

THE BLACK MOTOR-CAR

By HARRIS BURLAND

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Jack Porteous was the manager of the South Kensington branch of a London banking house, to which position he had worked himself by sheer application and devotion to his work. He was a married man and the father of a baby boy, of whom he was very fond, but his relations with his wife had been for some time unconvivial, and for this reason he allowed himself to succumb to the wiles of Mrs. Marie de la Mothe, a beautiful woman with a great influence over men generally. There was never much said by that woman about Mr. de la Mothe. Some said he was dead and others said he never existed. However, the lady never displayed any great grief for him if dead or in peril if alive. Mrs. de la Mothe is living in a rather pretentious house with Mrs. Nixon, a companion, and Porteous has become a regular visitor to the place. He has so far been influenced by the woman that he appropriated a large sum of the bank's money to his own use, and is planning flight to South America. The two are to fly on separate vessels and join each other later in a South American port. The day before the flight Porteous returns home late in the night to find his wife dead, and he is so overcome by remorse that he decided to retrace the woman on whom he has been showering money and attention. Pursuing this course he introduced her to a man named Harry, who has saved my life. We shall probably see much of him during the next few weeks. Mr. Arthur Holme—Lady Agnes Cliffe.

full of metal castings of small cogs, bars of steel, bolts, screws and bits of the framework of some engine.

The three horses, black with mud and trembling from head to foot, watched the operations with apparent unconcern, and grazed unfeelingly by the edge of the road.

Lord Harry Qui strolled down and looked at the address on the labels.

They were all consigned to the same person: Mr. William Jordison, The Red House, Gorehaven, Essex.

"Hum!" said Lord Harry to himself, "that's curious."

At last a number of people came crashing through the copse and scrambled over the edge of the wall.

Lady Agnes rushed up to Lord Harry and overwhelmed him with a torrent of questions: How did he feel? Was he cold? Was he feverish? Did his head ache? Was he wet? and so on.

"Agnes," said Lord Harry, when she had exhausted her torrent of questions; "let me introduce you to this gentleman, who has saved my life. We shall probably see much of him during the next few weeks. Mr. Arthur Holme—Lady Agnes Cliffe."

CHAPTER VII THE RED HOUSE.

OF all the lonely habitations in the eastern part of Essex, the Red House was the loneliest and least attractive. To east and west and south and north the land lay flat and uninhabited, save for an isolated cottage, the home of some watchman or ferryman.

Not a tree broke the monotony of the landscape. On the eastern horizon lay the sea. On the west, six miles away, the rising ground showed up dim and indistinct, like a miniature range of mountains.

A straight road commenced at the mound and ran west between two creeks. This road, constructed at enormous expense by the man who built the house, ran inland for six miles, and then cut at right angles into the same road that ran past Heatherstone Hall—a wide causeway that had been built in the time of the Romans, and had been maintained ever since as a communication between the north and south of Essex.

For six months he lived in London, and then, on one of his frequent tours through Essex, he saw the Red House, and the loneliness of it appealed to him.

He purchased it for a mere song, and decided to make it his headquarters.

CHAPTER VIII "RICHARD BEHAG IS DEAD."

WILLIAM JORDISON sat in a small room on the first floor of the Red House. It overlooked the eastern marshes, and from his chair he could see the sunlight sparkling on the ocean.

The chair was drawn up to a large deal table set close to the window. The table was covered with plans, pencils, rulers and compasses. He was measuring out fractions of a line with a diagonal scale.

William Jordison was playing with what had once been part of his daily work—the perfecting of a new invention which would reduce the cost of running a car to almost nothing, which would simplify the machinery, and which would generate a horse-power hitherto undreamed of in the trade.

Finally he threw the pencil down, tore up the drawing in front of him and rose to his feet. His playtime was over.

In a few minutes' time there was a slow, heavy footstep on the stairs outside. Then the door opened and a man entered. He was short and thick-set, with a low forehead, bestial mouth, and a sullen, clean-shaven face.

Jordison could not stand the sight of a woman in the house. He had three men-servants, and a more unobtrusive trio could scarcely have been chosen for the purpose.

They had been selected from the worst types of humanity, and were, in point of fact, three convicts who had escaped from Portland jail the year before. They served Jordison's purpose, however.

"Well, Lipp," he said, as the man entered.

"Jermey's just brought the second post from Gorehaven," the man replied sullenly, holding out a letter in his dirty muscular fingers.

Jordison took the letter, and glanced at the handwriting. A flush came to his haggard face.

"Well, Lipp," said the master of the house,

much as possible. We enclose our account to date. A check will oblige.

"Your obedient servants," "BRIGGS & WARLOCK."

"One thousand pounds," he murmured, and then he laughed and, sitting down at the table, filled in a telegram form.

"BRIGGS & WARLOCK, 21 Ship Street, Strand: Proceed with search. Spare no necessary expense."

"JORDISON."

"If it costs me all I have," he said to himself, "I will see it through. There's lots more money to be had in the world."

"Five minutes' time Lipp entered.

"Have the horses put in the dogcart at once," Lipp said. Jordison, "and get Jermey to drive you into Gorehaven. This telegram must go at once. Look sharp." He gave the man the telegram, and the latter left, mumbling something to himself. When he had gone, Jordison paced up and down the room. His face was flushed and his eyes sparkled with unwonted brilliancy.

"If I could only find him," he murmured. "If I could only find him, it might yet save me from this other search, and the duty that lies at the end of it." Jordison knew well that love for his son was the only redeeming trait in his character, and that this alone could drag him from the path he wished to tread.

The room seemed stifling, and he longed for the fresh air. He went down-stairs, and, crossing the garden, which looked like part of the London County Council improvements, made his way to the far end of the knoll.

Half a mile up the creek the sails of a yacht swelled in the faint west breeze, and seemed like the wings of some great white bird gliding over the golden waters.

As it came nearer, Jordison began to regard it with interest.

Nearer the boat came and still nearer, till Jordison could see the faces of the two men on the deck.

One was at the tiller and the other was losing the jib hiliard from its mast. As they came opposite the house the bulging balloon jib came fluttering down in a crumpled heap of canvas, and a second later came the rattling of the anchor-chain as it ran swiftly over the bows.

The boat swung round with the tide till her nose faced the west.

In less than ten minutes the men on board had

chap, but I don't think he'll get in. Well, I will go and look after the dinner, and will turn in till you come on board. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Holme," Jordison replied with sadness in his voice. This rough-bearded young fellow had brought with him the breath of the salt sea. To Jordison it brought back the days of his own youth, and the young man's voice touched some hidden chord in his hard, callous heart.

Then a sudden idea seized him, and hurrying after Holme's retreating figure, he came up to him as he was untying the dinghy's painter.

"Mr. Holme," he said quietly, "excuse me asking you a question, but you might be able to give me some information."

"Certainly," Holme replied, with a smile. "If I am able to do so."

"You have been a sailor and mixed with seafaring folk. Have you ever come across a young fellow of the name of Richard Behag?"

Arthur Holme did not answer. His back was to the west, where a faint glow of crimson still lingered. His face was in shadow, but to Jordison it seemed as if the young man remembered the name and was trying to recall the owner of it.

"Do you happen to recollect the name, Mr. Holme?" Jordison continued.

"Yes," the young man replied, "I certainly recollect the name. But for the moment—ah! I have it. Of course. I remember now."

"If you know anything of him," said Jordison, "I should be much obliged by the information. I mean him no harm."

"It would not be much good if you did," Holme answered, "for Richard Behag is dead."

"Dead," repeated Jordison in a low voice. "Are you sure? Have you proof?" And he caught the young man by the arm and peered anxiously into his shadowed face.

"I am sure," Holme replied. "He died in Valparaiso. I remember the story now. It made something of a stir. He was drowned."

"Drowned?" cried Jordison. "Are you sure?"

Holme shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes," he replied, "drowned while yachting off Valparaiso. I should not inquire too closely if you are a friend of Behag's. The whole story is not very creditable to him. You will excuse me now, Mr. Jordison. I am hungry. I will see you later," and stepping into the dinghy, he put the rowlocks in place and loosed the painter.

Jordison had taken a keen look at the man's eyes, and they had fallen guiltily from his glance. He turned back and walked slowly to the house.

"Dickie dead," he kept on repeating to himself. "Well, Briggs & Warlock will soon find out for me in Valparaiso, and if it is true I shall not lose sight of you, my young man. You know more of my boy's death than you have told me. I will find out the truth if it costs me every penny I have in the world." He turned and shook his fist at the yacht in the stream.

Then he went in and stumbled up to the small room that looked to the east, groping his way as though he could not see.

When he reached the table by the window he sank down in the chair, and buried his face in his hands. For ten minutes he did not move. His mind went back through all the years of agony and despair to the morning when he had last seen his son.

He could almost hear his own feeble imitations of the birds and animals of a farmyard.

"What do the fowls say, papa? I've forgot."

"Cluck, cluck, cluck, and cock-a-doodle-doo."

The wretched man rose to his feet and clenched his hands.

"If Dickie is dead," he murmured to himself, "there is only one thing left to me in life."

He sat down at the table and draughted a long telegram to Briggs & Warlock to be dispatched first thing in the morning. The burden of it all was that no expense was to be spared to find proof of Richard Behag's death.

At midnight, Jordison and his three servants went down to the creek. It was a dark night, but there was sufficient light to see that the yacht had moved from her anchorage.

The two cases lay half a dozen yards from the bank. It was clear that for some reason or other Arthur Holme had taken advantage of the falling tide to haul up his anchor and drift down the channel.

William Jordison toiled furiously, and did as much work as the other three men combined. He had an idea that severe physical exertion would distract his thoughts. But he found it impossible to get rid of the subject that was uppermost in his mind.

And all the time he was going to and fro through the mud, black to his knees, sweating with the burden of some great piece of iron, he was wondering why Arthur Holme had left so suddenly. By the time the work was over he decided that the young man had shirked another meeting and further questions.

to think too much about a young man of unknown parentage and rather unimpressive manners.

CHAPTER IX A BURIED PLACE.

WHEN Jordison had dispatched the telegram to Messrs. Briggs & Warlock, he tried to thrust the matter from his mind, and threw himself heart and soul into the construction of his new motor-car.

And success came to Jordison at last, as it comes to most men with an earnest purpose. The whole of one day and the whole of one night he sat at his deal table and made calculations and measured lines and drew plans to scale.

And when the gray light of morning came through the window it showed a white face still poring over a growing heap of papers, a white haggard face with a gleam of triumph in the restless eyes. And on the paper the motor-car had become an accomplished fact.

In less than three months from the date when the first castings had been thrown into the creek, the car was completed, and Jordison sold his fifty-horse power Jacquart for nine hundred pounds.

On October 25 Jordison took the first run on his new motor. It was blowing half a gale, pouring with rain, and the roads were deep in mud and water. It was a severe test for the new car, but she came through it splendidly and ploughed through the storm like a ship through a heavy sea, throwing up a shower of mud, like spray, on each side of her. Jordison revelled in the ride.

For three hours he sat with his hand on the steering wheel, and in that time they had traversed Essex from north to south and east to west. Lipp sat shivering and cursing by his side.

Lipp's face did not brighten until they came within sight of the Red House. The ugly building on the little hill had never appeared in so attractive a light to him before. No mariner returning from a stormy voyage could have welcomed the first glimpse of home with greater joy and thankfulness.

Then, as they rushed along the straight road, the hill in front of them was suddenly hidden in a flash of blinding light. A few seconds later a loud report burst on their ears, and the ground trembled beneath them.

Instinctively Jordison put on the brake, just as a man shuts his eyes to protect them from danger, not stopping to reason whether he will come to harm or not.

The great car slowed down, and, peering through the driving rain, the two occupants saw a heavy cloud of smoke pouring across the marshes, and long tongues of fire leaping up from the hill.

"The dynamite," said Jordison, hastily. A large supply of this dangerous material had been stored near the engine-house. Jordison had proposed to blast out a cave in the solid rock close to the road, where he could keep his motor and a large store of petrol.

"I've had enough of your cursed motor," growled Lipp. "Only wish it had been in the shed, and I'd have seen it in smithereens."

Jordison smiled sweetly. Then he released the brake, pulled the lever toward him, and the car glided forward.

In less than five minutes the car came to a standstill at the gate. The wind was from the southwest, and the smoke was carried away from them, but it hid the Red House from view.

Jordison did not much care whether any one was killed or not, but he was very thankful that the car was finished, and that it had not been blown to pieces into the thick and awful smoke and investigate matters. He sounded the horn on the car a dozen times and waited for information.

In two minutes' time Jermey appeared, round the bottom of the hill. He was black with soot from head to foot. His right cheek was bleeding, and he limped.

"Well, Jermey," said Jordison, "is there much damage done?"

"Curse you, and your—motors," the man growled, echoing Lipp's sentiments almost to the very words in which they had been expressed. "A brick's caught my leg, and a bit of somethin' 'as grazed my cheek, and—"

"I am not anxious about you, Jermey," Jordison broke in abruptly; "what about the house?"

"It stands," Jermey replied. "I've not been in it, and shan't till the smoke's gone. The engine-house is now an' ole in the ground, as far as I can see."

"Where's Susanson?"

"'Iding in a ditch, and calling down the wrath of seven on yer 'ead."

"Who's been fooling with the dynamite?" he said, abruptly.

"Better ask Susanson," the man replied. "He's been poking about in the shed all the morning."

Toward dark the blazing spirit burnt itself out. The flames dwindled down to flickering sheets of blue, sweeping along the ground and spouting up from the crevices where the petrol still lay hid. The dense volume of smoke died away into a thick stream of vapor that the wind scattered as soon as it formed.

Susanson emerged from his hiding-place and came crawling up with request for food and water.

He was questioned as to the explosion, but nothing could be got out of him. Both Lipp and Jermey kicked him, and Jordison did not interfere. Then all four men made their way to the Red House.

In the fading light they could see the ravages wrought by the explosion. The engine-house was, as Jermey had said, a mere hole in the ground, a pit of smoking debris. From it, as from the centre of a star, ran great cracks and fissures in the rock, some nearly two feet in width.

The Red House itself still stood, but there was not a pane of glass in the windows, and not a chimney left standing on its roof. The walls were seamed with narrow cracks, and the whole building leaned two or three degrees out of the perpendicular and the cellar had a gaping hole in the floor.

Jordison made a careful inspection of the walls, and came to the conclusion that there was no immediate danger to the main structure of the house, but there was a hole through the crust of the earth and underneath a huge pit.

But the next morning Jordison told Lipp to get a rope and a couple of lanterns. He was determined to investigate what lay beneath the cellar and find out for himself whether it would be safe to remain any longer in the Red House.

Lipp made the rope fast to one of the bars of the pantry window at the head of the stairs, and taking the heavy coils on his arm, moved cautiously down to the cellar, and flung them into the black gulf that yawned beneath them. They could hear the rope strike the bottom, and knew that it was long enough for their purpose. Then Jordison placed a rug beneath the rope and the jagged edge of the broken flagstones, and, hanging the lantern round his neck, lowered himself hand-over-hand into the pit.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

ANOTHER man had heard the clatter and cries along the road. He climbed out of the hatchway of one of the oyster-smacks and stood upon the deck. A tall, broad-shouldered man, with a bill, broad weather-beaten face, and a golden beard and mustache.

He came to the edge of the smack and glanced keenly at the runaway horses and then at the two figures behind the park wall. When the drag got within fifty yards of the onlookers, Lord Harry sprang lightly over the wall and crossed the road. He was an athlete, and, moreover, absolutely devoid of fear.

Lady Agnes cried out to him to come back, and the man on the smack yelled something out to him that he did not hear.

The horses came at him like an avalanche. He sprang at the reins of the leader and was swung off his feet.

If the horses had kept straight on he must inevitably have been trampled under their hoofs, but as luck would have it they caught sight of the girl's white dress and swerved sharply toward the creek, as though they had been struck broadside by a tornado.

Lord Harry was swung round like a stone in a sling, jerked off his hold and shot out half a dozen yards into the water. The driver went flying after him.

The contents of the van scattered and broke in every direction. The horses plunged a few yards through the mud, slipped, struggled to their feet, slipped again, rolled over and kicked furiously, churning the mud into a filthy black slime. The driver was pitched on to the leader's back, whence he ricocheted into a soft bed of mud two feet in depth.

He fell over and almost disappeared, but he rose unhurt, a filthy spectacle, spitting mud from his mouth and dripping with it from head to foot.

Lord Harry Qui was not so fortunate. The man on the smack kicked off the big boots and looked keenly at the foam-flecked water where he had disappeared. It was several seconds before he appeared on the surface, and then he was some yards farther down the stream. He sank almost as suddenly as he had risen.

The man on the smack looked no longer, but dove into the swift tide and swam rapidly to the spot where the body had vanished.

Once more the head appeared and vanished, this time but a few feet from the rescuer. The latter dashed through the water, and, diving down, caught the arm of the drowning man and brought him to the surface. The body was limp and still, and it was easy work to swim with it to the shore.

He did not touch bottom until he got into three feet of water, for to swim was mere child's play compared to walking through the mud. And then he lifted Lord Harry Qui onto his shoulder and carried him to the grass by the side of the road. Lady Agnes came to him with a white face.

"Is he— is he—" she faltered.

"He's all right," replied the man roughly; "run up to the house, that's a good girl, and get help; blankets, hot water, something to carry him up on. I will rub him down, and I'll bet he's smiling when you come back, but run like the devil, in case we don't happen to get him round." The girl turned without another word, and, clambering over the wall, disappeared from sight.

"Hi, you there," yelled the man to the driver, who had cut the traces and got his three horses out of their feet, "just leave your horse, and lend a hand here. I will walk out of the mud by myself now, I guess."

The sailor gave him a few rapid instructions, and then, hurrying to one of the dinghies, pushed it off and sculled over to the smack. In less than two minutes he was on his way back, clothed in a dry jersey and trousers and with a bottle of brandy and a rough blanket in the bottom of the boat.

Then both men set to work with a will, and in less than ten minutes Lord Harry sighed and opened his eyes.

A quarter of an hour before the arrival of the relief party from the hall he was clothed in a borrowed serge suit and smoking a cigarette, and was chatting cheerfully to the man who had pulled him out of the water.

The sailor went over to the dray and gave a hand to the driver, who was trying to save some of his cases from the encroaching tide. The two men toiled hard at their task and succeeded in depositing most of the boxes on the road.

Two of them, however, defied their united efforts, and they lay half-buried in the black mud, with the tide eddying round them. One of the cases was broken, and it appeared to be



"HE'S ALL RIGHT," REPLIED THE MAN ROUGHLY

placing the letter in his pocket, "any news from Gorehaven?"

"This election's driving 'em all crazy. They collared Jermey and asked him to vote straight and true, and filled 'im up with drink."

"'Drink!' Jordison said sharply; "Jermey drunk? I'll have no drunken backguards about this house."

"'Drunk, lor' bless yer. There ain't a drink made that could fuddle old Jermey in an afternoon; is 'ead's as clear as a bloomin' bell. Swelp me—"

"That'll do," Jordison said sternly. "Have those castings come yet from Sheffield?"

"Those that ain't in the mud," the man replied with a grin, and he told the story of the accident in a few words, liberally sprinkled with high-colored epithets. Jordison appeared to take no interest in the narrative. However, he made a note on a piece of paper.

"See that I get the rest of the castings to-morrow, Lipp," he said quickly. "You may go." The man went, but when he reached the door his master called him back.

"Have they begun excavating for the bed of the engine-house, Lipp?"

"Not as I know of. The 'ole place is in such a bloomin' mess that they might be going to dig a colmine."

"Well, tell Bysonth's foreman that I want it done at once, and that everything else must be postponed until it is finished. He has the plans. The engine will be here next week."

"Or right, guvner. I'll make 'em jump," the man slouched toward the door, which closed behind him with a crash, and the sound of his clumsy feet died away on the uncarpeted staircase.

Jordison smiled grimly. "A nasty customer," he said to himself. "I expect he had all the benefit of the doubt when the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter. But he'll do for the present." He walked over to the window and sat on the table. Then he pulled the letter out of his pocket, opened it, and perused it carefully. It ran as follows:

"Dear Sir: We have at last obtained some clue to the movements of Mr. Richard Behag. It is certain that he embarked as a common seaman on the brig Valetta, bound for Valparaiso, and that he left the ship at that port. Further search will be expensive, as it will entail a journey to South America. Are you prepared to go on? It will probably cost you at least one thousand pounds, but we will cut down all expenses as

stowed sail and made everything snug for the night. Jordison frowned and, rising to his feet, walked slowly down the slope toward the creek. He was not pleased at the idea of the yacht anchoring under his windows.

Before he reached the edge of the water, one of the men had put off in the dinghy and was making it fast to an old post on the bank. Jordison stopped and leaned against the black tarred pilings of his garden. He had no desire to converse with strangers. The man, however, crossed the road and came straight up to him.

"Are you Mr. Jordison of the Red House?" he asked abruptly.

"I am Mr. Jordison," was the curt reply.

"Well, I have got a couple of your cases here. Pitched into the mud the day before yesterday. Suppose you have heard all about it. You seem no interest in the narrative. No one's been near 'em till we decided to take 'em on board this morning. They were nearly out of sight in the mud, but we made fast to them, and waited till high tide. Then we pulled them aboard with our anchor-winch. You can have them when you like, but you must send some one on board to help get them off. I am Arthur Holme."

"I am much indebted to you, Mr. Holme," Jordison replied. "Will you come into the house? We are a little unsettled as yet, but still—"

"No thanks," Holme replied. "I have got to cook our dinner yet. My man's a duffer at the household work, but you should see him at the tiller in dirty weather. There's not a man on this coast to touch him, I can tell you. Have you got any men about that can lend a hand with the cases when the tide runs out? I reckon we shall be high and dry then."

"You will be stranded shortly after midnight, Mr. Holme. There is only a foot of water in the creek at low tide, and I suppose you draw five. I have three men here and I will send them across. It is a full moon tonight. Between the lot of us we ought to get the cases ashore. How's the electioneering going, Mr. Holme?"

"We are quite satisfied," Holme replied. "By the by, I suppose you haven't a vote—too late to get on the register, eh?"

"I have no vote," Jordison said, with a faint smile, "but if I had, I'd give it to your party. I have a few tenants in East Wick, and I'll send them across. It is a full moon tonight. Between the lot of us we ought to get the cases ashore. How's the electioneering going, Mr. Holme?"

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CHAPTER IX NEW FRIENDSHIPS.

DURING the next three months many things of importance occurred.

Lord Harry Qui was elected member for the eastern division of Essex by a narrow margin of three votes.

William Jordison smiled when he saw the result, for the seven votes he had promised to Arthur Holme were given to Lord Harry Qui.

Lord Harry, on the strength of his parliamentary success, asked Lady Agnes Cliffe to be his wife. She refused his offer, tearfully and pathetically, as though afraid of the consequences.

He had been her friend from childhood, and she dreaded the rupture of the friendship. But Lord Harry Qui took the blow like a man. He laughed away her tears, kissed her hand, and left her with the assurance that what had happened would not in any way alter the good-fellowship that had hitherto existed between them.

Lord Harry, for his part, had no intention of cutting himself adrift from her society. He had not yet given up all hope, though he knew in his heart that they could never be such good and close friends as they had been in the past, unless they became something more than friends in the future.

In the second place, Lord Harry Qui and Arthur Holme had conceived a strong affection for each other.

And so it came to pass that Arthur Holme was frequently at Heatherstone Hall, and before very long one member of the family began to look forward to his visits with more eagerness than prudence.

Lady Agnes Cliffe had no excuse whatever for the interest she began to take in this somewhat rough and surly young man, whom Lord Harry had brought to the house.

He admired her beauty, and saw much to love in her disposition, but, regarding her in the light of a possible wife for his friend, he went out of his way to dismiss her from his thoughts, and to avoid any unnecessary conversation with her.

Lady Agnes, on her part, would have laughed if any one had told her that she was beginning

To Be Continued Next Sunday