A House of Mystery

OR, THE GIRL IN BLUE

CHAPTER XXVII.—(Cont'd).

My vigilance on the morrow was rewarded, for about eleven o'clock in the morning I saw Edna emerge from the room dressed to go out. She passed my door and descended by the stairs, while I took my hat and swiftly followed her at a safe distance from observation.

The porter called her a hansom, and I saw her neat, black-robed figure mount into the conveyance. She had a letter in her hand, and read the address to the porter, who in turn repeated it to the driver.

Meanwhile, I had entered another hansom, and telling the man to keep Edna's cab in sight we drove along King's Cross Road and Farringdon Street to the City, passing along Gresham Street and Lothbury. Suddenly the cab I was following turned into Austin Friars, while my driver, an intelligent young fellow, pulled up at the corner of Throgmorton Street, opening the trap in the roof, and saying—

"We'd better wait here, sir, if you don't want the lady to notice us. She's going into an office at number 14, opposite the Dutch church."

"Get down," I said, "and try and find out whose office she's gone into," and I added a promise to give him an extra gratuity for so doing.

"Very well, sir," he answered, and commenced to back his horse into a position where the cab standing there would not interfere with the traffic, nor bring down upon him the peremptory order of the police.

As he was backing his horse an omnibus passed on its way to Liverpool Street, whereupon the red-faced driver, quick to detect any difficulty with horses, and ready to joke at the discomfiture of others, cried out in his Cockney dialect—

"Naw then, Soapy-feet, mind what yer do with the there Bath-chair and fishin'-rod!"

Whereat all drivers in the vicinity laughed, and contributed many forcible remarks in passing.

But the young cabman descended, and while I sat back, hiding my face in a newspaper for fear of being recognized in that great highway of business, he went along Austin Friars to endeavor to discover whose offices she had entered.

Some ten minutes later he returned with the information that the lady had entered the office of a money-lender named Morrison.

The thought occurred to me that she was perhaps still endeavoring to raise the loan for Prince Ferdinand. If so, however, why had she left the Bath Hotel and endeavored to conceal her identity under another name?

After twenty minutes or so she came out rather flushed and excited, stood for a moment in hesitation upon the kerb, and then giving her cabman an address was driven off. I, of course, followed, but judge my astonishment when the cab pulled up in Old Broad Street and she alighted at Winchester House. After a few moments she found the brass plate bearing my name, and ascended to my office, for what purpose I knew not, and, fearing to reveal my presence in London, I could not ascertain.

I sat there in the cab in full view of that row of windows, with their wire blinds bearing my name, an exile and a fugitive, wondering what might be the object of her visit. It was not, however, of long duration, but when she descended again she was accompanied by my secretary Gedge, who handed her into her cab and afterwards took his seat beside her. By his manner it was evident they were not strangers, and it became impressed upon me that, in those lost days of mine, I must have had considerable dealings with her and her princely employer.

They drove to the Liverpool Street Railway Station, where she despatched a telegram; then they lunched at Crosby Hall.

I feared, of course, to approach them sufficiently near to overhear their conversation, but I peered into the restaurant and saw them sitting at a table in earnest conversation, the subject of which was evidently myself.

It was a wearisome task waiting for her in Bishopsgate Street, but I lunched in a neighboring public-house off a glass of sherry and a biscuit, while my cabman partook gladly of the homely "half-pint" at my expense, until at length they both came forth.

Gedge called her a cab, and then took leave of her, while I followed her back to the Midland, having successfully accomplished my first essay at watching her movements.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

For two days the woman I was watching did not go out. I learnt from the chambermaid who, like all her class, was amenable to half a sovereign in her palm, that she was unwell, suffering from a slight cold. Then I took the servant into my confidence, and told her that I was in the hotel in order to watch Mrs. Slade's movements, giving her to understand that any assistance she rendered me would be well paid for.

I had an object in view, namely, to enter her room in her absence, and ascertain the nature of any letters or papers which might be in her possession. This I managed to affect, with the connivance of the chambermaid, on the following afternoon. Indeed, the chambermaid assisted me in my eager search, but beyond a few tradesmen's bills and one or two unimportant private letters from friends addressed to her at the Royal Hotel at Ryde, I found nothing. The despatch-box with the coronet was locked, and she carried the key upon her bangle. I made careful search through all her belongings, the chambermaid standing guard at the door the while, and in the pocket of one of her dresses hanging in the wardrobe I discovered a crumpled telegram.

I smoothed it out, and saw that it had been dispatched from Philippopolis in Bulgaria, about three weeks before, and was addressed to "Mrs. Grainger, Royal Hotel, Ryde." Its purport, however, I was unable to learn, for it was either in cipher, or in the Slav language, of which I had no knowledge whatever.

Again baffled, I was about to relinquish my search, when, in the pocket of a long driving-coat of light drab cloth I found a letter addressed to her at Ryde, and evidently forwarded by the hotel clerk.

I caught sight of my own name, and read it through with interest.

"I suppose you have already heard from your friend Gedge, who keeps you in touch with everything, all the most recent news of Heaton," the letter ran. "It appears that he was found on the floor of one of the rooms at Denbury, with a wound in his head. He had suddenly gone out of his mind. The doctor said that the case was a serious one, but before arrangements could be made for placing him under restraint he had escaped, and nothing since has been heard of him. The common idea is that he has committed suicide owing to business complications. They are, to tell the truth, beginning to smell a rat in the City. The Prince's concessions have not turned out all that they were supposed to be, and by a side wind I hear that your friend's financial status, considerably weakened during the past few weeks, has, owing to his sudden and unaccountable disappearance, dropped down to zero. If you can find him, lose no time in doing so. Remember that he must not be allowed to open his mouth. He may, however, be still of use, for his credit has not altogether gone, and I hear he has a very satisfactory balance at his bankers'. But find out all from Gedge, and then write to me."

There was neither signature nor address.

The words, "he must not be allowed to open his mouth," were, in themselves, ominous. Who, I wondered, was the writer of that letter? The postmark was that of "London, E. C.," showing that it had been posted in the City.

I read it through a second time, then replaced it, and after some further search returned to my own room.

When the maid brought my hot water next morning she told me that Mrs. Slade had announced her intention to leave at eleven o'clock; therefore I packed, and leaving slightly earlier, was enabled to follow her cab to Victoria Station, whence she travelled to Brighton, putting up at the Metropole. I pursued similar tactics to those I had adopted in London, staying in the same hotel and yet contriving never to be seen by her. She went out but seldom. Sometimes in the morning she would stroll beneath her pale mauve sunshade along the King's Road, or at evening take an airing on the pier, but she apparently lived an aimless life, spending her time in reading novels in her own apartment. As far as I could learn, she met no one there, and only appeared to be killing time and waiting. After a fortnight she moved along to Hastings, thence to Ilfracombe and afterwards to Hull.

We arrived at the North-Eastern Hotel at Hull one evening towards the end of August, having travelled by the express from London. Through nearly a month I had kept close watch upon her, yet none of her movements had been in the least suspicious. She lived well, always having her own sitting-room although she had no maid. Those days of watchfulness were full of anxiety, and I had to resort to all sorts of ingenious devices to prevent observation and recognition.

The station hotel at Hull is comfortable, but by no means a gay place of residence, and for several days I wondered what might be her object in visiting that Yorkshire port. The room adjoining her sitting-room on the second floor became vacant on the third day after our arrival, and I fortunately succeeded in obtaining it. She entertained no suspicion that I was following her, although I dogged her movements everywhere.

In Hull she only went out twice, once to a stationer's in Whitefriargate, and on the other occasion to the telegraph office. As at Brighton and Ilfracombe, she still appeared to be wating in patience for the arrival of some one whom she expected.

About nine o'clock one evening, after she had remained nearly a week in Hull, always taking her meals in her own room and passing her time in reading, I had returned from the coffee-room, and was about to go forth for a stroll, when suddenly I heard a waiter rap at her door and announce a visitor.

A locked door separated her sitting-room from mine, and standing by it, listening eagerly, I heard the sound of rustling paper, the hurried closing of a box, and her permission to show the visitor up.

A few minutes passed in silence. Then I heard some one enter, and a man's voice exclaimed with a distinctly foreign accent—

"Ah, my dear Edna! At last! I feared that you would have left before my arrival.

"I expected you days ago," she answered, and I knew from the man's sigh that he had sunk wearily into a chair.

"I was delayed," he explained. "I had a narrow escape. Oustromoff has guessed the truth."

"What!" she gasped in alarm. "The secret is out!"

"Yes," he answered gruffly.

"Impossible!"

"I tell you it's the truth," he answered. "I escaped over the frontier by the merest chance. Oustromoff's bloodhounds were at my heels. They followed me to Vienna, but there I managed to escape them and travel to Berlin. I knew that there was a warrant out for me—Roesch sent me word that orders had been issued by the Minister of Police—therefore I feared to cross to England by any of the mail routes. I knew the police would be on the look-out at Calais, Antwerp, Ostend, Folkstone, and Dieppe. Therefore I travelled to Copenhagen, then by steamer to Gothenburg, and rail to Christiania. I arrived by the weekly mail steamer from there only an hour ago."

"What a journey!" exclaimed the woman I had been watching so long and patiently. "Do you actually mean that you are unsafe—here, in England?"

"Unsafe? Of course. The Ministry have telegraphed my description to all police centres, with a request for my extradition."

"It is inconceivable," she cried, "just at the moment when all seemed safest, that this catastrophe should fall! What of Roesch, Blumhardt, and Schaefer?"

"Schaefer was arrested in Sofia on the day I left. Blumhardt escaped to Varna, but was taken while embarking on board a cargo-boat for England. I tell you I had a narrow escape—a very narrow escape."

"Then don't speak so loud," she urged. "Some one might be in the next room, you know."

He rose and tried the door at which I stood. It was locked, and that apparently reassured him.

"Whom do you think informed the Ministry of Police?"

"Ah! at present no one knows," he responded. "What do you think they say?"

"What?"

"That some of your precious friends in London have exposed the whole thing."

"My friends? Whom do you mean?"

"You know best who are your friends," he replied, with sarcasm.

"But no one is aware of the whole facts."

"Are you absolutely certain?"

"Absolutely."

"And the loan for the Prince?" he said. "Have you raised it?"

"No; the thing is too dangerous in these circumstances. I have made a full report. You received it, I suppose?"

"No; I must have left Sofia before it arrived. Tell me."

"That very useful fool named Heaton has suddenly gone out of his mind."

"Insane?"

"Yes," she responded. "At least he seems so to me. I placed the matter before him, but he refused to have anything whatever to do with it. His standing in the City has been utterly shattered by all sorts of rumors regarding the worthlessness of certain of the concessions, and as far as we are concerned our hopes of successfully raising the loan have now disappeared into thin air."

"What!" he cried. "Have you utterly failed?"

"Yes," she answered. "Heaton assisted us while all was square, but now, just when we want a snug little sum for ourselves, he has suddenly become obstinate and refuses to raise a finger."

"Curse him! He shall assist us—by Heaven! I'll—I'll compel him!" cried her mysterious companion, furiously.

(To be Continued.)

WILL DEPICT IDEAL HOME.

Exhibition in London Under Patronage of the Queen.

Extraordinary interest is being displayed in the ideal home exhibition, which opens under the patronage of her Majesty the Queen at Olympia, on Oct. 9. In a year which will be memorable in London for splendid exhibitions, this promises to be in every respect one of the most popular, appealing as it does to all classes of the community.

Put briefly, the exhibition is the first attempt by practical demonstration to portray the ideal home ception, construction and equipment.

On entering the amphitheatre the visitors will find himself in the sections devoted to construction, decoration and sanitation. Every type of metal work, flooring and building material, wood carving and turning, beautiful pictures, engravings, hangings and draperies, artificial flowers and ornaments, fascinating new methods of lighting, in town and country houses, all types of geysers, stoves and radiators will be displayed.

In the section devoted to ventilation not only will there be all sorts of patent windows, fans, and other devices, but a completely fitted billiard room will be filled with tobacco smoke at intervals, and practical methods for clearing it demonstrated.

Those who take interest in the interior charm of home will doubtless linger in the furnishing sections. There the rich and those of humbler means alike will have demonstrated what art refinement, science and invention have accomplished to make the home beautiful and comfortable. Leading firms will exhibit complete rooms furnished in various styles. Near by there will be a remarkable display of antique and historical furniture—one of the most original ever arranged in London.

But the exhibition will be notable in another direction. Furniture and equipment, such excellent adjuncts, do not constitute a home. Hence the promoters have arranged that all that tends to make home life social—its music and its recreations—shall have place in the foreground of the splendid display. There will be a section devoted to music and indoor pastimes.

Every woman will seek the "babyland" section, with its model creche, model ward in a children's hospital, children's furniture and games and toys of every description.

The practical housekeeper will examine with interest the infinite variety of cleaning materials, carpet sweepers, brushes, brooms, laundry appliances, washing and knife cleaning machines.

EXTREMES IN LIFE.

Extulant Young Father—My baby has just cut his first tooth!

Despairing Old Grandsire—My last tooth has just cut me!

ON THE FARM

BRAIN OR BRAWN!

As one goes about the country, he can readily pick out those farmers who are always behind with their work. Their number is legion. You will find them now a fortnight behind with their wheat-seeding. In a couple of months they will be caught short on fall plowing. "Freeze-up" comes before they get nicely started. Next season it will be the same, and the season after that again, and so on right along. They are always behind, and seem never able to catch up. It is doubtful whether they ever will, or whether they would be able to keep up if they get even. It requires some thinking and planning to do so, and the man who is habitually behind hasn't time to think or plan. He can only hustle.

A man requires some system of doing his work in order to have it done on time. System and organization count in agriculture as in anything else. Farm work has to be performed properly and in season, if the business is going to succeed. It needs to be planned, and the plan worked. One has to think, as well as act. That is what he has thinking apparatus for. The days of farming by brawn alone are passing, though some refuse to believe they are almost gone. Science and invention have advanced so much in the last twenty-five years that a man does not need to be plodding eternally to gain a livelihood. The hours of labor in all industries are being steadily reduced. So they are in agriculture. And the products of labor, instead of diminishing, are steadily on the increase.

DURUM WHEAT.

The American Department of Agriculture, during 1899 to 1902, brought Durum wheat for seed from Russia and Africa. The grain is specially adapted for regions of low rainfall, and in 1907 covered an area of over 3,000,00 acres, many of them valueless before the advent of this new crop. It yielded an average of about fifteen bushels per acre. It has spread throughout a wide strip of country, extending from North Dakota to south-eastern New Mexico and south-western Texas.

This variety of wheat may be mixed with other wheat in making flour for bread. It is especially, however, a maccaroni wheat, and for the manufacture of that article is used at home and exported abroad.

SEND RICH CREAM.

It pays to send rich cream to the creamery. Cream is not paid for by weight, but according to the amount of butter-fat contained in it, as determined by the Babcock or, in certain creameries, by the antiquated oil-test churn. All cream is composed of two general substances, butter-fat and milk serum (skim milk). The more butter-fat and the less milk serum a patron can manage to deliver to his creamery, within reasonable limits, the better he is off. He has more skim milk to feed, and there is less weight to haul or ship, as the case may be. It is economical to skim a rich cream. It should never test less than 30 per cent., and 35 or even 40 per cent. is better. Keep as much of the skim milk as possible at home.

COOL THE MILK PROMPTLY.

The prompt and thorough cooling of milk is generally recognized to be of prime importance in preventing the development of bacteria, which, under ordinary conditions, are always present in milk as soon as drawn, and to which the souring or curdling of milk is due.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

"I declare, I d'know w'at to make of ma wife. She'll ruin me a-spendin' all de money there is," declared Jim, when his old employer inquired for Mrs. Jim.

"She do seem reckless about money," continued Jim, with a sober face. "Always askin' me for a dollar, or fifty cents, wantin' money all de time, like I could pick it up in de streets."

"Well, well, that is hard," responded his questioner; "but what does she do with so much money?"

"I dunno. I ain't ever give her any yet."

A PLAIN CONCLUSION.

"Why did Mrs. Youngmother come down to this farm to rusticate?"

"I think it was for the benefit of a little son and heir."