

The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XL.—(Continued.)

David was too astonished to say anything for the moment. The skein was too tangled to be thought out all at once. Presently he began to see his way.

"Under ordinary circumstances the change seems impossible," he said. "Especially seeing that the juggling could not have been done without both the cases—but I had forgotten how easily the cases were changed. I have it! What is the date of that letter?"

Ruth slowly unfolded a document she had taken from the purse.

"The day following what you call your great adventure," she said. "Henson or somebody took the real case—my case—back to Lockhart's and changed it in my name. I had previously been admiring this self-same bracelet, and they had tried to sell it to me. My dear boy, don't you see this is all part of the plot to plunge you deeper and deeper into trouble, to force us all to speak to save you? There are at least fifteen assistants at Lockhart's. Of course the ultimate sale of the cigar-case to this American could be proved, seeing the case had got back into stock again, and at the same time the incident of the change quite forgotten. And when you go and ask questions at Lockhart's—as you were pretty sure to do, as Henson knew—you are told of the sale only to the American. Depend upon it, that American was Henson himself or somebody in his pay. David, that is too cunning, too complex. And some of these days it is going to prove his fall."

David nodded thoughtfully. And yet, without something very clever and intricate in the way of a scheme Henson could not have placed him in his present fix.

"There is only one thing to be done," he said. "You and I must go down to Lockhart's and make a few inquiries. With that diamond bracelet and letter in your possession you should have no difficulty in refreshing their memories. Will you have some tea?"

"I am too excited," Ruth laughed. "I couldn't eat or drink anything just as present. David, what a lovely house you have."

"I'm glad to hear that you are going to like it," David said, drily.

Lockhart's received their customers in the usual courtly style. They were sorry they had no recollection of the transaction to which madam referred. The sale of the bracelet was clear, because that was duly and properly recorded on the books, and as indeed was the sale of the gunmetal cigar-case to an American gentleman at the Metropole. If madam said that she had purchased the cigar-case, why—still the polite assistant was most courteously incredulous.

The production of the letter made a difference. There was a passing of confidences from one plate-glass counter to another, and presently another assistant came forward. He professedly regretted that there had been a mistake, but he remembered the incident perfectly. It was the day before he had departed on his usual monthly visit to the firm's Paris branch. Madam had certainly purchased the cigar-case; but before the sale could be posted in the stock ledger madam had sent a gentleman to change the case for the diamond bracelet previously admired. The speaker had attended to both the sale and the exchange; in fact, his cab was waiting for him during the latter incident.

"I trust there is nothing wrong?" he asked, anxiously.

"Not in the least," Ruth hastened to reply. "The whole matter is a kind of comedy that I wanted to solve. It is a family joke, you understand. And who made the exchange?"

"Mr. Gates, madam. A tall gentleman, dressed in—"

"That is quite sufficient, thank you," said Ruth. "I am sorry to trouble you over so silly a matter." The assistant assured madam with an air of painful reproach that nothing was counted a trouble in that establishment. He bowed his visitors out and informed them that it was a lovely afternoon, a self-evident axiom that the most disputations could not well deny.

"You see how your inquiries might have been utterly baffled but for this find of mine," Ruth said, as the two went along North Street. "We shall find presently that the Metropole American and Reginald Henson are one and the same person."

"And you fancy that he made the exchange at Lockhart's?"

"I feel pretty certain of it," Ruth replied. "And you will be sure later on to find that he had a hand in the purchase of the other cigar-case from Wale's. Go to Marley's and get him to make inquiries as to whether or not Wale's got their case down on approval."

David proceeded to do so without further delay. Inspector Marley was out, but David left a message for him. Would he communicate by tel-

ephone later on? Steel had just finished his dinner when Marley rang him up.

"Are you there? Yes, I have seen Wale's. Your suggestion was quite right. Customer had seen cigar-case exactly like it in Lockhart's, only too dear. Wale's dealt with some manufacturers and got case down. Oh, no, never saw customer again. That sort of thing happens to shopkeepers every day. Yes. Wale's thinks he would recognise his man again. Nothing more? Good-night, sir."

CHAPTER XLII.

It looked like being a long, dull evening for Steel if he were not going to the theatre or anything of that kind. He generally read till about eleven o'clock, after which he sat up for another couple of hours plotting out the day's task for tomorrow. To-night he could only wander restlessly about his conservatory, snipping off a dead leaf here and there and wondering where the whole thing was going to end.

With a certain sense of relief David heard the front door-bell trill about eleven o'clock. Somebody was coming to see him, and it didn't matter much who in Steel's frame of mind. But he swept into the study with a feeling of genuine pleasure as Hatherly Bell was announced.

"My dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you," he cried. "Take the big arm-chair. Let me give you a cigar and a whiskey and soda and make you comfortable. That's better."

"I'm tired out," Bell said. "In London all day, and since six with Cross. Can you put me up for the night?"

"My bachelor bedroom is always ready, Bell."

"Thanks. I don't fancy you need be under any apprehension that anybody has spirited Van Sneek away. In the first place Henson, who seems to have discovered what happened, is in a terrible state about it. He wanted very badly to remain at Littimer, but when he heard that Van Sneek had left the hospital he came down here; in fact, we travelled together. Of course he said nothing whatever about Van Sneek, whom he is supposed to know nothing about, but I could see that he was terribly disturbed. The worst of it is that Cross was going to get me to operate on Van Sneek; and Heritage, who seems wonderfully better, was going to assist."

"Is your unfortunate friend up to that kind of thing now?" David asked.

"I fancy so. Do you know that Heritage used to have a fairly good practice near Littimer Castle? Lord Littimer knows him well. I want Heritage to come into this. I want to get at the reason why Henson has been so confoundedly good to Heritage. For years he has kept his eye upon him; for years he has practically provided him with a home at Palmer's. And when Heritage mentions Henson's name he always does so with a kind of forced gratitude."

"You think that Heritage is going to be useful to us?"

"I fancy so. Mind you, it is only my idea—what I call intuition, for want of a better word. And what have you been doing lately?"

David proceeded to explain, giving the events of the afternoon in full detail. Bell followed the account with the deepest interest. Then he proceeded to tell his own story. David appeared to be fascinated with the tale of the man with the thumb-nail.

"So Miss Chris hopes to hypnotize the man with the thumb," he said. "You have seen more of her than I have, Bell. Does she strike you as she strikes me—a girl of wonderfully acute mind allied to a pluck and audacity absolutely brilliant?"

"She is that and more," Bell said, warmly. "Now that she is free to act she has developed wonderfully. Look how cleverly she worked out that Renbrandt business, how utterly she puzzled Henson, and how she helped me to get into Littimer's good books again without Henson even guessing at the reason. And now she has forced the confidence of that rascal Merritt. She has saved him from a gaol into which she might have thrown him at any moment, she had convinced him that she is something exceedingly brilliant in the way of an adventuress, with a great coup ahead. Later on she will use Merritt, and a fine hard-cutting tool she will find him."

"Where is Henson at the present moment?" David asked.

"I left him in London this afternoon," Bell replied. "But I haven't the slightest doubt in the world that he has made his way to Brighton by this time. In all probability he has gone to Longdean."

Bell paused as the telephone bell rang out shrilly. The mere sound of it thrilled both of them with excitement. And what a useful thing the telephone had proved!

"Are you there?" came the quick,

small whisper. "Is that you, Mr. Steel? I am Enid Henson."

There was a long pause, during which David was listening intently. Bell could see him growing rigid with the prospects of something keen, alert, and vigorous.

"Bell is here with me at this moment," he said. "Just wait a minute whilst I tell him. Don't go away please. Under the circumstances it might be dangerous for me to ring you. Just a moment. Here's a pretty mess."

"Well," Bell said, impatiently, "I'm only a mere man, after all."

"Henson is at Longdean; he turned up an hour ago, and at the present moment is having his supper in the library before going to bed. But that is not the worst part of it. Williams heard the dogs making a great noise by the gates and went to see what was wrong. Some poor, demented fellow had climbed over the wall and the dogs were holding him up. Fortunately, he did not seem to be conscious of his danger, and as he stood still the hounds did him no harm. Williams was going to put the intruder into the road again when Miss Henson came up. And whom do you suppose the poor, wandering tramp to be?"

Bell pitched his cigar into the grate full of flowers and jumped to his feet.

"Van Sneek, for a million," he cried. "My head to a cocoanut on it."

"The same. They managed to get the poor fellow into the house before Williams brought Henson from the lodge, and he's in the stables now in a rather excited condition. Now, I quite agree with Miss Henson that Henson must be kept in ignorance of the fact, also that Van Sneek must be got away without delay. To inform the hospital authorities would be to spoil everything and play into Henson's hands. But he must be got away to-night."

"Right you are. We'll go and fetch him. Et apres?"

"Et apres he will stay here. He shall stay here, and you shall say that it is dangerous to remove him. Cross shall be told and Marley shall be told, and the public shall be discreetly kept in ignorance for the present. I'll go over there at once, as there is no time to be lost. Miss Henson suggests that I should come, and she tells me that Williams will wait at the lodge-gates for me. But you are going to stay here."

"Oh, indeed! And why am I going to stay here?"

"Because, my dear friend, I can easily manage the business single-handed, and because you must run no risk of meeting Henson yonder. You are not now supposed to know where the family are, nor are you supposed to take the faintest interest in them. Stay here and make yourself comfortable till I return. Are you there? I will be at Longdean as soon as possible and bring Van Sneek here. No, I won't ring off; you had better do that. I shall be over in less than an hour."

David hung up the receiver and proceeded to don a short covert coat and a cap. In the breast-pocket of the coat he placed a revolver.

"Just as well to be on the safe side," he said. "Though I am not likely to be troubled with the man with the thumb again. Still, Henson may have other blackguards; he may even know where Van Sneek is at the present moment, for all I know to the contrary."

"I feel rather guilty letting you go alone," Bell said.

"Not a bit of it," said David, cheerfully. "Smoke your cigar, and if you need any supper ring for it. You can safely leave matters in my hands. Van Sneek shall stay here till he is fit and then you shall operate upon him. After that he ought to be as clay in the hands of the potter. So long."

And David went off gaily enough. He kept to the cliffs for the first part of the distance, and then struck off across the fields in the direction of Longdean. The place was perfectly quiet, the village was all in darkness as he approached the lodge-gates of the Grange. Beyond the drive and between the thick, sad firs that shielded the house he could see the crimson lights gleaming here and there. He could catch the rumble and scratch in the bushes, and ever again a dog whined. The big gate was closed as David peeped in searching for his guide.

"Williams, where are you?"

But no reply came. The silence was full of strange rushing noises, the rush of blood in David's head. He called again and again, but no reply came. Then he heard the rush and fret of many feet, the cry of a pack of hounds, a melancholy cry, with a sombre joy in it. He saw a light gleaming fitfully in the belt of firs.

"No help for it," David muttered. "I must chance my luck. I never saw a dog yet that I was afraid of. Well, here goes."

He scrambled over the wall and dropped on the moist, clammy earth on the other side. He fumbled forward a few steps, and then stopped suddenly, brought up all standing by the weird scene which was being enacted under his astonished eyes.

(To be Continued.)

"Halloa, Bill, old man! Well, well! I haven't seen you since the old days when we used to run around together!" "No, Jack. Ah, those old days! What a fool I used to be then!" "I tell you, I'm glad to see you. You haven't changed a bit, old man."

YOUNG FOLKS

HER FIRST PARTY.

For a week Anna Lee had thought of nothing but the party. The invitation was the first delight, and she had carried the square, gilt-edged card to school, and peeped at it once when recess was beginning, before she got her little lunch-basket and joined the three girls who were her particular friends. Then there was the interest of her dress, a red one with a guimpe; her little full petticoats with narrow but fine embroidery; her smooth lisle stockings, and shoes with cloth tops and shiny tips.

She was to have a red ribbon to tie the black hair back from her eager little freckled face; and she was to carry Cousin Mollie's tiny white fan hanging about her neck, for although it was winger, fans were proper at a party.

It seemed to her as if the time would never come. Days and nights passed away, of course, but the party stayed "next Wednesday" and "the day after to-morrow" for a long time. However, the morning came at last when the party was to be "this afternoon"; and then Anna had her dinner and tried restlessly to take a nap, and first thing she knew it was "now," and there was a great hurry to get her ready.

The whole family came into the parlor to have a look at her in her party clothes.

"Head up," said father, "and smiles to the front." That was part of a drill they used to play sometimes. But—would you believe it?—Anna looked as if she could not smile, no matter how hard she might try. Nobody remembered ever to have seen such a sober look on the face of the youngest Lee.

"What is it, dear?" asked mother. "Did I tie your hair-ribbon too tight?"

"No, ma'am," said Anna.

"What's the trouble, chick?" asked Uncle Charlie. "You look just like a little girl who was going to get kept in because she couldn't spell b-a-t, bat, and maybe not even c-a-t, cat. Now what is the matter?"

But Anna only shook her head, and although they could see that she was trying to smile, she was not able to get the tiniest bit of sunshine into her face.

"Dear me!" said mother. "After all this looking forward to the party!"

"Well, well!" began father; and Uncle Charlie was going to make a remark, too, when grandma, sitting in her big chair by the open grate, said:

"Bless the child! I know all about it. She's scared."

"Scared?" asked Uncle Charlie.

"What of?"

"Yes," grandma went on. "I remember my first party, and I remember Anna's mother's first party; and we were both of us frightened, thinking about the strange people and so many of them. But I know the cure for it. I am not going to tell it out loud before all of you, but if Anna wants me to I will go into my own room with her and tell her a secret and if she does just what I say she will enjoy the party as much as she expected yesterday to do."

Father and mother and Uncle Charlie laughed, because it was quite a family joke that grandma and Anna had so many secrets from the rest of them; then father said they would wait in the hall outside, and the two could talk in the parlor.

Ten minutes later Mary put on her white cap and apron and took Anna to the party. There were a great many little boys and girls already gathered together, and they seemed to be having a merry time playing games. Four or five ladies were standing near the door, greeting the newcomers, and when one of them came forward, Anna nearly turned to cling to Mary's hand, for although she was eight years old, she really was very shy. But then she remembered grandma's secret, and even while she was being welcomed she began to look about for somebody.

All during the first part of the party Anna was on the watch. She looked at each little girl and boy she came near, but she did not find the one she wanted; so at last she slipped out into the hall and peeped round in all the corners. And after a while, in the very last corner, where it was dark because the staircase went up right over it, she came upon a little girl about her own age, sitting quietly all alone on a sofa. Anna's eyes sparkled, and she went and stood in front of the little girl.

"I was looking for you," she said.

"What's your name?"

"My name's Maude," said the other. "And you couldn't look for me, 'cause you don't know me."

"But my grandmother told me to," explained Anna. "And we've got to go in and play games with the others, and make everybody have a good time at the party."

"I can't," said Maude, and then her voice lowered. "I'm too timid, and my mother says parties will wear it off, and they don't."

"Oh," said Anna. "I know. Grandma told me. Move over and I'll tell you all about it."

"Grandma says," she went on, spreading her fingers and counting them off, as she had seen Uncle Charlie do when he was discussing things, "grandma says that when

people are timid it is because they don't remember other people. She says 's'pose all the boys and girls said, 'I'm too timid to play, and so I'll sit in a corner and not smile or have a nice time.' What then? grandma says. And then she says no matter how scared you are, there might be somebody feeling still worse, and so go find that one, and tell them to let's play games and eat ice-cream—or maybe it's sherbet. Have you seen any popping notices yet?" she broke off.

"No," said Maude. "But how did your grandma know where I was? I was hiding."

"My grandma said 'specially under the stairs,'" laughed Anna. "That was a good place to find people timid than you are, she said; and they might be a boy or maybe they might be a girl. And if you will come along now I know where the lady with the notices is, and we'll get ours and be partners all the rest of the party. And anyway, Willie Tremont and his mother would feel sorry if they knew two of their party folks were under the steps; and thought they were scared."

So they went in to the games hand in hand; and when seven o'clock came, and with it a flock of maids and big sisters, nobody had had a better time or said good-by more reluctantly than the two timid ones who had started the party hiding under the stairs.

THE PAST AND FUTURE

A COMPARISON OF THE TWO CENTURIES.

We Wonder if the Twentieth Will Keep Up With the Nineteenth.

The nineteenth century received the horse and bequeathed the automobile.

It received the dirt road and bequeathed the railroad.

It received the sailboat and bequeathed the ocean liner.

It received the fireplace and bequeathed steam and the gas range.

It received the staircase and bequeathed the elevator and escalator.

It received the hand printing press and bequeathed the Hoe cylinder.

It received hand-set type and bequeathed the linotype.

It received the goosequill and bequeathed the typewriter.

It received the painter's brush and bequeathed lithography, the camera and color photography.

It received ordinary light and bequeathed the Roentgen ray.

It received gunpowder and bequeathed nitro-glycerine.

It received the flintlock and bequeathed the automatic Maxim.

It received the tallow dip and bequeathed the arc light.

It received the beacon light signal and bequeathed the telephone and wireless telegraphy.

It received wood and stone buildings and bequeathed twenty-story steel structures.

It received letters sent by a personal messenger and bequeathed a world's postal union.

It received the mediaeval city, a collection of buildings huddled within walls for safety and bequeathed the modern city, lighted, paved, sewered and provided with five-cent transportation.

It received a world without free public schools and left no civilized country without them.

It received a world in which men voted only in America and left them voting in every civilized country.

It received a world without a voting woman, and left it with some measure of woman suffrage in nearly every civilized country and full suffrage in a large section of the earth's surface.

Is the twentieth century going in for breaking after this style? If so, it will have to hustle.

But, really, at times it seems as if the twentieth century would usefully employ itself in just utilizing the discoveries of the nineteenth.

Steam heat, gas ranges, elevators, bath tubs and other nice things are in the world. Why not make them available for everybody?

Then there is the land. That has always been in the world. Why not make that available for everybody?

The nineteenth century discovered the kindergarten.

The twentieth could usefully make it available for all children.

It discovered the Roentgen ray. But lots of people can't afford to pay for just plain, ordinary sunlight in their houses.

The inventors are a very wonderful class of gentlemen—women, too, now-a-days—but it really seems as if the twentieth century didn't need them so much as some plain, practical people to utilize what they'd done already.

And then again, it sometimes seems as if the little young twentieth century had all it could do to manage the problems which the nineteenth bequeathed along with its blessings.

The nineteenth century discovered how to make people live in perpendicular layers instead of beside each other on the ground, as they used to, and bequeathed the problem of congested population.

It discovered the ocean liner and bequeathed the steamer.

It took the weaving out of the hands of woman and sent her to the factory.