

# KARL GRIER THE STRANGE STORY OF A MAN WITH A SIXTH SENSE

## XVIII. The Problem Takes Shape

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THERE are certain mortals, I suppose, who take delight in "At Homes," receptions, musicals and the rest of the social devices which enable fashionable folk to meet of evenings and learn the latest scandal. Personally, I would pass an hour far more agreeably in a fever hospital, provided the resident doctor was a good fellow and not too busy to smoke a pipe with me.

Hence, because of the unusual transactions of that memorable night, the proceedings at Sandilands' house stand out in my mind in cameo-like precision as contrasted with other similar gatherings I have attended. Nor was this result achieved by meeting notable personages.

I met a man with a grievance. He insisted on telling me why the Government had denied him the poet-laureateship. That was a safe topic. Politeness demanded an occasional "Dear me!" or "You don't say so?" from me; he did the rest.

From the safe anchorage of his eloquence I was able at leisure to watch and to a certain extent to sum up Nora Cazenove. Her genealogy, briefly sketched by the older Grier, partly accounted for certain deficiencies in her. It was reasonable to assume that her mother was a beautiful woman, of extraordinary acuteness within a somewhat narrow sphere. Like the girl in the ballad, her face was her fortune, and she deemed herself well paid, I doubt not, when she bartered her good looks and faultless form for a title and a big annual rent-roll.

I amused myself by studying her, and came to the conclusion that had Karl scoured the earth he could not have found a more exact antithesis to Maggie Hutchinson than her successful rival, the Hon. Nora Cazenove. They had the common attributes of good looks, good style and what passes current for good education among young women of twenty-three or thereabouts. In all else they differed. If I were seeking worthy tabernacles for merely intellectual concepts of what we mean when we speak of Soul and Body, I should choose those two girls as supplying the requisite shrines.

I was so wrapped up in my thoughts that I made a rather bad break with the would-be laureate.

"What would you have said," he fiercely demanded, "if the Prime Minister told you that your latest volume of poems was a collection of turgid nonsense?"

"I would have said that he was quite right," I answered blithely, for a man can always run down his own work with safety.

Then it dawned on me that the Prime Minister had expressed himself thus strongly not on my book, but on the poet's.

"Of course," I added, "it was evident that he had not read a line of your verse."

"Confound it! haven't I just related to you how I found him in the summer-house and compelled him to listen, yes, blocked up the only exit, until I recited to him the whole of my ode to 'Eternity'?"

"The subject was too vast for his intelligence."

"Not it. It is a shameful fact that no man of poetic tastes can gain a politician's ear nowadays unless he titillates it with a patriotic jingle. As a forlorn hope, I have written a threnody on the fleet. If I can find a good rime for 'guns' I am made. Can you help? 'Buns,' 'duns,' 'nuns' and 'tuns' are hardly suitable. 'Suns,' 'runs' and 'shuns' I have used. Just come into this corner while I—"

Miss Cazenove rescued me. "At last I have a

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She Flung an Accusing Hand Toward Me. "Help Me or You May Go Through Life Haunted by Unpleasing Specters"

moment!" she cried, showing her perfect teeth in a thoroughly good-natured smile. "You don't mind my carrying him off, do you?" she went on sweetly, as she noted the look of disappointment on my companion's face. "I have such a lot to say to him."

We hurried away. She laughed merrily when I told her of my escape.

"He is a real terror," she agreed. "One day he tackled dad after luncheon. Do you know my father? He says 'Gad!' to everything he doesn't understand and most other things as well. But on that occasion he lost his temper and said 'Rats!'"

That put us on good terms. I looked forward to an agreeable if not soulful chat with my radiant hostess; but I was fated to learn for the hundredth time that every woman is a born actress. Even the angelic Maggie was a stage adept when it became necessary to cloak her emotions from the public ken.

"Are you hungry?" asked Miss Cazenove, guiding me skilfully through the crowded suite of rooms.

"No," I said, flattering myself that the question was prompted only by hospitality.

"Then come this way."

Before I well knew what was happening, I was whisked through a curtained door into a passage left purposely unlighted. Clinging to my arm, but really compelling me onward, the girl led me to another door. She entered and switched on the

electric light. Evidently this was her boudoir; but she left little time to take stock of my surroundings.

"Sit down here," she said. "I don't care what people think. I must talk with you about Karl. Of course I might have waited until to-morrow and asked you to call, but now that you are here I am consumed with impatience. No, sit just where you are, please. I want to see your face."

"I am a most skilled prevaricator," I said, for her maneuvering was of the Napoleonic order. I was to be attacked by horse, foot and artillery, cross-examined and scrutinized at the same time. We sat on a roomy Chesterfield, an article of furniture which suggests insidious confidences; a cluster of lamps equipped with reading-reflectors shot their rays directly at us. Moreover, she did not seem to heed the fact that she laid herself open to equally searching criticism on my part. The first shot fired in the encounter showed that my adversary scorned subterfuge.

"Who is she?"

"Really—" I protested.

"Oh, you know very well whom I mean. Karl is engaged to me now, and is going to marry me—I shall see to that. But I must know who the girl is with whom he has been in love since five years ago."

I temporized. "Five years ago? You can hardly expect me to recollect anything of serious importance concerning the love affairs of a young gentleman at college and a young lady who may have worn her hair in two plaits, tied at the ends with a big bow—"

"Please, please!" she insisted. "As if I did not know how some girl has entered his very life, until he regards all other women with unheeding eyes, and even conducts himself toward me in what he considers to be the correct attitude of an engaged man! What is the spell she has cast upon him? Is she more beautiful than I, more sympathetic, more capable of devotion? Why is his father so troubled about him? Why have you been brought from Heidelberg to help in dispelling the cloud which has settled on him?"

"Did Mr. Grier senior tell you that?"

"No. No one tells me anything. Won't you have pity on me? I have the wildest dreams, but I know some of them are true. And I dreamed of you—I even saw you. I would have known you anywhere. When you came up the stairs with Karl to-night I could have shrieked aloud, but I dug my nails into my hands and restrained myself. See, here are the gloves I wore. I have changed them for others, but I kept them to prove to you how truly I am speaking."

She took from a pocket a crumpled pair of white gloves. The finger-seams were burst, the palms cut in four half-moons.

So, though the words nearly choked me, I was forced to say soothingly: "I imagine you are troubling your pretty head about a matter of little moment, Miss Cazenove. I am quite certain you have no serious rival. Karl is the soul of honor."

She started to her feet and grasped my shoulder with a vehemence she was hardly conscious of. "You men everlastingly prate of honor! Honor explains everything. Provided Karl is scrupulously attentive to me, he can take another woman to his heart, kiss her lips, her eyes, her hair, breathe her breath, inhale her fragrance, mingle his very soul with hers. That may be honorable to me, but it is the madness of love for her."

"Surely, Miss Cazenove, you are saying that which is not!" I cried, and I too jumped up from the