

A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER X.

The man who abandons all hope is constantly haunted by fears. This is as strange as it is unjust, like much else in our everyday life. Even though there had returned to me all the joys of existence, yet I was still haunted by an ever-present dread—a terror lest some terrible mandate should suddenly be launched upon me by the unknown director of my actions.

My situation was, to say the least, a most extraordinary one. Valiantly I strove to rid myself of the obsession which constantly crept upon me whenever my attention was not actually distracted by the new existence that had so mysteriously been opened up to me. For a little while I would let my mind dwell upon the terrifying thought that I was entirely helpless in the hands of one who was, without doubt, unscrupulous. I had pledged my honor to keep secret that appalling midnight crime, and to act always as directed. Edna herself, the woman whose voice sounded so tender, whose hands were so small and soft to the touch, had forced me to this. To her alone was due this state of constant anxiety as to what might next be demanded of me. The thought would creep upon me, now pausing, now advancing, until at length it wrapped me round and round, and stifled out my breath, like a death-mask of cold clay. Then my heart would sink, my sight seemed to die, even sound would die until there seemed an awful void—the void of death for ever and for ever dumb, a dreadful, conquering silence.

A thousand times I regretted that I had in that moment of my utter helplessness given my promise to conceal the mysterious crime. Yet, when I recollected with what extraordinary ingenuity I had been deceived by the man whom I had believed to be a police-constable, the deep cunning which had been displayed in obtaining from my lips a statement of all the facts I knew, and the subsequent actions of the cool-headed Edna, my mind became confused. I could see no solution of the extraordinary problem, save that I believed her to be deeply implicated in some plot which had culminated in the murder of the young man, and that she herself had some strong personal motive in concealing the terrible truth.

I ought, I knew, to have gone to Scotland Yard and made a full and straightforward deposition of the whole matter. Nevertheless, my story was a very strange one—stranger, perhaps, than that of the many curious romances which are daily laid before the Director of Criminal Investigations. After all, it might not have been believed. I had no idea where the scene of the tragedy was situated, and, having been sightless at the time, had actually witnessed nothing. Theory upon theory I formed, but when I dug down to their roots I found that they merely drew their strength from my own fear or imagination, and were utterly worthless. Once or twice I contemplated disregarding my promise and making a full statement to the police; but on calm reflection I saw that such a course was now absolutely useless. Two months had elapsed since the fateful night, and the body—or bodies—had, without doubt, been disposed of long ago. Such ingenious evildoers would exert the utmost care in the disposition of the corpse, and would never run risk of detection. They feared me, I felt assured, and it was this thought which constantly harassed me for if such were actually the case, then they had every incentive to take my life on the well-established principle that dead men tell no tales.

With the return of my vision my sense of hearing had, curiously enough, become both weakened and distorted. Sounds which I heard when blind presented quite a different impression now that I could see. The blind hear where those with eyesight can detect nothing. The ears of the former train themselves to act as eyes also, yet the moment the vision is recovered the sharpened sense of hearing again assumes its normal capacity. Hence I found that I could not now distinguish voices and sounds so quickly as before; indeed, the voices of those about me sounded somehow different now that I had recovered my sight.

My friends, into whose circle they declared I had returned like one from the grave, welcomed me everywhere, and I confess that, notwithstanding the oppression constantly upon me, I enjoyed myself to the top of my bent. I still remained in my dingy, smoke-grimed rooms in Essex Street, really more for Parker's sake than for my own, and also, of course, in order to be near Dick when he returned, but nearly every evening I was out somewhere or other, going here and there about town.

I had long ago been a member of the Devonshire, and had now returned, and spent a good deal of time there, even though the main distinction of the club was the number of old fogies who affected it. But I found it a conveniently central place to dine and idle away any hours of the day that I had to spare. In the middle of October, when most men I knew were away on the moors, I had a dinner engagement one evening with the Channings, in Cornwall Gardens. Colonel Channing, a retired officer of the Guards, was a man I had known during the greater part of my lifetime. His service had been mainly of a diplomatic character, for he had served as British military attaché at Berlin and Vienna, and now lived with his wife and daughter in London, and seemed to divide his time mainly be-

tween the St. James's and the United Service Clubs. He was a merry old fellow, with white hair and moustache and a florid complexion, the dandified air of attaché still clinging to him. His courtesy was distinctive, save when in the heat of argument upon European affairs—of which he prided himself on his extensive and peculiar knowledge—he would use strong and rather impolite epithets regarding those who disagreed with him.

As he sat at the head of his table, his habitual monocle in his eye, and the tiny green ribbon of the order of the Crown of Italy in the lapel of his dining-jacket, he looked a perfect type of the ex-attaché. His wife, a rather spare woman of fifty, who seemed to exist externally in a toilette of black satin and lace, was pleasant, though just a trifle stiff, probably because of her long association with other diplomatists' wives; while Nellie Channing was a happy, fair-haired girl, who wore pretty blouses, cycled, golfed, flirted, and shopped in the High Street in the most approved manner of the average girl of South Kensington.

Nellie and I had always been good friends. She had been at school in England while her parents had been abroad, but on completing her education she had lived some five years or so in Vienna, and had thus acquired something of the cosmopolitan habit of her father. She looked charming in her pink blouse a trifle décolleté, as she sat on my left at dinner, and congratulated me upon my recovery.

(To be Continued.)

SENTENCE SERMONS.

Faith easily dies without fellowship. What is given in love never is lost. Many mistake faultfinding for fidelity.

Envy is a confession of inner destitution. Sound doctrine does not cure a diseased heart.

The pursuit of truth is the secret of eternal youth.

The richest gifts come out of the poorest pockets.

The life of service has few difficulties of conduct.

A man's title to glory does not depend on the glory of his title.

You never lose your own joy by lending an ear to another's woe.

It doesn't take much fortitude to bear another's misfortune.

Happy is he who is too rich in faith to worry over a fortune.

A square deal has something beside sharp edges and angles to it.

The cross is irksome only when we try to climb it as a pedestal.

The man who cannot find a god in the universe discovers one in a mirror.

Only the morally astigmatic see lying as the only refuge in time of trouble.

Some men are ready to forgive their enemies when their enemies have them down.

Too many giving the poor crusts on the street are stealing their bread in the alley.

When a man tells the truth about himself he is anxious for some one to call him a liar.

He who believes nothing until he understands it fully must have a limited range of knowledge.

Religion never makes a permanently powerful impression without steady practical expression.

When you hear a man deprecating the good you may know he is discounting what he cannot acquire.

There would be little religious infidelity in this world but for our attempts to force the forms of one man's faith on other men.

GROWN UP WITH HIM.

An Irishman was in trouble about a gun found in his possession. The law, unfortunately for him, adopted the unkind suggestion that he had stolen it.

While awaiting his trial, he was visited by a friend, who urged him to steadfastly adhere to the statement that he had owned the gun for years. The friend, furthermore, cited how he himself, when in similar difficulty about a hen, had preserved both the hen and his character by swearing he had possessed the bird since it was a chicken.

The wisdom of this advice was not lost on Pat, and he henceforth regarded his trial with the settled serenity of, if not conscious innocence, sanguine anticipation.

On the day appointed, when conclusive evidence against him had been tendered, he was asked formally whether he had anything to say for himself. Pat throwing a glance of shrivelling contempt at the prosecutor, turned to the judge and said:

"The man's a perjured villain, yer honor. That gun's bin in my possession, yer honor, iver since it was a pistol."

THE DOOR TO OUR FEELINGS.

Every person's feelings have a front door and a side door by which they may be entered. The front door is on the street. Some keep it always open, some keep it latched, some locked, some bolted with a chain that will let you peep in but not get in, and some nail it up, so that nothing can pass its threshold. This front door leads into a passage which opens into an ante-room, and this into the interior apartments. The side door opens at once into the secret chamber. There is almost always one key to the side door. This is carried for years hidden in a mother's loom. Fathers, brothers, sisters, and friends, often, but by no means so universally, have duplicates of it. The wedding-ring conveys a right to one; alas, if none is given with it! Be very careful to whom you trust care of these keys of the side door.

ON THE FARM

TEST OF SEED CORN.

It is a mistake to buy seed corn shelled where it can be had on the ear, but inasmuch as the great bulk of ensilage seed corn which passes through the trade in Canada is shelled, it is largely a case of Hobson's choice. Ear corn is preferable for several reasons. In the first place, one can see what kind and variety of ears he is planting from, and reject inferior ones. The embryo will be somewhat less liable to have had its germinating qualities impaired by heating in storage or in transit. Most important of all, he can test his corn by the ear, thereby culling out those that show inferior germinating quality. There are almost sure to be a certain proportion of these which, if used for planting, would mean either blank spaces in the field, or, what is probably a more serious disadvantage in drilled corn, weak-growing, poorly-eared stalks. Far better in every way to buy an extra quantity of seed corn, plant the strong-germinating ears, and use the rest for feed. A tremendous loss occurs every year in America as a result of inferior seed corn, says the Farmer's Advocate.

For testing corn by the ear, several easy systems have been devised. They consist in numbering the ears, say, with a label on the butt, then selecting four or five representative kernels from each ear, and planting in a small box of sand or garden mould, divided off into squares corresponding to the numbered ears. By the promptness and vigor with which these representative kernels sprout, the advisability or otherwise of using each particular ear is determined. Butts and tips should be broken off and used for chicken or pig feed. A man is supposed, by this method, to be able to test from five to eight bushels of seed corn in a day, locating all weak or bad ears. As one writer has expressed it, there are dimes for minutes in this work.

Those who are obliged to buy shelled corn, as well as those who cannot be persuaded to take the slight trouble of testing their corn by the ear, should at least make a general germination test, in order to guard against the possibility of sowing seed so low in vitality that it will not produce a crop. This is particularly important in a cold, wet season, when only seed corn of the highest vitality may be depended on. This test should be made, if possible, before purchasing the seed, and certainly before sowing any of it in the field. In a little box of earth in the window, or between double folds of flannel or blotting paper, place one or two hundred average kernels. Keep the earth, cloth or paper moist, but not wet. If cloth or paper is used, it should be in the bottom of a plate or dish, with another plate inverted over it. The promptness, vigor and percentage of germination will indicate whether the corn is fit to sow or not, and, if sown, how much extra seed should be used to make up for defunct grains. A few non-viable ones in a sample are not of very serious consequence in ensilage corn, providing the proportion is known and allowed for, but any considerable number of weak, non-vigorous kernels may occasion much loss.

Seed corn should be tested every year, as a matter of course, but indications are that it will be particularly necessary this spring, as the unusually cold, wet season of 1907, in the corn-belt States, did not allow the corn to mature and dry out well before the season of frost.

CHURN CREAM SWEET AS POSSIBLE

I have come to the conclusion that the shorter the time elapses between the milking of the cow, and the manufacture of the butter, the better will be the quality of the butter. What we call a ripened cream flavor of the butter is an acquired taste. The true butter flavor is that which is made from sweet cream, churned as soon as possible after the milk comes from the cow. This so-called ripened cream flavor, is something for which we have to develop an unnatural taste, and I put it in the same class as smoking cigars, drinking whiskey, and all those bad habits which the animal man has acquired. The butter which brings the highest price in the markets of Great Britain is made from cream with very little acid in it. I think it is wrong for the butter-maker to develop 5-6 of acid in the cream before churning. It would be better to churn the cream directly after separating, pasteurizing and cooling. I think I am safe in saying that we have been making a mistake in our methods of manufacturing butter. The sooner we get it made into butter after the milk comes from the cow the better it will be. Many of the bad flavors in cream are caused by holding it too long before churning.—Prof. Dean.

PASSING OF THE PATENT.

Higgins—"What are you blacking these shoes for—aren't they patent leather?"
Wiggins—"They were, but the patent has expired."

SIMILAR BUT DIFFERENT.

"I reckon you ain't much like your ma," said the old-fashioned woman as they met on the street corner.
"Oh, yes I am," protested the overdressed young lady. "Ma's at over piecing a quilt and I'm out making a spread."