

and went home. Now this is what troubled me most. I tell you and you must judge for yourself as to what is its worth. As I hurried towards Chevening, at a short distance from the Bridge, I saw someone coming along at a great pace. I recognized the walk and figure; it was Laurence Pridham going towards the bridge. I drew back into the shade of the trees, and I don't think he saw me, but I was close to him and saw his face distinctly. He looked disturbed and annoyed. I wondered what had put him out and caused him to return home. I didn't want him to see me because I thought he'd wonder what I was doing, lurking there so long after I had left his house—where you know I dined that night. The next morning I heard the news of the murder. I knew about the Chinese knife Mr. Pridham had bought, and I was in an awful dilemma after having seen Laurie so near the scene of the crime. It's been a burden on my mind. Now I have relieved myself of it. It is for you to judge whether I was right in keeping my own counsel about it."

Fen remained silent for some moments, thinking over all she had heard.

"Do you know what time it was when you met Laurie?" she asked him.

"It must have been about ten minutes or a quarter-past eleven, for after I left Liz I walked on some distance to work off the steam. I was a good deal upset by having to give her a sort of rebuff, for she was a nice girl—too nice to be treated any way but kindly. Yes! it was a few minutes after eleven o'clock."

"And Laurie had walked from Fleet Station, you know. The car took him there—then he came home to fetch something he had forgotten. He could not have been anywhere in the meantime; that was impossible. He could not have met Liz Bainton. She was found dead at eleven o'clock, you know. So you see he never saw her at all that night!" Fen gave a long sigh of relief. A load had been lifted from her heart.

"No," Tubby answered, with absolute conviction, "you're right. You must be right. That never occurred to me before. I admit now I have sometimes had doubts about it. You have convinced me now that Laurie never saw the murdered girl that night."

A loud cry from one of the sailors attracted their attention.

"A ship—a ship in view!"

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

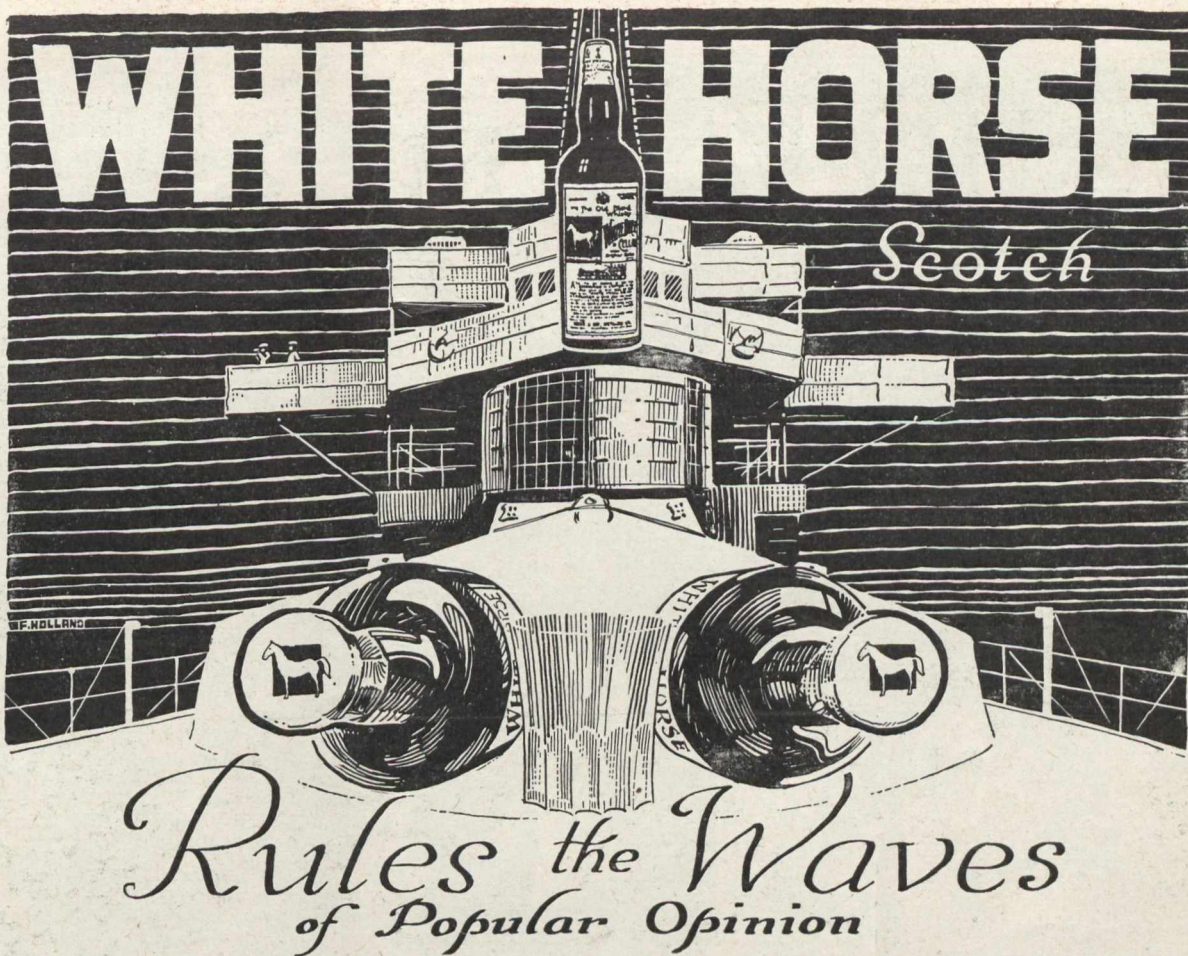
Trente et Quarante.

OUT in the moonlit gardens, the band of the 26th Chasseurs was playing the "Dream Waltz." The haunting melody drifted in through the open windows like the phantom of a song, but it failed to reach ears attuned, at that moment, only to the voice of the dealer counting out the sum total of the cards. It was Sallie's debut in the trente et quarante room. Hitherto she had never dared to risk losing the bits of gold which were so rare and precious to her. But now that her future was assured, she had grown reckless. She could afford to spend all that she possessed, realising there would be no difficulty for the affianced wife of Ferdinand Saxon to replenish her purse if she should find it empty.

But Fortune always favours the brave and Sallie was in luck; a heap of louis lay before her on the table and the fever of winning had brought a scarlet flush to her cheeks and a glitter to her eyes which betokened that the gambling demon latent in her blood had taken possession of her soul.

The man she was to marry stood at the opposite side of the table, watching her for some time, and would never have thought of looking for her in the gambling rooms unless a pretty woman, jealous of Sallie's matrimonial success, had directed him there, adding the feline amenity, "You'll find Miss Mauleverer playing trente et quarante. Like father, like daughter, you know. The Brismains, one and all, are born gamblers and it has been their ruin."

(To be Continued.)



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