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Chapter 33 - Unafraid

The Prince, still fully attired, save that in place of his dress coat he wore a loose smoking jacket, stood at the windows of his sitting room at Devenham Castle, looking across the park. In the somewhat fitful moonlight the trees had taken to themselves grotesque shapes. Away in the distance the glimmer of the sea shone like a thin belt of quicksilver. The stable clock had struck two. The whole place seemed at rest. Only one light was gleaming from a long low building which had been added to the coach houses of recent years for a motor garage. That one light, the Prince knew, was on his account. There his chauffeur waited, untiring and sleepless, with his car always ready for that last rush to the coast, the advisability of which the Prince had considered more than once during the last twenty-four hours. The excitement of the evening, the excitement of his unwonted outburst, was still troubling him. It was not often that he had so far overstepped the bounds which his natural caution, his ever-present self-restraint, imposed upon him. He paced restlessly to and fro from the sitting room to the bedroom and back again. He had told the truth,--the bare, simple truth. He had seen the letters of fire in the sky, and he had read them to these people because of their kindness, because of a certain affection which he bore them. To them it must have sounded like a man speaking in a strange tongue. They had not understood. Perhaps, even, they would not believe in the absolute sincerity of his motives. Again he paused at the window and looked over the park to that narrow, glittering stretch of sea. Why should he not for once forget the traditions of his race, the pride which kept him there to face the end! There was still time. The cruiser which the emperor had sent was waiting for him in Southampton Harbor. In twenty-four hours he would be in foreign waters. He thought of these things earnestly, even wistfully, and yet he knew that he could not go. Perhaps they would be glad of an opportunity of getting rid of him now that he had spoken his mind. In any case, right was on their side. The end, if it must come, was simple enough!

He turned away from the window with a little shrug of the shoulders. Even as he did so, there came a faint knocking at the door. His servant had already retired. For a moment it seemed to him that it could mean but one thing. While he hesitated, the handle was softly turned and the door opened. To his amazement, it was Penelope who stood upon the threshold.

"Miss Morse!" he exclaimed breathlessly.

She held out her hand as though to bid him remain silent. For several seconds she seemed to be listening. Then very softly she closed the door behind her.

"Miss Penelope," he cried softly, "you must not come in here! Please!"

She ignored his outstretched hand, advancing a little further into the room. There was tragedy in her white face. She seemed to be shaking in every limb, but not with nervousness. Directly he looked into her eyes, he knew very well that the thing was close at hand!

"Listen!" she whispered. "I had to come! You don't know what is going on! For the last half hour the telephone has been ringing continuously. It is about you! The Home Office has been ringing up to speak to the Prime Minister. The Chief Inspector of Scotland Yard has been to see them. One of their detectives has collected evidence which justifies them in issuing a warrant for your arrest."

"For my arrest," the Prince repeated.

"Don't you understand?" she continued breathlessly. "Don't you see how horrible it is? They mean to arrest you for the murder of Hamilton Fynes and Dicky Vanderpole!"

"If this must be so," the Prince answered, "why do they not come? I am here."

"But you must not stay here!" she exclaimed. "You must escape! It is too terrible to think that you should--oh, I can't say it!--that you should have to face these charges. If you are guilty, well, Heaven help you!--If you are guilty, I want you to escape all the same!"

He looked at her with the puzzled air of one who tries to reason with a child.

"Dear Miss Penelope," he said, "This is kind of you, but, after all, remember that I am a man, and I must not run away."

"But you cannot meet these charges!" she interrupted. "You cannot meet them! You know it! Oh, don't think I can't appreciate your point of view! If you killed those men, you killed them to obtain papers which you believed were necessary for the welfare of your country. Oh, it is not I who judge you! You did not do it, I know, for your own gain. You did it because you are, heart and soul, a patriot. But here, alas! they do not understand. Their whole standpoint is different. They will judge you as they would a common criminal. You must fly,--you must, indeed!"

"Dear Miss Penelope," he said, "I cannot do that! I cannot run away like a thief in the dark. If this thing is to come, it must come."

"But you don't understand!" she continued, wringing her hands. "You think because you are a great prince and a prince of a friendly nation that the law will treat you differently. It will not! They have talked of it downstairs. You are not formally attached to any one in this country. You are not even upon the staff of the Embassy. You are here on a private mission as a private person, and there is no way in which the Government can intervene, even if it would. You are subject to its laws and you have broken them. For Heaven's sake, fly! You have your motor car here. Let your man drive you to Southampton and get on board the Japanese cruiser. You mustn't wait a single moment. I believe that tomorrow morning will be too late!"

He took her hands in his very tenderly and yet with something of reverence in his gesture. He looked into her eyes and he spoke very earnestly. Every word seemed to come from his heart.

"Dear Miss Penelope," he said, "it is very, very kind of you to have come here and warned me. Only you cannot quite understand what this thing means to me. Remember what I told you once. Life and death to your people in this country seem to be the greatest things which the mind of man can hold. It is not so with us. We are brought up differently. In a worthy cause a true Japanese is ready to take death by the hand at any moment. So it is with me now. I have no regret. Even if I had, even if life were a garden of roses for me, what is ordained must come. A little sooner or a little later, it makes no matter.

She sank on her knees before him.

"Can't you understand why I am here?" she cried passionately. "It was I who told of the silken cord and knife!"

He was wholly unmoved. He even smiled, as though the thing were of no moment.

"It was right that you should do so," he declared. "You must not reproach yourself with that."

"But I do! I do!" she cried again. "I always shall! Don't you understand that if you stay here they will treat you--"

He interrupted, laying his hand gently upon her shoulder.

"Dear young lady," he said, "you need never fear that I shall wait for the touch of your men of law. Death is too easily won for that. If the end which you have spoken of comes, there is another way--another house of rest which I can reach."

She rose slowly to her feet. The absolute serenity of his manner bespoke an impregnability of purpose before which the words died away on her lips. She realized that she might as well plead with the dead!

"You do not mind," he whispered, "if I tell you that you must not stay here any longer?"

He led her toward the door. Upon the threshold he took her cold fingers into his hand and kissed them reverently.

"Do not be too despondent," he said. "I have a star somewhere which burns for me. Tonight I have been looking for it. It is there still," he added, pointing to the wide open window. "It is there, undimmed, clearer and brighter than ever. I have no fear."

She passed away without looking up again. The Prince listened to her footsteps dying away in the corridor. Then he closed the door, and, entering his bedroom, undressed himself and slept . . .

When Prince Maiyo awoke on the following morning, the sunshine was streaming into the room, and his grave-faced valet was standing over his bed.

"His Highness' bath is ready," he announced.

The Prince dressed quickly and was first in the pleasant morning room, with its open windows leading on to the terrace. He strolled outside and wandered amongst the flower beds. Here he was found, soon afterwards, by the Duke's valet.

"Your Highness," the latter said, "His Grace has sent me to look for you. He would be glad if you could spare him a moment or two in the library."

The Prince followed the man to the room where his host was waiting for him. The Duke, with his hands behind his back, was pacing restlessly up and down the apartment.

"Good morning, Duke," the Prince said cheerfully. "Another of your wonderful spring mornings. Upon the terrace the sun is almost hot. Soon I shall begin to fancy that the perfume of your spring flowers is the perfume of almond and cherry blossom."

"Prince," the Duke said quietly, "I have sent for you as your host. I speak to you now unofficially, as an Englishman to his guest. I have been besieged through the night, and even this morning, with incomprehensible messages which come to me from those who administer the law in this country. Prince, I want you to remember that however effete you may find us as a nation from your somewhat romantic point of view, we have at least realized the highest ideals any nation has ever conceived in the administration of the law. Nobleman and pauper here are judged alike. If their crime is the same, their punishment is the same. There is no man in this country who is strong enough to arrest the hand of justice."

The Prince bowed.

"My dear Duke," he said, "it has given me very much pleasure, in the course of my investigations, to realize the truth of what you have just said. I agree with you entirely. You could teach us in Japan a great lesson on the fearless administration of the law. Now in some other countries--"

"Never mind those other countries," the Duke interrupted gravely. "I did not send for you to enter into an academic discussion. I want you clearly to understand how I am placed, supposing a distinguished member of my household--supposing even you, Prince Maiyo--were to come within the arm of the law. Even the great claims of hospitality would leave me powerless."

"This," the Prince admitted, "I fully apprehend. It is surely reasonable that the stranger in your country should be subject to your laws."

"Very well, then," the Duke continued. "Listen to me, Prince. This morning a London magistrate will grant what is called a search warrant which will enable the police to search, from attic to cellar, your house in St. James' Square. An Inspector from Scotland Yard will be there this afternoon awaiting your return, and he believes that he has witnesses who will be able to identify you as one who has broken the laws of this country. I ask you no questions. There is the telephone on the table. My eighty-horse-power Daimler is at the door and at your service. I understand that your cruiser in Southampton Harbor is always under steam. If there is anything more, in reason, that I can do, you have only to speak." The Prince shook his head slowly.

"Duke," he said, "please send away your car, unless it will take me to London quicker than my own. What I have done I have done, and for what I have done I will pay."

The Duke laid his hands upon the young man's shoulders and looked down into his face. The Duke was over six feet high, and broad in proportion. Before him the Prince seemed almost like a boy.

"Maiyo," he said, "we have grown fond of you,--my wife, my daughter, all of us. We don't want harm to come to you, but there is the American Ambassador watching all the time. Already he more than half suspects. For our sakes, Prince,--come, I will say for the sake of those who are grateful to you for your candor and truthfulness, for the lessons you have tried to teach us,--make use of my car. You will reach Southampton in half an hour."

The Prince shook his head. His lips had parted in what was certainly a smile. At the corners they quivered, a little tremulous.

"My dear friend," he said, and his voice had softened almost to affection, "you do not quite understand. You look upon the things which may come from your point of view and not from mine. Remember that, to your philosophy, life itself is the greatest thing born into the world. To us it is the least. If you would do me a service, please see

that I am able to start for London in half an hour."