A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued).

My gloomy thoughts that morning were suddenly interrupted by the sound of a latch-key in the outer door, and as I rose old Mrs. Parker entered with an expression of profound surprise.

"Why, sir!' she cried, "I understood that you'd gone away into the country!"

"Into the country?" I echoed. "Who told you so?"

"The lady you sent to tell me.'

"Lady? What lady?" I inquired, amazed. "Surely, Parker, you've taken leave of your senses?"

"The lady came about an hour ago, sir, and said that you had sent her to tell me that you would be absent for perhaps a week or so—that you had gone down to your uncle's in Hampshire."

"I've sent no one," I responded, astounded at this fresh phase of the affair. "What kind of lady was she—old or young?"

"Middle-aged."

"Well-dressed?"

"Yes, sir. She spoke with a funny kind of lisp, which made me think she might be a foreigner. She said she knew you quite well, being a friend of your aunt's, and that you were travelling down to Hampshire this morning, your uncle having taken ill. I remarked that it was strange that you shouldn't come home for your bag and things, but she gave me a message from you to send a bag packed with your clothes by train from Waterloo to Christchurch Station marked 'To be called for.'"

"But didn't you think her story a very lame one, Parker?" I asked, angry that my old serving-woman should have thus been misled and deceived.

"Of course I did, sir, especially as you were absent all night. I told her that, and she said that you had called upon her, and finding your aunt, Lady Durrant, there on a visit, remained to supper. While at supper a telegram had arrived summoning your aunt home as your uncle had been taken dangerously ill, and at once you had resolved to accompany her. But you've hurt your head, sir, haven't you?" she added, noticing my bandages.

"Yes," I answered. "I fell down. it is nothing—my own carelessness."

This story was, to say the least, a most ingenious one. Whoever the mysterious woman was she apparently knew that my uncle, Sir Charles Durrant, lived in the neighborhood of Christchurch; that he was at that moment in a very critical state of health, suffering from paralysis, and further, that I had considerable expectations from him, and would not hesitate to travel down to see him if I knew him to be worse. One thing, therefore, was quite plain, namely, that my family affairs were perfectly well known to these persons whose movements were so mystifying.

"It was foolish of you, Parker, very foolish indeed, to have given credence to such an absurd tale as that," I said, annoyed. "You are usually a shrewd woman, but you have displayed no discretion in this affair—none whatever.'

"I'm very sorry, sir," the woman answered. "But I knew that if Sir Charles were worse you'd go down to the Manor at once. Did you really send nobody, sir?"

"No; nobody at all. There's some underhand business in all this, Parker, so keep your wits about you."

"And haven't you seen her ladyship at all, sir " she inquired, in her turn astonished.

"No, and, moreover, I know nothing of this mysterious woman who came to you with this cock-and-bull story. Did she say where she lived, or give any card?"

"No, she didn't, sir."

"I suppose you'd know her again if you saw her?"

"Well," she answered with considerable hesitancy, "I don't know as I should, sir. You see, she wore one of them white lace veils which makes it difficult to distinguish the features."

"But what object could any one have in coming to you and telling a falsehood in that manner?" I cried, my anger increased by the knowledge of Parker's inability to again recognize the bearer of the false message.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," was the woman's reply, in a voice which showed how deeply she regretted the occurrence.

"How long was she here?" I inquired.

"About five minutes. She asked me to let her see your sitting-room and the reading-books with the embossed letters, as she was much interested in you, and had heard so much of you from Lady Durrant."

"And you showed them to her?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you had no right to do so without my permission, Parker," I said angrily. "You are an old and trusted servant, and shou'd have known better."

"I am very sorry, sir. The truth was that she seemed such a well-spoken lady, and her manner was so perfect that I thought you would not like to offend her."

"Recollect that if any other persons call they are not to enter my rooms on any pretext," I said decisively.

"Very well, sir. I acknowledge that I was entirely in the wrong in allowing her to pry about the place."

"And when she had gone?"

"Then I went over to the butcher's in the Strand to get a bit of steak."

"And saw nothing more of her?"

"Yes, sir. I did see her again. As I was coming back I met her in the Strand, at the corner of Arundel Street, walking with a gentleman who looked like a City man. She said something to him, and he turned and had a good look at me."

"Then it must have been this same woman who was in my chambers here when I returned," I said.

"A woman here?" she ejaculated.

"Yes; when I entered there was a woman here, and she escaped as though she were a thief. She must have gone out and rejoined the man, who was awaiting her somewhere in the vicinity. That would bear out the fact that you encountered her again."

"But how could she get in? I'm always careful to see that the door is properly closed."

"Probably she stole the extra latch-key while prying about the place. See whether it is still on the nail."

She crossed the room, and next moment gasped—

"It's gone, sir!"

"Ah!' I said. "Just as I thought! The story she told you was a mere excuse to obtain admittance to the place, and, if possible, to get possession of the key. This she obtained, and, having watched you out, returned and continued her search for something she desired to secure. We must at once examine the whole place, and seek to discover what's been stolen."

"Do you think she was a common thief, sir?" inquired Parker, dumbfounded at the ingenuity with which the latch-key had been secured.

"I don't know what to believe at present," I answered. "We must investigate first, and form our conclusions afterwards. Now, make a thorough search and see what has been disturbed and what is missing."

I had no intention of entering into a long explanation with Parker regarding the events of that fateful night, or to disturb her peace of mind by relating any of the tragic circumstances. Therefore I went to my room and locked away my muddy, blood-stained clothing, and afterwards returned, and with my hands felt the various objects in my sitting-room, to assure myself that none was displaced or missing.

CHAPTER VIII.

The visit of this mysterious woman in the white lace veil—at that time a fashionable feminine adornment—was, I felt assured, more than a coincidence. That it had some connection with the strange events of the past night seemed certain, yet, try how I would, I could form no definite idea of either the motive of the visit or the object of her search. As far as Parker could discover, nothing whatever had been taken. A writing-table, the drawers of which contained some family papers, had apparently been hastily examined, but no object of value, nor any paper had been extracted. Therefore I concluded that I had returned before the intruder had had time to make the complete examination of my effects which she had intended.

A curious thought occurred to me. Was the intruder in the white veil none other than the mysterious Edna herself? That she knew my address she had admitted when I had been lying helpless and half conscious after my accident, and the fact that an hour had elapsed between our parting and my return to my chambers would allow her sufficient time to call upon Mrs. Parker, secure the key, watch my old servant leave, and then re-enter.

As the day wore on I became more and more impressed by the belief that my surmise was the actual truth. Yet the cabman West had declared that she was young and pretty, while Parker expressed herself positive that she was middle-aged. But of the two statements I accepted that of the cabman as the more reliable. He had seen her in the broad daylight without the veil.

The fact of her concealing her features in a species of fine window-curtain proved an attempt at disguise, therefore what more likely than that she shou'd contrive to render her features older, and thus impose upon Parker, whose sight was not over good? In any case, however, if it were really Edna, she had certainly lost no time in carrying out her design, and further, she must have been fully aware of my intended return.

Yet in this curious action I failed to distinguish any motive whatsoever. In the tantalizing darkness that enveloped me I groped about, my ears alert for every sound, but blind, blind, blind!

Days passed, hot blazing days and stifling nights, when the dust of throbbing, ever,roaring London seemed over my heart. Each morning, with Parker's assistance, I searched the newspapers, but nothing appeared to show that that strange midnight crime had been discovered. Were there two victims, or only one? How strange it was that although I had been present I could not tell. I only knew that the male victim was young and well dressed, probably a gentleman, and that he had been stabbed by a cowardly blow which had proved almost instantly fatal. That woman's scream that had sounded so shrill and agonized in the dead stillness of the night I remembered plainly as though it were but an hour ago—indeed, I remember it now as distinctly as ever. Was it the cry of Edna herself? It seemed as though it were, yet there also seemed many discrepancies when I came to calmly reason it all out.

In my helplessness I could do nothing but remain silent, and keep my terrble secret to myself. Unable either to communcate with the police or seek the assistance of my friend, I found that any endeavor to seek a solution of the problem was mere sowing of the wind. My thoughts hour after hour, as I sat alone in my dingy room, my poor blind eyes a black void, were of the ghastly affair, and in all its phases I considered it, trying to find some motive in the subsequent actions of the unscrupulous persons into whose hands I had had the misfortune to fall.

I heard of Dick through the office of his journal. He was down with fever at some outlandish place on the Afghan frontier, and would certainly not be home for a couple of months or so. A letter from him, written before his attack, was cheerful enough, and full of humor, as of old. He hoped to be back soon, he said, so that he might be able to take "his baby," as he called me, out for walks again. He was not aware that I could walk alone. How I would surprise him!

I smiled grimly, alas! when I recollected how my first walk alone had nearly cost me my life, and had placed upon my conscience the shadow of a terrible crime. Parker noticed my constant pensiveness, and remarked upon it, but I, of course, misled her by saying that my mind was much overburdened with private affairs.

At first I was puzzled how to get rid of my soiled and blood-stained clothes so that she should not discover them, and at last hit upon the expedient of making them into a bundle and going forth one night when she was over at Kennington with her daughter Lily, the dancing-girl, and casting them into the Thames from the Embankment. It was a risky operation, for that part of London is well guarded by police after dark; nevertheless I accomplished it in safety, and was much amused a few days later by reading in an evening paper that they had been found near London Bridge and handed over to the river police, who, of course, scented a mystery. The blood-stains puzzled them, and the journal hinted that Scotland Yard had instituted inquiries into the ownership of the discarded suit of clothes. The paragraph concluded with that sentence, indispensable in reporting a mystery, "The police are very reticent about the matter."

Fortunately, having cut out the maker's name, and taken everything from the pockets which might serve as a clue to ownership, I felt perfectly safe, and eagerly read the issue of the same journal on the following evening, which told how the stains had been analyzed and found to be those of human blood.

A little more than a week had passed since my remarkable midnight adventure, when one morning I received a brief note by post, which Parker read to me. It consisted of only two typewritten lines stating that at mid-day I would receive a visitor, and was signed with the strange word "Avel."

It was, I knew, a message from Edna, and I dressed myself with greater care in expectation that she herself would visit me. In this, however, I was disappointed, for after existing some three hours on tiptoe with anxiety I found my visitor to be a well-spoken, middle-aged man, whose slight accent when introducing himself betrayed that he was an American.

(To be Continued.)

RANSOM'S REFORMATION.

In a little town a few years ago there was a shiftless colored boy named Ransom Blake, who, after being caught in a number of petty delinquencies, was at last sentenced to a short term in the penitentiary, where he was sent to learn a trade. On the day of his return home he met a friendly white acquaintance, who asked:

"Well, what did they put you at in the prison, Ranse?'

"Dey started in to make an honest boy out'n me, sah."

"That's good, Ranse, and I hope they succeeded."

"Dey did, sah."

"And how did they teach you to be honest?"

"Dey done put me in the shoe shop, ssh, nailin' pasteboard onter shoes fo soles, sah."

In three years the progeny of a pair of rats number 1,000.

ON THE FARM.

DISCUSSION ON SEPARATORS.

The discussion on hand separators took place at the Eastern Dairymen's Convention, at Picton, January, 1908, following an address by J. Stonehouse on "The Creamery Outlook."

Mr. Stonehouse.—Results we have obtained in our experiments at the Kingston Dairy School warrant the statement that the percentage of fat in the cream from hand separators can be made to vary 5 to 15 per cent. by varying the speed of the machine, and without changing the cream screw at all.

Q.—What effect would the tightening of the cream screw have?

A.—That means thickening the cream.

Q.—Do we not lose fat in the skim milk by making a rich cream?

A.—Not if the speed of the machine is high enough. If you are running your machine at too low a speed, you are losing fat, no matter whether you are taking a rich cream or a poor cream. The richness of the cream has but little to do with the loss of fat in the skim milk. The principal factor in the loss of fat in the skim milk is the speed of the machine. Remember this, however, that I am not advocating a higher speed than is indicated on the handle of the machine, but don't get below it. What I want to impress, more particularly, is that, by changing the speed of the machine you alter the richness of the cream skimmed.

Q.—Will we get as good results in separating milk that has been warmed up as by separating directly from the cow?

A.—Yes, I think we would, if heated high enough; old milk requires a higher temperature than fresher milk.

Mr. Glendenning.—What is the best way to heat up milk after it has become cold?

A.—The best way is to put it in hot water, but the most convenient way is to set it on the stove.

Mr. Glendenning.—We have found it satisfactory to take a creamer can and fill it with boiling water, and set it in the reservoir of the separator.

Q.—You spoke of rich cream arriving at your creamery in better condition than poor cream. What is your theory for that?

A.—On account of there being less milk in the cream.

We know that when we take a rich cream from a separator it has but little milk in it, and it will always keep in good condition longer than a poor cream, because it is the skim or serum which goes off in flavor, and not the fat

Mr. Warden asked a question about not being able to get butter from cream sometimes on the farm. What is the reason?

A.—There are several causes. As a general thing, the whole trouble is a thin or poor cream, and too low a temperature for that particular cream. There are a good many people yet who think there is a certain churning temperature, regardless of any other condition of the cream. The churning temperature of cream may vary from 48 degrees, up to 70 or 75, and if one has not the proper temperature for this specific cream, he will have trouble. I have never yet seen the cream that would not churn if the temperature was high enough at the start. Trouble may come from one or two cows in the herd which have been milking a long time, and their cream is very difficult to churn. Keeping their cream out, sometimes solves the difficulty.

Mr. Warden.—A neighbor had trouble in churning, and he stopped milking two cows, and there was no further trouble. These cows had been milking eight or ten months.

Q.—Do you think it makes any difference to feed frozen feed to cows?

A.—I never had any experience with that.

Q.—Will not such feed make the fat harder, and consequently more difficult to churn?

A.—I cannot speak definitely on that point; the two principal fats in milk become hard, especially with cows that have been milking a good while, and are being fed on poor feed, and then these fats will not unite together, unless at a high temperature. These two fats have a melting point at 140 degrees, but if we feed a richer and more succulent ration we get a larger proportion of a soft or oily fat in the milk which has a melting point at 40 degrees; and if we have a goodly proportion of this oily fat, which we get from rich, succulent food, or from fresh cows, we will have but little trouble in churning, as the fats then readily adhere together.

Mr. Elwood.—What effect has acid on the cream?

A.—With a thin cream, we need to have a certain amount of acid to make it churn readily, but it is not necessary with a rich cream. Our principal object in souring cream is to have a little more distinct flavor in the butter.

Q.—Do you think the keeping quality of butter is as good from sweet cream as from sour cream

A.—I do not think there is much difference, if the quality of the cream is equal.

Mr. Derbyshire.—Does butter want to be kept? Why don't you sell it and have it eaten while it is fresh?

A.—That is what the creamerymen aim to do.

Q.—Is it not worth more money five days after it comes out of the churn than it is at any other time?

A.—Yes, I try to get my butter off my hands within a week, because I have never seen butter that improved with age.

Mr. Barr.—With reference to the 9-c.-c. cream bottles, I agree with Mr. Stonehouse and Mr. Mitchell that dividing the sample in two is an improvement, but I think that the cream should be weighed.

REASON FOR GRATITUDE.

A Highland Minister Tells of the Scotch Climate.

The people who live in the Scottish Highlands deem their climate the best in the world, although other people find fault with its high winds, cold rains and chilly days. In "Memories" Maj.-Gen. Sir O. T. Burne tells of a minister in one of the Highland churches who wished his people to realize how much they had to be grateful for.

"What causes have we for gratitude! Look at the place of our habitation! How grateful should we be that we do not leeve in the far north, amid the frost and the snow, the cold and the wet, where there's a lang day to half of the year and a lang nicht to the tither, and we should go shivering aboot in skins.

"And how grateful should we be that we do not leeve in the far south, beneath the equawtor, the sun burning; the sky hot, and the earth hot and the waters hot; and ye're burnt black as a snoddy! Where there are teegers and lions and crocodiles, and fearsome beasts growling and grinning at ye among he woods—that we do not leeve in such places!

"But we should be grateful that we do leeve in this blessit island of ours, called Great Britain, and in that pairt of it named Scotland, and in that bit of auld Scotland that looks up to Ben Nevis, where there's neither frost nor cold, nor wind, nor wet, nor hail, nor rain, nor teegers, nor lions, nor burning suns, nor hurricanes, nor —" Here a tremendous blast of wind and rain from Ben Nevis blew in the windows of the kirk, and brought the preacher's eloquence to an abrupt conclusion.

SENTENCE SERMONS.

Conduct is simply character vitalized.

A good lover is sure to be a first-class hater.

He rejects happiness who refuses all sacrifice.

The Father never drove any into the far country.

You cannot find a martyr by looking in the mirror.

To sow selfishness is certainly to reap sorrow.

It's hard to believe in the goodness of the grouchy.

The most wasteful thing in this world is selfish economy.

A hot scolding from the minister is the quickest way to cool any meeting.

The soul is simply that which sees the supreme and the sublime.

The church is almost sure to have paralysis following a fit over dogma.

Your use of your leisure often determines the usefulness of your life.

He can never be more than half educated who is not educated in heart.

The greater the opportunity the less likelp it is to have an advance agent.

There must be something queer about any faith that needs perpetual defending.

A man's confidence in goodness is usually dependent on his own reserves of it.

Infinite love would be a mockery without infinite hatred of things that harm.

It's easy to be pious when the children are aslep and the neighbors have left town.

The religion that does not improve human relations has no business with humanity.

There are too many saints who would rather lead a meeting than follow their Master.

The man who says he is too poor to give will never be rich enough to be other than poor in heart.

There are those who when they hear Gabriel blowing his horn will want to know what he gets a day for doing that.

THE NECESSARY SHOCK.

A college professor had been seriously ill of a fever for several weeks, but the fever had left him at last, and he lay in a stupor, utterly exhausted.

"This is the really critical period,' the attending physician said to the watchers, in an undertone. "If he has sufficient vitality to carry him through this—and I am strongly disposed to hope he has—he will recover. At present there is nothing we can do but be patient and give nature a chance, watching in the meantime for an opportunity to awaken his interest in what is going on about him."

One of the attendants, who happened to be standing near the window looking at the rosy sunset, remarked to the doctor:

"See what a lurid sky there is."

The sick man opened his eyes and turned his head in the direction indicated.

"Lurid!" he exclaimed, in a tone of disgust. "If you will consult your dictionary, madam, you will find that lurid means gloomy, ghastly, dismal!"

"He will recover!" announced the doctor, triumphantly.

Every time we hear a man abused behind his back it reminds us of the fact that we all catch it when we are not present.