



A GIRL OF GRIT.

BY MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

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CHAPTER I.

IT WAS the middle of the night (as I thought) when Savory—my man, my landlord, valet and general factotum—came in and woke me. He gave me a letter, saying simply, "The gentleman's a waiting, sir," and I read it twice, without understanding it in the very least.

Could it be a hoax? To satisfy myself I sat up in bed, rubbed my astonished and still half-sleepy eyes and read it again. It ran as follows:

GRAY & QUINLAN, SOLICITORS,
101 Lincoln's Inn, July 11, 1900.

Dear Sir:—It is our pleasing duty to inform you, at the request of our New York agents, Messrs. Smiddy & Dunn of 57 Chambers street, New York city, that they have now definitely and conclusively established your claim as the sole surviving relative and general heir-at-law of the late esteemed client, Mr. Aetias McLaughlin of Church place and Fifth avenue, New York.

As the amount of your inheritance is very considerable and is estimated approximately at between \$14,000,000 and \$15,000,000, say three millions of sterling money, we have thought it right to apprise you of your good fortune without delay. Our Mr. Richard Quinlan will hand you this letter and is person and will be pleased to take your instructions. We are, sir, your obedient servants,
Capt. William Aetias Wood, D. S. O., 21, Charles street, Piccadilly.

"Here, Savory. Who brought this? Do you say he is waiting? I'll see him in half a minute." And, snatching my hand in cold water, I put on a favorite old dressing gown and passed into the next room, followed by Roy, my precious golden retriever, who began at once to sniff suspiciously at my visitor's legs.

I found there a prim, little, old young gentleman, who scanned me curiously through his gold rimmed pince nez. Although, no doubt, greatly surprised—for he did not quite expect to see an arch-millionaire in an old usher with a ragged collar of catskin, with damp, unkempt locks and unshorn chin at that time of day—he addressed me with much formality and respect.

"I must apologize for this intrusion, Captain Wood—you are Captain Wood?"

"Undoubtedly!"

"I am Mr. Quinlan, very much at your service. I have this your dog?"

"Perfectly. I am not sure to him. Lie down, Roy! I fear I am very late—a ball last night. Do you ever go to balls, Mr. Quinlan?"

"Not often, Captain Wood. But if I have come too early, I can call later on."

"By no means. I am dying to hear more. But, first of all, this letter. It's all bona fide, I suppose?"

"Without question. It is from our firm. There can be no possible mistake. We have made it our business to verify all the facts—indeed, this is not the first we had heard of the affair—but we did not think it right to speak to you too soon. This morning, however, the mail has brought a full acknowledgment of your claims, so we came on at once to see you."

"How did you find me out, pray?"

"We have had our eye on you for some time past, Captain Wood," said the little lawyer smilingly. "While we were inquiring—your understanding—we were anxious to do the best for you."

"I'm sure I'm infinitely obliged to you. But still I can't believe it, quite. I should like to be convinced of the reality of my good luck. You see, I haven't thoroughly taken it in."

"Read this letter from our New York agents, Captain Wood. It gives more details," and he handed me a typewritten communication on two quarto sheets of tissue paper; also a number of cuttings from the New York press.

The early part of the letter referred to the search and discovery of the heir-at-law (myself) and stated frankly that there could be no sort of doubt that my case was clear and that they would be pleased, when called upon, to put me in full possession of my estate.

From that they passed on to a brief enumeration of the assets, which comprised real estate in town lots, lands, houses, stocks, shares, well placed investments of all kinds, part ownership of a lucrative "road," or railway; the controlling power in shipping companies, coal companies, cable companies, and mining companies in all parts of the United States.

"It will be seen that the estate is of some magnitude," wrote Messrs. Smiddy & Dunn, "and we earnestly hope that Captain William A. Wood will take an early opportunity of coming over to look into things for himself. We shall then be ready to give a full account of our stewardship and to explain any details."

"Meanwhile, to meet any small immediate needs, we have thought it advisable to remit a first bill of exchange for \$50,000—say £10,217 17s. 6d., at current rates—negotiable at sight and duly charged by us to the estate."

"The last part of the letter is convincing enough," I said with a little laugh, as I returned it to Mr. Quinlan. "Always supposing that it is real money and will not turn to wickered leaves."

"How would you like it paid, Captain Wood? Into your bankers?"

"If you please, Messrs. Sykes & Sarsfield, the army agents, of Pall Mall."

"It shall be done at once. I will call there. If you will permit me, on my way back to Lincoln's Inn. Is there anything more? As to your affairs generally, if you have no other lawyers, we are supposed to be good men of business and perhaps—of course we advance no claims—you may consider that we have served you well already and may intrust us further with your confidence."

"My dear sir, I fully and freely admit your claims. I should be most ungrateful if I did not. Pray consider yourselves installed as my confidential legal advisers from this time forth."

"Thank you sincerely, Captain Wood. I can only express a hope that as our acquaintance grows you will have no reason to regret this decision. I will now—unless you have any further commands—wish you a very good morning."

With a stiff, studied bow he bent before me and was gone. He left me a prey to many emotions—surprise, bewilderment still predominating, but with a sense of pleasurable excitement.

It was indeed a change, a revolution in my affairs. Hitherto, like most men of my cloth, I had been constantly hard up; of late, all but in "Queer street," for I had yielded only too readily to the fascinations of London. After many years of service abroad, this spell at home, in the heart and center of life, was enough to turn any one's head. I was now on the headquarters staff, with an appointment in the intelligence department, and I found people were very kind; shoals of invitations came in, and I accepted everything—balls, dinners, routs. I went everywhere on the chance of meeting Frida Fairholme, at whose feet I had fallen the very first day we met. I worked hard at the office, but I played hard, too, making the most of my time, of my means, which, unhappily, did not go far. Four or five hundred a year is not exactly affluence for a careless young soldier, with a war office appointment, aping the ways of a fashionable man about town. Gloves, but-bonholes and cab fares swallowed up half of it, and with the other half I had hardly been able to keep out of debt.

That, at least, and without looking further, was all over now.

Savory had suffered more than once from the narrowness of my budget, but he had been very good and patient, and I was glad to think he would be the first to benefit by my good fortune.

"Would you like your money?" I asked as I buttoned up my coat and made ready to start for the office, a little late in the day.

"Well, sir, I am rather pressed. The quarter's rent is overdue, and the landlord called twice yesterday. If you could make it convenient—"

"How much do I owe you?"

"Seventeen pounds eleven for the rooms, and Mrs. Savory's bill is £9."

I had taken out my checkbook while he spoke and wrote him a check for £50.

"A little check! There! Keep what's over after you've bought a nice bit of jewelry for Mrs. S. You've been long suffering with me and shall be the first to share my luck."

Out in the streets, along King street, down Pall Mall, I trotted the pavement with the conscious air of a man who had heard good news. Friends I passed eddied round me on my face and ruddy and boyant demeanor. They had not left me when I walked through the swinging doors of Sykes & Sarsfield's bank. I was no longer the humble suppliant for a pitiful overdraft, but the possessor of a fine balance, who could hold his head high. Roy usually waited patiently outside, but today I encouraged him to enter at my heels.

"I tell you now, you a very good morning."

Jewelry for Mrs. S. You've been long suffering with me and shall be the first to share my luck."

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CHAPTER II.

AT THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICE.
As I left the bank, where I had been most cordially received, with my sovereign purse full and the nice crisp notes for £250 carefully put by in my pocketbook, I began at last to believe in my fortune. There is a solid, unimpaired reality in the clink of good gold, while the supple civility of the great financiers, who had so lately looked black at my overdrawn account, proved how completely my position was changed.

The morning's adventures and surprises had occupied much time, and it was now getting late; past noon, in fact. We members of the "Intelligence" made it a point of honor to be in good time at the office—an hour or more earlier than this. It had hardly occurred to me that I need not go to the office at all. You see, I had been some 13 years under discipline and not many hours an arch-millionaire. Besides, there is such a thing as esprit de corps. I was a public servant engaged in responsible work, and I could not, would not, have neglected it willingly; no, not for the wealth of the Indies.

So I stepped briskly down the steps below the Duke of York's column and crossed the park at my very best pace. For all that, I was overtaken near Birdcage walk by some one who hailed me without coming quite close.

"One word, sir. I pray, in your own best interests. But, sakes alive, keep back that bound. He is a fine beast, no doubt, but I'd rather have him farther away."

"Quiet, Roy! My dog will not harm you," I said civilly. "But at this moment I am very much pressed."

"If you will allow me to walk with you a few yards, no more, I reckon I could make it plain to you that I have a good excuse for intruding upon your valuable time."

The park was as open to him as to me, and when he ranged himself alongside I made no objections. I confess I, too, was curious to hear what he had to say.

"You have enemies, sir," he began abruptly, and he looked so comical as he said this that I was rude enough to laugh. He was a broad shouldered, square faced, weather beaten looking man, with a florid complexion and a bulky nose, irreproachably dressed in the very height of the fashion. But he had rather the air of a second class tragedian, with his long, black, curly hair and his voice so deep and so solemn.

"I reckon this is no laughing matter, captain. Guess your enemies will soon fix that. They mean mischief."

He spoke it like a sentence of death and seemed very much in earnest, yet I could hardly take it seriously.

"Such a threat scarcely affects me. You see, it is my business to risk my life. The queen has sometimes enemies, and hers are mine."

"There I speak of altogether your own, captain—people who grudge you your new wealth."

"You have heard then?"

"Heard?" he cried, with great scorn. "There is nothing I do not know about you, captain. How did you enjoy the summer on the Cuyuni river, and were the maps you got at Angostura very useful to you?"

"My friend, hush! And what are you? What the mischief are you driving at?"

By this time we had entered Queen Anne's gate and were at the door of the office.

"Is this your bureau?" he now asked. "May I not go inside with you, only for one moment? The matter is urgent. It affects you very closely. Your danger is imminent. They are bound, these enemies, to do you an injury—a terrible injury."

"Oh, well, then, it must keep," I said petulantly. "I cannot give you any more time now; I am expected here. I suppose Sir Charles has arrived?"

I asked of the office messenger, old Sergeant Major Peachey.

"Yes, sir, he has been here these three hours. He came on his bicycle—soon after 9 a. m., and he has asked for you, I think, twice."

"There, your business must keep, Mr.—"

"Snuzzer. I bow to your decision, but if you will permit me, I will call in Charles street this evening again."

"If you must come, come about 5. Good day," and I passed into the office. I shared my room at the "Intelligence" with a colleague, Swete Thornhill, of the artillery, a lively youth out of hours, but who stuck to his work manfully—more so than any of us, and we were by no means idle men.

"Thought you were dead," he said shortly, and without looking up from his papers; "wonder you took the trouble to come at all."

"I was detained by something special. Important business. Anyhow, it's no affair of yours," I answered, rather nettled.

"Yes it is, when it throws me out of my stride. I wish you'd make up your mind either to come or stay away altogether. There has been a regular hue and cry for you all the morning, and I've been disturbed abominably. I have those calculations of the comparative penetration of the new projectiles in hand, and they take some doing."

"Well, keep your hair on. I don't want to disturb you. But who was it, anyhow?"

"The boss chief himself, Collingham, Sir Charles. He has sent three times for you, and came in twice. Wanted you for something pressing. Now, I believe, he is doing the job himself. Wise man. Do it a blinding sight better than you or any man Jack of us."

At this moment an office messenger came in with a huge bundle of papers, which he placed before me on my desk. They were enveloped in the usual green "jacket," which meant extreme urgency, and on the outside was written, in a big, bold hand, "Captain Wood—speak."

"He'll do most of the talking, I expect," went on Swete Thornhill maliciously. "He's fit to be tied. Go in, man, at once, and take your punishment."

The distinguished officer at that time head and chief of our department was Major General Sir Charles Collingham, V. C., K. C. B., one of the most notable soldiers of the day, ardent, fearless, highly skilled, strong in counsel, foremost in the field, who had served almost everywhere, in all the wars, great and small, of recent years and had made a close study of the science of his profession as well. He had traveled far and wide, knew men and many cities, was as much at home at court as in camp, popular in society, which he cultivated in his spare moments, although he allowed nothing to stand in the way of his work. The service came first, and first in the service was the all important, transcendently useful department, as he thought it, over which he presided.

Sir Charles expected—nay, exacted—a like devotion from us, his staff officers, whom in all matters of duty he ruled with a rod of iron. None of us liked to face him when he was put out, which, it may be said, was not seldom.

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Whooping Cough.

Don't you dread it? There's not a sensible, well-read person in the world who isn't afraid of whooping-cough. It's a most distressing disease and a very dangerous one, too. The child is so liable to have convulsions, pneumonia or bronchitis as a complication.

