A GIRL OF GRIT.

:: BY MAJOR ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

By the time I reached the Strathallan road it was broad daylight. I found a long road of detached villa houses, each in its own garden, many with stables adjoining. I figured it out, as I walked up and down this road twice, that one of these cottages was just suited for the purpose of sequestrating Captain Wood, if he could be got to it. He could be driven straight into the stable yard; the cab would be no more seen when the coach house door closed behind him, and no one, neither the neighbors nor the police, would be a bit the wiser as to what mischief was being worked inside.

It took me just two hours to examine the entrance gates of every villa house with stables in that road. In three of them there were the new tracks of wheels marked plainly in the thick lying summer dust. I could not discover which were the most recent, but I carefully noted the numbers of these houses, meaning to put a watch upon them all.

I called up the boy Joseph Vialls, a very smart young squire, too, from the office in Norfolk street, as soon as I could get a telegram through. By the time he arrived I had narrowed my investigations to a single point for further observation.

The day had so far advanced that the business of life was well begun. I saw the blinds drawn up in two of the houses, the front doors opened, the women helps busy shaking the mats and washing down the stoops. Presently some of the young folks ran out into the gardens, and I could see the family gatherings round the breakfast tables, from which on the early morning air came the smell of hot coffee and English breakfast bacon, with the temptation of Tantalus for a starving man who had been out all night. All this while the third house remained closed, hermetically sealed. It was closed up, tight shuttered, not a sign of life in it. When I reached my lodgings in Norfolk street I was pretty well washed out. But I turned in for an hour and at 10 a. m. woke much refreshed. As I dressed with care I pondered deeply over this business and the course that I should adopt. My first and most urgent duty was to secure the release of Mr. Wood, always supposing that my gentleman was the person actually carried off in the cab. At present I had no certainty of this, only a bit more than strong suspicion. Yet if I could ascertain that he had not returned home I should be justified in taking surmise for fact.

First I went to Clarges street. The man there remembered me, but looked strangely when I inquired for Captain Wood.

"You have not heard the news, then?" he said.

"What in thunder is there to hear more than I have to tell you?" I asked, nettled at thinking some one was before me.

"Why, that the captain has met with an accident. He slipped up somehow last night or early this morning and hurt himself badly."

"Who told you that story? Do you believe it?"

"I believe the captain's own handwriting."

"What did he say exactly?" I was quite taken aback, as you may suppose, but did not want to show it too much.

"Here, read it for yourself. It's not all his own, of course, and you will understand why. But that's his name at the bottom there sure enough."

It was written on good gray note paper in a fair running hand, and it said:

Savory, I've come to grief driving home. Horse slipped upon the curb, and I was thrown out of the cab. Some kind people picked me up and are taking good care of me. But I shan't be able to move hand or foot for some days. Send me by bearer portmanteau of things—shirts, dressing gown, dittoes, checkbook, letters, papers and the rest. Yours, W. A. Wood.

17A Laburnum Street, Harrow Road.

"And you sent them? How?"

"By the cab that brought the letter."

"Why didn't you go with them yourself?"

"I thought of it certainly, and I wish I had."

"You may well wish that. And now, if you will be guided by me, you'll go and find out 17A Laburnum street right away, if there's any such place at all."

"Oh, but there is. It's in the directory."

"Is that so? Well, if you come across Mr. Wood there I'll run you for next president of the United States. You've got just the face for a postage stamp."

"What in the name of conscience d'ye mean? What's 'appened to him, then?"

"It's my opinion that Captain Wood has fallen among thieves, brigands, worse—ruffians, who'll hold him to ransom for blackmail, rob, murder him, God knows what, unless some of us can circumvent their blackguard maneuvers. And I am going to try. I don't believe in cab accidents and Laburnum streets. You may, so you'd better go and judge for yourself."

But he was not going to find him in Laburnum street. I was pretty sure of that, but it was right to look there on the off chance that this story was true. For myself I was more than ever persuaded of foul play, and I considered I was bound to lay the whole matter before the London police.

I was not very well received at Scotland Yard. They told me to get proper credentials, a certificate from the American consul. I was terribly roiled, but not to waste time I took a cab straight to Great St. Helen's, where of course I was perfectly well known. One of the senior clerks came to me directly.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Snuyzer? Want an introduction to the metropolitan police? Why, certainly. Reckon it's no use asking what you're after? Big case?"

He was a friend and had often given me information in a small way. I thought perhaps he might help me now, for I'd heard from you they were mostly Americans working this conspiracy, and it was likely enough they'd know at the consulate whether any big "toughs" and "bunko men" were in London just then.

"It's something to do with the McFaught millions," I said. "You've heard, no doubt, of that young Englishman's luck?"

"Why, yes. He was here this very morning, only an hour ago." It was then about 1 o'clock. "Captain William Aretas Wood they called him. Is he your client?"

It hit me like a blow, this news, for I saw at once what it meant. Captain

"The woman called him a dreadful dog and tried to stop him."

Wood could not be lying injured in a street off the Harrow road and walking about Great St. Helen's. I wanted no more proof of foul play.

"We are acting for Captain Wood. Case of attempted fraud. They've soon found he's fair game. But what brought him here, if I may ask?"

"Some question of legal powers. Granting attorney to representatives in New York, assigning certain properties by deed to trustees. Legal business. The law, you know, requires the signature to be given in the presence of the United States consul."

"You saw Captain Wood, did you, yourself?"

"Why, certainly. A man worth millions. He interested us all. Took it quietly enough, though. Rather ordinary sort of sportsman. Tall enough, but no show about him. For so rich a man he went very plainly dressed—only a Derby hat and a business suit."

"Handsome young man, eh? Tall, fair, holds himself well?" I suggested.

"Why, no. Rather mean, I should say. Fair, yes; thickset, coarse looking, but I had no talk with him. He and his friends were in the inner room with the consul himself."

"His friends?" I hazarded.

"I suppose so, but he might have found better. There was that Lawford. Jimmy they call him. I don't know much about him. No good anyway. And there was Colonel McQuay, who ran the Cyclostoma swindle out west, and a little black faced Spanish chap who looked hungry enough to eat him, clothes and all. If you're a friend of Captain Wood's, Snuyzer, I'd warn him against being too thick with that crowd."

"Warn him!" I said to myself as I walked away from the consulate. "If he'd listened to me, he would have never got into this fix."

Much as I had been surprised by the promptitude with which these unscrupulous foes had got him into their toils I was now amazed with the breadth, the boldness of their scheme. It was as clear to me as if I had seen it all in print. To seize, sequestrate, securely hold their prisoner, with heaven knows what added ill usage—it might be make away with him utterly—while his double, some cleverly set up second self, their puppet or confederate, personated him, acted for him, making ducks and drakes of his fortune, acquiring every red cent that was movable and within reach, without fear of interference or retribution, provided only they kept fast hold of their prey.

How far was it in my power to meet and frustrate these felonious but astutely planned measures? At least I had one or two threads, one or two clews, in my hand.

I believed that I could exactly locate the present place of Captain Wood's detention. I knew the very house or its outbuildings in which he was imprisoned. To get him out must be my next job. If he were once free, much mischief, the worst certainly, might be prevented. But whether he were immediately released or not it was of little less importance to follow up his persecutors to ascertain what they were doing and work to counteract and defeat them.

Three of them, at least, I had heard of, thanks to my friend at the consulate, two by name and clear identity. The third should be discovered through the other two.

My next moves were clearly and imperatively marked out for me.

As I passed along the Strand I called in at Norfolk street. No sign from Joseph, so all was presumably without change in the Strathallan road. Next to Clarges street.

Time was getting on. Close on 3 p. m., and nothing done as yet in Mr. Wood's behalf. I was impatient, eager to act for him, and yet I knew I must proceed regularly. The man Savory had returned, and I knew by his face that he had drawn blank in Laburnum street. Of course no Mr. Wood was there. I did not require to be told that. Savory was also satisfied now, a good deal on the evidence of the collie dog which he had taken with him.

"Master Willie was nowhere on the premises. Roy will answer for that. I told him to 'go look,' although the woman of the place—it was a sort of second rate lodging house—called him a dreadful dog and tried to stop him. Roy's teeth helped him to quest right through the house."

"Fine fellow! We'll take him with us to look for Mr. Wood. Eh, Roy?"

He was like a Christian, that dog, for he made friends at once, wagged his tail and put his nose in my hand. When Savory added on some gibberish with "ullooloolooo, go search, Roy," he first howled and yelped, then ran up and down the hall entry like a mad thing.

"Where are we going, sir?" asked Savory, growing respectful as he recognized my authority.

"To Scotland Yard straight. They wouldn't listen to me this morning. Now perhaps— What have you got there?"

"It's a letter, sir, brought by hand half an hour ago for Mr. Wood, marked, 'Very immediate.' D'ye see? But—you wouldn't surely?"

This was in alarmed protest as I was about to break the seal.

"Wouldn't I, though? Why, it's a question of life and death with Captain Wood. Anything and everything that is likely to help us must be made use of. I stand on that, and here goes."

But just as I was about to open the letter we were interrupted by the arrival of a tall, military looking gentleman, with a fierce face and a very hectoring, overbearing manner. We were standing in the hallway, the man Savory and I, for although he knew what my business was he did not trust me enough to let me go up stairs. The front door was just ajar, he inside and I still on the stoop, when this highfalutin, masterful sort of gentleman came up and said to both of us:

"Is this where Captain Wood lives? Look sharp. I want to know."

There was a shortness in his tone and manner which, being a free born American, I could not stomach at all. He might have been a slave driver talking to black Africans, and I looked at him in a way to warn him not to raise my dander.

"Come, speak out. Which is the man of the house? Is Captain Wood in? I must see him at once. I am Sir Charles Collingham."

At this Savory bowed low. They are a mean, lickspittle lot, these Britishers, when there's any talk of titles or big toads in their puddles.

"Yes, yes, Sir Charles; quite so. I know you now. But Captain Wood is not in."

"Where shall I find him? I must see him at once. It is a matter of duty. Where is he?"

"That's just what we want to know," I put in. "It puzzles us entirely. He has got into some mess somewhere, and we can't tell for certain what has happened to him or where to find him."

"And who the devil are you, pray?" asked my gentleman insolently. "And what in heaven's name have you to do with Captain Wood? You are an American, I perceive."

"Waal, that's so, and what difference does that make? Ain't I good enough to know Captain Wood or for you to talk to?" He had pretty well raised my dander this time.

"Pshaw! I've nothing to say to you. I don't know you, and I don't want to know you, and you may go to the devil your own road as soon as you please."

And without waiting for more he brushed past me, pushing Savory aside and saying:

"I must go up to his rooms. There are some papers up there I want. Show the way, please," and he ran up stairs.

Of course I followed. I was as much concerned about Captain Wood as he was. Besides, I felt it due to my self respect and position as one of your most trusted agents to call this overbearing Britisher to account.

The new visitor, General Sir Charles Collingham, as I presently heard he was called, was the first in the room, and he went straight to the bureau or escritoire, at which I expect Captain Wood did his writing business. The general fell upon the papers and turned them over with much haste and excitement. Then he turned to Savory and said in the same peremptory tone:

"Where is the dispatch box from my office sent here last night? I don't see it. Fetch it, will you?"

"But it went to the captain this morning, Sir Charles, with his portmanteau and other things."

"Great powers! How could it when you don't know where he is?"

"If you will permit me to explain," I here put in, although I wonder I went on, for I saw clearly on his face that he thought me an interfering nonentity altogether beneath his contempt. But as I told my story his manner changed, his look of utter incredulity and amazement gave way to one of absorbed interest, and by the time I had finished he had thrown himself into the nearest armchair with a loud and prolonged whistle, an evident let off to his disturbed feelings.

Then he sprang to his feet and walked up and down the room like a madman, talking to himself aloud:

"It's not possible. It's too preposterous. I cannot, ought not, to believe it. But yet, by the Lord Harry, strange things do happen."

Then he pulled up short and faced me as if I were a criminal and a tough.

"I suppose you are to be trusted? Who and what do you call yourself? You haven't dreamed all this? You weren't drunk last night?"

"I am a water drinker, Sir Charles Collingham, and take it from choice not, according to my physician's rule," I replied severely. "You, I conclude, from your title, are a British army officer, but I do not consider you are a gentleman to make such aspersions."

"Come, come, don't lose your temper. I never do—it's a mistake—in business, and you haven't told me yet who you are and what you have to do with Captain Wood."

The shortest way was to give him one of my cards. He was not unacquainted with the name of Saraband and said so courteously enough. Indeed, he became now so civil that, judging him to be really a person of importance, I gave him a brief outline of the plot to which we believed Captain Wood had fallen a victim.

"You think it is the money, do you? Nothing else?" he asked sharply.

"Why, what else could there be?"

He hesitated for a moment, but said at last:

"I'm not at liberty to tell you exactly. They are confidential matters connected with the service. But there might be reasons to induce designing people to carry off Captain Wood and hide him for a time. He possesses certain information of the highest value to— Well, I must not tell you. But the disappearance of these papers, of the dispatch box, in short, supports me in that view."

"There are public grounds, then, for instituting a keen search for Captain Wood."

"Very much so, indeed, and we must instantly call in the police. I shall go at once to Scotland Yard and set the detectives in motion."

"Guess I've been there already, and they only laughed at me."

"By George, they will not laugh at me. Why, this might become a cabinet question. If those papers have fallen into the wrong hands, there may be the devil of a row. Wood or no Wood, I must have them back this very day, and I can't stop talking here."

"One minute, Sir Charles. My—our interest in Captain Wood is hardly second to yours. Anyway they are identical. It would be best, I submit, to work together."

"Quite so. That is very sensible. Have you any plans? What would you propose?" He was as sweet as milk by this time.

"Well, obviously one thing presses urgently. A descent should be made by a posse of police upon that house in the Strathallan road."

"In any case there shall be no more delay. Here, you, sir"—this was to Savory—"hail the first cab. I'm off to Scotland Yard. Will you come with me?"

"I'd rather meet you, Sir Charles, out yonder, for I suppose you'll go yourself with the police?"

"Certainly I shall, possibly ahead of them, so au revoir."

"Stay, Sir Charles. I had forgotten this letter which came an hour ago. It is addressed to Captain Wood, and it might throw some light on this mysterious affair. To be sure, it is in a woman's hand, but I was just about to open it when you appeared. Do you think I dare?"

"By all means. Every scrap of intelligence is of the utmost importance now. I'll do it. I can set it afterward if necessary with Captain Wood."

So he broke the seal, opened the letter and instantly burst into a loud, cheery laugh.

"Oho, Miss Frida, so you have not been long in coming to an understanding with our man of many millions! Read it," he said, and he handed me the letter. It was headed "273 Hill street" and was signed "Frida." There were only a few lines:

What has become of you? I thought we were to see you early, before luncheon. I have been simply furious. Now I am frightened. Something must have happened. It cannot be that you have already forgotten—last night!

"Reckon I know what she means by 'last night,' for I heard their parting at the door of the house in Prince's Gate."

"Where no doubt they had been billing and cooing," added the general. "But she is entitled to know what has happened. You had better go round by Hill street on your way to Barnes. Enough said. I'm off."

We soon started, Savory and I, in a second hansom and at the man's suggestion took the dog.

"He'll surely find the captain," said Savory, "if there is any sort of scent," and the dog seemed to understand his business, for directly we reached Hill street he was the first inside the house and raced up stairs in a businesslike way and evidently quite at home in the place.

By and by he came down again, followed by about the brightest, smartest and sweetest young creature I had seen since my last Sunday walk on Fifth avenue after church.

It's not in my line to say what she wore, but I think it was a tailor made

"Of course you are from Captain Wood? This is his dog."

garment, and it fitted her like a glove. All I could see were her flashing eyes and the red lips apart as she tackled me sharply.

"Of course you are from Captain Wood? This is his dog. What have you to tell me? Quick! Explain. Where is he himself?"

"I wish, madam, I could tell you that for certain, but I cannot. The fact is the captain is"—

"Here! Step in here." She opened the door of a room, showed me a chair, then took her stand on the hearthrug, with her arms behind her back, and said:

"Let me have the whole story or as much as you know of it. Make haste, please."

She still stood erect and fearless, showing great mastery over herself, as I told briefly and quickly all I knew. Except that the color came and went, that her cheek was now crimson, now blanched a creamy white, that her eyes glittered with the tears she still resolutely kept back, this brave child suffered no sign of emotion to escape her at the peril of her lover.

"Well, what have you done?" she asked imperiously. "What do the police say?"

I began to explain.

"Tut, tut! Let us have no excuses, no beating about the bush. You have known this—let me see—more than 12 hours, and yet my—my friend, Captain Wood, is still there where you say they took him."

"Where I believe they took him."

"This won't do at all, Mr.— I don't know who you are or what you call yourself—Snuyzer, an American detective? Ah, well, Mr. Snuyzer, I shall now take this matter in hand. We've got to find Captain Wood—at least I have whether you come into the business or not."

"I shall be sorry to be left out, miss, but there are others besides us have taken it up now. I've seen a British general, Collingham by name."

"Yes, yes; I know. Willie's—I mean Captain Wood's chief at the intelligence. I was just going to send to him. He is a man of great influence and importance, a man of the world, who knows his way about. He has been told, then? What is he doing?"

"Working the police. He will take a mob of them down to where I traced the captain. I am going on to meet them there."

"Then I'll go too. Wait here, please, while I put on my hat," and she rang the bell. "When the man comes, tell him to bring my bike around. No; I'd better take you with me. Order my pony cart. Say it must be at the door in ten minutes from now."

In less than ten minutes she came down stairs dressed for driving and buttoning on her gloves.

"Come, sir," she said brisker and sharper than ever. "I cannot easily forgive your previous dilatoriness, but we must try to make up for lost time. Here is the pony cart, and we will take the dog."

When we reached the Strathallan road, to my deep chagrin the boy Joseph was not there, nor was he to be seen anywhere near or far. Now, I could have staked my life on little Joseph Vialls. He was a London lad who had seen much in his short life on shore and afloat, for although I had picked him off a crossing on account of his quick tongue and bright ways he had been to sea on Thames lighters right round the coast. Now I was training him to our business. He took to it naturally, knew what was expected of him and was not the sort to be fooled into quitting his post or going off on fandangoes on his own account.

Miss Fairholme turned on me like a tiger when we drove past the house and back still without a sign of Joe.

"Get out of this cart and go and ring the bell," she said fiercely. "The sooner we get inside that house the better. Make haste, please."

I hammered at that door and hung on to that bell till I woke all the echoes of that dead-alive suburb. No one came. There was not a sign of life within. Presently the police came up, and the general, who had been cruising about on his bicycle, joined miss outside. They all stopped there, talking to her a bit, and I judge they were hesitating to act, arguing it out with the general, who was very fierce and positive, ordering them about short and sharp, but doing little good till missy took up the running. But she soon sent them flying in after me and came with them. One of the constables ran around to the back, where he found a strip of garden with a low wall. He was over that like a flash and in through the scullery window. Half a minute more and we heard him unchaining the front door. Then we all trooped into the entry and ran through the house, some high, some low, but none of us finding anything. There was not a scrap of furniture nor the signs of any occupancy that we could see.

But miss, she also hunted, halloing on the collie dog with a "Go look, Roy," worry, worry, worry, which drove the beast nearly mad. He hunted and quested through the house with a short, snapping bark, as if he was rounding up a sheepfold, and it was he, marvelous animal, who led us into the basement, into a sort of cellar between the front parlor and the kitchen. Here he raced round and round like a thing possessed, yelping furiously. The place was all black darkness. No windows, not a glint of daylight. But some one struck a match and lit a bullseye, and we could make out what there was there. One big, long table, a kitchen table with seats on each side, and at the end a strange thing that told its own story.

It was a sort of wooden erection something between a scaffold and a bulkhead; two great upright timbers, wedged in tight between the ceiling and the stone floor—might have been a support, pillarlike, for the roof or ceiling, but we could see it was meant to make some one fast to—a pair of stocks, you might say, or a whipping post. And so it had been used, no doubt. For there were a long chain and padlock hanging between the uprights just over a low bench that served as a seat for whoever was held there a prisoner.

This was where the collie raged about most fiercely, sniffing, scenting, hunting to and fro, always under the encouraging voice of missy, who shouted, "Lu-lu-lu, good dog; find him, then. Where is he? Out with him, Lu-lu."

Of course his master had been there. None of us had a doubt of that, any more than of the plain fact that he was not there now. We looked at each other blankly, after a bit, hardly knowing what to do or say next, till miss stamped her pretty foot and cried, "Well?"

"I have my suspicions," began the sergeant, knocking his hands together rather jovially, till the dust flew out of his white lisle thread gloves. "It's not all fair and square. I shall make a report to that effect and await instructions."

"Pshaw!" interrupted miss. "And meantime Mr. Wood may be murdered. I shall offer a reward of £500 to whoever finds him, but it must be within the next 24 hours."

"Now you're talking," I said heartily, "and I don't see we gain much by staying here. The cage is empty, and we've got to follow the birds wherever they've flown."

"If you'll excuse me," said the sergeant, who had got mighty eager when he heard of the reward, "the most proper course, as I see it, is to start from this here house. Whose is it? Who took it? Likewise who put up this apparatus, and why? When those questions is answered by the neighbors, house agents, tradesmen and such like, we may come to lay our fingers on them as is responsible for this here business."

"You had better do all that, then," said the general, very discontented, "and I shall go to New Scotland Yard to the fountain head. There's more in this than you duffers seem to think. We want the best man they've got, a real detective, to take up the case."

This was aimed at me. It was unkind, you'll say. But after all how much had I done and where was boy Joe?

"It's not like him," I was saying half to myself as we stood together, miss and I, while she was taking the ribbons and with one neat brown shoe on the step was just getting into her cart. "Either he's been caught spying—and that's not like him—or he's hanging on to their heels like bird lime. But—What in thunder's that?"

I saw some rough writing in white chalk upon the gate, and an arrow figured there with the point toward London:

'Ooked it. Follerin on. JOE.

They were as plain as print, so was their meaning, and I pointed out the words triumphantly to Miss Fairholme.

"I knew that boy wouldn't fail me. He's got grit, he has. Some day he'll be able to teach me my business"—

"I wish he would begin soon," said miss peevishly. "It's always the same story. Some day, one day, next day, never. And all this time he—poor Captain Wood—is"—

With that she gave her pony a smart cut with her thong, and the beast, nearly springing through his collar, started off like a mad thing, with the other mad beast of a dog yelping and screeching and jumping up at his muzzle or trying to bite at his heels. The general also gave me a contemptuous good day and, springing on to his "bike" like a boy, went off at a real right down scorching pace after the buggy.

I expect that is the last I shall see of her, for she never took a card of mine or asked where she could find me again, and I've fully made up my mind that never so long as I live will I hunt after her. When Joe reappears, as I tell you, gentlemen, I most confidently expect he will at any moment and with important news, so that I can pick up fresh threads. I'll do the next job alone. I don't want no highfalutin young duchesses treating one like dirt, for a true born American citizen is as good as any emperor, let alone a pert minx with ever so pretty a face. We shall see. If there was no better reason than the wish to humble her, I mean to see the thing right through to the very end.

CHAPTER VI.

PASSAGES FROM THE DIARY OF WILFRIDA FAIRHOLME.

S. S. Chattahoochee, July 17.—Although still harassed and oppressed by hideous anxiety, I want, in this my first moment of leisure, to set down clearly and fully the strange events that have occurred since that memorable evening in Prince's Gate. I have been in a whirl ever since. But I have forgotten nothing. Every act, every thought is indelibly fixed in my memory from the moment that I realized my loss.

Forget! I shall never forget that afternoon when the American detective brought me the news. What an odd creature he was. Very much overdressed, with a sort of company manner voice, which didn't disguise his Yankee accent or tone down his awful Americanisms. I know now that the poor wretch was honest and straightforward, but I could not get over my repugnance to him at first.

And so when we got to the very house and drew quite blank I made up my mind that the man was an arrant impostor. Nothing fell out as he said. "His boy would be on the watch." There was no boy. He was quite certain of the house into which Willie had been carried. The police broke in. There was no Willie Wood.

The whole thing was humbug. I felt convinced of it and said so, only to regret it directly after. It could not be quite humbug, or, if it was, Roy, dear Willie's lovely dog, was in it, too, for Roy had certainly smelt him out in the cellar where we found the awful apparatus and things, and I ought to have known that a dog's instinct is always true. But I was very short with Mr. Snuyzer and left him in a huff. It was a mistake, of course, for it was losing a chance. The man might be useful, and after all he was the only one who, whether the right or the wrong one, had any sort of clew. That was good old Sir Charles Collingham's opinion and Colonel Bannister's, the big official, chief constable or assistant commissioner or something whom the general brought with him to Hill street. I found them there closeted with mother who had heard all about it from them. She was rather in a limp condition, dear mother, having quite failed to take in the situation and unable to say or suggest anything.

The colonel—he was rather a cross looking, middle aged man, with square cut, short whiskers and a bristling gray mustache—took me sharply to