

SHADOWED ON THE SPA

A Story of Scarborough.

By WALTER GARDHAM, Author of "A Rival Without a Claim," etc.

"BOOM!"
"I—I—beg your pardon! Really, I—I didn't mean it!"

Surely it was the strangest of strange introductions. The nervous-looking, bald-headed, round-faced little gentleman looked as if he would give the world to be allowed to drop over the cliff as his hat had done but a moment before.

On the authority of his office-boy—who was observant, if at times a trifle disrespectful—it may be said that as a general rule, and despite his name, Stuart Witless, K.C., was "all there!"

At the present time, however, as his doctor would have told you, he was far from well. He was nervous and unstrung.

The hard work of a long trial—which had resulted in a smart gang of aliens being sentenced to long terms of imprisonment—had left the little K. C. in a state bordering on collapse.

On this particular morning, the first he had seen at Scarborough, he had left Brigg View Boarding Establishment, on the South Cliff, for a stroll.

Wandering aimlessly along he had crossed the Valley Bridge, passed through the centre of the town, and eventually found himself on a seat on the North Cliff, a trifle weary after a longer jaunt than he had been accustomed to of late.

For a few minutes the pretty gardens below had interested him. He watched the players on the new bowling green and the children disporting themselves on the sands far below.

Glancing further along to the new Marine Drive he was wondering if this costly work would ever be completed when he found himself nodding.

The strong sea-air, the warm sun and his long jaunt all combined to bring about a state of drowsiness which, after all, was not unwelcome to the overworked lawyer.

As he dozed off he half remembered, half dreamed of, the many threatening letters he had received of late, the fearful vengeance the friends of the prisoners had sworn to take. Would it be poison, pistol, stiletto, dynamite—

Boom!
It was only the big gun at Burniston Battery—away to the left—the first shot of the day's practice. But how was Mr. Stuart Witless to know that?

To him it came as a direct answer to the question of his dream, and with a startled cry he flung out his arms—and smote a charming young lady full in the face with his clenched fist!

He was wide, very wide awake the next moment. Is it to be wondered at that his hat went over the cliff, or that he regretted that it was only his hat?

He reviled himself even as he apologised, and cursed himself as a spot of blood stood out boldly on the white handkerchief pressed to her pretty face. Was ever courteous gentleman, the soul of chivalry and honour, placed in such an unfortunate predicament?

Bravely the little lady tried to smile through her tears. She didn't mind, she said—as if black eyes and broken noses and thick lips were little trifles to which she had grown accustomed.

It was an accident, pure and simple, she assured him. And as if that were not enough she simply took his breath away by asserting that perhaps she was more to blame than he!

Stuart Witless, K.C., was amazed. Never had he met a woman so sweet, so gentle, so forgiving.

After doing all he could to express his sorrow, Mr. Stuart Witless left the lady on the seat and hurried away into the town—for he had no present intention of joining the "hatless brigade."

But he could not forget.

"More to blame than I am!" he muttered.

"How very ridiculous! How utterly preposterous!" And yet, perhaps the little lady was right! In any case she had done something to bring about the unfortunate occurrence.

Though he knew it not, she had followed him every yard of the way from Brigg View to that seat on the North Cliff, taking the place at his elbow only when he had comfortably settled down!

Though he knew it not, she was following him now!

II.

Among the thousands of letters which left Scarborough that night was one addressed to Mr. Hugh Marriot, The Elms, High Nottsford.

It was as private and confidential as a love letter

should be. But I'm afraid that won't protect it! The author has no conscience! He was ever a prior and a prober into the private concerns of others—particularly of lovers—and, well, here goes for a paragraph of two!

"Oh, that uncle of yours! You warned me that he was rather odd in his manner, but you did not tell me that he was dangerous. Mind you, I'm not yet despairing though I know a good many girls who would be!"

"Will it surprise you to learn that at my first attempt to make friends with him your dear uncle presented me with what you would call a lovely black eye?"

Steady yourself, Hugh! I have a few 'don'ts' for you. Don't laugh, there's a dear! Don't, for goodness sake, say, "I told you so!" Don't fly into a violent rage. Don't jump into the first train for Scarborough in order to wreck swift vengeance on your wicked uncle. Just stay where you are and read on."

The letter then went on to explain exactly how the writer of it had received "that lovely black eye." Much that followed even the author must regard as sacred.

Another paragraph, however, we simply must have:

"I am not at all disheartened, Hugh. I am still as determined as ever that your uncle shall not only recognize the fact that he has a fine fellow for a nephew, but that he shall be present at that fine fellow's wedding."

After that I think we had better leave Miss Mary Mayburn's letter alone, and return to Brigg View and Stuart Witless, K. C.

To be strictly accurate, however, that was not his name at Scarborough. He had never been much in love with his surname. Perhaps, being a busy man, he had never had time to change it.

In any case, those who enjoyed his friendship, and wished to retain it, invariably called him Stuart. When on his holidays he dropped not only the "Witless" but the "K. C.," and became plain Mr. Stuart. He was so entered on the books of Brigg View.

On the morning following his adventure on the North Cliff, the eminent barrister had decided to take a trip along the coast as far as Robin Hood's Bay, for which charming little place the pleasure steamer *Cambria* was timed to depart at 10.30.

As he descended the shaded path from the South Cliff to the top of the Aquarium, Mr. Stuart Witless for we shall still give him his proper name—discovered that he had cut it rather fine. Indeed, he could hear already the clang of the *Cambria's* bell. Jumping on a passing tramcar he was carried swiftly along the crowded Foreshore Road, past the West pier, along Sandside—where the Scottish lassies sang blithely as they packed the silvery herring—and so to the Lighthouse Pier.

As he hurried along with short quick steps he discovered that he had cut it very, very fine indeed.



"Sitting on the stump of a tree, Mr. Stuart Witless did laugh—laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks."

Crossing the little drawbridge over the mouth of the inner harbour he heard the bell again, followed almost immediately by the order to cast off.

"Only just in time," he remarked to the grey-bearded, pleasant-faced captain as he crossed the gangway and boarded the boat.

And yet he was not the last. Someone had cut it finer than he! As he heard the patter of feet on the gangway he turned in amazement to find—the little lady of the North Cliff, the recipient of his accidental blow!

She was smiling gaily, and looked every whit as sweet, as gentle, and as forgiving as on the day before.

Mr. Stuart Witless could scarcely do less than inquire after her health, and renew his apologies.

Apologies! What a number he had to offer, and how remarkably well he did it! If it be possible to be happy apologising then was Mr. Stuart Witless happy. As they rounded the frowning Castle Cliff and headed northward he was really enjoying himself.

But alas! It did not last long! Before reaching Scalby Mills, tucked snugly away under the cliffs at the mouth of the Beck, Mr. Stuart Witless was almost miserable.

He remembered, and regretted, the years that had passed—the years that had brought him fame, and had robbed him of his hair!

He was still a bachelor. But he was old—he did not try to deceive himself—old enough to be this girl's grandfather!

As for the girl, well, we will dip once more into her correspondence.

That night a picture postcard, containing a fine view of the Castle Hill, followed the letter to Hugh Marriot.

There was not much on it, but what little there was meant a very great deal:

"Making remarkable progress! He is such a dear old man!"

That was all. The first sentence was eminently satisfactory. But the second gave Mr. Hugh Marriot something to think about over his coffee in the morning!

III.

"REALLY, sir! Fate seems determined that we shall meet!"

The gallant little K. C. beamed.

"I'll never rail at fate again, Miss Mayburn!" he murmured.

Stuart Witless, K. C., had just ascended the steps from the well room at the Spa when he came face to face with the charming little lady he had met—accidentally as he fondly imagined—on the North Cliff, and again aboard the *Cambria*.

After these meetings "accidents" had happened remarkably regularly. Take the following as a sample of the rest:

Mr. Stuart Witless was one of a party driving round Forge Valley and Hackness. In Lady Edith's Drive the horn of a motor was heard and a smart car passed the char-a-banc.

With the exception of the chauffeur Miss Mayburn was the sole occupant of the car. Mr. Stuart Witless emitted something like a sigh as he gazed after the speedy vehicle and its smiling occupant.

He was soon to see them again, however. At Hackness, where the char-a-banc stopped for a few minutes, the car was found drawn up by the roadside and the lady, as it seemed, almost in tears.

Something had gone wrong, she explained to the sympathetic K. C., and she was faced by the prospect of a long wait until assistance could be brought from Scarborough. Mr. Stuart Witless was quick to offer a suggestion.

"Why not leave the car in charge of the driver, Miss Mayburn?" he asked. "There's a vacant seat on the char-a-banc!"

Thus they finished the drive together, reaching Scarborough some time after the "disabled" car, and firmer friends than ever.

It was following on the latest of these "accidental" meetings that Miss Mayburn expressed a desire to see the picture gallery at the Spa.

The gallant little lawyer promptly whisked her off, and and soon they were criticising the pictures, the lady displaying an artistic knowledge which surprised her companion.

"Ah" she suddenly remarked, pausing before
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