

THE OTHER MAN

By FREDERIC REDDALE

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that person has been in any way connected with the diamond fields, or has marketed any considerable quantity of stones. That's it, I think, in a nutshell."

"The instructions are explicit enough, Mr. Dysart," said the manager, "but I may be allowed to point out that there are probably a dozen men in London or in Amsterdam at this moment who would come under your classification."

"Very good," said Richard, coolly, "and the person I want will be one of the dozen. If it lies within your province, send me a description of the doings of each."

"Very good, sir. Anything more?"

"I think that will be enough for a starter," said Richard, "except that I should like you to trek at once—I mean make haste, you know—and you need not worry about the expense," laying a fifty-pound Bank of England note on the desk.

"You will hear from us in a few days, Mr. Dysart. Have I your address?"

"Denecroft by Blandford, Dorset," and so saying he took his departure.

"We must give them both a run for their money," soliloquized the astute manager, "but it strikes me as a case of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. The first thing is to notify Mr. Kane that his man is in England."

But before the report was prepared in the customary verbiage of the agency, there arrived a dispatch from Rossiter Kane in these words:

"Discontinue search; the gentleman has been found."

CHAPTER VIII.

And now the quick march of events brings us to the night of the dance at "The Cedars," which was to confront for the first time on one stage the chief characters in this little drama.

Dinner for the house party was over at 8:30, and by nine o'clock the invited guests from the nearby country-side began to arrive. Among the first light was the party from Denecroft—Stella and Sir Arthur, Marcia Churchill and Richard.

The historic old picture gallery, which was to be devoted to the dancing, was already well-filled, and Rossiter Kane stood at the entrance to receive his guests in company with a young-old dowager, Lady Agatha Kin-



TURNING TO STELLA, KANE ASKED TO SEE HER DANCE CARD.

gan, who had consented to chaperon the house party, seeing that the host was a bachelor.

A typical English butler, rubicund of face, portly in form, and with irreproachable natural underpinning, announced the arrivals, and when in pompous tones he vociferated:

"Sir Harthor Dysart and Miss Dysart, Mr. Richard Dysart and Miss Churchill." It needed all Kane's self-control to compose his features and his manner to the requisite standard of polite and genial interest.

A moment now, and he would know his fate—recognition, exposure, disgrace, or—

Sir Arthur, with Stella on his arm, came first, and passed under the arched door of the gallery, followed by Richard and Marcia. The first couple paused a moment after their greetings, and it fell to Marcia to introduce Richard to his host.

"Welcome to The Cedars and welcome home, Mr. Dysart!" said Kane. There fronted him a tall, athletic figure, bronzed and tanned of face, as clean-shaven as himself save for a tawny mustache, and in the man's conventional evening dress bearing not the remotest resemblance to or suggestion of the unkempt and bearded wayfarer of the Karroo Desert.

The two men gripped hands in the hearty English fashion, and each looked the other squarely in the face. The first keen glance was what Kane feared most, but in the steady gaze of Richard there was naught save the utmost courtesy.

Kane's heart leaped. He was safe, at least for the present. But there was an expression of studied interest in Richard's glance as they exchanged a few commonplace, as though asking "what manner of man is this?"

which was to be explained a moment later.

Turning to Stella, Kane asked to see her dance-card, saying—

"My duties will not permit me to be selfish, but I claim the first waltz."

She handed him the enameled pasteboard, and while he was penciling his initials thereon the girl murmured in significant tones that none other could hear—

"Be on your best behavior to-night, sir," flashing him a dazzling smile across her snowy shoulder as she was led away.

Kane sent her an answering look, and breathed more freely. The fact that the brothers were both under his roof seemed a good omen, and argued no opposition to his suit.

For the first time in many days his inner mood lightened. All might yet go well, and he resumed his task of welcoming the remaining guests with almost boyish vim and abandon.

After all, the ball would be a personal triumph, as he had at first intended, with his affianced bride as its chief ornament and attraction for him.

That waltz with Stella Dysart, he told himself, the soft perfume of her hair floating upward like blessed incense, was worth perilling a man's soul for. The while he held her in his arms he vowed to himself that he would go through the fires of perdition rather than give her up. Yet even at the thought there came to him the dread query, like a grinning demon in the midst of a feast, "What would she say or do if she knew the truth?" But he willfully drove the thing away, and resolved, for that moment at least, to drink the cup of happiness to the last drop.

As he led her to a cool corner after the final crashing bars of the music he murmured:

"I shall call upon Sir Arthur in the morning, dearest. You can guess why."

"I will tell him to expect you," she said, lifting her eyes bravely to his, the love-light shining in their starlike depths.

"Will your brothers be likely to make any objections, do you think?" he inquired, the slight tremor of anxiety in his voice seeming perfectly natural to the girl's quick perception.

"I think Sir Arthur will be glad to get me off his hands," she said roughly. "As for Rick, why, he does not know you very well, you see, and he must take my word for it that you are perfectly eligible, of legal age, and sound mind!"

"I'm not so sure about that last," he responded, catching at her gay humor, and answering in kind. "When a man is bewitched, you know—"

The rest of the sentence was unfinished, for at that moment Stella was claimed for the next dance, and Kane saw her no more until supper was served, when he had expressly reserved the privilege of taking her in, and she sat on his right hand with Richard on his left.

By all rules of social precedence these places of honor belonged to others, but at the last moment Kane gave orders which resulted in the arrangement named. The evening had begun and continued auspiciously, and with his customary cool hardness he resolved to then and there test to the utmost the possibility of Richard's recognizing him.

During the repast the talk naturally drifted to the Cape. Nearly everyone knew that Rick had just returned thence, and he was kept busy answering questions as to his adventures, so that Kane was spared the necessity of originating or replying to any direct inquiries, but by a judicious remark here and there he showed his knowledge of the subjects touched on, nor seemed to manifest the slightest desire for concealment.

Every word he uttered had for its ulterior object the creating of a favorable impression upon Richard Dysart, but it was all done with such consummate tact that the younger and bluffer man was completely captivated by the elder, as was proved when, on kissing Stella good-night, after their drive home, he said—

"Well, sis, your Rossiter Kane seems to be a trump!"

"Thank you, Rick," was her reply. "I just knew you would like him!" and, covered with happy blushes, she disappeared.

So the ball was an unqualified success, and the star of Rossiter Kane was in the ascendant house.

At noon the next day he cantered up to the entrance of Denecroft and inquired for Sir Arthur Dysart. On being ushered into the library he found the baronet alone and apparently expectant, for, true to her promise, Stella had expressly asked her elder brother to remain at home that morning.

"Eh—eh—what's in the wind now, Stella?" the baronet inquired, looking up from his letters, and blinking nearsightedly at his sister. "More surprises?"

Stella, to conceal her embarrassment, came around to the back of his chair and leaned over his shoulder, roughing and ruffling his hair in a certain tormentingly lovable way as was her wont.

"Aren't you glad Rick is back?" she inquired, woman-like talking of the thing that was farthest from her heart at that moment.

"Why, of course," assented Sir Arthur. "I believe we killed our fatted calf in proper fashion. It will be the happiest Christmas Denecroft has seen for many a year."

Stella sighed blissfully. "Yes," she said, "I am a very happy girl."

The baronet granted an assent in preoccupied man-fashion, and opened another letter. Stella wriggled a little nearer, seating herself on the arm of his chair.

"Well, what is it?" asked her brother, leaning back with an air of resignation. "Let me know the worst, and get it over."

"Oh, it's nothing alarming," gurgled Stella—"at least I hope not. Are you in a very good humor this morning, Arthur?"

"I was," he answered gravely, "but the most patient man has his limits, you know."

Stella—the dignified little Stella—fairly giggled—there is no other name for the sound of suppressed delight and merriment which rippled from her lips—and immediately went off on another tangent.

"Don't you think it very nice that Richard and Mr. Kane seemed to like each other so much last night?"

"Why, yes—since we are all neighbors I should say it was most fortunate. Perhaps we ought to feel delighted that Mr. Kane likes us so well—eh?" and he pinched the girl's cheek mischievously, while a quizzical smile twisted the corner of his mouth.

"Do you really like him?" she murmured, hiding her face on her brother's shoulder.

"Who—Rick?" Sir Arthur perversely inquired.

"No, you old stupid—Mr. Kane!" she replied, giving him an admonitory shake.

"Certainly. He impresses me as a fine fellow; a man of action and affairs; a man of head and of heart. In point of birth and breeding, I suppose, we must concede something, but in these democratic days the new men are coming to the front and must be reckoned with politically and socially."

During this didactic speech, delivered in Sir Arthur's most deliberate manner, Stella slid off the chair-arm and edged towards the door.

"I am so glad you feel that way," she said as she turned the handle; and then, nodding saucily at her brother, "he is coming to see you this morning!" and with a whisk of drapery she was gone.

Sir Arthur preserved his gravity for a moment, and then, with his favorite chuckle, said half-aloud—

"Another addition to the family, I suppose!"

It is not always an easy thing to ask a father for his only daughter in marriage; but when the guardian of the girl happens to be her brother, and rather younger than the suitor himself, the task of the latter is not a whit less embarrassing.

But Kane found the baronet disposed to meet him half way—perhaps because of his general liking for the man. So when, after the usual salutations and inquiries, he came to the point simply and directly with—

"As the head of your family, Sir Arthur, I am come to ask your sanction to your sister's engagement to me," the baronet smiled and said:

"Yes, I received a hint to that effect this morning, coupled with a command that I was not to go out. Well, Mr. Kane, what has the culprit to say for himself? You know it's a pretty serious matter to rob a brother of his only sister, particularly when that brother is a bachelor!"

"The only extenuation I can plead, Sir Arthur, is that the lady will be making another poor bachelor the happiest man on earth."

"Oh, if you put it in that way," laughed the baronet, "I can have nothing to say, except that I do not know anyone to whom I would sooner trust Stella's happiness." And so saying he offered his hand.

"The lawyers can attend to the settlements, I suppose," he continued, "and from what I have seen and heard of your resources, Mr. Kane, I opine there is little danger of your wife ever coming to want."

They both laughed at the jest, and at this opportune moment Richard stroled in.

"Here, Rick," exclaimed Sir Arthur, "you are just in time to be introduced to your future brother-in-law. Shake hands and congratulate each other."

As Rick came forward his manner was most cordial. The morning's recollections of the night before had apparently left no unpleasant taste, and he took Kane in all seriousness and sincerity for what he had appeared to be.

"See what comes of my leaving home," he said ruefully. "I find the family running at loose ends when I return and my little sister about to be carried off into captivity. But you have my sincere congratulations and good wishes, Mr. Kane. I wish our acquaintance had begun a little earlier out yonder. I rather think you and I together could have pulled off some big things."

Kane could only bow his acknowledgments, as was perhaps natural under the circumstances, and was certainly safest.

Rick knew, out of his own experience, what the other would wish next, and said tactfully, with a quiet smile lifting the corner of his tawny mustache:

"You'll find Stella arranging her flowers in the morning room and keeping an eye on the door. We shall see you at luncheon, I hope?"

With a grateful assent and a farewell bow Kane took his way in the direction indicated, and as he was careful to close the portals after him we will not intrude.

Proudly elated, he rode homeward in a species of physical and mental ex-

altation, in which mood he continued for several days.

But the reaction, inevitable to a man of his acute temperament, ere long appeared. He had failed to reckon with a foe within which night and day assailed the fortress of his iron-clad will and determination to see the thing through. The simple faith and courtesy and confidence with which he had been received for what he claimed to be by those two English gentlemen did more to undermine his purpose than if they had held him at suspicious arm's length.

Moreover, he was now a daily visitor at Denecroft, and treated already as one of the family, he dined or lunched there more often than at home. His relations with Richard became more and more intimate and confidential. Again and again the subject of the latter's adventures in South Africa was touched upon. Once, in full family conclave, after dinner, he was compelled to listen unflinchingly, and in the full glare of the brilliantly lighted room, to a graphic recital of the tragedy on the banks of the Mool river, to feign indignation, horror and surprise, to join in conjectures as to the identity of the criminal, and discuss plans for his exposure and punishment. He also learned, to his dismay, that Richard had set an inquiry on foot to achieve these righteous ends.

And all this under the warm glances of the girl whom he loved dearer than life, and whose manifestations of affectionate trust and loyal admiration were thereby turned into so many scourging whips of steel.

In short, the situation was daily becoming one long, intolerable torture alike to Kane's manhood and his love. Remorse mocked at his endeavors to lift the incubus.

CHAPTER IX.

The dual wedding of Stella and Marcia was set for early in the new year, a rumor had it that Sir Arthur, moved perhaps by the sight of so much lulling and cooing, would shortly afterwards console himself likewise, and put a period to his bachelorhood by leading to the altar the daughter of a neighboring county magnate.

The time was rapidly approaching, and while the girls were busied with the delightful mysteries of tresseau-building the two men, Rossiter Kane and Richard Dysart, were perforce thrown much on their own resources, and naturally saw a great deal of each other. Frequent trips to town were necessary, and these they often made in company on the off-days when there was no hunting. Kane could never have told how it came about, but it was certainly not of his devising, and to have shown indifference or distaste would have been to court suspicion.

And besides, the attraction was mutual; under any other conditions the older man would have been comrades with his intended brother-in-law with unfeigned heartiness.

On one of these off-day trips to London they traveled in the same compartment to Euston, and then, both being bound for the city, they chartered a hansom, which set them down at the bank. Walking up Threadneedle street, they came suddenly face to face with a shabby little man who at sight of them stopped short, threw up both hands with an indescribable gesture of surprise, and then, turning sharply on his heel, vanished round the corner.

It was Moses Plish!

"Funny little beggar," said Richard; "the last time I saw him was in Ladysmith; seemed to know us both!"

"Why, yes," said Kane, as nonchalantly as possible, "he is—or was—for I haven't set eyes on him in a long time—one of the sharpest and shrewdest dealers in stones in all South Africa. In fact," with a quiet chuckle, "I've had some dealings with him myself in the old days."

"That's curious—so have I," said Richard. "He's the man to whom I sold some stones, you remember, when I came out of the wilderness."

Arrived at the corner of Bishops-gate street they parted, agreeing to meet for luncheon. As Kane turned away with a courteous wave of the hand, a sudden thought flashed through Rick's brain and held him rooted to the curb.

"By all that's holy!" he muttered, gazing after his late companion. "Could it be possible?"

Instead of doing his errand in the city, he hailed a passing hansom, and jumping in called out to the caddy "Wellington street," and within a quarter of an hour he was with our friend the manager of the inquiry office.

"Have you anything for me?" he asked.

In response he received a legal envelope, quite bulky, which he thrust into his pocket.

"I believe all the data you asked for are there, Mr. Dysart," said the head of the concern, "and we have tabulated them in what seemed to us the order of their importance relative to your inquiry."

"Thanks," said Richard, and regained his cab.

Once within its shelter he lost no time in examining the contents of the envelope. These consisted of a series of foolscap sheets, fastened together with a brass clip at the corner, each sheet bearing at the top the name of some man more or less well known in the city or the diamond trade, with certain biographical remarks appended.

And the first sheet bore the name of Rossiter Kane!

Richard replaced the envelope in his pocket and sat staring ahead at the crowded mass of vehicles in Fleet street with a puzzled frown on his face.

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CHAPTER X.

Five minutes after leaving Richard, as Kane was striding along Cornhill, he was overtaken by a shuffling, breathless figure in rusty black, and to the whispered appeal—

"Bister Kane, sir—just a minute, sir!" he turned his head and saw the cringing form of old Plish at his side, ducking and bowing with abject servility.

"Well, Moses, what is it?" inquired Kane, in a business-like tone, stopping short, and drawing to one side out of the way of the hurrying throng.

With an eye to the main chance, and realizing that it would be good policy to keep on the right side of the ledger with so rich a man as Kane, Plish had instantly decided to let him know that Dysart had asked certain pertinent or impertinent questions at Ladysmith, and thus forestall any possible evil consequences to himself from his wagging tongue.

"Excuse me for troubling you, Bister Kane, but ven I see you alonger 'tother vun," pointing a dirty thumb over his shoulder, "I ses to myself, ses

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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