THE CLIMBING COURVATELS

IX. Exit Delancy and Enter Count Serristori

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HERBERT DELANCY slowly turned his gaze from Carl to the Malay, then sank into a chair with a look half of fatigue, half of hopelessness. He did not appear to be angry, and when his expression did change it was to one of expectant wonder.

He had just been thwarted in a desperate enterprise undertaken chiefly to revenge the insults and humiliation Richard Courtney had subjected him to; but his first purpose of revenge had been joined by a thought that at the same time he might win from Virginia the consent her parents had denied with such hurt to his pride. At first the purpose to induce Virginia to leave the Opera House with him alone went no further than the hope to turn the adventure to the advantage of his desire for revenge. He could, he believed in the desperate whirl of his resentful thoughts, compromise the girl in the eyes of the world. That would serve his revenge.

But, when he reached the Hardees' box at the Opera House, all the love he was capable of feeling was aroused by the sight of Virginia, more beautiful than he had ever before seen her. It was then the insane thought came to him that, if he could have her alone long enough to plead his love, he could win her consent to go with him. But where?

He knew that a boat of one of the German lines sailed the next morning; and when, by the story of her mother's illness he had succeeded in inducing Virginia to leave the Opera House alone with him, the wild plan of getting her across the river, and as far as the pier of the boat, suggested itself to further his second plan. He could not think in details; only that if the young woman, distressed by the false news of her mother's serious illness, and with but little knowledge of the city's streets, gave no alarm until the ferry was reached, he could somehow carry through his plan, and gain her consent to an elopement.

The sudden interruption of his journey, Virginia's quick disappearance by means Delancy even yet did not understand,—he did not know that the Hindu had slashed the tire with a knife,—brought to his confused mind some sense of the enormity of the crime he had attempted. This had given sudden pause to his whirling thoughts, somewhat as the accident to the machine had brought its whirling machinery to a sudden stop. There was something fearsome, too, in the mysterious appearance by the side of the disabled car of that quiet Hindu which shook Delancy's nerves. He recalled how often, both in Paris and here, he had been shadowed by one of those softly treading, patient men who seemed to spring up out of the very pavement as allies of the Courtneys.

IN short, Herbert Delancy was more nervously and mentally benumbed, when, after a careful inspection of the house, he entered his rooms, than he had ever before been in his life. So, as he raised the light and turned at the sound of his own door being locked behind him, it was with a strange sense of helplessness that he sank into a chair, half consciously wondering at himself that he felt no anger at the intruders.

Both Carl and his Malay companion fixed their eyes intently upon Delancy, observing the languor, rather than anger, his look expressed, and noting his physical lassitude. Then they exchanged quick, satisfied glances.

"Well?" said Delancy, after a silence neither of the others seemed disposed to interrupt.

"Of course you know," began Carl in a voice rather sympathetic than reproachful, "that if you are in New York to-morrow Richard Courtney will try to kill you."

Carl's utterance was soft and monotonous, and Delancy seemed to hear it as at a distance. But this did not surprise him so much as did his interest in Carl's eyes. They were compelling. He could not take his own from them.

"As you are good enough to warn me," replied Delancy, quietly enough, "I'll try to take care of myself."

"As to that," responded Carl reassuringly, "I myself would prevent his harming you, if it was necessary. I have five or six old friends about me—this is one—who would make it unnecessary for anyone else to—to— You understand? They are all, as it happens, under obligations to me for favors such as even a poor man can render sometimes."

"You mean, I suppose," said Delancy, and he even smiled grimly as he spoke, "that your interesting friends are so little averse to using the knife that at a hint from you they would save Mr. Courtney the trouble of looking for me?"

His nerves were steadier now. Carl's voice was so gentle, even soothing, as to give the impression to Delancy that his unbidden visitors were not unfriendly in the purpose of their call, after all.

"If you care to put it like that," answered Carl, "I shall not trouble you with explanations, as the hour is late and you are tired."

Delancy smiled and bowed as if acknowledging the other's politeness. This butler of the Courtneys' was a strange fellow; spoke almost like a gentleman. He recalled hearing some gossip at the Colony that Carl was in fact a scholar. Certainly he had agreeable manners, and there was something fascinating about his eyes. Delancy leaned forward to listen more intently as Carl resumed:

"The point is this: You must leave this country at once,—a steamer sails in the morning,—because I wish to spare you trouble, and myself annoyance. It would be an annoyance to have to arrange the escape of the man who believed his obligation to me required that he—you understand?—should dispose of you."

The pleasant tone in Carl's voice had not departed; yet he had plainly threatened Delancy's life if he did not leave the country at once. Delancy thought of this, and then began to think of an emphasis, slight, but full of meaning, Carl had placed on the word "must." After a pause of some seconds Delancy said:

"Of course I am not frightened at your mysterious threats; but the fact is I had half a notion of sailing to-morrow."

"Make it a whole notion," suggested Carl persuasively. "My friend here will help you to pack."

He spoke in a strange language to the Malay, who, without surprise, rose, approached Delancy, and held out his hand.

"He wants your trunk keys," explained Carl.

Delancy, under an influence he could no more resist than he could explain, tossed a bunch of keys to the Malay, who opened trunks and wardrobes and proceeded to pack as for a master he had served for years.

Carl continued in the same voice, and Delancy vaguely wondered if the calm monotony of the voice or something in Carl's eyes, which never lost their hold on his, had to do with that influence. "My friend here has my orders to pack such things as will accommodate you until I shall have shipped all your belongings to you."

"All my belongings where? What are you talking about?" Delancy asked this with an intention to show indignation at such presumption; but he was dreamily aware that he had uttered the question with almost childish inconsequence.

"You are never to return to this country again," said Carl. "So I will look after all that you leave here, and forward all that you may not wish me to dispose of."

"Oh, come!" said Delancy. "This is running into farce."

He half rose; but at a sign from Carl the Malay placed a single finger against Delancy's chest and gently pushed him back into the chair. Delancy did not resist, nor did he think it strange that his temples were swiftly swept three or four times by the Malay's hands.

Carl rose now, and going close to Delancy placed his hands on his shoulders and by his own fixed gaze steadied the other's wavering eyes. "You are not to come back here, because I know all the reasons Mr. Van Alstyne could give to the law officers for sending you to prison. A good, a gentle, a kind, man, Mr. Van Alstyne, one only a very treacherous person would betray."

Carl paused; but noting a slight look of dissent in the other's eyes, he continued.

"Mr. Van Alstyne learned that I had some useless learning—useless to me—on a subject he wished information about. His son in law had sent him photographs of inscriptions on a new—ah, a very rich, important!—excavation discovery, and I was able to transcribe it for him. You understand? It brought us into the relation of gentleman and gentleman. On the other hand, he knew something I wanted to know. It related to you. A sensitive man, he is. I know now. Pay strict attention, Herbert Delancy! If you ever return to this country, I will send you to prison! Mr. Van Alstyne must testify, because he—cannot—refuse—if—I—ask."

Delancy slowly nodded his head as if showing that he understood.

"Say aloud that you understand!" suddenly commanded Carl.

"I understand," said Delancy.

Carl, with a slight smile, turned to the Malay, who was locking and strapping a steamer trunk. He told the man that he would go for a carriage. "The beast is asleep," he added, though Delancy, to whom he referred, was now taking wide eyed but impersonal interest in the Malay's actions.

IT was chill, sunless daylight when a carriage deposited Delancy, Carl, and the Malay on a pier in Hoboken. But early as it was the pier was awake and bustling with the last busy preparations for a sailing. Most of the few cabin passengers had avoided an early morning call in New York by crossing over during the night and sleeping on board. But there were hundreds of steerage passengers, some leaning over the side of the ship, some still noisily bidding good by to fellow countrymen on the pier.

The scene was familiar to Delancy, and he accepted it as a matter of course that he should be there; that Carl should accompany him on board, seek the purser for a cabin assignment, and go with him to the cabin.

"My friend and I will remain on board until the last 'All ashore!' gong," said Carl; "but we shall leave you alone if you want to lie down. I think you'd better lie down and go to sleep."

"I should like to lie down and go to sleep," answered Delancy docilely.

Even as the last warning strokes of the gong sounded, Carl looked in at Delancy, deep in sleep, and only then quit the ship.

IT is to be recorded as interesting evidence concerning human nature that the person who suffered most from the evil attempt of Delancy was Richard Courtney.

In the weeks following the adventure Betty seemed as if she might have forgotten the whole matter had it not been for anxiety about her husband. Vir-

"My Little Playlet Is About to Unfold Itself."