

A Political Vendetta

By

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CHAPTER IV.

The last year of a century, the last day of the year, the last hour of the day—in the solemn hush of an eerie scene, Gideon Hope stood alone awaiting the final token of the fact that he was to make him master of a vital situation.

It was six months after the sealing of that strange compact which, through a fair young girl's sterling confidence, had bound to him the Tremaines, father and daughter, with links of steel, for weal or woe.

This had happened:

“All that tragic story of a beloved brother, a true Amalgamation Hope had told—all the dark, shadowy, and blander certainties of the secret culpability of Percival Keene he had laid bare.

That man, waxed rich and powerful by some caprice of Luck—off through minister finesse, made master of millions and potent king of a vast industrial combination, was now known as “Percy V. Kane,” there could not be the slightest doubt.

Each by inch, hour by hour, from the crisis of his political deishment, Gideon Hope had traced this ex-magnate of the rotten Consolidated Silver Company. In and out of a labyrinth of deception, evasion, disappearance—reappearance in a new guise and a fresh role—he had followed the arch-swindler until he had put his finger upon him as the central figure of that mastodonic ring of capitalists, who control the metal industries of a State, and who had “roped in” and ruined the unscrupulous Albert Tremaine.

And now:

Gideon Hope had disculped his plan: To degrade, to humble, to drag down to bitter defeat a person who must answer to him for “the taking of the one being born all his love and interest.”

Thus, he had the “sleeping city,” broken, ruined, and the negroes in the hills a closed, abandoned h

was given out that the Tremaine sons abroad, to exhaust in pincement the remnant of a once great fortune.

But all the while the hidden hand of the master genius behind the scenes worked deitiously, slowly, the wires that were soon to focus on this man Kane, a purpose bitter as death and cruel as the grave.

In the eastern story, the heavy slab that failed to fall on the bed of state in the flush of conquest was slowly wrought out of the quarry, the tunnel for the rope to hold it to its place was slowly carried through the leagues of rock, the slab was slowly raised and fitted to the roof, the rope was rove to it, and slowly taken through the miles of hollow to the great iron ring.

It had been a tale replete with labor, and in the course the gulfan was aroused in the dead of the night, and the sharpened ax that was to sever the rope from the great iron ring was put into his hand, and he struck with it, and the rope parted, and rushed away and the ceiling fell.

So, in the case of Gideon Hope—the man with a purpose—all the world near and far, that tended to the end was being accomplished, and in instant the blow was to be struck, and the roof of Percy Kane's stronghold was to drop in upon him!

Midnight!

Gideon Hope stood where a ledge of rock overhung the moment of a precipice, looked out upon a few broad expanses down, towards a stretch that would have awed and puzzled the unfeeling beholder.

The moonlight shone like day. It irradiated a vast valley, flecked far as the eye could see with dots, spottches, vivid bursts of light—i.e., a mammoth blast furnace, open to the sky, with smoke and sparks shot upwards in drifts of spectral fire; there—and everywhere—the myriad coke ovens, uncovered to show a dazzling nest of red, seething cinders.

The world seemed spread at his feet—for good or bad, it lay before him! When he reflected, with some of the old-time managemen, vise, how he, a master hand at inception and direction, might turn the sixty thousand men in that valley as puppets by his desire, he, a being of will and resources, a gilded dash of opulence, tempted for a moment.

Then came the infusion of the one great purpose of his life—the wan, sad face of his brother seemed to float before him, and the sudden, stern whiteness of his own told that no temptation of wealth or honor could turn him from his plan.

The soft, tender influences of the holy hand of a woman, the look of a fair face. A vision of a home blest with love, a life crowned with the gladness of children's voices, of old woes forgotten in the soothing bliss of a new experience, stole over this man's soul.

He shut it out—all out! His face was lifted towards heaven in sudden sternness, his hand described an involuntary, almost wild, spasm of passion—no! no! no! The die was cast! He lived, prayed, for but one thing, and that was to be master. He knew, to prove what he suspected, straight as an arrow to the target's heart, fate must impel him towards the moment when Percy Kane should stand, before him unmasked, at his mercy!

There was a rustle of the near shrubbery. Hope turned. A half-eager sentinel swept his face, then he was suddenly impervious, expectant.

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