





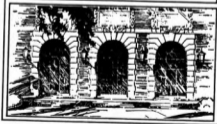


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UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

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VOL. III.





# UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

A Story.

BY

T. W. SPEIGHT,

AUTHOR OF "BROUGHT TO LIGHT," "FOOLISH MARGARET,"  
ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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OF  
THE THIRD VOLUME.

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# UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE THIRD REPORT CONTINUED.

“ FIVE minutes later, Captain Ducie and your hopeful son slunk out of Bon Repos like the thieves we were, and treading the gravelled pathway as carefully as two Indians on the war-trail might have done, we came presently to the margin of the starlit lake. There was no lack of boats at Bon Repos, and soon I was pulling over the quiet mere in the direction of Bowness. We managed to find the little pier without much difficulty. There we disembarked, and then chained up the boat and left it. By this time the first faint streaks of day were brightening in the east. There would be no train from

2 THE THIRD REPORT CONTINUED.

Bowness for three or four hours. Captain Ducie's impatience could not brook such a delay. At his request I roused the people at one of the hotels. Even then we had to stand kicking our heels for half an hour before a conveyance and pair of horses could be got ready for us. But when we were once fairly under way, no grass was suffered to grow under our horses' feet. The captain's object was to catch one of the fast up trains at Oxenholme Junction, some fourteen miles away. This we succeeded in doing, with a quarter of an hour to spare. A portion of that quarter of an hour was occupied by me in sending a certain telegram to my respected *pater*. The day was still young when Captain Ducie and I alighted at Euston-square.

"I did not know whether it was the captain's intention to give me my congé as soon as we should reach town, but I certainly knew that it was not my intention to part from him quite so readily. He had insisted on my travelling up in the same carriage with himself, and I had had the free run of his cognac and cigars. During

the early part of the journey he had been silent and thoughtful, but by no means morose. As the morning advanced, however, his shoulder had begun to pain him greatly, and by the time we reached London I could see, although he uttered no complaint, that the agony was almost more than he could bear. Consequently, I was not surprised as I helped him to alight from the railway carriage, to hear him say:—

“ ‘Jasmin, my good fellow, I find that it will not do for me to part from you just yet. This confounded shoulder of mine seems as if it were going to make a nuisance of itself. You must order a cab and go with me. I will make your excuses to M. Platzoff.’

“ ‘Right you are, sir,’ said I. ‘Where shall I tell cabby to drive to?’

“ ‘To the Salisbury Hotel, Fleet-street.’

“ Captain Ducie was such an undoubted West-end swell that I was rather surprised to find him going east of Temple Bar. But my place was to obey, and not to question his behests.

“ ‘Get into the cab: I want to talk to you,’

said he. 'On one or two points it will be requisite that I should take you into my confidence,' he began, as soon as we were out of the station. 'And I have less hesitation in doing this because, from what I have seen of you, I believe you to be a perfectly trustworthy and straightforward fellow.'

" 'It is very kind of you to say so, sir,' I answered respectfully.

" 'Now, for certain reasons which I need not detail, I do not want my presence in London to be known to any one. I am going to an hotel where I have never been before, and where I am entirely unknown. While stopping at this hotel I shall pass under the name of Mr. Stonor, a country gentleman—let us say—of limited means, who is up in town for the furtherance of some business of a legal character. Can you remember Mr. Stonor from the country?'

" 'I shall not forget it, sir—you may trust me for that.'

" 'Yes, if I had not felt that I could trust you, I should not have brought you so far,



nor have taken you so deeply into my confidence.'

"Father! for the first time these dozen years your son blushed.

"On reaching the hotel Mr. Stonor seemed to care little or nothing about the size or comfort of the rooms that were shown him. He was particular on one point only. That point was the fastening of his bedroom door.

"After rejecting three or four rooms in succession he chose one that had a stouter lock than ordinary, and that could be reached only through another room. In this other room it was arranged that I should sleep, so that no one could obtain access to Mr. Stonor without first disturbing me.

"Is not this another proof that I acted judiciously in leaving Bon Repos, and that Captain Ducie, above all men in the world, is the man I ought to stick to?

"We had no sooner settled about the rooms than Captain Ducie was obliged to go to bed. He

6 THE THIRD REPORT CONTINUED.

would not allow me to help him off with any other article of dress than his outer coat. Then he sent me for a doctor, and when the doctor and I got back he was in bed. The doctor pronounced the wound in his shoulder to be not a dangerous one, but one that would necessitate much care and attention. The captain was condemned to stay in bed for at least a week to come.

“There is no occasion to weary you with too many details. A week—ten days, passed away and I still remained in attendance on Captain Ducie. For the first four or five days he did not progress much towards recovery. He was too fidgety, too anxious in his mind, to get well. I knew the form which his anxiety had taken when I saw how impatient he was each morning till he had got the newspaper in his fingers, and could be left alone to wade through it. At the end of an hour or so he would ring his bell, and would tell me with a weary look, to take ‘that cursed newspaper’ away.

“I was just as impatient for the newspaper as he was, and did not fail to submit its

contents each morning to a most painstaking search.

“ After the sixth day there was a decided improvement in the condition of Captain Ducie, and from that date he progressed rapidly towards recovery. It was on the sixth day that my search through the newspaper was rewarded by finding a paragraph that interested me almost as much as it must have interested Captain Ducie. The paragraph in question was in the shape of an extract from *The Westmoreland Gazette*, and ran as under :—

“ *The Dangers of Opium-smoking.*—We have to record the sudden death of M. Paul Platzoff, a Russian gentleman of fortune, who has resided for several years on the banks of Windermere. M. Platzoff was found dead in bed on the morning of Wednesday last. From the evidence given at the inquest it would appear that the unfortunate gentleman had been accustomed for years to a frequent indulgence in the pernicious habit of opium-smoking, and the medical testi-

mony went to prove that he must have died while in one of those trances which make up the opium-smoker's elysium. At the same time, it is but just to observe that had not the post-mortem examination revealed the fact of there having been heart-disease of long standing, the mere fact of the deceased gentleman having been addicted to opium-smoking would not of itself have been sufficient to account for his sudden death.'

"There are one or two facts to be noted in connexion with the foregoing account. In the first place, it is there stated that M. Platzoff was found dead in bed. When I saw him soon after midnight, he lay dead on the divan in the smoke-room. But it is possible, that the use of the word 'bed' in the newspaper account may be a mere verbal inaccuracy. In the second place, there is not a word said respecting Cleon. Now, had the valet disappeared precisely at the time of M. Platzoff's mysterious death, suspicion of some sort would have been sure to attach to

him, and an inquiry would have been set on foot respecting his whereabouts. Such being the case, the natural conclusions to be derived from the facts as known to us would seem to be : First, that Cleon was not out of the way when the body was found, and that the statements made at the inquest as to the habits of the deceased were made by him, and by him alone. Secondly, if any fracas took place between Cleon and Captain Ducie on that fatal night, as there is every reason to suspect, the mulatto has not seen fit to make any public mention of it. Captain Ducie's name, in fact, does not seem to have been once mentioned in connexion with the affair, and if Cleon either knows or suspects that the captain has the Great Diamond in his possession, he has doubtless had good reasons of his own for keeping the knowledge to himself. That some curious underhand game has been played between him and the captain there cannot, I think, be any reasonable doubt.

“ As soon as I had read the paragraph above quoted, I took the newspaper up to Captain

Ducie, and pointed out the lines to him as if I had accidentally come across them. I wanted to hear what he would have to say about the death of Platzoff.

“‘Some strange news here, sir, about M. Platzoff,’ I said. ‘Here is an account of——.’

“He interrupted me with a wave of his hand. ‘I have seen it, Jasmin, I have seen it, and terribly shocked I was to have such news of my friend. So strangely sudden, too! I always suspected that he would do himself an injury with that beastly drug which he would persist in smoking, but I never dreamed of anything so terrible as this. I suppose it will be requisite for you to go down to Bon Repos for a time, Jasmin. There will be your wages, and your luggage and things to look after. What articles of mine were left behind I make you a present of. I hope to be sufficiently recovered in the course of three or four days to be able to spare you, and I will of course pay your fare back to Westmoreland, and remunerate you for the time you have been in my service. For myself, I

intend spending the next few months somewhere on the Continent.'

"I replied that I was in no hurry to go down to Bon Repos; that, indeed, there was no particular necessity for me to go at all; that the amount due to me for wages was very trifling, and that my clothes and other things would no doubt be forwarded by Cleon to any address I might choose to send him.

"But the captain would not hear of this. I must go down to Bon Repos and look after my interests on the spot, he said; and he would arrange to spare me in a few days. His motive for taking such a special interest in my affairs was not difficult to discover. He wanted thoroughly to break the link between himself and me. By sending me down to Bon Repos he would secure two or three clear days in which to complete whatever arrangements he might think necessary, and would, besides, insure himself from being watched or spied upon by me. Not that he doubted my fidelity in the least, but it seemed to me that of late he had grown suspicious of

everybody ; and, in any case, he was desirous of severing even the faintest tie that connected him in any way with M. Platzoff and Bon Repos. Such, at least, was the conclusion at which I arrived in my own mind. But it may have been an erroneous one.

“ Although Captain Ducie was desirous of getting rid of me, I did not mean to lose sight of him quite so readily. Each day that passed over my head confirmed me more fully in my belief that he had the Great Mogul Diamond concealed somewhere about his person. I had no one strong positive bit of evidence on which to base such a belief. It was rather by the aggregation of a hundred minute points all tending one way that I was enabled to build up my suspicions into a certainty.

“ If he had made himself master of the Diamond, he had done so illegally. He had stolen the gem, and I should have felt no more compunction in dispossessing him of it than I should have felt in picking a sovereign out of the gutter. But the prospect of making the gem my own



seemed even more remote now, if that were possible, than when I was at Bon Repos. Nothing went farther towards confirming my belief that the captain had the Diamond by him than the fact of his taking so many and such unusual precautions to insure himself against a surprise from any one either by day or night. As already stated, I slept in the room that opened immediately out of his, so that no one could reach him except by passing through my room. Then, he always slept with the door of his bedroom double locked, and with his face turned to the window, the blind pertaining to which was drawn to the top, leaving the view clear and unobstructed. In addition, Captain Ducie always kept a loaded revolver under his pillow, and I had heard too much of his skill with that weapon to doubt that he would make an efficient use of it should such a need ever arise. What chance, then, did there seem for ce pauvre Jacques ever being able to coax the Diamond out of the hands of this man, who had no more right to it than had the Grand Turk? Still, I put a good face

on the matter, and would not allow myself to despair.

“After the sixth day Captain Ducie improved rapidly. On the tenth day he said to me: ‘This is the last day that I shall require your services. You had better arrange to start by the nine forty-five train to-morrow morning for Windermere.’

“The captain was not the sort of man to whom one could say that one did not want to go to Windermere, that one had no intention of going there. The slightest opposition from an inferior in position only confirmed him the more obstinately in his own views. All, therefore, that I said was: ‘I am entirely at your service, sir, to go or stay as may suit you best.’ All the same, I had no intention of going.

“What I intended was to bid farewell to Captain Ducie, take a cab to the station, go quietly in at one gate and out at another. But the captain spoiled this little plan next morning by announcing his intention of going with me to the station. He was evidently anxious to see with his own

eyes that I really left London, and this of course only made me the more determined not to go. I had only a few minutes in which to make my arrangements. It was necessary that I should take some one at least partially into my confidence, and I could think of no one who would suit my purpose better than Dickson, the one-eyed night-porter at the hotel. He was fast asleep in bed at that hour of the morning, but I went up to his room and roused him. He was a quick-witted fellow enough where anything crooked was concerned, while in the simple straightforward matters of daily life he was often unaccountably stupid. His one eye gleamed brightly when I put half a sovereign into his hand, and told him what I wanted him to do for me. I left him fully satisfied that he would do it.

“A cab was ordered, my modest portmanteau was tossed on to the roof, Captain Ducie was shut up inside, and with myself on the box beside the driver, away we rattled to Euston-square. The captain went himself and took a ticket for me to

Windermere. He had already given me a handsome *douceur* in return for my services from the date of our leaving Bon Repos. He now saw me safely into the carriage, gave me my ticket, and nodded a kindly farewell. He did not move from his post on the platform till he saw the train fairly under way. So parted Captain Ducie and your unworthy son.

“At Wolverton, which was the first station at which the train stopped, I got out and gave up my ticket, with a pretence to the railway people that I had unfortunately left some important papers in town and that I must go back by the first train. Back I went accordingly, and reached Euston station in less than five hours after I had left it.

“My first object was to thoroughly disguise myself: no very difficult task to a person of my profession. My first visit was to the *peruquier* of the Royal Tabard. Here I was dispossessed of the charming little imperial which I had been cultivating for the last month or two, and from which I did not part without a pang of regret.

Next, I had my hair cut very close, and was fitted with a jet-black wig that could be termed nothing less than a triumph of mind over matter. When my eyebrows had been dyed to match, and when I had purchased and put on a pair of cheap spectacles, and had arrayed myself in a suit of ultra-respectable black, I felt that I could defy the keen eyes of Captain Ducie with impunity. Having exchanged my portmanteau for one of a different size and colour, I took a cab, and drove boldly to the Salisbury Hotel. It was satisfactory to find that Dickson passed me without recognising me, and I shall never forget the puzzled look that came into the fellow's face when I took him on one side and asked him for news of the captain.

“The captain had ordered his bill, Dickson told me when he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise, and had himself packed his own luggage, but without addressing it. A cab was to be in readiness for him at half-past eight that evening. I ordered a second cab to be in waiting for me at the corner of the street at the same

hour. Meanwhile I kept carefully out of the captain's way.

"At 8.35 p.m. my cab was following that of the captain down the Strand, and in a little while we both drew up at the Waterloo terminus. Ducie's luggage consisted of one large portmanteau only, which the cabman handed over to one of the porters.

" 'Where shall I label your luggage for, sir?' asked the man: it was too large to be taken into the carriage.

"The captain hesitated for a moment, while the man waited with his paste-can in his hand.

" 'For Jersey,' he said at last.

" 'Right you are, sir,' said the man. 'Bill, a Jersey label.'

"I went at once and secured a ticket for that charming little spot.

"I did not lose sight of the captain till I saw him fairly seated in his carriage and locked up by the guard. I travelled down in the next compartment but one.

“ I need not detain you with any account of our journey by rail, nor of our after-voyage from Southampton to St. Helier.

“ The fact of my dating this communication from a Jersey hotel is a sufficient proof of my safe arrival. We reached here yesterday afternoon, the captain never suspecting for a moment that he had James Jasmin, his ex-valet, for a fellow-passenger. We are lodged at different hotels, but the one at which I am staying is so nearly opposite that of the captain, and has so excellent a view into the private sitting-room where he has taken up his quarters, that I see almost as much of him, both indoors and out, as I did during the time I acted as his valet. His reasons for coming here are best known to himself; but be they what they may, I do not feel inclined to alter my opinion one jot that he has brought the G. M. D. to this place with him.

“ Whether, after all this time and trouble, I am any nearer the object for the attainment of which you first engaged me, remains for you to judge. In any case, send me instructions; tell me what

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I am to do or attempt next. Or do what would be infinitely better—come here in person, and talk over the affair with

“Your affectionate son,

“JAMES MADGIN.”