

Our Serial Story

"THE CHAPERON."

By C. N. and A. M. Williamson.

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Chapter XVI.

RUDOLPH BREDERODE'S POINT OF VIEW.

(Continued.)

"By Jove, here's a lark!" exclaimed Starr, at the breakfast table, looking up from the Paris Herald.

It was at the Amstel Hotel, on the fourth morning, and he and I were taking coffee together, as an Ancient Mariner and his Albatross should. The ladies had not yet appeared, for they were breakfasting in their rooms.

"What's up?" I asked.

"It's under the latest news of your Queen's doings," said he, and began to read aloud: "Jonkheer Brederode, who is equally popular in English and Dutch society and sporting circles, has taken for the season a large motor-boat, in which he is touring the waterways of Holland, with a party of invited friends, among whom is Lady MacNairne. It was her portrait, as everybody knows, painted by the clever American artist, Mr. R. L. Starr, which was so much admired at the Paris Salon this spring. Funny, how they strung that story together, isn't it? But it's a bore—in the circumstances, their having got hold of my aunt's name."

"People who weave tangled webs mustn't be surprised if they get caught in them sometimes," said I.

"I wonder how Miss Van Buren will like this? She's sure to see it," Starr went on, reflectively.

How she liked it mattered more to me than to anybody else, because if she disliked it, I was the person upon whom her vexation would be visited. But there was a still more important point which apparently hadn't come under the Mariner's consideration. How would Lady MacNairne's husband like it?

Evidently Starr doesn't know that there has been an upset of some sort between Sir Alec and the charming Fleda; and as Fleda is his aunt, but has not confided in her nephew (while she has in me) no matter what trouble the newspaper paragraph may cause for the entire party, it would be a breach of confidence for me to enlighten him.

"By Jove," I said to myself, "what will MacNairne do if he sees in the paper that his wife, who has run away from home without telling him where she's staying, is the principal guest on board a boat of mine? I ought to warn Starr that there may be a crash, but I can't."

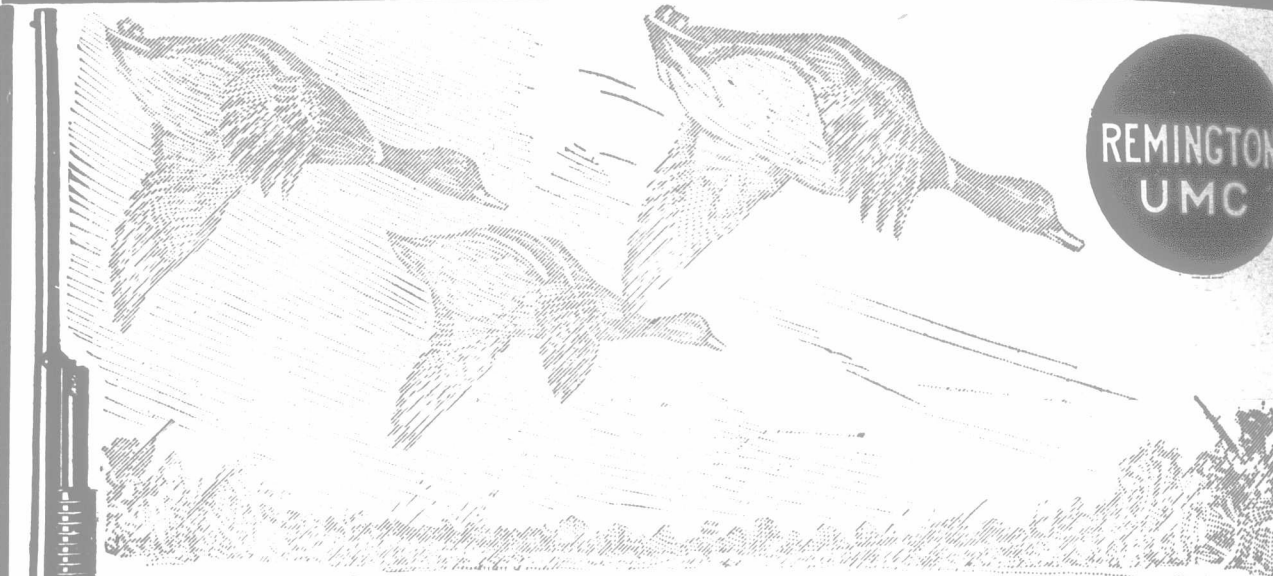
The only thing I could do was to pump him, in the hope that he knew more of his aunt's affairs than I supposed.

"My stock's pretty far down in the market with Miss Van Buren already," said I. "It can't go lower. I wonder how these asses think of such nonsense? But I suppose it came of registering 'Lorelei' in my name, which I had to do, to use the flag of the Sailing and Rowing Club of Rotterdam. Somebody heard of the boat's being registered by Rudolph Brederode, and voila the consequences. But where is Lady MacNairne?"

"Heavens, don't yell at the top of your voice," groaned Starr, in a dreadful whisper. "There may be some one at the next table who can speak English. I've had an awful lesson, as nobody knows better than you, to behave in a restaurant as if I were at church. The real Lady McN., who is not upstairs at the present moment breakfasting with Tibbe, may be in Kamschatka for all I know, though I think it probable that she's not. All I do know is that she's never answered two frantic telegrams of mine. She's not at home. She may be anywhere else—except in Holland, where she's wanted."

"It would be awkward if she should turn up now," I remarked.

"Was wanted, I ought to have said."



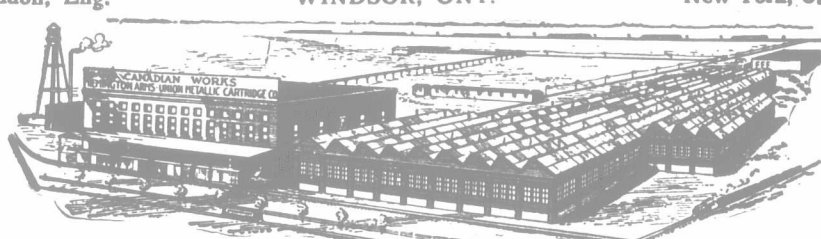
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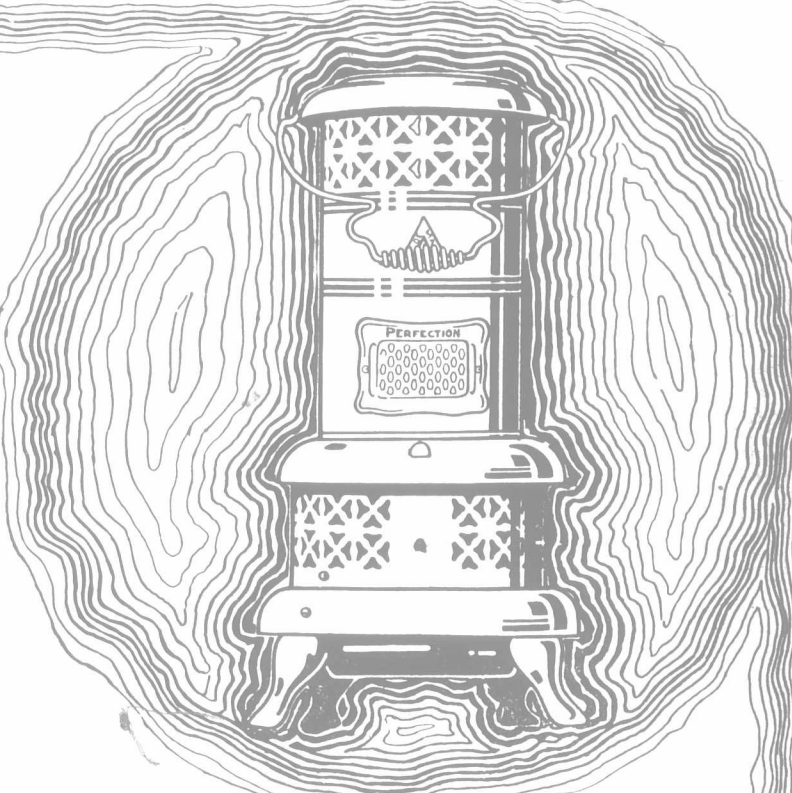
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