

Half A Chance

BY FREDERICK S. ISHAM.

Author of "The Strollers," "Under the Rose," "The Lady of the Mount," Etc.

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CHAPTER IX. A CHANGE OF FRONT.

HE found the task no easy one, however, although he went at it with his characteristic vigor and energy. Few men knew the seamy side of London better than John Steele—its darksome streets and foul alleys, its hovels and various habitations. And this knowledge he utilized to the best advantage, always to find that his efforts came to naught.

Reluctantly John Steele concluded that the man he sought had made his way out of London; otherwise the facilities at his command were such that he should most likely ere this have been able to attain his end—find what he desired. Soberly attired, he attracted no very marked attention in the slums, breeding spots of the criminal classes. The denizens knew John Steele. He had been there oft before.

He had on occasion assisted some of them with stern good advice or more substantial services. He was acquainted with these men and women, had perhaps a larger charity for them than most people find it expedient to cherish. One man had seen the object of Steele's solicitude, and to this person, a weakened little "undesirable," the red headed giant had confided that London was pretty hot and he thought of decamping from it.

"After all this time that's gone by," he says to me, bitter like, "to think a man can't come back to 'is native 'ome without being spied on for what ought long ago to be dead and forgot!"

"What brought him to London?"

"I expect it was 'omelickness, sir. 'Er been a bad lot, but 'e has a 'ear, arter all. It was to see 'is mother 'e came back; the old woman drew 'im 'ere. You see, 'e had written 'er from foreign parts, but could never 'ear 'cause she had moved. Used to keep a place where a woman was found"—

"Dead?"

"Murdered!" said the man. John Steele was silent. "And she, 'is mother, 'ad gone, 'aving saved a bit, out into a peaceable-like little 'amlet, where there weren't no bobbies, only instead bits of flower gardens and bright blooming daffy-down-dillies. But, blime me, when Tom come and found out where she 'ad changed to if she 'adn't gone and shuffled off, and all 'e 'ad for 'is pains was the sight of a mound in the churchyard."

"Yes; she's buried," said John Steele thoughtfully, "and all she might have told about the woman who was—murdered is buried with her."

"But she did tell, sir, at the time," quickly, "of the trial."

"True." The visitor's tone changed. "If you can find Tom give him this note. You'll be well paid."

"I ain't askin' for that. You got me off easy once and gave me a lift arter I was let out."

"Well, well!" Steele made a brusque gesture. "We all need a helping hand sometimes," he said, turning away.

And that was as near as he had come to attainment of his desires.

Summer passed. Sometimes, the better to think, to plan, to keep himself girded by constant exercise, he repaired to the park, now neglected by fashion and given over to that nebulous quantity of diverse qualities called the people.

"How do you do, Steele? Just the man I wanted to see!"

Near the main exit toward which John Steele had unconsciously stepped the sound of a familiar voice and the appearance of a well known stocky form broke in with startling abruptness on the dark train of thought.

"Deep in some point of law?" went on Sir Charles. "Pon honor, believe you would have cut me. However, don't apologize; you're forgiven!"

"Most amiable of you to say so, Sir Charles!" perfunctorily.

"Not at all! Especially as our meeting is quite apropos. Obligated to run up to town on a little matter of business; but, thank goodness, it's done. Never saw London more deserted. Dined at the club, nobody there. Supped at the hotel, dining room empty. Strolled up Piccadilly, not a soul to be seen. That is," he added, "no one whom one has seen before, which is the same thing. But how did you enjoy your trip to the continent?"

"It was not exactly a trip for pleasure," returned the other, with a slight accent of constraint.

"Ah, yes; so I understood. But fancy going to the continent on business! One usually goes for—which reminds me, how would you like to go back into the country with me?"

"If it is impossible at the moment for—"

"But Sir Charles seemed not to listen. "Deuced dull journey for a man to take alone, good deal of it by coach. You'll find a few salmon to kill, trout and all that. Think of the joy of whipping a stream after having been mewed up all these months in the musty metropolis. Besides, I made a wager with Jocelyn you wouldn't refuse a second opportunity to bask in Arcadia." He laughed. "I really couldn't presume to ask him again, 's the way she expressed it, 'but if you can draw a sufficiently eloquent

picture of the rural attractions of Strathorn to woo him from his beloved dusty byways you have my permission to try."

"Did she say that?" John Steele spoke quickly, then, "I am sorry it is impossible, but," in a low tone, "how is Miss Wray?"

"Never better. Enjoying every moment. Jolly party and all that. Lord Ronsdale and"—Here Sir Charles enumerated a number of people.

"Lord Ronsdale is there?"

"Yes; couldn't keep him away from Strathorn House now," he laughed. "As a matter of fact, he has asked my permission to—There!" Sir Charles stopped, then laughed again with a little embarrassment. "I've nearly let the cat out of the bag."

John Steele spoke no word. His face was set, immovable.

"You mean he has proposed for her hand, and she"—Steele seemed to speak with difficulty—"has consented?"

"Well, not exactly. She appears complaisant, as it were," he answered. "But, really, I shouldn't have mentioned the matter at all. Quite premature, you understand? Let's say no more about it. And—what was it you said about going back with me?"

"Yes," said John Steele, with a sudden strength and energy that Sir Charles might attribute to the desire to make himself understood above the din of the street. "I'll go back with you at"—the latter words, lower spoken, the other did not catch—"no matter what cost!"

Sir Charles and John Steele arrived at Strathorn. This little hamlet lay in a sleepy looking dell. As the driver swung down a hill he whipped up his horses and literally charged upon the town, swept through the main thoroughfare and drew up with a flourish before the principal tavern. Sir Charles started and stretched his legs. John Steele got down.

"Strathorn House," he said to Sir Charles, "is near. I am in the mood for exercise after sitting so long and should like to walk there."

"By all means," returned the other, "since it's your preference. Pretty apt to overtake you," he went on, after giving his guest a few directions, "especially if you linger over any points of interest."

The trap which had been sent for drew up and the two men separated. Sir Charles rattled briskly down one way, Steele turned to go the other.

Soon rose before him the top of a modest steeple, then a church, within the sanctuary of whose yard old stones mingled with new. He stepped in. "Straight on across the churchyard!" had been Sir Charles' direction. John Steele moved quickly down the narrow path.

Neither would talk much. Mrs. Johnson said that Webb and Johnson went to the park yesterday afternoon, while she returned home with her 7-year-old boy, as he was not feeling well.

Webb stated that he saw Johnson "down at the Union depot" last night. The police today identified Webb as a real estate agent of Seattle. Webb, who sometimes goes under the alias of A. C. Powers, is known to the Seattle authorities.

Mrs. Johnson's possession of the large sum of money found in her purse was cleared up today when it was learned that she and her husband had just sold their farm at Kent, eight miles from Seattle.

Johnson's murder in room 119 in the new Grand Central hotel some time yesterday, where his skull was crushed by some blunt weapon and a bullet shot through his head, was brought to light by the discovery of a small clot of blood which had seeped through from the trunk in the Union depot.

The trunk had been checked to North Puyallup, Wash., late in the afternoon.

The number on the check indicated that William A. Shaw, a trucker, had handled the trunk. He was awakened and said that he had moved the trunk from the new Grand Central.

The police made a hurried investigation and found that Webb or Powers had occupied room 109, just across the hallway.

In room 119, where Johnson was murdered, there had been many hasty efforts to conceal the crime.

The blood-stained mattress and sheets upon which Johnson had presumably lain, had been turned over to hide the tell-tale blood splashes.

The trunk was broken open and Johnson's body found jammed within.

John Long, a hotel porter who moved three trunks belonging to Webb and one belonging to Johnson, said that Mrs. Johnson and Powers spent the greater part of the afternoon in packing and re-packing the trunks. They stated, Long said, that they proposed to move some household goods. Later Long was called upon to move a trunk to Shaw's dray. At the morgue he identified the one which held Johnson's body as the one he had moved from room 119.

The police believe that Johnson was first drugged and then killed. They assert that Webb and Mrs. Johnson had planned to leave town together and that Johnson probably was killed when he learned of their plans.

When Webb was searched at the station, two watches were found on him, one of which Mrs. Johnson identified as having belonged to her husband. Webb also had two ladies' handkerchiefs, both of them were bloody. His right hand was wounded and bound up in a bandage.

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PORTLAND HAS TRUNK MYSTERY

Widow of Dead Man Found at Union Depot in Trunk, Is Arrested, Together With Man Who Was With Her.

PORTLAND, Or., June 21. Suspected of the murder of William A. Johnson, whose body was discovered jammed in a trunk at the Union depot last night, Jesse P. Webb and Mrs. William Johnson, widow of the dead man, were arrested early today and taken to the police station.

The couple were apprehended by city detectives as they alighted from an automobile at the Willamette rooming house, 322 1-2 Stark street, after they had been out riding all night.

Mrs. Johnson had \$1900 in cash in her purse, which she said had been given her by her husband the day before. Both Webb and Mrs. Johnson had been drinking.

Neither would talk. Mrs. Johnson said that Webb and Johnson went to the park yesterday afternoon, while she returned home with her 7-year-old boy, as he was not feeling well.

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