

## HAFFLED VILLAIN.

## CHAPTER I.

## A LAWYER AND HIS CLIENT.

[CONTINUED.]

His visitor was precisely of the same type of humanity with, however, a marked advantage of eye. His gaze was steady and evidence courage and determination, but his mouth was sensual and cruel. His age must have been about forty, and his appearance so far as dress went, was quietly respectable.

Whatever might have been the purpose of his visit, there could not well arise any difficulty of agreement between two men so similarly constituted and whose principles and opinions so evidently harmonized. This was exactly what the result proved.

The visitor took a seat as requested, and the lawyer quickly placed himself in his professional chair, more firmly adjusting his glasses the while.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Spearwell," his visitor said, "and my object in calling is to consult you professionally."

"I am quite at your service, sir," was the sententious reply.

"I am glad to hear it. You act in divorce matters, do you not?"

Mr. Spearwell hesitated, and it was evident that he wished, before replying, to gain some direct information respecting the nature of the business referred to. It might be to his advantage to answer in the affirmative, or it might serve his purpose to deny all complicity in any such practice. Like a cautious man, he desired to see his way clear before committing himself.

"Well, sir," he guardedly replied, "the term 'divorce matters' has such a wide application that I hardly know how to answer your question. If you will please explain yourself more fully, I shall doubtless understand you better."

"Why, confound it, man," the other brusquely exclaimed, "what is there to explain? The question is simple enough for a Stockton lunatic to answer: Do you undertake divorce cases? If so, I may have call for your services; if not, there is no use to put a fee in your way."

It was clear to Mr. Spearwell that he had an irascible person to deal with, who, however, had a decided temper of his own that was not to be trifled with. Still, he judged a little more equivocation would be most prudent before coming to the point. Assuming the part of interrogator, he briefly asked—

"Do you call on me on your own behalf?"

"Most assuredly," was the reply. "Think you that I would be such a cursed fool as to meddle in another man's domestic affairs?"

"Have any other lawyer been consulted in the matter?" Mr. Spearwell next asked, paying no attention to his visitor's enquiry.

"Thunder! no! didn't I say I had heard of you and wished your advice?"

"You flatter me, sir," the lawyer rejoined with a smile, "and without questioning you further for the present, I shall be happy to undertake any business with which you may be pleased to entrust me. Have you any objection to tell me your name?"

It was now the visitor's turn to show caution, and apparently he began to see more than ever that he had a crafty practitioner to deal with. But he was not the man to be led by the nose against his will, and looking the lawyer boldly in the face, he said:

"What my name has to do with the matter at present I can't see, and look here, sir, I don't want any more beating about the bush. Come to the point, man, and answer me one or two direct questions in an equally direct manner. You undertake divorce cases, I know; will you pull me through—yes or no?"

"If the particulars warrant proceedings I will do my best," was the reply, still somewhat guarded.

"D—n it, sir, answer me yes or no, and let's go ahead."

"How can I be more explicit when I know nothing of the circumstances, or how to give a definite guarantee when you tell me nothing? You say you wish to consult me, well, sir, state your case."

This was professional, as the visitor was not slow to perceive, and drawing his chair closer to the lawyer, he came to the point in the most pointed manner he knew of.

"I will tell you," he said, "that I am a rich man, and look upon expense as nothing to the accomplishment of my object. I want a divorce from my wife—there you have it—and money is no consideration in getting it. You are smart that way, I have heard, and have managed cases quite as groundless as mine."

"What am I to understand by groundless?" Mr. Spearwell asked in the most innocent way, but the cunning expression of his eye grew keener as he spoke.

"What do you mean by groundless?"

"What do I mean? Why, simply that I have no charge to bring against my wife, and that—come! I know you well enough to feel safe in saying it—fabrication must take the place of truth."

"Of course, as a lawyer, I understand what you mean, and, however as a man I oppose such proceedings, I will professionally listen to your statement. Proceed, sir."

"Proceed—how? Haven't I called to be advised by you? You know what I want; can you succeed in it?"

Mr. Spearwell understood the matter perfectly well, and was unscrupulous enough to undertake any business, no matter how disreputable, provided he got well paid for it; but in the present case he was ignorant on one point, which he deemed all important to know, and when he next spoke it was to get the information.

"Of course," he said, "in the face of proceedings so unusual as will be necessary in your case to ensure a successful issue, no lawyer would accept the responsibility before knowing something definite about his client."

"Will you do your best for me if I satisfy you that I am fully able to be liberal in payment?"

"You must see that the expenses will necessarily be heavy and—"

"Yes, yes, all right," the visitor interrupted. "Have you ever heard of Reuben Spotted?"

"What of North Beach? Certainly."

"Well, I'm the man. Now, if we can agree upon the action to be taken, I will give you a check for \$1,000 before leaving, bear all the expenses as matters progress, and, if you succeed in procuring the divorce, place a bonus of \$5,000 in your hands when all is finished."

To be continued.

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