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. Philip, while reconnoitering "The White House," comes to blows with an unknown assailant who proves to be Whittle. Crane foolhardily attempts to get into the house.

CHAPTER XI.—(Cont'd.)

Recovering himself, Crane started to move towards the light which glimmered fitfully through what must have been a deep belt of shrubbery. The thought did not cross his mind that he would have been glad of the company of the fellow who had told him he was an American detective—but the chap had had cold feet, and there was an end to it: this was not a job for faint hearts.

Although he stepped as lightly as possible, he knew he was walking on a gravel path from the slight scrunching sounds made by his feet. To the right was a broad carriage way, evidently leading to the garage. But that must not be his route. Anyone from the occupied room might be able to see his figure; his way must be through the shrubbery.

Stopping, he started to creep a way through the somewhat thick undergrowth. His face was scratched every now and then by thick twigs and what must have been holly leaves; but, after five minutes or so, this minor purgatory was at an end. He stood on a piece of turf only twelve yards or so away from the room which was his objective.

His pulse beat quicker as he noticed two or three figures outlined against the window. The curtains had not been drawn, and it was possible to look straight into the room. He had come so far that it was impossible to think of returning without having achieved some definite purpose. If he got close up to the window, he might either hear some important piece of information, or perhaps— The thought, mad as it was, crossed his mind of attempting to break the glass, leap into the room, pick up the prisoner—if there was a prisoner—in his arms, and rush away with him, much after the fashion of a preposterous but exciting thriller which he had read in the train coming up from Truro.

There was this danger, however: he had to cross that intervening space, with the risk that anyone taking a glance out of the window would inevitably notice him.

Yes, if he got down on all-fours.

Before he could start to crawl forward on this second portion of his journey, from somewhere behind, a heavy form rammed itself down with terrific force upon his back. His face was pressed relentlessly into the hard ground. The pain was intense—so agonizing in fact, that he was momentarily stunned, and, during those few seconds of stupefaction, three merciless blows descended upon the back of his head, and he remembered nothing more.

Still swearing beneath his breath, Whittle waited. It was useless, he decided, to attempt to rush throug the gates, which were rapidly closing. There must be men on the other side, although he had not been able to see them. He had only caught sight of a flying figure which he knew must be the young fellow who had said his name was Crane. The latter had got away with a good start, but he had been able to keep track of his movements by the sound his feet made in the silence of the night. One thing was certain: if Crane was captured, he would probably be killed. Though he had no definite information about the occupants of "The White House," the hint which George Melton had given was sufficient for him; here was the headquarters of a gang of crooks who would stop at nothing to gain their ends.

Still, he had come there for a certain purpose—and this was strengthened now by the action of the young Englishman. Although he had tried to persuade Crane not to enter the grounds, he himself had resolved to get into the place, by hook or crook, before the night was much older.

Waiting sufficiently long to endeavor to catch any sound coming from the other side of the gates, he took from his pocket what proved to be a light, pliable, silk ladder. He flung the top of this so that it caught on two of the spikes of the gates. Then, swaying slightly, he mounted to the top, drew the ladder over to the other side, and descended in the same way.

There was a brief hesitation whilst he debated whether he should leave the ladder on the gate, or replace it in his pocket. He decided on the first alternative. If pursued, he would be able to save in this way several valuable seconds.

Stepping remarkably light for a man of his build, he crept forward in the darkness, his right hand holding tightly a noiseless automatic. There were six bullets in that gun, and if he found it necessary, he was prepared to use them all.

He had gone perhaps twenty yards, and was fumbling to get clear of some kind of shrubbery int. which he had stepped, when he heard a voice, tense and dramatic, behind him.

"Come on, you fool; he's in front—I heard him."

Whittle's life had made him a quick thinker, and this faculty was considerably strengthened in an emergency. He did not require much mental churning to decide now that he had been mistaken in the darkness for a companion of the speaker. The latter, of course, must be one of the men placed in the grounds to act as guards to the house.

He whispered back in a strained voice:

"All right—I'm coming." He had to take the risk of his voice being something akin to that of the supposed second guard. If the first man evinced any sign of suspicion, he would have to deal with him with his gun.

But, as it happened, the words were received with nothing more alarming than a peremptory:

"Well, don't waste any more time, then."

Stepping on his toes, as agile as any ballet dancer, Whittle moved forward. He had pulled his hat well down over his eyes, but either the clothes he was wearing or his frame, must have been different to what the second man had expected, because, when he was within a couple of yards, the other started forward.

"Here——!"

He said no more. Whittle, moving quickly forward, hit the man clean on the point of the jaw before any further words could escape. The blow was shrewdly aimed and the fellow went down like a log.

The detective waited. There must be another near at hand. But no attack come. Instead, from somewhere in front, proceeded the sounds of a scuffle.

Crane being attacked? He moved forward rapidly.

* * * *

Philip opened his eyes wonderingly. It was the American detective bending over him, and not an enemy.

"How did you get here?" he asked slowly.

"If you hadn't rushed off like a young fool, we'd have been together," was the reply; "as it was, I found my way here by luck—and she helped me like the lady she is. But there's no time to waste talking—we've got to get away, my lad. How are you feeling now?"

Whilst saying the words, the detective hauled the other to his feet. Crane looked around blinking.

"Someone gave me some crack on the head with something that felt like a sledge-hammer," he said. "But," thrusting out a foot and gingerly trying it, "I'll be all right. Look." Although he swayed unsteadily, Crane proved he could walk.

"Good! Now, then, steady; it's a wonder to me those fellows in that room haven't heard anything already. Quietly, I tell you!"

By this time they were making their way through the undergrowth to the gates.

"Did you climb over?" whispered Crane.

"Not a chance," said the American; "I prepare for emergencies of this kind." Whilst he was talking, he wondered if the rope ladder would still be where he had left it hanging from two spikes of the gates. If not, their retreat would be cut off with a vengeance.

But Lady Luck, who had been his guiding star so far that night, still proved loyal to him. When they reached the gates, casting quick glances to right and left to see if the two men he had put out had been substituted by others, the rope ladder was visible.

"Up with you," he urged.

Crane merely waited to steady his aching head for a moment after the recent exertion. Then, without questioning the order he started to climb.

He was half way up when an urgent whisper came from below.

"Hurry, man," he heard Whittle say. For the American detective, on guard, had seen a number of figures rush from the house. Somehow or other, the alarm must have been given to the occupants of that lighted room.

He was in a ticklish dilemma. The ladder would not carry the weight of both, and Crane had not yet reached the top. Moreover, if he started to climb, they would both present admirable targets to their enemies.

He decided to send the opposition a warning. The bullet from his noiseless automatic sped into the night. But the aftermath was heard distinctly; a hideous scream shattered the silence. Charles Whittle realized that if he had not actually killed a man, he must have mortally wounded one. After this it would be war to the knife.

Glancing up, he saw that his companion had now reached the top. A few seconds later came the sound of a heavy thud on the other side of the gates.

With astonishing ability for a man of his bulk, Whittle clambered up the fragile ladder, reached the top, and then, without hesitation, hurled himself into space. It meant the risk of a broken leg, or, at the least, a sprained ankle; but he had to take that chance.

By the time he had regained his feet, Crane was by his side.

"What was that scream?" asked the younger man.

"Never mind—we must get away. They'll be searching for us."

(To be continued.)

World Flight

Of all the nerve-wracking moments that the Hon. Mrs. Victor Bruce experienced during her lone flight round the world, that time when she made a forced landing in a jungle clearing on the borders of Siam must have been the worst. The torrential rain, she tells us in "The Bluebird's Flight," had saturated the engine of her little machine; she was literally miles from anywhere, and night was coming on. At its greatest length the clearing was not more than a hundred and eighty yards; "Bluebird" needed a hundred and fifty in which to rise, and there were high trees all round. She swung the propeller, but there was no sign of life in the engine. Hurriedly she changed the sparking plugs and cleaned the magneto points. Still nothing happened:

I sat on the edge of the wing to take breath. How oppressively hot it was! Perspiration was pouring down my face. I felt I hadn't the strength to keep swinging that heavy propeller. I knew if the throttle were opened more fully there might be a better chance of getting the engine to start, but I dared not do this without something to hold the wheels of the machine from moving forward. . . I felt desperate; precious moments were being lost. The sun had already sunk below the trees. I returned and gave the propeller another desperate swing. The engine burst into life, and I leapt into the cockpit and manipulated the throttle. For two or three seconds there was a spluttering and backfiring, and then the smooth, even firing to which my ears were so used.

Finally she got up—touching the tops of trees with the wheels of the under-carriage. Just out of the wood!

A LANDING ON QUICKSAND.

Another time, flying towards Jask, on the Persian Gulf, she found her oil pressure getting dangerously low. So she decided to come down on the sand near the water and fill up with some fresh oil she was carrying in the fuselage:

As I landed I felt the wheels of the under-carriage sink, and the nose of the machine dive downwards. At the same time I was shot violently forward against the windscreen. Amid a deafening sound of splintering wood and a smell of escaping petrol, I found myself hanging by my straps, the tail of the machine bolt upright in the air, and the engine buried out of sight in the soft sand. I had landed on quicksand!

Half dazed she released herself, to find that she was on one of the most desolate stretches of desert on the Gulf. Even when help came—in the shape of some none too friendly natives—the difficulty was to get "Bluebird" on to its wheels again. But at last, although the wind was blowing hard, they succeeded:

Oh, the joy! It seemed too good to be true to have got it back again without damage, for usually when a machine has landed on its nose it is a tricky business to right it, requiring skilled labor, ropes, and other material for lifting. I was delighted, and was naturally smiling; the Baluchis were so pleased that they joined hands and began to dance round the aeroplane. They insisted that I should joint their "ring o' roses," but I soon stopped, for the heat was terrific, and I felt that I should quickly become exhausted unless I got under shelter.

THE BUYING OF "BLUEBIRD."

Such were some of the incidents that enlivened Mrs. Bruce's flight. Truly it was one of the most amazing adventures of modern times. Here was a woman, who, a little more than a fortnight before starting, had been up in the air only once, gaily setting out to fly round the world via India, Japan, and America. The buying of "Bluebird" is a story in itself. Having an hour or so to spare before lunch, Mrs. Bruce was strolling towards Bond Street. In a shop window she saw a little blue-and-silver aeroplane:

Somthing influenced me to step inside and ask the price of the machine.

"Five hundred and fifty pounds," replied the salesman.

I was about to leave the shop when he added: ". . . and chromium plating is only five pounds extra."

That settled it. It was just like buying a motor-car. "Chromium plating five pounds extra!" I had always imagined that aeroplanes were extraordinary things, and yet this machine seemed so very ordinary.

"Could one fly round the world in this?" I asked.

"Of course . . . easily!" was the reply.

That settled it. In a week or two she was painting the name "Bluebird" on its nose, and was ready to be off. But no wonder a visitor, who asked a mechanic what "Bluebird's" registration letters—G-A.B.D.S.—stood for, received the reply "A B——— Daft Stunt"! And no wonder that when she rang up her husband on reaching Munich to tell him "I'm here," he replied: "Where? In Kent?"

ENGLAND IN SIAM.

One of the interesting features of the flight was the fact that she never knew what fresh experience she might have on landing at some out-of-the-way aerodrome. Sometimes she had pleasant surprises—at Lakhon, in Siam, for instance, where the Siamese Governor came to escort her to his house:

On arriving I was very interested to see how English everything was. The interior of the house was a perfect example of an old Elizabethan dwelling. The Governor was particularly proud of his garden, and I was highly amused to see that even the banana trees were surrounded witn white paling to create the atmosphere of an English park. The entrance to his drive was also typically English, with a five-barred gate, and at the side an old-fashioned English stile. Round the porch was a great arch of foliage with masses of orchids.

The found tea waiting for her—not the usual Siamese tea, but served in English fashion with plenty of cream and sugar!

THE EARTHQUAKE.

After crossing the Yellow Sea—five hundred miles of lonely water and eight hours of suspense—she safely reached Japan. But her troubles were by no means over. She was told at her hotel not to worry if she felt the building shake, as there had been over two hundred small earthquakes that year:

I had not been asleep more than three hours when suddenly I was awakened by my bed shaking violently. At first I thought "So this is Japan," and turned over and tried to go to sleep again. But the shocks became more violent, and I simply had to sit up and take notice. Then the whole room began to move. A horrible thought struck me. An earthquake and a bad one! . . . I tried to turn on the light, but it wouldn't work. Sparks were coming out of the electric radiator. The whole hotel was in darkness. Every second the building shook more violently. There was a crash just beside me; two china vases had fallen from the mantelpiece; it was almost impossible to keep my feet.

Needless to say, she had arrived just in time for one of the worst earthquakes of the year!

It was a wonderful flight—nineteen thousand miles in a tiny machine with an open cockpit, through twenty-three countries, and across three continents—and Mrs. Bruce has written a wonderfully good book about it. It is sensible, straightforward and full of humor—for she makes light of all her dangers. One cannot help echoing the wondering admiration of the air-mail pilot in America, that country of huge aeroplanes, who wrote on "Bluebird's" side the words: "The bally thing flies, by Jove!"

Hon. Margaret Ruthven, daughter of Lord Ruthven, governor of Jersey, is engaged to marry Peter Davies, godson of Sir James Barrie and said to be the original of "Peter Pan".

Seeing Stars

New counts of the number of stars that could be seen with perfect telescopes or unlimited power to gather light and magnify images were announced by astronomers of Mount Wilson Observatory at the annual exhibit of scientific work by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, held recently in that city. The number of stars visible to an unaided human eye probably is not over 6,000, but even a small telescope increases this number many times. Large telescopes, like the great 100-inch one at Mount Wilson, which is the largest in the world, show millions of stars even in a small part of the sky. The possibility of a complete count depends, however, upon the fact observed with these large telescopes that the stars are not scattered through space as far as these giant instruments can see. On the contrary, it is found that all of the individual stars which can be seen belong to a limited star cloud of which our sun is one. Earthly astronomers necessarily see this cloud from inside looking out, like one insect looking out through a vast cloud of other insects. Calculations based on the numbers of stars visible in the 100-inch telescope in different directions outward from the earth have made possible an estimate of the distance at which the stars begin to thin out, marking the edges of the star cloud. These calculations indicate that the total number of stars in this cloud probably is 30 or 40 billion, about six or seven million times as many as can be seen by the naked eye.

A Schwab Story

Charles M. Schwab, steel magnate, does not claim to be much of an orator. But he does tell some good stories. At a recent banquet, according to Editor and Publisher, Mr. Schwab told of a farmer who aproached him.

"I've got a cow I want to sell to you, Charlie," the neighbor said.

"Yes, would she fit into my Guernsey herd?"

"No, I dunno as she would."

"Has she got anything to recommend her?"

"Wall, I dunno as she has."

"Does she give lots of milk?"

"No, I can't say as she gives lots of milk, but, Charlie, I can tell you this: She's a kind, gentle, good-dispositioned old cow and if she's got any milk she'll give it to you."

What most increases anger is the feeling that one is in the wrong.—Jean Paul Richter.

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