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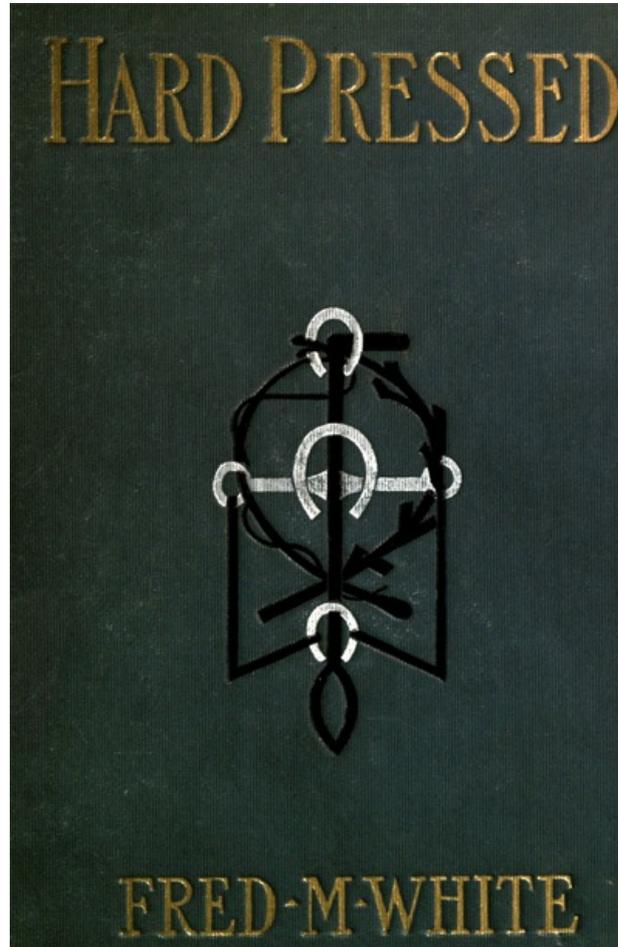
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# HARD PRESSED

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# HARD PRESSED

BY

FRED M. WHITE

AUTHOR OF

"THE CRIMSON BLIND"

"THE CORNER HOUSE"

"THE YELLOW FACE"

ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

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## CHAPTER I

[11]

### A MODERN SPORTSMAN

IT was a gala night at the National Opera House, and the theatre was crammed from floor to roof, for Melba was sustaining a new part, and all London had gathered to listen. It was rarely indeed that so fashionable an audience assembled in February. The boxes were ablaze with diamonds. On the grand tier, however, there was one box which was not filled with gaily garbed women and which attracted attention by the fact that its sole occupants were a girl and two men. Though she was quietly dressed and wore no ornaments except flowers, nevertheless a good many women envied May Haredale; for the box belonged to Raymond Copley, who was quite the last thing in the way of South African millionaires. He was a youngish, smart-looking Englishman of the florid type, was becoming known as a sportsman and, according to all accounts, was fabulously rich. He was supposed to have discovered diamonds in Rhodesia, a stroke of fortune which put him in a position, it was alleged, practically, to dictate terms to the De Beers Company, and those "in the know" in the City declared he had come out of a negotiation for amalgamation with two millions of money in his pocket.

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Be that as it may, he had purchased a fine old estate within twenty miles of London, and lavished large sums upon his racing stud, and people began to court his acquaintance. He was on very friendly terms with his near neighbour, Sir George Haredale, of Haredale Park, which accounted for the fact that the Baronet and his only daughter were availing themselves of Copley's hospitality that evening.

May Haredale ought to have been enjoying herself. She did not have many opportunities for pleasures of this kind, for, sooth to say, Sir George Haredale was a poor man. He had a constant struggle to keep up appearances, and most of his friends wondered how he managed to pay the expenses of his racing stable. But the Haredales had been kings of the turf for a hundred years or more, and Sir George clung desperately to this last vestige of the family greatness. The whole estate was going to rack and ruin, the gardens and grounds were neglected, the conservatories were empty, the carpets and old furniture were faded and worn. But the stables left nothing to be desired. How near they were to the verge of collapse only Sir George himself knew.

He had few rich and influential friends. He did not care for moneyed men, as a rule, and so the old county families were surprised to see the intimacy that had grown up between him and Raymond Copley. They professed not to understand it, but one or two shrewd observers declared that May Haredale was at the bottom of it, and that Copley was over head and ears in love with the girl.

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It would have been strange were it otherwise. She was just the sort of girl to attract a man like Copley. She was tall, well formed and exceedingly pretty, though cold and haughty at the mere suggestion of a liberty.

What she thought of Copley she had never been heard to say. She had not many friends in her own circle. She was perfectly happy and contented so long as she had a good horse and the promise of a day with the hounds. Most people deemed her rather distant and reserved, but a few hinted that May Haredale could be chummy enough when she chose. Others, however, had noticed a great change in the girl during the past two years. There was a time when she had been one of the merriest madcaps, and then, all at once, she seemed to grow up and become staid and dignified. And it was not altogether the weight of family trouble which bore her down, for, as a matter of fact, she had no idea how desperate Sir George's fortunes were.

She appeared on friendly terms with Copley, but, though for the past twelve months he had been a familiar visitor at Haredale Park, he did not think that he was making much progress in her good graces. Clever as he was, the girl managed to keep him at a distance without wounding his pride, and as time went on he found himself more and more infatuated with May Haredale. [14]

He belonged to the class of man who never counts the cost of anything and is ready to go any lengths in the pursuit of a fancy. He thought he had been extremely patient, and told himself earlier in the evening that before the week was out things would have to be settled one way or the other. And he was not without weapons, either. Sir George could have unfolded a tale in that respect had he chosen to do so. The Baronet was proud, but there are times when pride has to take a second place, and such a crisis in his affairs had arrived. May would have been surprised to learn that Copley could at any moment sell the old home over their heads and turn them out to shift as best they might.

She sat with her face on her hand, looking at the stage, but she was not listening to Melba's marvellous voice. Her mind had gone back to a somewhat similar scene two years ago when she was last in the same opera house. How different things had seemed then! How much happier she had been in those days! She roused herself presently to find that Copley was addressing her.

"Oh, I beg pardon," she said. "I suppose the singing carried me away. What were you saying?" [15]

Copley uttered something appropriate. There was a hard look in his eyes as he took in the details of May's fresh beauty. She was just the wife for him. She had a fine appearance and good breeding and would take him into certain houses the *entrée* of which had as yet been denied him. They were going on afterwards to supper at the Carlton, and before he slept that night Copley would know his fate; indeed, he knew it already. He had a kind of instinct that May disliked him. But that, after all, was a small matter. When she learned the truth there would be no alternative. That her dislike might turn into hatred mattered nothing to Copley. He bent down already with an air of possession which brought a faint flush into May's cheeks. She was feeling rebellious.

"You are enjoying it?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I should be a strange creature if I didn't. I have so few treats like this."

"Isn't that your own fault?" Copley returned. "Surely, you must know that if you only liked to say the word——"

A sudden outburst of applause drowned the rest of his speech, but to all intents May heard everything that he had to say. She blamed herself that she had not shown this man earlier that her feelings towards him were merely conventional. And now she would have to make up her mind one way or the other. Copley stood with a smile upon his face, evidently very sure of his ground. A longing to get away, to be alone with herself, came over May Haredale. In a way she was grateful to Copley for saying no more. She was glad when the performance was over and they began to move towards the stairs. Here a stranger bustled up and touched Copley on the arm. As he turned to the intruder his face changed. May thought he looked almost alarmed, but it was a trifle and she only noticed it vaguely. The recollection was to come back to her later. [16]

"One moment, Sir George," Copley said. "Would you mind waiting for me in the vestibule? It is a little business affair which won't detain me five minutes."

Sir George passed on with his daughter, leaving the two men together. Copley turned sharply round upon his companion.

"Now what is it?" he asked curtly.

"Oh, I thought you would like to know," the other said. "I only got back last night. The first man I met this morning in the City was Aaron Phillips."

"You don't mean that," Copley exclaimed.

"I do, indeed. It is a thousand pities I haven't managed to find you before to-day. I have been chasing you from place to place in the most maddening fashion. However, Phillips is here, and so I thought I would come and warn you. No, no, I have made no mistake." [17]

"But the thing is impossible, Foster. You know as well as I do that Phillips was killed——"

"Well, so we imagined. Anyway, the beggar's back again, and there's no getting away from it. And if he is allowed to talk, and we don't square him——"

"Square him! Why, it would cost half a million!"

"Well, suppose it does. Won't it be cheap at the price? Wouldn't it be better for us to plank that money down than be standing in—but you know what I mean. It's a most infernal piece of ill luck,

but, after all, your position is by no means a bad one. You go everywhere, you are eagerly sought after. Besides, who is to know whether you are a millionaire or a pauper? You've got the reputation of being a rich man, and with brains like yours——"

"I can't stop now," Copley said hurriedly. "I have some people supping with me at the Carlton, and it is impossible to put them off."

The other man grinned.

"I understand," he said. "I guessed who the lady was. I'll come round to your rooms at half-past twelve or a quarter to one, and then we can talk the thing over quietly. You can see for yourself that the matter won't keep."

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## CHAPTER II

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### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

MEANWHILE, Sir George and his daughter were waiting impatiently for Copley. As they stood, the fashionable stream hurried by them. The road outside was crammed with cabs and 'buses and motors, for all the theatres were discharging their audiences. The street was one seething mass when Copley joined his friends. They pressed together towards the pavement, and Copley could scarcely conceal his annoyance that his car was not in attendance. He supposed there was some misunderstanding and suggested that it would save time if they took a cab.

"We might have some difficulty in getting two cabs," he said. "One of us had better walk."

"I'll walk," Sir George answered. "I haven't had any exercise to-day, and it will give me an appetite for supper."

May looked up vaguely alarmed. She had no fancy for a drive to the Carlton in the company of Raymond Copley.

"Wouldn't it be better to walk along till we come to the end of the street?" she proposed. "There would be more chance of getting a cab when we are out of the crush."

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Without waiting for a reply she stepped on to the pavement. In his aggressive way Copley elbowed a clear path. The road seemed to be fuller than ever of vehicles. Then there rose the quick cry of a woman's voice, the sound of clashing metal, and before any one could realize it two motors had overturned. Instantly all was confusion, and five minutes later May found herself on the other side of the street alone and presenting a somewhat conspicuous figure in her evening dress and cloak.

She was not frightened or alarmed. She had too much pluck and courage for that. She thought the best thing would be to turn down this dark side street and make her way to the Haymarket.

She walked quietly and fearlessly along, the road getting narrower as she went. She passed one or two men who made audible remarks upon her appearance, but she did not heed them. And, then, almost before she knew what had happened, a man by her side began to pester her with remarks which brought the blood flaming to her face. That the nighthawk was not sober did not tend to improve the situation.

She looked about for some one to appeal to, and with sudden thankfulness heard steps hurrying behind. Next moment she saw her tormentor lying on his back in the gutter with another man standing over him.

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"I am glad to be of assistance to you," the stranger said. "If you will allow me to walk with you as far as the corner of the street I will call a cab. I suppose you got separated from your party and this fellow followed you."

"That is so," May replied. "I cannot sufficiently thank you."

She paused in the midst of her speech, for her rescuer's face was shining out clear and distinct in the lamplight. At the same instant the stranger turned and their eyes met.

"Harry," the girl murmured, "Harry!"

"Well, yes," the stranger laughed awkwardly. "This is rather an unexpected meeting, isn't it?"

May made no reply at the moment. She was studying her companion intently. She noticed how white his handsome face was. There was the suspicion of suffering in his eyes. His dress was neat, but worn and shabby, and yet there was an unmistakable air about Harry Fielden which proclaimed that he had been accustomed to better things. He stood half-defiant, half-smiling, and

yet he held up his head as if he had nothing to be ashamed of.

"Where have you been for the last two years?" May asked.

Harry Fielden shrugged his shoulders.

"It would be difficult to tell," he said. "In the first place, I tried Australia. But things were worse there than they are here. America I could not stand at any price; then I went to South Africa, where I managed to starve. I had one slice of fortune, but was cruelly used by a man I trusted. And now, if it be possible, I am poorer than ever. I am trying to get employment at a stud farm or racing stable. It is the only thing I really know."

May Haredale listened with trembling lips. Raymond Copley would have been surprised had he seen the expression on her face. He might have been uneasy, too.

"I am very sorry," the girl remarked. "Oh, my dear boy, how foolish you have been! To think what you wasted! To think of that beautiful old house!"

"I try not to think of it," Fielden said. "I was all the fool you took me for, and worse. It was my misfortune that I had no one to look after me. When I came into a fine property at the age of twenty-one I had no knowledge of the world. And every blackguard and sponger who came along I accepted at his own valuation. Well, it is an old story, May—a fool and his money are soon parted. But, thank goodness! I never did anything to be ashamed of. I never wronged man or woman and I pulled up in time to pay all my debts. There is nothing left now but the old house, and that I couldn't sell because it is not worth any one's while to buy it. More for the sake of sentiment than anything else I have managed to pay my subscriptions to my clubs. I still have the freedom of Tattersall's and Newmarket, though I have known what it is to sleep out of doors, but not till this minute did I fully realize what I threw away. Ah, we were good friends in those days, May."

May Haredale nodded. It was difficult to speak at that moment, for she and Harry Fielden had been more than friends. They had been brought up together from childhood, and had been together at many a dance and tennis party and many a clinking run with the hounds. Nothing had ever passed between them, but it was a tacit understanding that Fielden and May Haredale would wait for one another.

When the crash came and Fielden disappeared, May had made no sign, but from that time she was more sedate and seemed to have left her old life and spirits behind her.

"I had not forgotten you," she murmured presently. "We must try to do something for you, Harry. I will speak to father. And then there is Mr. Copley. He has a fine establishment near us and one of the largest racing stables in the kingdom. But you don't know him. He is a South African millionaire who has come into our neighbourhood since your time."

"Oh, I have met some of them," Fielden said grimly. "They don't think so much of them out there as folk do at home. I fancy I know the name. I wonder if it is the same Copley I met on the Rand—but, no, that is out of the question. So you think he might find me something to do? You don't know what heartbreaking work it is, seeking occupation and finding none. And I am anxious to work, goodness knows. I am young and strong, steady and trustworthy, and there is no man living who knows more about horses than I do. I wonder if you would mind speaking to this man for me. I've got no pride now. I have had that knocked out of me. But perhaps you would not like me to come down into the old neighbourhood again. You might not care for it."

"Oh, my dear boy," May said reproachfully. "How can you talk like that! You know that there are some friends who were ready to do anything for you. But you would not give them a chance. You disappeared without so much as saying good-bye."

"Well, you can understand my feelings," Fielden answered. "However, I've got to go down to the old place to-morrow, in any case. There are some things in the house that I need, and I shall hope to meet Joe Raffle. It was very good of you to take Joe into your service. It was awfully kind of your father to buy most of my horses. I hope there is a Derby winner amongst them."

"We think so," May exclaimed. "We have great hopes of a Blenheim colt. He hasn't been seen in public since the Middle Park Plate which he won handsomely enough. We think he is the best horse we ever had, and people appear to be of the same opinion. If he doesn't win the Derby I don't know what will become of us. But get Raffle to take you over to Mallow's to-morrow and he will show you the colt. It's only a matter of a few hundred yards, as you will recollect, from our lodge gates to Mallow's stables. Mallow is only a small trainer, but he suits us and is not expensive. I wish you would stay down for a day or two. We shall be back to-morrow night, and my father will be disappointed if he doesn't see you. And now, really——"

"I am sorry," Fielden said. "I have no right to keep you talking here. Come along and I will get you a cab. And if I can manage to stay at the old place over to-morrow I will come and see you. How jolly if one of my colts should win the Derby for Sir George!"

There was a tender smile on May's lips and a dash of colour in her face as she drove presently to the Carlton. Sir George was waiting with fussy anxiety. Copley looked disturbed and rather ill-tempered. They accepted May's explanation. Naturally, they put down her heightened colour and sparkling eyes to the excitement of her adventure.

## CHAPTER III

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### A LIVING FORTUNE

HARRY FIELDEN would have shirked the visit if he could, but there was nobody whom he could trust to go down to the old home and procure the papers he required. He was glad to see Herons Dyke again, but, at the same time, he was half ashamed to meet the old faces. Many would have welcomed him gladly, but he had made an utter failure of his life, and pride stood in the way of meeting these acquaintances.

There was nothing left but the house. Long ago the estate had passed into the hands of strangers. The stables had fallen into decay. The tan track round the park was overgrown with weeds and grass. He was surprised to find himself unrecognized. A dozen people passed him with no more than a casual glance. He had forgotten that two years' "roughing it" had changed him from a handsome boy into a stern, resolute man, with an expression far beyond his age. Even his moustache had altered him. It was true that May Haredale had recognized him readily enough, but that, surely, was different.

He would go as far as Haredale Park Farm and look at the horses. He was all the more ready to do this, because he felt assured he would pass for a total stranger. It was possible Joe Raffle might identify him, but, then, the old head groom had known him ever since he could walk. And now Joe was Sir George Haredale's trusted right-hand man and had been so for the last eighteen months, since the death of his predecessor. It had always been a consolation to Fielden to know that Raffle had gone on to Mallow's, with the stud which had once been his property. They had not been a very brilliant lot and few of the horses had ever paid for their keep; but Raffle believed in the Blenheim blood and had always prophesied that some of the colts would do great things at the proper time.

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Fielden was amused to see the suspicious glances cast at him by more than one of the lads. Presently Raffle came himself, a short, sturdy man, bent with age, whitehaired, but with cheeks rosy as a winter apple. He was about to ask Fielden's business sharply, when his face changed and he led Fielden to one side. The old man was moved and with difficulty held his voice steady, but his keen blue eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"I never expected to see this day, Master Harry," he said. "And one of those lads wanted to order you off the premises. Just think of it! And they told me you were dead. I met a man in London who said he knew for a fact that you were drowned in the Modder in South Africa."

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Fielden's face grew stern for a moment.

"Your friend wasn't far wrong, Joe," he said grimly. "It was a near thing. But that is too long a story to tell now. I came down on business, and I don't know whether I was glad or sorry to find that no one recognized me."

"Miss May would have been glad to see you," Raffle said.

"Oh, we have already met. That was an accident, too. I told her I was coming to-day, and she gave me a cordial invitation to look at the horses. I couldn't resist a chance like that. Well, Joe, I hope that Sir George has done better with the Blenheim stock than I did. I understand he didn't give much for them. I am told he bought the whole lot, lock, stock and barrel, for a bagatelle. And now they say there is a Derby winner amongst them. Is that a fact, Joe? Or is it one of the fairy tales one is always hearing in regard to turf matters?"

Raffle lowered his voice impressively.

"It is no fairy tale, Mr. Harry," he said. "Barring accidents, we are going to win the Derby this year with a colt locally bred and locally trained. It is a Blenheim colt, too, and if you hadn't been unfortunate he would have been yours. He's only once been seen in public yet, and nobody but ourselves knows what he can do. Still, people will get talking and our horse stands at a short price in the betting."

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"I am glad to hear it," Fielden said heartily. "I am especially glad to hear it for Sir George's sake. You know almost as much about the family as I do. You know what Sir George could do with the money. We don't want to gossip, but I know Sir George is a good master to you and that his interests are yours."

"That's true, Mr. Harry. I'd do anything for Sir George, who has been a rare good master to me. But he ain't you, sir, and he ain't the old squire, either. You see, I served under a Fielden from the time I was ten years old till I was close on seventy, and it was a bit of a wrench leaving Herons Dyke. And when I heard you were dead, it seemed to me, sir, that I had nothing else left to live for. I ain't one to show my feelings much, sir, but when I saw you in the yard just now I could have burst out crying like a kid. You ought never to have gone away, sir. You ought to have stayed here and faced it out. But, perhaps, you did well in South Africa. Maybe you have come back with a fortune. I'd like to hear you say so."

"I think I am rather worse off than when I went out," Fielden smiled. "I had a fortune in my grasp, but was robbed by a pair of murderous scoundrels, who will have something to answer for later. And now, take me round and show me the horses. Let me see this Blenheim colt of which such great things are expected."

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Raffle led the way across the fields to the neat yard along the range of stables where Mallow trained for a small owner or two. Whatever the condition of the house and grounds, there was nothing lacking in the stables. They came at length to a loose box a little apart from the rest, and Raffle stripped the clothing off a great raking chestnut horse, showing a skin like satin gleaming in the sunlight. The expression on Raffle's face was almost motherly. His eyes shone as he laid his hand upon the horse's glossy neck.

"There," he said proudly, "look at that! You are most as good a judge of a horse as I am, tell me if he doesn't look all the way a Derby winner. Just cast your eye over those shoulders, look at those quarters. And a real tryer he is, too, and as good-tempered as a lamb. I always knew we should do great things some day with one of the Blenheim colts, but I never expected anything quite as good as this."

A quarter of an hour later the two left the box. So far as Fielden could see, Raffle had not overestimated the chances of the Blenheim colt. If everything went well for the next three months, Sir George's fortunes would be restored and there would be no more poverty at Harefield Park.

Fielden was extravagant in his praise, but there was no answering enthusiasm upon Raffle's part. He was moody and thoughtful. There was something almost guilty in the glance that he turned upon Fielden.

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"What's the matter?" the latter asked.

"No man ever yet did a foolish thing without being found out," Raffle muttered. "Let's walk across the park where we can be alone, because there is something I must say to you. If you hadn't turned up yet, Mr. Harry, it would have been all right, but seeing you have turned up, why, it's all wrong and I am bound to tell you. When you went away, you left your affairs in a muddle. There was money coming to you from Weatherby's, though perhaps you didn't know it, and up to this year they have kept up your subscriptions to one or two races, the Derby amongst others. Oh, I knew it, and I am going to tell you now why I kept the knowledge to myself. The year you went away so sudden you nominated more than one colt for the Derby and, of course, the money was all right. Well, after you disappeared and they said you was dead, nothing seemed to matter and I thought no more about things. Sir George took over your 'osses, and it was only when this Blenheim colt began to shape so well that I began to ask myself a few questions. It was easy to bamboozle Sir George, because he is the worst man of business in the world. And I can prove every bit of it, sir; I can prove every word I am saying. And therefore it comes about that this Blenheim colt—this one that's going to win the Derby—belongs to you, or at any rate he was nominated in your name, which comes to the same thing. I daresay you will ask me why I have done this, and why I kept the secret, and I'll tell you. I really did it for the sake of Miss May. I would do anything for her, anything to put Sir George on his legs again. You see, I thought you was dead and out of the way and, after all said and done, I was doing nobody any harm by keeping my mouth shut. And yet now you have come back home again I feel a bit of a scoundrel."

[31]

"It seems incredible," Fielden exclaimed; "it is a strange discovery for a pauper to make."

"Well, sir," Raffle said doggedly, "there it is, and this wonderful chance is entirely in your own hands, pauper or no pauper."

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## CHAPTER IV

[32]

### A GREAT TEMPTATION

AS yet Fielden could not realize it. The thing was so unexpected he found it hard to grasp Joe Raffle's meaning. He was too conventional to have much imagination. He had not thought it possible that fortune could have devised a method of restoring his old prosperity. But after the first shock of discovery it seemed feasible. Similar things had happened before, though, perhaps, not exactly on lines such as these.

And now the position of things as they were at the time he left was coming back to him. He had a vivid recollection of the night when he first stood face to face with ruin, when he knew that he had come to the end of his tether. For Harry Fielden had not drifted into a mess with his eyes shut. He had known that things were getting desperate and had staked pretty well everything on a certain race and his horse had lost. When things came to be settled up there was just enough to pay his creditors in full. He recalled how he sat down one night with pencil and paper and

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worked out the whole thing fairly and squarely. He had had friends to dinner that evening. It was daybreak before the last hand had been played and Fielden found himself alone to face the dreaded disaster.

How clearly it all returned to him now! He had not felt disposed to sleep, but had gone up to his room in the silent house and refreshed himself with a bath and changed his clothes, after which he had come down to the dining-room again. He had thrown back the curtains and opened the windows to admit the sunshine of a perfect day—the day of his ruin!

But he had done nothing to be ashamed of. He had not disgraced himself, and no friend or tradesman was the poorer for his rashness. So leaving his affairs to the family solicitors, he quietly vanished from the scene of his folly.

He did not know then—indeed, he did not know fully now—that out of a sum of money waiting at his banker's his various subscriptions and racing liabilities were being paid, for it had never occurred to him to withdraw the various orders he had given to his banker.

Obviously Joe Raffle was speaking the truth as to the Blenheim colt, though the other part of the business still remained a mystery. But if he could believe his ears aright, then at that moment he was not an outcast and pauper, but one of the most envied men who had ever set foot upon a racecourse. At the lowest estimate, he was worth five thousand pounds. He could sell the Blenheim colt with all his engagements for such a figure before the day was out. He might return to the old house and restore some of its glories. He might have enough to keep him comfortably, and, above all, acquire a position that would entitle him to go to Sir George Haredale and ask for the hand of his daughter. [34]

This was all very well from one point of view, but there was another side. His prosperity would be Sir George's ruin. Still, the temptation was dazzling, and for a few minutes Fielden was afraid to trust himself to words.

"You have done very wrong, Raffle," he said presently.

Joe scratched his head contritely.

"I know it, sir," he admitted. "I didn't realize how wrong I had behaved till I saw you come in the stable yard, and you could have knocked me down with a feather. But what else could I do? You had gone away and I heard you were dead. I had to believe it, because the man who told me gave me chapter and verse for it, and I felt as if I had lost a child of my own. By-and-by I was comfortably settled in Sir George's employ, having as much money as I needed for my wants, and never, so far as I knew, a single relation in the world. I said nothing about the colt, because I hadn't much opinion of it at first. Then I began to get as fond of Miss May as I used to be of you, sir. An idea came to me one night when I was sitting over my pipe—and, bear in mind, nobody else knew—and that was that, bar accidents, I had a Derby winner in the stable. For Miss May's sake I was willing to do much. There was no chance of anybody finding it out. And, after all, I was doing nothing wrong. You see, in the first place, nobody will be a penny the worse. As to Sir George and yourself, there is no reason why you shouldn't make a large fortune. It makes no difference to me, of course; I am long past troubling about that sort of thing. But now that I know you are alive it is another matter. Still, the colt's keep hasn't been much, and it's only a matter of luck that he don't happen to belong to Sir George. Besides, Sir George is expecting to win a fortune, and he is not the man to grudge you your share. You will have to tell him what I've told you, sir, and if Sir George wants proofs I shall have them ready when the time comes." [35]

"Nobody knows anything of this?" Fielden asked.

"Not a soul, sir," Raffle said solemnly. "Nobody even guesses it, and if you hadn't turned up I should have gone down to my grave with the secret unspoken. Because, as I said before, sir, there's no harm done, and nobody any the worse. But, seeing that you have come back, why, the truth must be told." [36]

"And what will Miss Haredale say?" Fielden asked.

Raffle's face paled perceptibly.

"Ah, well, sir," he said, "that won't be very pleasant. I'd do anything in the world for Miss May, but she isn't you, and that makes a difference. Of course, I know what you would do if you had your own way. You would just say nothing about it and let Sir George put the money in his pocket. You would rather starve than do anything you didn't consider right. I can see it in your face now, I can tell by your eyes. But it isn't going to be, sir. You'll excuse me for speaking so plainly, but I couldn't rest comfortably in my grave if I thought you were in want, when, by every right, you ought to have a fortune in your pocket. It's no use you arguing, Mr. Harry, if you don't tell the truth, I shall."

The old man's voice shook strangely as he spoke. His lips were quivering, but there was an air of determination about him which there was no mistaking. Nobody knew better than Fielden how obstinate Joe Raffle could be. There was nothing to gain by threats, and sternness would be worse than useless.

"I am certain you have acted for the best," Fielden said soothingly. "And, as you say, there is nothing wrong in this little scheme of yours. Why, you might have kept the colt yourself and made a fortune over him. But, to use a pet expression of your own, my dear Joe, what you have told me [37]

has knocked me all of a heap. I must have time to think it over. I should be sorry to spoil an interesting situation like this by doing anything rash. Besides, there is plenty of time between now and the Derby—pretty well three months, isn't it? Has the colt any other engagements before Epsom?"

"Only two," Raffle explained. "And then he'll be an eye-opener to some people. Now don't you do anything foolish, sir. If you go the right way about it you've got a hundred thousand pounds in your pocket."

"Oh, I'll do nothing rash," Fielden laughed. "You needn't be afraid of that. But I must have time to think this matter over. I shall stay down here a day or two, though I had intended to go back to London to-morrow. I don't mind so much now that I find nobody identifying me, and there are several things at the house I want to gather together. I had no idea the old furniture was left. I suppose they didn't sell it because they had no instructions from me, and enough was saved from the wreck to pay my creditors without it. I'll come round in the morning and see you again, Joe. To-night I believe I am dining with Sir George. If anybody asks you who I am, you had better say my name is Field; it sounds like Fielden and is easy to remember. Seeing that I am so changed, nobody will connect me with the old family. Now I must be off."

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In a thoughtful mood Fielden turned towards the old house. He was glad no one recognized him, for the knowledge was likely to make his task all the easier. He had the key of the house in his pocket. The mansion appeared to have been left exactly as he last saw it. There was not even a caretaker on the premises. The estate around Herons Dyke had long passed into the possession of strangers. It presented a striking contrast to the neglected grounds and grass-covered paths which surrounded the old mansion where, for the last three hundred years, the Fieldens had kept open house and dispensed a lavish hospitality. But those days were gone for ever, they would never come back again, unless, perhaps—

"What a chance!" Fielden muttered to himself. "What a wonderful stroke of fortune! And yet, I don't see how I can do it. There is no honourable course but silence."

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## CHAPTER V

[39]

### THE SHADOW OF DOUBT

THERE were many things in the place which Fielden had forgotten. Here were boxes of cigars and cigarettes, while cards still lay scattered about and the glasses had not been removed.

Fielden had learnt much in the hard school of adversity, and he began to realize that he had about him the means to secure a considerable sum of money. Despite the dust and gloom and air of decay, the library was intact. Fielden was surprised at this, for he had frequently heard his father say that the books were valuable. Perhaps it had occurred to nobody to look for rare books in the house of a man who gave himself over entirely to sport, but here they were and possibly a little later they might appear to advantage in a London auction-room. Fielden was not so sanguine as he once had been, but at a modest computation he thought they would fetch at least a thousand pounds.

He went up to his bedroom and began idly turning out the drawers. At any rate he would be able to cut a presentable appearance at Haredale Park. He might venture in the open, too, for it was nearly dark. The lights of Haredale gleamed hospitably as he walked up the drive. He had had no formal invitation, nothing save May Haredale's suggestion, but he knew Sir George well enough to be sure of his reception.

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It all looked strangely familiar as the butler opened the door and asked his name. Fielden knew the butler's face well, but it was plain the latter did not recognize him. Yes, Sir George and Miss Haredale were at home. They had arrived from London late in the afternoon, but, so far as the butler knew, did not expect any guest. Still, so many people came and went to that hospitable house that the advent of a stranger caused no surprise in the butler's mind.

"If you will give me your name, sir," he suggested.

"Oh, tell Miss Haredale that Mr. Field is here. She expects me, because——"

Fielden broke off suddenly, for May Haredale came across the hall at that moment. She smiled a welcome and held out her hand. She dismissed the butler, after giving instructions to him to take the visitor's bag upstairs.

"I was almost afraid you wouldn't come," she said. "I feared you would be too proud or something equally absurd."

"I plead guilty," Harry Fielden smiled. "Really I don't think I should have had courage to come, only I found that not a soul knew me with the exception of Joe Raffle. I have passed a score of

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people to-day whom I know intimately. But it is just as well, May. Why, even Mason, your butler, looked at me as if I were a perfect stranger."

"But I recognized you," May said quietly.

"Ah, you recognized me, and I was glad of that. I don't think I can tell you how happy that made me. When we met in London I felt for the first time for more than two years that I was not alone in the world. It makes one hard and bitter to be always amongst strangers who care nothing for one, to feel that if one dropped dead in the street no one would feel even a pang of regret. But I ought not to be talking like this. There is one thing I am going to ask you and Sir George, and that is, to keep my identity a secret. It is possible I may be here a good deal off and on, and that is why I am going to drop the last two letters of my name and call myself Field."

It was with mixed feelings that Fielden stood by his dressing-table adjusting his black evening tie an hour later. His surroundings were bringing back his boyhood's associations vividly, every object was growing familiar. It was just the same when he came down to the drawing-room and found Sir George waiting him.

Here was a change, at any rate. Those around him daily might not have seen much difference, but to Fielden Sir George had grown old and bent. There were lines of care about his eyes and his manner was painfully nervous. In this old man there was no suggestion of one of the finest sportsmen and most fearless riders in the county. Fielden had learnt much in the light of bitter experience. He knew great mental anxiety when he saw it, and he needed no one to tell him that he was face to face with it now. But Sir George's welcome was hearty. The ring in his voice and the pressure of his hand left nothing lacking in the way of sincerity.

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"Ah, my boy, this is an unexpected pleasure," he said. "I don't think you really know how glad I am to see you. You are almost the only one of the old stock left except ourselves. One by one they have passed away, and of the score of houses where I used to go as a boy there isn't one to-day which is not inhabited by new people. Most of them are sportsmen of a sort, but they haven't the old feeling for it. Well, perhaps I am a bit old-fashioned. And how you have changed! I give you my word for it, I should not have known you from Adam. Yet it seems only the other day that you came into one of the finest properties and proceeded to get rid of it after the manner of your kind. How we missed you! But it is no use crying over spilt milk. I hoped at one time that you and May—God bless me, what am I talking about! May tells me that you don't want to be known by your own name, and that we are to speak of you as Mr. Field. Perhaps it is natural. Now you are here, you had better stay a few days, and I'll see if I can find something for you to do. A friend of mine lives close by, Mr. Raymond Copley. He is new since your time, is very rich, has a fancy to keep a stable, and is looking for some one he can rely upon to take the entire management. He has had one or two men who have robbed him. I am sure I can recommend you; with all your folly and extravagance you never forgot what is due to your name."

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"You are very good, sir," Fielden answered. "The post you speak of would be a perfect boon to me. Besides, it is about the only thing I am capable of doing properly. But who is Mr. Copley and where did he make his money?"

"South Africa, I believe. He is a millionaire with a taste for sport, not exactly what you would call a gentleman, but I believe him to be a thoroughly good fellow. I don't mind telling you, between ourselves, that I am under obligations to him. Things haven't gone very well with me, and I don't know how I should have pulled through if it hadn't been for Copley. He has been very generous and I only wish May could be more cordial towards him. I can't think why she doesn't like the man. It would be a splendid thing for her— But, there. I am rambling again."

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Fielden turned his face aside. He was feeling a strange pain at his heart which he could not account for. But he understood what Sir George intended to convey. Beyond all doubt, Sir George Haredale was under great obligations to this newcomer and was warning Fielden there must be no more nonsense between May and himself. He was telling the latter precisely what his hopes for his daughter were.

Of course there was nothing in it that Fielden could resent. He had had his opportunity and deliberately lost it. It was only during the last twenty-four hours that he realized what his feelings towards May were. If he had not been a fool, he would be rich and prosperous at this moment, with May for his wife.

The strange sensation was with him all through dinner. He tried in vain to shake it off. It was not a cheerful meal, on the whole, for every now and then Sir George lapsed into moody silence and May's gaiety was fitful. The evening dragged on till ten o'clock before Sir George came into the drawing-room with slightly flushed face and eyes that were too bright. May looked anxiously at her father. So here, Fielden thought, was another skeleton in the closet. The discovery was a fresh stab to him. His own selfishness and folly were a reproach. It was a relief when the door bell clanged and the butler announced that Mr. Copley would like to speak to Sir George.

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"Ask him in," Sir George said unsteadily.

Fielden glanced at May. He could see that her face had changed slightly and her eyes grown hard and cold. Then the door opened and Copley came in, big and self-important, with the air of a man entirely at home. There was something in his appearance which jarred upon Fielden, something that aroused a pang beyond mere jealousy. As Copley bent over May Haredale's hand and murmured something which he intended for a compliment, Fielden started back for a

moment.

"This is my young friend, Mr. Harry Field," Sir George said. "Harry, let me introduce you to Mr. Copley. I think I have found the very man you want for your stables, Copley. He is the son of an old pal of mine and has all the game at his finger-tips."

Copley threw a half-contemptuous glance at Fielden and did not hold out his hand, for which discourtesy Harry felt grateful.

"Excuse me a moment," Fielden said. "I have forgotten something. I'll be back presently."

With his head in a whirl Fielden walked into the library. He was fighting hard for the mastery of himself.

"Good God!" he muttered, "so it's that blackguard! What a blessing he doesn't know me by sight! Raymond Copley and May Haredale! Not if it costs me my life!"

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## CHAPTER VI

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### A TRIAL SPIN ON THE DOWNS

HARRY FIELDEN spent a sleepless night and was glad when it was time to come down to breakfast. He congratulated himself upon the way he had restrained himself on the previous evening. He had even forced himself to be polite to Copley, though his one impulse had been to take him by the throat and choke the life out of him. His very presence in a house like Haredale Park was an outrage. He wondered what Sir George would say if he had known the real character of his guest. Possibly Fielden would have spoken freely, had not he remembered what Sir George had said as to the relationship existing between himself and Raymond Copley. Plainly the master of Haredale Park was under the scoundrel's thumb. No doubt he had lent him money, and probably the price of the assistance was to be May Haredale's hand. There had been no mistaking Copley's manner towards her. His air of cool proprietorship had sent the blood humming in Fielden's head and caused it to tingle in his finger-tips. Harry had to smile complacently whilst every instinct in his nature was crying out against the villain's presence. He had only to speak and he knew that Sir George would do his duty at any cost.

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But he dared not speak. He had no desire to ruin the man who had been so kind to him. It was far better to play a waiting game. But come what might, May Haredale should never marry that man. Sir George should be ruined a thousand times over and Haredale Park pass into the hands of strangers before that catastrophe occurred.

It had been a relief to hear Copley say that he would not be down again till the end of the week. Therefore he had three days in which to think of some scheme. It was a bright, fresh February morning, with a touch of frost in the air, but the diamonds were growing soft and yielding to the sunshine. May Haredale was in excellent spirits. It was impossible not to catch the infection of her gaiety. Fielden put trouble on one side. There would be time for that later, he thought, as they rode out together over the Downs. They were out again in the afternoon and it was dark before they returned. It was like old times for Fielden to feel a good horse under him. The exercise and motion drove all gloomy thoughts away. Still, from time to time the shadow of distress lay heavily upon his shoulders.

He strolled round to Mallow's after tea to have a pipe and chat with Raffle. Everything appeared to be going well, and the old man was in high glee.

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"We shall try the colt at daybreak," he said. "Would you like to come and have a look, Mr. Harry? I daresay there will be one or two people about, but I don't think they'll learn much. I've got a plan of my own on foot, and after to-morrow I shouldn't be surprised if you found the colt going a little queerly in the betting."

Raffle chuckled as he spoke, but refused to be more explicit.

"Oh, never you mind, sir," he said. "There are some things it is as well not to talk about. If you like to turn out to-morrow as soon as it is light, I think I can show you something worth looking at."

Fielden nodded approvingly. He woke fairly early with the pale dull light of the wintry morning streaming through his window, crept downstairs into the deserted hall and let himself out by a side door. The grey mist hanging over the Downs lifted as the sun began to make his influence felt. A little later Fielden discerned a group of figures faintly sketched against the skyline, and could see two horses in their clothing. Then he picked out the form of Joe Raffle. There was a stretch of turf between two banks of gorse, and the horses began to move along the flat expanse. Fielden strolled up to the group, and was amused to see the suspicious glances turned in his direction.

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"That's all right, Mr. Mallow," Raffle muttered. "This gentleman is a friend of mine. Now, sir, will you go on to the top of the Downs and wait for us by the boundary stone? That will be the winning post. No reason, I suppose, to ask you if you know which is the colt and which is the old horse. That's pretty plain even in this light."

"That's right enough," Fielden smiled.

He walked rapidly towards the improvised winning-post, unslung his glasses and fixed them steadily upon the little specks in the distance. Presently they made a move in his direction and grew larger as they came along. Fielden could hear the thud of hoofs upon the turf. Then they flashed by him, the old horse lengths ahead. It came as a surprise to the watcher, for he had expected an entirely different result. What was Mallow doing? What scheme had that wily man in his brain? Fielden stepped aside into the gorse, so as to be out of the wind which had already extinguished two matches he had used in his attempt to light a cigarette. As he stooped, he heard voices from somewhere close by. The voices carried clear enough in the silence of the spot, and Fielden could hear every word. With an instinct of caution which he could not have explained he crouched down behind the thick shelter of a bush.

He thought he had recognized one of the voices and now he felt sure of it. It was Raymond Copley beyond a doubt. Who the other man was Fielden had not the slightest idea. [51]

"Now what does that mean?" Copley was asking.

"What does it mean?" the other man exclaimed with a sneer. "Why, it is as plain as the nose on your face. I felt certain what was going to happen when I advised you to come here this morning. The boy told me there was going to be a trial, and I wanted you to see for yourself. You are always too sanguine in these matters, Copley, and that's a fact. Now what do you think of the chances of your friend Sir George's colt?"

"I don't know what to say," Copley muttered. "The colt seemed to be beaten fairly and squarely. I suppose there is no faking about it."

"Faking! Sir George and his trainer between them haven't got brains enough for that. They belong to the old-fashioned school who pride themselves upon doing everything above board. And a precious good job for you and me, because they find the money to keep and train horses and we sail in when it comes to making a book. Perhaps you're sorry you had anything on the Blenheim colt."

"Oh, you were quite right to bring me here," Copley replied. "I owe you one for this day's work. But the worst of it is I have backed that horse for a big stake, just when I don't know where to turn for ready money. If anybody knew my present position, a good many people would be anxious to have an interview with Raymond Copley, the South African millionaire. Then there's that scoundrel Phillips to be reckoned with. But come along, let us go before anybody sees us. After breakfast——" [52]

"Breakfast be hanged!" the other man broke out impatiently. "What's the use of worrying about breakfast with a bit of information like this in our pockets? The delay of half an hour may make all the difference in the world. Besides, there may be a dozen other people watching for all we know."

"Well, what do you suggest?" Copley asked.

"Suggest, who wants to suggest anything? What we have to do is to get back to your place as soon as possible and take the motor straight to town. By ten o'clock we can get our commission on the market at our own price. Then we can have as much breakfast as you like. That's the worst of you, Copley. You always think everything can wait. Now come on."

The voices died away in the distance, and then Fielden straightened himself again. He was somewhat mystified by what he had seen. He was puzzled to know what Joe Raffle and Mallow were driving at. But no doubt the old man would tell him at the first opportunity. Some clever scheme was in the wind. It was just possible, too, that Raffle expected that Copley and his friend would be there. It was more than possible that Raffle knew the class of scoundrel he had to deal with. The old man was coming down the wide stretch of turf, and Fielden looked eagerly towards him. As he vaulted a patch of gorse, his left foot dropped on something soft, like a bundle, and he was thrown violently to his knees. Then he turned to find that he had stumbled upon the figure of a man lying at the foot of the gorse bush, snugly rolled up in a railway rug. Here was another tout, beyond doubt, another of the hateful tribe which has always been the detestation of every racing man. Fielden turned upon him savagely and demanded what he was doing there. He bent over the stranger threateningly, and the latter rose to his feet. [53]

"Keep your temper," he said. "I'm doing no harm. I'm not the only one who has earned a bit on the Downs this morning. Hands off, please. Why, bless my soul! if it isn't Mr. Fielden."

Harry stared in amazement at the mention of his name. For a moment he did not recognize the dark unshaven features of the man. They seemed familiar, yet somehow he failed to connect them with time, or space, or locality.

Then it suddenly came to him.

"Aaron Phillips!" he exclaimed. "Now is it Luck that has sent you here, or Coincidence?"

## CHAPTER VII

[54]

### A LEAF FROM THE PAST

ARON PHILLIPS was standing up with something like a smile upon his face. He was a short, slim person, swarthy and foreign-looking, except for the pair of keen blue eyes which bespoke the Anglo-Saxon in his blood. From the roots of his hair across to his left temple was a long, angry red furrow which looked like a comparatively freshly-healed wound. As to the rest, he was fairly well dressed, with that indescribable air of nattiness which usually pertains to those who belong to the *genus* "horsey."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Fielden," he grinned.

"I shall be obliged if you won't use that name here," Harry replied. "For the present my name is Field, and I want you not to forget it. But how did you manage to get home again? I thought you were dead."

Phillips indicated the scar on his forehead.

"It was a near thing, Mr. Fielden, I beg pardon, Field. It wasn't the fault of those scoundrels, I can tell you. They left me for dead, and if I hadn't been picked up by some of the boys I should have died of starvation on the veldt. As it was, I had a very close shave, and so did Copley and Foster, for the matter of that. Our friends chased them all across the Colony and how they managed to escape was a mystery to me. Still, perhaps it is as well. There are more ways than one of taking revenge."

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The little man's eyes gleamed as he spoke. He glanced meaningly at Fielden and jingled a few coppers in his pocket.

"Make them pay for it, you mean," Fielden smiled.

"That's it, sir, you've got it first time. Now, as you know perfectly well, there are a dozen or more people out yonder who would give a good round sum to have Copley on the end of a rope, or within reach of a revolver shot. They are not the sort to give information to the police, because that is not the way we used to do things. Still, if I like to open my mouth widely enough I could make it deuced hot for Copley & Co. I could have them conveyed to Cape Town, and it wouldn't take me long to find evidence enough to give those two chaps ten years on the Breakwater. Yes, sir, I'd have done it, too, but there's a better way than that. It took me the best part of a year or more to scrape enough money together to pay my passage home. I had heard some queer stories about Copley, and I wanted to find out if they were true. What do I see when I reach London? Why, Copley with a set of offices in the city—Copley with a suite of rooms at a palatial hotel—Copley with a place in the country and a string of race-horses. Oh, I tell you, Mr. Fielden—Field, I mean—I rubbed my hands when I heard of it. Thinks I to myself, 'This is a better game than handing Copley over to the South African police.' I don't quite know yet how Copley has managed it, but here he is ruffling it with the best, spending money like water, and going to marry the daughter of a baronet in these parts."

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Fielden's face flushed angrily. He winced at this home thrust on Phillips' part. So already people were coupling May Haredale's name with Copley. It had not occurred to him that things had gone as far as that. However, Phillips could not be expected to know this. He was merely innocently repeating local gossip.

"I suppose you mean to have some of this money?" he asked.

"If you don't mind my using the expression, I am going to blackmail Copley. I am not afraid of the blackguard here. There is no chance of his trying on any of his murderous tricks in England. He knows I have come back, but as yet I have not waited upon him. I have had a hint to call from Foster, but I am not taking any of that, thank you. You don't catch me dropping into a police trap with a chance of being prosecuted and hustled out of the country before I know where I am. When I do strike it will be in a different way altogether. For the present, I have been looking around asking questions, because, you see, it will be of considerable advantage to me to find out where Copley is getting his money. That he is earning it honestly I don't believe. He couldn't do it if he wanted to. He is the sort of blackguard who would rather make five pounds dishonestly than a tenner by legitimate business."

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"I suppose you never found those plans?" Fielden asked.

Phillips swore heartily.

"Never, sir," he said. "They were in my portmanteau, as you know. I had the portmanteau in my possession when those blackguards attacked me, and they had to levain without it, so closely were they pressed. But when I was well again I asked for my baggage and no one could tell me what had become of it. It vanished in a most mysterious manner. If you ask me, the portmanteau was stolen by one of those thievish Kaffre boys. It makes me wild when I think of it. Probably it is concealed in a Kaffre hut. In the old portmanteau is a scrap of paper which is worth hundreds of

thousands to us. I say us, because it is yours just as much as it is mine. I don't belong to your class, Mr. Fielden, but you played the game and were always a white man. And if those papers ever do come to hand, I shall do the fair thing by you. It doesn't follow because I happen to be the son of a sporting publican that I don't know the difference between right and wrong. But what's the good of worrying about that? We shall never see those papers again, and as far as we are concerned that diamond mine might never have existed. But what are you doing here?"

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"I used to live close by," Fielden explained. "Most of this was once my property. Sir George Haredale's trainer employs an old servant of mine and I came out this morning to see that trial. I might ask you the same question."

Phillips' blue eyes twinkled.

"Bit of a disappointment, wasn't it?" he asked.

"What do you know about it?" Fielden demanded.

"Oh, well, sir, we are not partners in this job, at any rate. If you like to keep your counsel, I am perfectly willing to keep mine. Old Raffle is as straight as they make 'em, but he is a downy old fox all the same, and pretty neatly he drew the feather over Copley's eye this morning. Oh, yes, I heard all those blackguards had to say; in fact, I followed them here. I am glad I came, because I heard something that confirmed my suspicions."

"You mean as to Copley's movements?"

"To be sure. I wanted to know where Copley is getting his money. I know he isn't paying his tradesmen, but that doesn't matter, for a man with a reputation for wealth can get as much credit as he likes. But Copley is flying at high game and must have the command of a good deal of ready cash. Now where does it come from? What sort of a swindle is on? Why were they so anxious to watch the trial of the Blenheim colt this morning? And, by the way, Mr. Fielden, you must give old Raffle a hint to keep his eye on the stable lads. Somebody has been betraying confidence. It doesn't matter this time, because Copley was fooled this morning as easily as if he had been a schoolboy. But I am getting a bit away from the point. I was going to tell you where Copley got his money. Well, it's a betting swindle, one of the biggest and most ingenious that has been attempted on the turf for many a long day. I just heard enough to put me on the track. But I've my work cut out before I reach the bottom of it. You have no occasion to love Copley——"

[59]

"Indeed, I haven't," Fielden said bitterly. "I have every reason for disliking the man, every reason for exposing him before Miss—well, before things have gone too far. If I can help you, I will do so cheerfully."

"That's right," Phillips said approvingly. "Now where can I see you for half an hour in the course of the afternoon? We mustn't stay talking here. There is old Raffle."

Fielden thought it over for a moment or two. He was glad enough to meet this old South African comrade of his again. In several respects Phillips was anything but a desirable acquaintance. His upbringing had been none too strict, but, at the same time, he had a rough code of honour, and it was one of his proudest boasts that he never forgot a friend or a favour. Probably he had had his own reasons for leaving England suddenly, and no doubt those reasons had something to do with the turf. At any rate, he had a profound and intricate knowledge of racing matters, and there was no swindle or trick with which he was not familiar.

[60]

"You had better meet me at Heron's Dyke," Fielden said. "You can be outside in the road about a quarter to five. There is nobody on the premises. I have the key in my pocket, and I daresay I shall manage to get a light from somewhere."

Phillips disappeared amongst the high gorse. As Fielden stepped into the open he saw Raffle looking about for him. There was a shrewd smile on the old man's face, and he did not appear in the least disconcerted by the result of the trial.

"Well?" Fielden asked. "What about your Derby winner now?"

Raffle's eye contracted in a wink.

"It's all right, sir," he said. "The trial was a great success. Did you happen to see anybody in the gorse?"

"Yes," Fielden replied. "I saw Mr. Copley."

[61]

"And a friend," Raffle chuckled. "I know all about it. And between you and me, sir, I got this up for the benefit of Mr. Copley, who is about the greatest rascal unchanged, and that's saying a good deal. It was high time you came back."

## ROGUES IN COUNCIL

**R**AFFLE strode sturdily along, refusing to say another word. What deep-laid schemes the old man had in his mind Fielden could only faintly guess. At any rate it was good to know that Raffle was satisfied, and that some careful plan was afoot with a view to Copley's discomfiture.

"Perhaps you are wise to keep your own counsel," Fielden said. "But I've learnt something this morning, too, Raffle. There is somebody in the stable who is disclosing secrets, and the sooner you know it the better."

"I know it already," Raffle grinned. "It is all part of the scheme. They have got hold of one of the boys, and I am watching him carefully. I let him take away just as much information as I like. Don't you worry about me, Mr. Harry. I haven't been at this game for fifty years without learning a thing or two. I have always made it a rule to go straight myself, but that is no reason why I should keep my eyes closed to the doings of other people."

"Quite right," Fielden said approvingly. "But what do you know about Mr. Copley? He is a stranger in these parts." [64]

"That may be, sir, but he is no stranger to me. I never forget a face, and I've been on every racecourse in the country during the last five and twenty years. The first time I saw Mr. Copley, he was being shown round the stables by Sir George. I didn't like him, and I didn't like his manner, and thinks I to myself, 'I wonder where I've seen *you* before?' Suddenly there flashes into my mind a little incident that happened at Lincoln. I can see it as plain as I can see this book in my hand. And then I knew that Mr. Copley, the African millionaire, was one and the same with the welsher that I had seen half killed at Lincoln a good many years ago. Well, it wasn't for me to say anything about it, because I can find you a score of men to-day, rich and prosperous men, who started life amongst the scum of the racecourse. I have been making a few inquiries amongst my old pals, and it is just as I expected. Mr. Copley may be a rich man now, but he is just as big a scamp as ever he was, and Sir George ought to know it. I tell you, Mr. Harry, it fairly makes my blood boil to see that blackguard swaggering about here and hanging around Miss May as if she belonged to him. It fair spoils my enjoyment and my food, it does. But you see how difficult it is for a man in my position to interfere. But your case is different."

Fielden shook his head sadly. His case was very different indeed. More and more bitterly did he blame himself for the heedless, senseless folly which had brought him to his present pitch. How changed things might have been if he had only shown ordinary prudence! What would he gain if he went to Sir George with these vague stories about Copley? He could not doubt but that Sir George was deeply in Copley's debt, and that Copley had brought this about so that, when the time came, he could force May to marry him. These painful thoughts were uppermost in his mind as he strode back to the house. He could not shake them off, though May rallied him on his quietness and offered him the proverbial penny for his thoughts. [64]

"I know what is the matter," she said gaily. "You are fretting because you have nothing to do. But that won't be for long. Do you know that we are dining with Mr. Copley to-night, and that you have been included in the invitation? Mr. Copley telephoned from London this morning, and you were especially mentioned by name. I am sure if I put in a word for you the post will be as good as yours. Before long you will be occupying an important place in the racing world, and the rest is in your own hands. You have the consolation, too, of knowing that no one has recognized you." [65]

It was on the tip of Fielden's tongue to refuse. It was repugnant to his instincts to take service with a man like Copley. Yet, on the other hand, it was fair enough to fight this fellow with his own weapons. Through him Fielden had lost the chance of his lifetime. But for him and his rascally associates, Fielden and Phillips would have been rich men to-day. Moreover, if something were not done speedily, a fate which was worse than death awaited May Haredale. To turn his back upon a chance like this would be to precipitate the very calamity which he was most anxious to avert. Copley was the type of strong man who always gets his way. He was not the least scrupulous as to his methods, and Sir George Haredale was bound to him hand and foot. It would be far better to seize this coign of vantage, especially as Copley had not the smallest idea of the bitter enemy he was maintaining under his roof. [65]

Meanwhile, Copley and his friend Foster had returned from town. They reached Copley's establishment, Seton Manor, just before dark. They had not lost any time. Apparently they had done their work fairly well, for, according to the late evening papers, the Blenheim colt had receded steadily in the betting. People were asking themselves what had happened. Most of the public knew and respected Sir George Haredale. Not the faintest shadow rested on his reputation, and this fact had had somewhat of a steady effect on the market. But though a certain division had rushed in at these improved prices to back their fancy, there seemed to be an unlimited amount of money ready to be laid against the horse. At any rate, Copley was fairly satisfied. He had invested several thousand pounds against the Blenheim colt, which, in his opinion, was already as good as out of the running altogether. [66]

He came into what he called his library just before dinner and found Foster awaiting him. Both were in evening dress, both exceedingly shiny and glossy, and both carried more jewellery than was in accordance with good taste. The guests were not expected for half an hour, so Copley

helped himself liberally to brandy and soda and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Any letters?" he asked.

"Nothing of importance," Foster replied. "When I left you this morning I went round to see if I could see anything of Phillips. He wasn't at his lodgings, and they said he wasn't expected back till to-morrow. Now what are you going to do about that chap?"

"Oh, let him go to the devil!" Copley growled.

"My dear Copley, why do you always talk like that? Why do you think that every man is a fool except yourself? You appear to be very prosperous. Nobody can deny your courage. And because you are not afraid of Phillips you seem to think he isn't dangerous. I think he is. Suppose he goes to Scotland Yard and lays his information before the people there, and suppose they communicate with the authorities in Cape Town, the result will be an application for your arrest, and once you get out there you know what will happen. It will be all U.P."

[67]

"Thinking about your own skin," Copley sneered.

"Well, and what if I am? I haven't got a sanguine temperament like yours. Of course, we could buy Phillips off; at least we could buy him off for the time being and keep his mouth shut till we devised some plan for getting rid of him altogether. But he is a cunning devil, is Aaron Phillips, and has learnt how to profit by past experience. It is no use asking him to come to your hotel. He isn't going to walk into a trap like that, and he isn't going to wait much longer, either. If we could give him a thousand pounds just to go on with, why——"

"A thousand devils," Copley exclaimed furiously. "Where am I going to get a thousand pounds? I mean, where am I going to get it just at this moment? I've got this place here, which isn't paid for. I managed to get the bank to advance the money till I could complete the purchase, and the furnishing was an easy matter. One can get as much credit as one likes in this country, provided one winks at extortionate charges. As I will never pay for the stuff at all, the West End tradesmen can charge what they please. But the fact remains that though people are tumbling over one another to get my custom I am fairly at my wits' end for ready cash. Of course, it will be all right when the flat season begins in earnest. With any luck there'll be a hatful of money to share between us before the October meeting at Newmarket. We ought to make over a thousand pounds at Mirst Park on Saturday week. I suppose you've got it all ready. Got the telephone in place? The worst of this game is that one has to take so many people into one's confidence."

[68]

"That's all right," Foster explained. "Everything is in its place now. I went down to Mirst Park the day before yesterday. The house is finished and all the workmen have gone. The telephone is in good order, because I tried it. The man who fixed up the extension from the hall to the roof was a bit curious, but I managed to put him off the scent by some lie about the doctor's orders and a patient who had been recommended to try outdoor treatment. But we ought to have a mechanic of our own, Copley. If any hint of our little secret leaked out, the man who fixed that extended telephone would be certain to see it, and naturally he would ask himself a question or two. The fewer outsiders we have to deal with the better."

"There's no doubt of that," Copley agreed. "Then there's nothing to settle now. Did you rehearse the bit in Covent Garden?"

[69]

"Oh, yes. I was in the office we have taken next door to the Post Club, and went through the whole thing with Radley, who was stationed outside. There wasn't a hitch anywhere. I don't see why we shouldn't clear a thousand pounds; indeed, we might make a great deal more. But perhaps it would be just as well to be on the safe side. It would be a fatal mistake to arouse the suspicions of the bookmakers at the beginning, and if this scheme breaks down we've got another one."

Copley smiled as he finished his brandy and soda. He threw the end of his cigarette into the grate as the door bell rang.

"Come along," he said. "Here are our guests. Let us go into the drawing-room and wait for them. We must assume respectability even if we have it not."

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## CHAPTER IX

[70]

### IN THE TOILS

**I**N spite of his dislike of Copley, Fielden could not see much to object to in his manner as he came forward to receive his guests. He was, perhaps, a trifle loud and domineering, perhaps a little too familiar in the way in which he held May Haredale's hand in his. Foster more or less obliterated himself. It was his rôle in company to play the confidential servant. He was quiet and subdued, though nothing escaped his sharp glance. The dinner was excellent. Everything was in

good taste, as Fielden was forced to admit. The talk, for the most part, was lively and was kept principally to the topic of sport. Afterwards there was a move towards the billiard-room, and ere he realized it, Fielden found himself engaged in a game of pool with Sir George and Foster, while May Haredale and Copley looked on. A moment or two later these two vanished on a pretext of Copley's that he wished to show May some sporting pictures he had lately acquired. The pictures were duly inspected, but Copley made no move to rejoin the party.

"Hadn't we better go back?" May suggested.

[71]

Copley turned an admiring glance upon the girl. There was no mistaking the expression of his face. May had more than her fair share of courage, but she was feeling a bit restless and nervous. She was wondering why she disliked this man so much. She had had nothing but kindness and courtesy at his hands. She knew that he had helped her father more than once. Yet her instinct told her that Copley was not to be trusted. There was a boldness about him that repelled her, something in his glittering eye from which she recoiled. Now she knew almost before the words were spoken what Copley was going to say.

"The others are not likely to miss us for a bit," he said. "Besides, there is something I have to talk to you about. To be perfectly candid, I asked you over here this evening on purpose. I wonder why it is that you avoid me so."

"I was not aware of it," May murmured.

"But, indeed, you do. I have noticed it more than once. Surely you must know why I come so frequently to Haredale Park. I am not much of a ladies' man, Miss May, and I never have been. I have led a rough kind of life. I know so little of the atmosphere of drawing-rooms. But every man recognizes, when the time comes, when he meets with the woman who is made for him alone, and that is the point I have reached. I think I could provide you all you need. You will have a fine house and a good position, and everything you want. I daresay this is a rough way of putting it, but it is none the less sincere for that."

[72]

It was sincere enough, as May had to admit. Copley's assurance had vanished. He was speaking from his heart. The man was rogue and scoundrel through and through, but had fallen deeply in love with May Haredale. He was prepared to go any lengths to make her his wife. It was the only piece of honesty and sincerity that he had ever displayed since he was old enough to know the distinction between right and wrong.

May stood silent and trembling. She was not insensible to the compliment Copley was paying her. She knew that he meant every word he said, and she knew, too, that there must be a hard fight before she could convince him that the thing he so ardently desired was impossible. She had an uneasy feeling, too, that Copley had not yet played all his cards. "I ought to thank you, I suppose," she said. "In a sense you are doing me an honour, and this is the first time that any man has asked me such a question, and naturally I feel disturbed. But what you ask of me is quite impossible."

"Why impossible?" Copley asked grimly. "Oh, I didn't expect you to jump at me; I know you are not that sort of girl. Perhaps that is one of the main reasons why I am so anxious to make you my wife. But if there is no one else——"

[73]

"There is no one else," May said with a sorrowful sincerity which was not lost upon her companion. "There is no one else, and there never will be. If it is any sort of consolation to you, Mr. Copley, I shall never marry."

"Never is a long day," Copley smiled. "At any rate, as long as there is nobody else in question I shall feel encouraged to go on. I am a very persistent man, and in the end I always get my own way. I'll ask you again in a week or two, and, perhaps, when you have had time to think it over ——"

"No, no," May said firmly. "There must be no thinking it over. I could not marry you. I could not care for you enough for that and I would never marry a man to whom I could not give myself wholly and entirely. It is the same to-day, it will be the same next year. Mr. Copley, I ask you not to allude to this distressing topic again. If you do, I shall have no alternative but to treat you as a stranger."

There was no mistaking the sincerity of May's words. Her natural courage and resolution had come back to her. She met Copley's glance without flinching. Her little mouth was firmly set. Even Copley, with all his egotism and assurance, knew that the last words had been said.

A sudden blind rage clutched him. His thin veneer of gentility vanished. He stretched out a hand and laid it upon the girl's arm.

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"So you mean to defy me," he said hoarsely.

"Defy you!" May cried, indignantly. "What do you mean? Have you forgotten that you are a gentleman? Anybody would think to look at you and hear you speak that you were playing the villain in some sensational melodrama. You have paid me the compliment of asking me to be your wife, and I have done my best to decline in such a manner as to give you as little pain as possible. You will be good enough to take me back to the billiard-room and not to allude to this matter again."

Copley laughed derisively. He had forgotten himself. The love and passion in his heart had died away to a sullen anger. Never since he had known May Haredale had he felt such a wild longing to possess her. Well, if the girl would have it, then he must speak openly and freely. She must be made to understand that here was her master, whose lightest wish she must learn to obey.

"You don't understand," he said. "I suppose you think you have only to raise your hand and pick and choose. Ah, you are mistaken, my dear young lady. If you don't believe me, ask Sir George. He promised to speak to you on my behalf, but I see he hasn't done so. Probably he shirked it. Now I shall have to tell you myself. Do you know that at the present moment I am master of Haredale Park? I don't imagine you are acquainted with business, but you know that your father is not a rich man. Has that fact escaped you?"

"I am aware of it," May said coldly.

"Very well, then. Where do you suppose he has found the money to pay his racing debts? Do you suppose it dropped from the clouds? During the last twelve months, your father has had from me something like thirty thousand pounds. Even a rich man can't always put his hand on large sums of money like that. And I should have refused to part with the money if it had not been for your sake. But when a man is in love, he is guilty of all sorts of follies and extravagances and when a man like me is in love he does not stick at trifles. Now try to realize my position. Try to realize that if I say the word there is an end to Haredale Park as far as you are concerned. I am not boasting. I could turn you both out to-morrow if I chose, and what would become of you then? Ask yourself the question. You needn't answer it now; you can take time to do so."

May Haredale trembled from head to foot. She had half-dreaded, half-expected this, but the blow was no less crushing now that it had fallen, and she could see from the grim expression on Copley's face that he meant every word he said. She had read of similar situations in novels, but they had sounded cold and unconvincing, and little like the real thing now that she was face to face with it.

"You would never do it," she faltered.

"By Heaven, I would!" Copley cried. "Ah, you do not know what manner of man I am. Why, when you look at me like that, instead of melting I grow all the harder. I must make you my wife. You little know the sacrifices I have made to bring this about. I never thought that I could be a fool for the sake of a woman. I could almost laugh at my own folly, but it has become part and parcel of my very existence, the only object in the world that is worth attaining. Well, it is no use talking, for I could go on in the same strain all night. It is for you to decide. You can please yourself whether your father is turned out of house and home, or whether your prosperous and happy future—"

"Prosperous and happy future," May echoed scornfully. "The words on your lips sound like blasphemy. It seems almost incredible that a man with any sort of pride should stoop to such a trick as this to force a woman to marry him, when, from the bottom of her heart, she loathes and detests him."

Copley jeered.

"Oh, go on," he said. "Let it come out. Treat me as if I were dirt under your feet. But you will think better of it before a week has passed. Tell your father what I have been saying to-night, and talk it over with him. Perhaps he will be able to persuade you better than I can. Let us go back to the billiard-room."

May turned coldly away, but her eyes were dim, and all the world seemed slipping away from beneath her feet.

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## CHAPTER X

### CONFESSION

FIELDEN was not enjoying his game of billiards. It was a favourite game of his, and one which he had not had much opportunity of exercising lately, but he would have given something for an excuse to get out of it. The reason was obvious why Raymond Copley had made an excuse to get May out of the room. His instinct told him what was going on, and if he had had any lingering doubt on the subject it would have been dispelled by the most casual glance at Sir George.

For Haredale had lost all geniality. He became silent and depressed. From time to time he glanced anxiously towards the door. If such a thing were possible to a man of his position, and with a record like his, it might be said that he looked as if he had been committing some crime and was in deadly fear of being found out.

There was no longer room for hesitation in Fielden's mind. There was a conspiracy between Sir George and Copley against May Haredale's happiness. Fielden was boiling. It seemed incredible that a man like Sir George could deliberately become a party to such a scheme as this. And so the game went on, with two people at least not taking the faintest interest in it. Then the door opened and May Haredale entered.

Fielden shot a swift glance in her direction. He saw how pale her face was, how rigidly haughty and set were her features. There were traces of tears in her eyes, but so far as Fielden could see he had no cause to despair. Whatever had been said or done, Copley had not gained much. His face showed that. Defeat was written all over it. He was not the man to put up with disaster without showing it, and Fielden knew in that moment that so far, at any rate, things had not gone well with his host. Sir George saw it, too, for his jaw dropped, and he turned almost a guilty face towards Copley. For a moment there was an awkward silence.

"It is getting very late," May said. "Don't you think we had better be going?"

Haredale looked at Copley as if waiting for a lesson.

"It is not so very late," he remarked.

"Well, it seems so to me," May said. "Besides I am very tired. I am sure Mr. Copley will excuse me."

Copley murmured something more or less appropriate. He was not used to taking the trouble to disguise his humiliation.

"If you must go, you must," he said. "I'll come round after breakfast and see you to-morrow morning, Sir George. I have something important to say to you. Perhaps you will be there, too, Mr. Fielden. I fancy I can put something in your way. I want some one to take a general superintendence of my stables. Sir George tells me you are thoroughly up to the work, and that I can place every confidence in you. You seem to be the sort of man I am looking for, and, though I am interested in racing, I have very little time to spare to look into the details."

[80]

It was hard work to return thanks for this ungracious speech, but Fielden managed it somehow. He was feeling strangely elated, and hoped that nothing of his emotions found expression on his face. He was glad enough to find himself at length seated in the brougham with his friends on the way back to Haredale Park. It was a singularly silent ride, for May never spoke a word the whole time and Sir George was ill at ease. When they reached home May turned to Fielden.

"I hope you will excuse me a moment or two, Harry," she said. "I have something to say to my father. It won't take many minutes. Perhaps you will wait for us in the library. I think you will find everything you want there."

Sir George stood nervously in the hall shuffling from one foot to another. It seemed to take him a long time to get out of his overcoat. He turned to May testily.

"Surely, there is nothing you have to say to me to-night," he said. "It will keep till to-morrow."

[81]

Without reply May turned towards the drawing-room and Sir George followed. He closed the door carefully behind him. She crossed to the fireplace and stood facing her father. Her face was firm, though her lips trembled slightly, and the task before her was by no means a pleasant one.

"I hardly know how to begin," she said. "It is so difficult for me in my unfortunate position. I have never ceased to regret the death of my mother, but I cannot remember feeling the want of her so much as I do now. I suppose you can guess what happened to-night. You know what Mr. Copley said to me."

Sir George shook his head. His attempt to appear unconcerned was so grotesque a failure that, in spite of her unhappiness, May could not repress a smile.

"You are very transparent," she cried. "You make a bad conspirator, father. You know perfectly well what happened to-night. You know why we were asked to dine with Mr. Copley. He has done me the honour to ask me to be his wife. Now don't pretend to be surprised, because Mr. Copley had your full sanction; in fact, he told me he had discussed the matter with you more than once."

"And you accepted him?" Sir George asked eagerly.

"We will come to that presently. Now let me ask you a question. Suppose that your position was as good as it was twenty years ago, that there were no mortgages on the estate. In that case, what would you have said to Mr. Copley if he had expressed a wish to become your son-in-law? You wouldn't have turned him out of the house, because we don't do things like that. But your reply would have been no less unmistakable. You would have made Mr. Copley feel the absurdity of his ambition. He would never have been asked to come here again. Now isn't that so?"

[82]

Sir George shuffled about uneasily.

"Other times, other methods," he answered. "You see the condition of things is quite altered. Really, some of our best women marry rich men who have nothing particular to boast of in the way of pedigree. I can call a dozen cases to mind."

"Yes," May retorted. "And I can call a dozen cases to mind where you have expressed the strongest indignation with parents who have encouraged marriages of that sort. You have

stigmatized the thing as a sale. Why, you refused to shake hands with Lord Middlebourne when he told you that his daughter was going to marry young Blackley. Yet, in the face of all this, you entered into a conspiracy with Mr. Copley, a conspiracy which you must know would be fatal to my happiness."

"You, you didn't refuse him?" Sir George gasped.

"Refuse him! Of course I did. I hope I did not say too much. But I let him know that the thing was impossible. I told him that in no circumstances could I become his wife. I have felt that this was coming for some time, and I blame myself for permitting things to go so far. Mr. Copley took it very badly. He lost his temper. He threatened me. He even went so far as to say that, unless I thought better of my reply, he would turn us out of Haredale Park."

Sir George turned a white and anxious face towards his daughter.

"Did he say that?" he asked hoarsely.

"I have already told you so. But, of course, this is ridiculous. You would never have been so foolish as to place yourself in the power of a man like Mr. Copley. It is very well to know such people, and I daresay you have found him useful in business. But as to the rest—— Why do you look at me like that? You don't mean to say that his story is actually true?"

Sir George seemed to have some difficulty in speaking. When at length the words came they were free enough.

"It is true," he said. "My dear child, you must not blame me unduly. I have been terribly unfortunate of late. Everything I have touched has gone wrong. I am almost afraid to look at my betting book, and if the Blenheim colt does not win the Derby, then I shall be something worse than a pauper. You don't know what hopes I build upon this. If it comes off all right we shall be rich and prosperous. But it has been an awful struggle to keep my head above water so far, and when Copley offered to help me in an open-handed way, I dared not refuse. Of course, I had not the least idea then that he had given you even more than a passing thought. It never occurred to me that he was lending me this money merely to have a hold upon me, and I thought it possible you might care for him. There is always the chance——"

"Oh, you didn't. I cannot believe you would ever think so meanly of me as that."

"Well, I don't know," Sir George said, stung into retort. "Anyhow, it is unfortunate that Harry Fielden should come back just now."

The hot blood flamed into May's face.

"That is unjust and ungenerous," she cried. "In any case, my reply would be just the same. I never did care for anybody but Harry Fielden, and I never will. You know that. There is not the slightest chance of his ever being in a position to keep a wife. But we are talking in a circle. I am more than sorry to hear what you say, but if the worst comes to the worst we shall have to dispose of everything and leave Haredale Park. For nothing shall induce me to marry Raymond Copley."

"Well, there's an end of it all," Sir George said. "This makes a beggar of me. But don't decide like that. Think it over and give me your final answer in the morning."

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## CHAPTER XI

### ON THE EDGE

IF Harry Fielden had hoped to see May again that night he was disappointed. She was tired, Sir George said, and hoped that Fielden would not mind if she did not come into the library. He was a little bit under the mark himself and would go to bed. So Fielden was left to his uneasy thoughts with the hope that he might learn something in the morning. But glancing at May across the breakfast table he could read nothing from the expression of her face. She was a little silent, but otherwise her features were tranquil, and it was not till an hour or so afterwards that Fielden found himself alone with her.

"I hope you are better?" he asked.

"Oh, there's nothing whatever the matter with me," May said in her candid way. "I am only worried, that's all. You have been here quite long enough to see that things are not going with us as they should. It will be a terrible thing if our colt fails to win the Derby. Indeed, I don't know how we shall be able to carry on till the end of May in any case. What a wretched business it all is! How foolish people are to risk their happiness on the speed of a horse! But the Haredales have always been gamblers. I suppose it is in the blood. Put on your hat and take me for a walk across

the Downs. I need something to blow the cobwebs away."

Fielden was eager. For some time he walked in silence by the girl's side, waiting for her to speak. He had a feeling that, sooner or later, May would confide in him. She stopped suddenly and raised her eyes to his.

"I am going to ask you a question," she said. "I want you to put yourself in my place for a moment. Suppose that the honour and fortune of the family rested in my hands, and it was for me to say whether the Haredales were to leave this old place in poverty and disgrace, or whether they were to stay on occupying the old position, what would you do?"

"It depends on circumstances," Fielden said.

"Of course it does, my dear boy. I didn't expect you to make such a tame reply as that. Surely you must know what I mean. It is for me to decide. I have the opportunity of bringing into the family the necessary money to set everything right. But at a price."

"As usual," Fielden, said sadly. "The price happens to be yourself."

"You have guessed it. The price is myself. I suppose it would be no news to you if I told you who the man was." [88]

"Not after last night," Fielden said between his teeth. "So Raymond Copley has asked you to marry him. I suppose it is the old story which one has read in books and newspapers a thousand times. Copley has got your father under his thumb and has threatened to ruin him, unless you consent to be his wife. I am not a very shrewd person, but I felt sure of this when we came home last night. You refused Copley, of course, and he took his refusal in the way such a cad would. He threatened you and said he had your father on his side. And now you are hesitating what to do. You have said that no power on earth shall force you to consent, that you cannot save the family honour at such a price. You are right, May. It is a vile thing to ask of a girl. It is so mean and dishonourable. Heaven knows, I care for your welfare. I never knew how much I did care till we met in London the other night. Then I realized for the first time the price I am paying for my folly. If I hadn't been a fool, you would be my wife to-day, and it would have been my pleasure and privilege to help Sir George out of his trouble. Can you ever forgive me?"

May turned a tearful face towards Fielden. Impulsively she held out her hands to him, and he caught them almost fiercely. They were alone on the wide stretch of Downs. Not a soul was in sight. Neither knew how it happened, but a moment later Fielden's arms were about the girl, and she was crying unrestrainedly upon his shoulder. There was only one thing for it, and that was to kiss the tears away and bring the smiles back to May's lips. [89]

"Now we have done it," Fielden said ruefully. "I am a nice fellow to talk about other men being dishonourable. I ought to be well thrashed for giving way to temptation like this. Fancy a man in my position daring to make love to any girl. But you knew what my feelings were."

"I was sure," May whispered.

"But what are we to do? It would be another matter, I suppose, if it were three months later and the Blenheim colt had won the Derby. Then, perhaps, Sir George would forgive me and make the best of it for your sake. As it is, I have only succeeded in complicating matters. You are resolved, of course, that nothing will induce you to change your mind so far as Copley is concerned. But will you have strength enough to do it, May? I don't think you realize the pressure which would be put upon you when you find that Haredale Park will have to go, when you find yourself in lodgings——"

"Never," May cried passionately. "I refuse even to discuss it. The idea is unthinkable."

Fielden pressed the point no longer. He really had not the heart to do so. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. But it was with mixed feelings that an hour or so later he walked across the fields to Seton Manor. Copley was waiting to receive him. The latter was in his hardest and most businesslike mood. There was something repellent about the expression of his face. The library reeked strongly of tobacco and spirits. From the ruddy tinge on Copley's face he had partaken of more than one brandy and soda already. [90]

Fielden hoped there was nothing in the expression of his face which in any way betrayed his thoughts. Fancy a man like this married to a girl like May Haredale! Copley was braggart and bully to his finger-tips—a man without heart, or conscience, or feeling. Nay, he was worse than this, as Fielden very well knew. For the moment, it was on the tip of Harry's tongue to say he had thought the matter over and had decided to decline Copley's offer. But more prudent thoughts prevailed. It would be as well to be as near Copley as possible, to be on the spot, to act when disaster threatened. Besides, Fielden, to some extent, was in league with Aaron Phillips, and if there was anything in the way of rascality afoot, it might be possible to detect it. It would be a fine thing to go to Copley with the evidence of his rascality in plain black and white, and agree to silence on the condition that this persecution of Miss Haredale ceased.

"Ah! you have come," Copley said in his blunt way. "Well, I have arranged everything for you. I want you to take over the entire management of my stable. The last man had four hundred a year and the run of the house, and I am prepared to offer you the same terms. Everything will be left in your hands. As I told you last night, my racing stable is only a side-show, and I don't want to be bothered with it. You can make a start next week at Mirst Park. I have horses running in races [91]

both days, and I shall probably run down myself. But you know the ropes well enough."

"I think you can leave it to me," Fielden remarked.

"Very well, then, that's settled. You can ask the housekeeper to give you a room. You can have all the meals you want, and the horses will be yours to handle as you like. I must wish you good morning, for I have a score of things to occupy my attention before I motor to town at six o'clock. I think that will do. Good day."

Fielden took his leave, hardly knowing whether to be pleased or not. He spent the next hour or so in the stables, interviewing the stud groom and the helpers, who seemed to know all about the new arrangement. He said little or nothing about it, but was somewhat surprised to find what a poor set of horses Copley owned. For the most part they were little better than platers. There might be a racer or two amongst them, but only for small meetings. The groom was quite open in his comments, and to these Fielden listened discreetly. He was free, presently, to go over to Haredale Park and get his belongings together. He strode across the Downs and passed the wide stretch of turf where the trial of the Blenheim colt had taken place. He was hurrying down the slope when he came face to face with Aaron Phillips. [92]

"I was looking for you," the latter said. "I haven't been letting the grass grow under my feet since we met last. I am beginning to get a hold of the game. We shall be able to make those fellows sit up before long. I suppose you couldn't manage to get away on Friday and Saturday next for the two days' racing at Mirst Park? If you can, I shall show you something that will open your eyes."

"As it happens," Fielden explained, "I am going there. I have just been appointed a kind of general manager to Mr. Copley. I have to thank Sir George Haredale for this. As you can imagine, Phillips, it is not a congenial occupation. But there are urgent reasons why I ought to accept it. We have a horse or two entered for the Mirst Park meeting, and I shall go with them. Now, then, what is it?"

Aaron Phillips' face lightened.

"What a stroke of luck!" he exclaimed. "In that case, I need not detain you now. But I'll contrive to see you on the course, and then I think it will be our turn." [93]

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## CHAPTER XII

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### A LION IN THE PATH

COPLEY did not appear to be so busy as he had professed when he dismissed Fielden so unceremoniously. He lighted a fresh cigar and sat down moodily over a mass of accounts. He pushed these aside presently, and took up a copy of the *Sportsman*, which he proceeded to read with a perplexed frown on his moody face.

"I cannot for the life of me understand it," he muttered. "The trial was fair and square, and I see no reason why the boy's information was not to be relied upon. But that colt is more firmly established in the betting than ever. I can't recollect anything like it. It seemed a dead sure thing to lay that money against the horse. And, yet, though I laid over ten thousand pounds against him, in this morning's paper he is at a shorter price than before. Well, if the public like to be such fools, it's their look-out, not mine. Still, it's unpleasant. I wonder if Foster has learnt anything this morning."

Foster came in a moment or two later. His usual smile had deserted him, and he looked troubled and anxious. [95]

"I wanted to see you," said Copley. "I can't for the life of me understand this betting. Here's the Blenheim colt backed for a ton of money again. Why, in the face of the commission we have put on the market, he ought to be fairly knocked out."

"Oh, I've seen it," Foster replied. "I've sent for the boy. I wonder if that young rascal played us false. But, no, I don't think he would dare do that. Besides, he stands to win a pot of money himself. At any rate, I have sent for him, and if there was anything about the trial that was not fair we shall know it in half an hour."

For the next hour or so the two conspirators sat discussing the matter. Then there came to them a diminutive youth, shrunken and clean-shaven, with the air of one who has passed all his life in the atmosphere of a stable. His little wizened face was white with agitation, and he stood, with his eyes cast to the ground, waiting for Copley to speak.

"What is it?" the latter asked roughly.

"I don't know, sir," the boy said humbly. "I don't know how it was done. Ah, that there Raffle is a deep 'un. I made sure as the trial the other morning was all open and above board, and now I find as how it wasn't the Blenheim colt we saw at all. It is no use asking me to explain, gentlemen, and it is no use bullying me, for the more you do that the more muddled I get. It is only a word or two I 'eard between Raffle and the 'ead lad that put me on the scent. We've got two or three 'osses in the stable as like the Blenheim colt as two peas. They are nearly all the same blood, you know. What old Raffle is a-driving at, I dunno. But it looks as if one colt was changed for another at the last moment, and nobody would have been any the wiser if I hadn't 'eard that little conversation this blessed morning."

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Copley and Foster exchanged glances. It was no use to scarify the boy, for the conspiracy was none of his making, and he was obviously telling the truth; indeed, he had been well paid to bring information to Copley and had nothing to gain by further deception. But what was the meaning of it all? Why had Raffle chosen to bring off a mock trial? So far as Copley knew, Raffle had no reason to suspect the honesty of the stable boy. He could not know that he was in Copley's pay, nor could he have known, either, that Copley and Foster would witness that early morning trial. Could it be that there was some one else in the field whom Raffle wished to deceive? At any rate, whether that was so or not, Joe Raffle had put both Copley and his accomplice in a hole. After witnessing the trial they had laid against the colt to an enormous amount, and, after all, Sir George Haredale's horse might win the Derby. They dismissed the boy with strict injunctions to keep his eyes open and let them know the latest developments. Then they talked the matter over to see if they could find some way out of the trouble.

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"It's a bit of a facer," Copley muttered. "I am bound to confess I never expected anything like this. I wonder what that old fox Raffle was driving at? Whom is he trying to deceive? I'd give something to know."

"What does it matter?" Foster asked impatiently. "Wilfully or not, he has deceived us. As I figure it out, we stand to lose something like five thousand pounds. If that horse starts fit and well for the Derby we shall be in a rare mess. And there's nothing to beat the colt. It would be maddening to be done at the beginning of the season. Fancy having to upset all our plans because of a misfortune like this!"

"Unless we could stop the colt," Copley suggested.

Foster looked keenly across the table at his companion.

"That's not a bad idea," he said thoughtfully. "If the Blenheim colt lost the Derby we should win ten thousand pounds at least. At the price the horse stands in the betting to-day, we could lay another twenty thousand pounds without knocking him altogether out of the betting. I don't call to mind a case in which the public have been more infatuated about a horse. Why, our commission never shook him at all. Suppose, without anybody knowing it, we could guarantee that the horse didn't start. In that case, we could lay a hundred thousand pounds against him, with the absolute knowledge that it would be only a question of time before we scooped up the money. Our Mirst Park scheme is a mere fleabite to it."

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Copley's sombre eyes lighted a little.

"Yes, if we could only do it," he sneered. "But the age for that game is past. There is no chance of hoccusing a horse, or laming him, or bribing a stable boy, or squaring a jockey. That was all very well in the old days, when meetings were few and far between, and we hadn't got an enlightened Press that watches everything as a cat watches a mouse. It's no use wasting time over idle dreams of that sort, Foster. Poor as he is, Sir George wouldn't even hear of such a thing."

"Think not?" Foster asked. "Well, I believe myself that every man has his price. I have never found anything to the contrary. I thought you were a fool to come down here at all. I thought you were a fool to allow yourself to be fascinated by that girl, but now I begin to see a way of turning it to account. I don't suppose she'll marry you. I never thought she would."

The big veins on Copley's temples thickened.

"Stow that," he said hoarsely. "You are going too far. I'll not listen to a word of it. It is no business of yours. If you have anything good to suggest, I shall be glad to listen to it, but I'll thank you to leave Miss Haredale's name out of the discussion."

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"Oh, very well," Foster said sulkily. "But, in this case, one thing leads to another. To gain Miss Haredale you found money for her father when we could have done with it ourselves—indeed, we wanted it pretty badly. Now is your chance to get it back, and more. Sir George can't pay you. He could as easily repay a million. He will find, too, that it is impossible to coerce Miss Haredale into marrying you. Don't get wild. I don't want to introduce the young lady's name more than I can help, but I am bound to speak of her. You will find that she will hold out to the end, and that, if need be, she won't object to leaving Haredale Park. But Sir George will cut up rough when the time comes. He is chockful of family pride. He is the sort of chap who is wedded to the family home, and when the pinch comes you'll find him ready for anything. Of course, he will make a fuss. He will ask you how you dare suggest such a thing to him, but it will come right in the end."

Copley glanced contemptuously at the speaker.

"What are you talking about?" he exclaimed. "What are you driving at? Do you take Sir George

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for an utter fool? Do you suppose that he is likely to scratch a horse he has backed to win or lose everything he has?"

"Well, why not? He backed the colt at a very long price, and I don't suppose he has put down more than a thousand altogether. On the other hand, he owes you at least forty. Suppose you ask him to pay that back at once. Suppose you let him know that if he doesn't you will turn him out of his house a mere beggar. Suppose, if he consent, you offer to wipe out his debt and give him, say ten thousand pounds, the day after the colt is scratched. You needn't do it now; you can wait a month. Then you can put the screw on at once. He'll kick, jib, order you out of the house, but he will knuckle under in the long run. If he doesn't, then I'm a fool and know nothing about human nature. Why, the thing is so easy and perfectly safe not a soul will know anything about it. The colt pulls up lame one day at exercise, he is reported to be coughing, and before the fools who back horses know what has happened the pen has been put through the name of the favourite. You've got the game entirely in your hands. Then we can get our commissions out all over the country and make a fortune without a penn'orth of risk. By Jove! it makes me tremble only to think of it. If the thing is properly worked, we should divide half a million between us. Now, what have you got to say to that? Doesn't it sound right?"

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Copley brought his fist down upon the table.

"By gad," he exclaimed, "I'll do it, Foster!"

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## CHAPTER XIII

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### "AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN"

AS most people are aware, the camp-followers of the turf are a large body whose ways of earning a living are, to say the least of it, peculiar. This noble army numbers folk of all kinds, from the member of a swagger West End club to the humble seller of cards on the various courses. Amongst these, in his place, came Aaron Phillips. If he had been asked, he would probably have said that he was a professional backer of horses, a description which covers a wide field and embraces many methods of getting a living—more or less honestly.

In all likelihood Phillips would have resented the imputation that he was not a sportsman, and have declared emphatically that he was nothing else. He had been connected with racing ever since he could recollect, but had never been across a horse in his life, and would have found it impossible to pick out the good points of an animal. But he was fond of horses in his way. He had heard them talked about for years, and most of the frequenters of his father's public-house were either followers of racing or indirectly mixed up with the "sport of kings." He had been born, too, in the vicinity of a classic course and had always taken the greatest interest in the dramatic side of the turf. There was not an ingenious swindle but he had the details of it by heart.

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For some years before his departure for South Africa he had followed racing from one course to another. Though he had never done anything deliberately dishonest, he was up to every dodge, always seemed to have money in his pocket, and was invariably well dressed. The fact that his mother had belonged to one of the leading Romany tribes Phillips found greatly to his advantage. He was never above passing the time of day with such nomads as he encountered, and more than once had benefited by this politeness. Had he ever wanted a useful and faithful tool, something uncommonly smart in the way of a human ferret, he knew where to put his hand on such a person. Strange as it may seem, there was never a great fraud connected with the turf that was not freely whispered amongst its humble followers long before it reached the ears of the authorities. More than once Phillips had listened to the outline of a story which would have astonished the magnates of the Jockey Club if they could have heard it. And it was by such means that he had managed to pick up the threads of a plot which, before long, seemed likely to promise sensational disclosures. It was an additional satisfaction to Phillips to know that the main persons in this plot were his old enemies Raymond Copley and Foster. He had followed up the clues in his patient way, and at last had something really definite to go upon.

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It might be inferred that Phillips already had these two in the hollow of his hand. But he had learnt patience in the hard school of adversity, and had no intention of throwing away the chance of making money for the mere sake of revenge. At any moment he might have pricked the glittering bubble which Copley had blown, and laid both scoundrels by the heels in gaol, but that would have entailed loss of time and a considerable sojourn in South Africa, without any material return beyond that of triumph over his enemies. Now he was beginning to see a way to crush both Copley and Foster, and fill his own pockets at the same time.

He was not without his peculiar code of honour. Harry Fielden had defended him at one time and he was not going to forget it. Fielden would have been astonished to learn how much Phillips knew about his affairs. He knew, for instance, all about May Haredale. He knew that Copley was infatuated with the girl and was prepared to go any lengths to make her his wife. He knew too,

pretty well what was in old Raffle's mind, and chuckled as he thought of it. And now the time had come to fire the first shot.

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He turned out of his lodgings on a sunny Friday in February, and made his way to Russell Square. He was more carefully dressed than usual and wore a dark, quiet-looking suit, with a grey overcoat and felt hat. His gloves were neat, his boots well polished, and, save the horseshoe pin in his white cravat, there was no suggestion of the racing man about him. He turned presently into Kelly Street, and, knocking at the door of a certain house, asked for Major Carden. The Major, he was informed, was just finishing breakfast, but would see Mr. Phillips.

It was the usual room in a lodging-house—shabby Axminster carpet, dingy horsehair furniture, with the inevitable lustres on the mantelpiece. The tablecloth was none too clean, though on it was a vase or two of flowers, tastefully arranged. At one end of the table sat a stout pink-faced person with a carefully-trimmed grey moustache. He was a typical specimen of the retired military man, bluff and hearty in manner, with a pair of faded grey eyes faintly tinged with pink. Evidently, too, he had been accustomed to mix with the best people, as he would have phrased it himself. Probably, he still belonged to a good club, and no doubt found it exceedingly difficult to make both ends meet.

The second person at the breakfast table was an exceedingly pretty girl, who looked none the less refined and attractive because her black dress was of the plainest. She was chattering gaily as Phillips came in. She appeared to have a proper respect and affection for her father, whose words she seemed to hang upon. The Major looked up from the table and nodded genially.

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"You are punctual, Phillips," he said. "I am afraid I am a little late this morning. Alice, my dear, this is Mr. Phillips. He is the distinguished journalist I was telling you about last night. We are both connected with the same papers."

As the Major spoke, he winked swiftly at Phillips, and the latter smiled. What the Major was driving at he hadn't the remotest idea.

"Oh, yes," he murmured. "The Major and I are old friends."

The girl smiled pleasantly. She appeared a trifle shy, and gave Phillips the impression that she had no friends, and that her young life was, for the most part, a constant sacrifice for her selfish and dissipated father. She rose presently, and with an excuse left the two men together. Immediately she was gone the Major crossed the room and produced a bottle of brandy, from which he helped himself liberally. Phillips curtly refused.

"I met some old friends last night," the Major said. "I am afraid I was just a little—well, you know how it is."

"I do," Phillips said shortly. "But what did you tell that lie for? What have we got to do with journalism?"

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"My dear sir, there are times when one must dissemble. I know I am a bit of an old scamp, but, you see, my daughter doesn't know it. I wouldn't for worlds like her to know the life I am leading. She is a good girl and believes in me, and I have managed to give her a fine education. She is the only thing I have in the world to care for. She is the only thing that has kept me from going headlong to the dogs. I daresay when I am done with, some of my relations will look after her. Meanwhile, they take precious good care to keep me at arm's length. I don't blame them, either. I hit upon the journalistic dodge to account for my late hours. I was afraid you might give me away. I am bound to tell you this, and I hope you will respect my confidence. Well, now, what do you want me for? Sit down a minute."

"I have come to put a little money in your way," Phillips replied. "I gave you a hint of what I was after the night before last. They tell me you are a member of the Post Club."

"Oh, yes," Carden replied. "I have managed, somehow or other, to keep myself on the club books. Not that I go to the Post very much, because I can't afford it. If I meet a young friend occasionally who is anxious to see life, I take him there to lunch, on the strict understanding, of course, that he repays me."

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"Then I want you to take me there. I would like to lunch there to-day, and I wish you to introduce me to Mr. Rickerby, the commission agent. It is a very simple matter. If you can bring this about and get me half an hour's conversation with Rickerby after lunch, I'll give you a tenner and pay for the lunch besides. There's no risk and no responsibility as far as you are concerned."

The Major pondered the matter.

"What are you up to?" he asked presently.

"That," Phillips said, "is no business of yours. But I assure you that I am up to nothing wrong. Nothing I can say or do will get you into trouble. I don't mind telling you there is a big swindle on foot to rob the leading bookmakers and commission agents and I am trying to expose it. If I do, there will be a good round sum of money for me, and if I fail, I shall be none the worse off. Now, are you game?"

The Major smiled. At that moment ten-pound notes were scarce, and Phillips' offer came in the nature of a windfall. But it was not part of his diplomacy to accept the suggestion too eagerly.

"I think so," he said. "I don't see why I shouldn't accommodate you. Perhaps, later, you might have something else to put in my way."

"Very well, then," Phillips replied. "I need not detain you now. I'll meet you at the club at half-past one."

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## CHAPTER XIV

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### THE POST CLUB

THERE are several smart betting clubs in London, but none smarter or more up-to-date than the Post Club. Like most institutions of the kind, it is somewhat mixed and largely devoted to the purposes of gambling. All sorts and conditions of men can be met there, from the magnates of the turf down to small bookmakers. At the same time the subscription is a heavy one and the entrance fee large. It is so large, indeed, that the police have never been bold enough to raid the club, which is conducted on the best principles. Betting on the tape goes on to an enormous extent, and there on most afternoons of the racing season nearly all the chief commission agents can be found. The club premises consist of a billiard-room, dining-room, and smoking-room, the last fitted with several tape machines, which bring the result of the day's racing directly from the course. Great wagers are constantly being made and sometimes enormous bets effected even after the horses have been dispatched by the starter.

Till after lunch the club is very quiet as a rule. On the first day of the Mirst Park Meeting not more than half a dozen racing men were in the dining-room. At a little table near the door sat the Major and his guest, discussing a dainty luncheon to the accompaniment of a choice brand of champagne. The Major was beaming. This was a pastime after his own heart, and seeing that the luncheon was costing him nothing he was doing the thing very lavishly indeed. There was something almost regal in the way he spoke to the waiters. His manner was bland and florid, and, beyond all was the consciousness of the five-pound note in his pocket which Phillips had given him to pay for the repast. They sat for some little time, when the door was flung violently open and a large man in an impossible waistcoat came into the dining-room.

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Full-bodied and scarlet, he had an air of prosperity and in an aggressive way suggested money. Most persons in the sporting world were familiar with that huge personage in the striking waistcoat, for it was none other than Mr. Rickerby, of a firm of turf accountants, who advertised that they recognized no limit. In early life Mr. Rickerby, or Rick, as his friends styled him, had been a butcher. He had failed at that principally because he spent most of his time backing horses or arranging prize-fights. After he had passed through the Bankruptcy Court he began with a small silver book and, having a real genius for figures, together with a striking presence, an enormous voice and amazing audacity which amounted almost to simplicity, he soon made headway in his new profession. In a short time he took a partner who had been a smart accountant, and now had a suite of palatial offices in the Strand, where he kept a large staff of clerks, and where telephone messages were pouring in almost day and night. Rickerby was a leviathan, and though he by no means despised the small fish that came into his net, revelled in big bets and dramatic wagers.

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He nodded to the Major with a mixture of insolent familiarity and fawning politeness. Occasionally the Major was of use to him. Besides, Carden was well connected and Mr. Rickerby had a profound admiration for the aristocracy. He would have passed on only, at a sign from Phillips, Carden detained him.

"Come and lunch with us, Rickerby," he said. "Try this new brand of champagne. Waiter, lay a place for Mr. Rickerby. Bring another bottle. No, on second thoughts, you had better bring a magnum. Rickerby, let me introduce my friend Mr. Phillips. He is just home from the Cape."

Rickerby touched an imaginary forelock.

"Proud to make your acquaintance, sir," he said. "Do you do anything in our line?"

"Well, I have," Phillips said. "I used to follow racing closely enough before I left England. Out yonder, from my point of view, I found something better. Still, there is nothing so fascinating as the great game. I daresay I shall make a wager or two before the season is over. I suppose one can't make bets here?"

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"Not unless you are a member," the Major explained. "The committee are most particular about that kind of thing. They must think of the police. But I've no doubt Rickerby will be glad to accommodate you."

"Certainly, sir," Rickerby said. "Up to any amount you like. The Major's introduction is good enough for me, and a telegram or letter will always receive attention."

Gradually the conversation became more general. Luncheon was a thing of the past, and cigars and coffee had been set out in the smoking-room. Phillips seemed to find Rickerby a mine of interesting information, for he plied him with diplomatic questions. Under the influence of the champagne and brandy Rickerby expanded.

"Swindles, my dear sir!" he exclaimed. "There is no end to them. We drop on a dozen dodges every year of which the public know nothing. Why don't we prosecute? Because it isn't worth while, and the police are not sympathetic. Moreover, why should we let the public know of ways and means by which they might rob us? Ah, I could tell you of one or two men, and big men, too, in some of the West End clubs who would find themselves in a pretty tight place if some of us only liked to open our mouths. But what's the use? Why throw good money after bad?"

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"But don't you get done?" Phillips asked.

"Well, very rarely," Rickerby responded, "but there are others in the club, who seem to me to lay themselves out for that sort of thing. There's a chap here called Selwyn, a rich young Australian fool, who thinks he knows everything. He's just the type of mark that the broken-down racing man prays for. He's in the hands of one or two here who are robbing him of thousands. He's soft enough to make bets five minutes after a race has been run. I've tipped him a hint once or twice, but bless you, it's no use. It is waste of breath to tell Selwyn that the men in whose hands he is are manipulating the telephone or wire and always betting on a dead certainty. One or two of the bets have been offered to me, but I am not taking any. I daresay you may think I ought to expose these people, but I've got something better to do."

"I should like to ask you one question," Phillips said. "Have you noticed by any chance if the people you are speaking about are particularly lucky in their bets on races run at Mirst Park?"

Rickerby looked admiringly at the speaker.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you know more than I gave you credit for, but perhaps you are in the habit of studying this kind of thing. Now I come to think of it, I do recollect hearing it said that Selwyn had dropped a lot of money to these men last Mirst Park Meeting. If you really know anything, Mr. Phillips, I think you ought to say so."

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"Oh, I won't go quite so far as that," Phillips said modestly; "it's only an idea that occurred to me which I was reminded of by something I read when I was in South Africa. But mightn't this be a coincidence?"

"I think not," Rickerby replied, "you could hardly say that of a series of bets in which Selwyn always loses and which are never made till after the race is run."

"Extraordinary," Phillips said. "But I can't see how it can be anything more than a mere coincidence. I suppose you do a tremendous lot of late betting."

"My dear sir, that is exactly what the club is for. Some of us wouldn't be able to live without it. But, all the same, we don't bet a second after the official time of starting."

By this time the smoking-room was filling up rapidly. Two or three score of men had come mainly to hear the result of the afternoon's racing and to make their bets up to the very last moment that wagers were accepted. Phillips, apparently perfectly satisfied with what he had heard, lounged in one corner smoking a cigar, watching the crowd of sportsmen keenly out of the corner of his eye. He seemed to have one glance, too, for the weather outside, which had changed somewhat, for the sky was overcast and flakes of snow were falling. A little later the room was almost in darkness and the whole world seemed to be lost in a white drift. The clock over the mantelpiece pointed to nearly twenty minutes past three. The result of the three o'clock race had been announced, and, so far as Phillips could tell, there had not been one sensational incident in the way of a bet.

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"Your friend Selwyn is evidently not present to-day," Phillips observed, as Rickerby dropped into a seat by his side.

"Oh, yes, he is," the bookmaker retorted.

"That's very interesting," Phillips said. "I wish you would introduce me to Mr. Selwyn. I think a little later I shall be able to show him a way of saving money."

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## CHAPTER XV

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### JOLLY & CO.

PHILLIPS slipped out of the club by and by, and for a while walked up and down opposite, studying the building in which the Post Club was situated. It was a large block of offices on

five or six floors, mostly given over to merchants and dealers whose business was in connexion with Covent Garden Market. Moving up and down as if waiting for a friend, Phillips was making an exceedingly careful scrutiny of the building.

"It isn't as easy as I thought it was at first," he said. "I've got a pretty shrewd idea, for which I have in the main to thank that snowstorm. It is evident that Rickerby is perfectly right, and that there is some cunning plot afoot to rob this Selwyn. I wonder whether Rickerby was alluding to Raymond Copley. It can't be anybody else. Now it is clear the gang cannot make late bets during a snowstorm or thick mist or anything of that kind. I should like to know how they manage to get the name of the winner into the club before the horse is past the post. But that I must leave for the present. The point I have to find out now is how the man upstairs who comes to do the betting gets his information. If there was another block of buildings opposite the club I could understand it, because it would be easy to signal from one window to another. But there's nothing opposite except the Market with a lot of porters hanging about, and I don't suppose they have anything to do with it. The puzzle beats me for the moment. Still, having got so far, it is hard if I can't get to the bottom of it. The signal must come from somewhere in the block of buildings where the club is situated. Well, that gives me something to go on with anyhow, and I haven't much time to spare, especially as I must meet Fielden to-morrow at Mirst Park. I suppose there is only one thing to do, and that is to find out the name and occupation of every firm which has an office under the roof. The first thing I need is a Post Office Directory."

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With the aid of this book he managed to winnow down the doubtful firms to five or six. The rest he found were established houses engaged in legitimate trade, the others being more or less new-comers whose callings were rather nondescript. By a stroke of good fortune, just before five o'clock Phillips obtained the assistance of a clerk in a fruit concern, whose firm was in the block of buildings in which the club was housed, and the doubtful firms were reduced to two. Standing outside looking up at the club, the windows of which were now in darkness, Phillips saw that next door were a couple of windows bearing on their wire blinds the legend, Jolly & Co. There was a light behind the blinds, so that the lettering stood out clear and distinct.

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"I think I am getting on," Phillips commented. "Now, how am I going to find out about Jolly & Co.? It is a bit too dangerous to ask casually for Mr. Jolly. But, stop. Most of the people have left, and it is any odds the light has been used by the charwoman who is cleaning out the offices. It won't do any harm to go up and see."

Phillips put his plan into execution. He came at length to the second floor, and stopped at a door at the end of the passage which led to the rooms occupied by the Post Club. On the door the name of Jolly & Co. was painted in white letters. From behind it came the sound of scrubbing. Phillips entered boldly. The room was furnished as an office. There were a table and a chair or two, and in a corner an American roll-top desk. Beside the desk was a telephone which, from its glittering newness, had not been long erected. Attached to the receiver in the place of the usual short flex was a cord at least eight or nine feet long. It was a small matter in itself, but it did not escape Phillips' keen glance. He wondered what it was for. It was certain that it was not attached to the receiver by accident.

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In one part of the room an old woman was kneeling down scrubbing the floorcloth.

"Is Mr. Jolly here?" Phillips asked.

"No, sir," was the reply. "He went away early. I saw the key of the office hanging up soon after half-past three."

Phillips smiled. He was beginning to understand now. There had been snowstorms most of the afternoon at intervals, and this, no doubt, had interfered with the campaign against the bookmakers.

"That is very annoying," Phillips said. "I particularly want to see Mr. Jolly. I have some very important business with him. Can you tell me where he lives?"

The old woman shook her head emphatically.

"No, I can't, sir," she said. "I haven't any idea where he lives. And, besides, he is mostly a stranger to me."

"He hasn't been here long, then?"

"No, sir. He came last autumn and, of course, I does for him like I do for the other gentlemen. He stayed till about the end of November, then he told me he had to go abroad for the winter. He has only been back about a week."

Phillips thought his time was not being wasted. Everything appeared to be going his way.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but, really, I must find him. It is most awkward, seeing that he is a stranger to me. Would you mind telling me what he is like? If you can give me a description of him I might make inquiries in the neighbourhood. It is possible he may be in one of the hotels close by playing billiards or something of that sort."

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"Well, that's possible," the old woman said. "I know Mr. Jolly is fond of a game of billiards, because my little boy has had to fetch him once or twice. He is young and clean-shaven, looks like a boy almost till you get close to him, and then you can see what a lot of wrinkles he has round

his eyes. He might easily be mistaken for an actor. Dresses very well, he does, except he wears a steel watch-chain."

Phillips gave the old woman a shilling and departed. He had found out all he was likely to discover. He had already moved towards the door when a sudden thought struck him.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "I wish you would let me have the number of your telephone. If I can't come here again I shall telephone Mr. Jolly in the morning."

The old woman intimated that the number was on the top of the telephone, and Phillips made a note of it. Then he went away, on the whole very well satisfied with his afternoon's work. He had yet, however, to verify a certain suspicion, and this he could not accomplish till late in the evening. It was eight o'clock or more before he turned into a public telephone call-office and rang up the number which he had copied in Jolly's office. He was not surprised to find that he received no reply, but it was not a reply he was after. What he really wanted was to get in connexion with the Exchange. He managed this presently. It was growing late, and there was no great pressure upon the office. [122]

"I am sorry to trouble you," he said, "but I can't get anything from this number. Can you tell me if Mr. Jolly has a wire between the office and his house?"

The assistant amiably replied she would ascertain. In a few moments she spoke again.

"No wonder you couldn't get a reply," she said. "Jolly & Co. are not connected with the Exchange at all. We switch them on by arrangement for business purposes, but their wire is a private one. It has only been recently erected."

Phillips drew a sharp breath. He was expecting sensational developments, but this information fairly staggered him.

"I am much obliged to you," he said. "But I am very anxious to get on to Mr. Jolly. You say the wire is a private one. I suppose it goes from the office to Mr. Jolly's own house. Where is that?"

"His place is called The Nook, Mirst Park."

Once more Phillips was taken aback. The whole plot was opening up before his eyes. Many important matters remained to be cleared up, but he felt he was getting on with a vengeance. [123]

"I didn't know where he lived," he said, "but many thanks for this information and all the trouble you have taken. Would you mind putting me in connexion with the Nook?"

The assistant was still obliging. For the best part of five minutes Phillips stood there with the receiver at his ear, and the longer he had to wait the more satisfied he appeared to be. Then, presently, the thin voice at the other end of the wire began to speak to him again.

"I am very sorry," she said. "But I have rung half a dozen times and can't make anybody hear. Probably they have left the receiver off the instrument. I can try again presently."

"A thousand thanks," Phillips said. "But I won't trouble you. I'll call round at the office in the morning. What a stroke of luck! Now for Mirst Park."

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## CHAPTER XVI

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### THE NOOK

ON second thoughts, Phillips deemed it more prudent to remain in town overnight. There would be no difficulty in reaching Mirst Park to-morrow in time to open his campaign. Besides, when he came to think it over there were a good many things yet to be done. He ate his modest dinner in his modest lodgings and then sat down over a cigarette to think out the result of his day's work. The more he cogitated the more satisfied he was with his rate of progress.

He had got past the age when a man burns for revenge and that sort of thing. He infinitely preferred to make Copley smart and put money in his own pocket at the same time. As for his diamond-mining adventure, he expected to hear no more of that. He had been robbed of his precious plans and had no hopes of seeing his missing portmanteau again, but, like a prudent man, he was not inclined to cry over spilt milk.

He had thought it all out before morning, and shortly after ten o'clock set out to call upon Major Carden again. To his surprise he found that the Major had already breakfasted and was making preparations for going out. A big fur coat was carelessly thrown across an arm-chair, and Phillips smiled when he saw it. Probably the Major had struck a prosperous line. Possibly some of the ten-pound note had been laid out at an adjacent pawnbroker's. [125]

"I didn't expect to see you this morning," the Major said genially. "Most infernally cold, isn't it? Looks like snow, too. Still, one must take the rough with the smooth when one goes racing."

"So you are going racing?"

"Well, I had thought of it. I don't often get the chance of treating myself, and my idea was to run down to Mirst Park this afternoon. You're going, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, I am going down on business. But I wanted you to stay in town and do a little commission for me."

The Major's florid face fell.

"That is very awkward," he muttered. "You see, I promised to take my daughter with me. She is fonder of that kind of thing than I am, and the poor child seldom has an outing. In the old days of my prosperity Alice had her own horse, and deuced good across country she was. Can't you manage to put it off till to-morrow, Phillips? I shall be greatly obliged if you can."

Phillips reflected for a moment.

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"Very well," he said. "I daresay it can be managed. I will see you on the course this afternoon and let you know what my address is. If you are discreet and cautious over this little matter there is a fair sum of money in it for you. You can drop me a note to-night, because there is no pressing hurry, and you can get the information this evening or early to-morrow. What you have to do is to go round to the Post Club and find out all the heavy bets which were made there with Selwyn in connexion with to-day's racing at Mirst Park. You must let me know with whom the bets were made and who made them. I think that is all. But I shall see you on the course later, and if anything crops up in the meantime I shall let you know."

There was nothing to prevent Phillips from making his way to Mirst Park. Half an hour later he took train from Waterloo and, arrived at his destination, proceeded to look out for lodgings. He had his own reasons for preferring rooms to an hotel. He needed to keep himself as quiet as possible. This matter satisfactorily settled, he turned his steps to the course, which was as yet practically deserted. There was little to indicate that a race meeting was in progress, excepting the shows and roundabouts and booths outside the stands and paddocks. There were the usual loafers picnicking on the grass, the usual litter of torn betting-tickets and papers scattered far and wide. Phillips passed along, looking eagerly about him. He wanted somebody who could give him certain information. He stood on the centre of the course, some four or five hundred yards from the ring. He appeared to be admiring the landscape, which was pleasant enough under the brilliant sunshine, though this was interspersed now and then by ominous-looking clouds which seemed to threaten snow later.

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As most people know, Mirst Park course is situated in a kind of theatre, with rising ground behind the stands, so that it is possible for everybody to obtain a perfect view of a race from start to finish. Peeping out of the trees here and there were a few good-class houses, one of which, standing higher than the rest, towered over the top of the grand stand. There was the suggestion of a smile on Phillips' face as he adjusted his racing-glasses and made a close inspection of the house in question. He could see that it possessed a flat roof with a parapet around it. Phillips was still intent upon his examination when a policeman with a fine air of detachment strolled by.

"The best natural course I have ever seen," Phillips said with enthusiasm. "Have you got many like this in these parts, officer?"

"Not that I know of," the policeman said. "I suppose you have never been here before."

"I am from South Africa," Phillips said. "We've got nothing like this out there. I should like to have one of those houses yonder. It must be nice to sit in your own house and be able to watch all the races, especially in weather like this. Now there's that place at the back of the stand. I suppose you know who that belongs to. Some man with money, I expect?"

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"I can't tell you, sir," the policeman replied. "I've lived here most of my life, but that house yonder has been empty for a long time. I understood it was taken by some Colonial gentleman last autumn, but I don't think he has been in it yet. Of course, I don't know for certain, because my beat is on the other side of the Common, and I am only on duty here on race days."

"Just so. What is the name of the house?"

"Let me see," the policeman said, reflectively. "Oh, I know. I think they call it The Nook."

The officer passed on, and Phillips replaced the racing-glasses in their case. Fortune was still on his side. He made his way through the woods up into the road which ran in front of the houses, and came at length to a pair of iron gates with the name of the house, The Nook, painted on them in gilt letters. The place appeared to be fairly well looked after. The paths were trim, but, so far as Phillips could see, there was little traffic through the gates and no sign whatever of wheels, either of cabs or motors. Peering through the shrubs, he noticed that the windows were fitted with curtains and blinds as if the house were inhabited. There was, perhaps, some risk in what Phillips was about to do, but he was prepared to take the consequences. He walked briskly up the drive until he came in front of the house. Most of the blinds were up. He saw evidences of refinement and luxury in the blinds and curtains, though it struck him as rather significant that the gardens had not had much attention bestowed upon them. Phillips hesitated before ringing

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the bell. It was an old-fashioned bell, with a drop-handle, and he could hear it clanging through the house with a hollow sound which suggested emptiness. As he expected, no reply came, though he rang two or three times. It was impossible for any one to see into the living-rooms, for the house was built upon a slope and the front door was approached by a flight of steps. Just as Phillips was turning away a man emerged from behind a belt of shrubs, followed by a truculent-looking bull-terrier. He looked like a gardener, though there was in his appearance that faint, intangible something which suggested a close familiarity with the turf. He eyed Phillips sourly and suspiciously, and none too politely requested to know his business.

"Are you employed here?" Phillips asked.

"Yes, I am," the man growled. "I am the gardener. And there's no one at home, if you want to know." [130]

Phillips' assumption of annoyance was artistic. He turned away impatiently.

"Then Mr. Ronaldson is not here now?" he asked.

"Never heard the name," the gardener responded.

"But he used to live here. I knew him well in South Africa. He gave me his address two years ago and asked me to look him up if ever I came to England. I suppose he has gone somewhere else then. Do you happen to know the name?"

"No, I don't," the gardener said sulkily. "We've only been here a few months, and my master hasn't come into the house yet. He's a stranger, too. You had better make inquiries in the village."

Phillips expressed his thanks. He had found out pretty well all he wanted to know, and felt that if this repellent person had entertained any suspicions they were lulled to sleep by this time. He stood examining the repulsive-looking bull-terrier. He alluded to the animal's points approvingly. He spoke, too, as a man who knew what he was talking about. One or two remarks elicited the assent of the gruff gardener, who smiled slightly.

"Yes, he's a good dog," he said. "And capital in the house."

"Keeps the burglars away," Phillips laughed.

"Oh, I daresay he would if I left him here. But I don't live on the premises. I only look round to see that things are all right. I believe the servants are coming in next week." [131]

"But why not have a caretaker?" Phillips asked.

"Oh, there's no occasion for that. They're more trouble than they're worth."

Phillips nodded and walked leisurely away.

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## CHAPTER XVII

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### A FAIR DAY'S SPORT

AT Mirst Park there was not very much for Fielden to do. The horses he had brought with him were a moderate lot, and, in the words of the stud-groom, there was not a racer amongst them. With his intimate knowledge of horse-flesh Fielden wondered why Copley kept such an indifferent stable, and where he got his animals. They were even worse than the ordinary run of equine rubbish usually foisted on the millionaire whose ambition it is to figure as a patron of the turf. Perhaps the whole thing was a blind. Perhaps the stud at Seton Manor was merely intended to cover Copley's rascality in another direction. At any rate, Fielden watched the first two races with mingled feelings of contempt and amusement. He had seen his employer's horses figure in both in the sorriest fashion, and till the four o'clock race was free to do as he pleased.

It was strange to move about the paddock, by the weighing-room and on the stand, rubbing shoulders with a score of men whom he knew well. The course was familiar to him, too. Were the past two years but a dream, and had he never left the scene of his former recreations? But no one recognized him. He strolled about listening to the roar of the betting-ring and the cries of the multitude, or threaded his way in and out among the horses. He even spoke to one or two jockeys whom he had once known, but none seemed to identify him. [133]

Despite the crowd and the horses, the ladies on the stand and the members in the enclosure, however, it was a lonely business, and his face lightened as he caught sight of May Haredale seated by herself on one of the stands. He made his way eagerly to her side. She turned and smiled upon him. There was a healthy flush on her face. Her eyes were sparkling, and yet there was a suspicion of anxiety about her which Fielden had noticed more than once lately.

"Why are you alone?" he asked.

"Oh, it has only been the last few minutes," May explained. "We have a colt running in this race, and my father has gone to give instructions to his jockey. By the way, how badly your horses have cut up to-day. No, I am not particularly interested in this race, and I haven't so much as a pair of gloves on it."

"Then what do you say to a stroll?" Fielden suggested. "It is cold, and we look like having another fall of snow. I couldn't see the three o'clock race for the snow. Positively I hadn't the faintest notion what had won till I saw the numbers go up. Let us walk across the course to the starting-point and back. We shall have plenty of time."

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May consented, and soon they were beyond the enclosure and past the white posts and rails towards the patch of gorse across the Downs, where the starter was already fidgeting about on his cob. Away from the noise and excitement of the ring the flush faded from May's face, and her eyes seemed inexpressibly sad.

"What's the matter?" Fielden asked anxiously. "We all change as we grow older. I suppose I am different from what I used to be. But I don't like to see you so quiet. It is so foreign to your nature, May. There was a time when you were all laughter and sunshine. Oh, dear, what a fool I have been, to be sure. How different things might have been if I had only had a little common sense. You don't know how I blame myself."

"Were you altogether to blame?" May asked. "I don't think so. You had no one to look after you from the time you were at school till you came into your property. You were merely a boy then, and you behaved like one."

"Oh, I know, I know," Fielden sighed. "But that's all past and done with. But don't talk about me. I am far more interested in you. I hope nothing has happened to increase your anxiety. You know what I mean."

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May looked irresolutely at her companion.

"I ought not, perhaps, to tell you," she said. "I ought not to tell anybody. But, then, well, you are Harry Fielden, and I have known you all my life. If you didn't care for me quite as much as you do, if I had not cared for you—but, there, we need not go into that. It is my father who has worried me. It is extraordinary what a change has come over him lately. He used to be so kind to me, to let me do as I liked, and even when we were so poor that we didn't know where to turn for money he was always happy and cheerful. Why, a few months ago he would have laughed at the idea of my marrying a man like Mr. Copley. Now he is almost eager for it."

Fielden made no reply for a moment. A wave of indignation came over him. He caught his lip between his teeth and bit it fiercely. A year or two ago he would have smiled at the suggestion that Sir George would sanction a match between his daughter and a man like Copley. But during the hard and bitter months of his wanderings he had learnt some amount of cynical wisdom. He was no longer inclined, as he had been in the old days, to take every man at his face valuation. And, no doubt, when the pinch came, Sir George was just like the rest. He would speak loudly enough of his willingness to give up the old house and live in humble lodgings rather than have any slur cast upon his honour. But it would be different when this pretty theory came to be put to the test. Fielden forgot all about the racecourse. He heard nothing of the shouting crowd. The horses streaming to the post conveyed nothing to his eye.

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"I want you to be candid with me," he said. "Is Sir George putting pressure upon you to marry that blackguard?"

There was something so vehement in Fielden's speech that May looked at him in astonishment.

"Surely you are going too far," she said. "Mr. Copley is not a gentleman, of course——"

"I tell you, he is a scoundrel," Fielden interrupted. "Believe me, May, I would not have spoken unless I had been bound to. That man is not fit to go into any respectable house. I cannot say more than that at present, because the secret is not altogether mine. But this much I tell you: Had there been no such person as Raymond Copley I should be a rich man at the present moment. I know that, but for the merest accident, there would be blood on that man's hands. You must not marry him, May. You must not give him the slightest encouragement. When I think of your associating with that rascal my blood boils. If the worst comes to the worst, I must tell Sir George what I know myself. It is with the greatest reluctance I entered Copley's employment; indeed, I only did so because there are certain things I want to find out and this seemed to provide a favourable opportunity. Otherwise, I would rather get my living by selling race-cards and sleep under a furze bush. But do you mean to say your father really insists on this?"

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A rush of tears filled May's eyes.

"That is what it comes to," she rejoined. "It is only the last two days that I have noticed such a change in my father. Harry, do you think it is as bad as he says it is? He tells me that unless I consent to marry Mr. Copley we shall be ruined and be turned out of the house without so much as a penny. It seems incredible. I can't understand a man with an atom of self-respect who would compel a girl to marry him against her will. It isn't as if I were rich, or intellectual, or beautiful."

Harry thought he could understand. Indeed, any man could understand who looked down into

the pretty, pleading, anxious face that was turned up towards Fielden.

"There is no accounting for people like Copley," he said. "He is the kind of man that has not an atom of consideration for anybody but himself. He has no heart or conscience, and the more unattainable a thing is the more he longs for it. He cannot win you; therefore, you are the one thing in the world that he passionately desires. God help the woman, however fascinating and beautiful, who becomes Copley's wife! It would mean years of brutality and neglect and self-contempt. You mustn't, May. I understand the duty you owe to your father, but no man has a right to exact such a sacrifice as that. Don't you think I had better see Sir George and give him a hint of the sort of man Copley is?"

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May shook her head resolutely.

"I am afraid that would do more harm than good," she said. "I must fight my battle alone, Harry, and if you interfered my father might forbid you Haredale Park. He has already hinted that, if you had not come home again, I should have been willing to become Mrs. Raymond Copley, and if I were not allowed to see you I don't know what I should do. There is nobody else I could confide in. But I will let you know how things go on. We had better go back. I feel better for this confession."

But it seemed a hopeless business, and Fielden's face was sad and gloomy as he strode alongside May towards the stand.

Ah! but hope was not dead yet.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

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### AN EVENING VISIT

FOR once Sir George Haredale did not seem to be in the least pleased to see Fielden. He was standing on the lower steps of the stand talking to Major Carden with the air of one who is conversing with an old acquaintance. By Carden's side was his daughter, eager and interested, following all that was going on around her with the zest and enjoyment of a child.

"Oh, here you are," Sir George said fussily. "I was beginning to wonder what had become of you. Carden, this is my daughter. Major Carden and I were at Eton together. We used to do a good deal of racing before you were born."

The Major took off his hat with a flourish.

"Charmed to meet the daughter of my old friend," he said, "charmed. Ah, those were pleasant days when one had youth and strength and a banking account which appeared to be inexhaustible. Now I deem myself fortunate if I can steal a day off occasionally to get down to a suburban racecourse. Let me present you to my daughter. My dear Alice——"

"But I know her already," May Haredale cried. "We were at school together. I had no idea that my father and yours knew one another. I am so pleased to see you again. Father, Alice Carden was my greatest friend all the years I was at Eastbourne. We parted promising to write to one another regularly, but somehow or another we have never corresponded. But now that I have met you I won't lose sight of you any more. Major Carden, you really must let Alice come and stay at Haredale Park with me. I want her for a long visit."

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Carden professed himself to be delighted, and this in all sincerity. He began to see visions of a snug and comfortable time, away from dingy lodgings and vilely-cooked food to which he had never become accustomed. The two girls paired off, and the Major strolled towards the paddock gates, for he had noticed Phillips there, evidently waiting for a chance to speak to him.

"Got any instructions?" the Major asked.

"Nothing fresh," Phillips explained. "I want you to do exactly as I asked you, and if you can manage it this evening, after you get back to town, so much the better. I have written my address on the back of this card, and it is possible I may be here for two or three days longer. I want you to find out what wagering there was to big money with Selwyn at the Post Club to-day, and wire to the address on this card. It is more than probable that, before the week is out, I may be able to put a good thing in your way. I suppose I can come round and see you whenever I like."

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The Major thought that would be all right. It would be just as well, perhaps, to get his daughter out of the way. With diplomacy he might contrive to expedite the invitation to Haredale Park, so that he could have the ground clear without fear of interruption. He returned to the place where his daughter was waiting for him.

At a sign from Phillips, Fielden came forward.

"Well," he asked, "how are you getting on?"

"Splendidly," Phillips replied. "I have been far more fortunate than I anticipated. We will get some fun out of Copley and Foster yet. From your point of view I daresay you may think I am wrong. But I mean to make money out of this. I will expose Copley and fill my purse at the same time. You wonder what I am driving at? Can you manage to stay here over to-morrow?"

"I think so," Fielden said.

"That's good. In that case we can push our investigations farther and, with any luck, before the week is out we shall not only know where Copley gets his money, but how he makes it. Of course, we know that he doesn't even begin as a millionaire; we know that he is an unscrupulous adventurer. But he has the command of ready money, and we wish to know how he makes it. As a matter of fact, I know that already. But there are a few weak points in my case, and we can't make a definite move till these are cleared up. Now I want you to have dinner with me in my lodgings. I told my landlady I might have a friend staying with me, and she will be ready to put a bedroom at your disposal."

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"Why this mystery?" Fielden asked.

"Oh, it is no mystery. I only want to interest you. After dark we shall indulge in a little quiet burglary, that is, if you don't object."

"It is not an alluring prospect," Fielden said.

"Of course it isn't," Phillips agreed. "But when you are dealing with scoundrels it is necessary to use their own weapons. I presume you are as interested as I am in the exposure of Copley and Foster and all their methods."

"Up to the hilt," Fielden said between his teeth. "Poor as I am, I would give all I possess to bring that about. I would give five years of my life to manage that between now and Derby Day. And if necessary I can find some money. I am better off than I expected, but I intended to keep the money for a start in life later. Still, if you want it and will promise to put it to a good use, I will give you every farthing cheerfully. You have only to say the word."

Phillips chuckled.

"Oh, there's no occasion to do that, sir," he said. "Keep the money in your pocket. I shall have enough and to spare before long. I mean to drag Copley's plunder from between his teeth. I will take all I can get from him, and when the time comes we shall drop a hint in the proper quarter, and there will be an end to Raymond Copley. Within three months you will see that man in gaol. You needn't be alarmed for Miss Haredale. She is as safe from that man as if she were the daughter of the King. I had better be going, because it is as well that we should not be seen talking together for too long. I have scribbled my address on the back of this card, and shall expect you about half-past seven."

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Fielden asked no more questions, but returned to his friends with a vivid sense of curiosity. He listened to Major Carden's flamboyant talk, and as he bowed to Alice Carden could not help thinking what a pretty and refined girl she was. He made his excuses for not returning to Haredale, and was faintly amused to see how relieved Sir George appeared to be.

"No, I can't get back to-night," he explained. "I have several things to do here. But I hope to see you on Sunday, if I may be allowed to come over."

"Of course, you may," May smiled, as she held out her hand. "Miss Carden is coming to stay with me to-morrow. I have persuaded her to come at once. I am ashamed to have neglected her so long."

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Fielden finished his business, saw the stud-groom and the horses safely on the rail, and then went to the retired part of the village where Phillips' lodgings were situated. It was little more than a cottage, but the place was neat and clean, and the cooking left nothing to be desired.

"It is only a bit of fish and a steak," Phillips said cheerfully, "but you will find it beautifully served, and as to the wine, well, I got that myself, and I know it is everything it should be. Please sit down and make yourself at home. We can discuss matters over our cigars. There's nothing like racing to give you an appetite. I only hope it won't snow before morning."

"I hope not," Fielden said. "To all intents and purposes the racing was spoilt this afternoon by the snow, and it is very odd that no one saw a yard from start to finish of the three o'clock race. It was most annoying."

"Was it?" Phillips asked. "Well, I confess I didn't find it so. Yesterday at the time of the three o'clock race I was at the Post Club, and, singular to say, we had the same blinding snowstorm in Covent Garden. Now it surprises you, but from your point of view and mine that snowstorm was the most fortunate thing that could have happened. When I sat smoking my cigar in the Post Club there came to me the inspiration of a lifetime. I seemed to see in a flash exactly what had happened, and soon I shall know to a dead certainty. You must restrain your curiosity for a little longer. You will probably know all about it before you go to bed. Try one of these cigars. They are excellent."

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Fielden had hardly got his cigar aglow before the landlady came in with a telegram, which

Phillips opened eagerly. There was a smile of triumph on his face as he handed it to Fielden.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

"I can make nothing of it," Fielden said. "It is a wire to the effect that no important wager was made this afternoon on the three o'clock race at the Post Club, and is signed Carden. I presume that is our stout friend with the florid face and ingratiating manner, who was talking to you this afternoon. But how it helps us I haven't the ghost of an idea."

Phillips rose and threw his cigar in the fire.

"Come," he said. "It is time to start. You haven't much longer to wait."

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## CHAPTER XIX

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### THE EMPTY HOUSE

THERE was just enough moonlight for Phillips' purpose, but not enough to render his task dangerous. Fielden asked no questions, partly because he deemed it would be useless, and partly because he did not wish to spoil what appeared to have in it the making of a dramatic adventure. His spirits were rising, and he was looking forward keenly to something in the way of enterprise. He and Phillips had been in more than one tight place together, and he had every confidence in his companion.

They made their way along the main street in silence, and came presently to the deserted racecourse. There was very little evidence of the afternoon's sport, nothing but a few partially dismantled tents and booths, and the extraordinary remnants of reeking humanity that always haunt a race meeting.

They went across the heath, and by and by Phillips pulled up in front of the avenue to The Nook.

"This is the place," he said quietly.

"Oh, is it?" Fielden asked. "Perhaps you had better tell me before we go farther who lives here."

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"That is precisely what we've come to find out," Phillips said coolly. "I've got a pretty shrewd notion, but that isn't good enough for me. I've told you that there's a gang of clever swindlers in England who have put their heads together to rob the betting ring of an enormous sum of money. Operations began last autumn, but the flat-racing was nearly finished, so that they did not make quite such a haul as they had anticipated. Still, they made enough to keep themselves in luxury all the winter and to find the necessary funds for carrying on the campaign in the spring. It is a big combine, and unless something is done to stop it, these people will make colossal fortunes. Mind you, one or two of the large bookmakers have a suspicion, but up to now they haven't been able to prove anything. Indeed, without egotism, I may say they would be powerless without me. I got some vague idea of the scheme three years ago from a man who is now dead. Then when racing began again this year I fancied I could see a trace of the same idea in this business. I knew I was right when I discovered that Copley was operating on a large scale. I lunched at the Post Club with a member who gave me an introduction to Rickerby, the financial agent. You remember him?"

"I ought to," Fielden said drily. "Goodness knows, his firm had enough of my money. But go on."

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"Well, I pumped Rickerby. I don't mind telling you that I went to the Post Club on purpose. He has been pretty hard hit. He believes he has been the victim of a swindle, and he is right, though it was no part of my policy at the time to tell him so. He can't very well refuse to take big bets, even when he feels there is something underhand going on. Only a short time ago he was hit for some thousands of pounds by one of the gang, and, moreover, had to pay the money."

"This sounds very interesting," Fielden said, "but what has it to do with our present adventure?"

"Oh, I am coming to that," Phillips went on quietly. "You see, these bets are always made in the same way. One of the conspirators, who is actually a member of the Post Club, strolls into the smoking-room some five or six minutes before—well, we'll say before the three o'clock race. He hangs about till the horses are about finishing and then, in the most casual way in the world, makes a bet. Now, mind you, this bet is booked before the race is finished, as a careful comparison of the time shows. Yet the horse has won, and the man in the smoking-room of the Post Club knows it before the judge has given his decision."

"Impossible," Fielden exclaimed.

"I know it seems impossible, and twenty years ago you would have said the telephone was

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impossible, and people would have scouted the idea of wireless telegraphy. But they both came, like the phonograph and other wonders."

"Oh, that's all very well," Fielden smiled. "But you are not going to ask me to believe that this thing is done by thought-reading or anything of that sort? You won't tell me that this famous member of the Post Club is a clairvoyant who sees the race finished while it is being run? Because, if that were the case, the favoured person would have no need of a syndicate to help him; he would do it all by himself."

"I am not suggesting anything of the kind," Phillips said. "There's nothing occult about the business. The thing is capable of explanation, and I am in a position to give it, except for the finishing touches, which make this dodge almost a work of genius. I know who is at the bottom of it, I know who is working it, and I know how the information is conveyed to within a few feet of the tape machines in the Post Club. But how that information is filtered to the man inside is the thing that beats me at present. But so much I have found out. In the very next office to the smoking-room of the Post Club is a firm who call themselves Jolly & Co. Now Jolly & Co. only took their office last September or October. There is not the slightest sign of any business being done there, because I have been in the office myself. Taken in conjunction with what I have told you, it must strike you as an odd thing that this mysterious Jolly & Co. shut up the office and went abroad last year after the flat-racing was over. Probably Jolly & Co. went off to make a bit in the Riviera, or Egypt, or some other fashionable resort where fools and money congregate. It is an odd thing that during the January meeting at Mirst Park Jolly & Co. should turn up again and resume operations in Covent Garden. Now I called to see Mr. Jolly. He had left his office, but I guessed that before I called, or I shouldn't have ventured. The first thing I saw was a telephone with an unusually long flex to it. I don't quite understand why this flex is so long, but I can make a shrewd guess. It cost me an hour or two and plenty of hard thinking to get farther in my investigations, but I found late in the evening that Jolly & Co.'s telephone was a private wire leading from Covent Garden to his residence at Mirst Park. Now do you begin to understand?"

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Fielden shook his head.

"It begins to smell suspicious," he said. "I am bound to confess it looks very like a deep-laid conspiracy. But I must confess myself too dense to follow it."

"Oh, it requires explanation. But luck favoured me in my investigations, and I managed to pick up a good many unlooked for clues. Still, the fact remains that from this house here to an office next door to the Post Club there is a private telephone. Now a child would admit that no one would have a private telephone from here to an office in London, at a cost of something like a hundred and fifty pounds a year, merely for the sake of sending domestic messages. I came here to have a good look at The Nook, as this house is called, and I found, not altogether unexpectedly, that nobody was living here. I was told by a gardener that the tenant had not yet taken possession, though it has been furnished for some time. I had rung the bell a few times, and when the man came professed I had called to see some one who used to live here. Considering that it is supposed to be a fully-furnished house, that bell made a great deal of noise. I am ready to bet that the house is practically empty. At any rate, I have come here to find out for myself, and as I believe there is nobody on the premises our task ought not to be difficult."

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"I don't like it," Fielden said. "It smells very much like burglary, and if we were discovered we should find some difficulty in giving an explanation which would satisfy the police. Isn't there any other way?"

Phillips waved the suggestion aside impatiently.

"You can go back if you like, sir," he said. "As for me, I will see this thing through. We might never have such an opportunity again. And, besides, I want to have a look at that telephone. I think we shall find something that will open our eyes. I am not in a position actually to prove it, but I am convinced that Jolly & Co. will be found to be part and parcel of Copley and Foster. Now you understand why I am so anxious to enter the house. Still, if you prefer to remain outside and leave the matter to me——"

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"Oh, no," Fielden said hastily. "Having come so far I won't turn back. I am taking it that you are correct in thinking the house is empty."

"Of course it is, there is no question about that. The gardener told me so, and I see no reason to doubt his statement. I wouldn't miss this chance for anything. Even if I get nothing out of it, I should like to know how this swindle is being worked. But come along, we are wasting time. There is enough moonlight to help us without using lights, which is so far fortunate. It may be a little awkward for you, connected as you are with Copley, but it is all in the game."

"Lead on," Fielden said curtly.

They turned into the avenue and came presently to the front of the house. Somebody had evidently been in since Phillips' visit, for all the blinds had been pulled down. Then they walked cautiously round, looking for a weak spot where they could effect an entrance.

## INSIDE

THE adventurers managed to squeeze through a scullery window, the latch of which had not been secured, and a moment later were in the house. As Phillips had surmised, the place was empty. There were, however, cooking utensils in the kitchen, a quantity of plates and dishes and glass, with two baskets containing a small supply of cutlery and silver. Floorcloth had been laid down on the kitchen floor and a carpet in the hall, and there were carpets on the stairs, but three of the four living-rooms on the ground floor were empty. But the fourth room was comfortably furnished. A fire was still burning in the grate, and on the tiled hearth Phillips detected the ends of two or three cigarettes. There was a faint aroma of tobacco on the air, not the sort of tobacco likely to be consumed by a caretaker.

"It is just as I told you," Phillips chuckled. "I felt sure we should find the house empty."

"Yet you are not altogether right," Fielden replied. "Somebody has been here recently, and somebody who knows how to appreciate a good cigarette. Besides, look at that fire. I don't like it, Phillips, and wish we were well out of it. We don't happen to be in South Africa now." [154]

"Oh, that's all right," Phillips said cheerfully. "No doubt the fire was lighted this morning by the gardener, and no doubt also one of the conspirators has been here. In fact, I should have been disappointed if I hadn't found traces of him. It isn't necessary for our friends to come often, but they couldn't very well work their scheme unless they were on the spot when racing is taking place at Mirst Park. I wonder what our friend thought of the snowstorm about three o'clock. I guess that must have upset his calculations a bit. Now look at this."

Phillips bent down to the fireplace and lifted one of the cigarette ends, which he handed to Fielden.

"Do you know anybody who smokes these?" he asked.

"I think so," Fielden said after close inspection. "They are particularly expensive cigarettes, and can't be had unless specially ordered. The only man I know who smokes them is Raymond Copley."

"Precisely. And you may bet your boots this is one of his. At any rate, it is a curious coincidence, and tends to confirm what I have already told you. I should be greatly surprised if Copley were not here this afternoon. Now let us get a bit farther. There is nothing to detain us after we have examined the telephone. I am afraid we shall have to use a match, but, then, we are bound to take certain risks." [155]

By the aid of a box of vestas the telephone instrument was found in the hall. It presented no special features. It appeared to be the kind of hanging instrument to be seen in hundreds of offices and private houses.

"Nothing remarkable about that," Fielden said.

For the moment Phillips made no reply. He fetched a chair from the kitchen and mounted it. After the expenditure of two or three matches, the ends of which he was careful to deposit in his pocket, he broke into a smile.

"Ah, I expected something like this," he said. "There is an extension to this instrument. If you look in the angle of the wall you will see that it goes up to the ceiling. To tell you the truth, I am glad to find this, because it bears out what strikes me as a very plausible theory. I was rather disappointed to find the telephone here at all. But now I can understand why it was placed in this particular spot. We have a cunning lot to deal with, and it was to be expected they would not do things like other people. Let us go upstairs and see how far this extension goes. To the roof, unless I am mistaken."

The exploration proved troublesome, but the extension was traced to the second floor and thence along the ceiling, where it finally disappeared through a skylight which gave on to the roof. An iron ladder was attached to the skylight, and Phillips pointed out to his companion that the ladder appeared to have been regularly used. The iron rungs were worn bright, the sides were clean and shiny. [156]

"Come along," Phillips whispered. "We must get out on the top. But be cautious and display as little light as possible. I daresay we can manage with a solitary match."

They found themselves on the roof presently. By feeling about they could trace the flex of the extension to a square wooden box screwed down to the leads. The box did not appear to be locked, and it was easy for Phillips to fumble about inside it until he drew out a cylinder of gutta percha with something glittering at either end.

"Stoop down and light a match," he whispered, "and hide the flame under your coat. Now, then, bend down here. That's right."

The match burst into flame under cover of Fielden's coat. The feeble light displayed another telephone receiver attached to the end of a somewhat long flex.

"You can blow out the match," Phillips went on, "and don't forget to put the end in your pocket. It is just as well to be careful when dealing with such a gang. Perhaps you begin to understand? You don't know, I expect, that this roof commands the whole racecourse, and enables one to see everything from start to finish. Now a man could sit down here on this box and watch the race with the telephone receiver to his mouth. If he were a really good judge of racing—I mean, if he were any good as a judge of a finish—he would be able to spot the winner in nine cases out of ten fifty lengths from home, and therefore, if there was some one at the other end in the office of Jolly & Co., the result of a particular race would be known in London before the horse was past the post. Do you follow?"

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"Yes, that's all very well," Fielden objected, "but that does not account for the fact that——"

"That the information is conveyed in the smoking room of the Post Club. Of course it doesn't. That, I confess, is where I am beaten for the present. I am certain that a second later the confederate in the Post Club knows what has happened. Don't ask me to tell you how the final touches are put on, because I don't know. But, knowing as much as I do, we shall soon find out, and I think you will admit that we haven't wasted our evening. You understand now why either Copley or a confederate was here this afternoon. The man, whoever he was, came with the intention of sending the result of the three o'clock race to Covent Garden. Why the three o'clock race is always picked out for this swindle we don't know, but that will be made plain sooner or later. They didn't make anything yesterday or to-day, because on both occasions the race was run in a snowstorm. It was the snowstorm that first put the idea into my head; in fact, it was the snowstorm that led me here at all. And now, let us go back to my lodgings and discuss the matter over a cigar."

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The telephone receiver was replaced in its box, the lid shut down, and the investigators began their descent to the lower rooms. They had not forgotten to be cautious and walked as quietly and carefully as if the house were occupied, which was, perhaps, as well, for as they reached the first-floor landing there came the scratch of a match downstairs. It was only a slight noise, but in the empty house it boomed loudly in the ears of the explorers. The match had been struck to light the gas, for a moment later the hall blazed up brightly, and Fielden and his companion, looking over the banisters, saw two men in the hall.

"Have you made up a fire in the dining-room?" one of them asked. "You haven't? Well, do so at once. I am half frozen. It's precious poor fun motoring from London on a night like this. Did you bring in the hamper?"

Phillips started at the sound of the voice.

"This is awkward," he whispered. "I wish to goodness we had gone five minutes sooner. It will be worse for you than for me if we are found out. Did you recognize that voice?"

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"Copley," Fielden muttered. "I'd give something to be out of this. The other man is Foster, of course. I wonder what ill luck brings these fellows here to-night. Still, as all these rooms are empty they are not likely to come upstairs. But they mean to stay, or Copley would not have been so fastidious about the fire."

"They are going to make a night of it," Phillips replied. "Judging from that remark about the hamper, they have brought supper with them, expecting somebody else, very likely. Well, there is nothing for it but to wait. If we could only put out the gas in the hall we might have a chance. We can slip down while they are at supper and leave by the way we came. We must have that gas out."

"They would only light it again."

"Not if I plug the burner. I'll go and look for a piece of wood. It is likely the carpenters have left some behind: they generally do. If I can find a piece about four feet long, the trick will be done."

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## CHAPTER XXI

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### THE EAVESDROPPERS

TO Fielden, waiting, it seemed that Phillips was a long time away. While he stood looking over the banisters he learned that the fire had been made up downstairs. With grim amusement he watched Foster open the hamper and take from it certain delicacies which formed the foundation of what promised to be an exceedingly good supper. There were sundry bottles, too, with gold foil about the necks, and when the hamper had been emptied Foster repaired to the kitchen and presently reappeared with a tray laden with plates and dishes, the requisite number of glasses and knives and forks, and a tablecloth. Judging from the smell, Copley was smoking in the dining-room whilst his accomplice was preparing the supper. Matters had progressed thus far when Phillips stole gently back, carrying a long very thin slip of wood from a broken board, the

end of which he had whittled to a fine point.

"I've found it," he said. "If I lean over the banisters I can jam the point of this stick into the eye of the burner, and put out the gas. They won't be able to light it again for a while. Is it safe?"

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The sudden pop of a cork was heard.

"Sounds like it," Fielden whispered. "I think Foster carried in everything and they are at supper. Now is your time."

Phillips leant over the banisters, and at the second attempt thrust the sharpened end of the long strip of wood into the eye of the burner. There was a feeble flicker or two, and then the whole place was wrapped in darkness. He was only just in time, for almost on the same instant Foster came out of the dining-room. They heard him muttering that the gas had gone wrong, and watched him, faintly outlined by a match, strive in vain to light the gas once more. After the third attempt he abandoned the effort with an oath and went back to the dining-room. Straining their ears, the two men on the landing could hear Copley's reply.

"Choked up with dust, I suppose. But never mind so long as we are all right. Sit down and eat. I daresay those other fellows will be some time yet."

Phillips whispered in his companion's ear.

"I think we shall be safe. What do you say to creep away now we have the opportunity? Or would it be worth while to stay outside the dining-room and listen to what they're talking about? It is pitch dark, and we can slope at any moment."

Fielden was feeling reckless. It did not matter what happened. Without further ado they tiptoed into the hall where, by the aid of the intense stillness and a door ajar, they commanded all that was going on. Copley sat at one end of the table, facing Foster at the other. For some time the two men ate steadily with an appetite sharpened by their drive through the cold air. When the meal was finished Copley pushed his chair aside and strode over to the fireplace. Would Foster remove the supper things? He had begun to gather the plates and dishes together when Copley stopped him.

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"Oh, never mind the things," he said impatiently. "Let the man remove them in the morning. He can finish up what is left. We have more important matters to attend to. Take a cigar and sit down by the fire. What is the next move?"

"We have had cruel bad luck," Foster replied. "Who would have expected to have two race-days ruined by snowstorms? A prophet could not have foreseen anything like this. I reckon we have lost twenty thousand pounds the last two days."

"It's a bad start," Copley answered. "We didn't have the luck, and we haven't made the money. I was on the roof yesterday and to-day, and I declare to you I couldn't see a single incident in the race. I've never seen two such blinding snow showers. It was simply maddening to stand there and feel a fortune sipping through your fingers, all on account of the snow. And that's not the worst, Foster. It will be another month before there will be two days' racing at Mirst Park, and we can't count upon a single penny till then. I tell you frankly I don't know where to turn for ready cash. It's all very fine to have tradesmen breaking their necks to get my custom, but that doesn't fill my purse with the needful. It's very odd that a man in my position can procure almost any article of value he pleases, but when it comes to raising a bit of cash everybody's suspicions are aroused at once."

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"Well, philosophy won't help us," Foster said. "We must annex some ready money to carry us over the next month, at any rate. The same ill luck can't happen at the next meeting. Such a coincidence couldn't happen twice. Don't forget that if we can manage to hang on for four weeks we shall make enough to carry us on to the Derby, and after the big race is run we shall be in clover. If you work your cards properly the Blenheim colt is bound to lose, and with this knowledge we can lay against the horse as long as anybody is fool enough to take our bets."

"I haven't forgotten that," Copley said. "Of course, I haven't spoken to Sir George about it yet, but I have asked him to dine with me on Sunday evening at Seton Manor, and I shall put on the screw then. He'll kick at first. He'll talk about the blood of his ancestors and the honour of his race and all that kind of rot, but he is bound to give in. If I asked him to-night he would say he would rather leave Haredale Park and beg his bread before he would do anything to be ashamed of. We have both heard people talk like that before now, but when it comes to the point Sir George will sing another tune. They all do."

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"Provided the lady does not change her mind," Foster said with a grin, which caused Fielden, listening at the door, to clench his fists. "You mustn't lose sight of that fact, Copley. Miss Haredale dislikes and despises you. But though she vows that nothing in the world will induce her to marry you, circumstances alter cases, and when she knows she is no longer mistress of Haredale Park, it is possible her frowns may turn into smiles."

Copley laughed unpleasantly.

"I haven't lost sight of these things," he said. "Miss Haredale has the bad taste to dislike me exceedingly. I would give anything if I could induce her to change her mind. I believe I might even grow honest and lead a respectable life. Still, that would be beastly monotonous. Your plan

is the best. I had better accept my dismissal and leave Miss Haredale to go her own way. Then I can put the screw on Sir George and compel him to find some excuse for scratching his colt. When he sees that I mean to have my money and discovers the sheriff in possession, he will not be long in inventing a reason why the Blenheim colt should not run that shall be consistent with his confounded dignity. You can leave that safely to me, Foster. My word, how cold it is! I wish you would shut that door. The draught is cutting my legs off. I daresay——"

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What Copley was about to say was lost to the listeners in the hall by the closing of the door. They could hear nothing save a murmur of voices which conveyed nothing to their ears. Phillips touched his companion's shoulder.

"Here's our chance," he whispered. "The sooner we are off the better. We cannot learn anything more this evening; indeed, there cannot be much more to learn."

They stole cautiously along the hall, through the kitchen and outhouses, and were soon outside safe under cover of the darkness. It was black enough now that the moon had gone down, and they could move freely into the road and across the heath to the village.

"Well, what do you think of these precious rascals?" Phillips asked. "Don't you agree that we are deep in the secrets of a vile conspiracy? We can't leave it where it is."

"Most certainly not," Fielden said. "At present I am thinking more about Sir George Haredale than of anybody else. A year or two ago I should have scorned the idea of his doing anything dishonourable. But I have learnt worldly wisdom, and can imagine how it would be if Sir George were suddenly face to face with poverty. He is completely under Copley's thumb. If these two men bring off their coup, they will make an enormous fortune. But it must be prevented at all costs, Phillips. Think out some scheme of checkmate, and I shall be your debtor for the rest of my life."

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"I think I can manage that," Phillips said. "I'll tell you what my plan is when we get back to my rooms."

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## CHAPTER XXII

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### A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

MAJOR CARDEN sat over the breakfast which his daughter had prepared for him. He had been unusually late the night before, and showed it in the additional pinkness of his cheeks and the slightly red rims under his eyes. Not that he was feeling much the worse for the previous evening's pleasure; indeed, in his philosophical moments, the Major was fond of speculating which was the wiser—to take his fill of enjoyment's cup with its concomitants in the morrow of suffering and tribulation, or abandon such courses, however delightful. One mode of life was jolly to a point, but, on the other hand, the man who exercised prudence and some measure of control had a compensation in his economy. As a matter of fact, the Major never had been economical. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof" summed up his religion to its fullest extent. After a stimulant he knew he would be himself again, so he ate his breakfast with a zest that was truly amazing after the carousal of the night.

For Major Carden always appeared to be in the best of health and spirits. Beyond his impecuniosity he had little to trouble him, and at the moment things appeared to be going very well indeed. He saw his way to make money out of Phillips, and had also been offered a roving commission on the Continent to purchase horses for the Army. This would entail his being away for three or four months, but his travelling allowance was liberal, he would put up at the best hotels, and enjoy himself in a manner consonant with his mission and dignity. He would tell his daughter that he was going abroad on some journalistic commission, for the Major, to do him justice, would have been loth for Alice to know all the expedients he resorted to in earning his precarious living.

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His love for his daughter was the one wholesome spot in his otherwise shady existence. He had been a selfish man all his life, had spent his own fortune and his wife's, and had broken the heart of that unhappy woman in a gentlemanly way. There had been no violence, no open unkindness, but the refinement of neglect that undermines health and spirit. When the crash finally came the Major removed to London with his young daughter. He told her just as much as he considered necessary, with the consequence that she regarded him as one of the best and most self-denying of men. Alice had few friends, and none knew anything about the Major's means, so that the journalistic fiction remained unassailable, and Alice could speak freely of her father as adding high intellectual qualities to his other gifts. His frequent late absences from home were explained in this way, and if he never said anything definite about his work, his diffidence might be attributed to natural modesty.

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In the circumstances, therefore, the Major was not sorry his daughter had had an invitation to spend a holiday at Haredale Park. He had thought of inviting himself also, but his new commission put that out of the question. After he had finished his breakfast he helped himself to a liberal dose of brandy and soda, and had just lighted his first cigar when his daughter came in.

"You are very late," she said with playful fondness. "I declare you grow worse and worse."

"Not my fault, my dear," the Major protested. "These things are inevitable amongst newspaper men. I thought I should be at home by eleven, but something important turned up at the last moment and they told me off to attend to it. They are good enough to say they can depend on me, Alice. That is one of the advantages of being steady. If anything goes wrong at the office the first thing they say is, 'Where is Carden?'"

Alice smiled affectionately. To her this was quite natural. For a girl who had spent so many years in London she was wonderfully simple.

"I suppose it can't be helped," she said. "How few men there are who would have endured your misfortunes and turned to and made a living as you are doing! I wish I were clever." [170]

"Oh, so you are, my dear, so you are," the Major said magnanimously. "The great thing is pluck and perseverance. Without egotism, I think I am endowed with those qualities, and to some extent so are you, and you will make a name as an artist yet. Stick to it, my child, stick to it. At the same time, it is good to have an occasional change, and I am glad you are going to Haredale Park. I suppose you can manage to put your painting pupils off for a week or two? Probably you will find it lonely when I am away. I shall only be able to run over from the Continent occasionally."

"Oh, I shall miss you," Alice said. "But I shall be safe enough. The landlady is always motherly, and she will see I come to no harm."

The Major dismissed the subject with a flourish of his cigar. He had rather feared his daughter might give way to tears. He thought she might ask him to take her along with him and so put him to the pain of refusal. Possibly the girl was looking too eagerly forward to her visit to Haredale Park to think of anything else. She had not forgotten the days when Major Carden was a man of position and they occupied a fine house in the country, when she had her horse and plunged into the dear delights of country life. It was good to feel she was going back to it, even though it was only for a little time. She had already made her modest preparations. She only hoped there would not be too many visitors at Haredale Park. But May Haredale had assured her they lived very quietly and had not many friends. [171]

"I am getting nervous about it," she said. "It will seem so different to the life I have been leading here. If I had only foreseen this I might have saved up and bought myself another dress or two. Still, I know I shall enjoy myself."

"Of course you will," the Major said heartily. "But you won't get much gaiety at Haredale. They don't go in for society much. You see, there are very few of the old families left. Times change, my dear, and we change with them. I don't suppose, plainly speaking, that Sir George is much better off than I am. I happen to know that much depends upon the Blenheim colt winning this year's Derby. I was in the Post Club yesterday with one or two of my——"

The Major coughed hastily as if his cigar smoke had gone the wrong way.

"What am I talking about?" he exclaimed. "Anybody would think I am still interested in sport. Do you know, beyond an occasional day at a small meeting, I have no time for that sort of thing. I was in the Post Club on business, purely on business. It is a very sad thing to see young men wasting so much of their time and money on horses. But I can't prevent them from talking and am bound to hear the gossip that goes on. That is how I came to know so much about Sir George's affairs. Every penny he can scrape together goes on the stables, so you'll probably find that Miss Haredale leads a very quiet existence." [172]

"I am glad to hear it," Alice said. "I shall be happy with her. She was the greatest friend I had at school, and I can't understand how I ever managed to lose sight of her. Is it a nice place?"

"Very pleasant," the Major said critically. "It is a grand old house, full of works of art and furniture and that kind of thing. Of course, all these things go with the estate, so that Sir George could not dispose of them, which is a precious lucky thing for the heir, for there won't be too much for him when the time comes. The stables are very fine, too, and Sir George has some of the best cattle in the country. Oh, I have no doubt you will enjoy yourself. When do you go?"

"To-day," Alice said.

The Major appeared to be slightly embarrassed.

"Oh, yes," he said, "I had forgotten. It is a trifle awkward, because I have only a little money just now. The cashier at the office is so careless. He omitted to draw my cheque on Friday. Till tomorrow I am not sure whether I shall be able to spare money for your fare. Next week it would be quite different." [173]

Alice Carden kissed the speaker affectionately.

"How thoughtful you are!" she said. "You are always thinking about other people. But please

don't worry about that. I have saved a little, and shall have enough to keep me for the next two or three weeks and bring me home again."

The Major expressed his gratification. For once at least he was sincere. It was most unfortunate, he said, that he should be in temporary need of cash. He laid strict injunctions upon Alice to spend what she had freely and not for one moment to forget that she was a Carden; if she wanted more money she was to write to him without hesitation. He saw her off at Waterloo presently. He paid for the cab in the most lordly fashion, and insisted on his daughter travelling first class, though he had not the money to pay for the ticket. But Alice was looking forward too eagerly to her holiday to notice these things.

"Good-bye," she cried. "You will have left for the Continent before I come back. But don't let the thought of my being alone in London interfere with your pleasure. I should like to feel you were not troubling about me."

"I'll try, my dear," the Major said. "Good-bye."

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## CHAPTER XXIII

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### A CHANGE OF AIR

**A**BOUT the same time that Major Carden was sitting over his breakfast, Sir George Haredale was gloomily contemplating his own. He had read most of his letters, and had impatiently pushed aside the sheaf of bills and applications for money which poured like a flood upon him at every post. Some of them were peremptory and some imploring. But they had been coming in for so long that the master of Haredale Park was more or less hardened to them. But one communication was distinctly out of the common and worried him excessively.

"What the deuce does it mean?" he soliloquized irritably. "And who are these people, Absalom & Co.? I never had any dealings with them. According to their note-paper they call themselves financial agents, but the whole thing looks more like a communication from money-lenders. Yet I don't see how I owe them anything. They write to remind me that in virtue of an assignment made by Mr. Raymond Copley of a certain date I am in their debt to the extent of more than forty thousand pounds. What the dickens is an assignment? And what does Copley mean by doing a thing of this sort without consulting me? These people hope I shall make arrangements to liquidate the debt in the course of the next fourteen days. Why, they might just as well ask me to find as many millions. But I daresay there is nothing really alarming about the thing if I only understood it. I wish I had a head for figures. I wish my father had given me a business training. Still, Copley will put it right. Perhaps he is annoyed at the way that May has been behaving. But I hardly think he will visit her folly upon me. However, I must say the thing is alarming."

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Sir George shuffled the letter into his pocket as the door opened and May entered. She was dressed for going out and was buttoning her driving gloves round her wrists. Outside on the gravel stood a smart cob in a Whitechapel cart.

"Where are you going?" Sir George asked.

"To the station to meet Alice Carden. She will be here for lunch."

"I had forgotten her," Sir George murmured. "To tell you the truth, my dear, I am rather sorry you asked her."

"But I was always fond of Alice."

"Yes, of course, why not? The girl is all right. But, between ourselves, Carden is a bit of a bad egg. He comes of an old family, and I recollect when his position was as good as ours. But he muddled his money away. He always affected the society of those sportsmen who are ready to do anybody. He made the mistake of regarding everybody as a fool except himself, and naturally he came to grief. Those fellows always do."

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"But he belongs to one or two good clubs," May protested.

"Oh, I know that. He was never actually found out. He was mixed up in one or two very queer transactions, but contrived to keep clear of trouble himself. There are scores of men who meet him on familiar terms, but precious few ask him to their houses. Still, the girl is coming here, and we must make the best of it. But I wouldn't ask her again if I were you. You can easily drop the acquaintance after the next week or so."

May discreetly refrained from discussing the matter further. There was a strong vein of loyalty in her nature. She liked Alice Carden, and was not disposed to visit any of the father's shortcomings on the daughter. She had almost forgotten what Sir George said during her drive to the station. It was a crisp day, and a frosty sun was shining. There was an exhilaration in the air

almost like champagne. Before the station was reached May put her troubles behind her, not a very difficult matter for a girl in her twentieth year who boasts of a fine constitution and a perfect flow of animal spirits. Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes sparkling, as she advanced to meet Alice Carden.

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"I thought I would come for you myself," she said. "I brought a cart which I am driving. Now if you will pick out your boxes we'll get a porter to put them in the trap for you."

"My boxes," Alice laughed. "Behold my humble belongings. I have come down here with one dress-basket which contains all the finery I have. I hope you haven't many dinner parties and that kind of thing, for, positively, I have only one evening dress, and I am afraid that that is hopelessly out of date. Still, if you have any special functions, it will be easy to plead a convenient headache."

May laughed as she took up the reins.

"Calm yourself," she said. "I assure you there will be nothing of that sort. We have dropped out of gaieties. For one thing, most of our old friends have left the neighbourhood, and my father doesn't care for new people. We three will probably dine alone every night of your stay, and we can ride and drive, and I can give you a day or two with the hounds if you like."

Alice Carden protested sincerely that she wanted nothing better. It was pleasant to find herself once more driving down the country roads behind a good horse. It was like old times when she came to Haredale Park and surveyed the room which had been appropriated to her use. It was exactly as her father had described. Here was the old oak, the long rambling passages, the china and pictures and ancient furniture, all in the setting where they had been fixed the best part of two centuries ago. Here was the open landscape in front of the mullioned windows. Here were the woods and fields and lawns, and in the distance the stables where Sir George Haredale's stud led its luxurious existence.

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It was pleasant to sit in the dining-room before a well-appointed lunch with the fine silver on the table, the vases of flowers, and the beautiful glass. Whatever Sir George's feelings on the subject of his daughter's guest were, there was nothing in his manner to which the girl could take exception. He was natural, courtly and charming, as he always was, and appeared to take the keenest pleasure in Alice Carden's arrival. So far as she could see, there was no sign of trouble, no grim shadow to forecast the ruin hanging over the house. The butler and a footman or two moved about the room. The sunshine poured through the painted windows. Altogether it was a household to be envied. Alice's spirits rose accordingly. She meant thoroughly to enjoy herself, and when lunch was over professed herself willing to fall in with any plan May had to suggest.

"Well, let us have a ride," the latter said. "We will go over the Downs towards the sea and come back by Seton Manor. Now run away and get your habit on. I will have a horse saddled for you which is not too fresh. You used to be a daring rider at one time, but it is as well to begin cautiously. In a day or two you shall have a hunter after your own heart."

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They rode out in the keen sunshine and broke across the wide expanse of Downs, and Alice Carden gave herself up to the exquisite enjoyment of the hour. It was good to feel the elastic movement of the cob, to listen to the thud of his hoofs on the turf and catch the breeze streaming in her face. They turned presently as the sun was setting, and jogged more quietly homewards. A little later, as they came to Seton Manor, a string of horses clothed and hooded were turning into the stables. Alice pulled up.

"Who lives there?" she asked.

Some colour crept into May Haredale's cheeks.

"Our neighbour, Mr. Copley," she explained. "He is a newcomer and a great lover of horses; he is very rich, having made a large fortune in South Africa, and I suppose this is one way of getting rid of his income. Like most beginners at the game, he has hardly any good horses, but that is probably because he hasn't time to look after them himself."

"Is he a friend of yours?" Alice asked.

"Oh, well, he comes over to Haredale Park pretty frequently. My father has struck up a sort of intimacy with him. Between ourselves, I detest the man. He goes everywhere in virtue of his money, but he is not a gentleman, as anybody can see. I am going to tell you a secret, Alice, which you must not tell to a soul. Mr. Copley is anxious to marry me. Needless to say, I have given him very little encouragement."

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"Of course, you wouldn't," Alice said. "You haven't forgotten what you used to tell me at school. Don't you remember how you confided in me about Harry Fielden, and how you used to read part of his letters? I never knew what became of him."

"No, I never told you. Well, perhaps I will to-night before we go to bed. It was a very unfortunate business altogether. There was nothing wrong about Harry. He was merely very reckless and extravagant, and got rid of his money and went abroad. He hadn't a single penny left, and there was an end of my romance. It sounds very commonplace, but it is just as serious to me as if it were one of those pretty stories we read in books. So now Harry has nothing and I have nothing, and some day or other I shall end, I suppose, in marrying a man for the sake of a home. But you may be certain it won't be Mr. Raymond Copley."

"How very sad!" Alice said sympathetically. "Do you ever see Mr. Fielden?"

"Oh, yes," May laughed unsteadily. "In fact, he is coming towards us now."

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## CHAPTER XXIV

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### A STRANGE VISITOR

**I**NTEREST as well as sympathy lit up Alice Carden's eyes. She looked with something more than curiosity at the well-set-up young man who came striding across the turf towards them. May reached over and laid an impressive hand upon her friend's arm.

"I am not sure I meant to tell you so much," she whispered. "I spoke on the spur of the moment. Harry came back to England unexpectedly a little time ago, and I met him by accident in London. It was a bit romantic in its way, but I'll tell you about that later. He came down here to his old home to get some of his belongings, and, to his surprise, nobody recognized him. I was the only person who knew him, excepting an old stud-groom who had been in the employ of the Fieldens for the last fifty years. When he found that no one knew him, he thought he might procure some congenial occupation in his own neighbourhood. It was part of the same romance that he should obtain this employment at the hands of Mr. Copley. But, of course, he does not pass in his own name. Please to recollect that he is Mr. Field. Now, my dear, you have the whole story in a nutshell. It is like the plot of a novel. I am the beautiful heroine, beloved by the rich bounder, while my heart is given to the handsome penniless young man of good family who is in the villain's employ. Don't think me heartless because I speak so lightly of it, and don't forget to behave as if I had not told you this story. Mr. Field is an old friend of ours, and that's the only thing you have to remember."

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Alice Carden promised to act discreetly. There was no time to say more, for Fielden was beside them, and Alice found herself bowing to him as if he were a new acquaintance.

"You have not been here before?" he asked.

"This is my first visit to Haredale," Alice said. "But I have seen you before, Mr. Field. Don't you remember you were with my father and Sir George at Mirst Park a day or two ago? We were not introduced then."

"Oh, I have not forgotten it," Fielden laughed. "I understand you are an old friend of May's, I mean Miss Haredale's. Would you mind if I came over to-night after dinner?"

May flashed a glance at the speaker.

"We shall be delighted," she said. "I fancy my father told me he expected Mr. Copley, too."

Fielden said nothing for a moment or two; then it suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten an important matter which would detain him that evening. He understood what May had hinted to him. He knew it was hardly prudent for him to be much at Haredale Park whilst Copley was in the neighbourhood. By way of turning the conversation, he suggested that the girls should dismount and inspect the stables.

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"Nothing I should like better," Alice cried.

"Then come on," Fielden said eagerly. "Let me help you down. You will find the stables everything to be desired. They are modern, luxurious, and nothing appears to have been overlooked. From first to last they must have cost about twice as much as the house. We have a dozen helpers more than are necessary; indeed, things are conducted on a most lavish scale."

"And the horses?" Alice asked. "Are they——"

"Well, as to the horses, the less said about them the better. They are a pretty moderate lot. Perhaps later we may weed them out a bit. But come and see for yourself."

It was growing dusk by the time the inspection was over. Then the two girls walked back towards the archway which led into the wide stable-yard. Outside the gate two of the stable helps were engaged in an altercation with a seedy-looking tramp in an advanced state of intoxication.

"Excuse me for a moment," Fielden said, "I must see what is wrong. Now, my man, what are you doing here?"

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It was easy for the girls to notice what was going on and to hear every word that was said. At the tones of authority in Fielden's voice the tramp looked up and made a ludicrous effort to pull himself together. Over his right eye there was a fresh cut, from which the blood was trickling. The helpers, too, showed signs of punishment, and a desire to fling out the stranger, but they dropped back as Fielden appeared.

"I came to see Mr. Copley," the tramp said.

"Mr. Copley isn't here," Fielden said curtly. "Still, if you want him, it would be as well to ask for him in a proper manner. What do you mean by pushing yourself forward in this fashion?"

"I didn't," the tramp said sulkily. "I never said nothing to these men till they ordered me out, and one of them shoved up against me. I don't stand that from any one, guv'nor, and so I tell you. If you don't believe me, try it on yourself."

Fielden was conscious that the blood was mounting into his cheeks. He returned for a moment to where the two girls were standing and walked with them into the road.

"I think you had better leave us," he said. "I must give that fellow a lesson, and this is no place for either of you."

"I hope you won't get hurt," Alice Carden said. "It is curious, but I know that man quite well by sight. He used to be in my father's regiment; in fact, he was his servant. He comes to our rooms in London occasionally and my father helps him with a few coppers and some clothes now and again. I am afraid it is another case of degradation caused by drink." [185]

"It looks like it," Fielden said. "This man was probably one of the Major's racing-touts, one of those broken-down creatures occasionally employed on more or less shady jobs. But he must be taught decent manners. I don't think you need be afraid for me. I'll try to come over to lunch to-morrow."

Fielden saluted the two girls and returned to the spot where the tramp was swaying about defiantly.

"Now what do you want?" he demanded once more.

"What do I want?" the fellow sneered. "Well, I want a sovereign, and I am not going till I get it. If Mr. Copley was here I could have ten sovereigns. Yes, and he would be glad to pay me, too. You think, because I have been unfortunate that I can't get any money. You are wrong, young man, you are wrong."

"Well, you won't get any here," Fielden said. "If you have anything to say to Mr. Copley you had better wait. He will be here at five o'clock, but you must wait outside."

"Me wait outside! Who are you talking to? I don't wait for no man, not even for Raymond Copley. I have got to get back to London to-night anyhow. You just give me a sovereign or two and tell Mr. Copley you've done it. Tell him if I have any more of this sort of thing he had best look for somebody else to play building houses with fruit baskets in Covent Garden. Tell him that. If I have any more of this to put up with he can get somebody else to monkey with his fruit baskets. You needn't say more than that." [186]

In spite of the man's intoxication he knew what he was talking about, and was plainly desirous of conveying something definite. There was a malignant look in his eye which Fielden did not fail to notice.

"Oh, be off," he said impatiently. "I won't have any row here. Are you going, or shall I turn you out?"

The intruder answered with a furious oath. He was anxious, he said, to see any man on the face of the earth who could do a job like that. He lurched violently at Fielden, and the next moment was sprawling on his back with the haziest knowledge of what had happened. Then, at a sign from Fielden, the two helpers took him by the shoulders and legs and carried him into the road. He rose muttering and threatening. He shook his fist towards the stables and lurched off until he was swallowed up by the darkness. Quite unconscious that his knuckles were cut and bleeding Fielden went about his work. It was only when Copley himself appeared and asked what had happened that Fielden looked at his damaged hand. [187]

"Oh, that's nothing," he laughed. "A tramp came here not long since asking for you and demanding a sovereign or two as if you were his banker. The fellow was insolent, and I had to knock him down, but I had no idea my knuckles were cut. Needless to say the man didn't get his sovereign, though he did leave a queer message for you. It is astonishing what strange things men say when they are in liquor."

"And what did this one say?" Copley asked.

"Oh, he said if he could see you he would get as many pounds as he liked. He went on to remark that if he had to put up with any more of this you could find somebody else to monkey with your fruit baskets at Covent Garden. Idiotic, wasn't it?"

Fielden spoke carelessly, but he kept an eye upon Copley. He saw the latter start, remarked the queer look on his face, and how his eyes gleamed with anger.

"Absurd," he said. "I suppose the fellow thinks I am interested in Covent Garden. But there is no accounting for the vagaries of a drunken man. Anyway, it's not worth thinking about. Anything fresh to report?"

## THE DERELICT

RAYMOND COPLEY went back into the house in a thoughtful mood. The much-envied and much-talked-of millionaire was not particularly happy. He had a good deal to occupy his attention and had reached a crisis in his affairs which was likely to prove awkward unless something turned up speedily. It was easy, as he often cynically observed, to obtain almost unlimited credit upon the strength of his fictitious wealth, but exceedingly difficult to raise even a hundred pounds in the City. He had practically no security to offer his bankers, and dared not do anything that would suggest to an outsider that he was in want of ready cash. One or two of his schemes lately had ended in failure, and, so far as he could see, it was almost impossible for him to hold out for the month which intervened between now and the next meeting at Mirst Park.

Now here was a fresh cause of annoyance which he had not anticipated. Unfortunately for the ultimate success of Copley's schemes, they necessitated the employment of more than one subordinate, and these subordinates had to be paid. Moreover, they were drawn unavoidably from the refuse of the population, so that they were a standing source of danger, for it is hazardous to depend upon people who are usually ready to sell their services to the highest bidder. One of them had been so audacious as to turn up at the very gates of Seton Manor and demand money. Luckily, he had not said enough to rouse suspicions. His remarks to Fielden might easily be ignored as the ravings of a drunken wretch. Certainly they did not convey much intelligence. So far all was safe.

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But it was a warning, and a warning that Copley did not care to disregard. Happily, he thought, Fielden was not a curious man, or he might have inquired farther into the incident. He might even have been disposed to speculate a sovereign or two, and the tramp might have been in a sufficiently reckless mood to sell information at that price. The thing must be looked into at once.

Foster sprawled in the library with a copy of the *Sportsman* in his hand and a cigarette in his mouth. He looked up carelessly at his employer, but seeing there was something amiss put down the paper and waited for Copley to speak.

"What has gone wrong?" he asked.

"Oh, everything," Copley said savagely. "Has a single thing gone straight since the Mirst Park meeting? Here am I in a big house, furnished regardless of expense, with scores of tradesmen tumbling over one another to serve me, and yet I haven't a ten-pound note to call my own. As if that was not bad enough, that blackguard Chaffey has turned up here."

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"I suppose he wants money," Foster asked.

"Well, that was the idea, no doubt. I didn't see him myself, but I understand he was drunk and objectionable, and Field turned him out. They had a bit of a scrimmage, and I hope Field gave the fellow a lesson. At any rate, he went off quietly in the end."

"Then why worry?" Foster said.

"Why worry? What a question! I forgot to tell you the worst. Chaffey came here demanding money. He said if I had been at home he could have got as much as he wanted. Imagine what Field must have thought. He would conclude that I was under obligations to the scamp, but, as you know, I haven't exchanged a dozen words with him. Everything has been done through you, and I must say I can't congratulate you on your choice."

"You never do when things go wrong," Foster retorted. "Would you have had me employ a gentleman? Did you want a man of intelligence, who would have asked many questions of himself. Chaffey is the man for us. But you are making a great fuss about nothing."

"Well, what do you think of this? Chaffey told Field that if he had any more of this sort of thing I could get somebody else to monkey with my fruit baskets in Covent Garden. Ah, I thought you would change your tune. Imagine a remark like that in a sporting public-house! Scores of people would smell a rat instantly. They would get on the track of money-making, especially if Chaffey happened to mention my name in connexion with the affair. If they only found him with money and plied him with drink, he would tell them all he knew."

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"Which is precious little," Foster said coolly, as he lighted a fresh cigarette. "Chaffey doesn't really know anything. Still, we must make him understand that we won't stand this kind of thing. What do you propose to do?"

"Why, follow him, of course. He can't be far away. He is sure to have gone to some pothouse. He went down the London Road, and the best thing is to go after him at once. Let us take the car and make excuses that we shan't be back in time for dinner. You think I am making much ado about nothing. But my nerves are not what they used to be. Come along."

Foster made no objection. In truth he was almost as uneasy as his employer. By and by they were rolling along the road in a car, stopping under some pretext or other at every public-house.

They came presently to a small place where they heard news of the man they were after. He had left a short time before; in fact, he had been violently ejected, because he had no money to pay for the drink he had consumed. Half a mile farther on the motorists espied a shadowy outline staggering down the middle of the road and lurching from side to side, singing as he went.

"That's the man," Foster whispered. "Stop the car and I'll get out and tackle him."

The tramp paused when he found himself within the radius of the powerful lights. He stood trying to collect his scattered senses, until, finally, he got some hazy idea of whom he was talking to. His face grew hard and sullen, and he looked none the better for a swollen eye and a cut forehead.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "This is a nice way to treat a gentleman. Here am I, miles away from my happy home and not a penny in my pocket."

"What are you doing here?" Foster asked.

"That, sir," said the tramp with great dignity, "is my business. I have private occupations of which you know nothing. You are taking advantage of my poverty. Don't forget that I was in as good a position as yourself at one time."

"You might easily be better," Foster said contemptuously. "Still, you haven't told me what brings you here, and why you made a disturbance at Seton Manor."

"I was at the Lington Meeting," Chaffey answered. "I lost all I had and was tramping back to London when I recollected that Mr. Copley lived close by. I thought I would borrow a pound or two from him, and that's why I called. It would have been all right but for those stable men. Would you care to be treated like a dog? I lost my temper. You'd have lost yours if you had been in my place. And that's all about it. I don't want to make any trouble if you treat me properly. Give me a few pounds and I'll go back to London the first thing in the morning."

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"I'll give you money if you return to-night," Foster said curtly. "Get in the car and we'll drive you as far as Maley Junction. Come on."

"I will not come on," Chaffey said with an assumption of his old dignity. "You give me the money and I'll go to town early in the morning. I can't go before, because I have heard something. There's a trial coming off here to-morrow morning, and I am bound to see it. You don't suppose I live on what I get from you. If the trial turns out as I hope it will, it will put a lump in my pocket. Now what is the good of standing frowning at me like that? I tell you I'm not going back to London to-night. I won't go till eight o'clock to-morrow morning. If you don't help me, I know a man who will give me a tenner cheerfully to hear how I monkey with the fruit baskets in Covent Garden. But do as you please. I don't mind lying in a ditch till morning, and I don't mind tramping to town to-morrow. It wouldn't be the first time I've done both. Not that I want to quarrel with you, Mr. Foster; if you do the fair thing by me, I'll do the fair thing by you. Give me a quid or two so that I can get some supper and a bed, and I'll promise not to come near Seton Manor again. What's more, if the trial turns out all right, I'll send a message to Mr. Copley."

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"Oh, give him money and let him have his way," Copley cried impatiently. "There isn't much chance of drumming sense into him to-night."

A whispered conversation between Copley and Foster followed, then three sovereigns changed hands and Chaffey departed along the road with the air of a man who has an object in life.

"You have done the right thing," he said. "I knew you would, when you came to think of it, and I'll let Mr. Copley know all about the trial. Good-night, gentlemen, and good luck to you."

So Chaffey vanished into the darkness.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

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### A SECOND TRIAL

**D**ESPITE his cheery optimism, Joe Raffle did not appear so gay as usual. He seemed to have something on his mind, and those under him noticed that now and then he spoke with a sharpness that was not customary. In fact, the groom was troubled. He had been glad to see his old master again and to know that his small conspiracy looked like setting Harry Fielden on his feet once more. But when he came to review the position of affairs he did not feel absolutely satisfied, though he had done nobody a wrong, nor had calculated on putting a single penny in his pocket. On the contrary, he had been convinced that he was doing a most disinterested action.

But in the light of the past few days everything looked different. Raffle was by no means blind

to what was going on around him. There was plenty of gossip in the stables, for some degree of friendship between the lads at Haredale Park and those at Seton Manor was inevitable, and it was an open secret that there might possibly be an alliance between the two houses. It was plain to Raffle's keen eyes that May Haredale disliked Raymond Copley intensely and that Sir George was doing all he could to remove this objection. Raffle guessed, too, pretty accurately what was the state of Harry Fielden's feelings, and saw that if this marriage took place his little scheme would be worse than useless. If Fielden had not turned up again it would not have mattered. But as it was the large fortune which Sir George was about to annex seemed likely to go into the pockets of Raymond Copley.

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Joe hated Raymond Copley with all the contempt that an old sportsman has for an ignorant dabbler in the great game. He knew that Copley cared nothing for racing for its own sake, that he kept his stable only to give himself importance in the eyes of his neighbours. Raffle was not aware that the Seton Manor stud was a blind to cover the conspiracies hatched between Copley and Foster, but he knew enough to set his teeth on edge and to make him determined to stop this hateful marriage if he could. It was gall and wormwood to feel that after all he had been working and planning for the advantage of Copley. He knew that Harry Fielden would have some delicacy in interfering and believed it likely that, if May consented to become Copley's wife, he would forbid Raffle to say a word about the real ownership of the Blenheim colt.

This was bad, but worse was to follow. For the last two or three days the colt had been off his feed, and Raffle thought he was developing symptoms of staleness. To settle this point, he arranged for another early morning trial. He had confided his intention to a couple of his trusty helpers, who fondly imagined that no one knew of it but themselves. But these things leak out in stables, and in some mysterious way the projected trial reached the ears of Chaffey, who, when he chose to tear himself away from his beloved bars, was one of the cleverest touts that ever worried a stable. After parting from Copley and Foster, he staggered along cheerfully till he came to a roadside public-house, where he obtained a shakedown for the night. The thirst for drink was upon him—indeed, it was seldom or never absent—but he managed to put a check upon himself, and retired to bed with strict injunctions to be called at daybreak. In the morning he rose a trembling wreck, his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth, his nerves were a-quiver, but, by a supreme effort, he kept himself from the drink which called to him so strongly. The smell of it in the dingy public-house appealed to him mockingly, but he thrust the fierce desire aside and stole off to the Downs with splitting head and aching brows. He resolved to make up for his sufferings later. With luck he would be in London soon after nine o'clock. An hour later he would have sold his valuable information, and then—well, then, he would enjoy himself after the manner of his kind.

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Having concealed himself in a patch of gorse, he waited with what patience he could for the trial. It was a long and weary vigil, but presently he heard the muffled tramp of horses and the sound of voices. Cautiously Chaffey raised himself and peeped out. He knew he was hiding just behind the winning-post. The solitary figure standing there was familiar to him. With a grin he recognized Fielden.

In the distance he could see two horses flashing along, and as they drew nearer he made out the fine dashing outline of the Blenheim colt. He had never seen that noble animal before, but his keen instinct told him he was not mistaken. He forgot his aches, pains, and everything else in the excitement of the moment. He saw the Blenheim colt holding his own, sailing along with a free and easy stride, and then suddenly, within a hundred yards or so of the gorse bushes, the other horse came away and finished many lengths ahead. The colt had a peculiar action that Chaffey did not fail to notice.

"They are right," he said, "the colt's queer. My word! it was well I came here this morning. This will be five and twenty pounds in my pocket. And if I have any luck that bloomin' Copley can get somebody else to look after his fruit baskets. I've had enough of it."

Chaffey dropped down as he saw Raffle coming up to the winning-post. The horses had been led away, and nobody could hear what Fielden and his companion and Mallow had to say.

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"This is a bad business," Harry observed.

"Looks like it, sir," Raffle said gloomily. "I can't make out what's wrong with the colt. I thought I knew all about horses, but this puzzles me. He seemed quite right a day or two ago, and I can't see now what's wrong."

"Oh, there's plenty of time," Fielden said cheerfully. "I daresay you'll manage to make him fit for the Guineas. It is a good thing I didn't take your advice and back him. I am glad the money I got for the library is still in the bank."

The stud-groom shook his head obstinately.

"I don't think you are right, sir," he said. "I still believe in the colt and, as you say, there is heaps of time between now and the Guineas. Of course, I must tell Sir George, and a fine state he'll be in, I expect. Just think what a difference that colt will make if he wins. And yet you refuse, sir, to benefit by so much as a penny."

"Why should I?" Fielden asked. "Practically the horse doesn't belong to me. Legally, I suppose, he does, and I have no doubt I could put in a successful claim. But the colt was only a yearling when I went away. He has been trained in Mallow's stable and by Sir George's man."

"I never call myself that, sir," Raffle muttered.

"Ah, but you are, Joe, morally speaking. You have accepted service under him, and you take his money. I know you have behaved exceedingly well to me. I know you have meant everything for the best, and I thank you for it. But I cannot interfere. Can't you see that I am in honour bound —"

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"In honour bound to stand by and see Mr. Copley marry Miss Haredale?" Raffle asked indignantly. "I am sure I beg your pardon. I forgot myself. I had no business to speak like that to you. But that is what it is coming to. Here have I been working and scheming and keeping my mouth shut to put a matter of a hundred thousand pounds into Mr. Copley's pockets."

"If the colt wins," Fielden suggested.

"Oh, he'll be all right, sir. It is only a matter of a few days, but if this thing gets talked about, why, the colt will go bang down in the betting and we shall all make fortunes with the outlay of a few pounds. There is another thing I must tell you. You see, it is like this——"

Raffle turned away as he spoke, and Fielden followed him, so that the figure eagerly listening behind the gorse bush could hear no more. Though, on the whole, he had had an exceedingly fortunate morning, he bitterly regretted that the deeply-interesting conversation had been cut short just at the point when he might have picked up information that might have made his fortune.

"I wonder what they're talking about?" he muttered, as he limped painfully and slowly across the Downs towards Seton Manor. "I suppose I had better give Mr. Copley a tip. I can send it to him from one of these pubs. He doesn't deserve any consideration from me, but it will be worth a fiver later. Now for breakfast and just one drink—only one before I get back to London and draw my money. There will be plenty of time for fun this evening. What a fool I've been! If I could only have kept off that accursed liquor I should have had a stud of my own by this time."

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With this philosophy on his lips Chaffey turned into the bar of the nearest public-house.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

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### DRIVING IT HOME

COPLEY sat at the breakfast-table waiting for Foster to come down. He had glanced impatiently through his letters, none of which appeared to be particularly interesting. Then he picked up a repulsive-looking envelope that lay by the side of his plate. The envelope was greasy and forbidding, though the handwriting upon it was fairly neat and clear, if a trifle unsteady. Copley was on the point of pitching it into the fire, feeling pretty sure it was something in the nature of a begging epistle, when he changed his mind and opened it.

"Dear sir," it ran, "I was on the Downs this morning and saw the trial I was speaking to you about last night. Sir George's head man thought it a dead secret, but I had had it from a sure quarter, and I saw the race between the Blenheim colt and another at half-past seven. The colt was quite stale, and, if I am any judge of such matters, I think it will take all their time to wind him up for the Guineas. I thought you would like to know this, because, properly handled, there is money in it. Perhaps it may be worth a five-pound note to me the next time we meet."

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There was no signature to this document, but Copley guessed where it came from. He rose from the table and stood for a while thinking this over. There was money in the tidings, but not in the way hinted at by Chaffey.

"Anything fresh?" Foster asked, as he attacked his breakfast with zest. "You look rather pleased about something."

"Well, I am," Copley said, with a sinister smile he found it hard to conceal. "I've got something here that looks like good business if we can only hold on a bit longer. As you know, we don't quite agree as to how Sir George Haredale is to be handled. If I went to him boldly and told him that he must scratch the Blenheim colt, do you think he would consent if he saw I was in earnest? My opinion is he would kick me out of the house. But there is another way of working it, and for the hint I have to thank Chaffey, of all people in the world. Here is a note from him."

"Wants more money," Foster said with his mouth full.

"Not for the moment, at any rate. He thinks his information is worth a prospective fiver. As a matter of fact, it is invaluable. You know he told us last night that he wasn't going away till he witnessed a trial this morning. He has seen it, and this letter gives me the result. The trial was that of the Blenheim colt. Chaffey says it will take them all their time to get him fit for the Guineas, even if they can manage it. Chaffey is probably in town by now, and has no doubt sold

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his information to some smart bookmaker. By this time to-morrow the Blenheim colt will be knocked out of the betting, and one will be able to get any price one likes. When this becomes public property Sir George will be justified in scratching the colt. He could say he had no hopes now of winning the Derby, and has taken this step solely on behalf of the public. Everybody will believe him. No questions will be asked, and his conduct will be regarded as most sportsmanlike. Do you see what I am driving at?"

"By Jove!" Foster exclaimed. "That is really smart of you. As Sir George backed his colt at long prices the money loss will be small. You can arrange as to the money Sir George owes you, and directly the pen is put through the colt's name we shall be masters of a hundred thousand pounds. It isn't so much as we expected, but we shall be able to draw the money during the next few days, and then be in a position to carry on a war against the bookmakers till we have made as much as we like. Things are entirely in your hands. You have only to put it plainly to Sir George and offer to cancel his mortgages, and the thing is done. He'll fall in with your suggestion readily. He only wants the excuse to get out. You'll want to handle him carefully, of course. But every man has his price, and I don't believe Haredale is any exception to the rule."

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"I'll do it to-day," Copley muttered.

"That's right," Foster said approvingly, "there's nothing like striking while the iron is hot. But if I were you I'd run up to town first and give Absalom & Co. a hint to put the screw on without delay. What you have to do is thoroughly to frighten Sir George, who will probably send for you, and see if he can't arrange terms. We had better motor to London at once. It might be as well to get Absalom's people to send a man down this afternoon to let Sir George know that business is meant. By the time we get back this evening there will be a note from Sir George asking you to go over and see him. If not, I am no prophet."

On the best of terms with themselves the conspirators started for town half an hour later, and before eleven o'clock Copley was closeted with the principal of the well-known financial house of Absalom & Co. Apparently the interview was to his satisfaction, for he soon made his way to the Post Club. Foster joined him at lunch, and up to four o'clock they amused themselves by making small wagers on the day's racing. Soon after five one of the waiters came into the smoking-room and informed Copley that a gentleman was waiting to see him.

He went downstairs to find Mr. Absalom in the ante-room. The latter smiled as he heard the clicking of the machines.

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"Do you do anything in that way?" Copley asked.

"Not I," the visitor laughed. "I leave that to the fools who have more money than sense. If there were no such thing as a horse or a bet I should be deprived of nine-tenths of my clients, and instead of being a rich man, I should be hard put to it to obtain a living. So the sport has all my sympathy. But I didn't come here to discuss racing. I want to speak to you about Sir George Haredale. I sent my manager down to see him."

"Yes, yes," Copley said impatiently.

"Oh, I won't detain you longer than I can help. My manager saw Sir George and had a long conversation with him. He was inclined to be high and mighty at first, but we soon changed all that. He was very anxious to know why you had transferred your debt to us, and we told him, of course, that you were engaged in very big speculations which called for all the ready capital you could lay your hands upon. We also hinted that we were finding money tight, and gave him to know that unless the cash was paid within a week, we should have to avail ourselves of our rights and place a man in possession at Haredale Park. That rather knocked the old gentleman off his balance. My manager said he was quite civil after that, and intimated his intention to do everything he could. But, at the same time, he appears to be very much annoyed with you. He thinks you have not treated him fairly, and seems to hope that when he has seen you he can arrange matters. Of course, he hasn't the least idea that we are merely dummies, so if you change your mind you can telephone to us and we will sit tight. He said he expected to see you this evening."

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Copley nodded approvingly. There was no need for hurry, for he knew that the longer Sir George Haredale thought over the matter, the more likely he was to yield in the end. After thanking Absalom, who went his way, he sent for Foster.

"It's all right," he said when the latter came downstairs. "Absalom's people have seen Sir George, and have left him in a state of blue funk. I think the best thing we can do is to let him think it over for a day or two, because the longer he dwells upon the prospect before him the more likely he will be to listen to any terms I choose to offer. But we can talk this over after dinner. Let's get back to Seton Manor. By the way, I suppose you have dealt with those commissions. Did you manage to lay any money against the Blenheim colt to advantage? Has the trial leaked out yet?"

"I managed to get a good lump on," Foster explained. "I fancy the story is getting known. According to one of the papers, the Blenheim colt has gone back to six to one. I think we have done as much as we can. At any rate, the money is as good as in our pockets."

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At Seton Manor Copley and his accomplice sat down to dinner in higher spirits and with better appetite than they had displayed for some time. There was nothing to trouble them. They had

netted a huge sum of money without the slightest risk, and, what was more to the point, they would be in a position to handle it in the course of a few days. There was a good deal of flavour in Copley's cigar as he lay back in his seat sipping his coffee. A moment or two later a footman came in with a note on a tray. Copley smiled as he tore open the envelope, and intimated to the servant that he need not wait.

"From the Baronet?" Foster grinned.

"You've guessed it," Copley replied. "He wants me to go over at once on most important business."

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

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### HONOUR BRIGHT

AS time passed Sir George Haredale began to think that trouble was really before him. He had not the least pretence to be a business man. He had always been prone to take people at their own valuation. He would never have done anything dishonest or underhanded, and he paid his fellow-men a similar compliment. He had never counted the cost of anything, for the simple reason that he had never been taught to. If he wanted a thing he got it. If he couldn't pay for anything he simply owed for it. When, from time to time, his creditors grew pressing, he gave his lawyers instructions to raise another mortgage, and there, so far as he was concerned, was an end of the whole transaction.

It does not take long, especially with two or three generations of similar incapacity, seriously to embarrass even so fine an estate as Haredale Park. The day came at length when Sir George was under the painful necessity of facing the inevitable, when his worried lawyer told him a few plain truths, and he realized that his income was barely sufficient to live upon. Unfortunately, at this crisis, an occasional run of luck on the turf had relieved the pressure, and it occurred to Sir George as a brilliant idea that here was a source of permanent income. Then luck ran steadily against him, as it always does sooner or later, and at the time Sir George made the acquaintance of Copley he was literally at his wits' end to know what to do.

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It was a misfortune, though a disguised one, that Copley in his headstrong way should fall in love with May Haredale. He had gone about his wooing in characteristic fashion, and had recognized that, unless he were in a position to force the pace, his suit was hopeless. Hence he had helped Sir George, although he needed every penny he had for himself. At that time Copley did not see his way to get it all back and a great deal more. But now he had the consolation of knowing that he would come out all right, whether May Haredale became his wife or not.

He was playing his game with wonted caution and cunning. In response to Sir George's note, he pleaded some excuse, and on one pretext or other kept clear of Haredale Park for the best part of a week. He knew how to play his fish. He knew that delay was in his favour, and was not going to spoil his triumph by undue haste.

Sir George was thoroughly frightened. The interview with Messrs. Absalom's manager came in the light of a revelation to him. He realized that he was in Copley's power, and that the latter could ruin him whenever he chose. Not that he expected anything of the kind. He was of far too sanguine a nature for that, and being a gentleman and a man of honour he naturally believed the story that Copley was temporarily hard put to it for the want of money. From that point of view, of course, Copley was behaving very well. He had not pressed Sir George, nor had he insisted that the money must be paid. In point of fact, he had not mentioned the matter at all.

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But Messrs. Absalom's manager had been emphatic enough. There was something in his manner which Sir George did not like. He actually had no respect for the aristocracy, and spoke as if money were the only thing in the world that mattered.

"It comes to this, Sir George," he said. "We must ask you to make arrangements to clear this off in a week. It is business, pure and simple, and my people want the money. Things are not going well, and we must look to you to settle this claim."

"Within a week?" Sir George cried. "Impossible!"

The shrewd manager shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Sir George," he replied. "In that case, we must take matters into our own hands and sell you up, including your horses in training. We shall much regret this step, but necessity will compel us. The best thing you can do is to consult your solicitors and see if you can raise a loan. Otherwise—well, I think I have made myself plain."

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The man withdrew, leaving Sir George to his own disturbed thoughts. With his sanguine disposition and lack of business knowledge he still clung to the idea that Copley would be able to

put this matter right. But when Copley wrote that business called him elsewhere Sir George's vague sense of alarm began to develop into a perfect nightmare. At the expiration of a week the first blow fell. A man, shabbily dressed and dingy of aspect, called to see Sir George and would take no refusal. He stood in the hall grimly quiet, waiting for the master of the house, who appeared presently and demanded in his haughtiest manner what the intruder wanted.

"I am here on behalf of Absalom & Co.," the intruder said. "Fact is, I represent the sheriff. It is no use blaming me, Sir George. I am only doing my duty, and it's not so pleasant, at that. But I am here in possession, and here I am bound by law to stay until this money is paid. As soon as that is done I shall be only too pleased to go away."

Sir George began to understand the position. He had heard of these things before, but they had always appeared to be remote enough from him. This was what was called an execution, and Sir George's dignity disappeared accordingly. [213]

"This is very awkward," he said. "I had not anticipated anything like this. How long will you have to stay here?"

"Well, it varies according to circumstances," the man explained. "It all depends upon what action the plaintiffs take. If they give you an extension of time I may be here for a month. Sometimes I have been in a house much longer."

"A month," Sir George exclaimed, "impossible!"

"It may be less than that," the man said. "If they don't give you any time at all I shall be gone in a week. In the ordinary course of things, at the expiration of seven days the sheriff will come in and sell everything."

"Seven days!" Sir George repeated the words over and over again, as if he were trying to grasp their meaning. He had barely a week to find this money, and, if it were not forthcoming, everything he had would be disposed of. He would have to face the world without a penny. He wondered if these people would take his horses. He wondered whether their action would injure him in the Derby. But misfortunes never came singly, and it was possible that the Blenheim colt might not start for the historic race at all. For the moment everything lay in the hands of Raymond Copley. Probably he had not the slightest idea that Absalom & Co. had gone to these lengths. No doubt he would devise a way out of this disgraceful situation. It was the only chance. [214]

"If you wouldn't mind going away," Sir George said, "and coming back later in the day, I will see what I can do."

The man smiled broadly.

"Bless you! I couldn't do that," he said. "It would be as much as my place is worth. I might even get prosecuted, and I've a wife and family to think of. I dare not stir a step from here, Sir George; indeed, I dare not. If people treat me well I always try to give as little trouble as possible, and as yet nobody knows who I am and why I came. I daresay you can think of some excuse to account for my presence in the house."

It was very humiliating, but there was nothing for it but a mild conspiracy between the master of Haredale and this grubby representative of the majesty of the law. Sir George led the way into the library.

"You had better stay here," he said. "I can say you've come down from London on some business in connexion with the stable. By the way, it is just as well I should know your name. Oh, Brown, is it? Well, you had better remain here till I come back, and I can arrange for you to have your meals in the kitchen. I suppose you won't object to that?"

"I shan't, if the servants don't," Brown said. [215]

"Very good. I am going to see a friend, and shall return as soon as possible. I suppose if you had a telegram from Absalom calling you back to London, you would disappear without any trouble."

"Certainly, sir, and very glad to go. I have never been in a big house like this before, and it makes all the difference. But I'll do my best to save your servants from knowing who I am and what I am doing at Haredale Park."

Possibly the speaker had some hope that this complacency would not leave him poorer than it found him, and, in his sanguine way, Sir George was already settling in his mind the size of the tip he would give this fellow after he had seen Copley and made arrangements to get rid of him. Nevertheless the master of Haredale was really distressed and alarmed as he made his way across the fields to Seton Manor. Perhaps Copley might not be back from London till dinner-time. But Copley was there. He was in the stable-yard talking to Foster as Sir George approached.

"Here he comes," said Foster with a grin. "I thought he wouldn't be very long. It is any odds that Absalom's man is in possession already. Our friend looks rather dejected, doesn't he? Now is your time to clinch the business."

Copley smiled his assent. "I don't think we are likely to have much trouble with Sir George."

## CHAPTER XXIX

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### ACTING THE FRIEND

COPLEY turned to his visitor with an air of surprise. He held out his hand with an appearance of great friendliness and began to talk about horses as if nothing out of the common had happened.

"I am sorry I have been unable to see you," he said. "But I have been dreadfully harassed in business. You country gentlemen think that capitalists like myself have unlimited cash. Never, my dear Sir George, was there a greater mistake. There are times when I would give one of my ears for a thousand pounds in hard cash. Everything we have is locked up, and bankers are so chary of speculative securities. Of course, it comes all right in the long run, but really, for some days, matters have been extremely critical. However, I managed to make a satisfactory arrangement last night, and came home dead tired, with the full intention of not going near the City for two or three days. I hope there is nothing amiss with you. I don't suppose there is. Ah, you want to be in my line to know what anxiety is."

"I think I've a pretty fair idea of it," Sir George said, as he shook hands. "You have been good enough to advise me once or twice, and I thought I would come over this morning and consult you about a worry of my own. I came on the off-chance, and esteem myself fortunate to find you at home."

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"Oh, not at all, not at all," Copley said breezily. "In fact, I was coming to see you. My conscience has been pricking me, and I feel I have been very rude. But come into the library and tell me all about it. I'll help you if I can."

"You are exceedingly good," Sir George said gratefully. "I have had a most unpleasant shock this morning. It has to do with those people, Absalom & Co. They tell me you have transferred my debt to them. I can't understand it."

Copley shook his head as he motioned his visitor to a chair. He passed over the cigars to Sir George, and sat down to listen in an attitude of respectful attention.

"No, you wouldn't understand these things," he explained. "It is only the man of hard business training and instinct that can follow the ramifications of modern finance. Finance is a fascinating sport with substantial gains for the successful man, but Heaven help him who fails. He is bound to go to the wall, and no one has the slightest mercy for him. It is almost a truism to say that we are at war with one another. Though outwardly on good terms, we really are the bitterest enemies. It is part of the game. I go and stay with other financiers, and they come and stay with me. We drink each other's wine and smoke each other's cigars. We share grouse moors and yachts, we even marry each other's daughters. But, at the same time, it is everybody for himself. That is one of the recognized rules, and if you go under you may become a clerk or something of that kind, unless you prefer to blow out your brains. It is all the same in the City. I tell you this, so that you may understand what a lot of enemies one makes when one embarks in a new venture. It is a mistake to imagine that all the money the successful man makes comes from the public. Every time I make a quarter of a million, some of my friends must suffer. I have a very big thing on at present, and thought I had guarded myself at all points. But man is only human, and it is impossible to foresee everything. Two of my cleverest friends spotted the weak point in my armour, and were not slow to take their opportunity. They squeezed me to such an extent that, about a fortnight ago, they very nearly crushed the life out of me altogether. I was compelled to find forty thousand pounds at a few hours' notice. The only people I could think of were Absalom & Co., and I transferred your debt to them. My dear fellow, if I hadn't done so I should have been in the Bankruptcy Court to-day. Absalom & Co., in their turn, are being squeezed, and that is why they are putting pressure upon you."

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"Then you can't help me?" Sir George said blankly.

"My dear Sir George, I am afraid not. It is with great regret I say this. In two or three weeks I shall be in funds, and if you will wait till then, why I shall give you my cheque with pleasure. At the moment I have nothing. In a month's time I shall have a fortune at my disposal. But probably these people won't wait."

"Then I am ruined," Sir George exclaimed.

Copley murmured that it looked very much like it. He made no suggestion at all. He merely appeared to be duly sympathetic. He was waiting for Sir George Haredale to realize his position. That done, it would be easy to play his game successfully.

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For a time Sir George paced up and down the library. He cursed himself and his bad fortune, blamed Chance, bemoaned his cruel ill luck; in fact, like the weak man he was, he blamed everything except the headlong folly and short-sighted blindness which had brought all this about. In the meantime, Copley sat letting his fish play until his strength was exhausted and he could readily be drawn to land. It was a one-sided battle.

"Is there nothing you can suggest?" Sir George cried despairingly. "Is there no way of getting delay?"

Copley made no reply for a time. When at length he spoke he dropped his voice to a persuasive whisper.

"Well, there is one method," he said. "Absalom is a sportsman, and he takes a great interest in racing matters. Between ourselves, he finances some of the swell bookmakers, and I understand has a grip upon some of the large commission firms. If you could show him a way to make thirty or forty thousand pounds on a race like the Derby, you might induce him to withdraw his execution for a month. Though he is in a corner, or he wouldn't have dropped on you, the suggestion I speak of would be worth a sacrifice."

"I don't follow you," Sir George said.

"No? Then I must speak more plainly. At the present moment you own a colt which looks like winning the Derby. I know the colt has been coughing lately, but your man Raffle is very sanguine and knows what he is talking about. I see the colt has come back in the betting to eight to one, and the public never seem to be tired of backing him. That, however, is the public's look-out and is no concern of yours. In the colt's present condition you will be justified in putting a pen through his name and nobody could blame you. Owners don't raise horses for the benefit of the public, and if the public choose to come in and forestall the market and the horse is scratched, then they must take the consequences. It has been done over and over again, and I don't see why you shouldn't do it yourself. You needn't do it to-day, or to-morrow, or even next week, but if I can assure Absalom that this is going to happen, why, in that case, I feel certain these proceedings will be withdrawn, and perhaps such terms arranged as will wipe the debt out altogether. Do you follow me?"

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Sir George sat white and rigid. He seemed trying dimly to comprehend what Copley was driving at. All the time Copley was speaking he did not meet the eye of his victim. But Sir George's face was no index of his feelings. He was quivering from head to foot with a nameless indignation and, though Copley did not know it, was within an ace of inflicting personal punishment on the financier.

"You can't be in earnest," Sir George said with difficulty. "Surely, you were joking when you asked me to do this thing? Why, it would be contemptible, dishonourable to the last degree. I expect to win a fortune with the Blenheim colt, but I backed him at a very long price, and if he breaks down the loss will not be so great. It would be bad enough to lose a fortune which I regarded as as good as in my pocket, but deliberately to scratch the horse, to wait for a fortnight whilst these friends of yours are laying against the colt, is an insult which I did not dream any man would put upon me."

"You will pardon me if I don't see it in that light," Copley said coolly. "You have a right to do what you like with your own. You are justified in scratching the horse and, indeed, you have every excuse for doing so. I don't see that it matters much whether it is done to-day or in a fortnight's time. You may lose the few thousands pounds you put on the colt, but that seems probable in any case. And, on the other hand, you have it in your power to wipe out your debt to me—that is, to benefit to the extent of forty thousand pounds."

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Sir George's indignation began to ebb. He no longer felt a disposition to smite Copley hip and thigh; he was thinking of his own position and future.

"And if I refuse?"

Copley shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

"In that case, there is no more to be said or done," he answered. "I would help you if I could, but I am powerless just now. But perhaps you will think better of it. I am sure you will be tired of that man in possession by the end of a week."

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## CHAPTER XXX

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### AN ULTIMATUM

COPLEY rose as if the interview were over, and he had done all he could for his friend. But Sir George lingered. He stood gazing into the fire thoughtfully and moodily. Copley's last shaft had gone home. Sir George's whole nature revolted from spending a week in the company of the man in possession. He wanted to gain time, to have an opportunity to consider matters, and, above all, to get rid of the incubus which, in his mind's eye, he could see seated patiently in the library at Haredale Park. Yet he also knew what he ought to have done. He ought either to have knocked Copley down out of hand, or to have walked out of the house with a curt intimation that

he and Copley must be strangers in the future.

But, like the weak man he was, when the pinch came he did neither of these things. It would never have occurred to him to assert that he was a man of honour. All the world had taken it for granted, and in this opinion Sir George shared. But, on the other hand, he was face to face with disgrace, and in a few days would be homeless and penniless, a mark for the finger of scorn, and the object of pity of those whom he had looked down upon from a lofty standpoint. But was there, after all, any great harm in what Copley suggested? Scores of owners of horses had done such things before, and he had a genuine excuse for drawing the pen through the name of the Blenheim colt, since it had fallen ill. If other people benefited by the knowledge, it was no concern of his. If the colt were no better at the end of a fortnight, he could be scratched and things go on as they were. Besides, the colt was a good one, and in the autumn there would be every chance of winning the St. Leger with him. This reasoning was all very specious and wrong, but it wasn't long before Sir George had justified himself, as Copley felt sure he would do.

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"Wait a little," Sir George said. "You can't expect me to make up my mind at once. I must have time to think it over. But I can't do anything as long as that man is at Haredale Park. If you can get rid of him for me——"

"Oh, I think I can do that," Copley interrupted. "But if I telephone to Absalom & Co. from here they will want some guarantee from you that—well, you know what I mean. They won't want any writing, your word will be good enough for that."

Sir George expanded at this suggestion. It never struck him that a mere negotiation on this point from Copley's view would be as good as a written document.

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"I think I can give it," he said.

"Very well," Copley said briskly. "I am glad to hear you talk like that. It is a commonsense view of the situation. Sit down and smoke your cigar in peace and don't worry any more about the matter. I'll go into my office and ring up Absalom & Co., and in an hour's time you will be free from your trouble."

For three-quarters of an hour Sir George sat immersed in gloomy thoughts. Manipulate the transaction as he might, deceive himself as he pleased, there was no getting away from the fact that he was contemplating a shameful thing, and the knowledge that he was saving himself did not mend matters. The best part of an hour had passed before Copley returned with a cheerful face.

"I thought I could manage," he exclaimed. "I felt sure there would be little difficulty, if we only convinced Absalom & Co. that there was a good thing for them here. But, mind you, I had to give them my word. They wouldn't accept anything in the least vague. Nothing is to be done for a fortnight; in fact, not till after the next meeting at Mirst Park, and at the end of that time the Blenheim colt is to be scratched. You have only to keep him short of exercise, and the public will conclude that something serious is amiss with the colt. I had to promise this before I could move these people at all. Of course, if you don't want to go as far as that I can ring them up again. It would be a pity to do so, however, seeing that by this time Absalom's have taken steps to withdraw their action, and in a few minutes the man at Haredale Park will receive a telegram calling him back to London at once. You had better think the matter over. Don't say that I persuaded you, for, if you wish to break off negotiations, it is not too late to do so."

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Copley's voice was gentle, but there was nothing persuasive about him. He meant to leave the matter entirely in Sir George's hands. But, as he had confidently expected, Sir George did not repudiate the bargain. On the contrary, he thanked Copley for what he had done, and when they left the library a few minutes later the arrangement was ratified. As they made for the stable-yard Copley paused as if something had suddenly occurred to him.

"There is one other matter," he said. "I didn't like to mention it before for fear you should imagine I was forcing your hand. Now I can speak freely. It relates to your daughter. When I lent you that money I expected to have the privilege of calling myself your son-in-law. I have not yet had anything definite from Miss Haredale; in fact, I am afraid she dislikes me. But things can't go on like this, and you promised to put in a good word for me. I daresay you will think it strange, but I have set my heart on this marriage. It will be well, perhaps, to let your daughter know how things stand. I fear she doesn't comprehend the position. Tell her yourself."

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There was no mistaking the ring of command in the last words.

"Certainly," Sir George promised. "I will do so without delay. I can't for the life of me understand May's hesitancy. Almost every girl in the county would jump at the chance of being Mrs. Raymond Copley. Besides, May must marry a rich man. But leave it to me, Copley. Come over after dinner this evening and see if we can't fix this thing up once and for all."

Sir George returned to Haredale trying to feel on good terms with himself and elated with the turn things had taken. But he could not disguise that he had done wrong. He could not still the voice of conscience. However, he was relieved to hear from his butler of the departure of Brown on receipt of a telegram. The man had made certain promises. He would call again later in the day, but had left his address in case Sir George wanted to write to him. It was very correct and discreet, no one was any the wiser, nobody had guessed about this black disgrace, and in the fullness of his heart Sir George wrote a short note to Brown enclosing a cheque. He was sealing

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up the envelope and putting on the stamp when May entered.

She was fresh from her ride. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks glowed. There was something in her gay abandon and her clear light of innocence that jarred upon Sir George. Why should she have none of this trouble? Why should she be outside of it all? To some extent, she was the cause of the mischief. But for her Copley would never have lent Sir George any money; but for her he would never have found himself in the clutches of Absalom & Co. This was as specious as his other moralizing, and he never imagined that he had fallen into a trap set by Copley. What he wanted was some one to vent his anger upon.

"Where have you been?" he asked irritably. "I have been looking for you everywhere. I have just been having a conversation about you with Mr. Copley. He wants to know——"

"He already does know," May said coldly. "I thought I had made that quite clear. I shall be glad if you will not allude to this again. It is most distasteful to me."

Sir George brought his fist with a bang on the table.

"You are a fool," he cried. "I beg pardon, but I can't think of any other word. You don't seem to realize what obligations we are under to Mr. Copley. Do you know that if he liked he could turn us out of the house to-morrow? Do you know that even this morning he has saved us from a great disgrace? And he has done all this out of affection for you. I can assure you that Mr. Raymond Copley is not the man to be played with."

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"My dear father," May protested, "why this violence? I don't in the least want to play with Mr. Copley."

"Oh, this is no joking matter. You ought to be proud to think that a man like that is ready to lay his wealth at your feet. Now, I want you to understand that if you treat him in this way he will very likely teach you a lesson. It is no use beating about the bush. We are in his hands. And, therefore, you must marry him."

"Must, my dear father. Surely——"

"Oh, I am not going to listen to any more. I won't argue with you. You are either going to marry Mr. Copley or I wash my hands of you altogether. I will not be ruined for the mere whim of a girl. Now you quite understand me? If this thing isn't settled to-morrow, Haredale will be no place for you."

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## CHAPTER XXXI

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### A POINT-BLANK REFUSAL

IT was a cruel shock to the girl. She had never heard her father speak like that before; indeed, she would not have deemed him capable of such harshness. For many years May and her father had been the best of friends; indeed, their relationship had been more like brother and sister than anything else. She had shared in Sir George's pleasures, she had known most of his troubles, and generally had been allowed to do exactly as she pleased. And if she had a proper sense of pride, it was Sir George who was mainly responsible for it. He had never forgotten that he was the master of Haredale Park, and that the family had lived there three centuries and more. He had always spoken his mind freely to May on the subject of new-comers and interlopers. He had declared that no matter what his neighbours might do, not one of them should ever cross his threshold; he had apparently despised these new rich from the bottom of his heart. It seemed only the other day that Sir George had spoken most contemptuously about Raymond Copley. A few months before and he would have laughed to scorn any suggestion on Copley's part to become one of the family.

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"We need not envy them, my dear," Sir George had said over and over again. "After all, money is not everything. Of course, one has to be agreeable to these people in the hunting-field and when one meets them at neighbouring houses, but, thank goodness, we need not go farther than that. You won't have much when I die, but so long as you marry the right sort of man I shall be quite content with your choice. I can trust you, I know."

These recollections crowded into May's mind as she stood face to face with her father. It struck her almost with painful force that she was making his acquaintance for the first time. This was another Sir George Haredale, of whom she had not the slightest knowledge. He looked hard and sullen, and met her eye with difficulty. May hoped he would have the grace to be ashamed of himself, that this was an outburst for which he would apologize presently.

"Do you really know what you are saying?" she murmured. "I hope I have not mistaken you, father."

"You have not mistaken me at all," Sir George said sullenly.

"Then I am to understand that it is your wish that I should become the wife of Mr. Raymond Copley?"

"I thought I had made it quite plain."

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"You are so set upon this match that unless I marry this man I am no longer to consider Haredale Park as my home."

Sir George nodded. He had not the courage to put it as plainly as that.

"I will try to be calm," May went on. "But this has been a terrible blow to me. Even now I can hardly believe my ears. Do you mean to say that if I refuse Mr. Copley I am to be turned out of house and home?"

"Don't be dramatic," Sir George interrupted.

"I didn't know that I was. I only want to have a clear understanding. Oh, the thing is monstrous. You cannot realize what you are saying. If you have no sort of feeling for yourself or me, just try to imagine what our friends will say. We know many people who would decline to be on visiting terms with Mr. Copley. There are lots of houses where he could not go. Even if I were fond of the man and could meet your wishes, it would be a long time before certain of our neighbours forgave me. What will you say when you meet them racing, or hunting, or shooting? Do you suppose this thing can be kept quiet? Do you suppose everybody won't know why I left home? Do you believe for a moment that common gossip will not say that you turned your daughter out because she refused to marry a man whom you declined to call upon for months after he came here? I know such things happen in the case of boys, but I never yet heard of a father in your position who sent his daughter away because she refused to sell herself to a person whom she both disliked and despised."

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Sir George listened uncomfortably. He was violating all his best feelings. He knew what a sorry figure he must be cutting in the eyes of his daughter. Moreover, every word she said was true. This thing would get out. It would be a dainty morsel in the mouths of all the gossips, and, though he could rely upon May to be silent, other tongues would not be bridled. But he comforted himself with the assurance that things would never go as far as that, for when May saw that he was in earnest she would yield. There might be tears and reproaches, but in the end she would bow to his wishes, and though Copley was not popular, yet he would be accepted in time on the strength of being Sir George Haredale's son-in-law.

"There are reasons why this must be," he said. "I am under obligations to Copley, under great obligations. Besides, he is paying you the greatest compliment in his power. There are many girls \_\_\_"

"Oh, what have the majority of girls to do with me? I am not like them. I have not been trained in the same school. I know lots of my friends regard matrimony as a matter of business. They are too idle and selfish to think of anything but themselves. They would deem it a fine thing to have the spending of Mr. Copley's money. But I detest the man too much for that. He is not a gentleman, his manners are not good, and I am sure he is neither honest nor straightforward. I would do anything in my power to help you, but if it comes to this, that Haredale Park can only be preserved to us by this hateful marriage, then I decline. It is too great a sacrifice to ask of your daughter. Oh, how can you even make the suggestion?"

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"You will think better of it," Sir George said.

"Never! I have said the last word. I will not allude to it again, and, unless you take back what you have said, I will accept you at your word and go out into the world and earn my own living. Don't mention it again."

Sir George looked uneasily at his daughter. Her austere sternness disturbed him. He said that Copley was coming over later in the evening to hear what May had to say on the matter.

"Very well," she answered, "I am rather glad of that. I shall be able to settle this thing for ever."

She turned and swept from the room. She was glad she had kept the tears out of her eyes. She was glad Sir George little knew how terribly he had wounded her. For the rest of the day May went about the house as though nothing had happened. She had a smile and a pleasant word for her visitor, so that even Sir George took heart of grace and deluded himself with the idea that his firmness had not been misplaced. It was only when Copley came that he found out how mistaken he was. Copley had no difficulty in getting May to himself, for Alice Carden was deeply engrossed in a book, and Sir George was sitting over his cigar in the library. At the very first hint of the reason for his visit May turned to him.

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"I think I know what you are going to say," she observed. "I shall be glad to have this matter finally settled. Oh, no, I don't mean what you do at all. Will you be good enough to come to the library with me, because I should like my father to hear what passes between us? I won't detain you more than a few minutes, and it is the best way."

The self-satisfied smile died from Copley's lips. He had not expected a reception like this, and it surprised him, too, to see this uncompromising dignity in May's manner. Perhaps she had never been more alluring or more attractive in his eyes than she was at that moment, and he knew, too,

without any words from her, that he was on the eve of defeat.

"Very well," he said, "though I don't see why we shouldn't settle it between us. It is our affair."

May made no reply. She walked into the library, followed by Copley. Sir George turned eagerly as they entered.

"Ah, well?" he said with an uneasy attempt at playfulness. "I see you have come to an understanding."

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"I trust so," May said quietly, "though I don't think it is the understanding you anticipate. This is a very hateful position for me, and I would give a good deal to be out of it. But it would be cowardly if I tried to shirk my duty. Mr. Copley has already asked me to be his wife, and I refused him. I do not wish to give him any pain, but I had to put the matter plainly because he is a persistent man and not inclined to take 'No' for an answer. I understand he has come here to-night to renew his offer. Now, Mr. Copley, I have to tell you before my father that what you ask is impossible. I am old-fashioned enough to prefer happiness to money, and I could not marry a man whom I did not love. I have never liked you, I never could like you, in fact, I hope you won't think me rude when I say that I dislike you exceedingly. Besides, there is something unmanly and cowardly in pursuing a defenceless girl in this way. If you have one spark of proper feeling you will never allude to this topic again. I don't want to appeal to your pride. I think I have said enough."

Copley said nothing at the moment. He was struggling to obtain the mastery of himself. His face flushed angrily. There was a nasty glitter in his eyes.

"Does she understand?" he asked.

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"It is not my fault if she doesn't," Sir George muttered.

"It is because I do understand," May said, "that I am all the more determined in my refusal."

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## CHAPTER XXXII

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### AN EASY FALL

"ONE moment," Copley put in. "If Sir George has explained matters, then, perhaps I can speak freely. Your father is indebted to me—I will not say anything about the amount, for that would all be wiped out and we could start on a much better footing if you would only take another view of the case. If you persist——"

"You can take that for granted," May said.

"Would you like to think it over?" Copley suggested.

"Oh, I have thought it over. I have had all day to think it over. I see you mean to force me to speak more plainly still. You have a hold over my father. He is deeply in your debt. You have lent him a large sum of money, not out of any feeling of friendship or generosity, but simply because you thought you could force me to marry you. Did any one ever hear of such a situation except on the stage? I know that if I do not change my mind you will visit your displeasure upon my father, you will make it impossible for us to remain at Haredale Park any longer. It seems a strange thing that a man should be so lost to all sense of decency as to use weapons like these to compel a girl to marry him. But it hasn't stopped there. My father has told me quite plainly, even brutally, that unless I make this sacrifice I am no longer to consider myself as his daughter. I must go out as if I were a mere underling to earn my own living. Very well; I am ready to do so. No, I don't want words from either of you. My mind is made up, and there is no more to be said."

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May turned away, and left the library with her head held high and a bright colour burning her cheeks. She was very near to tears, but was grateful for the pride which had carried her through this trying interview without the semblance of a breakdown. When they were alone Sir George turned to his companion.

"I wouldn't have believed it," he said apologetically. "I never expected that May would be so disobedient. But you must make allowance for her. I daresay in time——"

"Never," Copley said emphatically. "She means every word she says. If you had half the pluck and grit she has you would never have found yourself in your present position. We have made a mistake, Haredale; we have gone the wrong way to work. I don't blame you any more than myself, but you may depend upon it that your daughter will never be my wife. She will keep her word; she will go out into the world, if necessary, to earn her own living, and I shouldn't wonder if she made a very good one. I must put up with my disappointment, I suppose. I would give half I possess to be able to say that your daughter was my wife. But there must be none of these harsh

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measures, Haredale. Just think what people would say! We should both be boycotted. The thing would get into the papers and your life wouldn't be worth living. We must find some other way out. Now let us change the subject."

Sir George was perfectly willing. Despite his selfish obstinacy the interview had been a trial to him, and he was exceedingly glad to get it over.

"What else have you in your mind?" he asked.

"Oh, business, of course. About the Blenheim colt? I am taking it for granted that you will scratch him. I don't see very well how you can back out. I have made the arrangements with Absalom & Co., and as they have withdrawn their action they will expect you to do your part. Now what do you say to letting the colt have a run in the Champion Stakes next week at Mirst Park? I thought it would be a very good way of getting out. To begin with, the public will be glad to see whether or not their fears are justified, and if the horse cuts up badly, why, then, you can scratch him at once. It would appear absolutely fair and above board; in fact, it will be. Or, if you like, you can let it be understood that the horse is not quite fit and that you still have hopes of getting him in fettle for the Derby. Either seems a good scheme."

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"I see," Sir George said thoughtfully. "Yes, on the whole, that isn't a bad idea of yours. I shall be glad to get it over, too. I hadn't the slightest intention of sending the colt to Mirst Park, but Raffle reports that he is much fitter to-day, so that there is no reason why I should not adopt your suggestion. There is the chance that people will blame me for taking the risk, but, at the outside, that will be the worst of it. I will talk it over with Raffle in the morning, and let you know definitely."

Shortly after breakfast next morning Mallow came into the library to hear what his employer had to say. The trainer would hardly believe his ears when Sir George unfolded his plan. He had a score of practical objections to make, but Haredale put them all impatiently aside.

"Does the colt belong to you or to me?" he asked. "I have the very best of reasons for what I am going to do. It has always been my policy to take the public into my confidence. I want them to see at Mirst Park exactly what the horse can do. If they like to go on backing him after that it will be their own look-out."

"But that isn't the point, Sir George," Mallow insisted. "The colt is coming on splendidly again. It would be madness to extend him just now, and if he breaks down badly, don't blame me. I'll do my best between now and the day of the race, not because I want to, but because you are my employer and I must obey orders."

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Mallow refused to say more. He closed his mouth obstinately and went back to the stables in a peculiar frame of mind. He had had twenty years of turf experience. There was no cunning wile or deep-laid plot that was not familiar to him and he was wondering what dodge Sir George was up to. Hitherto he had found Sir George Haredale the soul of honour and integrity, but it was one of Mallow's theories that every man had his limits. Besides, no one knew better how critical Sir George's financial affairs were. Of late, too, Sir George had been hand in glove with Raymond Copley, and Mallow hated Copley from the bottom of his heart. In his own phraseology, Copley was a wrong 'un.

Raffle was past all words when, in the fullness of his heart. Mallow confided in him. Raffle was a keen judge of such matters. He sought an opportunity later in the afternoon of seeing Fielden and telling him what had happened.

"Is Sir George mad?" Fielden asked.

"I don't think so, sir," Raffle replied. "I don't like it at all. Depend upon it, Sir George has got into a mess over his money matters and has thought out some scheme for putting himself right. Call me a fool if that there Copley isn't at the bottom of the whole thing. He and Sir George have been as thick as thieves lately. They say you can't touch pitch without being defiled. And since those two have been so friendly, Sir George is quite another man. However, unless you like to interfere, I must act upon instructions. I am bound to do as I am told."

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"How could I interfere?" Fielden asked.

"Well, sir, the colt rightfully belongs to you. He is as much yours as the coat on your back. I can't see why you should stand quietly by and watch the ruin of one of the finest horses that ever trod the turf."

"I had forgotten that," Fielden said. "Perhaps, later, I may have something to say, but for the present that must be our secret, Joe. Mallow must carry out his instructions. By the way, what are they?"

Something like a grin crossed Raffle's face.

"Oh, we've got to run him, sir," he said. "We've got to run him and do our best. That there is the faintest chance of his winning Sir George does not believe for a moment. Still, if you refuse to take a hand, I must do as I am told, that's all. Perhaps you will be at Mirst Park yourself on the first day."

"Of course. I am taking one or two of our crocks there. But I must be off, Joe."

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The conversation haunted Fielden. It was with him night and day till the first day of the Mirst Park meeting arrived. He had seen little or nothing of Phillips for some time, but that morning he had received a telegram asking him to meet Phillips in London early in the afternoon. He gathered from the message that Phillips had something important to say and so he decided to go to town. It would be easy to get back in time to see the end of the afternoon's sport. None of the Haredale Park party was over. Nor had Copley put in an appearance, and Fielden had his time almost to himself. He ran against Raffle in the paddock half an hour or so before the race for the Champion Stakes. There was a queer grin on the old man's face as he suggested that Fielden should go and have a look at the horse. They found the Blenheim colt in his stable looking in much better condition than Fielden had expected.

"He looks splendid," he said.

"Ah, he is a bonny colt," Raffle exclaimed with a look of affection in his eyes. "I never saw a better-tempered horse or a more genuine trier. He'll go every inch of the way, and I shouldn't be surprised if—but we won't talk about that."

Raffle refused to say more. Moreover, he had the colt to look to, for the race was close at hand; so Fielden made his way into the stand, where he could command a good view. Not that he had any interest in the race. It was a foregone conclusion that the Blenheim colt would be beaten and in only one or two instances did he carry any public money. A moment or two later Raffle took up a position by Fielden's side.

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"The colt moves well," said Fielden, looking through his glasses, "and I don't see much signs of staleness, either. Upon my word, if I had any money to spare I'd back him for a trifle myself."

"You might do worse," Raffle chuckled.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII

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### THE FIVE BASKETS

THERE was the usual roar from the ring which began to die down as the horses were seen fidgeting at the post. Then a murmur arose from the spectators, and the dancing kaleidoscope of colours broke into a thin stream as the field got away to a capital start. They came along all in a cluster round the bend of the course till, presently, there was a hoarse shout from the onlookers and the name of the Blenheim colt was on every lip. The horse hung for a moment or two coming up the straight, then seemed to recover himself and, moving along with a beautifully free and easy stride, caught the leaders a dozen lengths from home and slipped past the post a winner by a short head.

"What did I tell you?" Raffle chuckled. "Well, they can't blame me. I was told by Sir George to do the best I could with the horse and I carried out my instructions to the letter. No, sir, I didn't back him myself. I wasn't quite sure. Besides, Sir George wouldn't have liked it. Between you and me, sir, I don't think he'll be altogether pleased."

Fielden asked no questions. Whatever suspicions Raffle had he kept to himself. Fielden glanced at his watch and saw he would just have time to catch a train to town and join Phillips at the rendezvous in Covent Garden. He hurried away from the course and caught his train by sheer good luck.

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He wasn't at all easy in his mind. He was inclined to agree with Raffle that there was more than met the eye in this affair and that Sir George had little consideration for the public when he decided to run the colt at Mirst Park. On the face of it, it was a mad thing to do and the fact that the horse had won rendered Sir George's policy all the more inexplicable. There was something sinister, too, in the close friendship which had sprung up between Haredale and Copley. That Copley was an unscrupulous blackguard Fielden knew very well. Possibly this knowledge was not shared by Sir George, but there was no getting over the fact that Haredale's money matters were in a critical state. Better men than Sir George had yielded to temptation.

Fielden was still debating the matter when he reached town. He turned up at the hotel in Covent Garden where Phillips was awaiting him, it wanting then just ten minutes to three. Phillips was relieved when Fielden came in.

"I thought you were going to fail me," he said. "I began to think that you had missed your train."

"I very nearly lost it," Fielden laughed. "But why do you want me?"

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"We shall see that in good time, sir," Phillips said. "In about ten minutes from now we shall begin operations. There is just time to smoke a cigarette before we start. What is the best news from Mirst Park? I haven't seen a paper yet. Was the Blenheim colt beaten very disgracefully?"

"He wasn't beaten at all," Fielden said. "In fact, he won with considerable ease. There was very little trace of staleness about him. But it is early to talk about that. We must wait and see what old Raffle says to-morrow. I should not be surprised if the colt has done himself some serious injury to-day."

Phillips burst into a hearty laugh.

"What a joke!" he cried. "And what a sell it will be for Sir George! Oh, I know a thing or two, Mr. Fielden. I haven't been moving about with my eyes shut lately. It is very good of your old friend to pull out his horse in public, for the benefit of backers generally, but the man who will be most surprised and most disappointed at the result of to-day's race will be Sir George himself. If there is another man madder than Sir George it will be that scoundrel Copley."

"What do you mean?" Fielden asked.

"Never mind, sir. The least said soonest mended. But if I had ten thousand pounds I'd cheerfully back my opinion to the last penny that Sir George never hoped for and never expected a victory for the colt. I'll explain all in very good time. Now the sooner we are off the better. We are going to meet a gentleman named Chaffey whom I expect to see in a few minutes not very far from the Post Club on the other side of the street. You remember telling me how Chaffey turned up at Seton Manor, and what he said when he was drunk. I am glad you overheard that, because it solved a point that has been puzzling me for some time. I couldn't for the life of me make out how it was that Jolly & Co. managed to signal the result of the three o'clock race at Mirst Park into the smoking-room of the Post Club. I doubt if I ever should have found out had not Chaffey gone down to Seton Manor and hinted that if he couldn't get what he wanted somebody else might have his job of playing with the fruit baskets in Covent Garden. I saw at once that this was connected with the swindle, but for the life of me I couldn't place it. After thinking over it for the best part of a week, I took a stroll through Covent Garden market and finally stood in front of the Post Club trying to piece the puzzle together in my mind. There were a good many men about loading and unloading baskets, and I saw that most of them carried them on their heads. Why, some of these porters can carry as many as eight or nine bushel baskets on their heads. While I stood watching them an idea flashed into my mind. Look at this copy of to-day's *Sportsman*. Turn to the probable starters in the three o'clock race, and you will see for yourself that there is a number by the side of every horse. Now most racing men carry a *Sportsman*. There would be nothing suspicious in a backer pulling the *Sportsman* out of his pocket and consulting it at any moment. He might do it in a railway carriage, or on the course, or in a smoking-room, and it wouldn't attract any attention. Unless I am greatly mistaken, I have found the clue to the means by which Copley & Co.'s confederate has the result of a race at Mirst Park conveyed to him into the smoking-room of the Post Club practically before the horses are past the post. Then, of course, he can make what bets he likes. He is perfectly safe, because he can't lose. But, come along, it is past three and I don't want to lose this chance of verifying my conclusions. Only we must be careful. We must not rouse Chaffey's suspicions. He must not know that we are even watching him. Close to the Post Club there is a shop where we can procure some cigars and cigarettes and keep our eye upon what is going on. Are you ready?"

Fielden was ready and willing, for his curiosity was aflame. When he and his companion reached Covent Garden, they turned into a cigar shop in the same block of buildings in which the Post Club was situated. A good many customers had to be attended to, so that it was excusable to stand inside the door way and watch what was taking place on the other side of the road.

The market was practically empty. Business had been finished for the day, and there were only two or three casual porters loafing about waiting on the off-chance for an hour's work. One of them standing by a pile of baskets with hands plunged deeply in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth was Chaffey.

"No mistake about him?" Phillips asked.

"That's the man," Fielden whispered. "I could swear to that expression of his anywhere. But what is he doing there? He doesn't seem to be particularly busy."

"He is getting well paid for his job, anyway," Phillips chuckled. "As it is not likely to last long he'll be gone in a few moments. Have you the right time about you? What do you make it? Five minutes past three by post office time? The result ought to be here at any moment. Ah, I thought so. Just keep your eye closely upon Chaffey."

In his excitement Phillips bent over and grasped his companion's arm. Fielden saw Chaffey suddenly pull himself up and moisten his hands. He touched his ragged cap as if in response to a distant call, then he proceeded to fling five baskets one on the top of the other and balance them on his head. With this pyramid thus arranged he walked slowly across the market and disappeared down one of the corridors, where he was lost to sight.

"What on earth does it mean?" Fielden asked.

"Oh, that's the signal," Phillips explained. "The result has just come into the office of Jolly & Co. on the private telephone wire from The Nook at Mirst Park. The supposed Mr. Jolly stands near the window with the telephone receiver to his ear ready to flash the signal across the street. Now you understand why the flex of the telephone is so long. Before the horse is past the post the man on the top of the house at Mirst Park sends the number, and Jolly & Co. signal it to Chaffey. Then Chaffey simply puts five or other number of baskets on his head, and the confederate in the Post

Club has the result. Mind you, this could be done within five seconds of the race being settled. Now take this *Sportsman* and I'll eat my hat if the winner of the three o'clock race at Mirst Park isn't number five on the programme."

When the result was published Phillips proved to be correct.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV

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### NO. 5

"THAT'S it," Phillips exclaimed. "I think we've got it right at last. We know by the evening paper that Dandy won the Longhill Handicap, which was the three o'clock race at Mirst Park to-day. We also know that Dandy is No. 5 on the *Sportsman* list, all of which goes to prove our case. It is a smart bit of business, isn't it?"

"Exceedingly smart," Fielden said, "and, to some extent, risky. Whoever sends the message from Mirst Park is certainly a very good judge of racing. That telephone signal must have been started before the horse was past the post."

"Oh, I don't know," Phillips argued. "In a very tight race they would have to wait to see what the judge had to say. But I am sure that either of us could spot the winner in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred within fifty lengths of the post. Therefore, the result would be known in London and signalled into the Post Club practically at the same instant that the race was over. I think we shall know how to deal with Mr. Copley now."

"What are you going to do?" Fielden asked.

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"That depends upon circumstances. I don't mind telling you, when I first came home and found Copley in an apparently good position, I intended to make money out of him. I didn't feel so keen upon revenge as I used to feel. It would have been no great satisfaction to me to get him ten years on the Breakwater, and, besides, I should have had to go out to the Cape and waste several months there. That is why I decided to hit him through his pocket. But I had to be careful, because I had a dangerous man to deal with and I didn't relish the idea of a prosecution for blackmail. That is one of the reasons why I went into this business. When I speak, I shall lay Copley by the heels without taking any trouble and probably without appearing in the matter. I shall have the satisfaction of sending him to gaol, and I shan't have to go out of the country at all."

"You can't make anything out of this," Fielden reminded him.

"Of course not. If I were to go to Copley to-day and tell him what I had discovered he would give me a few thousand pounds to keep my mouth shut and, sooner or later, when the dodge is found out, as it must be, I should figure in the dock with the others. It is too dangerous a game. Still, when I come to think of it, sir, you are somewhat in my debt."

"Perhaps I am," Fielden admitted. "But I don't see what special favour you have done me——"

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"By getting rid of Raymond Copley," Phillips smiled. "I couldn't have served you better. We shall have him out of the way anyhow. Later, when you find yourself in a good position again, I will ask you to give me a responsible post in your stables. Oh, it will all come right, sir. You ought to win a big stake over the Derby, if you play your cards right, and the Blenheim colt will be worth a small fortune."

"What have I to do with the horse?" Fielden asked.

"I know all about that, sir," Phillips said cheerfully. "Never mind where I had my information. I am half a gipsy and my mother's tribe pick up news from all sorts of unlikely quarters. A lad who used to be in your stables told me the story. Nobody else would have believed him but me. I can give you chapter and verse if you like, but that would only be wasting time, and I can guess what Copley's game is, too. See if I don't prove to be a true prophet. The Blenheim colt will be sure to show signs of to-day's race; indeed, he is a marvel if he does any good during the rest of his career as a three year-old. But, then, the horse is a marvel. Still, very few of us know that, and we shall be able to back him for the Derby at our own price within the next few days. I will stick on the horse every farthing I can rake together. If I could only get a couple of thousand pounds I could make a fortune. And you ought to make a fortune, too. You told me that you could find that sum, if necessary, and seeing that you have it in your power to prevent the Blenheim colt from being scratched you will be flying in the face of Providence if you turn your back on a chance like this."

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Fielden looked at his companion in some perplexity. He was astonished to find that Phillips knew so much. Whence did the man derive his information? But there never was a gipsy yet who was not fond of a horse. The various clans roam all over the country, and very little that is going

on escapes their sharp black eyes and there is, besides, a sort of freemasonry amongst them. But it mattered little whence Phillips' information came, for he had certainly got it. He was correct in every detail, too, and for the first time Fielden began to see his way. He could lay his hands upon a couple of thousand pounds, and before the week was out he knew that the Blenheim colt would be at any price in the market that a backer needed. Two thousand pounds in itself was not much to lose. It would leave him only a little worse off than he was at present. On the other hand, it might bring him in enough to start life again as a rich man. He was thinking of May Haredale and all the brilliant possibilities in that quarter. He could stop this vile conspiracy. It was for him to say what the future of the Blenheim colt was, and he could do this without arousing any gossip or giving the public any chance for spicy scandal. When the right moment came he could go to Sir George and inform him that he had no control whatever over the colt. Sir George might bluster and Copley might threaten, but their threats would be in vain. In the long run Sir George would benefit and May would be free from the persecutions of a scoundrel and Fielden would be in a position to offer her a luxurious home. He had learnt his lesson, too. He was no longer the careless and extravagant youth who had left England more or less under a cloud.

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He was aroused from his reverie by questions from Phillips.

"Really, I beg pardon," he said, "but, for the moment, I was thinking about something else."

"Oh, I understand that," Phillips said with a dry smile. "But we haven't finished. Our case is not complete. We must know whether there is any big wagering on the three o'clock race this afternoon in the Post Club. To get my facts I have brought Major Carden over here on purpose. I have paid his expenses to and from Germany, and I understand he wishes to return to-night, if possible. Let's go on to our hotel and wait for him. But I must tell you that Carden knows nothing. He thinks I have some deep scheme on for making money and so long as I pay him for his information he is satisfied. You had better leave all questions to me."

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Fielden was willing enough to do so. To some degree he was not pleased to be mixed up in this business, though it gave him a hold over Copley. They had hardly reached their hotel before the Major came in. He made no objection to Phillips' offer of refreshment. They talked for a few minutes on indifferent topics and then Phillips went to the point.

"I suppose you've got my cheque," he said, "or you would not have been here to-day. I hope it wasn't inconvenient."

"It was devilish inconvenient," the Major said in his florid way. "But as you are willing to pay I don't mind. Now I am ready to give you all the information you need. Please don't be long because I have a train to catch before five."

"Then we needn't waste more time," Phillips said. "I suppose you were in the Post Club all the afternoon."

"My dear sir, I lunched there and I've only just come away. I left a lot of people there. Rickerby was there, with three or four more of the gilded plungers, including Selwyn. As to the first and second race——"

"Oh, hang the first and second race," Phillips cried impatiently. "It is the three o'clock race at Mirst Park that I am interested in. Was there any heavy wagering going on, and can you tell me who was betting? That's all I want to know."

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The Major went into detail. There had been a certain amount of business over the three o'clock race, but sundry heavy wagers had been deferred almost to the last moment. A large amount of chaff had gone on between one particular plunger and Selwyn and his satellites over a horse called the Dandy. Dandy had been a rank outsider and had only cropped up in the betting at the eleventh hour, so to speak. A quarter of an hour before the race there had been no takers. Then the argument grew more heated and finally Selwyn had laid several wagers against Dandy at a thousand to thirty. All this had taken place, so far as the Major could guess, whilst the race was in progress. There was something like consternation amongst the bookmakers when the news came that Dandy had won the Longhill Handicap by three lengths. Altogether it had been a dramatic afternoon.

"And that's about all I can tell you," the Major concluded. "If you want me again, give me more notice, please. I really must be going."

He took up his hat and swaggered from the room, leaving Phillips apparently very well pleased.

"Our case is complete," he said. "The rest is in your hands."

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## CHAPTER XXXV

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### A POISONOUS ATMOSPHERE

It is impossible for a man to change the habits of a lifetime, especially when he has reached the age to which Sir George Haredale had attained. He tried hard to justify himself in his present embroilment. He juggled with his conscience, but the ways of the transgressor are hard, and the master of Haredale Park was having anything but a good time. He knew that he was doing wrong, that he was about to commit something in the shape of a crime. When a man has pledged himself to this kind of thing, it is marvellous how circumstances combine to help him.

On the face of it things were not going well. The victory of the Blenheim colt in the Champion Stakes was a blow to him. He had expected the colt to lose, thereby giving him occasion to scratch it. If this had turned out as he had expected, he would have been the object of popular sympathy and his reputation as a sportsman and an honourable man would have been enhanced. But to his surprise and vexation, the colt had proved his sterling worth and within the last few hours the public had established him more firmly than ever in the betting. There was always the chance, of course, that the race would leave its mark on the colt and that some ill effects might supervene, in which case the original programme could be carried out without exciting the suspicions of the many-headed.

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This was precisely what did happen. Three days later Mallow came into his employer's study with a long face and the information that the colt's lack of condition was rather more manifest than before. For once in a way Mallow was not polite and forgot the respect due to his master.

"It's just as I told you, Sir George," he exclaimed. "The colt's been ruined. I don't say it isn't possible to get him fit in time for the Derby, because he's a wonder. But if you had tried to ruin the horse you couldn't have gone about it in a better way. I can almost cry when I think of it."

"You are forgetting yourself, Mallow," Sir George said.

"Oh, maybe I am, sir, maybe I am. I have been dealing with fools and knaves all my lifetime, and I ought to be accustomed to them by now. I feel as if I had been a party to cutting that colt's throat. You don't deserve to have a horse like that in your stable; you don't deserve to win another race as long as you live."

Sir George was vastly indignant. He wanted to know if Mallow realized whom he was talking to. But Mallow was in no mood for politeness and told his employer a few home truths. He sketched graphically what the better-class sportsmen would say when they realized what had happened. It was useless to be angry, all the more so because he knew that every word Mallow spoke was true. On the spur of the moment he had intended to give Mallow instructions to have the horse struck out of all his three-year engagements, but looking his irate servant in the face he lacked the pluck to do so. So he proceeded to compromise.

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"At the worst," he said with some dignity, "it was only an error in judgment. If you can get the colt fit again before the Derby the public will have no grievance against me. They will win their money and that's all they care about."

Mallow appeared to be somewhat mollified.

"Then things are to go on as they are, Sir George?" he asked. "There has been a lot of mischief done, but it is not yet too late. But it is no use crying over spilt milk."

This was going rather too far and too fast. Sir George's fears were aroused again.

"Your instructions are not quite indefinite," he corrected. "We will let the matter stand over for a week. At the end of that time we will see the colt's condition. If there is no material change for the better, then I must scratch him."

With this perforce Mallow had to remain content and went out muttering to himself. He wanted to know what Sir George was driving at and what this new policy meant. The trainer had a shrewd idea, though he hardly dared to whisper it even to himself. Still, a week was a week, and much might be done in that time. Besides, if necessary, he knew Raffle had a great card to play. For some reason or other Sir George wanted the colt scratched and Mallow had no difficulty in laying this somewhat shady diplomacy on the shoulders of Raymond Copley.

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Meanwhile, the week drifted on and things remained in much the same position at Haredale Park. Sir George had said nothing more to his daughter, neither had she alluded to the detestable topic. But she was ready to take a step which would have considerably alarmed her father had he known of it. Copley was away on business. He came back on Saturday and made his way across to Haredale Park after dinner. In the drawing-room he was coldly informed that Sir George was in the library. He appeared to take this curt dismissal in good part and went off in search of Sir George whom he found sitting moodily over the fire.

"Where have you been lately?" the Baronet asked.

"Oh, my dear sir," Copley explained, "you forget that I have my business to look after. I have been exceedingly busy. When things take a turn for the better that is the time to follow your fortune closely. During the last few days I have been making money with both hands."

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It appeared to be no idle boast, for Copley was looking less gloomy than usual. Fortune was smiling upon him again. He and his confederates had had a rare haul over the Longhill Handicap. They were in funds, and unless things went very wrong indeed by the time the Derby was over they would be all rich men. But Sir George guessed nothing of this. He was only sorry to think

that May should be so obstinate in refusing to take her share in the spending of these phenomenal riches.

"I am exceedingly glad to hear it," he said.

"Oh, thank you very much. You see, fortune cuts all round. What's good for me is good for you. In the first place, you can make your mind easy about that affair of Absalom & Co., because they won't trouble you any more. After the Derby we need not worry ourselves as to money matters. That brings me to my reason for coming here this evening. I understand that the colt has broken down permanently. From what I see in the papers there is not the remotest chance of his winning a race as a three-year old."

"It looks like it," Sir George answered. "At the same time, Mallow doesn't share my opinion. He is very obstinate."

"Oh, what the devil does it matter what he says or thinks?" Copley said impatiently. "He is only a servant. Surely you can do what you like with your own. Besides, in this matter the opinion of the whole racing world will sustain you. At the worst people can only say that you have made an error in judgment. The Press recognizes that you have acted like a good fellow and a sportsman in running this risk simply with the object of taking the public into your confidence. They don't know, of course, that you don't want the horse to win, nor what a surprise the Mirst Park victory was to you. And on the top of that they tumble over one another to back the colt, and if he doesn't start at all they are to blame. Still, it has been a good thing for me. I have laid against your animal thick and thin and after the Derby is over I shan't need to do any more work."

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Sir George made no reply. He sat gazing dubiously into the fire. Looking back at the course of events, he could hardly see how he had got himself into this mess. He ought to have refused to listen to Copley, and should have supported the opinion of such a sound judge as Raffle. Besides, he had never won a Derby in his racing career, and it seemed to him that he was wasting a splendid chance. But it was too late to repent, too late to draw back, and all Sir George could hope was that no one would ever have an inkling of his shame. He did not know, neither did Copley, that May was standing in the doorway. She had come in for something she required. Her evening shoes had made no sound on the thick carpets, and she had heard every word that was said. Not that she intended to play the eavesdropper. But one remark of Copley's had fascinated her and she stood as if rooted to the spot.

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She knew her ears did not deceive her. She had been brought up all her life in an atmosphere of racing. She knew almost as much about it as Raffle himself. The thing was plain and a wave of shame and humiliation rushed over the girl as she stood there drinking in every word.

She could not blind herself to the truth. She could not get away from the fact that her father was a conscious participant in a disgraceful action. It mattered little that her father was in Copley's hands, or that Copley had suggested the whole thing. The shock was none the less painful. It seemed incredible that a man in Sir George's position should stoop so low as this. These plots had happened before and no one had spoken of them with greater contempt than had Sir George. Now was he self-confessed as a principal in one of the shadiest of them all.

May stole away. For a moment she had been on the point of an outburst. But perhaps it would be better to wait and speak to her father quietly later, to try to find some means of averting this dreadful dishonour.

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"I cannot stay here," she murmured. "The atmosphere poisons me. I must get away, I must get away."

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## CHAPTER XXXVI

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### FIELDEN INTERVENES

MAY went quietly back to the drawing-room. There was nothing in her face to indicate what she was suffering. For a time she sat gazing into the fire, watching Alice Carden who sat opposite her engrossed in a book. At the end of half an hour May had made up her mind what to do, and when Alice laid her volume aside, she began to speak.

"How long is your father likely to be away?" she asked.

"Oh, for two months, I suppose," Alice said. "But I may find him at home when I go back next week."

"I hope not," May answered, "because I have a plan to suggest to you. I wonder if you would mind my coming with you? I suppose you could get me a bedroom in your house. I should like to pay for myself. Could it be managed, do you think?"

"It would be delightful," Alice cried. "But why do you want to leave this beautiful house? What will Sir George say when he hears of it?"

"He mustn't hear it," May whispered. "We have always been very good friends, Alice, and you can help me now if you will. I am going to confide in you and you must not whisper a word of it to a soul. So long as your father is away I shall be safe with you, and as he may not be back for some weeks I will have time to turn round. I must go away, I cannot stay here any longer. Something has happened which compels me to get my own living."

"Oh, impossible!" Alice cried.

"My dear, don't you know that it is the unexpected that happens? Well, in my case, it has. If anybody had told me this a couple of months ago I should have laughed the idea to scorn. It would have been incredible that my father should threaten to turn me out of the house. Hitherto we have been the best of friends, and I have regarded him as one of the most upright and most honourable of men. I have always prided myself upon the fact that nothing could rob us of our good name; but I was mistaken, Alice. Actually this place does not belong to us at all. My father is a mere lodger, dependent upon the good will of Mr. Raymond Copley, who can turn us out at any moment. Moreover, he has compelled my father to do a thing that I blush to mention. Do you know why Mr. Copley has brought all this about?"

"I think I can guess," Alice said. "He is anxious to marry you. Am I not right?"

"You have guessed it," May exclaimed. "You have saved me the humiliation of telling you that. Mr. Copley can't say he has bought me. But he has bought my father, and it comes to this, that unless I consent to be Raymond Copley's wife I am to consider this my home no longer. These were my father's very words. I suppose he chose them because they sounded best. But it is as if he had told me to go. I couldn't marry that man; nothing would induce me to do so. There is worse behind—there is a conspiracy on foot which I overheard in the library just now. You must not ask me to tell you what it is. My tongue would refuse to tell it. Well, it is the last straw. I couldn't be more miserable than I have been the last week or so. I cannot stay any longer. I have little or no money, but I have my mother's jewels which ought to fetch at least a thousand pounds. I propose to go to London and look about for something to do. I want to come to you because we are such friends, and because I know you will sympathize with me. We can live very cheaply together and I will pay you for all I have, and before your father returns I shall probably have found work. You won't refuse, will you?"

"How can you think such a thing?" Alice said reproachfully. "There is nothing I would not do for you, and I know we shall be perfectly happy together. It would be worse than death to marry a man like Mr. Copley. I don't know why it is, but from the very first moment I saw him I hated him. I think he has such a cruel face. His mouth is so hard and his eyes are dreadful. But when do you want to go? When will you be ready to start?"

"Didn't you say you must be back in town on Tuesday? Didn't you say something about your pupils? Well, suppose you go up on that day and I follow you on Wednesday. It would arouse suspicion for us both to go at the same time, and indeed I would ask you to stay longer only I can't breathe here. Knowing what I do, it is hateful to have to sit down to the same table with my father. I daresay I shall come to forgive him in time, but for the present it is beyond my strength. Mr. Copley is always about the house. Do try to make it Tuesday if you can. It seems so horrid of me——"

Alice rose from her seat and kissed the speaker affectionately.

"I won't hear another word," she said. "It is not in the least horrid of you. I will gladly do all I can to help you."

Tuesday came at length and Alice Carden went away, leaving May to her own melancholy thoughts. She had not seen Harry Fielden for a few days and was thankful he had not been near her. It would be hard parting from him. It would be difficult to say good-bye without betraying herself or giving him some inkling of what had happened. After lunch on Wednesday she stole out of the house and walked to the station. She had sent on her luggage by Alice Carden the day before, so that when she left for London it might seem that she was only going for a casual visit. She would not mind the new life, so she thought, and she hardened her heart as she looked out of the carriage window. But, all the same, she was glad to find herself alone, for the tears would come and the old familiar landscape grew dim and blurred.

What would they say, she wondered, when they knew. What would Harry Fielden think? But, at that very moment, Harry Fielden had something else to occupy his attention. He was walking across the Downs towards Haredale Park with Raffle, and the latter was speaking his mind very freely.

"I won't be quiet, sir, and I won't keep my mouth shut," he said. "I tell you, Mr. Harry, it is a foul conspiracy and there are no two ways about it. Sir George gave Mallow a week to try to pull the colt round, and he says, says he, 'Mallow, if he's no better by that time, he's to be scratched.' Those were the instructions and Sir George confirmed them this morning. Now I am not going to say that the colt is much better, but I am prepared to pledge my reputation, and it is worth something, that I'll get him fit in a month. The whole thing has been arranged between Sir George and that man Copley, so that the horse can be scratched for the Derby. The public are to believe that Sir George has been unfortunate, but has played the game like a gentleman and a

sportsman. Well, you may have what opinion you like, but I know better. Mind you, if I didn't know what I know I should have to put up with it and hold my tongue, because I am only a servant and no one can blame me for obeying my orders. But I have been making inquiries, and I find that Copley and his gang have been laying thick and thin against the colt for the past week. Do you mean to tell me they could know the colt would be scratched if they hadn't got Sir George in their power?"

"What do you want me to do?" Fielden asked.

A bitter smile crossed the old man's face.

"I shouldn't have thought you'd ask what you were to do, sir," he said. "But I'm not going to stand it. I'm not going to sit down quietly and see this game going on. I daresay you think it will be bad for Miss May if this thing comes out. But bless you! if you go the right way to work nothing will leak out. The colt mustn't be scratched. You leave him where he is and he's certain to win the Derby. You are the very man to step in and stop the game. Let Sir George know what your power is. Let Copley see that he's got a gentleman to deal with. It will ruin Copley and his mob, but that doesn't matter. They are a fine set of thieves, if you ask me, sir, and I shouldn't mind telling Copley so. Now I would like to hear your opinion."

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Fielden had no particular opinion to offer. At the same time, he had information in his possession which would have astonished Raffle if he could only have seen into the mind of his old master. Pressing as the matter was, it was not possible to act on the spur of the moment, and Fielden contented himself by saying he would think over the matter.

"But you can't do it, sir," Raffle protested. "There's no time to waste like that. The colt has to be scratched and maybe a telegram's already gone to London to that effect. The mischief may be done."

"By Jove, I hadn't thought of that," Fielden exclaimed. "All right, Joe, it will be a most unpleasant piece of business, but I see now that it must not be put off any longer. I'll go straight over to Haredale Park and see Sir George at once."

Sir George was in his library. He had given instructions to the butler to deny him to every one. In fact, he was seated by the library fire reading a letter which May had left for him. She had not minced matters. She had gone away for reasons well known to him, she said, and her address mattered nothing to anybody. Sir George was looking particularly old and grey and troubled as Fielden thrust his way past the butler and entered the library. Sir George's manner was not encouraging, and he curtly demanded to know the meaning of this intrusion.

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"I am sorry," Fielden said, "but my business would not wait. Am I to understand that you have struck the Blenheim colt out of the Derby? Is it done?"

"It's not done yet," Sir George said indignantly, "but it will be done this afternoon. Perhaps you have some objection to make. Perhaps you would like to forbid it?"

"I do and must," Fielden said quietly. "The horse does not belong to you at all. He happens to be mine."

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## CHAPTER XXXVII

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### BETWEEN TWO FIRES

SIR GEORGE HAREDALE pulled himself together.

"You will excuse me," he said, "but I don't follow you. I have had much trouble and worry lately and I am not myself this morning. Did you say that the Blenheim colt belonged to you? If this is a joke I cannot say I admire it."

"I assure you I was never more serious in my life, Sir George," Fielden protested. "I know what I say sounds extraordinary. The Blenheim colt belongs to me; it was never yours at all; in fact, it is not even entered in this year's Derby in your name. I have been making inquiries, and this is a literal fact. I have derived my information from headquarters. The conditions, monetary and otherwise, have been complied with——"

"I don't doubt it for a moment," Sir George exclaimed. "But what has all this to do with me? When you went abroad I bought every animal you possessed."

"I don't think so, Sir George. One or two were kept back; Raffle did so on his own responsibility. My solicitors have the papers and receipts, so that it is possible to earmark your exact purchases. I may tell you, however, that until I came here, I had no notion of this singular business. It appears that I forgot to advise my bankers before I left England and that, even up to

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the present moment, they are meeting my racing obligations out of the surplus moneys paid into my account. Now according to what Raffle says, *your* colt, I mean your entry for this year's Derby, was disposed of long ago. My colt Raffle kept for sentimental reasons and, for the last two years, he has been trained with your horses. Raffle has always declared that some day he would do something great with one of the Blenheim blood. When he found out how good a thing he had he was almost frightened. He was on the point of confessing to you several times, but when he heard that I was dead he decided to let matters slide. Raffle has a vein of sentiment in his nature and, I suppose, the romance of the thing appealed to him. Besides, he knew that you were a friend of mine and that May was more than a friend. He is very fond of your daughter, in which he shows his good taste. So the foolish old man resolved to keep the secret to himself. He had transferred his allegiance to you and yours and had set his heart upon restoring your family fortunes; in reality he was giving May a comfortable and settled future. He didn't want the money for himself. He was satisfied to feel that he was repaying the kindness he had had at your hands. From a lofty moral point of view the thing may be open to censure, but what I am able to prove I say through my lawyers, through my bankers, through Raffle himself, and through other witnesses whom we can produce. Of course I am in your debt for training expenses, but that, at the moment, is beside the point. The point is that the Blenheim colt which, bar accidents, is certain to win this year's Derby, as you are perfectly well aware——"

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"I am not so sure of that," Sir George interrupted. "If I am to believe what Raffle says——"

"We will come to that," Fielden went on. "I think otherwise. The horse has been knocked about in the betting a good deal lately and I am told that he has gone to an outside price again. I have managed to scrape together about two thousand pounds, every penny of which I have put upon the colt. I had made up my mind never to make another bet, but this opportunity is too good to be lost. If this horse wins the Derby, then I shall be a rich man again. If that good fortune is in store for me, it will be the last bet I shall ever make. And now, you understand why, apart from the morality of the thing, I object to the horse being scratched. In fact, you are not in a position to do so."

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Sir George rubbed his head bewilderingly.

"Please say it all over again," he asked. "I know you mean everything you say, I know you are not joking with me, but I can't understand it."

Fielden went over his points once more slowly and carefully, and then, at last, Sir George began to see. He did not fail to grasp his own position, either. He knew the peril in which he stood, unless he could persuade Fielden to fall in with his plans. But Fielden had told him he had backed the colt for all he was worth, and he was not likely to ruin himself merely to save an old man from the result of his folly. Besides, this would entail a shameful confession, for Sir George was not aware that Fielden had an intelligent view of the situation.

"This is very awkward," he remarked.

"I don't see why it should be," Fielden said coolly. "You can make a fortune, too. You have backed the horse heavily, and nothing in the race has any chance of beating him. I must consider myself. I have learnt the folly of sacrificing myself to my friends. In this affair I have some one to think about besides myself. May——"

"May! What has she to do with it?"

Fielden hesitated. He hated to give anybody pain, but the time had come to speak plainly.

"She has a great deal to do with it," he said. "Whatever disgrace falls upon you cannot affect her good name. But, at the same time, I strongly object to any one being able to say that my future wife's father had been warned off the turf for malpractices."

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"Malpractices!" Sir George cried. "My dear Fielden, you are forgetting yourself. Explain, please."

"I had much rather not," Fielden said. "But since you force me to speak, I must go on. I happen to know a good deal about Mr. Raymond Copley. I know you are deeply in his debt. I know that he helped you, because he hoped thereby to compel you to coerce May into a marriage with him. I am given to understand that you have done your best. I beg of you, Sir George, not to interrupt me. You have challenged me and I have a right to state my case. Copley is a scoundrel. I knew something about him in South Africa, though we never met. But he was in constant contact with a sort of partner of mine named Aaron Phillips. Phillips and I contrived to get an option on a diamond mine and, but for unforeseen circumstances, we should have made a fortune out of it. But the locality was kept a secret. The only man who knew where it was died and we had nothing but some plans to go on. Copley and Foster heard of this and resolved to get hold of those plans. The plans have vanished and probably will never be seen again. Then these two ruffians tried to murder Phillips. Indirectly they nearly murdered me. Phillips came back to England and sought me out. If he thought it worth while he could put the police on the track of Copley and Foster and they would be certain of penal servitude. But Phillips has other views. He has been following up these two men like a sleuth-hound and you may take my word for it that within a few days both Copley and Foster will be arrested in connection with one of the biggest turf frauds of recent years. Oh, I know what I am talking about."

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"Bless me!" Sir George cried, "is this true?"

"Absolutely. I know about the whole thing. I know how the scheme has been worked and could put my hand upon the confederates at the present moment. But you will see for yourself before the week is out. You must not say a word of this to a living soul, and if you meet Copley during the next day or two I will ask you to behave towards him as if he were still a friend. Now you see the kind of man who has you in his toils. Simply because Copley has a powerful hold on you, you have promised to draw the pen through the name of the Blenheim colt. I won't unduly blame you, Sir George; no man knows how weak he is till he is face to face with a great trouble and a great temptation. Was not that the situation? Copley is in a position to turn you out of Haredale Park. He offers to cancel the debt if you will scratch the colt. At that moment the colt falls providentially lame. You can oblige him without a soul being any the wiser, and even gain popular applause over it, and make a fortune out of it by working it the right way."

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"Not a penny," Sir George said emphatically.

"Well, I am glad to hear you say that. At the same time, I can't forget what you were willing to do. At any rate, I am preventing you from something in the nature of a crime. You can't interfere with my property, but you can refuse to carry out what Copley desires and defy him to do his worst. You are safe from him, and in future your daughter will have no occasion to be ashamed of you."

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII

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### LOOSENING THE GRIP

FIELDEN'S last thrust went home. Sir George fairly winced and the red of shame flushed his face. Never in the course of his life had anybody ever spoken to him like this before. And never did he feel less able to resist the reproach.

"You are going too far," was all he could say.

"Indeed, I have no wish to," Fielden exclaimed. "I only want to save you from this crowning folly, and you need not be afraid of Copley. He is powerless to do you any mischief. Of course, you will still owe the money to somebody, but ere the law can make up its mind who is your creditor, if we have any luck at Epsom, you will be independent of all your creditors. Nobody need know of this. You may rest assured that not a word of it will ever pass my lips, and not even May shall be told."

"I am afraid she knows already," Sir George rejoined. "It is useless, my dear boy, for me to combat your statements farther. I thought I was an honest English gentleman, and now I find that at a turn of the screw I am only a pitiful scoundrel. I fear that May has found out all about it. I was anxious she should marry Copley, for salvation seemed to lie that way, and I was under great obligations to the man. I was so annoyed with May that I said more than I should have done; indeed, I lost my temper and, in the heat of the moment, told her that if she did not obey me in this matter she was no longer a daughter of mine. Of course, I did not mean it."

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Fielden walked to the window and back before he ventured on a reply. Hot words hovered on his lips and anger filled his heart, but he tried to speak calmly.

"That, to say the least of it, was indiscreet," he said. "If I know May, and I think I do, she is the last girl in the world to put up with treatment like that."

"She didn't put up with it," Sir George confessed miserably. "She has gone, taking with her nothing but her mother's jewels which she intends to turn into money. In her letter to me she refuses to say where she is. She says she is going to get her own living and will never come back to Haredale. She must know what took place between Copley and me last night, for she alludes to something she overheard in the library. I wonder if you can help me?"

Fielden groaned aloud. He had not expected a bitter disappointment like this. He was anxious to avoid scandal. Of course, the public would have to hear the strange story which, like a romance, clothed the Blenheim colt. But there was nothing in that to be ashamed of, nothing which would reflect on the honour either of Sir George or himself. Nor would the vast army of race-goers suffer. But the disappearance of May had altered all that. People would ask questions and neighbours were sure to talk. For the moment it seemed as if Fielden's efforts had been wasted, then an inspiration shot into his mind and he took comfort from it.

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"I think I know where to find her," he said. "But it may take me a few days and, meanwhile, you had better let it be known that May has gone away on a visit. We will assume that she is staying with Miss Carden for the present. I need not detain you longer. You will know what to do when Copley turns up to ascertain why the Blenheim colt has not been scratched. For obvious reasons we won't make the discovery public just yet; in fact, I see no reason why it should be made public at all. We can trust May, and I am sure we can trust Raffle, though you will have to tell Copley

the truth. Still, as he will be in other hands before long, nothing he can say or do will matter much. I am going up to London and shall be greatly surprised if, when I come back, I don't bring you news of May."

Fielden took his departure, leaving Sir George to his own troubled thoughts. He was properly ashamed of himself. He knew what a humiliating figure he had cut. He knew how two people, whose opinions he valued highly, despised him. Yet, in spite of everything, himself included, he was glad to know that he would be compelled to keep faith with the public. He was glad to know that within a few days Copley would have no further power to harm him. He had known all along, juggle with his conscience as he might, that old Raffle had been perfectly correct in regard to the colt. Notwithstanding the folly of that appearance at Mirst Park, the colt was not so lame as he had made out and in a week or two would be all right again. At the present moment if he risked a thousand or two, there was almost absolute certainty he would get it back fifty-fold at the great Epsom meeting. As Sir George pondered the situation, his mind was equally divided between shame and exultation. He did not fail to see his conduct in its proper light, nor did he fail to see an honourable way out, with credit to himself and a good many thousands in his pocket. He sat thinking until it was time for his solitary dinner. He had proved everything to his satisfaction before he returned to the library for a cigar. He would have given anything to have had May back again, for once she was under his roof, the way looked perfectly clear. He was still weighing the pros and cons when Copley strode angrily into the library.

He had entered unannounced and looked at Sir George with the light of battle in his eye. He stood an imposing, bullying figure. But the master of the house was not afraid.

"What is the meaning of this?" Copley demanded. "I hope you are not trying to shirk your obligations, because if you do, by gad, I shall have to teach you a lesson."

"You mean about the colt?" Sir George asked.

"What else could I mean? You promised he should be scratched this afternoon. It hadn't been done when I left London at six o'clock. Why?"

"Sit down and have a cigar," Sir George said, "and I'll explain to you. But don't adopt that tone to me, because I don't like it. I am not accustomed to it."

Copley burst into an offensive laugh.

"Oh, aren't you?" he said. "We'll precious soon see about that. No, I don't want a cigar or anything to drink. I'll go home again and perhaps I can find another way—"

"I don't think it will make much difference," Sir George said mildly. "I didn't scratch the colt for the simple reason that I find I haven't the power."

"Haven't the power? What are you talking about?"

"I assure you I am speaking the truth. I wasn't in the least aware of it myself till this afternoon. It is quite a story in its way. Now do, please, sit down and listen. The man you know as Field is the son of an old friend of mine named Fielden, who at one time owned a considerable amount of property hereabouts. You may have heard some of the neighbours speak of him. The son preferred not to be known by his proper name, and that is why I introduced him to you as Field. Now Field, or Fielden, whichever you like to call him, is really the owner of the Blenheim colt. If you will be quiet I will tell you all about it. By the way, Fielden knows a good deal about you and also about your friend Foster. He ran against you in South Africa where he was in partnership with a man called Aaron Phillips. I don't know Mr. Phillips myself, but he tells a story which interested me very much. I have just had it from Mr. Fielden's lips. But sit down."

Copley sat down suddenly. His bullying air fell away from him like a garment. He seemed to have some difficulty in getting a light to his cigar. Sir George could almost have smiled as he saw the change in his one-time friend. There was a look of anxiety, almost of anxious misery, in Copley's eyes as he wriggled about in his chair whilst Sir George told his tale.

"There you have it in a nutshell," the latter concluded. "That is the whole romance for you to deal with as you like. It doesn't matter a bit whether I want to serve you or not, you can see for yourself the position I am in and how powerless I am to prevent the Blenheim colt from running in this year's Derby. Mr. Fielden would not consent, even if he hadn't backed the colt to his last penny. You may depend upon it that if the horse starts he is bound to win, for in this year's moderate lot there is nothing to beat him. This upsets all your plans, but you will find that everything I say is correct. You have still time to get out."

"How can I?" Copley asked. "Why, I have laid against the colt till I am tired of it, and if he runs he'll win. But it is no use my sitting here wasting time. I must go back at once and talk this thing over with Foster. I never heard such an extraordinary story in my life. I thought I was up to most of the moves, but a prophet couldn't have foreseen this. One thing is very certain, as matters have turned out I shall want every penny I can scrape together the next few days and I shall look to you to repay what you owe me. Of course, I don't want to be unpleasant, but necessity knows no law."

Sir George waved his cigar gracefully. He felt he could promise with an easy mind.

"Don't let that trouble you," he said. "I think I shall be able to manage. Circumstances alter

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## CHAPTER XXXIX

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### A DRAMATIC EXIT

MAY had taken her fortune in her own hands. She had, as she thought, shaken the dust of Haredale Park from her feet for ever. There was no reason, she thought, why she should not make her own way in the world. Her trinkets were more valuable than she had expected. She had disposed of one for a hundred pounds, and had no anxiety as to the immediate future. But she was miserable enough. Lodgings seemed to cramp and confine her. She missed the pure air of the Downs, and longed once more to feel the exhilarating stride of a good horse under her. At the end of three days she would have given her pride and all her possessions to be back at Haredale. Already she was trying to think of some excuse for returning home.

She did not know how near her wishes were to being gratified. She was not aware that Fielden was looking for her all over London. He had jumped to the correct conclusion that he would find her near to Alice Carden, but the trouble was to obtain Miss Carden's address. It was not till the Saturday morning that he ran against Phillips, who fortunately knew where Carden lived.

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"You won't find him at home," he said.

"I don't want him," Fielden smiled. "Thank you very much. I'll see you later in the day, perhaps."

"I'm busy," Phillips said darkly. "I've a good many things to do this morning. I've to interview Selwyn and other big plungers. After that, I have an appointment with one of the leading men of Scotland Yard, which will take us down to Mirst Park with a view to going over a certain house we wot of."

Phillips bustled away and Fielden lost no time in seeking out the modest residence of Major Carden. He was disappointed to hear that Miss Carden was out, but it was gratifying to be told that Miss Carden's friend was in the house. Without waiting for further information, Fielden walked upstairs into the room where May was seated. She had pulled a chair up dejectedly in front of the fire and started at the sound of Fielden's voice. There were tears in her eyes.

"So you have found me out."

"Oh, yes, I have run you to earth," Fielden smiled. "I have been looking for you for three days. I had some difficulty in getting the Major's address, but felt quite sure that when I had that you would not be far off. Like me, May, you have not many friends. And now, don't you think you have been foolish?"

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May smiled through her tears.

"But what else could I do?" she asked. "Oh, my dear boy, if you knew everything you would not blame me."

"I think I do know everything," Fielden said gravely. "At any rate, I know why you left home. I had a long interview with your father, and—well, I won't blame him. None of us know what we would do in a temptation like that. That scoundrel Copley had him entirely in his power. Now, tell me, do you know anything of the great conspiracy? Were you in the library the night before you left home, and did you hear Sir George and Copley—"

"I heard everything," May exclaimed. "I must tell you, Harry; I must tell somebody. I never felt so ashamed and humiliated in my life. It was bad enough to be turned out of the house because I refused to marry that man, but when I found that my father had entered into a plot with Mr. Copley to do a disgraceful thing, I felt I could not stay at home any longer. I suppose the mischief is done and the Blenheim colt has been struck out of the Derby. But though the public will never know how they have been swindled, I shall always feel that my father—"

The girl broke down.

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"You need not worry about that," Fielden said. "I quite understand what your feelings are. But what you so greatly dread will never happen. Disgrace will be spared you and yours, because your father has not the power to interfere with the colt. Possibly before the day is out Copley will be as helpless as a child. You look surprised and I don't wonder. I am going to tell you something in the nature of a romance. To begin with, the Blenheim colt belongs to me."

May was too surprised to speak. She sat on the arm of Fielden's chair. She did not seem to notice that his arm was around her, and that her head was very near his shoulder. She did not seem to care about anything now that Fielden was with her, and there was a link between the

past and the present. It was a fascinating story which Fielden had to tell, much more remarkable than anything May had ever read of between the covers of a sporting novel. When the recital was finished she wiped the tears from her eyes, and a happy smile broke over her face. On the spur of the moment she bent down and kissed her companion.

"Did any one ever hear the like of it?" she exclaimed. "It seems almost too good to be true. It is more like a fairy story than literal fact. But I am glad for your sake, for my sake, and for my father's sake. For he is my father, and it is possible that in his position I might have acted in a like heedless and foolish way. It would have been a terrible blow for him to leave Haredale Park. It is only since I have been in lodgings that I have come to realize what it means to have no home, what it was to turn out of such a dear old place as Haredale. But, Harry, we don't appear to be out of the wood yet. It will be a bitter disappointment to Mr. Copley and his colleague to be deprived of their chance of swindling the public. I am sure Mr. Copley will be none the less vindictive against my father, because this was no fault of his. I am afraid we shall have to leave Haredale in any case."

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"I don't think so," Fielden said. "Before long Copley will be powerless. We shall be able to hang on till Derby Day; then the gallant colt will win fortunes for all of us, and I shall be a rich man again. I shall be able to restore the old house and buy back the land, and then I shall have a home fit to ask my wife to. After that we shall be happy, only there won't be any more betting and gambling, because I have learnt my lesson, and it will be all the more effectual and lasting because it has been bitter. Meanwhile nobody knows anything about your trouble with your father except myself and, I presume, Miss Carden. You are supposed to be on a visit to London for a few days. It is lucky you have no maid to make mischief. I must return to Haredale this evening. Let me tell your father that I have explained everything to you, that you are coming back on Monday or Tuesday, and that Miss Carden will accompany you. I know Sir George will be glad to see you. He told me he could not understand how he spoke to you as he did. And, you see, as there is no one to follow your father, as the title will die out with him, Haredale Park will be your own some day. I know you love the place."

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"I couldn't tell you how much," May said unsteadily. "It is only during the last few days that I have realized the depth of my affection. I will come back. You may tell father I said so. I will return on Monday as early as possible and I hope you will be there to meet me. I thought I was going to be brave and strong and earn my own living; I thought that wanted no more than the pluck one has to exhibit in the hunting-field. But it is quite different. It must be a matter of custom and surroundings. It is all very well to run up to London to spend a few days with friends, but when you are alone, as I have been, the very size of the place frightens one. You don't know how glad I shall be to be home again. Why, twenty-four hours after I came here I began to cast about for reasons and excuses for going back."

An hour later Fielden left, at peace with all mankind and inclined to take a roseate view of the future. Everything depended on the Blenheim colt. The path was clear and those chiefly concerned were going to have a straight run for their money. The poisonous influence of Copley would be removed. There would be peace and happiness at Haredale Park once more and, above all, May was coming home.

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Fielden flung himself down in the corner of his carriage and proceeded to open a late edition of an evening paper. He read the racing news of interest, then turned to the news items on the fifth page. Two headlines caught his attention at once and held him fascinated. They were sensational enough even to the ordinary person, but to Fielden they were pregnant with meaning.

"ALLEGED GREAT TURF FRAUDS.

"ARREST OF MR. COPLEY AND MR. FOSTER.

"Late this afternoon, the well-known financier, Mr. Raymond Copley, and his private secretary, Mr. Foster, were arrested in London on a warrant in connection with some alleged turf frauds which took place recently at the Post Club. We understand that the warrant was granted at the instance of Mr. Selwyn."

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## CHAPTER XL

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### CAUGHT!

RAYMOND COPLEY went away from Haredale Park with every ounce of fight knocked out of him. Never for a moment had he anticipated a development like this. He had gone there in his most truculent mood. Everything seemed to be prospering with him. He had only to hold out his hand and all would drop into it. He had no fear Sir George would defy him. Rather had he taken a journey across the fields in order to manifest his power.

There had been no actual necessity for Sir George to put his colt out of the betting yet; indeed, it would have been diplomatic to wait for another fortnight. But Sir George must be shown that he could not do as he liked. He must understand the force he had to deal with in Copley.

Now it had all vanished like a dream. The thing appeared incredible to Copley as he walked homewards. He could not realize it. He was not disposed to regard Sir George's story as a deliberate lie, for it bore the impress of truth. The only way to settle the thing once and for all was to ask for absolute proof. But, if this were done, Harry Fielden would protest and, if he did so, the public would learn what was going on. Taking it altogether, the risk was too great. [299]

He would have to find some other way out of his difficulties. He had laid against the Blenheim colt thick and thin. He had literally piled the money against it with the comfortable assurance that it would never run at all, and that he was about to net a huge fortune without a pennyworth of risk. That prospect had vanished at a blow. If he stayed in England he would have to pay these debts, or the turf would know him no more. And if posted at Tattersall's, his career was at an end. There would be no more chance of making money in that way. He would have to start an entirely new plan if he meant to keep up his rôle of millionaire. But millionaires do not repudiate their racing debts, and Copley could see nothing but ruin wherever he looked.

There was worse behind, too. It was disturbing to know that in some mysterious manner Aaron Phillips was mixed up in this business. But he had made no sign. He had not come near Copley, nor had he attempted to extort money from him. Yet he was actually a sort of partner with Harry Fielden, who had taken service with Copley under the name of Field. The more Copley thought over the matter the less he liked it. He had known Fielden by name, although they had never met. He realized for the first time that he had a deadly enemy under his own roof, so to speak. How much did these two know? [300]

Well, it wouldn't be difficult to discover. He would send for Fielden directly he got back to Seton Manor and pump him judiciously. Foster awaited him with the air of a man who finds the world a good place to live in. He looked uneasy, however, as he noted the expression of his employer's face.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Matter enough," Copley growled. "It's all over, my friend. You can say good-bye to your dreams of fortune. If we can get away with a whole skin we shall be lucky. As far as I can make out, we have made ourselves liable for thirty or forty thousand pounds, and have nothing to pay it with."

"Well, that's all right," Foster said.

"Oh, is it? I suppose you will admit that if the Blenheim colt turns out fit and well for the Derby there is nothing to beat him."

"If he does turn out. But he won't."

"Oh, yes, he will. But I'll tell you the story and if you can show me some way out you are a cleverer man than I take you for."

Foster listened with deepest interest. He looked just as anxious and haggard as Copley by the time the story was finished. For a long time he sat gnawing his fingers. [301]

"It's a facer," he said presently. "That horse will run, and he'll win, too, unless we can find some means of preventing him from starting. We *must* find some means."

Copley threw up his hand impatiently.

"What's the good of talking that rot?" he said. "The age for getting at horses is past. That was done with years ago. Even the sporting writer wouldn't dare to use a situation like this. You must think of something better than that. If the worst comes to the worst we've got a few weeks to turn round between now and Derby day. Sir George owes me forty thousand pounds, which I must get without delay. It is no use thinking anything more about May Haredale. With that money we may be able to cover our loss or hedge and bring it down to a trifle. We shall have to be contented with what we make over the Mirst Park meeting. So long as Rickerby and that set are not suspicious——"

"I begin to fear they are," Foster interrupted. "As you know, we ought to have had a big cheque last week, but it hasn't come, though I wrote a sharp letter about it again the day before yesterday. I don't know whether Rickerby suspects, or whether he will refuse to pay, but in the face of what you have learnt the non-receipt of that cheque is alarming. Nor do I like what you say about Phillips and this chap Fielden. Phillips is a dangerous man and owes us a grudge. Let's have Fielden in. We may be able to bully something out of him." [302]

Copley jumped at the idea. He rang the bell and sent for Fielden, who appeared presently cool and collected, and ready to answer any questions.

"Look here," Copley said in his most overbearing manner, "I've been hearing things about you. I am told your name is not Field at all, but Fielden. Is that so?"

"That is quite correct," Harry said calmly.

"Then, what the devil do you mean by coming into my service under false pretences? No honest

man——"

"I'll thank you not to take that tone with me," Fielden said. "We don't want to discuss the question of honesty. It is a subject on which you are not an authority. But I see you have found out everything and I may as well be candid. I entered your service because I had nothing to do. I assumed the name of Field, because I found nobody recognized me and I didn't want any of my old friends to know what I was doing. I suppose I am correct in assuming that Sir George Haredale has told you everything. Probably he has informed you that my partner in South Africa was Aaron Phillips. I need not ask if you know Aaron Phillips, because that would be superfluous. I never met either of you till I returned to England, but I know about you. Phillips knows more. I am also aware of the conspiracy for preventing the Blenheim colt from running in the Derby, but that scheme is frustrated. Have you any more to say?"

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"This is a nice way to speak to an employer," Copley protested.

"It would be if I were still in your employ," Fielden retorted. "But I no longer consider myself your servant. There is no occasion for me to remain with you. Perhaps the next time we meet—but never mind about that."

Fielden turned curtly on his heel and left the room. The other two exchanged significant glances.

"Pretty cool," Foster muttered.

"Yes, and pretty sure of his ground, too," Copley replied. "I don't like it, Foster, I don't like it a bit. I have a feeling that those fellows know everything. It frightens me to think that Phillips has been lying low for so long. You may depend upon it he is up to some mischief. And now that you tell me you have not received Rickerby's cheque I feel all the more certain of it. Don't you think it would be as well to go over to The Nook and remove that telephone? It always struck me as a dangerous thing to leave it on the roof. You never know what inquisitive people there may be about. If anybody acquainted with racing only saw it they would be sure to make inquiries. We had better take the car and run over before it is dark. What do you say?"

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Foster had no objection; in fact, he rather liked the idea. Half an hour later the car was crossing the country and before dusk the two reached their destination. They were later than they had expected in consequence of a breakdown on the road, but they seemed to be in time, for the house was quiet and deserted and, so far as they could see, nobody had been meddling with the telephone. Foster drew down the blinds and lit the gas. It had not occurred to him to lock the front door. There was no occasion for hurry and, after procuring a chest of tools, he started on his work, which presented few difficulties.

Then the door opened and two men walked deliberately into the hall. Copley turned upon them with a snarl.

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## CHAPTER XLI

[305]

### HOME AGAIN

"**W**HAT do you mean by this?" Copley demanded.

The intruders were not in the least abashed. On the contrary, they had every evidence of being very sure of their ground. The foremost touched Copley on the shoulder.

"Mr. Raymond Copley, I believe?" he said politely.

"It would be foolish to deny it," Copley sneered.

"Very good, sir," the stranger went on. "And this other gentleman is Mr. Foster?"

Foster nodded uneasily. He held the screwdriver he was using and waited for developments with white face and quivering lips.

"That being so, gentlemen," the stranger said, "I may as well introduce myself. I am Inspector Andrews of Scotland Yard and this is my assistant. We have a warrant for the arrest of both of you on the charge of obtaining a large sum of money by means of a trick from Mr. Selwyn and others in connection with race meetings at Mirst Park. The warrant was obtained on the information of Mr. Selwyn, and you will please consider yourselves my prisoners. Anything you say, of course, will be given in evidence against you."

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Copley cursed himself under his breath. What a fool he had been to come here! The matter would have been bad enough if he had been arrested at Seton Manor, but to be taken here, to be identified in this fashion at The Nook was fatal. There was nothing for it in the circumstances but to try to bluster.

"This is an outrage," he exclaimed. "It is a mere tale to extort money from a man in my position. You haven't a scrap of evidence to justify a proceeding like this."

"That remains to be proved, sir," the Inspector said quietly. "I may say that your accomplice, Captain Eversleigh, is already in custody and is volunteering all the information we require. We have also arrested the man Chaffey in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden. More than that, we have interviewed the National Telephone authorities, and they have not been reticent, either. Besides that, we can produce the agent who let this house and who has already identified you. Also, we have taken possession of the office of Jolly & Co., and your accomplice there is in our hands also. I don't think we have left anything undone. We motored to Seton Manor, but you had left just before we arrived. We kept you under observation till now. Come, Mr. Copley, nothing will be gained by taking this attitude. I am telling you this in fairness to yourself so that you may know what you have to answer."

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Copley was done and submitted quietly to have the handcuffs put upon his wrists. Foster seemed equally subdued. He advanced towards the Inspector's assistant, then suddenly lunged forward, brushed him aside, and darted through the door into the open air. Instantly he was lost in the thick bushes. Inspector Andrews shrugged his shoulders.

"You are to blame for that," he said. "No, it is no use following him just now. We must pick him up later. Mr. Copley, if you are quite ready we'll get back to London."

An hour later Copley was safely housed. By seven o'clock his name was ringing from one end of London to the other. At first the published details were meagre, but the extra specials contained fuller tidings. They had managed to ferret out some racing particulars and to interview Rickerby, who was not in the least reticent. By ten o'clock Copley's arrest formed the one topic of conversation in the clubs. His name appeared largely on every poster and the South African millionaire found himself notorious.

The news even reached the ears of May Haredale and her friend Alice. They had been treating themselves to the theatre in honour of recent events and paused on their way home to buy a paper. There was plenty to discuss as they partook of their frugal supper and they sat till late with the paper between them.

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"You have had a lucky escape," Alice said.

"My father has," May replied. "I would never have married that man. I would have starved first. I never liked him and always felt there was something wrong about him. He won't trouble us any more and I only hope this terrible business won't upset my father."

"Don't let us talk any more about it," Alice said. "Let us think about nothing else but your going home again. I don't know how I shall manage to stay in London after this. My fortnight at Haredale Park spoils me."

It is not necessary to say much about May's homecoming. Sir George met his daughter in the hall. He waited to say a few words to Alice Carden and then led May into the library.

"I hope you won't blame me, my child," he said. "I can say no more than that I am exceedingly sorry for what happened. It was only after you had gone that I realized what a brute I had been. I must have been mad. But I thought I was going to be turned out of the old home, and to marry Copley—pardon me for alluding to it—seemed such an easy way out of my difficulty. I know now that women don't regard these things from the same standpoint as men do and, of course, I believed Copley was in a strong position. I regarded him as honest and straightforward, otherwise——"

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"You could not have done that," May protested. "How could you? When you were ready to fall in with his—but I won't say anything about that. All that is past and done with for ever. As Harry Fielden said, no man knows how weak he is till he is face to face with a great temptation. It is enough that you sincerely regret what has happened. As for me, I am only too glad to return home on any terms."

"You overwhelm me," Sir George murmured.

"Oh, don't feel like that, I implore you. But, tell me, what difference will this make to you? I have heard about the strange story of the colt and how Harry Fielden stepped in to prevent disgrace to our house. But that does not alter the fact that you owe Mr. Copley a large sum of money. I suppose it will have to be paid whether he is convicted or not."

"Undoubtedly," Sir George answered. "But my lawyer says it will be some time before I am called upon to pay the money. I had a long interview with him this morning. Everybody knows now that Raymond Copley is no millionaire and that he is an unscrupulous adventurer who passed himself off as a wealthy man in order to carry out his swindles. From a telegram I have just received a good many fresh details came out this morning when Copley was brought up at Bow Street. The magistrate has refused to allow bail, but it will be two or three months before Copley is convicted, and during the interval some of his creditors are sure to make him bankrupt. They will be anxious to rescue some of the plunder and there are probably several thousand pounds in the bank besides all the stuff at Seton Manor and other places. It will take time to investigate these things, and possibly the summer will be over before the Bankruptcy officials ask me to pay this money to Copley's estate. Long before that the Blenheim colt will have won the Derby."

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May could not repress a smile.

"You are always sanguine," she said. "In fact, if you hadn't been so sanguine, you would not be in your present position. I suppose nobody knows of our trouble."

"Only Harry Fielden," Sir George said thankfully. "I suppose, we shall have to regard him as one of the family, though what he is going to live on and how he is going to keep you, goodness knows. I've got nothing."

A smile crossed May's face.

"We are all going to make fortunes out of the colt," she said. "If you are so sanguine, you must not grudge a little bit of a similar spirit to us. I know that Harry has backed the colt for all he is worth. It is very dreadful and wrong and extravagant, but Harry tells me that this will be the last time. How singular that the fortunes of two families should depend upon a horse! Only think, too, that, but for the merest accident, the Blenheim colt would not be in the Derby at all. That makes me think our good fortune is to continue. I don't think Fate would play us a low-down trick. It is impossible that the colt has been saved only to speed us to ruin at the last. But I don't like to think about it. I shall be in a fever of anxiety from now till May. But I'll try to be calm. I must realize that this is my last bet."

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Sir George was content to let it go at that. He was glad to have his daughter back, glad to think that things were no worse. Fate, too, had been kind to him, for he had preserved his name and reputation. He had lost nothing; indeed, he stood to be in a better position than he had ever yet occupied. For the first time for months he was looking forward to his dinner with gusto.

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## CHAPTER XLII

[312]

### FIRST PAST THE POST

THINGS turned out much as Sir George's lawyer had predicted. After several adjourned hearings Copley was committed for trial, together with his associates, and Aaron Phillips had the satisfaction of giving the most damning evidence against the accused. Of Foster nothing whatever had been heard and it was assumed he had got safely out of the country. Copley's trial was set down to take place in June and in the meantime some of his creditors had made him a bankrupt. The bubble was pricked. Copley had nothing to gain by keeping up the pretence of being a man of integrity and substance. He stood out now unabashed and unashamed, and refused to give any information about his business affairs. Perhaps he was looking forward to the time, some years hence, when on his release from gaol he could blackmail Sir George Haredale.

But Sir George had already taken steps to obviate that. He had learnt his lesson and was not likely to put himself in Copley's power again. A proper statement of the relationship between Copley and himself had been rendered by Sir George's lawyer and ample time had been given by the Bankruptcy officials to pay the debt. Therefore Sir George could look forward with easy mind to the momentous event at Epsom.

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Everything went smoothly and Raffle pronounced the colt as fit to run for a kingdom. The horse was established in the betting once more and at that moment there were few more popular men in England than Sir George Haredale. He was anxious, of course, for so much depended upon what was to take place between now and next Wednesday, and Harry Fielden was not very far from the spot; indeed, his feelings were like those of Sir George. His whole fortune, too, depended upon the running of the colt. About the only member of the party who was not unduly anxious was Raffle himself. He went about his business with a knowing smile and refused to discuss even the possibility of defeat.

"Bless you, sir," he said to Fielden two days before the race, "I can't see what you've got to fret about. The race is in our pockets. It wouldn't do to disappoint the people now, for Epsom is Epsom. But that colt will just win from the start. There ain't going to be any risks, because so much depends upon it. What a story it would make, Mr. Harry, wouldn't it?"

Fielden nodded. They were standing in the Blenheim colt's stall admiring the noble animal, which looked fit to race for his own life. There was no sign of staleness about him. He was apparently trained to the last ounce and, as Raffle said, his temper was perfect.

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"He won't mind the crowd and the horses," he said, laying his hand upon the colt's glossy neck. "I never saw such a tractable animal. It is a proud day for me to live to see the Blenheim blood doing a big thing like this. I always believed in it, sir, though we had a good many failures. I wonder what the public would say if they knew everything."

"They are not in the least likely to do that," Fielden laughed. "I think we were wise to keep the whole thing to ourselves. It is just as well, too, to let the colt run as Sir George's property. At any

rate, there's no harm done and we haven't broken any rules. Besides, it is all in the family. What are your plans for to-morrow, Raffle? If you don't mind, I will go to Epsom with you. Sir George and Miss Haredale can follow on Wednesday morning. I don't want to lose sight of the colt if I can help it. I wish Wednesday was over."

Raffle highly approved the suggestion, so, on the morrow, they went off to Epsom with the colt. They literally slept with it all Tuesday night. The fateful Wednesday dawned without a cloud in the sky and by noon the Downs were crowded with people. For the most part they meant to have a holiday, seeing that they were on the favourite to a man and that the chance of the favourite losing was as remote as a racing possibility could be. Shortly after two o'clock Fielden left the paddock and went to join Sir George and May and Miss Carden.

"I hope all is well," May whispered.

"It couldn't be better," Fielden said. "Another hour and you will be out of your misery. The colt looks as fine as a star. We are having him saddled at the top end of the course so that he won't be actually seen till he is ready for the start. It will be a popular victory, May."

"Oh, yes," May said nervously. "I suppose it will. I don't know when I felt so anxious. I was looking forward to enjoying this race, but I don't think I shall. I envy you, Harry. How can you keep so cool?"

Fielden smiled. In fact, he was anything but cool. He looked confident but, at the same time, he was conscious of a dryness in his throat and of the quicker beating of his heart as he weighed the possibilities which the next hour held for him and the party from Haredale Park. At that moment he possessed practically nothing. If by any untoward fate the horse lost he would be as poor as he was before, and his marriage with May would be indefinitely postponed. In case of this disaster Sir George would have to sell everything to pay his mortgages and the money he owed to Copley's estate. He would have to spend the rest of his days in humble lodgings. There would be an end to the glories of Haredale.

But if the horse won! So much depended upon those four feet, upon those wonderful staying powers of which Raffle had so frequently boasted. Hitherto there had always been a weak spot in the Blenheim blood and it might crop up at the very moment when so much depended upon bone and muscle and sinew.

And if everything did go well, why, then, Sir George Haredale would be a rich man again. Fielden would have more than he ever possessed before and the tarnished glory of the family would be restored. As he stood, quiet and reserved, he did not look like a man to whom the next half-hour meant so much. But he thought that half-hour would never be over.

The minutes wore on nevertheless. The roar and fret and murmur of the crowd at last died down and the long winding ribbon of turf between the masses of people began to manifest itself. The gay kaleidoscope of colour gradually drifted into a ragged line at the post. Then a hoarse roar broke out again.

"They're off!" May whispered, clutching Fielden frantically by the arm. "You must tell me how the race is going. Positively, I haven't the courage to look."

Fielden did not hear a word she said. He had no consciousness of those tense nervous fingers on his arm. He stood like a statue with his racing glasses glued to his eyes. He watched the streaming glow of colours rigidly, until, presently, it seemed to him that one horse came floating easily and gracefully apart from the rest and then his heart began to sing within him. They came in much the same order round Tattenham Corner. Then the roar intensified till everything seemed to shake and rock, and Fielden trembled and could not see through his glasses. When he finally adjusted them to his satisfaction, he was conscious of a still deeper shout of gratification from the multitude. Then, as if in response to the ringing cheers, the Blenheim colt drew almost imperceptibly away from the ruck of horses and passed the winning-post a good half length ahead. The Derby was ancient history now. The Blenheim colt had won this classic race and a score or two of old friends were gathering round Sir George to shake him by the hand. The victory was all the more popular because ninety-nine out of every hundred spectators had backed the winner.

Fielden closed his glasses with a snap. He was conscious now that May was clinging to his arm and that she was swaying backwards and forwards ominously. It was only for a few moments, however, and then a slight smile trembled on her lips.

"Take me away from here for a while," she whispered. "Let us take a walk on the course. Do you know, I feel as if I could enjoy a turn on a roundabout. I could even shy for cocoanuts. And only two or three minutes ago I felt as if I were going to faint. I never saw a yard of the race. If I had looked up I should have collapsed. I guessed how things were going only by the cheers of the crowd. I knew by that exultant roar that the colt was winning. But I don't want to go through it again, Harry, I have had enough. Now that we have all made fortunes, it will be so good to be at home again and feel that everything there actually belongs to us. Some of my father's old friends want us to dine in London. But I would far rather go home. You must back me up."

But Sir George wanted no particular backing. Tried sportsman as he was, the strain had told upon him and he was glad, so he said, to find himself once more in a comfortable corner of a railway carriage on his way to Haredale. It was a lovely evening, too, and the face of the old

house was bathed in sunshine.

"It is smiling a welcome to us," May said. "To think that it is absolutely our own! I hope we have done with gambling for ever."

"I have finished with it for good," replied Harry. "I have won a fortune and a wife on the same day, and that is more luck than most men gain on the course. If you are happy, darling, what more do I need?"

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## THE END

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### Transcriber's Note:

Changes to the original publication have been made as follows:

Page 68

there'll be a hatfull of money to *changed to*  
there'll be a [hatful](#) of money to

Page 80

Perhaps you will be there, too, Mr. Field *changed to*

Perhaps you will be there, too, Mr. [Fielden](#)

Page 150

flat-racing was over. Probable *changed to*  
flat-racing was over. [Probably](#)

Page 174

these people, Absolom & Co. *changed to*  
these people, [Absalom](#) & Co.

Page 219

were exhausted and he could readily *changed to*  
[was](#) exhausted and he could readily

Page 256

Phillips's information came *changed to*  
[Phillips'](#) information came

Page 258

to Phillips's offer of refreshment *changed to*  
to [Phillips'](#) offer of refreshment

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