

THE CLIMBING COURVATELS

VI. In Danger from the Machinations of Delancy

By EDWARD W. TOWNSEND

Author of "Chimmie Fadden," "Lees and Leaven," and Other Tales

Drawing by J. V. McFall

BEFORE the Courtneys were ready to go to New York, Herbert Delancy had departed from the colony to live for a few weeks, it was announced in the colony gossip, in his town apartment.

His going was a relief to Betty, who had a reason for supposing—she could interpret his marked attention to Genie in no other way—that he would bring matters to a crisis by a proposal for Genie's hand. Betty dreaded to have this happen while they were still at the colony; she knew her husband too well not to know that if Delancy went to him on such a quest the interview would be likely to involve them in a physical encounter.

As to this in itself Betty had no misgivings. She had been Richard's fellow performer, and knew better than anyone else what unending, patient, physical training her husband had undergone; how, to perfect himself in a single new feat, he had first devoted a year of work to the development of some set of muscles; how all this constant, intelligent physical training had made him almost as remarkable for his strength as for his quickness and dexterity. What Betty dreaded was that such an encounter might occur in the colony where it could not be concealed. That small, close corporation held few secrets, and the Courtneys were not yet well enough anchored to withstand the storm of gossip that would be raised by such trouble.

"But," thought Betty, "if we can postpone this until we get to town, no one need know."

Anything can happen in New York and not be known, and almost everything does."

"No, Dick," she said to her husband, "I'm not in the least shy—oh, what's the word?—not at all doubtful about what will happen if you and Delancy mix it up—meet in a physical encounter, I mean. He must be forty pounds heavier than you, and he used to rather star as a bruiser,—be prominent as a boxer, I mean,—but since that time in Germany when you conned—con—con— Is there no polite word for it?"

"Confounded," suggested Richard.

"Why, of course," assented Betty delightedly, for she was making rapid progress in polite language. "Since you confounded that committee in Berlin who were goggling at you within three feet, yet couldn't see your hands move when you took the props—the properties, I mean—from me, I've had faith that you could make up with speed what you lack in weight. You are too slick—er, sudden, alert, adept—for ordinary men."

Richard smiled as his wife recalled a notable occasion when a committee of distinguished German scientists solemnly declared that Monsieur Courvatel had not done a thing they thought they had seen him do, because they had not seen him do a certain other thing without the doing of which he could not have done the thing they thought they had not seen him do, although, on the whole, there was no doubt that he had done it.

"And all in the world it amounted to," said Richard, commenting on his thoughts, "was that they did not see my hand move when I exchanged with you the sealed package for the unsealed one. It is always the simplest tricks which fool people the most."

"That's true," remarked Betty. "So I thought I'd call on Mrs. Van Alstyne to-day and mention that her cousin's attention to Virginia seemed to have a serious purpose."

"And so find out from her if she knows what we know concerning him," Richard promptly rejoined.

Betty laughed at this example of domestic mind reading. "Oh, Dick!" she said, "you see why I must always be square with you, for if I tried to be anything else you'd come the old mind reading trick on me, and—"

"And give you a kiss," interrupted Richard after cutting short her speech in the manner his words indicated.

THE interview with Mrs. Van Alstyne came about without Betty's seeking it; for she called to offer the Courtneys the use of her residence in town during



"That Time You Conned the Committee in Berlin . . . You Are Too Slick for Ordinary Men."

their stay, as the Van Alstynes had decided to go South without stopping in New York.

Betty murmured sympathetically that she hoped Van Alstyne's health was not the cause of their foregoing the delights of the opera. She said this in her most confidence-inviting voice, for she had easily discovered that his health was not the subject on her caller's mind, and she wanted to know what the subject really was.

Besides the advantage an intensely sympathetic nature gave her in divining another's, and specially a woman's, state of mind, Betty's professional training was a help to her here. Accustomed during all her stage career to the keen exercise of every perceptive faculty to aid her in reading the minds of the cautious and suspicious, the open mind of the subject now before her, the product of a simple, open life, plainly showed to Betty a second motive at work,—something beyond the matter of the town house.

"Mr. Van Alstyne has been looking so very well lately," Betty added tentatively.

"He is very well," said the caller, with a sudden plunge of determination, leaning forward to place her teacup on the table. "I fancy it's pigs."

"Pigs?" queried Betty, thrown off her scent.

"Yes. Your dear uncle has made an enthusiast of my husband on the subject. He walks miles and miles every day looking after the pigs."

"Genie is out with her father looking after our pigs now," confided Betty, with so slight an emphasis on the name of her daughter that her caller was not conscious of it, and would have been vastly surprised to know that Betty had placed the emphasis to lead her gracefully to the subject she at once took up.

"Yes, Genie. Everyone is so fond of her,—so spoiled! My own daughters are both married."

"And so happily, everyone says," murmured Betty, refilling her caller's cup.

"Exactly," replied Mrs. Van Alstyne. "It is a compensation for a mother when she loses the companionship of her children, to know that they are happily married. Our daughters married well. I don't mean in a worldly sense only; but well—well—" She hesitated for the word, and Betty whispered it sweetly as she dropped a lump of sugar into the tea: "Domestically."

"Precisely. You are so clever with words! One of our sons in law goes in for golf, and the other for something in the way of investigation.—I think it is cuneiform something. It takes him to the most outlandish places, digging up dead cities; but

his wife, our eldest, is devoted to it,—wears native frocks and such. A mother cannot be too careful."

"Indeed, she cannot," remarked Betty with decision. "But, then," she continued more thoughtfully, "how are mothers to know—sometimes?" She was sure of her ground now.

"I suppose it is the right of one woman to warn another," resumed Mrs. Van Alstyne, "in a case—if she— Don't you agree with me?"

"Her right!" exclaimed Betty. "It is her duty."

"Yes, her duty," repeated Mrs. Van Alstyne.

"Her duty, even when—"

She ceased speaking, caught her breath, then began to weep softly.

Betty went to the elder woman's side and laid her arm gently on her neck. "If you were going to speak of Mr. Delancy's attention to Genie," she said, "you need not. She does not care for him, and we have learned something which makes us disapprove of him."

Mrs. Van Alstyne looked up hastily. "He has made me very unhappy about this," she said. "He has persisted in urging Mr. Van Alstyne and me to help him in his suit. He says we can influence you. Instead of doing that, I—I came here to warn you. Mark—my husband—thought I should do so. They, Mark and he, have had some trouble about some wretched checks or drafts. Everything was not quite proper, not regular. It cost Mark thousands of dollars; but he overlooked the matter to prevent even the appearance of scandal. But in spite of all that, Herbert has demanded that we help to influence you in his favor. Although he is only a distant cousin, the thought of a scandal becoming public nearly kills me." She rose, and sobbed as frankly as Betty, who, her tears flowing in sympathy, put her arms about her.

"Would it be a relief to you if he could be kept away from this country—always?"

The elder woman lifted her head high and shook it, as one shaking off something which smothered, and then uttered a long sigh of relief.

"The elder woman lifted her head high and shook it, as one shaking off something which smothered, and then uttered a long sigh of relief."

WHEN the Courtneys went to town they took the Van Alstynes' house. Mrs. Van Alstyne had urged this at a later call when the subject of Delancy was not mentioned.

"It is all very well, I suppose," she said, "for married people to entertain in an apartment; but the biggest apartment in New York is not a home, and Virginia must have a home for what entertaining you do for her."

"Calcutta, or Carl as he must be called now, in-