

Were Friends

Miss Collier looked up into the lieutenant's face as he stood before her and asked:

"Shall we dance or sit it out?"

Stanley said:

"Your pleasure is mine," and guessing what her pleasure was, he added:

"Shall we go on the steps or stay here?"

She rose, and they went out into the warm spring night.

"I knew you did not want to dance," said Miss Collier.

For reasons best known to himself Stanley was in no gracious mood.

He answered uncivilly enough: "But perhaps I did."

"Then," with the softest inflection of her soft voice, "I am more interested in your welfare than you are yourself. If you are to start at reveille, you should rest now. You should really not have come to-night."

She knew why he had come. She knew that it was because Mauricia Meredith had told him that if he were going to be too busy to take her she would release him and go with Mr. Kendall, which was tantamount to compulsion.

Stanley now contrasted her indifference with Miss Collier's gentle, solicitous tones. Of a sudden he wondered if Miss Meredith were selfish, which was what Miss Collier meant him to wonder. A still, smooth voice often flows over unexpected depths.

But, of course, continued she, gazing out into the blue-black sky and seeming to meditate aloud, "you had to bring Mauricia."

Stanley was up in arms.

"I beg your pardon. It was my wish to do so. Miss Meredith offered to excuse me."

"Did she? But, of course, she did! She is always considerate, I fear I myself should not have been so generous. I am not of a generous nature. But, then,"—the thought seemed just to occur to her—"I suppose Mr. Kendall stood ready to bring her. I think he is in love with her. Don't you?"

She turned her head and looked into his eyes, with a vague sort of speculation. They might have been discussing an interesting but impersonal question.

"It would not surprise me."

"It was too obviously cool."

"I hope so, because she deserves to be happy, and I think she cares more than a little for him."

"What makes you think that?"

Stanley asked with exceeding carelessness.

"A great many little things which a man would never take into account, but which a girl knows from her own experience"—the impersonal eyes grew very personal for one short instant, then dropped in confusion—"or from her own observation. Have you seen it? I think you will if you watch. It is either that or a desperate flirtation. But I believe Mauricia to be above flirting. I have never thought that she deliberately went about breaking Will Henderson's heart or Lieutenant Cook's. Any man would naturally fall in love with her. I should if I were

a man. I wonder that you can see so much of her and remain simply her friend. Your heart must be of stern stuff."

She checked a sigh, and resumed her gaze at the stars. Then, as if following out a train of thought, she recommenced:

"That in itself is proof that she is not a flirt. She has never flirted with you. Of course, though, it may be that she has been engrossed with Mr. Kendall."

Neither view was comforting to Stanley. The little things which Miss Collier had insinuated began to recur to him. They were very small things indeed, so he enlarged them, since love, when it may not be as happy as it would like, prefers to be as miserable as it may.

Miss Collier's gaze was not so fixed upon the star, that she could not see into the hall. She watched it, and she watched Stanley, and almost immediately she was rewarded. She saw Miss Meredith and Lieutenant Kendall coming down the corridor, and she saw that Stanley did not see.

She turned and faced the latter and caught his hands in hers and leaned toward him. The soft voice had never been more sympathetic, more low.

"But, perhaps," it murmured, "I have only just thought of it when you were so silent. Perhaps I am hurting you. Are you a mere friend, or do you love her, too?"

Woman cannot play at chess, they say, because she cannot plan her moves or determine those of her opponent far enough in advance. It is not the case when men are her pawns. She works on the supposition that fate will not play into her hands, but if it chooses so to do it is all the better, and fate notoriously favors the fair.

Miss Meredith's approach could not have been better timed. Stanley was worked to the requisite pitch of annoyance with her and himself. He was also irritated against Miss Collier, for causing his suspicions, even though they might be just. So he answered as she had planned.

"I am not so fortunate as to have any right to love her." His voice raised itself in exasperation at having to admit it. Miss Meredith and I are mere friends."

Miss Collier drew away her hands. The lieutenant looked up, and then he knew that Miss Meredith was standing on the steps above.

The soft voice picked up an imaginary conversation in the middle and went on with it, but Stanley lost his head.

He said that he had something to attend to at the barracks, and would Miss Collier excuse him?

"Mere friends!" Mauricia said to herself over and over. We are mere friends!"

"Mere friends!" she used as the watchword to pass the gates of flirtation, and for the rest of the evening she made Kendall happy, and herself well she was intoxicated with the wine of retaliation, and was radiant.

"I will go home with Mr. Kendall if you want to pack your bag or to get a little sleep," she told Stanley.

Stanley determined not to desert his post. He would do his duty to the end. "I have the dance before the last with Mr. Kendall, and I can't miss it."

Stanley assured her that it was immaterial to him if she chose to remain until daylight; that he was entirely at her service.

But Miss Meredith did not remain until daylight. At two o'clock she went home and sat in her room at the window looking out into the night.

There was not a sound in all the world. The stars twinkled and glit-

tered above the silent town. She could see quite plainly the barracks across the parade-ground, and there was not a light in any window. Still from the silence rang in her ears, as they had rung in the music's strains, the bitter words, "Mere friends," and still before her eyes rose the picture of those two as she had seen them when she had gone out upon the steps. She bowed her head on her bare arms to shut it out, and for a long, long while she did not move.

When she looked up again the barracks were gone. Over all the land was the darkness which comes before dawn, and in her heart was a hopelessness as blank. How dark, how inky the night had grown! It must be very late. She was cold, but she was not tired. She would wait now until morning. In a little time the house would be astir. She must breakfast with her father.

She put on a heavy cape about her shoulders and went back to the window. By and by she heard some one moving. A match was struck in the next room. There were heavy footsteps that tried to fall softly upon the stairs. Every one fancied her asleep, no doubt.

By and by her father opened her door softly and tiptoed into the room. "I have sat up to take breakfast with you," she hastened to explain. "In a ball dress?" he said.

"After or before six it is correct," she told him gayly.

"Stanley will be here," he said.

"For breakfast?"

"Yes. It is half-past four. We will be ready in ten minutes."

He went out and the girl looked again into the darkness, which grew thicker before the dawn. "Mere friends!" Well, she would meet him as a mere friend. She would, perhaps, have it to do often enough in the dull future. It might be best to begin at once.

The tinkling of a silver bell came to her, sounding weirdly through the night, and out of that night emerged another figure. It ran up the steps and the front door opened and closed. She drew her cape about her shoulders and groped her way out of her room, through the corridor, down the stairs. A candle was burning in the hall. She went on into the dining-room.

Her mother was pouring the coffee. Her father and his first lieutenant were already seated. The lieutenant rose.

"Good morning again," he said cheerfully. He was too much filled with the excitement of the occasion now to remember his injuries. "You approach our garments with the splendor of your attire, but our mission is to march on active service, and not to be beautiful. We can only hope you will excuse us."

"Certainly, and I will even be so gracious as to wish that the contrast may prove a seasoning to your bacon."

There was a roaring fire in the grate, and she threw back the cape from her shoulders. Her neck and arms shone white, and the lights glittered on her hair. From the crown of her head, with its faded flower, to the torn ruffle of her skirt she was in sad disarray. But Stanley thought her very beautiful, and memory came suddenly back to time.

They talked gayly, for all that they were quite unhappy. Then Moriarty reported that the sergeant-major was at the door and would like to see the captain. The captain went out and his wife followed him.

"Mauricia will take care of you," she said to Stanley. She had many things to attend to.

And then a silence that would not be broken came upon the two. Stanley racked his brains for a sentence. Mau-

ricia sought vainly for words. Stanley looked across the table, at the pretty, disordered head, Miss Meredith studied the light effects on his buttons. Then she affected to yawn. And still no words would come. Speech and consecutive thought were not.

And still the lieutenant watched the sweet, tired face until the shadowed eyes turned and looked out of the window. A shutter was open and Miss Meredith saw that the darkness was passing, that the light and the dawn were near.

Suddenly the lieutenant pushed back his chair and rose and went toward her. Miss Meredith sprang to her feet and backed against the wall. But Stanley had no mind to let her rest against anything so hard and unfeeling. Nor did he mean that she should keep her eyes upon the floor. He turned her face up to his and by the light that was quickly coming he saw all that he had been so long hoping to see. Yet Mauricia could not resist reminding him, as she tried faintly to free herself, "But we are mere friends, you know."

The light broke in, too, upon Stanley's mind.

"So that is it, is it?" was all the explanation of the luckless words that he ever gave or that was ever asked. "Well, supposing you make us more than that," he suggested.

A girl who is watching her father and two troops ride off at reveille to take part in a campaign ought not to look radiant. Neither should a girl with ordinary good sense stand bare-necked and bare-armed in the cold air of sunrise before the astonished view of several scores of troopers.

Mrs. Meredith checked her own inclination to weep, and bethought herself of her daughter. She laid her hand on one of the cold arms.

"Mauricia, how can you be so imprudent," she looked at the beaming face, "how can you be so happy?"

Mauricia's answer was not wiser than might have been expected. "It's such a beautiful dawn, and it was so dark," she explained.

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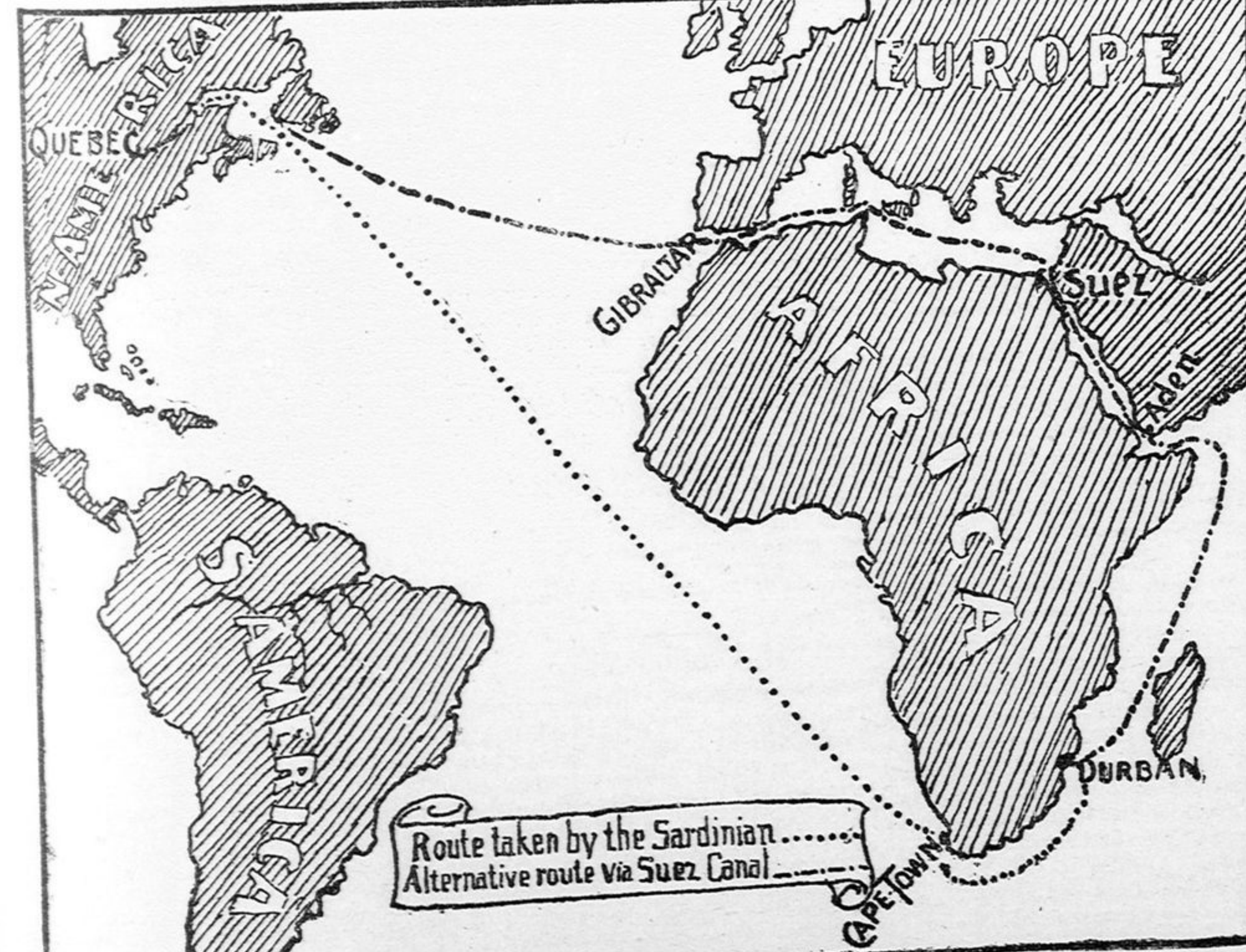
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ROUTE OF THE SARDINIAN.



It has been estimated that with favourable weather the transport Sardinian conveying the Canadian troops to the scene of the war in South Africa will reach Cape Town in thirty days at the most. The distance from Quebec to Cape Town is 7,015 nautical miles, and the Sardinian would only need to make an average of 250 miles a day in order to reach its destination within the time mentioned. While no official announcement was made, it is generally understood that the Sardinian takes the most direct route to Cape Town, across the Atlantic ocean as indicated in the map above. An alternative route, and one which it was thought possible the vessel might take, is that by way of the Straits of Gibraltar, Mediterranean Sea, Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, the Straits of Madagascar, and thence along the African Coast to Durban, the point of debarkation. This route would, of course, have been several thousand miles longer, and as it possesses no advantages over the direct route to compensate for this disadvantage, it was decided to send the troops the other way. Whether they will arrive in time to march with General Buller and have their Christmas dinner at Pretoria remains to be seen. One thing is certain, if General Buller gets there the Canadians will be along with him.

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