

A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER XX.—(Cont'd).

We wandered on from room to room. There must, I think, have been quite thirty sleeping apartments, guests' rooms, etc., all furnished in that same glaring style, that greenery-yellow abomination miscalled art.

"The next room," explained my secretary, as we approached the end of the corridor, "is Mrs. Heaton's boudoir. I expect she's in there. I saw Dalton, her maid, enter a moment ago."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, leave her alone!" I said, turning at once on my heel. I had no wish to meet that awful rejuvenated hag again.

I fancy Gedge smiled, but if he did he was very careful to hide his amusement from me. He was, without doubt, a very well-trained secretary.

The thought of Mabel Anson crossed my mind. All the recollections of the dinner on the previous night, and the startling discoveries I subsequently made recurred to me at that moment, and I felt dazed and bewildered. This painted and powdered person could surely not be my wife, when I loved Mabel Anson with all my soul! Only yesterday I had sat at her side at dinner, and had felt the pressure of her soft, delicate hand upon mine. No; it could not be that I was actually married. Such a thing was utterly impossible, for surely no man could go through the marriage ceremony without knowing something about it.

Hickman's treachery angered me. Why, I wondered, had he enticed me to his rooms in order to make that extraordinary attempt upon my life? The wound upon my head was undoubtedly due to the blow he had dealt me. The theory that I had accidentally knocked my head against the marble statue and broken it was, I felt assured, only one of that fool Britten's brilliant ideas with which he misled his too-confiding patients. If this were so, then all the incidents subsequent to my recovery of consciousness were part of the conspiracy which had commenced on the previous night with Hickman's attempt.

We descended the stairs, passing the footman Gill, who, with a bow, said—

"I hope, sir, you feel better."

"A little," I answered. "Bring me a whiskey and soda to the library."

And the man at once disappeared to do my bidding.

"I suppose he thinks I'm mad," I remarked. "This is a very remarkable menage, to say the least."

In the great hall, as I walked towards the library, was a long mirror, and in passing I caught sight of my own figure in it. I stopped, and with a loud cry of wonder and dismay stood before it, glaring at my own reflection.

The bandages about my head gave me a terribly invalid appearance, but reflected by that glass I saw a sight which struck me dumb with amazement. I could not believe my eyes; the thing staggered belief.

On the morning before I had shaved as usual, but the glass showed that I now wore a well-cut, pointed, reddish-brown beard!

My face seemed to have changed curiously, for I presented an older appearance than on the day before. My hair seemed to have lost its youthful lustre, and upon my brow were three distinct lines—the lines of care.

I felt my beard with eager hands. Yes, there was no mistake. It was there, but how it had grown was inconceivable.

Beyond, through the open door, I saw the brilliant sunlight, the green lawn, the bright flowers and cool foliage of the rustling trees.

It was summer. Yet only yesterday was chill, dark winter, with threatening snow.

Had I been asleep, like Rip Van Winkle in the legend?

"Tell me," I cried excitedly, turning to the man standing behind me. "What's the day of the month to-day?"

"The seventeenth of July."

"July?" I echoed. "And what year is this?"

"Why, eighteen hundred and ninety-six, of course."

"Ninet-six!" I gasped, stand-

ing glaring at him in blank amazement. "Ninet-six?"

"Certainly. Why?"

"Am I really losing my senses?" I cried, dismayed. "Yesterday was six years ago!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"Yesterday six years ago!" he echoed, looking at me in blank bewilderment. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that if what you've told me is really the truth," I cried agape in wonder, "then it is the most astounding thing I've ever heard of. Are you absolutely certain of the date?"

"Certain? Why of course."

"Of the year, I mean?"

"Positive. It's eighteen ninety-six."

"For how long, then, have you been my secretary?" I inquired.

"Nearly five years."

"And how long have I lived in this place?"

"For nearly four."

"And that woman," I demanded, breathlessly—"is she actually my wife?"

"Most certainly," he answered. I stood stupefied, stunned by this amazing statement.

"But," I protested, lost in wonder, "yesterday was years ago. How do you account for that? Are you certain that you're not deceiving me?"

"I've told you the absolute truth," he responded. "On that I stake my honor."

"I stood aghast, glaring at my reflection in the mirror, open-mouthed, as though I gazed upon some object supernatural. My personal appearance had certainly changed, and that in itself convinced me that there must be some truth in this man Gedge's statement. I was older, a trifle stouter than before, I think, and my red-brown beard seemed to give my face a remarkably grotesque appearance. I had always hated beards, and considered them a relic of prehistoric barbarity. It was surprising that I should now have grown one."

"Then according to your account I must have spent yesterday here—actually in this house?"

"Why, of course you did," he responded. "We were engaged the greater part of the day over Lafan's affair. Walter Halliburton, the mining engineer, came down to see you, and we were together all the afternoon. He left for London at five."

"And where did I dine?"

"Here. With Mrs. Heaton."

"Don't speak of her as Mrs. Heaton!" I cried in anger. "She's not my wife, and I will not have her regarded as such."

He gave his shoulders a slight shrug.

"Now, look here, Mr. Gedge," I said, speaking for the first time with confidence. "If you were in my place, awakening suddenly to find that six years of your life had vanished in a single night, and that you were an entirely different person to that of twelve hours ago, what would you believe?"

He looked at me with a somewhat sympathetic expression upon his thin features.

"Well, I don't know what I should think." Then he added, "But surely such a thing can't be possible."

"It is possible," I cried. "It has happened to me. I tell you that last night was six years ago."

He turned from me, as though he considered further argument unavailing.

My head reeled. What he had told me was utterly incredible. It seemed absolutely impossible that six whole years should have passed without my knowledge; that I should have entered upon a business of which I had previously known nothing; that I should have rapidly amassed a fortune; and, most of all, that I should have married that powdered and painted woman who had presented herself as my wife. Yet such were the unaccountable facts which this man Gedge asked me to believe.

He saw that I was extremely dubious about the date, therefore he led me back to the library, where there hung upon the wall a large calendar which quickly convinced me.

Six years had really elapsed since yesterday.

In that vexing and perplexing present I reflected upon the puzzling past. That happy dinner with Mabel at The Boltons, the subsequent discoveries in that drawing-room where she had sat at the piano calmly playing; her soft words of tenderness, and the subsequent treachery of that dog-faced man Hickman, all passed before me with extraordinary vividness. Yet, in truth, all had happened long ago.

Alas! I was not like other men. To the practical, level-headed man of affairs "To-day" may be sufficient, all-engrossing; but to the very large majority—a majority which, I believe, includes also many of the practical, the business of to-day admits of constant pleasant excursions into the golden mists of "long ago," and many happy flights to the rosy heights of "some day." Most of those who read this strange story of my life will remember with a melancholy affection, with a pain that is more soothing than many pleasures, the house wherein they were born, or at any rate the abode in which they passed the earlier years of their lives. The agonizing griefs of childhood, the disappointments, the soul-racking terrors, mellowed by the gentle touch of passing years, have no sting for our mature sensibilities, but come back to us now with a pathos that is largely tinted with amusement.

I stood there reviewing the past, puzzled, utterly unable to account for it. Age, the iconoclast, had shattered most of the airy idols which my youth had set up in honor of itself. I had lost six of the most precious years of my life—years that I had not lived.

Yet this man before me declared most distinctly that I had lived them; that I had enjoyed a second existence quite apart and distinct from my own self. Incredible though it seemed, yet it became gradually impressed upon me that what this man Gedge had told me was the actual, hideous truth, and that I had really lived and moved and prospered throughout those six unknown years, while my senses had at the same time remained dormant, and I had thus been utterly unconscious of existence.

But could such a thing be? As a prosaic man of the world I argued, as any one in his right mind would argue, that such a thing was beyond the bounds of possibility. Nevertheless, be it how it might, the undisputed fact remained that I had lapsed into unconsciousness on that winter's night six years before, and had known absolutely nothing of my surroundings until I found myself lying upon the floor of the drawing-room of what was alleged to be my country house.

Six years out of a man's life is a large slice. The face of the world changes considerably in that space of time. I found myself living a life which was so artificial and incongruous to my tastes as to appear utterly unreal. Yet, as I made further inquiry of this man Gedge every moment that passed showed me plainly that what he had said was the truth.

He related to me the routine of my daily life, and I stood listening aghape in wonder. He told me things of which I had no knowledge; of my private affairs, and of my business profits; he took big leather-bound ledgers from the great green-painted safe, and showed me formidable sums entered therein, relating, he explained, to the transactions at the office up in London. Some documents he showed me, large official-looking sheets with stamps and seals and signatures, which he said were concessions obtained from a certain foreign Government, and opened my private letter-box, exhibiting letters I had actually written with my own hand, but without having any knowledge of having done so.

These revelations took away my breath.

It could not be mere loss of memory from which I was suffering. I had actually lived a second and entirely different life to that I had once led in Essex Street. Apparently I had become a changed man, had entered business, had amassed a fortune—and had married.

Assuredly, I reflected, I could never have been in my right senses to have married that angular person with the powdered cheeks. That action, in itself, was sufficient to convince me that my brain had been unbalanced during those six lost years.

Alone I stood, without a single sympathizer—without a friend.

How this astounding gap in my life had been produced was absolutely beyond explanation. I tried to account for it, but the reader will readily understand that the problem was, to me, utterly inexplicable. I, the victim of the treachery of that man Hickman, had fallen unconscious one night, and had awakened to discover that six whole years had elapsed, and that I had developed into an entirely

different person. It was unaccountable, nay, incredible.

(To be Continued.)

EMERGENCY WAR-CHESTS.

Money Does not Last Long When War Begins.

The \$30,000,000 in gold, which Germany keeps hoarded up in the Julius Tower at Spandau against the next great European war, and which certain clerical members of the Reichstag recently wanted to convert to other and more immediate needs of the Empire, is not a great sum as Government war-chests go. In the event of hostilities breaking out with, say, France, it would probably be exhausted inside of a week.

True, in the war of 1870-71, Bismarck made the \$25,000,000 he had on hand last over the first fortnight. But wars then were not nearly so costly as they have since become.

Russia possessed a war-chest of \$200,000,000 when hostilities broke out between her and Japan in 1904. Or, at all events, so she asserted. Yet she was borrowing money freely before the campaign was four weeks old.

This, by the bye, was the biggest "kriegsschatz" (emergency war-chest) ever got together by any nation, although the United States once bid fair to equal it. This was after the civil war of 1861-65, when the Government at Washington was in such dire straits for money that it notes sank in value until they would fetch something less than one-third their face value.

One of the first things it did, consequently, when public credit was at length fully restored, was to start a "kriegsschatz" with an eye to future emergencies. Its war treasure, however, was not in gold, but in coined silver, and the weight of this presently broke down the walls of the treasury, the resultant avalanche of dollars killing, and temporarily burying, several unhappy clerks.

After this experience, the United States determined to rely, as does Britain, on her ordinary bank reserve.

ON THE FARM

ON WHAT DOES BUTTER QUALITY DEPEND.

Prof. Van Norman in the last report of the Farmer's Normal Institute for Pennsylvania has something to say as to what the quality of butter depends on, that is worth considering by Canadian butter makers. Referring to the faults in the butter of his State, he says there is an unnecessary amount of manure gets into the milk due to lack of cleanliness in the stables. If cows are kept clean the butter will be just as acceptable to the trade and will fare better at the National Dairy Shows. To quote: "The trouble is that we lack the uniformity which comes from comparing our own make with others. When I sit down in my little room and make butter, and see no better except what I make myself, I have no means of judging wherein I fail or excel. My judgment is one-sided. That is the trouble with most of our butter-makers."

"What I want in a judge is a man who is brought into contact with different kinds of butter regularly. He needs the variety and practice to keep his judgment accurate."

"One fault I find with much of the creamery butter, as well as the farmer's butter, is that the cream is allowed to get too old. Our farmers hold their cream at home for one or two days before they deliver it to the creamery, and the butter made from it has an old flavor, as the butter-maker calls it, and it is a flavor we do not want. The cream can be kept two days and kept in good condition if kept quite cold, but it is not wise to do this, as a rule. The same thing holds true on the farm, where only a limited amount of butter is made, and it takes two, three, four or even five days to collect enough cream for a churning. The facilities for holding that cream and keeping it in good condition, are not as favorable as we should have them. Therefore the cream is not kept cold, and is subjected to the odors of the cellar and of the cooking, of the washing, and of that boiled cabbage dinner that we sometimes have, and the result is unfortunate in the butter."

"The first principle in our butter-making is to have a clean, raw product and control the changes during the ripening of the cream so as to get the desired results. The market has changed in the last few

years, and to-day it wants a milder-flavored butter than formerly. When we say 'milder,' we mean one in which fermentation during ripening of the cream has not gone so far. First, the cream becomes slightly sour, then it becomes ripe, then over-ripe. The difference is in the degree of fermentation, and the market to-day wants a mild-flavored butter, one that is not rancid or made from over-ripe cream."

THE CARE OF GROWING STOCK

At this time of the year, growing fowls require the most careful attention. Many poultry keepers are in the habit of letting the chickens take care of themselves after the first few weeks, but until they are three or four months old, it is essential that every care should be taken. A little neglect may ruin a very promising youngster. The aim of the poultry-keeper should be to keep the chickens steadily growing from the time they leave the shell to maturity, and this can only be accomplished by the strictest attention to every one of the many details on which successful chicken rearing depends. See that the coops are well ventilated, and that they are regularly and thoroughly cleared. Avoid overcrowding at any cost, as more cases of retarded growth and actual loss can be traced to this cause than to any other.

It is a mistake to feed growing fowls solely on "dry" chick feed; much better results can be obtained by giving soft and "dry" food alternately. Vegetable food is essential, and chickens cannot be reared to the best advantage unless they have a grass run. Where, however, it is impossible for a grass run to be provided, vegetables must be given; but care must be taken that they are perfectly fresh, and renewed daily. If decayed vegetables are left about in the run, they will do much more harm than good. A great mistake, which many poultry-keepers make, is to keep their chickens in too close confinement. If strong, big birds are desired, it is essential that the chickens, after the first week or so, should be given a free range or an extensive grass run. Exercise is the finest thing in the world for growing fowls, and the birds that take the most exercise make the biggest and most vigorous adults.

CANINE SUPERINTENDENT.

On Allan Line Docks at Liverpool, "Jack" Starts Day's Work.

A retriever known as Jack has taken upon himself the duties of canine superintendent of the Allan Line at The Canada dock, Liverpool. As soon as one of the company's steamers arrives he is the first up the plank, making tracks for the galley, where the cook awaits him with a bone.

At 7 o'clock every morning he ushers the dock laborers to their work, barking at the head of the procession. He accompanies them out to dinner, and leads them in again for the afternoon. Jack at 1 o'clock then may go a mile away to board an Allan steamer in the graving dock, but he never makes the mistake of going on a wrong vessel.

Sunday is Jack's visiting day. How he found out various Allan officials' homes in Everton or Walton, miles away, nobody knows, but he barks at the doors regularly and is taken in to dinner at one house and to tea at another. At 11 o'clock at night he returns to the dock, where he barks until the watchman opens the gate for him.

HOW MACARONI IS MADE.

This is how macaroni is made:—To very glutinous wheat flour is added a plentiful supply of dried eggs. Mixed with water this becomes a dough, which is so thickly kneaded as to be difficult to impress with the fingers. Then it is carried to a round press perforated with holes, through which the dough is pressed by means of a heavy plate worked by a screw. The result is macaroni without holes in the sticks. Pipe macaroni is made through a similar press, with the difference that a round piece of metal makes the central hole. As it issues in long, snaky ropes from the bottom of the press, they are violently fanned to prevent them from sticking together, and are afterwards taken out into the open and laid on long bamboo poles to dry. Two or three days' exposure in the warm, sunny air of Italy makes the dough-pipes hard and brittle, and fit to use for food.

"Dat boy," said the negro sadly, as he prepared to administer to little Ephraim Rastus his eighth spanking in the last three days, "it a mighty bad boy. He's de white sheep of de family."