
Chapter 33

A gleam of day was in the sky as Hamel, with Mrs. Fentolin by his side, passed along the path which led from the Tower to St. David's Hall. Lights were still burning from its windows; the outline of the building itself was faintly defined against the sky. Behind him, across the sea, was that one straight line of grey merging into silver. The rain had ceased and the wind had dropped. On either side of them stretched the brimming creeks.

"Can we get into the house without waking any one?" he asked.

"Quite easily," she assured him. "The front door is never barred."

She walked by his side, swiftly and with surprising vigour. In the still, grey light, her face was more ghastly than ever, but there was a new firmness about her mouth, a new decision in her tone. They reached the Hall without further speech, and she led the way to a small door on the eastern side, through which they entered noiselessly and passed along a little passage out into the hall. A couple of lights were still burning. The place seemed full of shadows.

"What are you going to do now?" she whispered.

"I want to ring up London on the telephone," he replied. "I know that there is a detective either in the neighbourhood or on his way here, but I shall tell my friend that he had better come down himself."

She nodded.

"I am going to release Esther," she said. "She is locked in her room. The telephone is in the study. I will come down there to you."

She passed silently up the broad staircase. Hamel groped his way across the hail into the library. He turned on the small electric reading-lamp and drew up a chair to the side of the telephone. Even as he lifted the receiver to his ear, he looked around him half apprehensively. It seemed as though every moment he would hear the click of Mr. Fentolin's chair.

He got the exchange at Norwich without difficulty, and a few minutes later a sleepy reply came from the number he had rung up in London. It was Kinsley's servant who answered.

"I want to speak to Mr. Kinsley at once upon most important business," Hamel announced.

"Very sorry, sir," the man replied. "Mr. Kinsley left town last night for the country."

"Where has he gone?" Hamel demanded quickly. "You can tell me. You know who I am; I am Mr. Hamel."

"Into Norfolk somewhere, sir. He went with several other gentlemen."

"Is that Bullen?" Hamel asked.

The man admitted the fact.

"Can you tell me if any of the people with whom Mr. Kinsley left London were connected with the police?" he inquired.

The man hesitated.

"I believe so, sir," he admitted. "The gentlemen started in a motor-car and were going to drive all night."

Hamel laid down the receiver. At any rate, he would not be left long with this responsibility upon him. He walked out into the hall. The house was still wrapped in deep silence. Then, from somewhere above him, coming down the stairs, he heard the rustle of a woman's gown. He looked up, and saw Miss Price, fully dressed, coming slowly towards him. She held up her finger and led the way back into the library. She was dressed as neatly as ever, but there was a queer light in her eyes.

"I have seen Mrs. Seymour Fentolin," she said. "She tells me that you have left Mr. Fentolin and the others in the subterranean room of the Tower."

Hamel nodded.

"They have Dunster down there," he told her. "I followed them in; it seemed the best thing to do. I have a friend from London who is on his way down here now with some detective officers, to enquire into the matter of Dunster's disappearance."

"Are you going to leave them where they are until these people arrive?" she asked.

"I think so," he replied, after a moment's hesitation. "I don't seem to have had time to consider even what to do. The opportunity came, and I embraced it. There they are, and they won't dare to do any further harm to Dunster now. Mrs. Fentolin was down in my room, and I thought it best to bring her back first before I even parleyed with them again.

"You must be careful," she advised slowly. "The man Dunster has been drugged, he has lost some of his will; he may have lost some of his mental balance. Mr. Fentolin is

clever. He will find a dozen ways to wriggle out of any charge that can be brought against him. You know what he has really done?"

"I can guess."

"He has kept back a document signed by the twelve men in America who control the whole of Wall Street, who control practically the money markets of the world. That document is a warning to Germany that they will have no war against England. Owing to Mr. Fentolin, it has not been delivered, and the Conference is sitting now. War may be declared at any moment."

"But as a matter of common sense," Hamel asked, "why does Mr. Fentolin desire war?"

"You do not understand Mr. Fentolin," she told him quietly. "He is not like other men. There are some who live almost entirely for the sake of making others happy, who find joy in seeing people content and satisfied. Mr. Fentolin is the reverse of this. He has but one craving in life: to see pain in others. To see a human being suffer is to him a debauch of happiness. A war which laid this country waste would fill him with a delight which you could never understand. There are no normal human beings like this. It is a disease in the man, a disease which came upon him after his accident."

"Yet you have all been his slaves," Hamel said curiously.

"We have all been his slaves," she admitted, "for different reasons. Before his accident came, Mr. Fentolin was my master and the only man in the world for me. After his accident, I think my feelings for him, if anything, grew stronger. I became his slave. I sold my conscience, my self-respect, everything in life worth having, to bring a smile to his lips, to help him through a single moment of his misery. And just lately the reaction has come. He has played with me just as he would sit and pull the legs out of a spider to watch its agony. I have been one of his favourite amusements. And even now, if he came into this room I think that I should be helpless. I should probably fall at his feet and pray for forgiveness."

Hamel looked at her wonderingly.

"I have come down to warn you," she went on. "It is possible that this is the beginning of the end, that his wonderful fortune will desert him, that his star has gone down. But remember that he has the brains and courage of genius. You think that you have him in a trap. Don't be surprised, when you go back, to find that he has turned the tables upon you."

"Impossible!" Hamel declared. "I looked all round the place. There isn't a window or opening anywhere. The trap-door is in the middle of the ceiling and it is fifteen feet from the floor. It shuts with a spring."

"It may be as you say," she observed. "It may be that he is safe. Remember, though, if you go near him, that he is desperate."

"Do you know where Miss Fentolin is?" he interrupted.

"She is with her mother," the woman replied, impatiently. "She is coming down. Tell me, what are you going to do with Mr. Fentolin? Nothing else matters."

"I have a friend," Hamel answered, "who will see to that."

"If you are relying upon the law," she said, "I think you will find that the law cannot touch him. Mr. Dunster was brought to the house in a perfectly natural manner. He was certainly injured, and injured in a railway accident. Doctor Sarson is a fully qualified surgeon, and he will declare that Mr. Dunster was unfit to travel. If necessary, they will have destroyed the man's intelligence. If you think that you have him broken, let me warn you that you may be disappointed. Let me, if I may, give you one word of advice."

"Please do," Hamel begged.

She looked at him coldly. Her tone was still free from any sort of emotion.

"You have taken up some sort of position here," she continued, "as a friend of Mrs. Seymour Fentolin, a friend of the family. Don't let them come back under the yoke. You know the secret of their bondage?"

"I know it," he admitted.

"They have been his slaves because their absolute obedience to his will was one of the conditions of his secrecy. He has drawn the cords too tight. Better let the truth be known, if needs be, than have their three lives broken. Don't let them go back under his governance. For me, I cannot tell. If he comes back, as he will come back, I may become his slave again, but let them break away. Listen - that is Mrs. Fentolin."

She left him. Hamel followed her out into the hail. Esther and her mother were already at the foot of the stairs. He drew them into the study. Esther gave him her hands, but she was trembling in every limb.

"I am terrified!" she whispered. "Every moment I think I can hear the click of that awful carriage. He will come back; I am sure he will come back!"

"He may," Hamel answered sturdily, "but never to make you people his slaves again. You have done enough. You have earned your freedom."

"I agree," Mrs. Fentolin said firmly. "We have gone on from sacrifice to sacrifice, until it has become a habit with us to consider him the master of our bodies and our souls. To-day, Esther, we have reached the breaking point. Not even for the sake of that message from the other side of the grave, not even to preserve his honour and his memory, can we do more."

Hamel held up his finger. He opened the French windows, and they followed him out on to the terrace. The grey dawn had broken now over the sea. There were gleams of fitful sunshine on the marshes. Some distance away a large motor-car was coming rapidly along the road.