

# THE OTHER MAN

By FREDERIC REDDALE

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I, Bister Kane might like to know that 'tother gent was makin' inquiries about 'im."

"When was this, Moses?" asked Kane, coolly snipping the end off a cigar.

"Out yonder, a matter o' six months ago. It was jest arter he'd made that there strike o' his'n in the Karroo country."

"Just so," said Kane. "But you see, Moses, Mr. Dysart and I have become very good friends, and any information he is likely to want he'll come to me for. Thanks, all the same," and so saying he nodded jauntily to the little man and went on his way.

"Dash my vig, but 'e's a cool 'un," said Moses Plish to himself as he watched the tall, well-clad figure of the erstwhile adventurer disappear in the madding crowd. "Wonder if 'e knows that Cupples is in London, too!"

But despite his outward nonchalance Kane was inwardly perturbed at this chance encounter. That Moses Plish was in London had probably no significance. Whatever he might suspect, he had no absolute knowledge of that dark and bloody episode on the veldt—no one knew the truth save the two men implicated and since so strangely thrown together. And to only one of these was the whole truth known.

What was chiefly to be dreaded was that a new train of ideas might be set running in Dysart's mind. Kane feared lest a chance word should put him on the right scent, for even the dimmest suspicion would be disastrous now!

However, the two men got through their luncheon as per appointment, and the subsequent return journey was made without any noticeable strain or change in their relations. Nor was the evening spent at Denecroft any different from the many that had preceded it.

All was apparently serene. Both Sir Arthur and Richard were ideal hosts, and Stella's good-night kiss was as sweet and trustful as ever.

But the day's happenings served to kindle afresh Kane's uneasy forebodings, and intensified his distaste and horror at the part he was playing. The kindness and cordiality with which he was received at Denecroft made his own conduct, past and present, all the blacker by contrast.

That night the question occurred to him, what if Stella should discover the truth after they were married? She would scorn him with an unutterable scorn—not for his crime—but for his deceit and his false pretenses. That he had loved her and won her in ignorance of the identity of his victim would be no palliation of his after-offense in keeping it secret. With such a nature as hers, in which pride of birth was blended with an almost slavish worship of truth and honor, there could be but one outcome: She would spurn him from her sight!

Again: Suppose Richard were to stumble on the truth, and tax him with his crime? What could he do but cower like a whipped cur?

Rosier Kane was no common coward, but the mere thought of such a possibility caused him the keenest shrinking and chagrin.

Gradually, out of the turmoil of his thoughts, the conviction grew and took shape that his only hope of happiness lay in prompt confession and restitution—not an extorted avowal, but one made of his own free will, and while yet he held the reins in his own control.

Better to lose the girl now and retain his own self-respect than marry

her. This had been their weekly custom since the ball, and they both dearly prized this half-hour of sweet intercourse as they sauntered through the park.

On this, possibly their last day together, Kane realized as he had never done before how inexpressibly indispensable she had become to him, and yet in that very fact he found strength for the coming ordeal, for with his customary quick decision he meant to get it over.

"You will probably find Sir Arthur and Rick in the library," she said, as they entered the hall at Denecroft, as yet unlighted save by the fitful blaze of a log fire.

"Will you join us there?" inquired Kane, solicitously, as he detained her by the hand.

"Certainly, if you wish it," she returned.

"I do wish it," was the reply. "I have something to say which I want you all to hear."

A new note in his voice arrested her attention, and she looked up at him in quick surprise. He drew her, all wrapped and bonneted as she was, into a little recess, and took her in his arms, imprinting on her lips a warm and passionate kiss.

"It may be for the last time, dearest," he whispered, "but do not judge me too harshly when you hear all."

"What is it?" she asked tremulously, her eyes large and luminous with tender interest and alarm. For answer he said:

"In a little while you will know," and led her to the foot of the stairs. Slowly she ascended as though oppressed by the weight of an impending disaster; at the turn she stopped and looked back at him where he stood watching her with passionate adoration, all his soul in his eyes. Then he turned his steps towards the library.

"Hullo, Kane!" exclaimed Richard, heartily, rising and flinging a book to the other end of the leather lounge on which he had been dozing. "Come in, man! You're just in time to keep us awake."

The baronet's greeting, if less vociferous, was none the less pleasant. "Where's Stella?" inquired Richard.

"She will be here immediately," said Kane, and even as he spoke she entered the room.

"Ring for your candles, will you, Sir?" exclaimed Richard. "It gets dark so confoundedly early here."

Stella moved towards the bell, but Kane stayed her with a gesture.

"Not just yet, please, if I may interfere," he said. "I have something to tell you all—something that is not easy for me to say—and I think I can get along better by the fire-light."

There was a lifeless quality in his voice, and his usually verile tones were curiously muffled. Richard Dysart was as far from divining what was actually coming as either of the other listeners, yet he was conscious of a quickening thrill of expectancy, roused by Kane's words and manner, and he glanced at him keenly.

"One moment, Kane," he said; "am I concerned in the story?"

"You are!" was the answer, at which Richard drew a deep breath and settled back in his seat.

Stella moved to a place in the recess by the fireplace, where there was deep shadow; Sir Arthur and Richard sat on either side the blaze; Kane remained standing in the center, declining a proffered seat. All looked at him expectantly.

"Richard Dysart," he began in colorless tones, "nearly a year ago you were treacherously ambushed, shot and robbed on the banks of the Mool river. We all know the pitiful story; no need to go over it again. The man who robbed you was then a poor outcast, down on his luck, a very Ishmael, and it may be honestly asserted through no fault of his own. This man saw you, a perfect stranger, start on your prospecting trip into the Karroo country. He tracked you on horseback from day to day, camping within sight of your fire every night, sharing your hardships, starving when you went hungry, freezing through the long, dark nights because he dared not kindle a blaze which might have apprised you that you were watched. At first his only thought was to claim shares in whatever you might find. But when, ambushed in the tall grass, he saw you gather untold wealth, the demon of avarice took possession of him, and he determined to have the treasure, even if it came to the taking of life. You were nothing to him then; he simply saw in you one of an army of adventurers, many of whom would have served him the same way. He left you for dead, fled with his spoil to the coast, and thought that his secret was buried in the desert. He was rich, and he became richer; from that hour everything he touched turned to gold. But he had miscalculated the power of conscience, of remorse and of love. Sir Arthur and Miss Dysart, I am the man who shot and robbed your brother!"

He ceased speaking and turned away. There was silence in the room, save for the dull snapping and flicker of the fire, while from the darkness came a woman's sobs, answered by a deep groan of anguish from the bowed form of the man who had just signed his name to a warrant.

The two men, Sir Arthur and Rich-

ard, sat looking at Kane in dumb amazement. The former was the first to find his tongue, although usually the more unready of the brothers.

"This is a most extraordinary—er—presume you are aware of the full import of what you have told us—and—er—of the consequences," this last significantly.

The culprit bowed.

"Kane, old man," said Richard, "I'm unforgotten! I'd rather it had been any man but you. I won't say but what, since we saw old Plish yesterday, I've had certain misgivings, but I was unprepared for this."

"There was—there is—there can be no palliation or excuse," said Kane, lifting his head. "The guilty knowledge became more than I could carry after all your kindness and—"

The sentence was unfinished, for his voice broke.

"I presume you realize that this ends everything, Mr. Kane," said Sir Arthur, with a wave of the hand to where Stella was sitting sobbing softly.

"God help me, I do!" was the reply wrung from the anguished spirit, "but my punishment is greater than I can bear!" and with these words he left the room, and the clang of the heavy outer door announced his departure to those within.

Stella broke down utterly then, and would not be comforted.

"Send for Marcia!" she wailed, and, knowing nothing else to do, Rick set out across the park to beseech her to come to the motherless girl in her extremity.

"It is too dreadful, too horrible!" said Marcia, as they drove back after she had been made acquainted with Kane's confession. "Suppose he had killed you, as he meant to do, the wretch!" she panted. "I'll never forgive him—never!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Richard coolly. "He came mighty near it, but he just missed it, you see. If I'd caught him red-handed, or even three months ago, I expect I'd have been pretty hard on him too; but now, you see, it's different."

"I don't see," said Marcia vindictively.

"Wait till you meet Stella," said Rick significantly.

"She ought to hate him, too!" insisted Marcia.

"Well, I fancy she won't," was the quiet reply, arguing that Master Rick possessed rather more insight into the workings of the feminine mind than might have been expected.

Curiously enough, much of his own hot anger and indignation had left him, and he found himself looking at the matter from the position of an outsider or an onlooker. No doubt Stella would readily enough admit the enormity of Kane's offense, but Rick could see how it might appear to her as a mere episode in a daring and adventurous man's career. Then, too, the beggar had made a clean breast of it!

However, Stella kept her room all the next day, and so no one knew what her feelings were.

## CHAPTER XI

Kane went home to his solitary Odors and began to put his affairs in order.

First of all he made over to Richard Dysart the sum of £50,000 in checks and securities, the original proceeds of the sale of the diamonds of which he had been despoiled. Even this depletion of his fortune left Kane a rich man. In a few hours all was done, and he had even wired to engage passage



KANE HALTED IN DOUBT AS TO HIS RECEPTION AND OF WHAT MIGHT BE COMING.

In the steamer for the Cape, for thence he had determined to retire and end his days. England would know him no more.

But the tugging at his heart-strings would not let him leave the old country without a word from the only woman he had ever loved or ever could love. So, in defiance of convention, and not knowing whether her brothers would interfere, he sent Stella a line as follows:

"I am leaving England for good. For the sake of our united past will you say good-by? I shall be in the church porch at sunset."

It was a forlorn hope! She might come; she might not venture to trust her strength to go through such an ordeal; she might write instead; she might not reply at all. So it was with no very hopeful feelings that Kane made his way to the sorrowful try.

Instead of Stella he found Richard Dysart awaiting him, smoking a long cigar and flicking the light snow from his boots with a dog-whip.

Kane halted, in doubt as to his reception and of what might be coming. It was as he feared—he would not be allowed to see or speak with the girl!

Rick removed his cigar from his teeth and came forward, to Kane's sur-

prise offering his hand, which the culprit gripped with fierce tenacity, a great gulp in his throat the while. In his bruised and beaten state of mind the cool nonchalance and semi-geniality of the other's manner was like a pat on the head to a pariah dog that has been uniformly kicked and cuffed all around camp.

"I received your letter about the money," said Dysart, "and I'm bound to say that you've tried to do the handsome thing, as I told Sir Arthur. I can't quite make it out, Kane. By rights, I suppose I ought to hate you, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, but for the life of me I'm not able!" and the speaker gave a dissatisfied sort of chuckle. "Perhaps it's the life out yonder; one gets used to giving and taking hard knocks and running all sorts of risks. It's part of the great game. I won't say but what if I'd come up with you at the Cape there'd been a lively sort of reckoning between us; but somehow I can't call you down here at home when we've eaten each other's salt and been such uncommonly good friends."

He paused and puffed his cigar, as if to give Kane a chance to speak, but all the latter's old audacity had deserted him, and he paced slowly back and forth by Rick's side, his gaze clouded and his brain dulled.

"Perhaps it's on account of Stella," Dysart went on musingly, as if loath to cease wondering at his own pacific state of mind. "She's hard hit, Kane—worse than any of us, I'm afraid. What's to be done?" stopping short in his walk and facing him.

Kane groaned and staggered, and would have fallen but for the help of a friendly tree trunk, against which he leaned his hand heavily in an excess of bodily weakness and mental abandon.

"I won't insult you by asking if you love her," Rick went on. "It's plain to be seen the little woman loves you with all her heart and soul."

"Do not keep her from me!" burst from the tortured breast of the other. "I have no right to ask it, I know, but if I do not see her it will kill us both!"

"That's about it, I imagine," said Rick, sentimentally. "I'm up the same tree myself," he continued with a conscious laugh, "and I know how it would feel."

"Of course, I relinquish all claim to her," said Kane. "I know that's hopeless after what has happened, but—"

"Now, look here, Kane," interrupted Rick, "I'll undertake to square Sir Arthur, and seeing that I'm the injured party I fancy he won't have much to say. Suppose Stella agrees to marry you—in view of the facts you won't want to live in England?"

"The world is wide," answered Kane, raising his head, a gleam of hope new-born in his eyes. "I dare not ask you to be my friend, but I do ask you to trust me! I have had a bitter lesson, and I have paid dearly for my crime."

Like most healthy and sane English-speaking men, Richard Dysart hated heroics or anything approaching a scene. So he simply clapped the other on the shoulder and said bluffly:

"That's all right, old man! Good-by and good luck! Wait here and I'll send Stella to talk to you!"

And whistling to his dogs, who had been nuzzling each other by the old lych-gate, Rick strode away into the fast-gathering dusk.

Soon Kane saw the little cloaked and hooded figure approaching through the private woodland path that led from the Denecroft domain. Slowly she came towards him, her veil down, nor would he seem to presume or prejudice her attitude by advancing to meet her.

Bitter sorrow and vain regret had set their seal upon his finely chiseled features, while affection unutterable and unspeakable gleamed in his eyes. With an inarticulate cry she tottered into his arms; shaking with sobs, her head sunk on his breast.

With self-accusing words he strove to soothe her, putting back the rebellious tendrils of hair that fringed her temples. By degrees he calmed her agitation, and poured balm into her aching heart. He told her anew of his undying love, and that it was because of this ennobling passion he had schooled himself to the confession which had raised up a well-nigh impassable barrier between them.

"If I had not loved you so well, dearest," he concluded, "I could not have brought myself to face it."

"And now I love you all the better," she exclaimed, smiling upon him proudly through her tears. "Your noble heart was revealed to me then!"

"You must forget me, Stella," he urged, trying to put her away from him.

"Never!" she asserted, nestling life closer to his side.

"But I leave England at once," he insisted.

"Then you must take me with you," she cried, "for I cannot live without you!"

[THE END.]

Paying an Old Debt.

Mr. Davis' son, a stalwart young man, had returned from college. "Father," he said, "when I was a boy mother used to make your old clothes over for me, didn't she?" "I think she did, sometimes, Henry," answered Mr. Davis.

"Well, I am glad it is within my power to make some sort of recompense," said Henry, opening his suit case. "Here is an evening suit a tailor made for me a year or two ago. I have entirely outgrown it, but I think it will just fit you, and it's as good as new. Suppose you try it on."

Being a sensible man, Mr. Davis swallowed whatever pride may have been involved in the transaction, and tried the garments on. They did fit him perfectly.

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