

THE RED WINDOW

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BY FERGUS HUME.



Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Lord Coniston and Bernard Gore, both holding commissions in the British army, met accidentally in Hyde Park, London, and being old friends, soon got to telling each other their troubles. Coniston has his title, but not the money to live up to it while Gore, who was raised by his grandfather, Sir Simon, has been disinherited on account of his determination to marry Alice Mallowan, an adopted daughter of Sir Simon's, who is Coniston's aunt. Gore has Miss Plantagenet, who is Coniston's aunt, Lucy Randolph, who promises to put a lamp in the red window of the house if Sir Simon relents. Before parting the two men agree to dine together at seven that evening. Sir Simon takes home in London to transact some business with his lawyers. At an interview with Lucy Randolph and Jules Beryl, the man to whom she is engaged, it is agreed that Beryl, who is the nephew of Mrs. Gilroy, the housekeeper, means that a soldier is coming regularly to the house to see one of the maids and has reason to believe that Bernard Gore, who uses this subterfuge to gain information of Sir Simon.

The following day Sir Simon and Jules Beryl go to the attorney's office, Durham & Son, where a will is read leaving Sir Simon's fortune to Beryl. The latter then takes his departure, not caring to see the will signed, when Sir Simon walks to the fire and smashes the parchment to the flames, declaring that Beryl is left to his nephew. Another will had been drawn in which the bulk of his fortune is left Bernard Gore. Instead of dining together as planned, Coniston and Gore repair to the residence of lawyer Durham, with whom they are acquainted, and the events of the previous months are gone over in detail. In going there party breaks up. Gore starts home and in going there approaches him and tells him he is to follow the red window. Gore proceeds in the direction of the house, which is a red window, and as he is about to enter, he hears a noise. Mrs. Gilroy, his grandfather's housekeeper, comes running out, crying murder. Gore enters the house and finds Sir Simon bound and gagged, his hands having been fastened to the mantelpiece and neck and inquires who is responsible for the deed. When Mrs. Gilroy promptly accuses him of it and claims to him to prevent his escape. The housekeeper implores the policeman to arrest Bernard, but when the attempt is made the latter throws the officer to the floor and makes away in the fog, followed by several other policemen who had been summoned by Mrs. Gore. Bernard and his pursuers a long chase and eludes them only by jumping into the river. They wait for some time, but he does not come up.

The next morning Alice Mallowan, the girl to whom Gore is engaged, and her aunt, Miss Plantagenet, read the papers on account of the murder. The girl is prostrated, but her aunt refuses to believe Bernard guilty and at once promises to take up the case in his defense and establish his innocence. With lawyer Durham she attends the hearing, in which all of the evidence except that of the lawyer is against Bernard. The jury later brings in a verdict of guilty.

CHAPTER VII—Continued

"FOOLS," said Miss Berengaria, as she drove back in her brougham with Durham to the office of the lawyer.

"I don't think that," expostulated Durham. "Under the circumstances the jury could hardly bring in a different verdict."

"You know that Bernard is innocent," snapped the lady.

"Certainly! But on no evidence before them."

"A fig for the evidence!" interrupted Miss Berengaria. "I go by my own knowledge of the man. He would kill a fly."

This was so truly a feminine argument that Durham, with a shrug, held his tongue. "There's no more to be said," he remarked.

"I know that," snapped Miss Berengaria in a bad humor. "I am quite upset by all the rubbish those fools have been talking. What's to be done next?"

"I shall go down to Gore Hall and read the will."

"Ha!" said the old lady, brightly. "Can you do that until you are sure of the death of Bernard?"

"Yes. He may be dead after all—"

"He isn't, I tell you."

"Then it is all the better he should be thought to be so," said Durham, giving up the point in the face of this firm opposition.

"Why?" asked Miss Berengaria promptly.

"Because no search will be made for Gore should he be alive and in hiding. Yet I fear Beryl will search."

"I don't see why he should. Oh, I see what you mean. Sir Simon, the horrid old— Well, we'll say nothing about that. But he left the money to Beryl, after disinheriting Bernard for keeping faith with my poor Alice."

"Not exactly that," said Durham, hesitating.

"I can't tell you the contents of the will, Miss Plantagenet, as—"

"I know," she snapped. "You needn't tell me that. I'll come to the Hall and hear it read. But, of course, I know it already."

"In that case there's no more to be said," replied the solicitor, suppressing a smile. Miss Berengaria saw it.

"Ha!" said she, sharply and pondering. "So Bernard's not disinherited after all."

"I never said so."

"You smiled. That's quite enough for me. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse. Not that I'm a horse or blind. Thank God, I have my eyesight and can read print with glasses. Well, keep your professional secrets, but tell me this: Will Beryl—the deuce take him—hunt for Bernard?"

"Not if he thinks he is drowned, as is probable," said Durham, rather surprised at hearing strong language from the lips of the lady.

"And if he thinks otherwise?"

"He will certainly hunt," replied the lawyer determinedly.

"Ha!" said Miss Berengaria, rubbing her nose. "That's it, is it?"

"What do you mean, Miss Plantagenet?"

"That Bernard has not been disinherited. That old scamp—no, we must talk better of him—that the good old man who is dead repented and left the money to his rightful heir. What a joke!" Miss Berengaria chuckled. "There! there!" she went on, catching Durham's eyes. "It's all right. You have told me nothing. I can guess. Well, well, we must wait till the will is read. Then we shall see what is to be done to prove Bernard's innocence."

"That will be a hard task," said Durham, with a sigh; then added, with some little hesitation, "Miss Plantagenet, should Beryl make advances to you in the way of friendship receive them."

"Hum," said the lady. "I detest the fellow."

"But for Bernard's sake—"

"What plan have you in your head?" she asked sharply and peering into his troubled face.

"None. But I think that after the reading of the will—"

Miss Plantagenet chuckled. "After the reading—well!"

"Beryl may make advances to you."

"I will receive them. But if he thinks I will tell him where Bernard is to be found he is mistaken."

"You don't know where he is, or if he is alive," said Durham, astonished to find how quickly she fathomed his thoughts.

"True enough. But I will know before many days are over my head. I quite expect that Bernard will communicate with Alice, and of course she will tell me. As Beryl will find that the money is left to—"

"I did not say that," interrupted Durham, quickly, as the brougham stopped at the office door.

"To Bernard," went on Miss Berengaria, coolly, "he will try and learn if he is dead or alive. If dead he will—no, I can't say what he will do as I don't know if the money, falling Bernard, is left to him. But if he thinks Bernard is alive he will hunt him down so as to get the money."

Durham stepped out of the brougham rather afraid of the old dame. She was so clever that she seemed to read his most secret thoughts. He was glad the drive was at an end, and held out his hand to say good-bye. To his surprise and vexation Miss Berengaria stepped out at his heels.

"I'm coming in to talk," she said, and marched up the steps. I go down to-night to Hurstson, and I want to arrange what is to be done. Not a word, young man. I am Bernard's friend and so you are. If we don't combine it all up with the poor fool," Durham followed the energetic lady with a feeling of helplessness, not knowing very well how to get rid of her. Coniston was coming to see him, and a meeting between them and his aunt might be productive of trouble. Durham regretted that he had accepted the lady's offer to be driven to his office. But it was too late by this time, for Miss Berengaria was in the room. And in the room also sat Lord Coniston, now out of uniform, and looking much excited.

"Ha!" said Miss Plantagenet, not recognizing the young man, "and who is this?" She turned to Durham, who shot past her, making a sign of silence to his friend.

"A client of mine. Will you leave us for a moment, Coniston?"

The name slipped out before he was aware, and he could have stamped with vexation to see how quickly Miss Berengaria grasped the situation. With a grim smile she looked at the astonished young man. "So you are Dick," she said, looking at him through a double eyeglass.

"I haven't seen you since you made yourself sick in my garden. Bernard told Alice by letter that he met you. Where are you staying?"

"I don't understand," stammered Coniston, while Durham, giving up Miss Plantagenet as impossible, sat shuffling his papers.

"You ought not to be dense. Don't you remember me boxing your ears?"

Coniston burst out laughing. "Oh! by Jove! It's Cousin Berengaria."

"Aunt Berengaria," reproved Miss Plantagenet, giving him her hand. "Dick—I shall call you Dick," she interpolated—"you are Bernard's friend, as his letter to Alice was all about you. Are you going to desert him?"

"No," said Coniston, taking her entirely into his confidence. "I have checked the service to see him through his trouble."

"You don't know that he is alive, Coniston," said the lawyer.

"Ah, but I do," replied Dick. "Here's a letter from Bernard. He is safe and sound hiding at Cove Castle."

CHAPTER VIII

BERNARD'S ENEMIES.

THE deceased baronet was buried in the family vault under St. Peter's Church, with all the pomp of wealth.

Durham, as the solicitor and executor of the dead man, was present and directed operations. Coniston had gone to Cove Castle to see Bernard and hear his story; and Durham smiled as his eyes rested on the saug face of the presumed heir. There was no love lost between the two men, and Julius privately determined that, when in possession of the property, he would place the legal business in the hands of another solicitor.

From far and near people were gathered, for the murder had made a great stir. Everyone united in condemning Bernard, and not one person in the throng thought him innocent. Lucy was weeping alone at the Hall, with Mrs. Gilroy offering her such cold comfort as she could think of.

Alice remained at the Bower, talking over the death with Miss Plantagenet. Her joy, when the old lady returned with the good news that Bernard was yet alive, had been painful to witness. She wished to go at once to Cove Castle, but this Miss Berengaria, by Durham's advice, would not permit. Suspicion might be excited, so it was decided that Coniston himself should visit his own castle, as that would seem a natural thing for him to do. The merest suspicion that Bernard was alive and in hiding would set the bloodhounds of the law on the trail, and Beryl would be the first to loosen them. Therefore, Alice waited at home with Miss Berengaria until the funeral was over. Then they intended to go to the Hall to hear the will read.

Sir Simon's body was duly interred, and he left all his wealth behind him to take up his abode in the dark vault. After the service several people lingered in the graveyard, but the majority, thinking the spectacle was at an end, made haste to go. Julius with Durham returned in the carriage, and the rest of the relatives followed, flocking like vultures to the feast.

When Julius reached the drawing room, in which those invited to hear the will read were assembled, he adopted a conciliatory manner. Several relatives were present, and Mrs. Gilroy headed the servants at the end of the room.

Miss Berengaria sat beside Alice in a recess somewhat screened by the window curtain. But Lucy was nowhere to be seen. However, when Durham took his seat at a small table and opened his bag, she entered in deep mourning. Julius went to meet her.

"Dear Lucy," he said, "we have buried our best friend."

Lucy made no reply, and, drawing her hand away, walked to where Alice was seated. She kissed the girl, whom Bernard had loved, in silence; and in silence she kissed her. Even Miss Berengaria, visible as she was on all occasions, held her peace. She saw that Lucy was sincerely sorry for the loss of her cousin, and that from that moment she entertained a better opinion of her. Alice drew Lucy into a seat beside her, and the two girls sat side by side, while Julius, already assuming the airs of a master, bade the company welcome.

"I am glad to see you all," he said in an important voice, "and I am sure that our deceased relative in his will has done all that his kind heart inspired him to do. Mr. Durham will now read the will."

Durham took no notice of Beryl's little speech,

but opened the will and began to read. Julius listened with a complacent smile, which changed as the reading went on.

Legacies were left to nearly all the servants who had been with the testator a long time. Lucy became entitled to three hundred a year, and Mrs. Gilroy received one hundred. The sum allotted to her did not satisfy her, as she frowned when it was mentioned. Beryl's name was not mentioned, but he did not mind as he was waiting for the disposal of the residue of the estate. But when Durham read out that the estate had been left entirely to Bernard Gore, with the exceptions of the above-named legacies, he started to his feet.

"That is not the will!" he exclaimed loudly, and with a ghastly white face. "I am the heir."

"By a former will," interposed Durham, "or, rather, I should say, by a will which Sir Simon afterwards destroyed."

"He disinherited Bernard!" cried Julius savagely.

"No! the will—this will—which gives Mr. Gore the money was never canceled."

"A new will was prepared leaving all to me. You read it to me yourself in your office and in the presence of Sir Simon."

"Quite so," rejoined the lawyer, smoothly folding up the parchment; "but after you left, Sir Simon, refusing to execute that will, put it into the fire."

"It is a lie!"

"It is the truth," said Durham, his color rising. "I can bring forward my clerks who were to witness the new will, and they will state that it was never executed. Sir Simon changed his mind. The estate goes to Sir Bernard Gore, the new baronet, and as the executor of the will, I will take charge of all moneys and of the property until he comes forward to claim them."

"But you know he is dead," said Julius, clenching his hand.

"I know nothing of the sort. He is supposed to be dead, but we must have proof of the death. A production of his body will be sufficient, Mr. Beryl," added Durham, cynically. "I think on your own account you had better offer that reward I spoke of."

"My dear," whispered Miss Berengaria, with a grim smile, "that young man means mischief."

"There's No Need for You to Mention that I Have Visitors at the Castle."

Said Coniston.

I am taking Mr. Durham's advice and making friends with him, that I may thwart his plans."

This was whispered so softly that Lucy did not overhear. Nor, had it been spoken aloud, would she have attended. Durham had come forward and was speaking earnestly to her.

"I trust you will stop at the Hall for the present," he said, "until Bernard comes home."

"Will Bernard ever come home?" asked Lucy, sighing.

"Let us hope so. I doubt if he is dead, and I will not believe he is until his body is laid before me. As to the crime, I do not believe he committed it. However, I want you to stay here as the chateleine of the Hall. All things will go on as before."

"Am I to stay, sir?" asked Mrs. Gilroy, coming forward.

"Yes! nor will the servants be changed. Of course, any of them who wish to leave can do so. But you—"

"I will stop on in my old position, if Miss Randolph wishes."

Lucy nodded. "Yes! let all things remain as they were," she said.

Mrs. Gilroy made a stiff curtsy and returned to the other servants, who then filed in an orderly manner out of the room. The relatives also took their leave, amongst them Julius, now smiling. At the door Lucy said something to him about Bernard. He smiled dully.

"We have yet to prove that Bernard is alive," he said.

"Danger!" thought Miss Berengaria. "I'll watch you, young man."

"CHAPTER IX

AT COVE CASTLE.

FIVE miles from Hurstson the marshes began and did not end until they touched the coast.

The road from Hurstson changed where the marshes began to a causeway and ran solid and high across the treacherous bog towards the coast. Here it took a sudden turn, and passed through several fishing villages on its way to Market-on-Sea. And thence between hedges it passed onward to London, a road once more. Some distance from the curve

"Perfectly true," said Durham, coldly. "But Sir Simon changed his mind and burnt the new will. It was never executed, as I say."

"Sir Simon had every right to do what he liked with his own," said the diplomat Beryl, while Miss Berengaria, wondering what was in his mind, watched him with her keen eyes.

"But as I say, I am hurt. I quite understood that Sir Simon had disinherited my cousin, but I was prepared to allow him an income had I received the property."

"Two hundred a year," said the lawyer. "A munificent offer."

"It was approved by Sir Simon," said Julius, calmly. "However, it appears that Sir Simon rescinded the new will—"

"It was never executed."

"Then we will say he never executed it. The money goes to Bernard Gore. So far as I believe he is dead, but I hope Mr. Durham, as the executor of the estate, will offer a reward to prove if he is dead or alive."

"With regard to the commission of the crime, the jury at the inquest found Bernard guilty without one dissenting voice. However, I am willing to give my cousin the benefit of the doubt, and should he reappear (and I hope he may) I shall do my best to aid him to prove his innocence. I hope any words that may have escaped me in the heat caused by a disappointment will be overlooked."

Whether any of those present believed this statement it is impossible to say. Everyone looked down and no response was made, save by Miss Plantagenet. She rose, and walking across the room, offered her hand to the disappointed heir. "You are a good young man," she said heartily. "And I hope you will come and see me."

Julius, rather taken aback by this invitation from one whom he had cause to think loved him but little, grasped her hand and thanked her with great fervency. Her speech was a relief to him, and he sat down with a calmer face, when the old lady returned to her seat.

"Why did you do that, aunt?" asked Alice, dismayed.

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of an arm of the causeway ran for a quarter of a mile to Cove Castle, which was built on a firm and elevated spot of ground, near a kind of estuary which communicated with the sea. The sea itself was only distant half a mile, and a fine view of the building should be called by no high-sounding name, it is hard to say. It was simply a large stone house of two stories, with a kind of tower at one end. Formerly, in the reign of Elizabeth, it had been a fort, and afterwards, falling into decay, it had been used by smugglers for the storing of contraband goods.

When Coniston arrived at the castle he was met at the door by a gigantic female of uncommon ugliness, who answered to the name of Selina Moon. She was large enough to have earned an income by exhibiting herself in a circus, being considerably over six feet, and sufficiently ugly to shame even the witches in Macbeth.

This Amazonian female, from her height of six feet five, looked down on Coniston with a submissive air. She was as timid as a rabbit, the most harmless of her sex, and report went, that the late Mr. Moon, who had been almost a dwarf, had frequently beaten her in spite of her superior inches. However, the old man was dead, and for many a long day Mrs. Moon had lorded it over the one servant in the castle. He was still more submissive, and when her master imperiously demanded a sight of the gentleman who was expecting him, led the way at once to an upper room.

"But I wouldn't take anyone," said Mrs. Moon in a thin, high voice like the midnight wind in a chimney. "He being wishful to keep himself quiet. What have he done, my lord?"

"Nothing," said Coniston, promptly. "He only came down here for a rest. Do you think he has robbed the bank?"

"There's worse things than robbing banks," remarked Mrs. Moon, shaking her frilled cap portentously, "and the worse things is what he's done. And why shouldn't he tell me his name if he was a babe for innocence?"

"Didn't he do so when he arrived?" asked Coniston, halting on the landing with an anxious look.

"No, my lord, bless your heart! he didn't," said the giantess; "and but that he had your letter, which was as plain as print—"

"And was print," interposed Dick, remembering his calligraphy adapted to the brains of Mrs. Moon.

"I shouldn't have let him in. But your lordship said he was to have the best room, and the best room he has, to say nothing of your lordship's clothes, he having arrived in tatters like a tramp, which he isn't from the princely looks of him. No one knows as he is here, he having asked me to say nothing. But Victoria—"

"What about her?" asked Coniston, rather sharply, for Victoria was a small servant, preternaturally sharp and mighty curious.

"She's always asking questions as to what he's doing here."

"Then, don't answer her questions," and but that she's so strong I'd smack her hard. But only Jerry could manage her, and, bless me! your dear lordship, he's earning his bread in London, though I haven't heard of him for months."

"He's not in the place I obtained for him," said Coniston, stopping at the door of the room indicated by the housekeeper. "He's robbed the till and bolted."

Mrs. Moon was not at all disturbed. "Just like his poor father, my second son," she said, shaking the frilled cap again. "He was a wonderful boy for money and never minded how he got it. Have they jailed Jerry?" she asked, with great simplicity.

"I don't know, Mrs. Moon. But if he comes here, don't you let him into the castle and don't let him know that Mr.—Mr. Grant—Dick gave Bernard a new name for the sake of concealment—'is here.'"

"Grant!" echoed Mrs. Moon. "But he don't look Scotch."

"Never you mind what he is. You hold your tongue and make Victoria hold hers."

"Only Jerry can manage her," said Mrs. Moon, firmly, "me not being strong enough for such a tearing cat. If your lordship would speak yourself—"

"I'll see to it," interrupted Coniston, quickly. "I'm stopping here for the night, Mrs. Moon. Can you give me and Mr.—er—Grant a good dinner?"

"I'll cook it myself, Victoria being fond of burning things and her pastery being lead for heaviness. The wine your lordship knows—"

Coniston waited to hear no more of this domestic Newgate's Calendar, but abruptly opened the door and entered the room.

It was a large, airy apartment, with two windows looking on to the shining expanse of the sea, and well furnished in an old-fashioned way.

"Where are you, Bernard?" asked Coniston, seeing the room was empty.

For answer came out, holding the heavy steel poker. "It's only you," he said, looking very pale. "I heard voices and concealed myself behind the curtain. I expected you, but didn't know but what someone else might come. That servant suspects me."

"Not Mrs. Moon," said Coniston, pitying the haggard looks of his friend.

"No, Victoria. She is as sharp as a needle and—"

"Don't distress yourself, old boy," said Dick, taking Gore's hand and leading him to the sofa upon which he had been apparently lying until awoken by the sound of voices. "Mrs. Moon can be depended upon and I'll speak to Victoria myself. You are safe here."

"Are you sure, Dick?"

"Perfectly sure. And even if you were discovered I could manage to conceal you in the vaults below the castle."

"Are there vaults?" asked the fugitive, who was shivering and pale.

"Yes! the old smugglers used them to store goods and as hiding-places. There is a passage door communicating with the arm of the sea which runs near the castle, and you could easily escape to foreign parts by means of a boat. Cheer up, old boy," added Dick, clapping his friend on the back, "you're not dead yet."

The poor, hunted young fellow threw his arm school-boy fashion over Coniston's shoulder.