

perhaps, to the girl, who, happily, was quite unconscious of the close scrutiny to which she was being subjected.

And after the jolly little supper, another pleasant hour in the drawing room—all too short, reflected Jim, as at length Coralie rose to go to bed.

She said good-night to the old lady, then Jim saw her to the door. She held out her hand and for a moment their eyes met.

"Good-night!" she said.

Jim saw a tinge of colour sweep over her cheek. The next moment she had vanished and he came back to the old lady.

"Well, Gran?" said Jim with a laugh.

"I suppose it isn't possible that—in a single evening—the thing's preposterous!" he stammered out.

"My boy," said the old lady, "love is always preposterous."

And with that Jim went to bed. He rose rather late the next morning and hurried downstairs, only to be met with this astonishing note. It ran:

"Dear Jim,—This is not ingratitude—only discretion. There is sure to be a fuss, and I think that by leaving for Hampstead at once, any chance of your grandmother and yourself being mixed up in it will be reduced to a minimum. In two days' time, when I shall be my own mistress, I hope to be able to call and thank you both for your kindness in harbouring a runaway.—Coralie."

To say the least of it, Jim was bitterly disappointed. He went in search of his grandmother, and found she had received a similar note.

"I like it—the right spirit!" she said.

"Yes, the right spirit—but annoying!" he said gloomily. "There are two days to get through before I can find out who she is!"

He had strolled out to his club and in the reading-room had picked up a paper devoted to South African affairs. Under "Society Gossip" he, by some chance, caught sight of the word "Coralie," and read the paragraph quickly.

"The well-known and popular Lionel Belstein has not been seen much in town lately. Perhaps a reason for this can be found in the fact that at two o'clock to-day he will be married at Bamstoke Parish Church to Lady Coralie Walliston, only daughter of the late Marquis of Brackdale, and ward of General Sir Cornley Yorke."

The paper fluttered from his hands.

"Lady Coralie Walliston. I was right, then!" he murmured. "And engaged to Lal Belstein!"

Interested in South African affairs himself, he knew the man by sight and unsavoury reputation. A youngish millionaire, very successful, trying to break into society, Lal Belstein, of Wallbrook, Johannesburg, and Parklane!

No wonder Coralie had fled from him! He could not help smiling to himself as he thought of Coralie safe in Hampstead.

"All the Belstein forces couldn't do it! What on earth could the General, her guardian, be about to try and force her to marry a brute like that! Thank heaven she is safe out of their clutches. Lady Coralie Walliston—I must double back to tell Gran!"

He made his way out of the club, and the first thing that caught his eye was the first edition placard of an evening paper, and in big letters he read:

"HAMPSTEAD SENSATION—LADY ABDUCTED IN A MOTOR CAR."

He bought a paper, opened it quickly, and read the following:

"Mysterious affair at Hampstead. What a postman saw in Cedar Avenue this morning!"

He read on eagerly and found that a postman delivering letters about nine o'clock noticed a young lady with a basket in her hand apparently attempting to discover a particular house. Within a few moments, the postman witnessed an astonishing incident—no less than the sudden abduction of the young lady by two men who sprang from a large covered motor car that had stopped just behind her. A second or so afterwards and the car was vanishing in the distance. The whole affair had happened so quickly that the worthy postman had no opportunity of taking the number. As to the appearance of the two men, he could only say that one was tall and elderly with a white moustache and a somewhat military bearing, the other younger, short and dark.

Jim crammed the paper in his pocket.

"Kidnapped, by Jove!" he muttered excitedly. No doubt entered his mind as to the identity of the girl and the men with the car.

The General and Belstein had found the letter she had left behind giving the address at Hampstead and rushed up to town on the car. And they would get her down to Bamstoke in ample time for the ceremony at two. He had misjudged the Belstein forces!

What was to be done? He strode along deep in thought. What was it to do with him? Nothing—unless, by any chance, he had happened to have fallen in love with her.

Had he? He stopped suddenly, as if in hesitation. Looking round he saw a cab. The next moment he had jumped into it and told the man to drive to Waterloo as fast as he could.

"I'll just run down anyway; perhaps I shall be able to do something!" he said grimly.

In a few minutes he was in a train whirling down the Southampton line again, his brain vainly trying to hit upon some feasible plan.

"I can't make head or tail of a man like Sir Cornley Yorke trying to marry his ward to Lal Belstein!" he said for the hundredth time. "There's something ugly in it!"

He alighted at the little station of Bamstoke and found it was one o'clock.

"They must have got down a couple of hours ago, unless they have been stopped!" he thought.

He learnt that Bamstoke House was about a mile away, and as he strolled along the quiet country road he pondered deeply, but, try as he might, he could find no solution to the mystery.

Presently he reached the gates of Bamstoke House. There was a lodge, but apparently it was deserted. The house stood beyond the bend in the drive and was not visible.

As he stood gazing, he heard in the distance the throb of a motor.

"Perhaps after all they have been stopped—are coming now!" he reflected.

He had no desire to be seen, so hurriedly concealed himself from view in a clump of trees on the roadside.

The throb grew louder, and looking up the road Jim saw a large car in the distance very similar to the one he had noticed in the fog last night.

Another minute and it had drawn up outside the lodge. Belstein was driving, and was the first to alight, and went to open the gate. A door opened at the side and the General jumped out. Jim caught a momentary glimpse of Coralie's face, white and set. He felt a thrill go through him.

"What is Carter about not being here?" cried the General irately. "Is no one in the lodge? I'll—"

He walked quickly to the lodge, and tapping on the door, opened it and entered. Belstein followed him with a laugh.

"Don't be too hard on them on my wedding day!" he cried. "I want to speak to Carter, too!" he added as he disappeared.

Then suddenly a great idea dawned upon Jim. Springing from his place of concealment he tore across the road to the car, perched himself in the driving seat, and thrusting down the starting lever the car leapt forward. He heard a cry from the lodge, but he merely put the car at her top speed and in a few minutes they were a couple of miles away along the road.

"Two can play at the abduction game," he thought to himself. Then in a lonely part of the road he drew up, and, jumping down, opened the door and looked in on Coralie.

"Now?" he queried with a smile.

"Jim!" she cried in amazement.

"We haven't much time for explanations," he observed briskly. "I just want to know your wishes. In four minutes you can be back at the house—in ample time to dress for the ceremony."

She shuddered.

"Or I can run you on to Franley, wire to Belstein that his car is waiting for him at the hotel, and take you on to a place of safety for a couple of days—which?"

She looked up into his face.

"I'd much prefer to bolt again," she said, and a smile trembled round her lips.

He touched his cap.

"Right, miss!" he said, shutting the door.

Feeling chilly, he slipped into Belstein's fur driving coat, then off they went again.

In another three-quarters of an hour they were at Franley. He drove the car up to the Queen's Hotel and ordered some tea for Coralie.

"I shan't be away for more than fifteen minutes," he said, after seeing her comfortably installed in a sitting-room, and strode away in his fur coat.

First of all he went to the local garage and ordered a car to be sent round to the hotel at once. Then he proceeded to the telegraph office and despatched two wires. One was to Belstein and ran:

"Thanks for loan of car and coat—both waiting at Queen's Hotel, Franley."

The next was to his grandmother.

"Can you come to Handley for a night or so—Coralie there.—Jim."

As he walked back to the hotel, he unconsciously thrust his hand into the pocket of the fur coat, and brought out an unaddressed envelope. Not being accustomed to wearing other people's clothes, he forgot for the moment it was Belstein's property, and opened it without thinking. The first thing he pulled out was a cheque for £25,000, drawn in favour of General Sir Cornley Yorke, and signed Lionel Belstein. With it was a letter:

"As arranged, on the day of my marriage to your ward, I hand you herewith the sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, to take the place of her fortune lost by you in South African speculations. . . ."

Jim read no more. He replaced the contents of the envelope hurriedly.

"The something ugly!" he murmured. "No wonder poor old Yorke was forced to make the marriage. Same old story of the trustee and gambling with the funds. In the grip of Belstein—poor devil!"

At the hotel he stuck down the envelope, and addressed it to Belstein.

He met Coralie in the hall.

"What now?" she asked.

"Oh, all change here!" he answered, pointing to the new car that was waiting in the yard. "Explanations en route," he added.

He led the way, and they got into the car.

"I'm a passenger now," he said, seating himself beside her, and spreading a thick rug over them. "We have thirty-five miles to do."

He gave the word to the chauffeur, and they were off again. As soon as they were clear of Franley, Coralie turned to him.

"It's all very extraordinary. How on earth—"

He told her briefly the story of the South African paragraph and the night edition that appeared at eleven o'clock.

"And you came down at once to Bamstoke?" she cried, in wonderment. "Whatever induced you—"

She came to a stop suddenly.

He turned and looked into her face—quite the prettiest he had ever seen. Then he laughed softly.

"Thought I'd like to—pretty country, nice day for a run, and that sort of thing," he answered truthfully.

There was a few moments' silence. Coralie seemed rather deep in thought. Presently she looked up at him again.

"May I ask where we are going now? I hope I am not unduly curious, but the excursion is just a little unusual, isn't it?" she asked.

"Oh, dear no—quite normal," he answered lightly. "As a matter of fact we are well on the way to Handley Towers."

"Handley Towers," she repeated, wrinkling her pretty eyebrows. "Why, isn't that one of the places belonging to the Duke of Northborough?"

"Yes—they tell me it's mine," he replied coolly. She turned round in her seat and looked him straight in the face.

"Are you—are you the Duke of Northborough?"

He nodded.

There was a moment's pause. Then he saw a little smile dimple about her mouth.

"It seems rather a pity to discover it. You see, I shan't be able to call you Jim again."

Then this young man, who, twenty-four hours ago, had declared that he wasn't "much of a sentimentalist," did an absurd thing. He moved his arm and caught hold of her hand under the rug.

"I'm very much hoping you'll continue to do it—and for the remainder of your life, too," he added, in a voice that trembled slightly.

* * * * *

"An amazin' pair, my dear!" observed "Gran"—otherwise the Marchioness of Hexmouth—to a crony a few months later. "They met one another in amazin' fashion, became engaged in an amazin' short time, and, 'pon my word, they seem quite amazin'ly happy now!"

Who's What

SETON, ERNEST THOMPSON.—Nature faker in ordinary to the President, honorary member of the Liars' Club and husband of Mrs. Seton. This gentleman was born in England and divided his time between the back woods of Canada and the literary footlights. He draws pictures, the long bow, and checks. When not in pursuit of Sand Hill stags, grizzly bears, and free advertising, he can be seen in full Indian costume posing for his hired photographer, whom he engages at a yearly salary. Author of "Lives of the Posers," "Wild Animals I Thought I Knew," "Me and Nature," etc. Occupation: Climbing downward. Favourite flower: Narcissus. Address care Jörn Burroughs, Hudson River.—*New York Life*.