

The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XXIV.

Reginald Henson struggled out of bed and into his clothing as best he could. He was terribly weak and shaky, far more weak than he had imagined himself to be, but he was in danger now, and his indomitable will-power pulled him through. What a fool Littimer had been to tell him so much, merely so that he might triumph over his powerful foe for a few minutes. But Henson was planning a little scheme by which he intended to repay the young man tenfold. He had no doubt as to the willingness of his tool.

He took a bottle of brandy from a drawer and helped himself to a liberal dose. Walker had expressly forbidden anything of the kind, but it was no time for nice medical obedience. The grateful stimulant had its immediate effect. Then Henson rang the bell, and after a time Williams appeared tardily.

"You are to go down to Barnes and ask him to send a cab here as soon as possible," Henson said. "I have to go to London by the first train in the morning."

Williams nodded, with his mouth wide open. He was astonished and not a little alarmed at the strength and vitality of this man. And only a few hours before Williams had learnt with deep satisfaction that Henson would be confined to his bed for some days.

Henson dressed at length and packed a small portmanteau. But he had to sit on his bed for some little time and sip a further dose of brandy before he could move farther. After all there was no hurry. A full hour was sure to elapse before the leisurely Barnes brought the cab to the lodge-gates.

Henson crept downstairs at length and trod his catlike way to the library. Once there he proceeded to make a minute inspection of the telephone. He turned the handle just the fragment of an inch and a queer smile came over his face. Then he crept as silently upstairs, opened the window of the bathroom quietly, and slipped on to the leads. There were a couple of insulators here, against the wire of one of which Henson tapped his knuckles gently. The wire gave back an answering twang. The other jangled limp and loose.

"One of the wires cut," Henson muttered. "I expected as much. Madame Enid is getting a deal too clever. I suppose this is some suggestion of her very astute friend David Steel. Well, I have given Mr. Steel one lesson in minding his own business, and if he interferes further I shall have to give him another. He will be in gaol before long charged with attempted murder and robbery with violence, and so exit Steel. After that the girl will be perhaps chary of seeking outside assistance. And this will be the third I have had to get rid of. Heavens! How feeble I feel, how weak I am. And yet I must go through this thing now."

He staggered into the house again and dropped into a chair. There was a loud buzzing in his ears, so that he could hardly hear the murmur of voices in the drawing-room below. This was annoying, because Henson liked to hear everything that other folks said. Then he dropped off into a kind of dreamy state, coming back presently to the consciousness that he had fainted.

Meanwhile Frank Littimer had joined Enid in the drawing-room. The house was perfectly quiet and still by this time; the dust-cloud hung on the air and caused the lamps to burn with a spitting blue flame. Enid's face looked deadly pale against her black dress.

"So you have been seeing Reginald," she said. "Why—why did you do it?"

"I didn't mean to," Frank muttered. "I never intended him to know that I had been in the house at all. But I was passing his room and he heard me. He seemed to know my footsteps. I believe if two mice ran by him twice in the darkness he could tell the difference between them."

"You had an interesting conversation. What did he want to use the telephone for?"

"I don't know. I tried to manipulate it for him, but the instrument was out of order."

"I know. I had a pretty shrewd idea what our cousin was going to do. You see, I was listening at the door. Not a very ladylike thing to do, but one must fight Henson with his own tools. When I heard him ask for the telephone directory I ran out and nipped one of the wires by the bathroom, Frank, it would have been far wiser if you hadn't come."

Littimer nodded gloomily. There was something like tears in his eyes. "I know it," he said. "I hate the place and its dreadful associations. But I wanted to see Chris first. Did she say anything about me before—before—"

"My dear boy, she loved you always. She knew and understood,

and was sorry. And she never, never forgot the last time that you were in the house."

Frank Littimer glanced across the room with a shudder. His eyes dwelt with fascination on the overturned table with its broken china and glass and wilted flowers in the corner.

"It is not the kind of thing to forget," he said, hoarsely. "I can see my father now—"

"Don't," Enid shuddered. "don't recall it. And your mother has never been the same since. I doubt if she will ever be the same again. From that day to this nothing has ever been touched in the house. And Henson comes here when he can and makes our lives hideous to us."

"I fancy I shook him up to-night," Littimer said, with subdued triumph. "He seemed to shudder when I told him that I had found Van Sneek."

Enid started from her chair. Her eyes were shining with the sudden brilliancy of unveiled stars.

"You have found Van Sneek!" she whispered. "Where?"

"Why, in the Brighton Hospital. Do you mean to say that you don't know about it, that you don't know that the man found so mysteriously in Mr. David Steel's house and Van Sneek are one and the same person?"

Enid resumed her seat again. She was calm enough now.

"It had not occurred to me," she said. "Indeed, I don't know why it should have done. Sooner or later, of course, I should have suggested to Mr. Steel to try and identify the man, but—"

"My dear Enid, what on earth are you talking about?"

"Nonsense," Enid said, in some confusion. "Things you don't understand at present, and things you are not going to understand just yet. I read in the papers that the man was quite a stranger to Mr. Steel. But are you certain that it is Van Sneek?"

"Absolutely certain. I went to the hospital and identified him."

"Then there is no more to be said on that point. But you were foolish to tell Reginald."

"Not a bit of it. Why, Henson has known it all along. You needn't get excited. He is a deep fellow, and nobody knows better than he how to disguise his feelings. All the same, he was just mad to know what I had discovered, you could see it in his face. Reginald Henson—"

Littimer paused, open-mouthed, for Henson, dressed and wrapped ready for the journey, had come quietly into the drawing-room. The deadly pallor of his face, the white bandages about his throat, only served to render his appearance more emphatic and imposing. He stood there with the halo of dust about him, looking like the devil genius of the place.

"I fear I startled you," he said, with a sardonic smile. "And I fear that in the stillness of the place I have overheard a great part of your conversation. Frank, I must congratulate you on your discretion, so far. But seeing that you are young and impressionable, I am going to move temptation out of your way. Enid, I am going on a journey."

"I trust that it is a long one, and that it will detain you for a considerable period," Enid said, coldly.

"It is neither far, nor is it likely to keep me," Henson smiled. "Williams has just come in with the information that the cab awaits me at the gate. Now, then!"

The last words were flung at Littimer with contemptuous command. The hot-blood flared into the young man's face. Enid's eyes flashed.

"If my cousin likes to stay here," she said, "why—"

"He is coming with me," Henson said, hoarsely. "Do you understand? With me! And if I like to drag him—or you, my pretty lady—to the end of the world or the gates of perdition, you will have to come. Now, get along before I compel you."

Enid stood with fury in her eyes and clenched hands as Littimer slunk away out of the house, Henson following between his victim and Williams. He said no words till the lodge-gates were past and the growl of the dogs had died into the distance.

"We are going to Littimer Castle," said Henson.

"Not there," Littimer groaned—"not there, Henson! I couldn't—I couldn't go to that place!"

Henson pointed towards the cab. "Littimer or perdition!" he said.

"You don't want to go to the latter just yet? Jump in, then!"

CHAPTER XXV.

If you had asked the first five people on the Littimer Estate what they thought of the lord of the soil you would have had a different answer from everyone. One woman would have said that a kinder and better man never lived; her neighbor would have declared Lord Littimer to be as hard as the nether

millstone. Farmer George would rate him a jolly good fellow, and tell how he would sit in the kitchen over a mug of ale; whilst Farmer John swore at his landlord as a hard-fisted, grasping miser devoid of the bowels of compassion.

At the end of an hour you would be utterly bewildered, not knowing what to believe, and prepared to set the whole village down as a lot of gossips who seemed to mind everything but its own business. And, perhaps, Lord Littimer might come riding through on his big black horse, small, lithe, brown as mahogany, and with an eye piercing as a diamond drill. One day he looked almost boyishly young, there would be a smile on his tanned face. And then another day he would be bent in the saddle, huddled up, wizened, an old, old man, crushed with the weight of years and sorrow.

In sooth he was a man of moods and contradictions, changeable as an April sky, and none the less quick-tempered and hard because he knew that everybody was terribly afraid of him. And he had a tongue, too, a lashing, cutting tongue that burnt and blistered. Sometimes he would be quite meek and angry under the reproaches of the vicar, and yet the same day history records it that he got off his horse and administered a sound trashing to the village parson. Sometimes he got the best of the vicar, and sometimes that worthy man scored. They were good friends, these two, though the vicar never swerved in his fealty to Lady Littimer, whose cause he always championed. But nobody seemed to know anything about that dark scandal. They knew that there had been a dreadful scene at the castle seven years before, and that Lady Littimer and her son had left never to return. Lady Littimer was in a madhouse somewhere, they said, and the son was a wanderer on the face of the earth. And when Lord Littimer died every penny of the property, the castle included, would go to her ladyship's nephew, Mr. Reginald Henson.

In spite of the great cloud that hung over the family Lord Littimer did not seem to have changed. He was just a little more caustic than ever, his tongue a little sharper. The servants could have told a different story, a story of dark moods and days when the bitterness of the shadow of death lay on their master. Few men could carry their grief better, and because Littimer carried his grief so well he suffered the more. We shall see what the sorrow was in time.

There are few more beautiful places in England than Littimer Castle. The house stood on a kind of natural plateau with many woods behind, a trout stream ran clean past the big flight of steps leading to me hall, below were terraces after terraces of hanging gardens, and to the left a sloping, ragged drop of 200 feet into the sea. To the right lay a magnificently-timbered park, with a herd of real wild deer—perhaps the only herd of this kind in the country. When the sun shone on the grey walls they looked as if they had been painted by some cunning hand, so softly were the greys and reds and blues blended.

Inside the place was a veritable art gallery. There were hundreds of pictures and engravings there. All round the grand staircase ran a long, deep corridor, filled with pictures. There were alcoves here fitted up as sitting-rooms, and in most of them some gem or another was hung. When the full flood of electric light was turned on at night the effect was almost dazzling. There were few pictures in the gallery without a history.

Lord Littimer had many hobbies, but not one that interested him like this. There were hundreds of rare birds shot by him in different parts of the world; the corridors and floors were covered by skins the spoil of his rifle; here and there a stuffed bear pranced startlingly; but the pictures and prints were the great amusement of his lordship's lonely life.

He passed along the corridor now towards the great oriel window at the end. A brilliant sunlight filled the place with shafts of golden and blue and purple as it came filtered through the stained glass. At a table in the window a girl sat working a typewriter. She might have passed for beautiful, only her hair was banded down in hideously Puritan fashion on each side of her delicate, oval face, her eyes were shielded by spectacles. But they were lovely, steady, courageous blue eyes, as Littimer did not fail to observe. Also he had not failed to note that his new secretary could do very well without the glasses.

The typewriter and secretary business was a new whim of Littimer's. He wanted an assistant to catalogue and classify his pictures and prints, and he had told the vicar so. He wanted a girl who wasn't a fool, a girl who could amuse him wouldn't be afraid of him, and he thought he would have an American. To which the vicar responded that the whole thing was nonsense, but he had heard of a Boston girl in England who had a passion for that kind of thing and who was looking for a situation of the kind in a genuine old house for a year or so. The vicar added that he had not seen the young lady, but he could obtain her address. A reply came in due course, a reply that so pleased the impetuous Earl that he engaged the applicant on the spot. And now she had been just two hours in the house.

"Well," Littimer cried, "and how have you been getting on?"

Miss Christabel Lee looked up, smilingly.

"I am getting on very well indeed," she said. "You see, I have made a study of this kind of thing all my lifetime, and most of your pictures are like old friends to me. Do you know, I fancy that you and I are going to manage very well together?"

"Oh, do you? They say I am pretty formidable at times."

"I shan't mind that a bit. You see, my father was a man with a villainous temper. But a woman can always get the better of a bad-tempered man unless he happens to be one of the lower classes who uses his boots. If he is a gentleman you have him utterly at your mercy. Have you a sharp tongue?"

"I flatter myself I can be pretty blistering on occasions," Littimer said, grimly.

"How delightful! So can I. You and I will have some famous battles later on. Only I warn you that I never lose my temper, which gives me a tremendous advantage. I haven't been very well lately, so you must be nice to me for a week or two."

Littimer smiled and nodded. The grim lord of the castle was not accustomed to this kind of thing, and he was telling himself that he rather liked it.

"And now show me the Rembrandt," Miss Lee said, impatiently.

Littimer led the way to a distant alcove lighted from the side by a latticed window. There was only one picture in the excellent light there, and that was the famous Rembrandt engraving. Littimer's eyes lighted up quite lovingly as they rested upon it. The Florentine frame was hung so low that Miss Lee could bring her face on a level with it.

"This is the picture that was stolen from you?" she asked.

"Yes, that's the thing that there was all the fuss about. It made a great stir at the time. But I don't expect that it will happen again."

"Why not?" Miss Lee asked. "When an attempt of that sort is made it is usually followed by another, sometimes after the lapse of years. Anybody getting through that window could easily get the frame from its two nails and take out the paper."

"Do you think so?" Littimer asked, uneasily.

"I am certain of it. Take my advice and make it secure. The panels behind are hard wood—thick, black oak. Lord Littimer, I am going to get four brass-headed stays and drive them through some of the open ornamental work into the panel so as to make the picture quite secure. It is an iron frame, I suppose?"

"Wrought-iron, gilt," said Littimer. "Yes one could easily drive four brass-headed stays through the open work and make the thing safe. I'll have it seen to."

But Miss Lee insisted that there was no time like the present. She had discovered that Littimer had an excellent carpenter's shop on the premises; indeed, she admitted to being herself. She fitted with the lathe herself. She fitted down the stairs light as a thistle-down.

"A charming girl!" Littimer said, cynically. "I wonder why she came to this dull hole? A quarrel with her young man, perhaps. If I were a young man myself I might— But women are all the same. I should be a happier man if I had never trusted one. H—"

The face darkened; a heavy scowl lined his brows as he paced up and down. Christabel came back presently with hammer and some brass-headed stays in her hand.

(To be Continued.)

HEALTH

APPENDICITIS IN CHILDREN.

Most persons are pretty familiar by this time with appendicitis, which has come to be regarded as likely to afflict almost any one between twenty and fifty years of age, and to have escaped which is to be peculiarly fortunate. It is known that it begins with severe colic and tenderness in the right side of the abdomen, and a sensible person does not suffer long from an attack of that sort without calling in the doctor.

This is well, and no doubt the increased general knowledge regarding appendicitis and the wide-spread fear of the disease have saved many lives by leading those attacked to seek medical advice promptly while the inflammation is yet in its incipient stage. But this is true of adults only, and it seems to be believed by those who give a thought to the subject that children do not have appendicitis. This is an error, and one that may possibly have most serious consequences.

Children, even babies, may have inflammation of the vermiform appendix, and may die of it as promptly as older persons. Fortunately, however, the disease is often less severe in the very young than in adults, and a fatal case of the disease in a child is comparatively rare. But although the child may recover from his attack, the appendix is left more vulnerable, and many an apparently primary attack in adult life is really a recrudescence of a slumbering inflammation dating back to childhood.

Not every stomach-ache in a child is appendicitis, but any one may be, and parents should not be in-

different to these attacks by their frequency. Neither should the attacks excite too great apprehension. If the danger-signals are known, and an eye kept open for them, parents can simulate all the indifference they please, especially as regards frequent attacks coming on about the school hour.

An ordinary stomach-ache lasts but a short time; the pain is general all over the abdomen, or perhaps most marked on the left side, and the attack often passes off with a slight diarrhoea, usually without fever. When the appendix is the seat of the trouble, the pain may subside for a time; but it recurs again and again as a sharp colic, usually most marked on the right side, and is not relieved by pressure, as the simplest stomachache often is. There is fever, the face is flushed or dusky, and the child shows that it is really ill; the tongue is coated, and there are black circles under the eyes. When a child has a stomach-ache that persists or that comes back again after having disappeared, especially if there is fever, it should be carefully studied.—Youth's Companion.

COLD FEET AND INDIGESTION.

Coldness of feet and limbs is almost invariably an evidence of indigestion. The coldness is due not to weakness of the heart or feebleness of circulation, as is generally supposed, but to the contraction of the small arteries, preventing blood from entering the parts. There is generally an irritation of the abdominal sympathetic nerve centers which control the circulation of the lower extremities. This difficulty is not to be removed by exercise or by any special application to the limbs, but by removal of the causes of irritation. This may be a pro-lapsed stomach or chronic indigestion. Hot and cold foot baths are valuable. These act, not simply on the feet and limbs, but by reflex on the feet and limbs, but by abdominal sympathetic centers, which are in a diseased condition.

Rubbing of the feet and legs is also an excellent method of overcoming spasm of the blood vessels, thus preserving the normal circulation. The rubbing should be from the feet towards the body. The surface should be well lubricated with vaseline. To avoid irritation of the skin care should also be taken to clothe the limbs very warmly. In many cases this is necessary, even in the summer season.

NERVOUS TENSION.

Many people wear themselves out needlessly; of this there is no possible doubt, and their conscience is a species of tyrant to them. An exaggerated sense of duty leads many a person to very anxious ceaseless activity, to be constantly doing something, never to be idle a second of time, to scorn to rest. Such people are in unconscious nerve tension. They say they have no time to rest, they have so much to do, not thinking that they are rapidly unfitting themselves for probably what would have been their best and greatest work in after years. As there are conscious and unconscious thoughts, so there are conscious and unconscious nerve tensions. Self-control of nerve force is the great lesson of health, and therefore of life itself. To understand how to relax is to understand how to strengthen nerves. Hearty laughter is a source of relaxation, and relaxation is also found in diversion and amusements. Change of air and scene is occasionally necessary. It is sufficient rest of body and mind which enables a man to accomplish his best work by relieving his nerve tension.

GERMAN SCHOOL BATHS.

According to the London Mail, "every board school in Germany is provided with a well-equipped gymnasium and a 'brausebad' or douche. The latter is situated in the lower portion of the building and during the winter the heating apparatus for the school supplies also the necessary water for the douche baths."

"In summer the water is heated by a gas stove containing several Bunsen burners. By the latter method the baths are ready for use in half an hour. Just as the times of instruction exercises and douche baths. The older children receive three or four hours of physical training per week, and every child at least one douche."

This indicates a desire on the part of the government to provide the best hygienic conditions for school children. But the same number of baths at home, in which the entire family participated, would be an improvement. Perhaps the habit acquired by the children at school leads to this result.

WORKHOUSE MUSEUMS.

Several of the great London workhouses have remarkable museums attached to them. In a South London union museum can be found a clergyman's letters of ordination (the owner died in the house), and a peculiar belt made of human teeth and brought from the West Coast of Africa. But perhaps the most significant of all the things shown is a small pocket dice-box. Upon the box is neatly cut: "This box and other wagering cost me £80,000, and brought me to the workhouse."

Burglar (just acquitted, to his counsel)—"I will shortly call and see you at your office, sir." "Very good but in the daytime, please."