

THE LATE TENANT

CHAPTER IX.

Synopsis of preceding chapters at end of this instalment

By GORDON HOLMES

Coming Near

As for Henry van Hupfeldt, he, too, at that morning hour lay awake in his bed. If ever man knew panic, it was he all that night. He had gone home from his interview with Violet, arranging in his carriage, even from the glance of the passenger in the streets, stricken to the heart by that unsigned note of David's to Violet: "A pretty certain thing that your sister was a disreputable wife." "The results of it will be forthcoming," some one knew!

But who? And how? Van Hupfeldt locked himself away from his valet—he lived in chambers near Hanover Square—and for hours sat without a movement, staring the stars of the hopeless and the lost. The fact that he had as good as seen from Violet the pledging of herself to him—that fact which in another time would have filled him with elation, was now almost forgotten in the darkness of his calamity, as a star is swallowed up by clouds. The thing was known! That known which had been between the chamber of his heart and God alone! A bird of the air had whispered it, and her soul shared in its horror. The faintest hint of a wish to commit murder came from between his teeth. He had meant well, and ill had come; but because he had meant so badly and had struggled hard with fate, let no man dare to meddle! He could be flint against the steel of a man.

His eyes, long bereft of sleep, closed of themselves at last, as he threw himself upon his bed. But the pang which pierces the sleep of the condemned criminal soon woke him. He opened his eyes with a clearer mind, and set to thinking. The unsigned note to Violet was in a man's hand. Some nights before in the cemetery he had found a man near the grave with her, and the man had seemed to be talking with her, a young, sun-burned man. Who he was he had no idea; he had no reason to think this was the man who had sent the note. There was left only Miss L'Estrange. She might have sent it, getting a man to write for her—suspicion of itself fixed upon her. Always he had harbored this fear, that some paper, something to serve as a clue, had been left in the flat which would be hidden for a time, and then come forth into the noontday to undo him utterly. Gwendoline, he knew, had wished to screen him; but the chances were against him. He had never dared to go into the flat alone, to take the flat in his own name, and search it inside out. The place was haunted by a light step, and a sigh was in the air which no other ear could hear, but which his ear would hear without fail. Within those walls his eyes one night had seen a sight!

He had not dared to take the place; but he had put Miss L'Estrange into it, and she had failed him; so, suspecting at last that she did not search according to the bargain, he had threatened to stop supplies, in order merely to spur her to search, for his heart had always foreboded that there was something to find.

Given, he knew, had kept a diary. Where was that? His photographs, where were they? His last letter to her? The certificates? Had they all been duly destroyed by her? Had she forgotten nothing? But when he had attempted to spur L'Estrange, the woman had flown into a fury, and he had allowed himself to lose his temper. How bitter now was his remorse at this folly! He ought to have kept some man in perpetuity in the flat, till all fear of anything being hidden in it was past. He suspected now that L'Estrange might have found some documents, and had kept it from him through his not being well in her favor during the last weeks of her residence. He groaned aloud at this childishness of his. It was his business to have kept in touch with her, to have made her rich. But it was not too late.

So, on the following evening, he presented himself at the stage-door of the theater where Miss Ermyn L'Estrange was then displaying her charms, in his hand a case containing a *rivière* of diamonds.



"This is a surprise!" said she. "What's the game now?"

He said not one word about his motive for coming to her after so long, but put out an every-day hand, as if no dispute had been between them.

"Well, this is a surprise!" said she. "What's the game now?"

"No game," said he, assuming the necessary jauntiness. "Should old acquaintance be forgot?" They drove together to the Café Royal.

"It was just as I tell you," she explained in the cab driving later to Chelsea. "I never saw one morsel of any paper until that last day, when the two certificates dropped out of the picture, and then I wouldn't give you because of the tiff. I'm awfully sorry now that I didn't," she glanced down at the *rivière* on her palm; "but there, it's done, and can't be undone—nature of the beast, I s'pose."

"And you really think Jenny has them? Are you sure, now? Are you sure?" asked van Hupfeldt earnestly.

"That's my honest belief," she answered. "I think I remember tossing them to Jenny, and as Jenny knew that I had gone into the flat specially to search for papers for you, she must have said to herself: 'These papers may be just what have been wanted, and they'll be worth their weight in gold to me, if I can find Mr. van Hupfeldt.' No doubt she's been looking for you ever since, or waiting for you to turn up. When I said to her yesterday, 'What about those two papers that dropped out of the picture at Eddystone Mansions?' she turned funny, and couldn't catch her breath. 'Which two papers, miss?' she says. 'Oh, you go on,' I said to her; 'you know very well. Those that dropped out of the picture that fell down.'—'Yes,' said she, 'now I remember. I wonder what could have become of them? Didn't you throw them into the fireplace, Miss L'Estrange?'—'No, I didn't, Jenny,' I said to her, 'and a woman should lie to a man, not to another woman; for it takes a liar to catch a liar.'—'But what lie am I telling, Miss L'Estrange?' says she. 'I am not sure,' I said, 'but I know that you ought to tie your nose with string whenever you're telling a lie, for your nostrils keep opening and shutting, same as they're

doing now.'—'I didn't know that, I'm sure,' says she. 'That's queer, too, if my nostrils are opening and shutting.'—'It's only the truth,' I said to her; 'your mouth is accustomed to uttering falsehood, and it don't mind, but when your nostrils smell the lie coming out, they get excited, my girl.'—'Fancy!' says she. 'That's funny.'—'So where's the use keeping it up, Jenny?' I said to her. 'You do make me wild; for I know that you're lying, and you know that I know, and yet you keep it up, as if I was a man, and didn't know you. If you've got the papers, say so; you are perfectly welcome to them, for I don't want to take them from you,' I said. 'Well, you seem to know more than I do myself, miss,' she says. 'Oh, you get out!' I said to her, and I pushed her by the shoulders out of the room. That's all that passed between us."

"For what reason did you ask her about these papers yesterday in particular?" demanded van Hupfeldt thickly, a pain gripping at his heart.

"I'll tell you. The new tenant of the flat came to me—"

"Ah! the flat is let again?"

"What, didn't you know? He's only just moved in—a young man named David Harcourt."

"And he came to you? What about?"

"Asking about papers."

"Papers? What interest can he have in them? And you told him about the certificates?"

"Yes."

"*Gott in Himmel!*"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"You told him about the certificates? Then it was he who wrote the note!"

"Which note? Don't take on like that—in a cab!"

"You told him! Then it was he—it was he! How does he look, this young man? What kind of young man?" Van Hupfeldt wanted to choke the woman as she sat there beside him.

"Come, cheer up, pull yourself together; it will be all the same a hundred years hence. I'm sure I didn't know that I was injuring you by telling him, and even if I had known, I should still have told him—there's nothing like

being frank, is there? You and I weren't pals—"

"But what is he like, this young man?"

"Not a bad sort, something like a Jameson raider, a merry, upstanding fellow."

"It was he who was at the grave with her!" whispered van Hupfeldt to himself, while his eyes seemed to see a ghost. "And you told him all, all! It was he, no other. What name did you give him as that of the husband on the marriage lines. Did he ask that, too? Did you tell him?" With a kind of crazy secrecy he asked it at her ear, panting for the answer.

"I didn't remember the husband's name," she answered, "I told him it wasn't Strauss, but van or von Something. And don't lean against me in that way. People will think you are full."

"Van? You told him that? And what did he say then?"

"He asked if it wasn't van Something, I forget what, van Hup—something. I have an awful bad memory for names, and— Look here! don't come worrying me with your troubles, for I've got my own to look after."

Van Hupfeldt's finger-nails were pressed into the flesh of his palms. This new occupier of the flat, then, even knew his name, even suspected the identity of Strauss with van Hupfeldt! How could he know it, except from Violet? To the pains of panic in van Hupfeldt was added a stab of jealousy. That Violet knew this young man, he no longer doubted, nor doubted that the meeting at the grave was by appointment. Perhaps Violet, eager to find suspected papers of her sister, had even put this man into the flat, just as he, van Hupfeldt, had once put Miss L'Estrange there. At all events, here was a man in the flat having some interest or other in Violet and in Gwendoline's papers, with the name van Hupfeldt on his lips, and a suspicion that van Hupfeldt was Strauss, the evil genius of Gwendoline.

"But there must be no meddling in my life!" van Hupfeldt whispered to himself, with an evil eye that meant no good to David.

When the cab drew up before Miss L'Estrange's