

FORTUNE'S FOOL

(Continued from Page Two)

or never. And thus she sent out a preliminary skirmishing party.

"Why, look at yourself," she ran on, before he could answer. "Look at the condition of you." And she pointed a denunciatory finger at the great hole in the heel of his right stocking. "You should be seeking a woman to take care of you, instead of letting your mind run on soldiering in foreign parts."

"Excellent advice," he laughed. "There is one difficulty only. Who takes a wife must keep a wife, and, if I stay in England, I shan't have enough to keep myself. So I think it'll be the Indies, after all."

She came to the table, and leaned upon it, facing him.

"You're forgetting something. There's many a woman well endowed, and there's many a man has taken a wife with a jointure who couldn't ha' taken a wife without."

"You said something of the kind before." Again he laughed. "You think I should be hunting an heiress. You think I have the figure for the part."

"I do," said she, to his astonishment. "You're a proper man, and you've a name and a position to offer. There's many a wealthy woman of modest birth would be glad of you as you should be glad of her, since each would bring what the other lacks."

"Faith! You think of everything. Carry your good offices further than mere advice, Mrs. Quinn. Find me this wealthy and accommodating lady, and I'll consider the rejection of this Indian office. But you'll need to make haste, for there's only a week left."

It was a laughing challenge.

"That's not quite so easy as advising, is it?" he rallied her.

"Oh, yes, it is," she assured him. "If you was serious I could soon produce the lady—a comely enough woman of about your own age, mistress of thirty thousand pounds and some property, besides."

"Where is she, then?"

"Mrs. Quinn moved away from the table, and round to his side of it. "She is . . . here."

"Here?" he echoed.

She drew a step or two nearer, so that she was almost beside him.

"Here in this room," she insisted, softly.

He looked up at her, still uncomprehending. Then, as he observed the shy smile with which she sought to dissemble her agitation, the truth broke upon him at last.

The clay stem of his pipe snapped between his fingers, and he dived after the pieces, glad of any pretext to remove his eyes from her face and give him a moment in which to consider how he should conduct himself in this novel and surprising situation.

When he came up again, his face was flushed, which may have been from the lowering of his head. He wanted to laugh; but he realized that this would be utterly unpardonable. He rose, and set the pieces of the broken pipe on the table. Standing thus, his shoulder to her, he spoke gently, and horribly embarrassed.

"I . . . I had no notion of . . . of your meaning . . . And there he broke down."

But his embarrassment encouraged her. Again she came close.

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"And now that you know it, Colonel?" she whispered.

"I . . . I don't know what to say."

His mind was beginning to recover its functions. He understood at last why a person of his shabby exterior, and obvious neediness, should have been given unlimited credit in this house.

"Then say nothing at all, Colonel, dear," she was purring. "Save that you'll put from you all notion of sailing to the Indies."

"But . . . but my word is pledged already. It was a straw at which he clutched desperately. And it was not a very fortunate one, for it suggested that his pledged word was the only obstacle.

The effect was to bring her closer. She was almost touching him, as he stood there, still half averted, and she actually leaned against him, and set a hand upon his shoulder as she spoke, coaxingly, persuasively.

"But it was pledged before . . . before you knew of this. His grace will understand. He'll never hold you to it. You've but to explain."

"I . . . I couldn't, I couldn't," he cried weakly.

"Then I can."

"You?" He looked at her.

She was pale, but resolute. "Yes," she answered him. "If your pledge is all that holds you, I'll take coach at once and go to White-



THE STEM OF HIS PIPE SNAPPED BETWEEN HIS FINGERS.

hall. George Monk'll see me, or if he won't his Duchess will. I knew her well in the old days, when I was a young girl, and she was a sempstress glad to earn a groat where she could. Nan Clarges'll never deny herself to an old friend. So if you by any means will, I'll soon deliver you from this pledge of yours."

His face lengthened. He looked away again.

"That is not all, Mrs. Quinn," he said, very gently. "The truth is . . . I am not of a . . . a nature to make a woman happy."

This she deemed mere coyness, and swept it briskly aside. "I'd take the risk of that."

"But . . . but you see I've lived this roving life of mine so long, that I do not think I could ever settle. Besides, ma'am, what have I to offer?"

"If I am satisfied with my bargain, why take thought for that?"

"I must. The fact is, I am touched, deeply touched. I did not think I had it in me to arouse the affection, or even the regard, of any woman. Even so, ma'am, whilst it moves me, it does not change my purpose. I am not a marrying man."

"But . . ."

He raised a hand, dominantly, to check her. He had found the correct formula at last, and he meant to keep to it.

"Useless to argue, ma'am. I know my mind. My reasons are as I have said, and so is the fact. I am touched; I am prodigiously touched, and grateful. But there it is."

His firmness turned her white with mortification. To have offered herself, and to have been refused! As she considered him now with her vivid blue eyes, her face grew

mottled. She was moved to sudden hatred of him.

She walked to the door, moving a little heavily. She opened it, and then paused under the lintel. Over her shoulder she spoke to him again.

"Seeing that things is like this, perhaps you'll make it convenient to find another lodging not later than tomorrow."

He inclined his head a little in agreement.

"Naturally . . ." he was beginning, when the door closed after her with a bang and he was left alone.

"Phew!" he breathed, as he sank limply into his chair again. He passed a hand wearily across his brow, and found it moist.

CHAPTER X Buckingham Disposes

Colonel Holles hummed softly to himself as he dressed with care to keep his momentous appointment at the Cockpit.

Early that morning he had emptied the contents of his purse upon the bed, and counted up his fortune. It amounted to thirty-five pounds and some shillings. And Albernarle had promised him that, together with his commission, he should that morning receive an order on the Treasury for thirty pounds to meet his disbursements on equipment and the rest. He must, he considered, do credit to his patron.

Therefore, immediately after an early breakfast—at which, for once he had been waited upon, not by Mrs. Quinn, but by Tim the drawer—he had sallied forth and made his way to Paternoster Row. There he purchased a fine coat of red camlet lined with gold, and small clothes, stockings and cravat in keeping. By the time he added a pair of boots of fine Spanish leather, a black silk sack, a new, gold-broidered baldric, and a black beaver with a trailing red plume, he found that fully three-quarters of his slender fortune was dissipated, and there remained in his purse not above eight pounds.

He had returned then with his bundle to the Paul's Head, and as he surveyed himself now in his mirror, freshly shaven, his long thick gold brown hair elegantly curled, and a clump of its curls caught in a ribbon on his left the long pearl earring, he smiled at the memory of the scarecrow he had been as lately as yesterday.

He created something of a sensation when he appeared below in all this finery, and since it was thinkable that he should tread the filth of the streets with his new Spanish boots, Tim was dispatched for a hackney-coach to convey the Colonel to Whitehall.

It still wanted an hour to noon, and this the Colonel considered the earliest at which he could decently present himself. But early as it was there was another who had been abroad and at the Cockpit even earlier. This was His Grace of Buckingham, who, accompanied by his friend Sir Harry Stanhope, had sought the Duke of Albernarle a full hour before Colonel Holles had been ready to leave his lodging.

He had been instantly admitted to that pleasant wainscoted room that overlooked the Park in which His Grace of Albernarle transacted business. Wide as the polished and the two dukes asunder, the exquisite libertines and the dour soldier, yet cordial relations prevailed between them. Whilst correct and circumspect in his own ways of life, Monk was utterly without bigotry and as utterly without prejudices on the score of morals. Under his dour

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made answer: "Very well. I will bear in mind your grace's application on Sir Harry's behalf, and when a suitable position offers . . ."

"But if offers now," Buckingham interjected languidly.

"Indeed?" The black brows went up, wrinkling the heavy forehead. "I am not aware of it."

"There is this command in Bombay, which has fallen vacant through the death of poor Macartney. I heard of it last night at Court. You are forgetting that, I think. It is an office eminently suitable to Sir Harry here."

(Continued in Our Next Issue)

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