The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Bell seemed to know by intuition that Chris required him, or perhaps he caught a glimpse of her white dress from the terrace. Anyway, he strolled leisurely in her direction.

"Something has happened?" he whispered, as he came up.

"Well, yes," Chris replied, "though I should like to know how you guessed that. I had no difficulty in getting Mr. Steel on the telephone, but he would say nothing directly he heard that you were here beyond a peremptory request that you were to be told at once that Van Sneck has gone."

"Gone!" Bell echoed, blankly. "What do you mean by that?"

"He has disappeared from the hospital at Brighton to-day. Mr. Steel thinks they were extra busy, or something of that kind. Anyway, Van Sneck got up and dressed himself and left the hospital without being observed. It seems extraordinary to me."

"And yet quite possible," Bell said, thoughtfully. "Van Sneck had practically recovered from the flesh wounds; it was the injury to his head that was the worst part. He resembled an irresponsible lunatic more than anything else. Steel wants me, of course?"

"He suggests that you should go down to Brighton without delay."

"All right, I'll make some excuse to take the first train in the morning. We've got a fine start of Henson, and that's a good thing. If Van Sneck comes within his net we shall have a deal of trouble. I had hoped to get permission to operate on Van Sneck, and relied upon him to solve the mystery. And now you had better go back to your telephone."

Chris hurried back again. A whispered word satisfied her that Steel was still at the other end.

"Dr. Bell starts as early as possible to-morrow," she said. "If you will listen carefully I will give you a brief outline of all that has happened since I have been here."

Chris proceeded to tell her story succinctly and briefly. From little sounds and signs she could tell that Steel was greatly interested. The story of the man with the thumb fascinated him. It appealed to his professional instincts.

"And what do you want to do with him?" Steel asked.

"Well, you see I have in my power," Chris explained. "We can get the other Rembrandt any time we like now, but that is quite a minor consideration. What I want is for Merritt to know that I can have him arrested at any time for stealing my star. It's Enid's star, as a matter of fact; but that is a detail."

"An important one, surely," Steel's voice came thin and clear. "Suppose that our dear friend chances to recognise it? No, don't ring off yet."

"I'm not. Oh, you are speaking to the Exchange people. Yes, yes; we shall be a long sime yet. Are you there? Well, Henson has never seen the star. Enid bought it just before the great trouble came, and afterwards she never had the heart to wear it."

"I understand. You want Merritt to know this?"

"Well, I do and I don't," Chris explained. "I am anxious not to frighten the man. I want to get him in my power, and I want to prove to him that it would be to his advantage for him to come over to my side. Suppose Enid gave it out that the star had been stolen? And suppose that I could save him at the critical moment? I shouldn't mind him thinking that I had stolen the star in the first place. That is why I am asking you as a novelist to help me."

"You would have made an excellent novelist yourself," David said, admiringly. "Give me five minutes. Are you there? I fancy I have it. Can't you hear me? That's better. I'll see Miss Gates the first thing in the morning and get her to go over to Longdean and see your sister. Confound it, don't cut us off yet. What does it matter so long as the messages are paid for? Nobody else wants the line. Well, I may for an hour more. Are you there? Very sorry; it's the fault of the Post Office people. Here is the plot in a nutshell. Your sister has lost a diamond star. She gives a minute description of it to the police, and drops a hint to the effect that she believes it was taken away by mistake—in other words, was stolen—from her in London by a chance acquaintance called Christabel Lee—"

"Ah," Chris cried, "how clever you are!"

"I have long suspected it," the thin voice went on, drily. "The full description of the star will be printed in the 'Police Gazette,' a copy of which every respectable pawnbroker always gets regularly. I suppose the people where the star was pawned are respectable?"

"Highly so. They have quite a Bond Street establishment attached."

"So much the better. They will see the advertisement and they will communicate with the police. The Reverend James Merritt will be arrested——"

"I don't quite like that," Chris suggested.

"Oh, it's necessary. He will be arrested at the castle. Knowing his antecedents, the police will not stand upon any ceremony with him. You will be filled with remorse. You have plunged back into a career of crime again a being who was slowly climbing into the straight path once more. You take the blame upon yourself—it was at your instigation that Merritt pawned the star."

"But, really, Mr. Steel——"

"Oh, I know. But the end justifies the means. You save Mr. Merritt, there is a bond of sympathy between you, he will regard you as a great light in his interesting profession. You saved him because you had appropriated the star yourself."

"And go to gaol instead of Mr. Merritt?"

"Not a bit of it. The star you deemed to be yours. You had one very like it when you saw Miss Henson, when you were staying in London at the same hotel. By some means the jewels got mixed. You are confident that an exchange has been made. Also you are confident that if Miss Henson will search her jewel-case she will find a valuable star that does not belong to her. Miss Henson does so, she is distressed beyond measure, she offers all kinds of apologies. Exit the police. You need not tell Merritt how you get out of the difficulty, and thus you increase his respect for you. There, that would make a very ingenious and plausible magazine story. It should be more convincing in real life."

"Capital!" Chris murmured. "What an advantage it is to have a novelist to advise one! Many, many thanks for all your kindness. Good-night!"

Chris rang off with a certain sense of relief. It was some time later before she had a chance of conveying to Bell what had happened. He listened gravely to all that Chris had to say.

"Just the sort of feather-brained idea that would ocurr to a novelist," he said. "For my part, I should prefer to confront Merritt with his theft, and keep the upper hand of him that way."

"And he would mistrust me and betray me at the first opportunity. Besides, in that case, he would know at once that I wanted to get to the bottom of his connection with Reginald Henson. Mr. Steel's plan may be bizarre, but it is safe."

"I never thought of that," Bell admitted. "I begin to imagine that you are more astute than I gave you credit for, which is saying a great deal."

Chris was down early the following morning to find Bell at breakfast with every sign of making an early devarture. He was very sorry, he explained, gravely, to his host and Chris, but his letters gave him no option. He would come back in a day or two if he might. A moment later Henson came into the room, ostentatiously studying a Bradshaw.

"And where are you going?" Littimer asked. "Why do you all abandon me? Reginald, do you mean to say that you are going to refuse me the light of your countenance?"

"Is Dr. Bell going, too?" Henson asked, with just a suggestion of uneasiness. "I mean—er——"

"Business," Bell said. "I have here at great personal inconvenience. And you?"

"London," Henson replied. "A meeting to-day that I cannot get out of. A couple of letters by this morning's post have decided me."

Chris said nothing; she appeared to be quite indifferent until she had a chance to speak to Bell alone. She looked a little anxious.

"He has found out about Van Sneck," she said. "Truly he is a marvellous man! And he had no letters this morningf I opened the post-bag personally. But I'm glad he's going, because I shall have James Merritt all to myselff"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

On the whole Mr. James Merritt, ex-convict and now humanitarian, was enjoying himself immensely. He did not sleep at the castle, for Lord Littimer drew the line there, but he contrived to get most of his meals under that hospitable roof, and spent a deal of time there. It was by no means the first time he had been "taken up" by the aristocracy since his conversion, and his shyness was wearing off. Moreover, Henson had given his henchman strict instructions to keep his eyes open with a view to getting at the bottom of the Rembrandt mystery.

Still, there is always a crumpled rose-leaf somewhere, and Merritt had his. A few days after Henson departed so hurriedly from town the stolen Rembrandt disappeared from Merritt's rooms. Nobody knew anything about it; the thing had vanished, leaving no trace of the thief behind. Perhaps Merritt would have been less easy in Littimer's society had he known that the missing print was securely locked away in the latter's strong room. Still, had Merritt been acquainted with the classics, carpe diem would like as not have been his favorite motto. He declined to worry over the matter until Henson's return. It was not for him to know, yet, that Chris had actually gone over to Moreton Wells and, during the absence of Merritt's landlady, calmly walked into the house and taken the picture away.

"You are going to see some fun presently," she said, coolly, to the astonished Littimer, as she laid the missing picture before him. "No, I shall hear the whole story when Reginald Henson stands in the pillory before you. You know now that Henson was at the bottom of the plot to destroy Dr. Bell's character?"

"I always felt that our Reginald was a great scoundrel," Littimer purred over his cigarette. "And if you succeed in exposing him thoroughly I shall watch the performance with the greatest possible pleasure. I am not curious, my dear young lady, but I would give sixpence to know who you are."

"Keep your sixpence," Chris laughed, "and you'll know all in good time. All I ask is not to be astonished at anything that happens."

Littimer averred that he had long since lost the power of astonishment. There was a brightness and restlessness about Chris to-day that considerably added to her charms. It was nearly a week now since Bell and Henson had departed, and in the meantime Chris had heard nothing from Longdean. Half an hour before a telegram had arrived to the effect that a gentleman in a blue coat might be expected at Littimer Castle at any moment. The police were coming and Merritt was late to-day. If Merritt failed to turn up the whole situation would be spoilt. It was with a feeling of unutterable relief that Chris saw him coming up the drive.

"Come on the terrace," she said. "I have something very serious to say to you. Mr. Merritt, you have got us both into very serious trouble. Why did you do it?"

"Ain't done nothing," Merritt said, doggedly. He repeated the old formula, "What's up?"

"Er—it's about my diamond star" said Chris. "I lost it a few days ago. If I had known what was going to happen I should have put up with my loss. But I made inquiries through the police without saying a word to anybody, and now I find the star was pawned in Moreton Wells."

"Oh, lor," Merritt gasped. "You don't mean to say the police know that, miss?"

"Indeed I do. You see, once I allowed matters to go out of my hands I was powerless. The case now rests entirely with the police. And I am informed that they may come here and arrest you at any moment. I fear there is no escape for you—you pawned the thing yourself in your own name. What a thousand pities you yielded to sudden temptation."

"But I found it," Merritt whined. "I'll take my oath as I found it under the terrace- I—I was rambling along the cliffs one day and I found it. And I didn't know it was yours. If I had known it was yours I'd never have gone and done no such a thing."

Chris shook her head sadly.

"And just as you were getting on so nicely," she said.

(To be Continued.)

"Shadbelt," said Dinguss, "can you lend me a fiver this morning?" "No." "Just as I expected." "Then why did you ask me?" "Because," said Dinguss, vindictively, "I wanted the satisfaction of disproving that lying old proverb that 'it is the unexpected that happens'."

Goodheart—"I've got you down for a couple of tickets. We're getting up a raffle for a poor man of our neighborhood." Joakley—"None for me, thank you! I wouldn't know what to do with a poor man if I won him."

He—I can never think of the right thing to say at the right time! She—Why don't you try saying the right thing sometimes even if you get it in the wrong place?

A man always has a lot more income ahead when he is trying to borrow than the man he wants to lend to him.

Mrs. P.—"An pl suppose if we have another war you'll stay at home like a coward?" Mr. P.—"My dear, no one could call me a coward if I remained at your side."

Professor (lecturing upon the rhinoceros)—"I must beg you to give me your undivided attention. It is absolutely impossible that you can form a true idea of this hideous animal unless you keep your eyes fixed on me."

Ethel—"Who was that man you just bowed to?" Penelope—"That was Dobson, the great composer." Ethel—"A composer, did you say?" Penelope—"He manufactures soothing syrup."

YOUNG FOLKS

BEIN' SICK.

When I am really sick abed
It isn't ever any fun.
I feel all achy in my head
An' hate to take my medisun.
Th' sheets get stickyish an' hot,
But I am not allowed to kick
'Em off, er read, er talk a lot
When I am sick.

I hate for all the folks about
To come an' pat me on the face
An' say, "Poor child, you'll soon be out,"
An' tiptoe all around th' place.
They go when I pretend to be
Asleep—I do it for a trick;
I don't like folks to pity me
When I am sick.

My mother's diff'runt—I don't care
If she sits by me once or twice
An' says "Poor boy,' an smoothes my hair,
She ain't just tryin' to be nice.
They bring warm squashy things to me
For meals, an' make me eat 'em quick,
I'm mis'ruble as I can be
When I am sick.

TEDDY'S FIRTS POCKETS.

"I want pockets in my new pants" said Teddy.

"You are too little," said mama.

"Please, mama!" Teddy pleaded. "Pockets go with pants. All the big boys have them."

"Well," mama replied, "I suppose you must have them. Yes I will put some in."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Aunt Emily. "Clara, you don't mean to let that baby have pockets? He will have them full of rubbish and in a dreadful condition all the time. He's too little for trousers, to say nothing of pockets."

But mama put the pockets in, and Ted was happy. He went round with his hands in those little snuggeries, feeling very proud and grown-up, and trying to whistle; and by and by he began to put things into them.

"If I had the darning cotton I would mend the stockings," said grandma, "but it isn't in the basket."

"Here it is," said Teddy, taking a little black ball out of his right pocket. 'I found it behind the door, grandma. I didn't know it was darn cotton; I thought it was just string."

"You didn't happen to find my pencil, did you?" asked Sister Sue. "I lost it yesterday, and I can't find it anywhere."

"Yes," said Teddy. "It was in the wastebasket. I picked it out and put it in my pocket. I didn't know it was yours, Susie," he said, as he passed it to her.

Pretty soon mama could not find her thimble. "I had it this morning," she said, "and all at once I missed it. I am sorry, for it was the one you gave me, Emily."

"Here it is," said Teddy. "I found it down in the pansy bed. I meant to give it to you, but I forgot."

"It must have fallen off the window-sill," said mama. "I remember now; I was sitting by the garden window."

That afternoon Sister Mary asked if anybody had seen a button, for she had lost one off her blue dress; Tom inquired if anybody had run across his jack-knife, which he was using at noon and mislaid; Johnny needed a piece of string in a hurry; and grandpa could not find a little nail. All these things Teddy produced as they were wanted.

"I take it all back, Ted," said Aunt Emily, laughing. "Your pockets certainly are the most useful ones in the family. You don't happen to have a box of chocolates, do you?"

"No," Teddy replied, soberly, "but I have some candy that isn't chocolate. Mr. Smith gave it to me. It's taffy."

Aunt Emily laughed again. "There, Clara," she said. "I told you so!"

THE MYSTERIOUS PLAYER.

"Molly," mama called, softly, "don't dear! Baby's just beginning to get sleepy."

The sharp little patter of trills and scales on the piano kept on, undiminished.

"Molly, stop playing at once!" Mama's voice had the ring of command in it, but the patter of notes still continued. She did not dare to move, for baby's eyes were narrowing drowsily to little blue slits, and they must not fly open again. When at last the noise stopped, they were shut, and baby had landed on Noddle's Island after a long trip on a "choppy" sea.

Molly tiptoed into the room.

"Molly," mama said, gravely, "didn't you hear me tell you to stop drumming on the piano?"

"Why, I never, mama!" whispered Molly, surprised. "I haven't been in the music-room a tall!"

"Then it must have been Faith, but it didn't sound like her. She really plays little tunes."

"Faithie's out in the hammock, mama."

"Why!" mama said. "And the the boys are gone. Who could—Hark!"

The patter of notes again, running up and down the keyboard. Molly's eyes grew big with astonishment.

It was a queer little tuneless jig, with rests and "andantes" and "fortissimos" playing tag through it, and A flats and B sharps stepping on each other's heels.

Then it stopped short. Mama held out her hand to Molly, and they stole to the music-room door together. No one there. Peter Purr lay curled on the sofa in a doze, not looking at all as if he had just seen a ghost. So the queer little mystery stayed undiscovered until, a day or two after, Molly suddenly stepped right into the middle of it. She was hurrying through the hall when she heard the piano "going" again in the funny way.

"O, my!" she thought. "There 'tis playing on itself again—why-ee!"

For she had stopped at the door, and there was Peter Purr playing a tune all to himself! Peter Purr! Who ever would have thought? Molly stood and watched him do it. He leaped from the piano-stool to the keyboard, and whisked lightly back and forth, in great delight at his own music. His soft, padded toes struck the notes gently and made funny trills and quavers. Over and over again the tune played under his feet, and then it came to a sudden end. Peter Purr leaped down to the floor, and before Molly could unscrew the little round "O!" of astonishment her lips made, he was fast asleep on the sofa.

PERSONAL POINTERS.

Interesting Gossip About Some Prominent People.

Dr. Amelia Wilkes Lines, who recently celebrated her eightieth birthday, is the oldest practising woman doctor in the world. She has practised in New York City since 1854.

Among the Pope's treasures is an egg which he received from an English lady one Easter. The shell is made of ivory, its lining is of white satin, and the yolk is a golden case containing a large ruby set in diamonds; the whole is worth upwards of $10,000.

Brothers are seldom found in the ranks of Ambassadors simultaneously, yet the Cambon family can boast of having won this distinction. While M. Paul Cambon represents France at the Court of St. James, his brother acts in a similar capacity at Washington.

Prince Charles of Denmark is an expert typist, while Princess Christian is also a clever manipulator of the "keys." The latter's machine has German characters as well as English, and she types most of Prince Christian's German correspondence for him. Another Royal typist is the Princess of Wales, who is extremely quick, and types some of her own letters in quite a professional style.

The Sultan of Turkey, who is just sixty-two, is passionately fond of music—not of "military bands to drive away the stillness of the night," but of the pianoforte and the violin, of both of which he is a capital judge. Musicians visiting Constantinople with good introductions are easily admitted to play before the Sultan, who pays them on a lavish scale. The Sultan also takes a great interest in natural history. Like all Turks, he is fond of animals.

Gabriele d'Annunzio, the famous Italian poet and novelist, has a craze for idols. In his villa at Settignano, near Florence, he has a large room full of these "divinities," mostly Indian, Chinese, and Japanese. He pays any fair sum for a good specimen of his favorite gods. He is so much against anyone being admitted into his sanctuary when he is away that, before leaving the villa, he always gives strict orders to his servants not to allow anybody in under any pretence whatever.

Queen Alexandra some time ago wrote a few of her likes and dislikes in an album reserved for the purpose, her favorite King being Richard Coeur de Lion; her Queen, Dagmar of Denmark; her hero, Marlborough; her poet, Shakespeare; her painter, Rubens; her writer, Dickens; her color, sky-blue; her flower, the forget-me-not; her favorite name, Edward; her favorite dish, Yorkshire pudding; her favorite spot, England; and her ambition, "Never to interfere with the business of other people."

Little Prince Humbert's new nurse is now a conspicuous personage in contemporary history. The wife of a gamekeeper in the Royal service, she is twenty-three, and has a magnificent figure, superb black hair, and beautiful teeth. Around her raven tresses she wears an aureole of ribbon adorned with gold hairpins, and her costume is that of a nurse in the well-to-do middle-class of Rome. This fortunate young woman is paid $120 a month for two years, and is likely to have a pension of $500 a year for the rest of her life.

Lord Howard de Walden is about to start on a big-game hunting expedition in East Africa, where he has bought extensive lands near the Victoria Nyanza for the purpose of breeding zebras. This young peer is one of the wealthiest men in England, but is little known in society, as his tastes all lie in the direction of sport and a country life. His devotion to his mother, Lady Ludlow, is one of the most delightful traits in his character, and when she was married last year she had the somewhat unusual experience of being given away by her own son