

A GIRL IN A THOUSAND

He nodded carelessly to the count, bowed with execrating politeness to the lady at his side, and then sauntered nonchalantly away, not at all with the guilty appearance of a fellow who had been caught in the act of purloining grapes in another man's vineyard.

Rex was fairly well satisfied with the progress he was making, given a few days at such a rushing gait and he had reason to believe the craft of Count Rudolph would be hulled down in the distance. Still he knew the truth concerning the slip that often occurs 'twixt cup and lip.

He even vouchsafed poor Bridgewater one or two fleeting recollections, which, considering the state of mind he exploited, was quite good of him. Even when in Cupid's toils should have hoped?

But bless you, there was the identical bride himself, smoking a huge cigar for a change, and evidently ready to waltz his friend after a fashion he had care. Rex was in too jovial a humor to care.

In his soul he was audacious enough to believe Miss Madge entertained more than a passing interest in a fellow answering his description, and as necessarily the world looked resentful to his eyes.

Bridgewater saw this jovial humor and knew fortune had been kind to his friend—knew the trump cards had fallen to his lot in this particular deal.

"Well, is she an angel, still?" he asked garily, slipping the big fellow on the back in a way all little men have of doing.

"She's a divinity," chanted Rex, "and more than that, my boy, under the society polish she is a brick, a girl in a thousand, a girl raised on the prairies of Texas, filled with delicious memories of wild stampedes over the boundless wastes of hunting and fishing trips to thrill the poor heart of a sportsman like myself with ecstasy."

"I have been negligent of my duty; but, then, with such a resignation, and no use for a slow-witted Britisher to attempt to keep up with you race-horse Yankees. In war and in love you gallop over all obstacles, and by Jove! you get there every time. I shall be pleased to dance at the wedding, Rex. But how about the other, the press, the original of this confounded picture I've been carrying next my heart—here, take it or I'll destroy it, once for all."

"I say, hello, what does this mean?" "Well, hang the thing; it gave me a bad half minute to-night's work," said the shaggy fellow like a Frenchman, a habit no doubt assumed from the adoption of the language of diplomatic circles.

Rex laughed as a light broke upon him. "How did it happen, Bridge?" he begged.

The other looked peevishly at him. "You're a deuced way of jumping at conclusions, I declare; but I suppose it must be told. Fancy sitting talking to a charming girl, your heart going pat-a-pat, and the language of love beaming from your eyes, when, as you go to show her a picture you once thought your ideal, and which by the way, resembles her enough to be a twin sister, she picks something up and you've dropped, looks disdainfully, and then pushes it before you, saying she quite admires your taste."

"Good heavens! and it was this—scarcely!" "It was your infernal picture princess, the heiress of dear uncle's million, the woman whose delightful countenance made a rover out of you, and may yet be the death of me," groaned the other.

"Poor Bridge, who you explained; you told her—"

"The whole blessed story about your beastly business. But I'm still in blissful ignorance whether she took it for gospel truth or secretly believes I have slept with that photo next my heart, and am the most monumental liar in London."

CHAPTER XIX. Rex hardly knew whether to laugh or groan when Bridgewater gave such a ludicrous as well as doleful account of his experiences with the black-eyed Salvation Army lassie.

me a no-good specimen of an idler." "She'll never believe that when she knows you better, and understands how that stupenous brain of yours has more than once saved the country from actual hostilities with powerful ihubet jamaa or Burmese rajahs, now our allies."

"Bosh! Only a weakling as yet, with much to learn. Don't confuse me with flattery, dear boy."

"Then, in case what you say comes to pass, there's only one thing for you to do," pursued Rex.

"Tell it to me, in Heaven's name."

"Turn to a red sweater with a big 'S' on the bosom—join the Salvation Army, and use your influence with Gen. Booth to be appointed a captain or a major."

"I'm surprised at your childlike faith. Jove! one would think you a babe in swaddling clothes instead of a full-fledged diplomat."

"Wait. While I had a pretty fair measure of confidence in the general, I wasn't quite so certain of the astrologer, whose business it is to deceive people even as he does himself."

"So you took precautions?" "Rather. I marked the lovely crystal in a way that would always tell me its nature."

"Great head, my boy. But—you admit! the old fellow is a smart one—suppose Ras Ragoula also had a friend, a good friend, remember, whose trade was that of a cutter of precious stones, and who for love of him would at short notice turn out a pretty good imitation of the ruby, near enough to deceive you, at least?"

"Again Bridgewater laughed with the air of a man who has fortified all his weak points, and is confident of his strength."

"I even thought of that, and having a friend in a big jewelry establishment, I took the thing to him as soon as I got away."

"And his verdict?" "He lost his breath—then swore it was the greatest most royal ruby in the world, unmatched by any owned by the Shah of Persia or the Sultan of Turkey, all of whose gems he had handled."

Rex clasped him on the back with such delight and vim that the little man almost collapsed.

"Well, done, Bridge!" he said. "Yes," gasped the other, adjusting his glasses, "very nearly done that time, but please don't do it any more, that's a good fellow."

"You must show it to me some time." "Look here!" He glanced around carelessly, took a package from his pocket, pulled off the lid of a cardboard box, and thrust it in front of Rex.

The latter held his breath.

Looking like a small egg, yet of a fierce reddish hue, unequalled in brightness, lay the magnificent prince of rubies, the lost idol's eye, that for long decades had glowered upon millions of kneeling worshippers in the temple of Mandalay, famous throughout three continents.

The American whistled softly.

"A royal beauty, by my soul! But since your hopes are all centred upon that thing, Bridge, for heaven's sake don't be careless and carry it around with you. Such a reckless chap might be waylaid at any time; and were you told me there were wild native agents of the rajah searching London as with a fine-tooth comb, I've heard of the cord and crease method they have."

"What would you on the subject of the other, looking into his friend's face, seriously.

"Come, let me seal the thing up and have it deposited in the safe of the hotel, in my name. To-morrow, when you have made your arrangements for sending it out to Calcutta, we'll take it in broad daylight."

"You're a shrewd one, Rex." "At least cautious, when handling a haul worth perhaps a cool hundred thousand pounds to you. May I do it, Bridge?" "Certainly—right away, and thanks to you for suggesting it."

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Warm Winter Hosiery and Underwear---Great Reductions Ladies' Natural Wool Underwear 89c

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Immense Clearing Sale of Dress Silks Starts To-morrow

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