

Janet told her. "You're one after my own heart—and second only to dear, delightful Fen."

Theo had to impart every scrap of home intelligence to Fenella—Laurie's unchanged condition, Mrs. Pridham's continued wrath concerning Fen, Mr. Pridham's depression, and frequent visits of Inspector Lawson. "Why does he keep on coming to the house?" queried Theo; "I can't imagine what he can find to consult father about—although he's on the Bench. It's all so queer and bothering."

Fen sighed, but offered no explanation. Instead she spoke of Tubby and what she had to tell occupied Theo's attention until they reached the railway station and joined the small throng congregated near that portion of the train marked "Engaged for Mr. Harry Suitor's Company."

Theo's eyes grew wide and began to dance when she espied Tubby on the platform. He came up with his old air of nonchalance, said "Hallo, Rag-time!" and they began to laugh together as of yore. Then he told her, in a confidential whisper, he was going away with Janet and Fenella. "That Miss Speer is a real good sort; she got me a billet off her own bat. You behold in me a budding star! Harry Suitor has promised me a walk-on part—so I'm off to America. It's the best thing, believe me, Theo darling" (seeing the tears cloud her eyes); "I couldn't stay in England and face the music. I simply had to go."

The leading lady, Miss Beryl Leicester, came sailing along the platform towards her own reserved compartment. Harry Suitor himself, and several other men, were with the handsome songstress, but she turned from them all to speak to Janet. Now that she was successful she never forgot the days when she was a struggling student at the Academy of Music, who found a haven from despair in Janet's studio. "Are these your two friends?" she asked, and gave Fen and Tubby an encouraging nod and smile. "We shall see each other on the Spartan," and went on to join Mr. Harry Suitor again. She could twist him round her little finger; he adored the kindly-hearted woman who had the voice of an angel and the ease-loving serenity of a much-petted Persian cat.

Theo was amused by watching the groups of people who had come to say good-bye to their friends, and the moments sped away until the words: "Take your seats—going on!" made her suddenly realize that the time had come for parting.

Tubby wrung her hand silently, Janet and Fen kissed her on both cheeks, with promises to write soon. Then the train began to move out slowly, and Theo watched the waving hands until a veil of tears streaming down her cheeks shut out all else. She was conscious that an insignificant little man near, watching her with evident sympathy, noticed her drop her handbag in her agitation, and sprang forward to pick it up and restore it.

"Excuse me, miss," he said, "but was not that the Honorable Theodor Mauleverer who was on the train? I used to work for Lord Brismain and thought I recognized his son!"

Theo muttered an affirmative, and then hailed a taxi-cab and drove away.

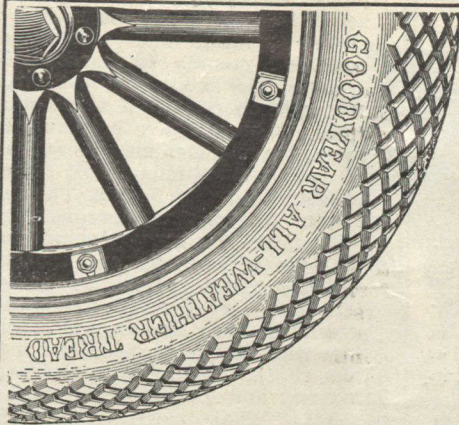
The insignificant man handed in a message at the telegraph office addressed to Frank Merry with the code address: "Curiosity, London." This was the cryptic communication: "T. M. and F. L. left in special for Spartan, Liverpool Berths engaged for S. Broke and F. Lorrimer."

CHAPTER XVI.

"Fifteen—sixteen! In the kitchen."

A SILENCE that was peculiarly oppressive hung around Spinney Chase. At the lodge gates, a notice had been hung up—"Mr. Laurence Pridham's condition is unchanged. Visitors are requested not to go to the house unless it is absolutely necessary." Consequently friends and tradesmen stopped their conveyances outside the gates, and left messages and parcels with the lodge-keeper.

Inside the big house, the stillness



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