THE SPY IN BLACK

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Synopsis of the Preceding Instalments

THIS startling novel of the German spy system is mainly the narrative of Lieutenant von Belke, of the German navy, with a few additional chapters by Mr. Clouston. Lieutenant von Belke lands from a submarine, with his motorcycle, upon those islands where the British Grand Fleet has its lair. He carries an important paper, which is to be delivered into the hands of a mysterious personage alluded to as "him."

Part II comprises "a few chapters by the editor," and introduces the Rev. Alexander Burnett, a country clergyman, who is induced to visit a parish on the island just mentioned, with an idea of applying for a clerical vacancy. He is called for by a certain Mr. Taylor, who is to carry him in his auto to the house of the minister's friend, Robert Drummond. At one stage of the journey, which takes place after dark, they leave the car for the purpose of investigating a mysterious light, which the chauffeur has seen. When close to a cliff the minister is struck on the head by this chauffeur, who is the minister's almost exact image.

Then Robert Drummond is visited by a British naval lieutenant, who acquaints him with the news that his friend has just been picked up by a patrol boat, unconscious from a blow on the head and half drowned. The lieutenant carries off with him a telegram Mr. Drummond has previously received, ostensibly from the Rev. Burnett, advising him not to look for him after all, as his plans have altered.

The scene shifts to a mail boat crossing the English Channel. Two persons, a handsome lady named Miss Holland and a man in clerical attire, purporting to be the Rev. Alexander Burnett, of Berwickshire, engage in conversation. When the ship docks they shake hands and separate. Miss Holland gets herself placed in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Craigie as governess to their two young daughters. But shortly thereafter she leaves mysteriously. Mr. Craigie recalls that he has seen a strange clergyman strolling in the vicinity.

Part III resumes the narrative of Lieutenant von Belke, who, obedient to a signal from a window of the nearby manse, pays his respects to one Adolph Tiel, the mysterious person alluded to in the beginning as "him." Tiel is impersonating the Rev. Burnett. Captain Ashington enters the tale, introduced as a British naval officer who has turned traitor, and who is supplying the information about the departure of the fleet. To do so it must pass through a narrow neck of water, and von Belke is to be on hand with four submarines.

Another accomplice enters—a lady this time, presented to von Belke as Miss Burnett. Von Belke falls in love with her. She entreats him not to return to his submarine, and though he has previously stood out against Tiel on this point, he readily agrees. He prepares exhaustive directions in the form of notes, which he hands to Wiedermann, the submarine commander, in the dead of night. Then he returns to the manse.

PART IV

Lieutenant von Belke's Narrative Concluded

CHAPTER I

Wednesday

I WOKE on Wednesday morning with an outlook so changed that I felt as if some magician must have altered my nature. Theoretically I had taken a momentous and dangerous decision at the call of duty, and all my energies ought to have concentrated on the task of carrying it through safely, thoroughly and warily. I had need of more caution than ever and of the most constant vigilance—both for the sake of my skin and my country. As a matter of fact, I was possessed with the recklessness of a man drifting on a plank down a rapid, where taking thought will not serve him an iota. In vain I preached theoretical caution to myself—exactly how vainly may be judged by my first performance in the morning, when I found myself alone with Eileen in the parlor. She suggested that for my own sake I had better be getting back to my room.

"Will you come and sit there with me?" I asked.

"I may pay a call upon you perhaps."

"After hours of loneliness! And then leave me lonelier than ever. No, thank you, I shall stay down here."

"In your uniform?" she asked, opening her eyes a little. "No, no, Mr. Belke!"

"Well, then, get me a suit of mufti."

She looked at me hard.

"You will really run that risk?"

"It is worth it now," I said with meaning.

She looked away, and for a moment I thought she was pained—not displeased, I am sure, but as if something had given her a pang of sorrow. Then the look passed, and she cried:

"Well, if Tiel agrees."

"Tiel be hanged! I don't care what he says."

She began to smile.

"Do you propose to wear my clothes?" she inquired.

"Yours!" I exclaimed.

"Otherwise," she continued, "you must persuade Tiel to agree, for it is only he who can provide you with a suit of mufti."

Presently Tiel came in, and I put the demand to him at once. He looked a little surprised, but, somewhat to my surprise, raised no serious objections. His motives are hard to fathom, but I cannot help suspecting that despite his air of self-confidence and authority he has an instinctive respect for an officer and acknowledges in his heart that I am really his superior.

"You mustn't go outside the house, of course," he said, "and if by any evil chance any visitor were to come in unexpectedly you must have some kind of a story ready."

"Have you had many visitors yet?" I asked, with a touch of sarcasm.

"You never know your luck," said he, "and I believe in guarding against all chances. If you are surprised, please remember that your name is Mr. Wilson."

"Wilson!" I said, with some scorn. "Am I named in honor of the President of the uncouth republic of dollar hunters?"

"You are named Wilson," said he, "because it is very like Watson and Williams and several other common names. The less conspicuous and more easily forgotten a name one takes the better."

There was no doubt about the thoroughness of the man and the cunning with which he laid even the smallest plans, and, though I was a little contemptuous of his finesse at the moment, I must confess I was thankful enough for it not so very long afterward.

"As for your business," added Tiel, "you are a government inspector."

"Of what?" I asked.

"If you are asked, look deep and say nothing," said he. "The islands are full of people on what they call in the navy 'hush' jobs."

"Can you get a suit of mufti for me?" I inquired.

"I'll look one out presently," said he.

"I presume you keep a few disguises," I added.

"A few," said he, with one of his brief smiles. "You had better go up to your room in the meantime, and I'll bring it to you."

I fumed at the idea of any delay, and as I went to the door I said:

"Don't be long about it, please."

More and more the thought of leaving those two alone together, even for a short while, filled me with angry uneasiness, and I paced my bedroom floor impatiently enough. Judge, then, of my relief and delight when, within a few minutes, Eileen knocked at my door and said:

"I have come to pay you a morning call, if I may."

I began to wish then that Herr Tiel would spend an hour or two in looking out clothes for me, and, as a matter of fact, he did. Eileen explained that he had said he must do some errand in his capacity of parish minister, but what the mystery-monger was really about heaven knows.

"Now," said I to Eileen, when we were seated and I had lit a cigarette, "I want to ask you something about this new scheme that we three are embarked upon."

She began to shake her head at once.

"I am very much in the dark," said she. "Tiel tells me as little as he tells you."

"You must surely know one thing. What is your own part in it? Why were you brought into the islands? Such risks are not run for nothing."

"What is a woman's part in such a plan usually?" she asked in a quiet voice.

I was a little taken aback. It was not exactly pleasant to think of—in connection with Eileen.

"I believe they sometimes act as decoys," I said bluntly.

She merely nodded.

"Then that is your rôle?"

"I presume so," she said frankly.

"Who are you going to decoy?" I asked, and I felt that my voice was harsh.

"Ask Herr Tiel," she answered.

"Not that gross brute Ashington, surely!"

She shook her head emphatically, and I felt a little relieved.

"You have seen for yourself that he needs no further decoying," she said.

"Then it must be some even higher game you're to be flown at."

"I wonder!" she said, and smiled a little. I hated to see her smile.

"I don't like to think of you doing this," I exclaimed suddenly.

"Not even for Germany?" she asked.

I was silenced, but my blood continued to boil at the thought of what might not be asked of her.

"Would you go to any lengths?" I asked abruptly.

"For my country I would go to any lengths," she answered proudly. And with that she changed her subject, nor could I induce her to return to it.

How long we had talked I know not when at last Tiel appeared bringing a very presentable tweed suit, and then they both left me and I did the one thing I had so firmly resolved not to do. I discarded my uniform with what protection it gave me, and made myself liable to be shot without question or doubt. Yet my only feeling was gladness that I need no longer stay cooped up in my room while those two spent their hours together downstairs.

That afternoon, when we were all three together, I asked Tiel for some definite information regarding his scheme, and we had a long and, I must say, a very interesting talk. The details of this plan it would scarcely be safe to put down on paper at present. Or, rather, I should say, the outline of it, for we have scarcely reached the stage of details yet. It is a bold scheme, as was only to be expected of Tiel, and necessitated going very thoroughly into the relative naval strengths of Germany and Britain, so that most of the time for the rest of the day was taken up with a discussion of facts and figures. And through it all Eileen sat listening. I wonder if such a talk ever before had such a charming background?

Now at last I am in my room, writing this narrative up to this very point. It is long past midnight, but sleep is keeping very far away from me. The weather has changed to a steady drizzle of rain. Outside the night is black as pitch and mild and windless. It may partly be this close, damp air that drives sleep away, but I know it is something else as well.

I am actually wondering if I can marry her! She must surrender; that is certain, for I have willed it, and what a German wills with all his soul takes place.

CHAPTER II

Thursday

FRIDAY morning, very early. The events of yesterday and last night have left me with more to think about than I seem to have wits to think with. Soon after luncheon Tiel put on an oilskin coat and went out. A thin, fine drizzle still filled the air, drifting in clouds before a rising wind and blotting out the view of the sea almost completely. Behind it the ships were doing we knew not what. Certainly they were not firing, but we could see nothing of them at all.

A little later Eileen insisted on putting on a waterproof and going out, too. As the minister's sister, she had to visit a farm, she said.

Left to myself, I picked up a book and had been reading for about a quarter of an hour when I was conscious of a shadow crossing the window and heard a step on the gravel. Never doubting that it was either Eileen or Tiel, I still sat reading until I was roused by the sound of voices in the hall, just outside the parlor door. One I recognized as our servant's; the other was a stranger's. I dropped my book and started hastily to my feet, and as I did so I heard the stranger say:

"I tell you I recognize her coat. My good woman, d'ye think I'm blind? I'm coming in to wait for her, I tell you."

The door opened, and a very large, stout gentleman appeared, talking over his shoulder as he entered.

"When Miss Holland comes in tell her Mr. Craigie is waiting to see her," said he, and with that he closed the door and became aware of my presence.

For a moment we looked at one another. My visitor, I saw, had a gray beard, a large, rosy face, and twinkling blue eyes. He looked harmless enough, but I eyed him very warily, as you can readily believe.

"It's an awful wet day," said he in a most friendly and affable tone.

I agreed that it was detestable.

"It's fine for crops all the same. The oats is looking very well, do you not think so?"

I perceived that my friend was an agriculturist, and endeavored to humor him.

"They are looking splendid!" I said, with enthusiasm.

He sat down, and we exchanged a few more remarks on the weather and the crops, in the course of which he had filled and lit a pipe and made himself entirely at home.

"Are you staying with the minister?" he inquired presently.

"I am visiting him," I replied evasively.

"I understand Miss Holland's here, too," said he, with an extra twinkle in his eye.

I knew, of course, that he must mean Eileen, and I must confess that I was devoured with curiosity.

"She is," I said. "Do you know her?"

"Know her? She was my governess! Has she not told you the joke of how she left me in the lurch?"

It flashed across my mind that it might seem odd if I were to admit that "Miss Holland" had said nothing about this mysterious adventure.

"Miss Holland came up to the islands as your governess, I understand," I said in as matter-of-fact tone as I could compass.

"We got her through a Mrs. Armitage in Kensington," said Mr. Craigie. "It seemed all right, and, mind you, I'm not saying it isn't all right now. Only, between you and me, Mr."——

"Wilson," I said promptly, breathing my thanks to Tiel at the same time.

"You'll be a relation of the minister's, too, perhaps?"

"I am on government business," I replied in a suitable tone of grave mystery.

"Dash it all, Mr. Wilson," exclaimed my friend with surprising energy, "every one in the county seems to be on government business nowadays—except myself!"

I was resolved, however, not to forego this chance of learning something more about Eileen.

"You were talking about Miss Holland," I said hurriedly before he had time to get under way again.

"Oh, so I was. And that reminds me I've come here just to make some inquiries about the girl.

"You see, it's this way: My wife's been at me ever since our governess bolted, as she calls it. She got wind of a girl who was the image of the disappearing governess being here at the manse as Mr. Burnett's sister, and then there was simply no quieting her till I'd taken the car and run over to see what there was in the story. Mind you, I didn't think there was a word of truth in it myself, but when I'd got here, by jingo, there I saw Miss Holland's tweed coat in the hall! Now, that's a funny kettle of fish, isn't it?"

I didn't say so, but I had to admit that he was not so very far wrong. The audacity of the performance was quite worthy of Tiel, but its utter recklessness seemed not in the least like him. Had the vanishing governess's employer been any one less easygoing than Mr. Craigie, how readily our whole scheme might have been wrecked! Even as it was, I saw detection staring me straight in the face. However, I put on as cool and composed a face as I could.

"I understood that Miss Holland's brother had written to you about it," I said brazenly.

"Oh, he is really her brother, is he?" said he, looking at me very knowingly.

"Certainly."

"He being Burnett and she Holland, eh?"

"You have heard of half brothers, haven't you?" I inquired with a condescending smile.

"Oh, I have heard of them." Mr. Craigie winked as good-humoredly as ever. "Only I never happened to have heard before of half sisters running away from a situation they'd taken, without a word of warning, just whenever their half brothers whistled."

"Did Mr. Burnett whistle?" I asked with, I hope, an air of calm and slightly superior amusement.

"Some one sent her a wire, and I presume it was Mr. Burnett. Are you an old friend of Mr. Burnett?" he asked.

"Oh, not very," I said carelessly.

"Then perhaps you'll not be offended by my saying that he seems a rum kind of bird," he said confidentially.

"In what way?"

"Well, coming up here just for a Sunday to preach a sermon, and then not preaching it, but staying on as if he'd taken a lease of the manse—him and his twelve-twenty-fourths of a sister!"

"But," I stammered before I could think what I was saying, "I thought he did preach last Sunday."

"Not him. Oh, people are talking a lot about it."

This revelation left me absolutely speechless. Tiel had told me distinctly and deliberately that he had gone through the farce of preaching last Sunday, and now I learned that this was a lie. What was worse, he had assured me that he was causing no comment, and I now was told that people were "talking." Coming straight on top of my discovery of his reckless conduct of Eileen's affair, what was I to think of him?

It was at this black moment that Tiel and Eileen entered the room. My heart stood still for an instant at the thought that in their first surprise something might be disclosed or some slip made by one of us. But the next instant I saw that they had learned who was here and were perfectly prepared.

"How do you do, Mr. Craigie!" cried Eileen radiantly.

Mr. Craigie seemed distinctly taken aback by the absence of all signs of guilt or confusion.

"I'm keeping as well as I can, thank you, considering my anxiety," said he.

"About my sister, sir?" inquired Tiel with his most brazen effrontery, coming forward and smiling cordially. "Surely you got my letter?"

I started. The man clearly had been at the keyhole during the latter part of our conversation, or he could hardly have made this remark fit so well into what I had said.

"I'm afraid I didn't."

"Tut, tut!" said Tiel, with a marvellously well assumed air of annoyance. "The local posts seem to have become utterly disorganized. Apparently they pay no attention to civilian letters at all."

"You're right there," replied Mr. Craigie with feeling. "The only use we are for is just to be taxed."

"What must you think of us!" cried Eileen, whose acting was fully the equal of Tiel's. "However, my brother will explain everything now."

"Yes," said Tiel, "if Mr. Craigie happens to be going—and I'm afraid we've kept him very late already—I'll tell him all about it as we walk back to his car."

He gave Mr. Craigie a confidential glance, as though to indicate that he had something private for his ear. Our visitor, on his part, was obviously reluctant to leave an audience of three, especially as it included his admired governess, but Tiel handled the situation with quite extraordinary urbanity and skill. He managed to open the door and all but push Mr. Craigie out of the room without a hint of inhospitality and solely as though he were seeking only his convenience. I could scarcely believe that this was the man who had made at least two fatal mistakes—mistakes, at all events, which had an ominously fatal appearance.

When Mr. Craigie had wished us both a very friendly goodby, and the door had closed behind him, I turned instantly to Eileen and cried, perhaps more hotly than politely:

"Well, I have been nicely deceived!"

"By whom?" she asked quietly.

"By you a little and by Tiel very much."

"How have I deceived you?"

I looked at her a trifle foolishly. After all, I ought to have realized that she must have had some curious adventure in getting into the islands. She had never told me she hadn't, and now I had merely found out what it was.

"You never told me about your governess adventure—or Mr. Craigie—or that you were called Holland," I said rather lamely.

She merely laughed.

"You never asked me about my adventures, or I should have. They were not very discreditable, after all."

"Well, anyhow," I said, "Tiel has deceived me grossly, and I am going to wring an explanation out of him."

She laid her hand beseechingly on my arm.

"Don't quarrel with him," she said earnestly. "It will do no good. We may think what we like of some of the things he does, but we have got to trust him."

"Trust him! But how can I? He told me he preached last Sunday; I find it was a lie. He said nobody in the parish suspected anything; in consequence of his not preaching, I find they are all 'talking.' He mismanaged your coming here so badly that if old Craigie weren't next door to an imbecile we should all have been arrested days ago. How can I trust him now?"

"Say nothing to him now," she said in a low voice. "Wait till to-morrow. I think he will tell you then very frankly."

There was something so significant and yet beseeching in her voice that I consented, though not very graciously.

"I can hardly picture Herr Tiel being very 'frank,'" I replied. "But if you ask me——"

I bowed my obedience, and then, catching up her hand, pressed it to my lips, saying:

"I trust you absolutely."

When I looked up I caught a look in her eye that I could make nothing of at all. It was beyond question very kind, yet there seemed to be something sorrowful, too. It made her look so ravishing that I think I would have taken her in my arms there and then had not Tiel returned at that moment.

"Well," asked Eileen, "what did you tell Mr. Craigie?"

"I said that you were secretly married to Mr. Wilson, whose parents would cut him off without a penny if they suspected the entanglement, and this was the only plan by which you could spend a few days together. Of course I swore him to secrecy."

For a moment I hesitated whether to resent this liberty or to feel a little pleased or to be amused. Eileen laughed gayly, and so I laughed, too. And that was the end, so far, of my afternoon adventure.

CHAPTER III

Thursday Night

I WENT up to my room early in the evening. Eileen had been very silent, and about 9 o'clock she bade us good night and left us. To sit alone with Tiel, feeling as I did and yet bound by a promise not to upbraid him, was intolerable, and so I left the parlor a few minutes after she did. As I went down the passage to the back, my way lit only by the candle I was carrying, I was struck with a sound I had heard in that house before, only never so loudly. It was the droning of the wind through the crevices of some door, and the whining, melancholy note in the stillness of that house of divided plotters and confidences withheld did nothing to raise my spirits.

When I reached my room I realized what had caused this droning. The wind had changed to a new quarter, and as another consequence my chimney was smoking badly and the room was filled with a pungent blue cloud. It is curious how events arise as consequences of trifling and utterly different circumstances. I tried opening my door and then my window, but still the fire smoked and the cloud refused to disperse. Then I had an inspiration. I have mentioned a large cupboard. It was so large as almost to be a minute room, and I remembered that it had a skylight in its sloping roof. I opened this, and as the room at once began to clear I left it open.

And then I paced the floor and smoked and thought. What was to be made of these very disquieting events? Clearly Tiel was either a much less capable and clever man than he was reputed—a bit of a fraud, in fact—or else he was carrying his fondness for mystery and for suddenly springing brilliant surprises, like conjuring tricks, upon people to the most extreme lengths.

His method of getting Eileen into the islands, though ingenious enough, if not very original, had been marred by the most inconceivable recklessness. Surely some better scheme could have been devised for getting her out of the Craigies' house than a sudden flight without a word of explanation—and a flight, moreover, to another house in the same island where gossip would certainly spread in the course of a very few days. And then again, why had Eileen consented to such a wild plan?

I sat down and wrote for an hour or two to keep me from thinking further on the subject, and at last, about midnight, I resolved to go to bed. The want of fresh air had been troubling me greatly, and it struck me that a safe way of getting a little would be to put my head through the open skylight for a few minutes. It was quite dark in the cupboard, so that no light could escape, and I brought a chair along, stood on it, and looked out, with my head projecting from the midst of the sloping slates and a beautiful, cool breeze refreshing my face.

So cool was the wind that there was evidently north in it, and this was confirmed by the sky, which literally blazed with stars. I could see dimly, but pretty distinctly, the outbuildings at the back of the house and the road that led to the highway and the dark rim of hills beyond. Suddenly I heard the back door gently open, and, still as I had stood on my chair before, I became like a statue now. In a moment the figure of Tiel appeared, and from a flash of light I saw that he carried his electric torch. He walked slowly toward the highroad till he came to a low wall that divided the fields at the side, and then from behind the wall up jumped the form of a man, illuminated for an instant by a flash from the torch and then just distinguishable in the gloom.

I held my breath and waited for the crack of a pistol shot, gently withdrawing my head a little and prepared to rush down and take part in the fray. But there was not a sound save a low murmur of voices, far too distant and too hushed for me to catch a syllable of what they were saying. And then after two or three minutes I saw Tiel turn and start to stroll back again. But at that moment my observations ceased, for I stepped hastily down from my chair, and stood breathlessly waiting for him to run up to my room.

He was quiet almost as a mouse. I had not heard him pass through the house as he went out, and I barely heard a sound now as he returned. But I heard enough to know that he had gone off to bed and did not propose to pay me a visit.

"What in heaven's name did it mean?" I asked myself.

A dozen wild and alarming theories flashed through my mind, and then at last I saw a ray of comfort. Perhaps this was only a rendezvous with Ashington or some subordinate in his pay.

My sleep was very broken, and in the early morning I felt so wide awake and my thoughts were so restlessly busy that I jumped up and resolved to have another peep out of the skylight. Very quietly I climbed on the chair and put my head through again. There was the man, pacing slowly away from me from the wall toward the highroad. I studied his back closely, and of two things I felt certain; he was not a sailor of any sort—officer or bluejacket, and yet he walked like a drilled man. A tall, square-shouldered fellow in dark, plain clothes, who walks with a short step and a stiff back—what does that suggest? A policeman of some sort—constable or detective, no doubt about that.

I dressed quickly, and this time put on my uniform. This precaution seemed urgently—and ominously—called for. And then I slipped downstairs, went to the front hall, and up the other stairs, and quietly called, "Tiel!" For, I confess, I was not disposed to sit for two or three hours waiting for information.

At my second cry he appeared at his bedroom door, prompt as usual.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Who did you speak to last night?" I asked point-blank.

He looked at me for an instant, and then smiled. "Good heavens, it wasn't you, was it?"

"Me!" I exclaimed.

"I wondered how you knew otherwise."

I told him briefly.

"And now tell me exactly what happened," I demanded.

"Certainly," said he quietly. "I went out as I often do last thing at night to see that the coast is clear, and this time I found it wasn't. A man jumped up from behind the wall just as you saw."

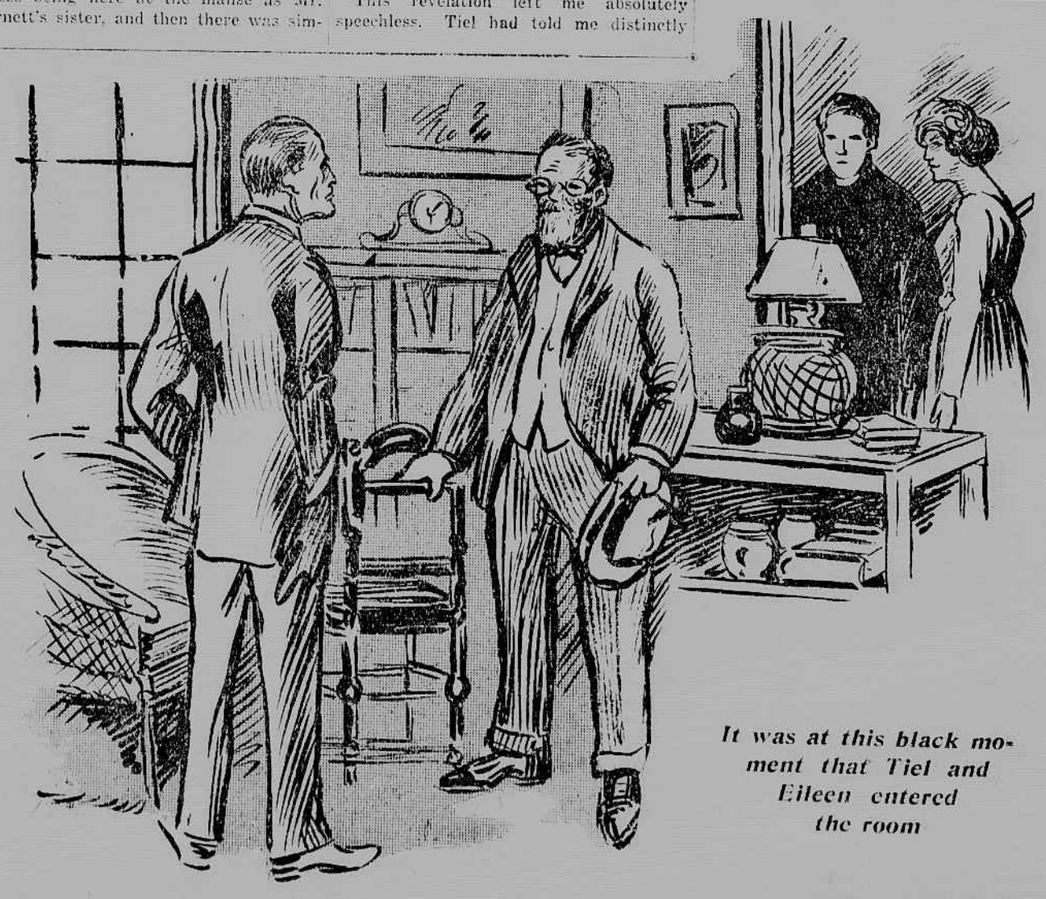
"Who was he?"

"I can only suspect. I saw him for an instant by the light of my torch, and then it seemed less suspicious to put it out. I spoke to him and asked him what he was doing there."

"I see," I said. "You simply tried to bluff him by behaving like an ordinary, simple-minded, honest clergyman?"

Tiel nodded.

"It was the only thing to do—unless I had shot him there and then. And there might have been more men for all I knew."



It was at this black moment that Tiel and Eileen entered the room

Last Instalment in Next Sunday's Review