

Away stole the trembling Thoms, and was met and stared at by the little chevalier, coming to have an early breakfast with his friend.

"Another raid into Thoms, *mon ami*?" questioned he, anxiously.

"Who is that devil?" cried St. Udo, passionately.

"Heaven knows! *ma foi*!—I wish we did," quoth the chevalier.

CHAPTER IV.

A LIFE SAVED.

The letter of St. Udo Brand astonished the executors of Ethel Brand's will; and their chagrin was intense when Miss Walsingham decisively informed them that they must find means to convey the property to the rightful heir, as she would never become mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste. They earnestly tried to combat her "quixotic" resolve. But she remained immovable. She would, she said, become a teacher, a companion in some family, or even a stewardess aboard ship—anything but the mistress of Seven-Oak Waaste.

And so, at an early hour next morning, Margaret Walsingham, with all her worldly possessions in a small valise, and bearing letters of unmeasured recommendation from Dr. Gay and Mr. Davenport, entered a railway carriage. She was on her way to London, in the hope of getting a situation that would take her out of the country.

She sat absorbed in reverie until the train passed at a village station, and a lady, escorted by a young naval officer, entered the car and took the seat opposite Margaret. Then with a shriek the train dashed on again.

Margaret's eyes lingered wistfully on the blooming face, the sylph-like form, the pure golden hair of the beautiful and bright young being before her. How she loved beauty, and for its sake loved this rare creature. She gazed through a mist of admiring tenderness, and forgot her troubles.

And then a piercing shriek of engines filled the air; a few seconds' hard snorting and unsteady jolting, a mighty crash, a sense of being hurled against the sky, utter chaos and oblivion.

A bricklayer, clad in a stained smock, the color of mud, was placidly eating his dinner in the midst of his family, when a scared face appeared at the open door, and a woman in torn black garments beckoned to him.

"Please come immediately," panted the woman at the door. "Life or death depends upon your haste."

She sped away at that, and the bricklayer followed her rapid feet which scarce seemed to stir the dust of the road breathed as if he carried his load full on his back.

They had a quarter of a mile to go before they reached the scene of disaster, and on the way John Doane elicited the following particulars from his excited guide.

The up train from London and the down express had run into each other by a few seconds on the part of one of the conductors. She knew nothing beyond the crash of the engines meeting, until she found herself upon a bank—some fifty feet upon the upper side of the track uninjured, though at first stunned. In looking for her fellow-passengers she found the carriage in which she had been, lying at the foot of the bank, bottom up, and she supposed the train had hurled on for some distance with the other carriages.

By the time she had explained thus far they had arrived upon the scene. It was melancholy enough to warrant the woman's white looks and faltering tongue.

Here and there a figure half raised itself and sank to the ground again with rolling head and helplessly outstretched hands. Detached pieces of wheels, and windows and twisted frames, and shattered roofs strewn the line. A first-class carriage lay upside down, its wheels idly revolving in the air, and a mass of golden curls were clustered on the broken frame of one of the windows.

"Force open the door if you can; that lady is crushing to death," said the young woman kneeling by the golden mass and raising a heavy head, which they shrouded.

The man found a beam and began methodically to batter in the door. It was done, the strange jumble of crushed and sleeping humanity were unlocked from their prison, and the two succorers made their way in, treading warily upon the gayly-painted ceiling, and both bent over a figure clad in silken draperies of diaphanous sheen.

"Lift that crushing head gently. Ah, it must be too late. There, there she is free. Put her head upon my shoulder—so. Now I will carry her myself; clear a way for me that I may not trip and fall with her. Spread that cloak upon the grass—so. Ah, is she dead?"

The Samaritan under orders assisted to lay the burden down, and then ran for some water, with which he quickly returned, and began to sprinkle copiously the insensative lady.