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## Chapter 30 - Inspector Jacks Importunate

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They were talking of the Prince during those few minutes before they separated to dress for dinner. The whole of the house-party, with the exception of the Prince himself, were gathered around the great open fireplace at the north end of the hall. The weather had changed during the afternoon, and a cold wind had blown in their faces on the homeward drive. Every one had found comfortable seats here, watching the huge logs burn, and there seemed to be a general indisposition to move. A couple of young men from the neighborhood had joined the house-party, and the conversation, naturally enough, was chiefly concerned with the day's sport. The young men, Somerfield especially, were inclined to regard the Prince's achievement from a somewhat critical standpoint.

"He rode the race well enough," Somerfield admitted, "but the mare is a topper, and no mistake. He had nothing to do but to sit tight and let her do the work."

"Of course, he hadn't to finish either," one of the newcomers, a Captain Everard Wilmot, remarked. "That's where you can tell if a fellow really can ride or not. Anyhow, his style was rotten. To me he seemed to sit his horse exactly like a groom."

"You will, perhaps, not deny him," the Duke remarked mildly, "a certain amount of courage in riding a strange horse of uncertain temper, over a strange country, in an enterprise which was entirely new to him."

"I call it one of the most sporting things I ever heard of in my life," Lady Grace declared warmly.

Somerfield shrugged his shoulders.

"One must admit that he has pluck," he remarked critically. "At the same time I cannot see that a single effort of this sort entitles a man to be considered a sportsman. He doesn't shoot, nor does he ever ride except when he is on military service. He neither plays games nor has he the instinct for them. A man without the instinct for games is a fellow I cannot understand. He'd never get along in this country, would he, Wilmot?"

"No, I'm shot if he would!" that young man replied. "There must be something wrong about a man who hasn't any taste whatever for sport."

Penelope suddenly intervened--intervened, too, in somewhat startling fashion.

"Charlie," she said, "you are talking like a baby! I am ashamed of you! I am ashamed of you all! You are talking like narrow-minded, ignorant little squireens."

Somerfield went slowly white. He looked across at Penelope, but the angry flash in his eyes was met by an even brighter light in her own.

"I will tell you what I think!" she exclaimed. "I think that you are all guilty of the most ridiculous presumption in criticising such a man as the Prince. You would dare--you, Captain Wilmot, and you, Charlie, and you, Mr. Hannaway," she added, turning to the third young man, "to stand there and tell us all in a lordly way that the Prince is no sportsman, as though that mysterious phrase disposed of him altogether as a creature inferior to you and your kind! If only you could realize the absolute absurdity of any of you attempting to depreciate a person so immeasurably above you! Prince Maiyo is a man, not an overgrown boy to go through life shooting birds, playing games which belong properly to your schooldays, and hanging round the stage doors of half the theatres in London. You are satisfied with your lives and the Prince is satisfied with his. He belongs to a race whom you do not understand. Let him alone. Don't presume to imagine yourselves his superior because he does not conform to your pygmy standard of life."

Penelope was standing now, her slim, elegant form throbbing with the earnestness of her words, a spot of angry color burning in her cheeks. During the moment's silence which followed, Lady Grace too rose to her feet and came to her friend's side.

"I agree with every word Penelope has said," she declared.

The Duchess smiled.

"Come," she said soothingly, "we mustn't take this little affair too seriously. You are all right, all of you. Every one must live according to his bringing up. The Prince, no doubt, is as faithful to his training and instincts as the young men of our own country. It is more interesting to compare than to criticise."

Somerfield, who for a moment had been too angry to speak, had now recovered himself.

"I think," he said stiffly, "that we had better drop the subject. I had no idea that Miss Morse felt so strongly about it or I should not have presumed, even here and amongst ourselves, to criticise a person who holds such a high place in her esteem. Everard, I'll play you a game of billiards before we go upstairs. There's just time."

Captain Wilmot hesitated. He was a peace-loving man, and, after all, Penelope and his friend were engaged.

"Perhaps Miss Morse--" he began.

Penelope turned upon him.

"I should like you all to understand," she declared, "that every word I said came from my heart, and that I would say it again, and more, with the same provocation."

There was a finality about Penelope's words which left no room for further discussion. The little group was broken up. She and Lady Grace went to their rooms together.

"Penelope, you're a dear!" the latter said, as they mounted the stairs. "I am afraid you've made Charlie very angry, though."

"I hope I have," Penelope answered. "I meant to make him angry. I think that such self-sufficiency is absolutely stifling. It makes me sometimes almost loathe the young Englishmen of his class."

"And you don't dislike the Prince so much nowadays?" Lady Grace remarked with transparent indifference.

"No!" Penelope answered. "That is finished. I misunderstood him at first. It was entirely my own fault. I was prejudiced, and I hated to feel that I was in the wrong. I do not see how any one could dislike him unless they were enemies of his country. Then I fancy that they might have cause."

Lady Grace sighed.

"To tell you the truth, Penelope," she said, "I almost wish that he were not quite so devotedly attached to his country."

Penelope was silent. They had reached Lady Grace's room now, and were standing together on the hearthrug in front of the fire.

"I am afraid he is like that," Penelope said gently. "He seems to have none of the ordinary weaknesses of men. I, too, wish sometimes that he were a little different. One would like to think of him, for his own sake, as being happy some day. He reminds me somehow of the men who build and build, toiling always through youth unto old age. There seems no limit to their strength, nor any respite. They build a palace which those who come after them must inhabit."

Once more Lady Grace sighed. She was looking into the heart of the fire. Penelope took her hands.

"It is hard sometimes, dear," she said, "to realize that a thing is impossible, that it is absolutely out of our reach. Yet it is better to bring one's mind to it than to suffer all the days."

Lady Grace looked up. At that moment she was more than pretty. Her eyes were soft and bright, the color had flooded her cheeks.

"But I don't see WHY it should be impossible, Penelope," she protested. "We are equals in every way. Alliances between our two countries are greatly to be desired. I have heard my father say so, and Mr. Haviland. The trouble is, Pen," she added with trembling lips, "that he does not care for me."

"You cannot tell," Penelope answered. "He has never shown any signs of caring for any woman. Remember, though, that he would want you to live in Japan."

"I'd live in Thibet if he asked me to," Lady Grace declared, raising her handkerchief to her eyes, "but he never will. He doesn't care. He doesn't understand. I am very foolish, Penelope."

Penelope kissed her gently.

"Dear," she said, "you are not the only foolish woman in the world." . . .

Conversation amongst the younger members of the house-party at Devenham Castle was a little disjointed that evening. Perhaps Penelope, who came down in a wonderful black velvet gown, with a bunch of scarlet roses in her corsage, was the only one who seemed successfully to ignore the passage of arms which had taken place so short a while ago. She talked pleasantly to Somerfield, who tried to be dignified and succeeded only in remaining sulky. Chance had placed her at some distance from the Prince, to whom Lady Grace was talking with a subdued softness in her manner which puzzled Captain Wilmot, her neighbor on the other side.

"I saw you with all the evening papers as usual, Bransome," the Prime Minister remarked during the service of dinner. "Was there any news?"

"Nothing much," the Foreign Secretary replied. "Consuls are down another point and the Daily Comet says that you are like a drowning man clinging to the raft of your majority. Excellent cartoon of you, by the bye. You shall see it after dinner."

"Thank you," the Prime Minister said. "Was there anything about you in the same paper by any chance?"

"Nothing particularly abusive," Sir Edward answered blandly. "By the bye, the police declare that they have a definite clue this time, and are going to arrest the murderer of Hamilton Fynes and poor dicky Vanderpole tonight or tomorrow."

"Excellent!" the Duke declared. "It would have been a perfect disgrace to our police system to have left two such crimes undetected. Our respected friend at the Home Office will have a little peace now."

"How about me?" Bransome grumbled. "Haven't I been worried to death, too?"

The Prince, who had just finished describing to Lady Grace a typical landscape of his country, turned toward Bransome.

"I think that I heard you say something about a discovery in connection with those wonderful murder cases," he said. "Has any one actually been arrested?"

"My paper was an early edition," Bransome answered, "but it spoke of a sensational denouement within the next few hours. I should imagine that it is all over by now. At the same time it's absurd how the Press give these things away. It seems that some fellow who was bicycling saw a man get in and out of poor Dicky's taxi and is quite prepared to swear to him."

"Has he not been rather a long time in coming forward with his evidence?" the Prince remarked. "I do not remember to have seen any mention of such a person in the papers before."

"He watched so well," Bransome answered, "and was so startled that he was knocked down and run over. The detective in charge of the case found him in a hospital."

"These things always come out sooner or later," the Prime Minister remarked. "As a matter of fact, I am inclined to think that our police wait too long before they make an arrest. They play with their victim so deliberately that sometimes he slips through their fingers. Very often, too, they let a man go who would give himself away from sheer fright if he felt the touch of a policeman upon his shoulder."

"As a nation," Bransome remarked, helping himself to the entree, "we handle life amongst ourselves with perpetual kid gloves. We are always afraid of molesting the liberty of the subject. A trifle more brutality sometimes would make for strength. We are like a dentist whose work suffers because he is afraid of hurting his patient."

Somerfield was watching his fiancée curiously.

"Are you really very pale tonight, Penelope," he asked, "or is it those red flowers which have drawn all the color from your cheeks?"

"I believe that I am pale," Penelope answered. "I am always pale when I wear black and when people have disagreed with me. As a matter of fact, I am trying to make the Prince feel homesick. Tell me," she asked him across the round table, "don't you think that I remind you a little tonight of the women of your country?"

The Prince returned her gaze as though, indeed, something were passing between them of greater significance than that half-bantering question.

"Indeed," he said, "I think that you do. You remind me of my country itself--of the things that wait for me across the ocean."

The Prince's servant had entered the dining room and whispered in the ear of the butler who was superintending the service of dinner. The latter came over at once to the Prince.

"Your Highness," he said, "some one is on the telephone, speaking from London. They ask if you could spare half a minute."

The Prince rose with an interrogative glance at his hostess, and the Duchess smilingly motioned him to go. Even after he had left the room, when he was altogether unobserved, his composed demeanor showed no signs of any change. He took up the receiver almost blithely. It was Soto, his secretary, who spoke to him.

"Highness," he said, "the man Jacks with a policeman is here in the hall at the present moment. He asks permission to search this house."

"For what purpose?" the Prince asked.

"To discover some person whom he believes to be in hiding here," the secretary answered. "He explains that in any ordinary case he would have applied for what they call a search warrant. Owing to your Highness' position, however, he has attended here, hoping for your gracious consent without having made any formal application.

"I must think!" the Prince answered. "Tell me, Soto. You are sure that the English doctor has had no opportunity of communicating with any one?"

"He has had no opportunity," was the firm reply. "If your Highness says the word, he shall pass."

"Let him alone," the Prince answered. "Refuse this man Jacks permission to search my house during my absence. Tell him that I shall be there at three o'clock tomorrow afternoon and that at that hour he is welcome to return."

"It shall be done, Highness," was the answer.

The Prince set down the receiver upon the instrument and stood for a moment deep in thought. It was a strange country, this,--a strange end which it seemed that he must prepare to face. He felt like the man who had gone out to shoot lions and returning with great spoil had died of the bite of a poisonous ant!