Sir Joseph Bethmeyer, the millionaire whom they call the mystery man of Europe, the man who is said to have a finger in every financial pie all over Europe?"

"Yes, I guess it's the same man," replied our sprightly companion. "He lives at Frenbury Park, a splendid place between Hindhead and Farnham."

What I wondered, could they possibly want with Sir Joseph Bethmeyer, the man who had, it was said, been behind the ex-Emperor Carl in his endeavor to regain the throne of the Hapsburgs, and who was declared to be immensely wealthy, though the source of his great riches could never be discovered.

We drove nearly to Petersfield, and it was considerable past midnight when, on our return, we descended that long hill which leads from Hindhead. Then, after turning off the main road for some time, we came to a narrow lane, which led into a dark wood, where Houston suddenly stopped me and ordered me to switch out the lights.

Scarcely had I done this when two men emerged mysteriously from the shadow, and one of them, addressing Houston, said:

"You're pretty punctual, Teddy! Sam isn't here yet. He's walking from Haslemere."



No, George, it is impossible—quite impossible.

"Of course, George, you will never breathe a word of this—well, this little contretemps—or of its result. When I'm up against the wall I always hit hard. That's the only way. I'm not going to be black-mailed!"

Just before luncheon Rayne was called to the telephone. I was in the room at the time. He apparently recognized the voice, and scribbled something upon the pad before him.

"Will you repeat that?" he asked.

"I want to be quite clear."

"Right! I'll be with you at ten to-night," he replied, and then hung up the receiver.

"I must go to London," he said, turning to me. "You'll drive me into York, and I can catch the four-thirty up. You stay here and meet that Italian chap to-morrow at six, and tell him that I'm up at Half Moon Street. Give him my address, and ask him to see me there. After you've seen him, start in the car for London and carry out the instructions I gave you on Monday."

being the Mecca of the daring cyclist who ran out of London and back.

In the rather dim light of that low-pitched, well-warmed inn parlor, with its wide, twisting chimney corner, I saw four men. One of them, facing the firelight, I recognized from the photographs Rayne had shown me—the man with the moon-stone in his eye.

I ordered my drink loudly, and looked him full in the face. Then, when a few moments later I had drunk it, I wished the barman good-night and went out. Its entering into the village towards Guildford, and there waited expectantly. In ten minutes he came out of the darkness.

"Mr. Hargrave?" he asked, and, after replying, I invited him inside the car, whereupon he at once recognized Madame in the half-light. It was plain that they were known to each other.

"I expected Vincent would be with you. Where is he?" asked the man named Houston.

"He's away. I don't know exactly where he is," Madame replied. "But what game are we going to play to-night?"

"Be careful not to press the button, because when the light is switched on the shot is fired! Only you might require it. One never knows! Come on."

May Cranston walked noiselessly with us, while in front the three men stalked quietly, speaking only in low whispers. Soon we came to a path which led into a great park, which we skirted, keeping still in the shadow of the trees, for the moon, though nearly gone, still shed some unwelcome light. The silence was only broken by our footsteps on the leaves. Silhouetted against the sky was the magnificent old castle-like mansion with many turrets in which dwelt the world's mystery man of finance.

At last we approached quite close to the house, and, crossing the broad terrace, we halted at the direction of our guide who had acted as footman there.

Before us was a row of long French windows. One of these the man known as Sam attacked in a methodical way with a short etel jimmy, and in a few moments he had noiselessly opened it, and while somebody showed a torch, we all entered what was, I found, a long and luxurious drawing room.

"Mr. Hargrave, you remain here!" said the girl Cranston, who now assumed the leadership. "If occasion arises don't hesitate to use your torch. All you have to do is to keep this way of retreat open. Leave all the rest to us."

Then, still guided by the ex-foot-

NEXT—THE HILL OF THE WINDS.