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RIGHTED AT LAST

BY MARY CECIL HAY

Author of "The Arundel Motto," "Nora's Love Test," "Back to the Old Home," Etc.

The private office of Mr. Haughton's was a large front room overlooking the vestibule of the Royal Hotel opposite, and no one glancing round it could fail to be impressed by the apparently limitless extent of the business entrusted to Lawrence Haughton, solicitor. How many secrets he must have held in his grasp, touching the well-known names so prominently displayed! How much he must have known of those families which Kinbury—with a wide appreciation of ancestry—called its "good families"! And, beyond that, how evident it was that he had in his keeping money as well as secrets. Yet the clients, locking ever so closely, could detect no sign of lavish or needless expenditure; and, shrugging their shoulders, would pronounce Lawrence Haughton a true Myddelton at heart, possessing inherently the old man's talent of amassing wealth—this being by no means an unpleasant reflection for those whose fortunes were in his hands.

Lawrence Haughton had pushed his round-backed chair from the writing-table, and, leaning back, with his elbows on his arms, he began to fold and unfold an empty envelope, an unmistakable sign that his conversation with his chief clerk was over. Mr. Slimp had made a movement to retire—a quite unusual proceeding with him, unless his master had shown this sign of having done with him.

"No evidence, you are quite sure, of such a name having ever been upon the records?" repeated Mr. Haughton, some suppressed excitement stirring his harsh tones.

"No proof at all, sir. A young Royden Sidney was called to the bar in 1859, but left the profession within a year."

"That's no evidence," retorted Mr. Haughton, curtly; "I found that out a week ago."

"That's the only mention of such a Christian name," continued Mr. Slimp, in his peculiar tones of mingled deference and assurance. "As for the surname, there have been several Keiths, but not one since 1859."

"Then, this journey," put in Mr. Haughton, impatiently, "has given you no further clue? You tell me now exactly what you told me on Tuesday night, when you returned from London."

"That is all I have been able to discover, sir."

Lawrence was silent for a minute, absently folding and refolding the paper in his hands, and seeing nothing of his clerk's wily glance into his brooding face. Suddenly recollecting himself, as it seemed, he wheeled his chair before his writing-table again, and nodding toward the door, took up his pen.

Mr. Slimp walked softly across the carpeted floor, and closed the door behind him, without a sound. He should be summoned back again, he knew, when any further plans were to be mooted.

Half an hour after this, Mr. Haughton opened the door of the chief clerk's office.

"I shall be out for ten minutes," he said; "no more."

He did not glance in at the lower office as he passed, but the two clerks heard his step, and looked out to see which way he went; more for the diversion of a gaze into the street than for any lively interest they felt in the lawyer's proceedings.

"Into the Royal Hotel! What's up?" "Bitter beer."

But it was no order for bitter beer which Mr. Haughton gave as he walked into the vestibule of the Royal Hotel. "Is Mr. Keith within?" he asked of the waiter.

Now, hotel waiters are, as a rule, quick and observant; and the man to whom the lawyer addressed this ques-

tion was no exception. While he answered, "I believe he is, sir, but I will fetch his servant," he was cogitating to himself in a very different strain. "Lawyer Haughton hasn't put on that friendly air for nothing. He's never been over to see Mr. Keith before, and these aren't his usual grim tones."

He cast one more keen glance into Mr. Haughton's face when he returned with Pierce, and then he went on into the bar with an unmoved countenance.

Royden Keith rose and put down his book when Mr. Haughton, uninvited, followed the card Pierce brought in. Royden offered his hand in his easy, courteous way; but though he showed no evidence of it, he felt a great surprise at his visit.

Mr. Haughton declined to take a chair. "I am expected at my office in a few minutes' time," he said, by way of excuse.

Then he paused. If, when he resolved upon his visit, he had for one moment fancied it would be easy to sound Royden Keith on the one subject which at present baffled him, his first glance this morning into the young man's face convinced him of his error. Even if possible, the task would be far from easy.

"Our visit to Abbotsmoor yesterday," began Lawrence, thinking it wisest to make a plunge at once, "very naturally put Gabriel Myddelton into my thoughts. This morning I find them returning to him, and so I have been looking over what papers I possess relating to his crime."

"A humiliating task, I fear." "A very humiliating task," assented Lawrence, taking up, with inexplicable heat, those few cool words of Royden's; "but I am not here with the intention of blaming him. He is as far beyond my blame as his crime is beyond my punishment."

"Is his crime beyond your punishment?" inquired Royden, with composure. "If you find him, surely you can hang him, even now."

A flame of scarlet rose to the lawyer's brow, the very veins of his face were swollen, when Royden, from his greater height, glanced calmly down upon him, reading his suspicion, but failing to read how this suppressed anger was caused by the consciousness of his feelings for Gabriel lying bare before the clear quizzical eyes of this young man, whom he could not read at all.

"A thought struck me last night,"—Lawrence had, by a strong effort, shaken off his impotent wrath, and was continuing the conversation with as much ease as he could assume—"that Gabriel Myddelton might be in straitened circumstances, and, if any one could tell us where he was, we might be able to help him."

"Yes?" questioned Royden, in the pause, his long, dark eyes fixed coolly and steadily upon the lawyer's face.

"I thought, as you have travelled much, even, as I hear, in America, you might, through your friends there, possibly make inquiries for us."

"I have one or two friends in America," returned Royden, in his leisurely tones; "what do you wish me to ask them?"

"I thought, as I said, that you might possibly make inquiries among them concerning Gabriel Myddelton."

"You mean, if they can be trusted in such a case?"

"Of course, of course," exclaimed Lawrence, hastily, wondering why he could not frame his words here, and on the subject, just as he could on matters of law in his own office; "I mean, if you know any one who can be trusted."

"If I do," said Royden, slowly, "what then?"

"If, through them, we could send out help to Gabriel—always providing that his identity were assured—we should be willing to do so."

With these words, the lawyer raised his eyes boldly. The younger man could hardly answer quite easily here, if his visitor's one-haunting and damning suspicion were well founded.

"Have you, then, reason to believe that he went to America?"

"I have reason to believe that he lauded in Quebec; but I did not hear this until it was years too late to be of service."

"Too late to capture him?"

Again the hot flame of anger burned in Lawrence Haughton's face. "I'm I not trying," he said, "to help this most degraded connection of my own?"

But for the eager intense desire he felt to assure himself of the correctness of this suspicion of his, Lawrence would have uttered no further words on this subject. As it was, though, he would bear any words his companion might choose to say, rather than resign the chance of some day proving him a convicted and escaped criminal.

"I never spent a day in Quebec in my life," said Royden, steadily studying the lawyer's hard, embarrassed face, "so I have, unfortunately, no friends there to whom I can appeal on behalf of your generous plan. I have one

friend, a miner, in Peru. Shall I apply to him for possible tidings of your cousin?"

"Mr. Keith," said the lawyer, in only half-concealed anger, "it appears to me that you willfully misunderstand what I wish to say. Such conduct would make a suspicious man fancy it more than possible that you yourself are cognizant of Gabriel Myddelton's hiding-place."

The one cool glance which Royden gave the face below him read the whole depth and width of this man's vile suspicion; but then the lesson had been slowly learned before that glance.

"You evidently understand the nature of a suspicious man," he said, with a smile.

"Will you tell me," inquired Lawrence, with a desperate last appeal, "if you think you can be of any service to me in this?"

"No, sir," rejoined Royden, gravely. "With all due deference to you, and to the law you uphold, I would not, if I could, be an agent—however remote—in leading a free man into captivity."

"You do not know, then, anything of Gabriel Myddelton?"

"I properly understand you—do I, Mr. Keith? You have no knowledge of the hiding-place of Gabriel Myddelton? Let me assure you that your information will be received in the strictest confidence."

Royden's steadfast eyes seemed to Mr. Haughton to take in his whole mind and person in their slow, haughty glance.

(To be continued.)

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