

The
TRIFLERS
By Frederick Grim Bartlett

CHAPTER VI.—(Cont'd.)

She must have been a fool not to understand that something was wrong with him—the more so because only a few minutes before that he had stood before her with his cheeks a deep red, his body firm, his eyes clear and bright.

Where was the surgeon? She rose and went to the clerk.

"Are you sure the surgeon has not gone?" she asked.

"Very sure," answered the clerk. "He has just sent out for a nurse to remain with monsieur."

"A nurse?" repeated Marjory.

"The doctor says Monsieur Covington must not be left alone."

"It's as bad—as that?" questioned Marjory.

"I do not know."

"I must see the doctor at once," she said. "But, first—can you give me apartments on the same floor—for myself and maid? I am his fiancée," she informed him.

"I can give mademoiselle apartments adjoining," said the clerk eagerly.

"Then do so."

She signed her name in the register, and beckoned for Marie.

"Marie," she said, "you may return and finish packing my trunks. Please bring them here."

"Here?" queried Marie.

"Here," answered Marjory. She turned to the clerk.

"Take me upstairs at once."

There was a strong smell of ether in the hall outside the door of Monte Covington's room. It made her gasp for a moment. It seemed to make concrete what, after all, had until this moment been more or less vague. It was like fiction suddenly made true. That pungent odor was a grim reality. So was that black-bearded Dr. Marcellin, who, leaving his patient in the hands of his assistant, came to the door wiping his hands upon a towel.

"I am Mr. Covington's fiancée—Miss Stockton," she said at once. "You will tell me the truth?"

After one glance at her eyes Dr. Marcellin was willing to tell the truth. "It is an ugly bullet wound in his shoulder," he said.

"It is not serious?"

"Such things are always serious. Luckily, I was able to find the bullet and remove it. It was a narrow escape for him."

"Of course," she added, "I shall serve as his nurse."

"Good," he nodded.

But he added, having had some experience with fiancées as nurses:—"Of course I shall have for a week my own nurse also but I shall be glad of your assistance. This—er—was an accident?"

She nodded.

"He was trying to save a foolish friend from killing himself."

"I understand."

"Nothing more need be said about it."

"Nothing more," Dr. Marcellin assured her. "If you will come in I will give you your instructions. Mademoiselle Duval will soon be here."

"Is she necessary?" inquired Marjory. "I have engaged the next apartment for myself and maid."

"That is very good, but—Mademoiselle Duval is necessary for the present. Will you come in?"

She followed the doctor into Monsieur Covington's room. There the odor of ether hung still heavier.

She heard him muttering a name. She listened to catch it.

"Edhart," he called. "Oh, Edhart!"

CHAPTER VII.

The Advantages of Being Shot

Monte was conscious of a burning pain in his shoulder, and he was not quite certain as to where he was. So he hitched up on one elbow. This caused a shadow to detach itself from the dark at the other end of the room—a shadow that rustled and came toward him. It is small wonder that he was startled.

"Who the deuce are you?" he inquired in plain English.

"Monsieur is not to sit up," the shadow answered in plain French.

Monte repeated his question, this time in French.

"I am the nurse sent here by Dr. Marcellin," she informed him. "Monsieur is not to talk."

She placed her hand below his neck and helped him to settle down again upon his pillow. Then she rustled off again beyond the range of the shaded electric light.

"What happened?" Monte called into the dark.

Then he thought he heard a door open, and further rustling, and a whisper conversation.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

It sounded like a conspiracy of some sort, so he tried again to make his elbow. Mademoiselle appeared promptly, and, again placing her hand beneath his neck, lowered him once more to his pillow.

"Turn up the light, will you?" requested Monte.

"But certainly not," answered the nurse. "Monsieur is to lie very quiet and sleep."

"I can't sleep."

"Perhaps it will help monsieur to be quiet if he knows his fiancée is in the next room."

Momentarily this announcement appeared to have directly the opposite effect.

"My what?" gasped Monte.

"Monsieur's fiancée. With her maid, she is occupying the next apartment in order to be near monsieur. If you are very quiet to-night, it is possible that to-morrow the doctor will permit you to see her."

"Was that she who came in and whispered to you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

Monte remained quiet after that—but he was not sleeping. He was thinking.

"Is she in there now?" Monte called to the nurse in the dark.

"Certainly, monsieur. But I thought you were sleeping."

No, he was not sleeping; but he did not mind now the pain in his shoulder. She had announced herself as his fiancée. Well, technically, she was. He had asked her to marry him, and she had accepted. At the time he had not seen much farther ahead than the next few minutes; and even then had not foreseen what was to happen in those few minutes. The proposal had given him his right to talk to Hamilton, and her acceptance—well, it had given Marjory her right to be here.

Now it was all right. It was all right and proper for her, all right and proper for him, all right and proper for society. Not only that, but it was so utterly normal that society would have frowned if she had not hurried to his side in such an emergency. It forced her here, willy-nilly. Perhaps that was the only reason she was here.

Still, he did not like to think that. She was too true blue to quit a friend. It would be more like her to come anyway. He remembered how she had stood by that old aunt to the end. She would be standing by her to-day were she alive.

"Is Mademoiselle Stockton sitting up there in the next room?"

"I do not know," answered the nurse.

"Do you mind finding out for me?"

"If monsieur will promise to sleep after that."

"How can a man promise to sleep?"

Even under normal conditions, that was a foolish thing to promise. But when a man was experiencing brand-new sensations—the sensations of being engaged—it was quite impossible to make such a promise.

"Monsieur can at least promise not to talk."

"I will do that," agreed Monte.

She came back and reported that mademoiselle was sitting up, and begged to present her regards and express the hope that he was resting comfortably.

"Please to tell her I am, and that I hope she will now go to bed," he answered.

Nurse Duval did that, and returned.

"What did she say?" inquired Monte.

"But, Monsieur—"

She had no intention of spending the rest of the night as a messenger between those two rooms.

"Very well," submitted Monte. "But you might tell me what she said."

"She said she was not sleepy," answered the nurse.

"I'm glad she's awake," said Monte.

After the doctors were through with Monte the next morning, they decided, after a consultation, that there was no apparent reason why, during the day, Miss Stockton, if she desired, should not serve as his nurse while Miss Duval went home to sleep.

"My assistant will come in at least twice," said Dr. Marcellin. "Besides, you have the constitution of a prize-fighter. It might well be possible to place a bullet through the heart of such a man without greatly discommoding him."

He spoke as if with some resentment.

After they had gone out, Marjory came in. She hesitated at the door a moment, perhaps to make sure that he was awake; perhaps to make sure that she herself was awake. Monte, from the bed, could see her better than she could see him. He thought she looked whiter than usual, but she was very beautiful.

There was something about her that distinguished her from other women—from this nurse woman, for example, who was the only other woman with whom it was possible to compare her in a like situation. With one hand resting on the door, her chin well up, she looked more than ever like Her Royal Highness Something or Other. She was dressed in something white and light and fluffy, like the gowns he used to see on Class Day. Around her white throat there was a narrow band of black velvet.

"Good-morning, Marjory," he called.

She came at once to his side, walking graciously, as a princess might walk.

"I didn't know if you were awake," she said.

It was one thing to have her here

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in the dark, and another to have her here in broad daylight. The sun was streaming in at the windows now, and outside the birds were chattering.

"Did you rest well last night?" she inquired.

"I heard you when you came in and whispered to the nurse woman. It was mighty wife of you to come."

"What else could I do?" She seated herself in a chair by his bed.

"Because we are engaged?" he asked.

She smiled a little as he said that.

"Then you have not forgotten?"

"Forgotten?" he exclaimed. "I'm just beginning to realize it."

"I was afraid it might come back to you as a shock, Monte," she said. "But it is very convenient—at just this time."

"I don't know what I should have done without it," he nodded. "It certainly gives a man a comfortable feeling to know—well, just to know there is some one around."

"I'm glad if I've been able to do anything."

"It's a whole lot just having you here," he assured her.

(To be continued.)

INITIATING AN IMMORTAL.

The Ceremony of Election in the "Silent Academy."

In Memphis, the capital of ancient Egypt, there was a celebrated academy one of the rules of which—"Members will meditate much, write little, and talk the least possible"—might well head the list of qualifications for admission to the modern "Hall of Fame." The institution was known as "The Silent Academy"; and there was not a person of any literary distinction in Egypt who was not ambitious to become a member.

Akmed, a young Egyptian of great erudition and exquisite judgment, was the author of a treatise entitled *The Art of Brevity*. It was a masterpiece of condensation and precision, and he was laboring to compress it still more when he learned in his country seclusion that there was a place vacant in the academy. He promptly presented himself as a candidate at its door.

A crowd of gossiping loungers in the portico speedily gathered round the stranger and plied him with a multitude of questions. Without a word in reply, Akmed, approaching one of the ushers, placed in his hands a letter addressed to the president of the august institution. It ran:

"Akmed humbly solicits the vacant place."

The usher delivered the letter at once; but Akmed and his application had arrived too late. The place was already filled. By a system of management, which even ancient academies sometimes found irresistible, the favorite candidate of a certain rich man had been elected, a glib and garrulous pretender.

Much chagrined at the loss of Akmed, the members of the academy were puzzled as to the best mode of telling him of the failure of his application, when the president hit upon this expedient: He filled a goblet with water so full that a single drop more would have caused it to overflow. Then he ordered the candidate to be introduced.

Akmed entered the hall, where the academicians were all assembled. The president rose and without a word pointed out to him, with a gesture of regret, the token of his exclusion.

The young Egyptian smiled, not in the least disconcerted. Picking up a rose leaf, he placed it on the surface of the water so gently that it floated without causing an overflow.

This ingenious and intelligible response won the members to a man. They handed Akmed their registry of names, and he inscribed his own name at the end. It remained then for him to pronounce, according to custom, an address of thanks. On the margin of the column where he had written his name he traced the number 100, representing the academicians and the number to which they had been limited. Then, placing a cipher before the figure 1 (thus, 0100), he wrote underneath:

"Their number has been neither diminished nor increased."

The president, delighted at the laconic ingenuity of Akmed, substituted the figure 1 for the cipher which preceded the number 100 (thus, 1100), and appended these words:

"Their number has been increased tenfold."

"Johnny," said the teacher, "you must stay in after school and learn the names of all the Mexican presidents and all the German chancellors since 1914."

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Food Control Corner

By the new regulations under which the Government will supervise stock yards in Canada, a considerable saving of grain will be effected. Delegates of the conference held in Ottawa recently by representatives of the Live Stock Branch and Agricultural Departments of the provinces with representatives of the different Live Stock Exchanges and Stock Yard Companies, testified that feed used to "fill" hogs, cattle and sheep before weighing and a few hours previous to being slaughtered, was pure waste. The use of grain for this purpose so far as cattle were concerned is being prohibited by the new regulations, while only the lower grades of barley and oats are allowed for hogs. Mr. S. E. Todd, Chief of Staff in the Office of the Food Controller, was present by invitation and spoke of the necessity for conservation, particularly of wheat.

"We are bombarded with letters regarding waste of feed in the stock yards," said Mr. Todd. "These letters are especially emphatic in regard to wheat. While it may be true that No. 3 milling wheat costs a little less than barley, or crushed corn at the present time brought in from Chicago, still the price justification for feeding wheat at the present time is insufficient. Wheat is the scarcest article in the world to-day. The amount available for shipment in the next three months measures the extent of hardship which the Allied people will have to endure. This matter should not be a question of price I should think it possible to substitute other grains for wheat."

It was pointed out that wheat has been fed to hogs before they are scaled so as to increase the weight. But, as the hogs are slaughtered immediately, this increased weight does not go into pork and is, in fact, pure waste, the grain, after the hog is slaughtered, being washed down the sewers.

Different representatives declared that packers paid no more for hogs fed on water than for hogs weighed off cars and the practice was really without justification. A committee

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was thereupon appointed to bring in a recommendation, which was as follows:

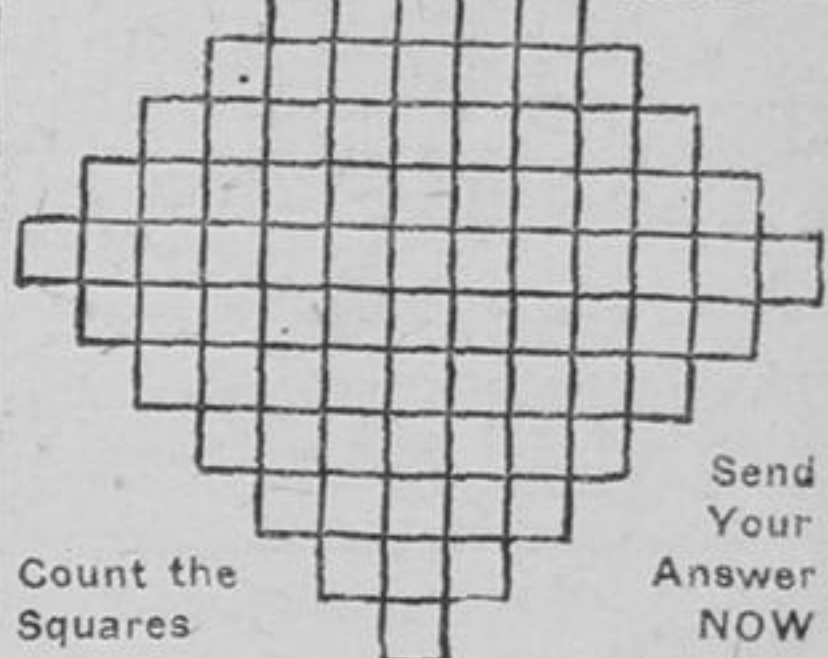
"At the suggestion of the Food Controller, and as a war measure only, we recommend that the use of wheat be prohibited as feed for stock to be immediately slaughtered, and that meal and grain of any kind be forbidden as feed for cattle at the stock yards; that hogs in the stock yards about to be slaughtered, may be fed on meal, barley of no higher grade than No. 4 and oats of no higher grade than No. 1 Feed."

This report was adopted.

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