

## THE PRICE OF A LIFE

I. The crowded excursion steamer was passing the double line of warships at a goodly pace, and the "wash" it created was very considerable.

Many eyes were directed towards a small rowing boat that had ventured dangerously near. Suddenly a chorus of cries rang out, for one of the curling waves, larger than its fellows, had swamped the little craft, the solitary occupant of which was seen struggling in the water.

A man on the steamer's after-deck swiftly dove off his coat and vest and, mounting the gunwale, sprang like a flash into the water. The steamer heeled over alarmingly as the passengers looked to the side to watch the progress of the gallant attempt at rescue. The telegraph rang sharply in the engine-room; the paddle-wheels ceased revolving and then began to reverse; and a couple of lifebuoys hurtled through the air and splashed into the water not far behind the swimmer.

The man who had ventured with- in the danger zone was making fierce efforts to clutch at the overturned boat, but was failing at every endeavor. It became a race between the relentless water that threatened every moment to engulf him and his would-be rescuer.

Screams rang out from the steamer, where hysterical women watched the proceedings with frightened eyes and blanched faces, hoarse shrieks from the men bidding the drowning man desist from wasting his strength in futile struggles. And all the while the swimmer, with long, rhythmic strokes, was steadily approaching him.

The tension amongst the excursionists on the steamer grew intense; it was a new experience to most of them—this witnessing of the life-and-death struggle of a fellow human being, and the efforts of another to defeat death. They held their breath as the swimmer cleaved his way through the last few yards of water, and then broke out into a great roar of enthusiastic plaudits.

For the drowning man was firmly grasped; his rescuer, treading water, was holding him with one strong hand whilst with the other he sought to secure a hold of the overturned craft. A boat, launched from the steamer, was already being pulled rapidly towards the spot; the rescuer was seen to succeed in attaining a grip of the other; danger was over.

And when the two, assisted by many willing hands, clambered on board the cheering increased in volume and could be heard far and wide over the waters of the Solent. The rescuer and the rescued were scrutinized with interest as they were conducted below by the captain.

The former was a man approaching middle age, wiry and athletically built, with deep-set, resolute eyes, and an iron-grey moustache. The latter was some ten of fifteen years his junior, was quite a good-looking fellow, with a round face, and with regular, intellectual features. Admiring glances were cast at each as they disappeared from view.

A little later the eyes of the two men met.

"I've got to thank you more than I know how!" the younger said, trying to conceal his emotion. "It was cramp—the first attack I have ever had, though I'm no stranger to the water either. I'm not a coward, but there was a particular reason why I shouldn't care to go under just now."

"That's all right," the other said, in abrupt, off-hand tones; "don't say any more, there's a good chap. I'm only too pleased to have been of service, and really it's quite a nice day for a swim!"

"I'll only say this, sir," the rescued man returned, with earnest warmth, "I don't as yet know who you are or whether you're even likely to need a friend, but if at any time you do there's nothing—absolutely nothing—short of anything dishonorable, of course—that I wouldn't do for you. Remember that, sir, will you? Here's my card!" And he produced one from the case he drew from his dripping waistcoat.

As he glanced at the card, which bore the name of "Norman Ravenscroft," the elder man gave a curious little start as though he had been struck by a sudden and uncommon idea; for a moment or two a strange expression lurked in his eyes as he scrutinized the man whose life he had saved.

"Thanks!" he said. "Are you married?" he added, in his abrupt way.

"No, but—" The sentence remained unfinished, for at that moment the steward came to the cabin with a couple of spare suits he had contrived to find, and which the two drenched men would have to make shift

with until they could reach their respective hotels.

"I'm not as active as I was in my younger days," the rescuer remarked, reflectively, a little later, "but I'm not too rusty to do a sprint in the water when necessary. I suppose I can give you," he remarked, after a slight pause, and regarding his companion critically as he spoke, "some fifteen years or so, eh? I'm just fifty."

"Your activity is remarkable, sir, as I have good reason to know," the other rejoined. "As a matter of fact, you can give me sixteen years; I shall be thirty-four on the 15th of this month."

Again Norman Ravenscroft's rescuer started; he turned away a little, so that Ravenscroft did not see the remarkable change that had come over his features. For a second or so he was as a man laboring under some strong emotion, but when he again spoke his voice was calm and his expression as before.

"By the way," he observed, calmly, "though it's not my habit to accept a return of any sort for service rendered, and certainly, not for one that a dozen others on board could probably have performed as easily as I, it happens that you may be able to do me an exceedingly good turn, and, if so, I'll hold you to your word. You're not likely to go back on it, are you?" He added the last words with a sudden new incisiveness.

"I've never broken my word since I've been old enough to understand the meaning of giving it," the other replied earnestly and with dignity. Then, returning to his former warmth of manner, went on: "I shall be but too grateful to you for affording me the opportunity of repaying a part at least of the debt. If you will let me know—"

"Here's my card," the elder man said, glancing at the other's as he handed him his own inscribed with the name "Bryce Ruthwell," and an address at Regent's Park, and with the name of a Cowes hotel scribbled beneath. "If you could find it convenient to call this evening I can see you at any hour suitable to you."

"I will do so with the greatest of pleasure," was the prompt reply. "And I hope you will then tell me unreservedly in what way I can be of service to you!"

"I will be quite candid!" came the response, with a certain grim flavor about it.

## II.

Punctually at the hour arranged, Norman Ravenscroft presented himself at Mr. Ruthwell's hotel and was shown into his private sitting room. The men gripped hands warmly.

Coffee and cigars having been brought, Ruthwell plunged into his subject without delay.

"If you've no objection I'll tell you a story, Mr. Ravenscroft," he began.

"I can promise you will have a most attentive listener," remarked Ravenscroft, who found himself becoming much interested in the uncommon personality of the man to whom he owed his life. Ruthwell sipped his coffee and began:

"A few years ago I quarreled with an extremely wealthy aunt, whose heir I then was. She promptly altered her will, leaving the whole of her property to charities. I allowed some little time to elapse and then approached her on the subject very discreetly, pointing out that the harshness of her action would fall chiefly on my daughter Nora, who had been brought up in an atmosphere of luxury, and had always been regarded as the eventual possessor of her great-aunt's property. The old lady, obviously somewhat impressed by my arguments, which I took care to express as delicately as possible, promised to reconsider the matter. Subsequently she informed me that she had made another will, with Nora, on certain conditions, as her principal legatee."

"A few weeks ago she died, and until then I had no idea of what the conditions were. They were apparently prohibitive, and probably were meant to be such. I secured counsel's opinion on the possibility of successfully contesting the will, but it was so discouraging that I abandoned any idea of doing so. It was evident that, although my aunt was eccentric, she was perfectly sane when she signed the document."

"Nora was to have three-fourths of the property and I one-fourth, on condition that within three months of the testator's demise she married a man born on a certain date and whose names began with certain initials. In view of the legal opinion, I determined to make a desperate effort to enable Nora to fulfil the conditions. I've advertised far and wide—wording the announcements in a very careful and veiled manner, of course—and I've had many replies. Some of the writers were not prepared with the necessary birth certificate; others were obviously mere down-at-heel adventurers; others, for various reasons, were equally impossible. The three months expire in four days' time."

Mr. Ruthwell paused.

"What of your daughter, Mr. Ruthwell? How does she view the matter?"

"Her attitude is somewhat curious. She readily gave me her promise, should I find the man I sought—one fulfilling the conditions and yet suitable in birth, character, and refinement to be my daughter's husband—to marry him if he should ask her to be his wife. The fact is, she seems fully convinced that no one answering the conditions will be found. She is entirely reconciled to the idea of the charities benefiting by the half-million that's approximately the figure at stake. Unfortunately, my private means have been extremely limited of late, owing to some heavy losses, and very pluckily, though much against my will, Nora has taken up a profession in which she chances to have ability, refusing to be what she calls a burden on me."

Again Mr. Ruthwell paused, and this time he regarded his visitor fixedly.

"A strange but interesting story, sir," Ravenscroft observed, just a trifle disconcerted by the other's steady gaze. "And what will be the most interesting part to me is yet to come. In what way can I assist you in the matter?"

"Your initials are those imposed in the conditions—the same as Nora's; you were born on the specified day; you are unmarried, of good birth, refined and honorable. I've not been a student of human nature for nothing, Ravenscroft. Now do you see how you can assist me?"

Before Ruthwell had concluded Ravenscroft realized what it was that was being suggested to him, and without a word, his lips tightened, he rose and walked to the window, whence he gazed out across the blue waters of the Solent. He did not wish Mr. Ruthwell to see his face just then.

There was beautiful Margery Seville, the dainty, pure-eyed little lady who had sprung into fame a few weeks back, almost upon her debut on the stage, who was to be his wife within a few brief weeks. He loved her passionately; to relinquish her seemed unthinkable.

And yet he owed his life to this man, and there was absolutely nothing short of anything dishonorable he would not do for him should he ask it. Ruthwell was set upon the acquisition of this fortune on his daughter's behalf. Would not Margery herself be the first to urge him to repay the debt in the manner he asked?

It was a terrible fight within himself—this contest between the love that had come swiftly and potentially into his life and the deep sense of duty towards him to whom he owed that life. He had given his word, to break it would brand him as a coward and a liar.

On the other hand, would it be honorable to break his engagement with Margery? He supposed so, if she agreed—not even an initial. It was the address given by Bryce Ruthwell.

Suddenly his interest deepened; it was just possible that something had happened that might release him from his compact. And then—Margery! But though he hastened to set out, he strove to stifle the new-born hope. If he allowed it to grow, and it proved groundless, the reaction would be but the harder to bear.

It did not take him long to reach 114, Lester Avenue Gardens. He was shown into a tastefully-appointed reception room; there was nothing in the servant's demeanor to denote the happening of any untoward event.

He heard a light step on the threshold, the door opened, and Margery entered, her eyes bright with love and happiness. Ravenscroft was astounded.

"You here, Margie! My darling, what does it mean?" "It means," she said, as she moved to where he stood and put her arms about his neck, "that I am the girl you are to marry. I am Nora Ruthwell!"

At first he could not bring himself to realize what this revelation meant, but after a moment of wondering astonishment he snatched her into his arms and held her as though he would never let her leave them again.

"It was my fault," she said, when a little later they sat, their arms entwined about each other, talking over the extraordinary events of the past few hours. "I never regarded that silly will really seriously, and looked on it merely as a trick of aunt's to tantalize poor father and myself. I did not even remember the details, and never connected you with the date and initials mentioned in it. And when I suggested in fun that I shouldn't tell you my real name until—until the banns were to be published, or anything else about myself except that I had a dear kind dad who would like you directly he met you, and whom I wanted to give a nice surprise to, I didn't think it would give you such a bad few hours as you have had!"

"It's worth the 'bad few hours' to have the present and the future ones," he observed. "And the banns won't be necessary after all, will they? Do you realize that this will be my wife in two days' time?" She hid her face upon his shoulder and his arms tightened around her.

"Yes, I shall be good to her, sir!" he said, speaking with difficulty. And then he went.

## III.

Norman Ravenscroft, grave-faced and with a deadly pain clutching at his heart, left by the next boat to Southampton, whence he journeyed to London. Arrived at his chambers he wrote the following note to Margery:

My darling,—It is with difficulty that I write this. I must force myself to the task whilst I am able. Something has come between us and I must ask you to release me from our engagement. If I am to act honorably I must be free.

To-day I was sailing in the Solent and the wash of a steamer upset the boat. Seized with cramp I was in danger; a gentleman sprang overboard from the vessel and saved me just in time. In the depth of my gratitude I promised him to do anything he might ask in return.

In the course of our subsequent conversation he chanced to learn the date of my birth, and in this and other ways I happen to fulfil the requirements of an eccentric will. In brief, the price I have to pay for my life is to marry his daughter; this must be within four days from now.

I felt it impossible to explain this personally—we had better go out of each other's lives entirely. What I am suffering and shall suffer you can guess. I shall, as will be my duty, strive to thrust away the memory of your dear face, but it will be the most difficult task of my life.—Yours brokenly, Norman.

Having read it through, he took a taxi-cab to the theatre, where she was attracting a full house every night.

"Be sure to give that to Miss Seville as she leaves," he told the stage-doorkeeper.

After a sleepless night he attempted to eat his breakfast, but he could not. Life, until yesterday so bright and full of hope, seemed very sombre now.

Pushing away his omelette, he took up the morning paper and listlessly read the account of the incident of the day before, headed, "Sensational Rescue in the Solent." He was glad that Ruthwell was accorded a full measure of praise for his brave act, but otherwise it had no interest for him. He almost wished the waters had covered over his head and defeated the gallant attempt.

There was a double rat-tat at the door below, but it did not interest him. A few moments later his man entered with a telegram. Mechanically he opened it.

"Come at once to 114, Lester Avenue Gardens," he read. There was no signature—not even an initial. It was the address given by Bryce Ruthwell.

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# LYE

## HOME.

IN THE LAUNDRY. Kerosene is used for the washing of very dirty articles, in the proportion of one tablespoonful to four or five gallons of boiling water, to which at least one ounce of washing soda and a quarter of a pound of shredded soap has been added. The clothes without preliminary treatment are put into the boiling liquid and pressed down with a stick until they are wholly under water and allowed to boil quickly for one hour, when they must be removed and rinsed thoroughly in at least three hot rinsing waters containing a little dissolved washing soda. This is necessary to remove greasy matter, a certain amount of which adheres to the clothes when they are taken out of the boiler. They should be blued and hung in the open air to dry, to deprive them of the smell of kerosene.

Coming now to the durable parts of the laundry fittings, the ironing board or table should be a solid affair, as nothing is so exasperating as a shaky table. If we are to do our work with pleasure and the minimum expenditure of nervous force, then look to such things as this, and adopt labor-savers of every kind, provided that their use does not materially increase the wear and tear of clothes. There is so much wear and tear upon laundry utensils that unless they are strong and good they will not last and will only prove a source of worry.

A washing board is of great assistance, and a brush will be found valuable, especially for collars, cuffs, bands, and all firmer articles. The use of washing and wringing machines causes less wear and tear and also save time. Wringing machines are either attached to washing machines or are movable, and can be fixed to a tub, table or stand.

Take the greatest care to keep every part of the wringer, especially the india rubber rollers, clean, and free from dust, oil and soap-suds. Mangles, like wringing machines, must be kept scrupulously clean. Irons should be of different sizes and have comfortable handles. Each ironer must be provided with an iron stand, and an ironholder. Shirt, sleeve and skirt boards are all required in fitting out a home laundry.

To Make Ironing Easier.—Ironing day may be made less tiresome by a little forethought on the part of the housewife. Never put linen pieces through the wringer if you would avoid the little wrinkles that are so hard to press out. Small tucks will iron smoother and look better if ironed on the wrong side. If knit wear, bath towels, etc., when taken from the lines are smoothed with the hands and placed on the bars to air, they will be ready to put away by the time the bars are needed for the ironed clothes. To avoid the unsightly frill so often seen on the top of a sleeve of starched shirt-waists, fold at the seam, iron the upper, then the lower side, not letting the iron pass within an inch or two of the edge; open the sleeve, fold with the unironed part in the centre of the sleeve and press carefully.

## SEASONABLE HELPS.

Lettuce Help.—Take it as it comes from the garden or store and put in an air tight vessel with a little water in the bottom. I use one of my fireless cooker vessels. Then when you wish to use it you will find many leaves which at first you would have thrown away fresh and crisp ready for your salad. This you will find much better than putting on ice.—E. B. B.

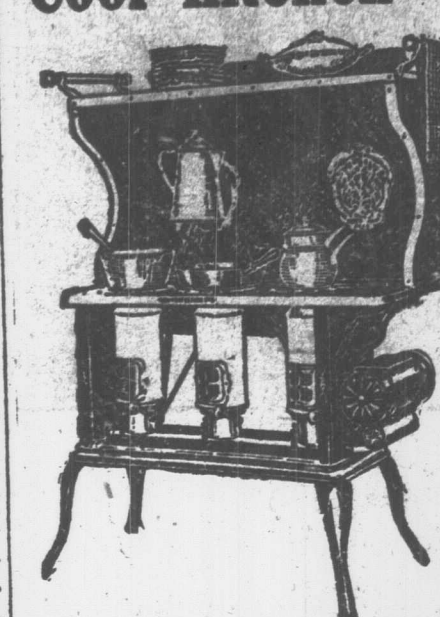
Care of Rug.—To make an old rug look fresh take dye and go over the worn places, using colors found in the rug or something that will harmonize. Mix the dye and put on with a small paint brush. This was done with a badly worn green and red rug and was delighted with the result, as it saved the buying of a new rug.

Satin Bands.—The bias of satin so much used on coats and dresses are difficult for the home dress-maker. Cut a strip of thin card-board the width you wish the finished band and about twenty inches long, then, having your satin cut a generous seam wider on each edge. Lay the cardboard on the wrong side of strip, and with a warm iron, press the satin edges over quite its length, that there may be no break in the line, and press as before. If you wish to curve the trimming cut carefully a curved pattern and fit and press the satin over it.

## RHUBARB.

Rhubarb Pie.—Make a rich pie paste and bake. Put on to boil two cupfuls of rhubarb, one cupful of sugar, and a little water. Thicken with two tablespoonfuls of corn-starch; add a small piece of butter; let boil a few minutes; lastly add yolks of two eggs; boil one minute longer. Beat whites of the eggs, add two tablespoonfuls of sugar; spread over the pie and set in oven to get lightly brown.

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