ADMIT ONE

BY SIDNEY HORLER.

SYNOPSIS

When Philip Crane, a young aeroplane designer, arrives in London on a holiday, through a coincidence of like names, he is taken for the crook Crane, who is a tool of a band ruled by a mysterious "Empress."

He rescues Margery Ferguson and takes her to a convent. He then goes to Mandling in Kent to rescue her father. Meanwhile, Charles Whittle, an American detective, is trailing a band of forgers. By close confinement The Empress hopes to bend Ferguson's will to her own. In the meantime Philip Crane arrives at Mrs. Hamble's Inn.

CHAPTER IX.--(Cont'd.)

Still smiling broadly, Mrs. Hamble conducted him into a bedroom on the first floor, and brought a large copper can of boiling water.

"There's soap and a clean towel on the rail, sir," she announced.

It was whilst he was descending the stairs that Philip made his decision. If the unravelling of the mystery upon which he had embarked necessitated his remaining in Mandling, what better lodging than this?

Mrs. Hamble served the meal herself. At the sight of the dish of appetizing eggs and bacon, supplemented by a mound of crisply fried potatoes, Philip rubbed his hands. He might have been a schoolboy home for his first breakfast of the holidays.

"Jolly good, Mrs. Hamble," he remarked. The landlady beamed.

"There's nothing to beat eggs and bacon for breakfast, young man," she said, with her pleasantly maternal air; "and I know where those eggs came from—out of me own back yard. Now, sit you down and eat it while it's hot."

Noticing Mrs. Hamble hovering in the middle distance, as though she would welcome the opportunity for a further chat (no doubt, life at Mandling was rather dull for a woman of her intelligence) Philip, half-way through the meal, invited her over.

"I'm really on holiday," he announced, "and a friend of mine told me about Mandling. Said it was the best place he knew to come for a few days' rest."

"What might your friend's name be—and yours, if it comes to that?"

There was no offence in the question; it was merely a sign that the speaker was interested.

"My name's Padden," he replied. A lie, but, in the circumstances, he decided it was necessary. And, after all, it was not so far from being the truth—his uncle's name was Padden, and he supposed he could have the loan of it for a day or so.

It was easy to go from one lie to another—although he was sorry to deceive so excellent a person.

"And my friend's called Smith," he added.

"There's a lot o' them in this part o' Kent," returned Mrs. Hamble quite seriously. "And where did you think o' putting up, Mr. Padden, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Here—if you'll have me."

"There's another house at the end of the street."

"I don't want to see it," he said; "I didn't believe there was such an inn as this left in England. What about it, Mrs. Hamble?"

Placing her hands on her ample hips, the landlady broke into a chuckle.

"Well, seeing as how you're so determined, Mr. Padden— Would that room I showed you into just now do?"

"Splendidly. I'll take it, in any case, for three days." Remembering that he had no luggage, he pulled out his pocket-book, and took out two one-pound notes.

"Here's something on account," he said. "And is there a general store, or anything like that in Mandling?"

"Oh, yes, there is that. Old Tom Cartwright sells practically everything there is."

"Good. Then, from this moment, Mrs. Hamble, I become your new lodger. That's understood."

"You are one for your little joke, Mr. Padden."

Tom Cartwright wore a shapeless hat, had spectacles fastened with string about his ears, a shirt that was not above suspicion, and a certain hostility of manner. But when it came down to supplying things, he lived up to Mrs. Hamble's recommendation. So far as Mandling's wants were concerned, he could supply everything.

Philip was able to purchase a suit of pyjamas, and a few other essentials of the toilet, including a toothbrush and a comb. He increased his haul to the extent of some handkerchiefs and collars; and then, with the small parcel under his arm, he felt he was able to look the world once again squarely in the face.

Leaving his package on the chest of drawers in his bedroom, he ventured out again. So far as he had been able to gather, Mandling did not hold more than a few hundred inhabitants. Scattered here and there about the district, were several more or less imposing residences, and, apparently, it was in one of these that the girl's father was being kept a prisoner.

Strolling down the main street again, he roke off to the right and, climbing a stile, found himself on the edge of a patch of woodland. It was an exceedingly pleasant spot and, seating himself on a big boulder, he lit his pipe and gave himself up to reflection.

This was a quixotic mission upon which he had started, but now that his blood had cooled and he was able to see things in a more or less reasonable perspective, he knew himself still determined to carry on. There could be no doubt about the sincerity of the girl he had helped the previous night. Every word she uttered, every glance she had given him, had been eloquent of the truth. And she was alone—utterly, completely alone. Worse still, the father on whom she, in the ordinary way, would have depended, was being held to some kind of ransom by a gang of criminals. The information she had given him during the short ride from Cima's to the Convent had consisted of short, fragmentary sentences all jumbled together, and, without the details he had personally gained, they might have been quite meaningless, apart from the one vital word: Mandling.

It was difficult to realize that, in this dreaming countryside, he had arrived at the heart of the conspiracy. In London, yes; in the teeming Metropolis, anything was possible. But here—!

What was this gang? And for what reason were they holding the man? There had not been time to ask the girl this vital question, with the result that the only information he had gained was that her father was being used for some indefinite criminal purpose.

His thoughts switched. He recalled his uncle, Sir Timothy Padden, that man whose visions were wide, but whose actual world was bounded by aeroplane engines. He smiled as he pictured the comment his uncle would have made on being told about his mad enterprise.

"Fudge and nonsense, lad; fudge and nonsense! If this man's in trouble, go to the police, sir." Sir Timothy was at least fifty years behind the times in his language and manners.

Fudge and nonsense! Perhaps it was. Any practical man of affairs would not have taken all this trouble upon such slender grounds. The most he would have done would have been to go to Scotland Yard on behalf of the girl.

A fool? Maybe. But, still, he had given his word, and he was going on.

Which reminded him; he must get information—as much information as was possible—about the occupants of each big house in the district. With this resolve, he started to walk back to the Inn.

"The Jolly Sailor" had been washed and scrubbed, and, it seemed, folded and ironed, by the time he reached it. Mrs. Hamble and the one servant—a native of Mandling, as right-eyed as her mistress—had put in some effective scouring since breakfast time. And, with the work done, the landlady was willing to rest awhile and exchange comments on what, to her, passed for the day's events.

Philip tried her out cautiously.

"Who lives about here?" she repeated; "well, that's easy enough to answer. Up at 'Rose Mount,' there's Sir Geoffrey Godfrey, who's a big tobacco man, I understand, somewhere in London; at 'The Larches,' there's Mr. Benjamin Quilter, who has a brewery business down at Ashfield. At 'Cedar Crest,' there's——" And so on and so forth.

It was not until six houses and their occupants had been gone over that Philip felt he was getting somewhere near his quarry.

"Up at what they used to call "The White House," there's someone by the name of Stevensson—I think . . ."

Stevensson! of course, it might be merely a coincidence, but he had to hear more.

"And what does Mr. Stevensson do?" he enquired, with the best attempt at jocularity he could assume.

"Some say he's a gentleman of private means; but not much is known about him. A thin-faced, severe-looking gent he is. Don't take much interest in the village life. But, there, it isn't every rich man from London who wants to be bothered with such paltry fry as we folks. He doesn't live here all the time—just comes down now and again. I have heard tell that he's got a funny sort of a man-servant up there—a big foreigner with a nasty-looking face; but I daresay that's a bit exaggerated; you know what village people are, perhaps, Mr. Padden? They can't bear a foreigner, anyhow, and it often happens that rumors are spread about when, perhaps, there's no call for 'em, if you follow me?"

"Quite, Mrs. Hamble. Is it much of a walk up to this 'White House'?"

"A tidy step, sir. But if you was intending to do it, you could get there and back nicely by lunch-time." There followed a detailed description of the route to be taken, concluding with the remark: "And they do say there's not a prettier bit of country anywhere in Kent than between this village and 'The White House.' Mind you take the second turning to the right after the crossroads."

(To be continued.)

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ROUND THE CORNER

By Ursula Bloom

It was a wise head who wrote the old proverb about the course of true love never running smooth. George Greyson reflected it, as he eyed Rosemary from under his lids. He loved her, yes, he really did love her; ash-blonde hair, grey eyes, and that little three-cornered mouth of hers. They had been half engaged for over a year, ever since that moment when they had met at the tennis dance. He had seen her dressed in Columbine, a fairy-like, fragile little thing, with pink and green ballons swirling about her. He had summoned up the courage to kiss her, and she had not rebuffed him. He had felt ecstasy and triumphant pride swelling together within him. Adorable little thing! When he was able he would buy her a ring.

Ever since then they had been meeting every other evening, walking in the park together, sitting on two prim chairs and glancing at each other, and saying all those romantic sweet nothings that lovers do say. Or they had been to the pictures, and had sat there hand in hand, thrilling with the sentimental parts, joying in the love of it.

Now, to-night, this had happened.

George supposed he had not been feeling too good-tempered when they met. He had had a bad day at the office, hot weather, and the chief with his rag out—one of those days when everything goes wrong. Then he had been afraid that he was going to be late, and had bolted his supper, and had waiter in the park, walking up and down, and every moment had made him more indignant with himself for getting there late!

When she had arrived, she had not been hurrying—just strolling along leisurely.

"You've kept me waiting," he had announced, and she had replied, quite calmly:—

"Oh, have I?"

That was all. Yet, from that little "all" everything had started. Now they were sitting on two chairs, hot and angry with each other.

"I never thought you'd be such a beast," she flashed, "saying all those unkind things."

"Well, what about you? The truth of the matter is that you have got used to me. You haven't been as nice as you used to be for ages."

"You're being stupid. You can't go on being sloppy for ever."

"Sloppy!"

He echoed the words irately.

There came silence. He was wondering if it would be a terrible comedown to suggest a compromise. He was contemplating the best way to approach it, when she said, angrily:—

"I think I'll go home; if you are going to sulk it isn't very pleasant for me."

"I wasn't sulking."

"That's it, contradict me."

Almost viciously he made a grand movement and hailed a taxi-cab. That would surprise her. He did not often rise to taxis, but he would take her home in style. The end should be a triumphant one.

She showed little surprise as she got inside and sat down with her face averted from him. That in itself was disarming.

George gave the man the address and got in beside her. He was thankful that the journey was not a long one. They bowled along.

"It's not as hot as it was,' he said at last. She ignored him. He repeated the modest remark; "Not as hot as it was. . . ."

"Well, I don't care I like the heat," she snapped

"I've never seen you so thoroughly beastly," he announced.

"Well, then, it's a new side of my nature. I don't know what has come over you to-night. I suppose this is the end?"

The longing to plead with her suddenly disappeared. "I suppose it is," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"I never thought it would end like this."

"If you hadn't been so snappy it wouldn't have done."

"You've never cared for me," she protested. "A good thing we found it out before we were married. A nice thing it would have been after."

"Yes, wouldn't it?"

She turned upon him furiously. "I'll never speak to you again as long as I live," she declared. "Never! This is the end."

"Granted," he sniffed, and sat back. Well, he had got one in there.

The taxi rolled on. He had not been noticing where they were going, because he had been entirely preoccupied with his own quarrel, but now it struck him that the streets were looking queerly unfamiliar. A short cut perhaps. He refused to take any notice. He had an idea that she was crying, something bright and glittering in her eyes! No, he would not notice. On they went.

On the box the old taxi-man crouched over his wheel. He was thinking of last night, of the fare he had had—a fat old gent, with white whiskers and all got up like a dandy. While carnation in his buttonhole, shiny hat and all. "Brixton," the old gentleman had said, "and a fat tip if you get me there quickly." The smell of his cigar had been good as a meal. The taximan had gone along to Brixton, and had had luck. He knew the way well, for he had had a mother-in-law who lived round there, and who had kept a little fish shop, and many a time he had gone down for the little dainty she had put aside for her daughter. Years since he had been that way, and rather pleasant to be going over the remembered ground again with the old gent with the shiny hat and the carnation, puffing at his strong-smelling cigar in the back of the car. Then, when they had got there, out the old gent had got, sprightly and agile enough, and he had stood on the edge of the pavement and had counted out the money, fat tip and all. It had been a fat tip, too!

Then he had done an amazing thing. He had taken off his hat; he had folded it and put it in his pocket. He had taken off his whiskers and had done the same. He had turned a laughing woman's face to the driver of the taxi-cab, and had turned and strode inside the house.

The driver would never forget it. All day long he had been thinking about it. All day long he had thought of the smell of the cigar, and the old gent who had taken off his hat and his whiskers and had laughed up at him impudently.

One of the others had told him about it at the rank when he was waiting for a fare.

"You got hold of Ella de Wrench," he said; "she used to be on the stage, did male impersonating. They say she goes on doing it in her private life. She's a caution."

All the same, he could not forget it. He was mooning along and thinking about it when suddenly . . .

"Hi," said George, furiously, his head out of the window, "where do you think you are driving us? What are you doing? I said Battersea."

The taximan came out of his day-dream.

"Blimey! I was thinking of last night's fare—a caution that was—and I've brought you to Brixton."

"Well, you just jolly well take us back—and at your own expense," said George, and he slammed up the window.

The taximan turned the cab slowly. At the corner of the street was the house where he had left her—cigar and white whiskers and all.

"Dashed annoying," said George.

Rosemary came out of her handkerchief and glanced at him.

"What's happened?"

"Why, the moony old fool has brought us all the way to Brixton. Heaven knows what he was thinking about."

He thought furiously that now they would have to prolong this awkward tete-atete. He fumed to himself.

"What was he thinking about?" she asked. "Perhaps he had had a row with somebody, too."

George caught the inflection of her voice and was suddenly ashamed.

"I—I never think rows are worth while," he commented, "one does say such nasty things; all the same. . . ."

"You said some very nasty things," she said.

"So did you."

There was a silence for a moment as the cab rolled along the street.

"I'm sorry, if you are," she said at last, very softly indeed.

"Darling. . . ." He caught her to him, just as the cab struck a pot-hole in the road He caught her to him, and kissed the little upturned face. The cheeks were quite wet, her eyes were brimming.

"Oh, George," and she clung to him. "Oh, George, darling, I feel so awful about it. I didn't mean those things, really I didn't . . . please, George. ."

"Sweetheart," and he kissed her again and again, "darling little sweetheart After this, dearest, we will have to be properly engaged, because I am not risking any more disputes. We will buy a ring at once. We will put the banns up."

"Oh, George!"

He held her to his heart. "Fancy, if the moony old fool hadn't driven us to Brixton we shouldn't ever have had time to make it up. We should have parted, perhaps for ever."

"That would have been too awful," she said, and she lifted her lips and kissed him timidly. "I'm not angry that he went to Brixton, are you?" I've got rather a weakness for the place, couldn't we live there when—when we are married?"

"And may it be soon," he whispered.

The taxi jarred to a standstill by the kerb of a Battersea flat. Slowly they got out.

"I'm sorry about that there," said the taximan—and he scratched his head. "I don't know what made me think like that, day dreamin' and all that. I do hope it ain't caused you no inconvenience."

"On the contrary it is one of the best things you ever did," said George, "and I'm going to pay for it."

The taximan watched him as he counted out the change. He watched George as he turned and linked his arm in Rosemary's, and then did a little gavotte of their own on the pavement and into the house.

"Blimey," said the taximan, and his eyes grew round with amazement; "if that there ain't another comic fare. Who'd ha' believed it?"—Tit Bits.

Controls Air Lines

Geo. Abrams wielding the new light traffic control at Cleveland airport, which works somewhat after fashion of intersection lights. It controls the air lanes and can flash a red beam several miles.

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The world-conqueror is valiant more valiant is he who conquers himself.—Herder.

DRUDGERY.

Drudgery is as necessary to call out the treasures of the mind as harrowing and planting those of the earth.—Margaret Fuller.

First came the "realtor," then the "mortician," later the "beautician," subsequently the "bootician," then the "pedicure." And the other day a large motor truck careened down Third Avenue, New York, bearing the imposing legend: "Kelly & McGuire, Truck-ologists."—Wall Street Journal.

"Thinking of me, dearest?" "Was I laughing? I'm so sorry."—London Opinion.

A bachelor's life is just one undarned thing after another.—Boston Transcript.