

The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

CHAPTER XIV.

There was a long pause till the sound of the horse's hoofs died away. Bell was waiting for his companion to speak. Her head was partly turned from him, so that he could only watch the dainty beauty of her profile. She stood there cold and still, but he could see that she was profoundly agitated.

"I never thought to see the day when I should trust you again," she said; "I never expected to trust any man again."

"You will trust me darling," Bell said, passionately. "If you still care for me as I care for you. Do you?"

The question came keen as steel. Enid shivered and hesitated. Bell laid a light hand on her arm.

"Speak," he said. "I am going to clear myself. I am going to take back my good name. But if you no longer care for me the rest matters nothing. Speak."

"I am not one of those who change God pity me," Enid murmured.

Bell drew a long, deep breath. He wanted no assurance beyond that.

"Then lead the way," he said. "I have come at the right time; I have been looking for you everywhere, and I find you in the hour of your deepest sorrow. When I knew your aunt last she was a cheerful, happy woman. From what I hear now she is suffering, you are all suffering, under some blighting grief."

"Oh, if you only knew what that sorrow was, Hatherly."

"Hatherly! How good the old name sounds from your lips. Nobody has ever called me that since—since we parted. And to think that I should have been searching for you all these years when Miss Ruth Gates would have given me the clue at any time. And why have you been playing such strange tricks upon my friend David Steel? Why have you—what is that?"

Somebody was moving somewhere in the grounds, and a voice shouted for help. Enid started forward.

"It is Williams coming from the stables," she said. "I have so arranged it that the dogs are holding up my dear cousin, Reginald Henson, who is calling upon Williams to release him. If Reginald gets back to the house now we are ruined. Follow me as well as you can."

Enid disappeared down a narrow, tangled path, leaving Bell to limp along painfully in her track. A little way off Henson was yelling lustily for assistance. Williams, who had evidently taken in the situation, was coming up leisurely, chuckling at the discomfort of the enemy. The hounds were whinnying and baying. From the house came the notes of a love song passionately declaimed. A couple of the great dogs came snarling up to Bell and laid their grimy muzzles on his thighs. A cold sensation crept up and down his spine as he came to a standstill.

"The brutes!" he muttered. "Margaret Henson must be mad indeed to have these creatures about the place. Ah! would you? Very well, I'll play the game fairly, and not move. If I call out I shall spoil the game. If I remain quiet I shall have a pleasant night of it. Let us hope for the best and that Enid will understand the situation."

Meanwhile Enid had come up with Williams. She laid her hand imperiously upon his lips.

"Not a word," she whispered. "Mr. Henson is held up by the dogs. He must remain where he is till I give you the signal to release him. I know you answered his call, but you are to go no farther."

Williams assented willingly enough. Everything that tended to the discomfort of Reginald Henson filled him with a peculiar and deep-seated pleasure.

"Very well, miss," he said, demurely. "And don't you hurry, miss. This is the kind of job that calls for plenty of patience. And I'm really shocking deaf to-night."

Williams retreated leisurely in the direction of the stables, but his lady was not so distressing that he failed to hear a groan and a snarling curse from Henson. Enid fed back along the track, where she found Bell standing patiently with a dog's muzzle close to either knee. His face was white and shining, otherwise he showed no signs of fear. Enid laid a hand on the head of either dog, and they rolled like great cats at her feet in the bushes.

"Now come swiftly," she whispered. "There is no time to be lost."

They were in the house at last, crossing the dusty floor with the notes dancing in the lamp-light, deadening their footsteps and muffling the intense silence. Above the stillness rose the song from the drawing-room; from without came the restless murmur of the dogs. Enid entered the drawing-room, and Bell limped in behind her. The music immediately ceased. As Enid glanced at her aunt she saw that the far-away look had died from her eyes, that the sparkle and brightness of reason were there. She had come

out of the mist and the shadows for a time at any rate.

"Dr. Hatherly Bell to see you, aunt," Enid said, in a low tone.

Margaret Henson shot up from the piano like a statue. There was no welcome on her face, no surprise there, nothing but deep, unutterable contempt and loathing.

"I have been asleep," she said. She passed her hand dreamily over her face. "I have been in a dream for seven long years. Enid brought me back to the music again to-night and it touched my heart and now I am awake again. Do you recollect the 'Slumber Song,' Hatherly Bell? The last time I sang it you were present. It was a happy night; the very last night in the world to me."

"I recollect it perfectly well, Lady Littimer," Bell said.

"Lady Littimer! How strange it is to hear that name again. Seven years since then. Here I am called Margaret Henson and nobody knows. And now you have found out. Do you come here to blackmail and rob me like the rest?"

"I come here entirely on your behalf and my own, my lady."

"That is what they all say—and then they rob me. You stole the Rembrandt."

The last words came like a shot from a catapult. Enid's face grew colder. Bell drew a long tube of discolored paper carefully tied round a stick from his pocket.

"I am going to disprove that once and for all," he said. "The Rembrandt is at present in Lord Littimer's collection. There is an account of it in to-day's 'Telegraph.' It is perfectly familiar to both of you. And that being the case, what do you think of this?"

He unrolled the paper before Enid's astonished eyes. Margaret Henson glanced at it listlessly; she was fast sinking into the old, strange oblivion again. But Enid was all rapt attention.

"I would have sworn to that as Lord Littimer's own," she gasped.

"It is his own," Bell replied. "Stolen from him and a copy placed by some arch-enemy in my portmanteau, it was certain to be found on the frontier. Don't you see that there were two Rembrandts? When the one from my portmanteau was restored to Littimer his own was kept by the thief. Subsequently it would be exposed as a new find, with some story as to its discovery, only, unfortunately for the scoundrel, it came into my possession."

"And where did you find it?" Enid asked.

"I found it," Bell said, slowly, "in a house called 218, Brunswick Square Brighton."

A strange cry came from Enid's lips. She stood swaying before her lover, white as the paper upon which her eyes were eagerly fixed. Margaret Henson was pacing up and down the room, her lips muttering, and raising a cloud of pallid dust behind her.

"I—I am sorry," Enid said, falteringly. "All these years I have deemed you guilty. But then the proof was so plain; I could not deny the evidence of my own senses. And Von Gulden came to me saying how deeply distressed he was, and that he would have prevented the catastrophe if he could. Well?"

A servant stood waiting in the doorway with wondering eyes at the sight of a stranger.

"I'm sorry, Miss," she said, "but Miss Christiana is worse; indeed, she quite frightens me. I've taken the liberty of telephoning to Dr. Walker."

The words seemed to bring consciousness to Margaret Henson.

"Christiana worse," she said. "Another of them going; it will be a happy release from a house of sorrow like this. I will come up, Martin."

She swept out of the room after the servant. Enid appeared hardly to have heard. Bell looked at her inquiringly and with some little displeasure.

"I fancy I have heard you speak of your sister Christiana," he said. "Is she ill?"

"She is at the point of death, I understand; you think that I am calous. Oh, if you only knew! But the light will come to us all in time, God willing. Look at this place, look at the blight of it, and wonder how we endure it. Hatherly, I have made a discovery."

"We seem to be living in an atmosphere of discoveries. What is it?"

"I will answer your question by asking another. You have been made the victim of a vile conspiracy. For seven years your career has been blighted. And I have lost seven years of my life, too. Have you any idea who your enemy is?"

"Not the faintest, but, believe me, I shall find out in time. And then—"

A purple blackness like the lurid light of a storm flashed into his eyes, the lines of his mouth grew rigid. Enid laid a hand tenderly on his arm.

"Your enemy is the common enemy of us all," she said. "We have

wasted the years, but we are young yet. Your enemy is Reginald Henson."

"Enid, you speak with conviction. Are you sure of this?"

"Certain. When I have time I will tell you everything. But not now. And that man must never know that you have been near the house to-night, not so much for your sake as for the sake of your friend, David Steel. Now I can see the Providence behind it all. Hatherly, tell me that you forgive me before the others come back."

"My darling I cannot see how you could have acted otherwise."

Enid turned towards him with a great glad light in her eyes. She said nothing, for the simple reason that there was nothing to say. Hatherly Bell caught her in his strong arms and she awayed to reach his lips. In that delicious moment the world was all forgot.

But not for long. There was a sudden rush and a tumble of feet on the stairs, there was strange voices speaking hurriedly, then the drawing-room door opened and Margaret Henson came in. She was looking wild and excited and talked incoherently. An obviously professional man followed her.

"My dear madam," he was saying, "I have done all I can. In the last few days I have not been able to disguise from myself that there was small hope for the patient. The exhaustion, the shock to the system, the congestion, all point to an early collapse."

"Is my sister so much worse, Dr. Walker?" Enid asked, quietly.

"She could not be any worse and be alive," the doctor said. "Unless I am greatly mistaken the gentleman behind you is Mr. Hatherly Bell. I presume he has been called in to meet me? If so, I am sincerely glad because I shall be pleased to have a second opinion. A bad case of—"

here followed a long technical name—"one of the worst cases I have ever seen."

"You can command me, Enid," Bell said. "If I can."

"No, no," Enid cried. "What am I saying? Please to go upstairs with Martin."

Bell departed, wondering. Enid flew to the door and out into the night. She could hear Henson cursing and shouting, could hear the snarling clamor of the dogs. At the foot of the drive she paused and called Steel softly by name. To her intense relief he came from the shadow.

"I am here," he cried. "Do you want me?"

"Yes, yes," Enid panted. "Never more were your services needed. My sister is dying; my sister must—die. And Hatherly Bell is with her, and you understand?"

"Yes," said David. A vivid flash of understanding had come to him.

"Bell shall do as I tell him. Come along."

"Hold him up, dear doggies," Enid murmured. "Hold him up and I'll love both of you for ever." (To be Continued.)

SEA PIRATES OF TO-DAY

PRIVATEERS WHO STILL SCOUR THE SEAS.

Fishing Fleets in British Waters Are the Principal Sufferers.

Coper, ahoy! People imagine that pirates no longer scour the seas. A five minutes talk with an old salt would produce some revelations. Even in our home waters many kinds of pirates are to be encountered, and rarely a night passes among the fishing fleets without the coper being hailed. Fortunately, this vessel is being driven off the ocean by the ships of the various excellent missionary societies.

Coper, ahoy! When that cry rings through the night, it is the sign that a beer-vessel flying the Dutch flag has hove in sight. She comes bearing spirits and other intoxicating liquors, and any other undesirable things. She comes up close to the fishing fleet, and stands by them until the morning. During that time she is boarded by sailors, who indulge in a drunken orgie.

HOW PIRATE CREWS WORK.

Work is at a standstill, and when the crew return to the vessel, mutiny and quarrels invariably follow. But there is an even more terrible side of the system, for it is part of the methods of the less scrupulous copers to rob their patrons during their stay on the boat. Then they make haste to get their victims back to the trawler, and themselves set sail with all speed for some obscure port in Holland.

A carefully planned system of piracy has been carried out for some time by Finnish seamen, and four cases have already been heard in the English police-courts. A gang of men go together to a captain who is making up his crew, and secure employment. They are excellent seamen, and all goes well until the vessel is on the high seas. Then one night they break into the captain's room, and make demands which it is quite impossible for him to accept. At once there is mutiny, and the ship is plundered, an taken to a point where they have plotted to meet a schooner sailed by their accomplices. The cargo is shifted, and the vessel deserted, the captain and his couple or three English hands only being left on board.

SCOURGE OF THE HEBRIDES.

A shipmaster, who told the terri-

ble story of a similar piracy recently in a London boat, said that it was his fourth experience of these brutal thieves. He shipped at Hamburg a Polish crew, and about three days out of port they all refused to obey orders, and announced that they intended to seize the cargo. He attempted to secure order, but they chopped pieces of wood from the ship, and pelted him with them. Then they drank brandy and played cards, and afterwards thrashed the English captain and the cook. They took all they wanted from the vessel and left her, going away in the ship's boat.

A few years ago a pirate ship haunted the lonely Hebrides. She was called the "Deeka," and caused terror among the fishers, who depended on their "catches" for their living. One little vessel and her crew had a thrilling experience. She was boarded by the crew of the "Deeka" during a heavy fog, and a struggle ensued. The islanders—six all told—fought gamely with knives and blocks. Their captain fell, stunned, and a little lad was killed.

After more than an hour's terrible fighting there were only two left standing. The others were lying shockingly wounded on the deck. The pirates took the little vessel in tow, and sailed for an uninhabited island to the north, where

SHE WAS RUN AGROUND.

The haul of fish was taken off, and four fellows left on the trawler remained there three days before being sighted by a passing steamer.

Even on the West Coast of Africa, the scene of the most thrilling exploits in pursuit of slave-traders, pirate ships are still occasionally met with. A British vessel bound for that coast fell in with one about three years ago, and was left stranded near Lagos. They were about eighty miles from their destination, when a schooner flying the Belgian flag pursued them, and gave warning of their sinister intentions by a volley from a gun.

The Britisher was seriously handicapped, but the captain thought it better to show fight. They took in sail, and awaited the coming of the pirate. She drew on rapidly, and was grappled to the trader, whilst the shouting, raving crew sprang on board their victim. It was a case of forty-two to nineteen, but for nearly three hours the Englishmen fought hard and bravely. At last only the cook and second mate were left standing, and the desperadoes towed their capture to a cave frequented by them, where, after plundering the vessel, they left her and the wounded crew to their fate. Two of the men were killed, but the remainder eventually reached Lagos, from whence they were sent home to England by the consul.

WHALING THIEVES.

Among the whaling fleet and the sealer pirates still carry on their desperate work, and a gunboat is frequently called to protect the vessels. These robbers sail in vessels built exactly on the lines of the ships among which they go, so that the traders cannot tell whether it is a friendly vessel of the whaling and sealing fleet or a pirate which is approaching them. The pirates watch the catches of a certain ship, and wait until she is bound on her homeward journey. Then the raid is made, and the precious cargo is often lost.

But though the pirate is still occasionally met with on the high seas his power for ill is severely restricted, while in British waters he has such a "hot time" with our "tars" that he finds it unprofitable to visit us too often.—London Answers.

JAP MAID'S REVENGE.

When a Japanese maid is jilted by her lover she takes a peculiar and picturesque revenge. No longer doubting his faithlessness, she gets up in the middle of the night and puts on a pleasing dress and wooden sandals. Attached to her headpiece she carries three lighted candles, and suspended to her neck hangs a small mirror. She takes in her left hand a small straw effigy of the faithless one and in her right a hammer and nails. Walking gravely to the sanctuary, she selects one of the sacred trees, and nails the effigy securely to the trunk. She then prays for the death of the traitor, vowing that if her wish is granted she will take out the nails which trouble her god, since they are fastened to a sacred tree. Night after night she comes to the tree, adding one or two nails and repeating her prayers, persuaded that the god will not hesitate to sacrifice the man to save the tree.

FISH LONGEVITY.

According to a recent writer there is now in the Imperial Aquarium of St. Petersburg a pike that first saw the light at the close of the fifteenth century. He still appears to be quite a young fellow, notwithstanding his centuries and his long captivity. The writer says that there is nothing very extraordinary in this case, and he mentions several other fishes in the same aquarium that are more than 150 years old.

CAT HATCHES CHICKENS.

At Buschen, near Dusseldorf, a brood of chickens has been hatched by a cat. She flew at the hen each time it ventured to approach her, and continued sitting on the eggs until the chickens were hatched in the ordinary course. They now follow the cat about wherever she goes.

RIVAL LOVERS' DUEL.

The Prosaic End of a Birmingham Romance.

The romantic exploit of two youthful lovers who had met to fight a duel "to the death" was made public in a Birmingham, England, police court the other day.

They had quarreled, each desiring to court the same damsel, and so they decided that a duel should settle the dispute, and that the one who escaped unscathed should have a clear field to win the girl's affections, and the other should sorrow in secret with his wounds and his broken heart.

Things did not turn out exactly as they had planned, mainly owing to the inability of the rivals to shoot straight, but the duel certainly took place.

James Hitchcock, who had purchased a revolver, met Robert Carless at 10 o'clock at night. Carless was also provided with a weapon.

The contestants measured the paces, after the orthodox fashion of gallants, and standing three yards apart, blazed away at each other, using ball cartridges.

Five or six shots were exchanged, and as neither of the duellists fell, and as even dueling becomes unexciting under these circumstances, the combat was abandoned.

The youths could not resist the temptation to boast of the exploit, however; and the police getting wind of the affair, led them before the stipendiary, who bound them over to keep the peace.

Detective Kilby then went to the trouble of tracing the history of Hitchcock's revolver, with the result that Charles Hubert Smith, a dealer in firearms, of Steel House-lane, was summoned for selling this particular weapon in contravention of the pistols act.

He had not made an entry in his books of the sale of the pistol, nor had his assistant, it was alleged, properly questioned the aspiring duellists when he had made the purchase.

The magistrates were not unnaturally inquisitive about the duel, and so the whole story was told again. What puzzled the bench was that neither of the duellists was injured.

"The duel," suggested the gun-dealer's solicitor, "would be more dangerous to the onlookers," and Mr. Powell, the presiding magistrate, finally came to the conclusion, which evoked much laughter in court, that it was "a kind of French duel."

To the astonishment of everybody, Hitchcock in the witness box, after telling how he purchased the weapon, declared that he was now good friends with his former rival. Who won the right to court the girl was not, however, disclosed.

With this prosaic collapse of the romance, the magistrates fined Smith 20 shillings and costs.

BRITISH SWEET EATERS.

Notable People Who Have a Sweet Tooth.

With the single exception of the King, we are told, all the members of the royal family are very fond of confectionery. The Queen's favorite is chocolate, and the Prince of Wales likes it, also, as well as fruit fricas. As for the young princes, they do not disdain anything in the shape of good sweets, whether it be fondants, chocolates, butter scotch or almond paste.

One is surprised to learn that the Duchess of Westminster favors American candies, which can be obtained as well in England as in the land of her birth. The Duchess of Roxburgh, on the other hand, has a preference for caramels.

Mrs. Joseph Chamberlain "confines her attention, as far as sweetmeats are concerned almost entirely to chocolate, of which, it is stated, she is extremely fond."

Several members of the House of Lords have quite a weakness for confectionery. "This is particularly so with the 'ancients.' One noble lord has before now introduced a packet of bon-bons into the august assembly, where during the course of a debate, he has surreptitiously eaten it."

"In the Lower House there are at least thirty legislators of all shades of opinion, who never enter St. Stephen's without being provided with candy of some kind or other. One obscure M. P. occasionally sucks peppermint drops, a habit that is known to those who sit in his immediate vicinity."

Mr. John Burns is singled out as having a sweet tooth. Many of his Majesty's judges are partial to sweetmeats, although they do not eat them in the courts; and nearly every actress of note is a candy lover.

WOODEN SHOES IN FRANCE.

Wooden shoes in France are produced to the extent of about 4,000,000 pairs yearly. They are made in Alsace and Lorraine by machinery, and in Lower by hand. In the last-named province 1,700 persons are engaged in this manufacture, and the yearly product is more than half a million pairs. The best are made of maple. In the provinces nearly every lady possesses a pair of the finer sabots, for wearing out in damp weather. These have monograms and other designs carved on the vamps, and they are kept on the foot by ornamented leather pieces over the instep. The manufacture of these pieces of leather is a regular business in France.

Man winks but little here below— with a little water on the side.