

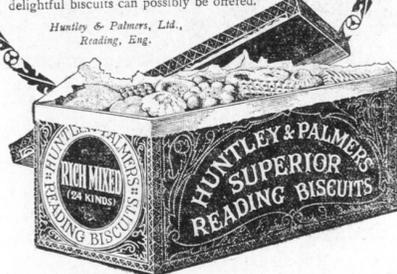
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A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER XIV.

Master of the Situation.

The detective seeing it, nodded and went toward the door, but was stopped on his way out by the artist saying, forcibly:

"I shall not be satisfied unless you bring witnesses also who can prove I am not the gentleman who carried letters of introduction to the Miss Rogers you have alluded to, not the person who bought baboons which are said to have been poisoned. I desire a complete justification and you can give it to me."

"We shall be only too happy," returned the inspector, and gave Byrd a second look, which sent him speedily out.

"It will be some time before these persons can be got together," observed the inspector, as the door closed upon the youthful detective. "Will you sit down, Mr. Degraw?"

"With pleasure, sir," rejoined the artist. He did not notice that his chair was so placed as to be in easy view from the open door, but if he had he would have taken it even with greater alacrity.

Mr. Gryce having business to attend to, soon went out, and presently the inspector followed him. The artist was left alone, but this did not disturb him. Nothing seemingly disturbed him, though men came and more than one curious face looked into the door. At length the inspector returned. He was beaming, and held out a congratulatory hand.

"It is all right, sir," said he. "You are not the man, and you are at perfect liberty to return home."

The artist bowed with unmovable self-possession.

"Do you mean," said he, "that I have been seen by the witnesses I suggested?"

"I do."

"And that they all unite in convincing you that I am neither the man who made the trouble at Miss Haddon's school, nor he who bought the deadly

"Your company is all that I ask, dear signorina. Since that night when your hopes came to such a disastrous end, I have cherished but one wish, and that was to open my arms to comfort you. But a strange timidity held me back. I feared to seem intrusive. I remembered that we had never spoken and dreaded your first look of astonishment and displeasure. And when at last I did overcome my fears sufficiently to call upon you in your own home, you can imagine my self-reproach at finding I was too late; that you were, as I believed, dead, and thus removed forever from my sympathy and love. Bitter regret overwhelmed me, and I vowed then, while strewing flowers above your silent breast, that in future, nothing should ever hold me back from those in distress but their own refusal to receive me; and when I heard that appearances had been deceitful, and that when I saw you, you had been only lying in a trance, I felt as if Providence had heard my prayer and that I should yet have the opportunity of telling you of the love which I felt for you."

"Ah!" sighed the signorina, while the tears well up in her eyes. "I am unworthy of such interest; I am unworthy of your care. Do not love me so well. You may be disappointed in me."

Miss Aspinwall smiled. "You have not disappointed me yet," she asserted. "As for the future, we will be such friends, that regret shall not find room to come in between us. Do you not think you can love me, trust me, rest with me and be happy?"

The signorina's eyes, which had been lowered to the ground, rose slowly till they rested upon Miss Aspinwall's face. There was trouble in them, but there was gratitude also, and a sudden light that seemed to come from an awakening soul.

"Love you?" she repeated. "Ah, there is no doubt but that I can love you. But—" she added, in another moment, with a restless change of manner, "did you not think it strange when you found me on the platform at this place, alone and without apparent purpose?"

"No, for I knew that Providence had led you to me."

The look which had filled the signorina's eyes, when Hamilton Degraw spoke to her of God, re-appeared in them at these words of her generous-hearted friend. But she did not let it become visible as she had before, but turned her face away toward the wide stretch of beautifully undulating country which lay before them.

"Perhaps that is true," she asserted, but there was not so much trust as fear in her tones. "I am sure," she went on in haste, as if anxious to cover up any momentary disappointment which might have been occasioned by her manner, "that if you knew my position you would think I needed a friend. I am not only without an adviser, but I am threatened by a danger—"

"I know, I know," "You know?" "Yes, you will pardon me, signorina, but—"

"Don't call me 'Signorina'; call me 'Jenny.' That is my true name, and I should like to hear it from your lips."

"You shall. I know, then, Jenny that you have reason for dread. That because of this very name, you feel that you have reason to fear. But you will be safe here. No one shall know that you possess this name, which just now seems to be the harbinger of persecution and peril. Besides—"

"But I would rather not conceal the fact that it is mine. There is a cowardice in doing so which is not agreeable to me. Perhaps, because I am the victim of another cowardice which I cannot suppress. Since I have failed as a singer, the word 'signorina' galls me almost beyond endurance. I hate its very sound, and long to hear myself called again by my childhood's name. Do you think there is any harm in yielding to this preference? Would you mind introducing me to your friends as Miss Rogers?"

"Not at all; why should I mind it if you do not? But it seems like giving up your old hope entirely, and I, for one, still think you will reap the honors to which your voice entitles you. I have a scheme—"

"Oh, do not talk of schemes, dear Miss Aspinwall. Let us rest without thought of the morrow in this paradise of sunshine and verdure. I have never seen anything so delightful as this place before. It is an experience for me to be here; let me enjoy it and forget, if I can, that the world holds any other riches, treasures or rewards. That little bird sings sweetly; if I were free as he and had the earth and flowers for my home, I could sing too. I wish I were a bird, how my throat would swell! I can almost fancy in this solitude that I am. Do you think any one would hear it if I—"

"Oh, oh, do sing. Just an aria, Jenny. Hark, the little fellow is urging you on. Surely you can rival his notes."

The signorina smiled. An exquisite color broke out on her cheeks and she looked so lovely that the noble woman at her side was filled with admiration. Then, without further words, and as if impelled by an in-

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ward enthusiasm she could no longer resist, she opened her lips, and song issued forth, so pure, so sweet and so entrancing that the little bird who had previously filled the silence with his voice stopped in amaze and bent his head to one side as if in inquiry as to the source of such delightful melody.

The spot occupied by the summer-house in the large and amply cultivated grounds was somewhat removed from the dwelling. Perched on a slight knoll it commanded a view of much of the country around, and for this reason was a favorite spot of resort for Miss Aspinwall, who had an eye for all that was beautiful, and a heart for this especial scene beyond all. But it had one drawback. But a few feet away ran the fence which marked off her property from that of her next neighbor, and as that neighbor took boarders, she never felt herself quite safe in this place from intruding eyes.

Thus it was that when the Signorina began to sing, Miss Aspinwall let her glasses travel in the direction of this fence and the winding walks beyond but seeing no one, gave her full attention to the song which was being caroled for her and the birds. It was melodious as heart could wish or taste exact, and she was drinking in the mellow notes with delight, when suddenly, without warning, the soaring tones trembled and fell, and glances

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ing in haste at her companion, she beheld her sitting petrified with amazement, gazing into the neighboring garden. Following her look, she was herself surprised to perceive a man standing before them, returning gaze for gaze and that with an intensity which proved he had not been unmoved by the song he had overheard. She thought, at first glance, that she did not know this man, but in another moment, she recognized him for the artist who had interrupted her in her work of strewing flowers over the signorina on that memorable afternoon of her supposed death.

Instantly she showed no such feeling as the woman at her side had done. A beautiful flush rose on her cheek and she stole a side glance at the startled singer, as if to see whether her own emotion was observed. It was not; for after the first movement of surprise, the latter had turned away and was looking toward the house as if she longed to take refuge in flight.

"You know him?" whispered Miss Aspinwall.

To be continued.

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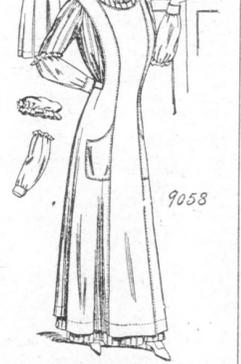
Boy's Russian Suit with Knickerbockers and Shield.

Suits of this kind are practical and serviceable. They make up well in wash fabrics, corduroy, velvet or cloth. In the model here shown the collar and cuffs are of contrasting material. The fronts are double-breasted. The pattern is cut in 3 sizes—2, 4 and 6 years. It requires 4 1/2 yards of 27 inch material for the 4 year size.

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