

---

## Chapter 19

---

Mr. Fentolin remained upon the terrace long after the departure of his guests. He had found a sunny corner out of the wind, and he sat there with a telescope by his side and a budget of newspapers upon his knee. On some pretext or another he had detained all the others of the household so that they formed a little court around him. Even Hamel, who had said something about a walk, had been induced to stop by an appealing glance from Esther. Mr. Fentolin was in one of his most loquacious moods. For some reason or other, the visit of the Saxthorpes seemed to have excited him. He talked continually, with the briefest pauses. Every now and then he gazed steadily across the marshes through his telescope.

"Lord Saxthorpe," he remarked, "has, I must confess, greatly excited my curiosity as to the identity of our visitor. Such a harmless-looking person, he seems, to be causing such a commotion. Gerald, don't you feel your responsibility in the matter?"

"Yes, sir, I do!" Gerald replied, with unexpected grimness. "I feel my responsibility deeply."

Mr. Fentolin, who was holding the telescope to his eye, touched Hamel on the shoulder.

"My young friend," he said, "your eyes are better than mine. You see the road there? Look along it, between the white posts, as far as you can. What do you make of that black speck?"

Hamel held the telescope to his eye and steadied it upon the little tripod stand.

"It looks like a horse and trap," he announced. "Good!" Mr. Fentolin declared. "It seemed so to me, but I was not sure. My eyes are weak this afternoon. How many people are in the trap?"

"Two," Hamel answered. "I can see them distinctly now. One man is driving, another is sitting by his side. They are coming this way."

Mr. Fentolin blew his whistle. Meekins appeared almost directly. His master whispered a word in his ear. The man at once departed.

"Let me make use of your eyes once more," Mr. Fentolin begged. "About these two men in the trap, Mr. Hamel. Is one of them, by any chance, wearing a uniform?"

"They both are," Hamel replied. "The man who is driving is wearing a peaked hat. He looks like a police inspector. The man by his side is an ordinary policeman."

Mr. Fentolin sighed gently.

"It is very interesting," he said. "Let us hope that we shall not see an arrest under my roof. I should feel it a reflection upon my hospitality. I trust, I sincerely trust, that this visit does not bode any harm to Mr. John P. Dunster."

Gerald rose impatiently to his feet and swung across the terrace. Mr. Fentolin, however, called him back.

"Gerald," he advised, "better not go away. The inspector may desire to ask you questions. You will have nothing to conceal. It was a natural and delightful impulse of yours to bring the man who had befriended you, and who was your companion in that disaster, straight to your own home for treatment and care. It was an admirable impulse, my boy. You have nothing to be ashamed of."

"Shall I tell him, too -" Gerald began.

"Be careful, Gerald."

Mr. Fentolin's words seemed to be charged with a swift, rapier-like note. The boy broke off in his speech. He looked at Hamel and was silent.

"Dear me," Mrs. Fentolin murmured, "I am sure there is no need for us to talk about this poor man as though anybody had done anything wrong in having him here. This, I suppose, must be the Inspector Yardley whom Lord Saxthorpe spoke of."

"A very intelligent-looking officer, I am sure," Mr. Fentolin remarked. "Gerald, go and meet him, if you please. I should like to speak to him out here."

The dog-cart had drawn up at the front door, and the inspector had already alighted. Gerald intervened as he was in the act of questioning the butler.

"Mr. Fentolin would like to speak to you, inspector," he said, "if you will come this way."

The inspector followed Gerald and saluted the little group solemnly. Mr. Fentolin held out his hand.

"You got my telephone message, inspector?" he asked.

"We have not received any message that I know of, sir," the inspector replied. "I have come over here in accordance with instructions received from headquarters - in fact from Scotland Yard."

"Quite so," Mr. Fentolin assented. "You've come over, I presume, to make enquiries concerning Mr. John P. Dunster?"

"That is the name of the gentleman, sir."

"I only understood to-day from my friend Lord Saxthorpe," Mr. Fentolin continued, "that Mr. Dunster was being enquired about as though he had disappeared. My nephew brought him here after the railway accident at Wymondham, since when he has been under the care of my own physician. I trust that you have nothing serious against him?"

"My first duty, sir," the inspector pronounced, "is to see the gentleman in question."

"By all means," Mr. Fentolin agreed. "Gerald, will you take the inspector up to Mr. Dunster's rooms? Or stop, I will go myself."

Mr. Fentolin started his chair and beckoned the inspector to follow him. Meekins, who was waiting inside the hall, escorted them by means of the lift to the second floor. They made their way to Mr. Dunster's room. Mr. Fentolin knocked softly at the door. It was opened by the nurse.

"How is the patient?" Mr. Fentolin enquired.

Doctor Sarson appeared from the interior of the room.

"Still unconscious," he reported. "Otherwise, the symptoms are favourable. He is quite unfit," the doctor added, looking steadily at the inspector, "to be removed or questioned."

"There is no idea of anything of the sort," Mr. Fentolin explained. "It is Inspector Yardley's duty to satisfy himself that Mr. Dunster is here. It is necessary for the inspector to see your patient, so that he can make his report at headquarters."

Doctor Sarson bowed.

"That is quite simple, sir," he said. "Please step in."

They all entered the room, which was large and handsomely furnished. Through the open windows came a gentle current of fresh air. Mr. Dunster lay in the midst of all the luxury of fine linen sheets and embroidered pillow-cases. The inspector looked at him stolidly.

"Is he asleep?" he asked.

The doctor shook his head.

"It is the third day of his concussion," he whispered. "He is still unconscious. He will remain in the same condition for another two days. After that he will begin to recover."

Mr. Fentolin touched the inspector on the arm.

"You see his clothing at the foot of the bed," he pointed out. "His linen is marked with his name. That is his dressing-case with his name painted on it."

"I am quite satisfied, sir," the inspector announced. "I will not intrude any further."

They left the room. Mr. Fentolin himself escorted the inspector into the library and ordered whisky and cigars.

"I don't know whether I am unreasonably curious," Mr. Fentolin remarked, "but is it really true that you have had enquiries from Scotland Yard about the poor fellow up stairs?"

"We had a very important enquiry indeed, sir," the inspector replied. "I have instructions to telegraph all I have been able to discover, immediately."

"Pardon my putting it plainly," Mr. Fentolin asked, "but is our friend a criminal?"

"I wouldn't go so far as that, sir," the inspector answered. "I know of no charge against him. I don't know that I have the right to say so much," he added, sipping his whisky and soda, "but putting two and two together, I should rather come to the conclusion that he was a person of some political importance."

"Not a criminal at all?"

"Not as I know of," the inspector assented. "That isn't the way I read the enquiries at all."

"You relieve me," Mr. Fentolin declared. "Now what about his possessions?"

"There's a man coming down shortly from Scotland Yard," the inspector announced, a little gloomily. "My orders were to touch nothing, but to locate him."

"Well, you've succeeded so far," Mr. Fentolin remarked. "Here he is, and here I think he will stay until some days after your friend from Scotland Yard can get here."

"It does seem so, indeed," the inspector agreed. "To me he looks terrible ill. But there's one thing sure, he's having all the care and attention that's possible. And now, sir, I'll not intrude further upon your time. I'll just make my report, and you'll probably have a visit from the Scotland Yard man sometime within the next few days."

Mr. Fentolin escorted the inspector to his dog-cart, shook hands with him, and watched him drive off. Only Mrs. Seymour Fentolin remained upon the terrace. He glided over to her side.

"My dear Florence," he asked, "where are the others?"

"Mr. Hamel and Esther have gone for a walk," she answered. "Gerald has disappeared somewhere. Has anything - is everything all right?"

"Naturally," Mr. Fentolin replied easily. "All that the inspector desired was to see Mr. Dunster. He has seen him. The poor fellow was unfortunately unconscious, but our friend will at least be able to report that he was in good hands and well cared for."

"Unconscious," Mrs. Fentolin repeated. "I thought that he was better."

"One is always subject to those slight relapses in an affair of concussion," Mr. Fentolin explained.

Mrs. Fentolin laid down her work and leaned a little towards her brother-in-law. Her hand rested upon his. Her voice had fallen to a whisper.

"Miles," she said, "forgive me, but are you sure that you are not getting a little out of your depth? Remember that there are some risks which are not worth while."

"Quite true," he answered. "And there are some risks, my dear Florence, which are worth every drop of blood in a man's body, and every breath of life. The peace of Europe turns upon that man up-stairs. It is worth taking a little risk for, worth a little danger. I have made my plans, and I mean to carry them through. Tell me, when I was up-stairs, this fellow Hamel - was he talking confidentially to Gerald?"

"Not particularly."

"I am not sure that I trust him," Mr. Fentolin continued. "He had a telegram yesterday from a man in the Foreign Office, a telegram which I did not see. He took the trouble to walk three miles to send the reply to it from another office."

"But after all," Mrs. Fentolin protested, "you know who he is. You know that he is Peter Hamel's son. He had a definite purpose in coming here."

Mr. Fentolin nodded.

"Quite true," he admitted. "But for that, Mr. Hamel would have found a little trouble before now. As it is, he must be watched. If any one comes between me and the things for which I am scheming to-day, they will risk death."

Mrs. Fentolin sighed. She was watching the figures of Esther and Hamel far away in the distance, picking their way across the last strip of marshland which lay between them and the sea.

"Miles," she said earnestly, "you take advice from no one. You will go your own way, I know. And yet, it seems to me that life holds so many compensations for you without your taking these terrible risks. I am not thinking of any one else. I am not pleading to you for the sake of any one else. I am thinking only of yourself. I have had a sort of feeling ever since this man was brought into the house, that trouble would come of it. To me the trouble seems to be gathering even now."

Mr. Fentolin laughed softly, a little contemptuously.

"Presentiments," he scoffed, "are the excuses of cowards. Don't be afraid, Florence. Remember always that I look ahead. Do you think that I could stay here contented with what you call my compensations - my art, the study of beautiful things, the calm epicureanism of the sedate and simple life? You know very well that I could not do that. The craving for other things is in my heart and blood. The excitement which I cannot have in one way, I must find in another, and I think that before many nights have passed, I shall lie on my pillow and hear the guns roar, hear the footsteps of the great armies of the world moving into battle. It is for that I live, Florence."

She took up her knitting again. Her eyes were fixed upon the sky-line. Twice she opened her lips, but twice no words came.

"You understand?" he whispered. "You begin to understand, don't you?"

She looked at him only for a moment and back at her work.

"I suppose so," she sighed.