

[The Yellow Crayon](#)

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Chapter 19

I will not pretend," Mr. Sabin said, "to misunderstand you. My help is not required by you in this enterprise, whatever it may be, in which you are engaged. On the contrary, you have tried by many and various ways to keep me at a distance. But I am here, Prince - here to be dealt with and treated according to my rights."

The Prince stroked his fair moustache.

"I am a little puzzled," he admitted, "as to this - shall I not call it self-assertiveness? - on the part of my good friend Souspennier."

"I will make it quite clear then," Mr. Sabin answered. "Lucille, will you favour me by ringing for your maid. The carriage is at the door."

The Prince held out his hand.

"My dear Souspennier," he said, "you must not think of taking Lucille away from us."

"Indeed," Mr. Sabin answered coolly. "Why not?"

"It must be obvious to you," the Prince answered, "that we did not send to America for Lucille without an object. She is now engaged in an important work upon our behalf. It is necessary that she should remain under this roof."

"I demand," Mr. Sabin said, "that the nature of that necessity should be made clear to me."

The Prince smiled with the air of one disposed to humour a wilful child.

"Come!" he said. "You must know very well that I cannot stand here and tell you the bare outline, much less the details of an important movement. To-morrow, at any hour you choose, one from amongst us shall explain the whole matter - and the part to be borne in it by the Countess!"

"And to-night?" Mr. Sabin asked.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the clock.

"To-night, my dear friend," he said, "all of us, I believe, go on to a ball at Carmarthen House. It would grieve me also, I am sure, Duke, to seem inhospitable, but I am compelled to mention the fact that the hour for which the carriages have been ordered is already at hand."

Mr. Sabin reflected for a few moments.

"Did I understand you to say," he asked, "that the help to be given to you by my wife, Lucille, Duchess of Souspennier, entailed her remaining under this roof?"

The Prince smiled seraphically.

"It is unfortunate," he murmured, "since you have been so gallant as to follow her, but it is true! You will understand this perfectly - to-morrow."

"And why should I wait until to-morrow?" Mr. Sabin asked coolly.

"I fear," the Prince said, "that it is a matter of necessity."

Mr. Sabin glanced for a moment in turn at the faces of all the little company as though seeking to discover how far the attitude of his opponent met with their approval. Lady Carey's thin lips were curved in a smile, and her eyes met his mockingly. The others remained imperturbable. Last of all he looked at Lucille.

"It seems," he said, smiling towards her, "that I am called upon to pay a heavy entrance fee on my return amongst your friends. But the Prince of Saxe Leinitzer forgets that he has shown me no authority, or given me no valid reason why I should tolerate such flagrant interference with my personal affairs."

"To-morrow - to-morrow, my good sir!" the Prince interrupted.

"No! To-night!" Mr. Sabin answered sharply. "Lucille, in the absence of any reasonable explanation, I challenge the right of the Prince of Saxe Leinitzer to rob me even for an hour of my dearest possession. I appeal to you. Come with me and remain with me until it has been proved, if ever it can be proved, that greater interests require our separation. If there be blame I will take it. Will you trust yourself to me

Lucille half rose, but Lady Carey's hand was heavy upon her shoulder. As though by a careless movement General Dolinski and Raoul de Brouillac altered their positions slightly so as to come between the two. The Duke of Dorset had left the room. Then Mr. Sabin knew that they were all against him.

"Lucille," he said, "have courage! I wait for you."

She looked towards him, and her face puzzled him. For there flashed across the shoulders of these people a glance which was wholly out of harmony with his own state of barely subdued passion - a glance half tender, half humorous, full of subtle promise. Yet her words were a blow to him.

"Victor, how is it possible? Believe me, I come if I could. To-morrow - very soon, it may be possible. But now. You hear what the Prince says. I fear that he is right!"

To Mr. Sabin the shock was an unexpected one. He had never doubted but that she at least was his side. Her words found him unprepared, and a moment he showed his discomfiture. His recovery however, was swift and amazing. He bowed to Lucille, and by the time he raised his head even the reproach had gone from his eyes.

"Dear lady," he said, "I will not venture to dispute your decision. Prince, will you appoint a time to-morrow when this matter shall be more fully explained to me?"

The Prince's smile was sweetness itself, and his tone very gentle. But Mr. Sabin, who seldom yielded to any passionate impulse, kept his teeth set and his hand clenched, lest the blow he longed to deal should escape him.

"At midday to-morrow I shall be pleased to receive you," he said. "The Countess, with her usual devotion and good sense, has, I trust, convinced you that our action is necessary!"

"To-morrow at midday," Mr. Sabin said, "I will be here. I have the honour to wish you all good-night."

His farewell was comprehensive. He did not even single out Lucille for a parting glance. But down the broad stairs and across the hall of Dorset House he passed with weary steps, leaning heavily upon his stick. It was a heavy blow which had fallen upon him. As yet he scarcely realised it.

His carriage was delayed for a few moments, and just as he was entering it a young woman, plainly dressed in black, came hurrying out and slipped a note into his hand.

"Pardon, monsieur," she exclaimed, with a smile. I feared that I was too late."

Mr. Sabin's fingers closed over the note, and he stepped blithely into the carriage. But when he tore it open and saw the handwriting he permitted himself a little groan of disappointment. It was not from her. He read the few lines and crushed the sheet of paper in his hand.

"I am having supper at the Carlton with some friends on our way to C. H. I want to speak to you for a moment. Be in the Palm Court at 12.15, but do not recognise me until I come to you. If possible keep out of sight. If you should have left my maid will bring this on to your hotel. "M. C."

Mr. Sabin leaned back in his carriage, and a frown of faint perplexity contracted his forehead.

If I were a younger man," he murmured to himself, "I might believe that this woman was really in earnest, as well as being Saxe Leinitzer's jackal. We were friendly enough in Paris that year. She is unscrupulous enough, of course. Always with some odd fancy for the grotesque or unlikely. I wonder - "

He pulled the check-string, and was driven to Camperdown House. A great many people were coming and going. Mr. Sabin found Helene's maid, and learnt that her mistress was just going to her room, and would be alone for a few minutes. He scribbled a few words on the back of a card, and was at once taken up to her boudoir.

"My dear UNCLE," Helene exclaimed, "you have arrived most opportunely. We have just got rid of a few dinner people, and we are going on to Carmarthen House presently. Take that easy-chair, please, and, light a cigarette. Will you have a liqueur? Wolfendon has some old brandy which every one seems to think wonderful."

"You are very kind, Helene," Mr. Sabin said. "I cannot refuse anything which you offer in so charming a manner. But I shall not keep you more than a few minutes."

"We need not leave for an hour," Helene said, "and I am dressed except for my jewels. Tell me, have you seen Lucille? I am so anxious to know."

"I have seen Lucille this evening," Mr. Sabin answered.

"At Dorset House!"

"Yes."

Helene sat down, smiling.

"Do tell me all about it."

"There is very little to tell," Mr. Sabin answered.

"She is with you - she returns at least!" Mr. Sabin shook his head.

"No," he answered. "She remains at Dorset House."

Helene was silent. Mr. Sabin smoked pensively a moment or two, and sipped the liqueur which Camperdown's own servant had just brought him.

"It is very hard, Helene," he said, "to make you altogether understand the situation, for there are certain phases of it which I cannot discuss with you at all. I have made my first effort to regain Lucille, and it has failed. It is not her fault. I need not say that it is not mine. But the struggle has commenced, and in the end I shall win."

"Lucille herself - " Helene began hesitatingly.

"Lucille is, I firmly believe, as anxious to return to me as I am anxious to have her," Mr. Sabin said.

Helene threw up her hands.

"It is bewildering," she exclaimed.

"It must seem so to you," Mr. Sabin admitted.

"I wish that Lucille were anywhere else," Helene said. "The Dorset House set, you know, although they are very smart and very exclusive, have a somewhat peculiar reputation. Lady Carey, although she is such a brilliant woman, says and does the most insolent, the most amazing things, and the Prince of Saxe Leinitzer goes everywhere in Europe by the name of the Royal Libertine. They are powerful enough almost to dominate society, and we poor people who abide by the conventions are absolutely nowhere beside them. They think that we are bourgeois because we have virtue, and prehistoric because we are not decadent."

"The Duke - " Mr. Sabin remarked.

"Oh, the Duke is quite different, of course," Helene admitted. "He is a fanatical Tory, very stupid, very blind to anything except his beloved Primrose League. How he came to lend himself to the vagaries of such a set I cannot imagine."

Mr. Sabin smiled.

"C'est la femme toujours!" he remarked. "His Grace is, I fear, henpecked, and the Duchess herself is the sport of cleverer people. And now, my dear niece, I see that the time is going. I came to know if you could get me a card for the ball at Carmarthen House to-night."

Helene laughed softly.

"Very easily, my dear UNCLE. Lady Carmarthen is Wolfendon's cousin, you know, and a very good friend of mine. I have half a dozen blank cards here. Shall I really see you there?"

"I believe so," Mr. Sabin answered.

"And Lucille?"

"It is possible."

"There is nothing I suppose which I can do in the way of intervention, or anything of that sort?"

Mr. Sabin shook his head.

"Lucille and I are the best of friends," he answered. "Talk to her, if you will. By the bye, is that twelve o'clock? I must hurry. Doubtless we shall meet again at the ball."

But Carmarthen House saw nothing of Mr. Sabin that night.