

Half A Chance

BY FREDERICK S. ISHAM.

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

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"A little contest with the foils, a fencing bout! Good!" exclaimed Forsythe.

Jocelyn Wray walked over to the group, and Forsythe followed.

"Brave, Ronsdale!" A number of people applauded.

"He has won. Now the reward! What is it to be?"

"Not so fast! Here are others."

"True." Ronsdale looked around with his cold smile. His glance vaguely included John Steele and Captain Forsythe.

"Count me out," laughed the latter.

"Not in my line, don't you know, since I joined the retired list."

"However, there's Steele," Sir Charles, pipe in hand, remarked.

"Do you use the foils, Mr. Steele?" asked Jocelyn Wray.

He moved forward. Lord Ronsdale stood near her, bending over with a slightly proprietary air.

"It—Steele looked at them. "Only a little."

"Then you must try conclusions with Lord Ronsdale," called out Sir Charles.

"As victor over the rest he must meet all comers."

"Nothing to be put out by being beaten by Ronsdale," interposed an observer. "Had the reputation of being one of the best swordsmen on the continent; has even had, I believe, with a laugh, 'one or two little affairs of honor.'"

"Honor!" Steele's glance swung around, played brightly on the nobleman.

The latter's face remained impassive. He lifted his foil carelessly and swung it. The hiss that followed might have been construed as a challenge. John Steele tossed aside his coat.

Ronsdale's eyes suddenly narrowed. Expectancy made itself felt in his manner. "Aren't you going to roll up your sleeve?" he asked softly. "Usually find it gives greater freedom of movement myself."

"Perhaps you are right," Steele said coolly, and, following the nobleman's example, he pushed back his sleeve. The action revealed the splendid arm of the perfectly trained athlete, marked, however, by a great scar extending from just above the wrist to the elbow.

"Bad job that, Steele!" cried Sir Charles. "Looks as if it might have been made by an African spear!"

"No," John Steele smiled.

Lord Ronsdale breathed quickly.

"Recent wound, I should say."

"Not very old," said John Steele.

"If there's a good story back of it we'll have it later," Captain Forsythe remarked.

Their blades crossed. Ronsdale's suppleness of wrist and arm, his cold steadiness, combined with a knowledge of many fine artifices, had already made him a favorite with those of the men who cared to back their opinions with odd pounds.

"Ten to five!" one of the men near her called out joyfully. "Odds on Ronsdale! Any takers?"

"Done!"

Jocelyn saw John Steele draw himself back sharply just in time. She also fancied a new, ominous gleam in his eyes. His demeanor underwent an abrupt change. If Ronsdale's quickness was catlike the other's movements had now all the swiftness and grace of a panther.

"Hello!" Through the swishing of steel she heard again the man at her side exclaim, make some laughing remark, "Perhaps I'd better hedge!"

But even as he spoke, with a fiercer thrusting and parrying of blades, the end came. A sudden irresistible movement of John Steele's arm and the nobleman's blade clattered to the floor.

"Egad! I never saw anything prettier!" Sir Charles came forward quickly. "Met your match that time, Ronsdale."

The nobleman stooped for his foil. "That time, yes!" he drawled.

Steele found himself walking with Jocelyn Wray toward the window. Across the room a footman now approached Lord Ronsdale and extended a salver.

John Steele's glance flashed toward Ronsdale. The telegram, then, had been for—He saw an inscrutable smile cross the nobleman's face.

A door closed quietly as Lord Ronsdale went out.

The afternoon of that same day there arrived at the village of Strathorn from London a discreet looking little man who, descending at the Golden Lion, was shown to a private sitting room on the second story. In about an hour he was joined by Lord Ronsdale.

"Well!" he spoke quickly—"I fancy you have a little something to tell me, Mr. Gillett?"

"A little something!" The latter rubbed his hands. "More than a little! The special inquiry which your lordship mentioned just as he was leaving my office proved for a time most illusive."

"You mean the object of John Steele's visit to the continent?"

"Exactly. And, the object of that visit solved, I have now a matter of

greatest importance to communicate, so important it could only be imparted by word of mouth." The police agent spoke hastily and moved nearer.

"Indeed! You have reached a conclusion, one that you sought to reject perhaps, but that wouldn't be discarded?"

Mr. Gillett looked at him earnestly. "You don't mean—it isn't possible that you knew all the while?"

"Let us start at the beginning."

"True, your lordship." Mr. Gillett swallowed. "As your lordship is aware, we were fortunate enough in the beginning to find out through our agent in Tasmania that John Steele came to that place in a little trading schooner, the Laura Deane of Portsmouth; that he had been rescued from a tiny uncharted reef, or isle, on Dec. 21, some three years before. The spot, by longitude and latitude, marks, through an odd coincidence, the place where the Lord Nelson met her fate."

"A coincidence truly," murmured the nobleman. "But at this stage in your reasoning you recalled that all on board were embarked in the ship's boats and reached civilization, except possibly?"

"A few of my charges between decks? A bad lot of ugly brutes. The story of John Steele's rescue," went on Mr. Gillett, "as told by himself, was well known in Tasmania. A lawyer by profession, he had been passenger on a merchant vessel, the Mary Vernon of Baltimore, United States. This vessel, like the Lord Nelson, had come to grief. All of those in John Steele's boat had perished except him. Some had gone mad through thirst and suffering. Others had killed their fellows in a frenzy. Being of superb physique, having been through much physical training—the listener stirred in his chair—"he managed to survive, to reach the little isle, where, according to his story, he remained almost a year."

"A year? Then he set foot in Tasmania about four years after the Lord Nelson went down," observed the nobleman, a curious glimmer in his eyes.

"Four years after," he repeated, accenting the last word.

"Such were the details gathered in Tasmania," answered the police agent. "Go on," said Lord Ronsdale.

"From the mate of the Laura Deane, the schooner that rescued him from the isle, and one of her crew whom I managed to locate at Plymouth, as I have informed your lordship by letter," answered Mr. Gillett. "These men now furnish lodgings to seamen and incidentally shanghaied a few of them for dubious craft. Both of them, the mate and the sailor, recalled the man of fine bearing and education whom they found on the little isle, a sort of Greek statue, half clothed in rags, so to speak, who made his personality felt at once on these simple, ignorant fellows. At the spring on the little island the seamen flied their water butts. This kept them several days, mixing labor with skylarking, during which time one of them picked up something—a pouch marked with a name."

"Which was?"

Mr. Gillett leaned forward, spoke softly; Lord Ronsdale stared straight ahead. "Of course," he said; "of course!"

"This, I will confess, startled, puzzled me," continued the police agent. "I tried to explain it in a dozen different ways. Then it was that the line of special investigation helped. John Steele's outing to which you directed my attention was passed on the continent. After a good deal of pains we discovered that he visited a certain large building in Paris."

"This led to an inspection of the tenants. They proved of all sorts and kinds. The place was a beehive. Hundreds of people entered and left every day. At this time I happened on an item in a periodical about some remarkable work in a certain line by a high class medical specialist. Here is the paragraph."

Lord Ronsdale took the slip of paper the other handed him and briefly looked at it. "You visited this person?"

"Yes, as his office address was mentioned as being in the large building we were interested in. But at the moment I had no suspicion that John Steele's pilgrimage to Paris could have been for the purpose of consulting."

"An eminent specialist in the line of removing birthmarks," read the nobleman, glancing at the slip of paper, "or other disfigurements?"

"One question, my lord. He is discerning—knows that you are?"

"Knows? Yes. He found that out one day in Hyde park."

"And yet he comes down here, dares to leave London, where at least his chances are better for—but why?"

"Why?" Lord Ronsdale's smile was not agreeable. "When does a man become illogical? When does he accept chances, however desperate?"

"When?" The police agent's tones expressed vague wonder. "Why, when there is a woman in the case," suddenly—"a woman or a girl."

"Is there anything else you have to tell me?" asked Lord Ronsdale.

"Only one thing, and it may have no bearing on the case. Some one who has not been seen in these parts in years, the red headed son of the landlady where the Gerard murder occurred, has been back in London, and—Steele's looking for him, for what purpose I don't know." The nobleman moved quickly. "But he hasn't found him—yet. Apparently the fellow took alarm, knowing the police agent might want him, and vanished again."

Lord Ronsdale moistened his lips, then got up and walked back and forth.

"I have made my plans," he finally said. "And—I intend to act."

"Where?"

"Here, and at once."

(To Be Continued.)

PORTLAND SEES OLD PIONEERS

Eastern Bond Market Off, So Portland People Are Buying City Improvement Bonds to Keep Up the Work in City.

PORTLAND, June 23.—Pioneers of Oregon are honored guests of Portland this week, the occasion being the annual reunion of the Oregon Pioneer association. The white haired band of empire builders who blazed the trail to Old Oregon will be greeted by an address of welcome by Mayor Simon and there will be other notable talks. A big banquet at the Armory is a feature of the reunion.

Because the eastern bond market is "off," Portland people are buying the city's improvement bonds, determined that betterments shall go ahead without delay because of financial conditions elsewhere. Bids made for the bonds by bond buying firms of the eastern money centers were far below what was considered satisfactory by Mayor Simon. In fact the best offer was to take the bonds at 91. This meant a loss to the city and then the securities were offered locally at par. The first block of the \$2,000,000 issue authorized to build the Broadway bridge, amounting to \$250,000, is now being taken at home, so there will be no delay or loss to the city.

Unfortunate children of the city, in whose lives there is too little sunshine, were given a treat this week when Portland automobilists gave the use of their cars for rides about the city that were much enjoyed by the children. Wards of the Boys' and Girl's Aid Society, the Children's Home and the People's Institute were the recipients of this outing and it was a mappy bunch of children that toured the city in the big autos for two hours.

Lions Escape From Wreck.

EBENSBURG, Pa., June 23.—Wild animals from a travelling circus were liberated by the wagon cages striking a low bridge as the circus train was running from this place to Gallitzin, on the Cresson and Cambria branch of the Pennsylvania railroad early today. Three flat cars were derailed and three wagon cars demolished.

The report that the animals were abroad excited the neighborhood, and the frightened farmers refused to aid in rounding them up.

Two circus employes caught in the wreckage were painfully but not seriously hurt.

Later in the day all the animals were captured except the hyena, and the circus was able to show at Gallitzin tonight. Two lions, an elephant, a leopard, a jaguar and an ibex were free for a while.

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NOTICE TO CARPENTERS.

Members of local union 1840 are requested to be present at the hall at 10 a. m. Sunday, June 25, for the purpose of attending memorial services at the M. E. church South, Rev. Mr. Goulder officiating.

—82 C. E. LEATHERMAN

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