

# The CASTLES

BY ARTHUR HENRY VANCEY  
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**CHAPTER XXIV—Continued.**  
"At least it was easier. I perceived when I was about to despair. I was successful in this extent: Sir Mortimer agreed to have a secret meeting with the banker at this chateau—today."  
"Today!" he stammered. "And Sir Mortimer is dead!"  
"I learned of his death when you were in the kitchen with me."  
"You need say no more. I understand why you have brought me to the chateau only too well. A just fate snatched from your lips the cup of success. But fate dashed one cup from your hand only to tempt you with another. I have seen for myself that I bear a sufficiently marked resemblance to the one whose name you know—Sir Mortimer, but slightly. Perhaps Kuhn has never actually met Sir Mortimer—"

"Never!" interrupted Madame de Varrier, her voice shrill. "You do wish me to do—what?"  
"An interview of half an hour and the destinies of a nation will be changed. Oh, I know that the more is a desperate one, but I am the best sign of success. Look, I give you power such as few men have held. Sir Mortimer lies in that room dead. But there are four people only who know Sir Mortimer and his banker. Madame de Varrier, myself, and yourself. One hour after this interview, it will be given out that he has died suddenly from heart failure. But in the meantime while the interview between yourself and the banker will have taken place—"

"Woman, you are mad," I cried scornfully. "Let us suppose for the moment that this interview has taken place between myself and the banker. Let us say that the deception has proved to be completely successful. The loan is promised to Ferdinand, but how is that promise to be made good? There are papers to be signed and attested—there are checks to be drawn and receipts to be given. Who is to sign these documents—who is to sign the receipts—who is to sign the checks?"

"Egremont, Egremont, your fanaticism has run away with your common sense. There is no pressure on earth that could make me consent to your scheme. Your banker would not be so great a fool as to be deceived. I say again, even if I consented. Did you think he would hand out a package to you containing millions as a procer passes a packet of soap across the counter to a customer?"

"That I should even discuss the matter with her at all seemed to me a hopeful sign. She seemed to draw closer to me. I regarded her disdainfully. For a clever woman, her scheme seemed to me preposterous on the face of it."  
"Do you think my dear monsieur, that the perplexities you mention have not occurred to me?" She was violently scornful in her turn. "Yes; and there are a hundred reasons why you have thought of them all. Money! I have not mentioned money or checks or receipts. I am not quite an imbecile. I have arranged all that. You have simply to see to Kuhn. There will be no discussion. You will lay before him an ultimatum. If he agrees, a document will be given to him promising on the part of England and her moral support. The document will have been officially sealed by the minister of the British Foreign Office. It will already have the signature of Sir Mortimer Bretti!"

"She leaned close to me. Her breath was in my face. Her eyes were liquid fire. Because I was silent for the moment she imagined me tempted. But if I were silent it was because my scorn was too great for utterance."  
"A forgery!" I said at last.  
"Listen. The document itself is official. It swayed recently the signature of Sir Mortimer Bretti."  
"How was that obtained, since Sir Mortimer is dead?"

"Dr. Starva is a clever peevish man. That is why he is being pushed upon. I sprang to my feet, clenching my chair so abruptly as to overturn it. Dr. Starva's name was a red flag to goad me to enraged impotence."  
"And this is the way that you intend to save a nation!" I cried in fierce contempt. "I say again and again, you are a fool—a fool to think that your scheme can be successful!"  
"Will England," I said, "be in a state of minister because he dies shortly after attacking it? I tell you, monsieur, I have counted the chances. I shall succeed."

"And the loyalty of Dr. Starva? You may count on that? I am willing to believe that your mad project has been planned with the hope that it may benefit your oppressed race. But that Arab-Seed Starva—it is impossible that he be influenced by an unselfish motive. That death-stamp, did you know its significance? It is the sign of the phylloxera. You were advised by me before it was too late. You have said I am your enemy. It is true. If I have come to this chateau—yes, to you, to you, to you, to you—to learn what I shall learn."  
"Do you think I have been kind to that?" she interrupted, smiling disdainfully.

"Had the treachery been absent—had the foul play of thugs and murderers not been resorted to—I should still have refused to aid you. But when I find myself secretly watched while I am your guest—when I am periodically offered a drug, which, by the way, I did not take—when I see an English gentleman treated with the violence of the Middle Ages—when the woman whom I have sworn to help is shot at by a lurking villain—I have a right to my revenge. I shall have it. Be sure of that."  
"You say that Starva attempted to murder Helena Bretti?"  
"Scarcely two hours since," I returned, trembling with rage. "Now, Madame de Varrier, I have listened to you patiently. Listen to me. I shall have justice. You have chosen to ally yourself with a forger, a thief, and a would-be murderer. You will be dragged down with him unless you throw yourself on my mercy. Great God, your madness reaches its apogee in this: you resort to every crime that you may bring freedom a little nearer to your precious Macedonia; and I know, as absolutely as if he had confessed to me, that Dr. Starva is one of the band of assassins who has doomed to a violent death the very man whose life you look to for succor."  
She stared at me a full half minute.

"I snuggled myself into my chair again with a careless assurance I did not feel. I remembered Lockhart's warning: look out for the Countess Sarahoff. She was about to scratch, and I was to feel her claws. For this woman, acquaintance in feature, was at heart heretic; the fierce cunning and treachery of the tigress were hers when aroused."  
**CHAPTER XXV.**  
Countess Sarahoff Tempis Me.  
"Before we settle our affairs I must speak to Alphonse."  
"To what purpose?" I demanded suspiciously.  
"You shall hear for yourself. Have



"A Copy is as Useful as an Original," She Said, Coolly.

"This adventuress with nerves of steel. No fear that I am to play you a trick. I shall give him my message before you."

"Pardon me if I refuse. I am unarmed, and Alphonse would have me at his mercy."  
"Bah, I begin to think I should call you by your true name. If you forbid me to speak to Alphonse, I shall be dumb. Now what have you to say?"  
She lit a cigarette, smiled defiantly and regarded me between half-closed eyes.

"It looks like a deadlock," I said cheerfully. "If you are obstinate I can be obstinate as well. At any rate I shall not open that door until I have seen the proofs of Sir Mortimer Bretti's dishonor. If time is valuable to me, allow me to suggest that it is even more so to you. You tell me that the interview between Sir Mortimer and the banker was to have taken place to-day."  
I had spoken with downright assurance. But I had had my misgivings as I noted the sudden distance of the woman. Five minutes passed; she smoked furiously. I began to pace the room. I listened at the door of the little chamber in which she had said Captain Forbes was imprisoned. I did not again knock at this door. I thought it impossible that my voice could be heard. Presently I opened the door of the oratory and looked down in surprise at the calm face of Sir Mortimer, my back to the woman.  
"Was I indeed guilty as she had said? It seemed incredible that she should have been able to guess that I had been black with guilt. The face, pale in death, had the majesty of deity. It had, too, that same noble serenity that I had so long known when I first met Helena Bretti.  
"My reflections were rudely disturb-

ed. A sudden blow struck on the door of the staircase shook me into tardy heed of Madame de Varrier.  
She was giving her message to Alphonse after all. She had taken my hint of making herself heard through the closed door. It was a short message. I had had no opportunity of word of it. Though she had raised her voice almost to a shout, she had doubtless spoken in her native tongue. She resembled herself so constantly, offering me her characteristic case.  
"Now I am ready, monsieur, for our little affair."  
"The sooner it is over the better," I said irritably. That she had stolen a march on me.  
"Are you familiar with the handwriting of Sir Mortimer Bretti?"  
"No," I said, pretending that I had not seen the box. If the proofs of Sir Mortimer's dishonor were in the dispatch box it would not be many minutes before I had destroyed them.  
"If that is the case, a copy is as useful as the original," she said, placing the box on the table, and unlocked it with a little key that hung at her chainelate. She took out of the dispatch box two envelopes. Their covers were lined with red waxen packets that she and Dr. Starva had been examining in the hotel at Vitnaux.  
"Evidently you think me a very trusting person," she answered. "No, Madame, am not quite so glib as that. A copy may be forged. Perhaps you are as clever with the pen as Dr. Starva. Show me the originals or bring them."  
"You wrong me," she protested mockingly. "And you wrong yourself. I am not so stupid as to expect you to take these typewritten copies for granted. I shall see to it that you are not the originals in your hands. You might destroy them, for instance."  
"Again it looks like a deadlock. The burden of proof lies with yourself. As you have not yet seen known in the handwriting of Sir Mortimer. Who is to vouch for its genuineness?"  
"One whose word you will scarcely doubt—the sister of Sir Mortimer."  
"How could you suggest so hardly? Her cruel smile made me for the moment forget her sex. If she had been a man I think I could have killed her then."  
"Then, that was my message. You will be waiting in the music room below. It is for you to say if she is to be spared the ordeal. You will cause her the suffering, not I."  
I could not remember how I had laughed at the old doctrine of the personality of the devil. I believe it now. Show me the papers."

"I do not understand that other first. In this envelope are copies of certain dispatches and notes made by Sir Mortimer. The originals are in a safe that is in the third room yonder. You will examine these copies. They will tell you to determine whether Miss Bretti is to be the final applier of Sir Mortimer's guilt or innocence."  
"And if I refuse to call on Miss Bretti?"  
"Sooner or later she shall see these papers."  
"What advantage will that be to you when I have failed to be a partner to your nefarious intrigues."  
"It shall be reversed on you, monsieur. Her eyes glittered. "And my revenge will be profitable. The Russian or Austrian governments would pay a long price for the papers in the safe. I will give you your own price for them." I said hoarsely.  
"And be robbed of my revenge? They are beyond price. Come, you weary me with questions. Are you ready for the proof?"

"One moment. These dispatches were stolen from Sir Mortimer's apartments that night at Vitnaux. You gained access to the apartment by using me off as Sir Mortimer. Where did you find them? How did you know they were there?"  
"Sir Mortimer had hidden them between the folds of a Venetian blind. They were concealed in his rooms at Vitnaux was told Dr. Starva by Sir Mortimer himself. When he had left Starva for Lucerne he was very ill. He had a fever, and his valet, I need hardly say that Dr. Starva was the physician; myself, the nurse; and Alphonse, the valet. But Lucerne savored too much of publicity for our plans. Vitnaux was not desirable, especially in view of the alarming state of Sir Mortimer's health. This chateau was so rendezvous. But on the service here Sir Mortimer suffered a collapse."  
"Dr. Starva remained with his patient; I returned to Lucerne to throw off suspicion as to our movements. In an obscure village I had my first interview with the Countess Sarahoff. Or, rather, it was not Sir Mortimer Bretti, Minister of His Britannic Majesty at Sofia, but a Mrs. Gillian Walters, an obscure English tourist."

"I began to say that before he died Sir Mortimer felt some misgivings for his conduct. He realized that the end was near, and that sooner or later the proofs of his dishonor would be known. He had a delirium he raved continually of certain incriminating documents hidden in his room at Vitnaux. His unexpected death filled Dr. Starva with consternation. He thought that I was thinking that our schemes had utterly failed."  
"In the meanwhile you had met one who might yet rescue your plans from failure. The rest I can guess. Revealed to you by the Countess Sarahoff, you fled to this chateau. Secretly your tool could be coaxed or browbeaten into submission—Enough of this horrible story. Show me the papers."

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# Illinois State News

## Recent Happenings of Interest in the Various Cities and Towns.

**LOSING MIND OVER CRUISE.**  
Illinois Boy Crized Over Joy of Peeking Voyage.  
Ottawa.—Information from New York states that Lieut. James R. Combs of the United States cruiser Washington, an Ottawa boy, who was married to a girl at the Hotel Astor after a late dinner at Jack's restaurant last May, is in the naval hospital in New York City, his illness being due to the forcing of himself on the Atlantic ocean from the Pacific to the Atlantic.

When it was hinted among the officers of the navy that the great voyage to the western ocean was being considered Lieut. Combs became enthusiastic, but when the final decision came that the huge fighting ships were sure to go the young lieutenant's delight knew no bounds. He talked about the trip constantly. At first it was supposed he was only a little overexcited. Soon, however, it appeared to his superiors that his happy anticipation of the cruise was unduly high reason.

It was finally decided Combs could not accompany his ship. With great difficulty he was taken to the hospital, where he is said to have raved about the Pacific cruise and the wonderful opportunities it will open to young men to distinguish themselves.

**POSTMASTERS IN A UNION.**  
Not a Labor Organization, But One to Improve Service.  
Springfield.—The presidential postmasters of Illinois have organized a state organization, with Dan Campbell of Chicago as president, H. D. Hemmings of Elkhart, Ind., as secretary, and J. B. Jostick of East St. Louis, treasurer. The first regular meeting will be held at Champaign November 12 and 13.

The object of the organization is to improve the service rendered by the Post Office. The organization is headed by Frank A. Hitchcock is expected to attend the Champaign meeting and deliver an address. Postmaster General Meyer has been asked to attend. The executive committee is made up of the officers and the following members: John Furfuro of La Salle, F. A. Freer of Galesburg, R. F. Shaw of Danvers, S. A. Constantine of Aurora, A. McDonald of Rock Island, William Dustin of Dwight, and Postmaster Thompson of Belleville.

**Seeks Princes; Sees Queen.**  
Springfield.—Alleging that he had been duped into paying \$1,100 for a girl, who lived with him secretly a month, Steve Wyolen, aged 21, has filed a remarkable suit in the circuit court here against Stella Stevens, "Queen Stella" of the egyptians, and her husband, George Stevens. The complainant avers that the parents of the girl promised her in marriage if he would pay them the sum named. He agreed, and was married in Chicago eight months ago to "Princess" Denna, as the daughter of "Queen Stella" was known a month after his wife left him, he says, and he claims that he was the victim of a plot to secure his money.

**Chapel Building Sold.**  
Arthur.—The old Fairview Baptist church, three miles west of this city, which has not been used for about two years, was sold to Martin Sharp, a nearby farmer, for \$429.  
This church was founded in 1875 by Rev. W. C. Barker, a pioneer Baptist minister then living at Cook's Mills, and had at the height of its prosperity 80 members.

Gradually the farms around it were bought up by the Amish people of which there is a large colony here, and the membership fell so small that the services were held only infrequently and finally were abandoned together.  
**Mothers Boost Teddy Bear.**  
Urbana.—"Teddy bears" were endorsed and cozy biscuits denounced in speeches before the seventh annual mothers' congress of Illinois at the opening session.  
Mrs. D. K. Gillison of Wilmette, president of the national congress, said "Teddy bears" proved great attractions to children at the Jamestown exposition. Other delegates supported her views that "Teddy bears" were not menaces to future motherhood because they supplanted dolls.

**Lutheran Convention at End.**  
Rockford.—The thirty-first annual convention of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the Lutheran Synod of northern Illinois was concluded, Washington, Ill., was chosen for the convention of 1909. The following officers were chosen: President, Mrs. W. G. Thrall, Freeport; vice president, Mrs. David Davey, Chicago; recording secretary, Mrs. G. W. Nyman, Mt. Carmel; corresponding secretary, Mrs. T. B. Hensch, Evanston; treasurer, Mrs. N. M. Crozier, Lena.

**Finds Trail to Gold.**  
Freeport.—Dr. George Dent Wilcoxson, of Freeport, who at 164 Springs, Ark., discovered a forgotten trail to the cave where an Indian tribe he said to have secured all its gold and jewels. He also found a stone bearing directions to the cave in Indian hieroglyphics, which he is deciphering. So certain is Wilcoxson of having located the repository that his uncle, Rev. Dr. Brown, of Hot Springs, has purchased the entire tract of 180 acres surrounding the cave, and it is there that Wilcoxson is ferreting out the secret.

**President in Decatur.**  
Great Precautions Taken to Insure Safety of Train.  
Decatur.—President Roosevelt spent just ten minutes in Decatur, the special arriving here at 2:50 a. m., and departing ten minutes later for the west. A mere handful of people were at the station when the special pulled in. They had the simple satisfaction of beholding four dimly lighted cars, the cars of the special, one of them the president of the greatest republic was sleeping. Gov. Deenbor boarded the train for the ride to Keokuk. At Decatur the train was turned over to the care of the Southern division. Engineer Max Fuson and Foreman McLaughlin with engine No. 568 handled the train. The trainmen were Conductor F. G. Schmidt and brakeman J. H. Wilson.

J. B. Long, road foreman of engines for the Springfield division of the Wabash, rode on the engine to see that all was in order. A hitch, while Trainmaster L. W. Karnes looked after the handling of the train.

**BRANNAN GIRL NOT INSANE.**  
Attorney on Acquittal Makes Prediction of Murder.  
Clinton.—"There will be murder sure" that fate within three weeks," was the prediction of the lawyers engaged in penitentiary the Brannon family enigma, when a declaration of Clinton physicians declared the insanity of a girl named Brannon, a handsome young woman in the case, is of sound mind, and allowed her to go free.

John Brannon, her married cousin, who, according to testimony offered before the insanity commission, has neglected his wife (but he might spend his time with the younger woman, with whom he is admittedly infatuated), and who was given a preliminary hearing before Justice Donahoe on a charge of threatening to kill his wife, was released on a \$100 cash bond.

**\$100,000 Mark Reached.**  
National Insurance Company Against the Central Illinois Traction company by claimants for damages by reason of the recent interurban wreck will be brought to the \$100,000 mark by suit for \$10,000 for the loss of a 26-year-old farmer of several townships.

**Seeks Cure in Dead Man's Hug.**  
Chicago.—Mrs. Mary Forman visited the county morgue and, after obtaining permission from Coroner's Physician Hunter, clasped the hands of an unidentified dead man whom she neck in the belief that the "treatment" would cure her nervousness.  
The woman's act was inspired by a fortune teller at an amusement park, who declared that this was the only method by which a cure could be effected.

**Five Burned Recovering Body.**  
Rockford.—Five neighbors of Mrs. William H. Goelling were severely burned by an explosion of gas when they took a bath in the bathroom of her home and discovered her body. Mrs. Goelling had been overcome by gas escaping from a heater.  
The persons injured by the explosion were Mrs. and Miss John Mench, Mr. and Mrs. James Whitaker and Robert Rothwell.

**Mothers' Congress Meets.**  
Champaign.—The annual mothers' congress was held here. A reception was given in the parlors of the woman's building at the university. Thursday was occupied by business sessions and addresses. Dr. Irvington C. Lord of the eastern Illinois normal was one of the speakers. The regular meetings were held in Morrow hall at the university.

**Deserted Babe Exposed.**  
Decatur.—The baby girl that was found at the Wabash depot about two months ago and later taken to the Illinois home, died at the house of Mrs. Frank A. Martin, 252 East Jefferson street, after an illness of about a half hour.

**Traces of Gold.**  
Freeport.—Dr. George Dent Wilcoxson, of Freeport, who at 164 Springs, Ark., discovered a forgotten trail to the cave where an Indian tribe he said to have secured all its gold and jewels. He also found a stone bearing directions to the cave in Indian hieroglyphics, which he is deciphering. So certain is Wilcoxson of having located the repository that his uncle, Rev. Dr. Brown, of Hot Springs, has purchased the entire tract of 180 acres surrounding the cave, and it is there that Wilcoxson is ferreting out the secret.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)