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ory is repeating itself, but, all the

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**Stupendous Sales** (on each side of us)

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BY MRS. C. N. WILLIAMSON

Author of "The Princess Passes," "The Lightning Conductor," Etc., Etc.

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CHAPTER XIII.

Number 33 was a small and common-place room, such as might have been given to a lady's maid; and Elspeth reflected, when she saw it, that Mr. McGowan would not have offered it to her had she not been going to leave his employ. Now, it did not matter to him whether she was satisfied or not at Lochrain Castle; she would have to stay on through her fortnight; and then some other girl would arrive to take her place, to be treated with all the kindness and consideration that had been hers at first. But, after all, she said to herself, such unimportant things mattered no more to her now than they did to Mr. McGowan. She was so unhappy both for herself and for Lady Hilary Vane that little details of physical comfort were too insignificant to be thought of twice.

She was miserable because she was going to be turned out into the world again, where she would be worse off than ever, because she had failed—or, if she had not really failed, it was the same as if she had. She was miserable because she knew that she had been foolish enough to fall deeply in love with a man as far removed from her as the sky is from the earth—a

man who thought of her, when he thought of her at all, as a clever child in a different class from her own, a poor little creature to whom one must be kind out of sheer pity for her loneliness. She was miserable because that man would perhaps marry Lady Lambert, who was doing all she could to secure him, and who—if she succeeded—would sooner or later induce her lover to believe the young stenographer a scheming little pretender.

These were Elspeth's own personal griefs, but she had others. She was very sorry for Captain Oxford, whom she liked and admired, and whose cause she would have championed if she could. She was wretched in sympathy with Lady Hilary, who would probably be forced into accepting a man she did not love; and she feared much that her friend was still in danger from the secret plottings of two jealous women.

As for the letter which Hilary had asked her to give Mr. Trowbridge, she had not handed it to him during their short conversation in the morning, and when several hours had passed without her seeing him again, she had enclosed the letter in an explanatory note and returned it to Lady Hilary. What had happened since—whether the girl had given her answer by word of mouth instead of writing, or whether the question was still in abeyance, Elspeth did not know, for she had heard nothing.

Now, of her regular work went on that day; except with Mr. McGowan; for she was informed by him that neither Mr. Kenrith nor Captain Oxford would need her services, and she could not guess whether this was because of her disgrace or because the theft of Mr. Kenrith's jewels had upset the ordinary routine.

Later, when the time came for her to go to Lady Ardcliffe, she was informed that she would not be wanted that afternoon; therefore she would have been idle during most of the day, had not Mr. McGowan had plenty of work to give her in the office to replace that which she usually undertook outside.

Altogether, she was in a strange state of mind—a state which she felt could not endure for long. Toward evening, as she tried to make the ugly new room look habitable, she decided that she would pay a secret visit to the tower that night, and discover, if she could, the reason for her banishment. She knew nothing of Lord Lochrain, and could not suppose that he had any connection with the mysterious occurrences in the tower; indeed he had not been in the hotel when they had taken place. But she believed that his desire to have the room was only an excuse to get her out of it.

Perhaps it was really to be given to him, perhaps not. Perhaps it would not be occupied at all, at any rate immediately; but of one thing Elspeth was obstinately certain. Something was to happen in that room, at all events in the tower, that very night, or she would not have been moved out so hurriedly.

Elspeth did not even say to herself that, if she was right in her surmises, it was nothing to her. She had come to have the idea—though but dimly and vaguely—that many mysteries were moving shadow-like about the hotel, and that all these dark shades were controlled by one hand, perhaps aided by others; that somehow there was a connection between all the gliding shadows.

Kenrith was concerned, if the motor car accident were part of a plot. Captain Oxford was concerned; Lady Hilary was concerned; and behind the veil which was impenetrable still, Elspeth seemed to see Trowbridge and Countess Radepolskoj. Maybe, after to-night that veil would not be impenetrable. In any case, the girl resolved to do her best, even if she risked much to find out what was on the other side.

Elspeth remained in her room all the evening, as she had remained in the beautiful old one; but she did not go to bed at the usual hour. She sat up, trying to read, and once in a while glancing at the stained and faded sketch of the boy in old-fashioned clothes, which she had brought away from the other room, between the pages in a book of her own.

The face was so like Captain Oxford's that she half intended to show it him some day, and though she did

not wish and had no right to take it with her out of the house when she left Lochrain Castle she had been disinclined to leave it in its old place. If she did so and the tower room was really occupied she could not get the sketch if she should make up her mind to let Captain Oxford see it.

The guests of the Hydro, those who were there for pleasure as well as those who were there for health, went to bed early, and by midnight, unless there were a dance or theatricals, the great house was quiet, the hall and drawing rooms deserted, even by the men. Elspeth knew this, and so when the half hour after midnight had well passed she opened her door and looked out.

The dimly lighted corridor was silent as the grave. Even the man who collected the boots had come and gone and would not return till early morning. She tiptoed downstairs and was not disturbed by a sound. On the ground floor there was a grandfather clock solemnly ticking and its hands pointed to the quarter before 1. Elspeth told herself that she was safe now. She would meet nobody—unless some person wandering for as strange a reason as her own.

To go from this part of the house to the tower where Elspeth had lived it was necessary to pass the doors of Mr. Kenrith's and Captain Oxford's rooms. They were in the same corridor, just beyond which was the entrance to the tower; and their corridor could be shut off from a small square hall (on which several private sitting rooms opened) by a heavy sliding door.

This door Elspeth had never seen closed, and so far as her knowledge extended, it never was closed by night or by day; but now, to her astonishment, it was shut.

"It is sure to squeak and wake somebody up," the girl thought ruefully, as she tried cautiously to push the door back. But for some time she tried in vain, and it was only when she discovered an odd, old-fashioned catch, which held the latch down as she strove to turn the handle, that she was able to open the door.

"Supposing anyone on the other side had wanted to come through," she said to herself, "he could not have got out of the corridor this way." And then the thought sprang into her mind that the closed and locked door was perhaps part of the mystery she was hoping to unravel. The idea frightened her, as it made the plot—whatever it was—appear so elaborate and so formidable, she felt that the elucidation might prove to be beyond her powers, or that she might be destroyed in the attempt she was about to make.

Still, she persevered, and slowly pushed back the sliding door which, so far from squeaking, glided so smoothly along its groove that Elspeth wondered if it had not been lately oiled.

As the door slid back a wave of acrid smoke rushed into the girl's face. She could see no light in the corridor, except a dim yellow gleam faintly visible through a thick brown smoke cloud.

Instantly the tears started to her smarting eyes, and she kept herself from coughing only by covering her mouth and nose with a handkerchief. "Something on fire here," she said to herself, and with a start of terror, her thoughts turned to Mr. Kenrith. His room was in the corridor. What if it should be burning while he slept? What if the same person who had stolen his jewels wished him now to die by fire?

Her eyes and lungs stinging with the acrid smoke, Elspeth felt her way down the corridor, and was about to stop before Mr. Kenrith's door, when she saw a red light glimmering through the keyhole of the door opposite.

"Captain Oxford's room!" the girl gasped. "It's on fire."

For a few seconds she lost her presence of mind, and ran to the door of the tower, not knowing what she did. But the fact that this door was locked, as the other had been, recalled Elspeth to herself. Never had it been locked before; never had it even been shut. It could not be that both these doors were closed to-night by accident; that this was a mere coincidence. No; they had been locked for a purpose, and that purpose could be no other than to prevent the escape of someone whose room opened on the corridor. The person who had kindled that red light had locked the doors as well; and the person who thus planned the destruction of Captain Oxford had attempted his life once before.

Elspeth knew that a most ran round this part of the castle, which was the oldest of all; and should Captain Oxford try to escape by his window, he would certainly be seriously injured, if not killed. Kenrith, too, was in the same danger. He was to be sacrificed with Captain Oxford.

All these thoughts flashed through the girl's brain in the fraction of a moment, which carried her back from the tower door to the door behind which the red light flickered. There, she beat upon the panel, shrieking "Fire, fire!" and crying Captain Oxford's name.

No sound came in answer, though again and again Elspeth rained blows on the heavy oak; and she turned to Kenrith's door on the opposite side of the hall. There was no red light there, and Kenrith was not in the deadly peril which threatened his friend, but if she could wake him he would help her rouse Captain Oxford, and would help her rouse Captain Oxford.

With all her force

the door, calling "Mr. Kenrith—Mr. Kenrith!" But there was no movement, no reply.

"Have they been murdered already?" she asked herself, trembling with horror now. "No. It can't be. The heavy smoke of the fire has drugged them. I must find the night watchman and get him to break the doors in. It's a wonder he or some one else hasn't heard me before."

She turned to run toward the door which led into the great hall when she was seized round the waist from behind and at the same time a hand was pressed over her mouth. She felt that she had been lifted off her feet, and that she was being borne away, away toward the corridor in the direction of the tower.

There could be no doubt that the hand which pressed her lips was the hand of the would-be murderer. She had interferred with the success of his work and she was to be removed perhaps from the world. But, strangely enough, there was no fear for herself in Elspeth's heart at that instant. She thought only of Kenrith and Captain Oxford, and especially of Kenrith, whom she loved.

She could not let them die a terrible death. If she could but save them she would be willing to die in their place. Let the murderer revenge himself upon her as he chose.

With the fierce strength that only desperation gives, the girl tore at the hand which covered her mouth, and regaining her liberty for a second's space, uttered such a shriek as she could not have given in a moment of less peril. It rang wildly through the corridor, and was terrible even in the girl's own ears. It seemed to her that it might almost make a dead man turn in his grave to be called thus. But would it wake John Kenrith and Captain Oxford?

She could but pray that it might be so, for the scream was stifled in the midst by the hand which crushed her face again, with an iron grip under her chin, and a pressure so savage over her lips that it seemed the blood must spring through the delicate skin. Her neck was bent so roughly that her muscles were strained, and her breath choked back upon her lungs. A shower of sparks seemed to rise and fall before her eyes, smarting and raining tears in the thick smoke. She struggled again, but vainly, and in the agonizing struggle of body and mind against the unseen, compelling force, lost breath and consciousness.

When she awoke, it seemed that she was lying on a bed—a bed at the same time comfortable and familiar.

What had happened? Had she had a horrible dream? she asked herself.

There was the same pleasant, mingling fragrance of dried lavender and

old wood which she had smelled every night when she had waked up in the wonderful bed in the tower room. Often she had told herself that these scents would make her think of that room, no matter where she might be, and how many years might have passed. Only last night she had thought that, not knowing she was not to sleep in that bed again.

But, she said in her mind, perhaps it was part of the dream that she had been changed to another room. Surely she could not mistake. No other bed could be just like that. And then, if she were not there, why should she be in bed at all? What about the fire shining behind the closed door in the corridor, her frantic knockings, her scream, and the hand that had choked away her breath? Had she really gone through that fearful scene? Oh, she could not doubt it. Perhaps, even at this minute, Mr. Kenrith and Captain Oxford were being burned to death. Somehow she must save them.

She tried to sit up, but something held her down. Her arms were crossed behind her back and tied together at the wrist; she could feel where they were bound. And her feet were bound also. She was powerless to move, but at least she could cry out.

Suddenly she remembered how near to the corridor of the burning room



She opened her door and looked out.

was the tower. If the fire spread it would reach the tower; and if in reality she were lying on her old bed in the tower room it was only the question of a little time before the fire should reach her, and she would be burned to death.

Elspeth Dean was young and strong, and the tide of life was high in her veins. The physical repulsion to death was intense in her, and the cry on its way to her lips was rendered even more piercing by the quick horror of this thought.

She screamed long and shrilly, but a voice within her seemed to say with the echo of her own shriek that rang in her ears: "If you are in the tower, no one will hear you. You might die a hundred deaths before any one would come."

(To be Continued)

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