

Literature.org:
[Authors](#)
[Contact](#)

[The Yellow Crayon](#)

[E. Phillips Oppenheim](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 24

A barely furnished man's room, comfortable, austere, scholarly. The refuge of a busy man, to judge by the piles of books and papers which littered the large open writing-table. There were despatch boxes turned upside down, a sea of parchment and foolscap. In the midst of it all a man deep in thought.

A visitor, entering with the freedom of an old acquaintance, laid his hand upon his shoulder and greeted him with an air of suppressed enthusiasm.

"Planning the campaign, eh, Brott? Or is that a handbook to Court etiquette? You will need it within the week. There are all sorts of rumours at the clubs."

Brott shook himself free from his fit of apathetic reflection. He would not have dared to tell his visitor where his thoughts had been for the last half hour.

"Somehow," he said, "I do not think that little trip to Windsor will come just yet. The King will never send for me unless he is compelled."

His visitor, an ex-Cabinet Minister, a pronounced Radical and a lifelong friend of Brott's, shrugged his shoulders.

"That time," he said, "is very close at hand. He will send for Letheringham first, of course, and great pressure will be brought to bear upon him to form a ministry. But without you he will be helpless. He has not the confidence of the people."

"Without me," Brott repeated slowly. "You think then that I should not accept office with Letheringham?"

His visitor regarded him steadily for a moment, open-mouthed, obviously taken aback.

"Brott, are you in your right senses?" he asked incredulously. "Do you know what you are saying?"

Brott laughed a little nervously.

"This is a great issue, Grahame," he said. "I will confess that I am in an undecided state. I am not sure that the country is in a sufficiently advanced state for our propaganda. Is this really our opportunity, or is it only the shadow of what is to come thrown before? If we show our hand too soon all is lost for this generation. Don't look at me as though I were insane, Grahame. Remember that the country is only just free from a long era of Conservative rule."

"The better our opportunity," Grahame answered vigorously. "Two decades of puppet government are enervating, I admit, but they only pave the way more surely to the inevitable reaction. What is the matter with you, Brott? Are you ill? This is the great moment of our lives. You must speak at Manchester and Birmingham within this week. Glasgow is already preparing for you. Everything and everybody waits for your judgment. Good God, man, it's magnificent! Where's your enthusiasm? Within a month you must be Prime Minister, and we will show the world the way to a new era."

Brott sat quite still. His friend's words had stirred him for the moment. Yet he seemed the victim of a curious indecision. Grahame leaned over towards him.

"Brott, old friend," he said, "you are not ill?"

Brott shook his head.

"I am perfectly well," he said.

Grahame hesitated.

"It is a delicate thing to mention," he said. "Perhaps I shall pass even the bounds of our old comradeship. But you have changed. Something is wrong with you. What is it?"

"There is nothing," Brott answered, looking up. "It is your fancy. I am well enough."

Grahame's face was dark with anxiety.

"This is no idle curiosity of mine," he said. "You know me better than that. But the cause which is nearer my heart than life itself is at stake. Brott, you are the people's man, their promised redeemer. Think of them, the toilers, the oppressed, God's children, groaning under the iniquitous laws of generations of evil statesmanship. It is the dawn of their new day, their faces are turned to you. Man, can't you hear them crying? You can't fail them. You mustn't. I don't know what is the matter with you, Brott, but away with it. Free yourself, man."

Brott sighed wearily, but already there was a change in him. His face was hardening - the lines in his face deepened. Grahame continued hastily - eagerly.

"Public men," he said, "are always at the mercy of the halfpenny press, but you know, Brott, your appearance so often in Society lately has set men's tongues wagging. There is no harm done, but it is time to stop them. You are right to want to understand these people. You must go down amongst them. It has been slumming in Mayfair for you, I know. But have done with it now. It is these people we are going to fight. Let it be open war. Let them hear your programme at Glasgow. We don't want another French Revolution, but it is going to be war against the drones, fierce, merciless war! You must break with them, Brott, once and for ever. And the time is now."

Brott held out his hand across the table. No one but this one man could have read the struggle in his face.

"You are right, Grahame. I thank you. I thank you as much for what you have left unsaid as for what you have said. I was a fool to think of compromising. Letheringham is a

nerveless leader. We should have gone pottering on for another seven years. Thank God that you came when you did. See here!"

He tossed him over a letter. Grahame's cheek paled as he read.

"Already!" he murmured.

Brott nodded.

"Read it!"

Grahame devoured every word. His eyes lit up with excitement.

"My prophecy exactly," he exclaimed, laying it down. "It is as I said. He cannot form the ministry without you. His letter is abject. He gives himself away. It is an entreaty. And your answer?"

"Has not yet gone," Brott said. "You shall write it yourself if you like. I am thankful that you came when you did."

"You were hesitating?" Grahame exclaimed.

"I was."

Grahame looked at him in wonder, and Brott faced him sturdily.

"It seems like treason to you, Grahame!" he said. "So it does to me now. I want nothing in the future to come between us," he continued more slowly, "and I should like if I can to expunge the memory of this interview. And so I am going to tell you the truth." Grahame held out his hand.

"Don't!" he said. "I can forget without."

Brott shook his head.

"No," he said. "You had better understand everything. The halfpenny press told the truth. Yet only half the truth. I have been to all these places, wasted my time, wasted their time, from a purely selfish reason - to be near the only woman I have ever cared for, the woman, Grahame!"

"I knew it," Grahame murmured. "I fought against the belief, I thought that I had stifled it. But I knew it all the time."

"If I have seemed lukewarm sometimes of late," Brott said, "there is the cause. She is an aristocrat, and my politics are hateful to her. She has told me so seriously, playfully, angrily. She has let me feel it in a hundred ways. She has drawn me into discussions and shown the utmost horror of my views. I have cared for her all my life, and she knows it. And I think, Grahame, that lately she has been trying constantly, persistently, to tone down my opinions. She has let me understand that they are a bar between us. And it is a horrible confession, Grahame, but I believe that I was wavering. This invitation from Letheringham seemed such a wonderful opportunity for compromise."

"This must never go out of the room," Grahame said hoarsely. "It would ruin your popularity. They would never trust you again."

"I shall tell no one else," Brott said.

"And it is over?" Grahame demanded eagerly.

"It is over."

* * * * *

The Duke of Dorset, who entertained for his party, gave a great dinner that night at Dorset House, and towards its close the Prince of Saxe Leinitzer, who was almost the only non-political guest, moved up to his host in response to an eager summons. The Duke was perturbed.

"You have heard the news, Saxe Leinitzer?"

"I did not know of any news," the Prince answered. "What is it?"

"Brott has refused to join with Letheringham in forming a ministry. It is rumoured even that a coalition was proposed, and that Brott would have nothing to do with it."

The Prince looked into his wineglass.

"Ah!" he said.

"This is disturbing news," the Duke continued. "You do not seem to appreciate its significance."

The Prince looked up again.

"Perhaps not," he said. "You shall explain to me."

"Brott refuses to compromise," the Duke said. "He stands for a ministry of his own selection. Heaven only knows what mischief this may mean. His doctrines are thoroughly revolutionary. He is an iconoclast with a genius for destruction. But he has the ear of the people. He is to-day their Rienzi."

The Prince nodded.

"And Lucille?" he remarked. "What does she say?"

"I have not spoken to her," the Duke answered. "The news has only just come."

"We will speak to her," the Prince said, "together."

Afterwards in the library there was a sort of informal meeting, and their opportunity came.

"So you have failed, Countess," her host said, knitting his grey brows at her.

She smilingly acknowledged defeat.

"But I can assure you," she said, "that I was very near success. Only on Monday he had virtually made up his mind to abandon the extreme party and cast in his lot with Letheringham. What has happened to change him I do not know."

The Prince curled his fair moustache.

"It is a pity," he said, "that he changed his mind. For one thing is very certain. The Duke and I are agreed upon it. A Brott ministry must never be formed."

She looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?"

The Prince answered her without hesitation.

"If one course fails," he said, "another must be adopted. I regret having to make use of means which are somewhat clumsy and obvious. But our pronouncement on this one point is final. Brott must not be allowed to form a ministry."

She looked at him with something like horror in her soft full eyes.

"What would you do?" she murmured.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "we are not quite medieval enough to adopt the only really sensible method and remove Mr. Brott permanently from the face of the earth. We should stop a little short of that, but I can assure you that Mr. Brott's health for the next few months is a matter for grave uncertainty. It is a pity for his sake that you failed."

She bit her lip.

"Do you know if he is still in London?" she asked.

"He must be on the point of leaving for Scotland," the Duke answered. "If he once mounts the platform at Glasgow there will be no further chance of any compromise. He will be committed irretrievably to his campaign of anarchy."

"And to his own disaster," the Prince murmured.

Lucille remained for a moment deep in thought. Then she looked up.

"If I can find him before he starts," she said hurriedly, "I will make one last effort."