

and clenched hands, striving to conquer his overmastering passion. But rugged and courageous as he was, the blow had struck too hard. Suddenly he cried out loudly: "My God! My God! Laurie, my boy's, own hand on the knife!" Then he collapsed, and with arms outflung across the bureau, he sank down, hiding his face, while great sobs of anguish tore his breast and broke the silence in the room.

Lawson gathered up his possessions and put them carefully away in his coat. He was very grave, and his voice shook when he addressed Mr. Pridham.

"You must not take it too much to heart, sir. The finger-prints on the knife are your son's, I believe. But he may have handled it after the crime was committed. It has always been my belief that Mr. Laurence Pridham discovered the murderer. He knows who did it, and that knowledge has gone far towards driving him out of his mind. He must have been running like some demented person to fall over that wire, as we have every reason to believe he did. Possibly he was pursued, and, trying to make good his escape from some evil-disposed person. In any case, it is my duty to follow the two people who are implicated, and whose flight from this country is a token of their guilt. I have your word that Mr. Laurence Pridham will remain here, under your supervision. I hope, when I return to this part of the world, I may bring with me certain proofs that he has been the dupe of another and a cleverer person. I wish you good-day, sir!"

It was the longest speech on record ever made by Inspector Lawson. He was a man of few words as a rule. Mr. Pridham stood up, before Lawson quitted the room and, with uplifted arm, swore he would not only prove his son's innocence but bring to book the dastard who had tried to escape by fixing his guilt on Laurence Pridham.

CHAPTER XX.

"Nineteen—twenty—maids in plenty."

THE S.S. Spartan was half-way across the Atlantic, a small liner in these days of Titans, and comparatively slow, but none the less sure, and comfortable. Harry Sutor's Company (Blue) was enjoying itself tremendously, for the weather was obliging and the remainder of the saloon passengers, being neither millionaires nor patricians of the exclusive order, welcomed the theatrical contingent as a lively addition to their numbers.

The days and nights passed merrily. Deck games and sweeps on the run filled the daylight hours with unflagging activity and excitement, while dancing and sing-songs gave wings to the night.

On the fourth day out, a gymkhana proved an enormous success. Janet Speer took a leading part, as organizer of the four-in-hand teams of girls and men which were driven along the promenade deck by one or other at break-neck speed and resulted in a grand win by Tubby (Stoney Broke) with Lottie Connaught, Tottie Frere, Daisy Meagins and Cleo d'Alroy in harness. These girls adored Tubby, "the careless," his lazy manner and drawly way of talking being their ideal of manly perfection. They gauged the position accurately and were not deceived by the non-de-guerre under which they knew him. "Stoney-Broke indeed!" said Cleo, the exquisite; "you bet he's all that, poor darling—but none the less he's got a good handle to his name or class me among the duffers."

So Tubby was popular on board and, with his usual habit of putting aside all things unpleasant—a habit inherited from Lord Brismain—he forgot the evening spent at the South Western Club and his tragic resolutions on the Embankment; only some-times a passing regret came, for Theo, in England, and with it the consoling reflection that although his little girl would miss him, some day everything would come right again. His debts troubled him no longer, for an unexpected rencontre with Captain Carbine—his neighbour at

the roulette table—had saved the situation. They met outside the office of the Transatlantic, where Tubby had booked a passage for S. Broke, Esquire.

The Captain stopped with a smile of recognition.

"I'm afraid you were down on your luck the other night," quoth he.

Tubby assented with the remark that he couldn't well have been downer.

The Captain's shrewd eyes pierced the envelope of reserve; possibly he was better acquainted with Theodor Mauleverer's circumstances than that youthful scion of a noble house suspected.

"If you should ever find yourself in a tight corner—I've been there myself—you can easily extricate yourself by a call on Mr. Athol Baring in Jermyn Street. He's a deuced obliging chap to any one with reversionary prospects—you'll excuse my mentioning it, I'm sure, as we're mutual friends of Lord Brismain's (that was his delicate way of showing he knew Tubby's name) but Baring is quite straight and can be trusted, if you ever care to deal with him."

AS a result of this small piece of information, Tubby did call on Mr. Athol Baring and was relieved temporarily of his load of care. He left Liverpool with a light heart and a modest roll of bank-notes in his pocket, besides the assurance that his I O U's would be redeemed and his honour saved.

So now he considered he was at liberty to seize on the best life had to offer. Janet Speer's influence, employed through the leading lady, had worked the miracle and the name of "Stoney Broke" was to be included in the forthcoming bill as taking the walking on part of the Duke of Never-say-dye. The modest honorarium of thirty shillings per week, offered by the manager, was a recognition that America does not disdain nobility under a cloud. Tubby's secret would be an open one when he reached the States, for the manager was a business man and did not intend to pay for nothing. Lord Brismain's heir as one of his company was a small trump-card—still a trump often scores the trick.

So Tubby drove his four-in-hand of pretty girls along the deck in masterly style and received a crown of laurel from Janet's friend, Miss Beryl Leicester, which he wore with great distinction for the rest of the afternoon.

"Why don't you say 'Ave Caesar!'" he inquired of Fenella, who took no part in the races except as an on-looker. These two had become closer friends since common calamity had drawn them together. Fenella was known as "the quiet Miss Lorrimer" with the addenda from Cleo d'Alroy that "those quiet ones are deep. She'll cut us all out yet, girls!"

It was beginning to be common talk that Broke and the little Lorrimer girl were hand and glove together, and if not engaged, then on the brink of it.

"Joining in the Obstacle Race?" asked Mussels, whose long lean limbs encased in green tights, made him look like an overgrown grass-hopper.

Tubby replied that he meant to rest on his laurels, and Mussels said over his shoulder, as he strode forward, "Wish me good luck, Miss Lorrimer!" He admired the quiet girl and would have enjoyed cutting out the victorious Tubby by beating him in high-jumping.

Tubby and Fenella leant on the rail and chatted together.

"I wonder what's going on in England. It seems such years since we heard anything of them all—four days, four centuries!"

Tubby made an impatient click with his tongue, in reply. "Personally I don't want to hear. The absence of news is a positive treat."

"Why?"

"Because I've started a new era—and I don't want to be reminded of the past."

Fenella stared at him. She had always noticed that he shied away from any reference to their "Spinney Chase" surroundings—except Theo. About her he would talk enthusiasti-



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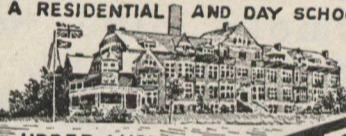
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