

of reasoning would be perfectly rational; but, being Valda's father, the whole thing resolved itself into about the most illogical and absurd nonsense to be imagined!

**N**O, she must begin all over again; and she did. The two villains, then, had done everything she said they did; but without her father. They had signed his name to those telegrams, exactly as she had divined from the first. A woman's intuition is a thousand times better than reason, anyway. They had signed his name to the telegrams. They had in some way—it didn't make much difference how—discovered the Spitfire's private cipher code. They had used it as a blind. They had—Oh, wait! That one telegram, in answer to her own, saying, "Don't be an idiot. Do as I tell you,"—that was just a wee bit too intimate for forgery. It was not only a signature, it was fact! Nasty, incontestable fact!

It implicated the old gentleman again; but surely there ought to be lots of ways to get him out of it. It was illogical ever to have put him in. Ah! she had it! How simple! Her father didn't know about the robbery. He thought it was just plain, ordinary smuggling. She would admit smuggling, because she had known him to do it twice; but robbing a poor fellow of his belt—preposterous! These two men had deceived him! Lied to him! And speaking of liars, George C. Brown—to revel in slang for once—not only took the cake, but ate it, every crumb! That man's sense of honor was about the lowest, most contemptible thing she had ever dreamed of. To think of him spending his entire young life in deceiving simple hearted women who hadn't done a single thing but try to economize and save a little duty on their own property. She could understand perfectly how such frivolous, weak minded creatures might be taken in by him, because he was handsome, even if he did laugh at them afterward—which, by the by, was a most ungentlemanly thing to do.

No, there hadn't been any crime at all! That was the way of it! This liar had manufactured the whole thing! When she thought of his bare faced impudence, her cheeks burned with shame and rage. When she thought how he had wilfully cast suspicion on her father's friends,—these two respectable and almost entirely honest gentlemen,—she longed to box his ears hard. As for his disreputable profession of worming secrets out of people—well, it was simply unbearable! Sympathy was his long suit, was it? He had expected to win her over with his crocodile tears and his dancing master bowings and scrapings! Well, thank goodness there was some intelligence left in the world, after all!

**V**ALDA sighed. Yes, it was the only solution, pitiful but true. The man was a professional scamp,—deceiving people for a salary. But, oh! how could he? Think of his mother! No, his mother was dead. She wasn't! That was a lie too! Everything he said was a lie! He was nothing but a heartless, conceited, vain beast! But if only he hadn't bowed like that! And if only his hair didn't curl up, as it certainly did, all over his perfectly shaped head! It wasn't fair for a man's hair to curl by itself, anyway, when a poor woman had to spend hours and hours and hours with hot tongs and a temper, or else do it up in papers which make you look a perfect fright and are so abominably lumpy to sleep in. And, concerning lumps, how did Mr. Morson get his lump, to which he had referred so humorously as Exhibit A? She herself had noticed one of the tugboat men with a coal shovel in his hands. This might certainly be a logical origin of the contusion, and—But no! Mr. Morson's lump has stitches in it,—stitches that must have hurt him frightfully. No wonder he had become faint and dizzy, poor fellow! Anybody but a very brave person would have screamed.

Valda started, her keen powers of perception receiving a shock. The weakest and most improbable part of Morson's story had embraced the crazy incidents immediately attendant upon that lump; yet now, in the cold, calm light of reason, it became the very strongest part of the story,—strongest because of its simplicity of fact. Given a head hit hard enough, and that head would bleed. Results, perfectly natural: Wound—doctor—stitches—pain—dizziness—intelligence on part of trained physician—sedative—relief—sleep! And there you are! It was all so clear now! Morson had told the

truth. There had been a robbery! Ormond and Tracy were unmitigated scoundrels! And her own father—No, that wouldn't do at all! Wait! There had been a robbery; but not of Mr. Morson. It was of somebody else! Ah! that was the way of it—at last! What a glorious thing was the power of reason! It was just like flying! She could see the whole simple thing, as in a glass. Mr. Brown was Mr. Brown; but what of that? He was merely following out his splendid principles of duty in tracking down Ormond, Tracy, and Gir—Why, oh why, should this stupid, idiotic logic persist in singling out her dear old innocent father, while everyone else, no matter how clearly culpable, was left scotfree? It was so unreasonable and mean!

Anyway, she didn't care! Marcus Girard had nothing to do with it whatever, and she defied the whole conspiring world to stand up and prove one single thing by silly, disgusting circumstantial evidence.

But one thing was certain. George C. Brown was solely and directly responsible for the whole business, and deserved to wear the unbecoming costume of a common seaman and scrub decks for the rest of his despicable life.

**A**T this juncture, Valda, having settled the question finally, turned her fair young back on the powers of reason and gazed dreamily out to sea. There was a hole in the moonlight, and she looked right through it, away into the far off land of Egypt. She had been there once herself; so the process was easy, and far more pleasant than racking one's brains with mad deductions. Egypt, too, was a restful sort of place, if one chose to take life easy; so she did not trouble herself to hunt up pyramids and camels and Bedouins and things. No, she was watching the building of an iron road.

Now on this iron road there were lots of people,—lazy, good for nothing people who had to be cursed and driven to their work. And a brown young man was doing it,—a very brown young man, but with a streak of white just under his hat brim. And beside him stood another man, a beautiful man, just exactly like the other one, only he was thinner and older, and his hair was gray. And the two men worked with their arms round each other's shoulders.

This was probably an unorthodox method of railroad construction; but then, you know, Egypt is a strange country, and maybe things are done differently down there.

Then there was a different scene, and it was in a house,—a very different sort of house, for there weren't any walls to it, only poles so that the breezes might come in, and there was matting on the floor, and queer looking water jugs hung up by strings. And there was a woman in that house,—a foreign woman, because she wore bangles which clinked when her brown hands wandered feverishly,—and the elder of the men was rather nice to her. The younger man was there too. He walked softly up and down, up and down, and carried a little brown baby in his arms. It was a funny little baby, so foreign and cute, with deliciously comic little features which became all wrinkly when it howled. And the young man jounced it up and down and sang silly, tender things to it. So Valda, somehow, grew intensely interested—in the baby. As for the two men, that was a matter of perfect indifference to her—perfect! And then a sheik or something came along and told them he was very much obliged to them, and that they must either accept a large fortune or have a lance run through their livers. And then—

**V**ALDA," said Aunt Mary. "Mr. Tracy, I regret to state, is a very vulgar person."

"Is he?" asked Valda absently, and Aunt Mary seemed surprised.

"Yes," she reiterated, "he is! Also, though I hesitate in criticizing any friend of my brother Marcus, this Tracy person cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be characterized by the ultracomprehensive name of gentleman."

"How do you mean?" asked Valda, dragging herself all the way back from Egypt for the sake of politeness; and Aunt Mary proceeded to explain.

"Because," averred the placid one, in placidly regretful tones, "he displays it in little things. Do you know, my dear, he actually tucks the corner of his napkin in his shirt collar! Think of it! Besides, he snorts when partaking of his food, while his manner of drinking after dinner coffee with the spoon in his cup—well, bless me!" The dignified champion of good breeding paused for an adequate expression of disapproval, and resumed:

"I suspected this lack of cultivation on first observing the character of his neckwear, and proved it later by a few of his conversational remarks. For example, while discussing literature with Mr. Ormond, I asked at random if he was familiar with Keats. Mr. Ormond made quite an appropriate quotation which proved his taste; but that

Tracy person spoke up with an affirmation that, to me, I confess, is utterly incomprehensible."

"What did he say?" asked Polly. "I heard it at the time; but—but I wasn't listening."

"He said," replied Aunt Mary, while a puzzled expression ridged her placid brow,—he said, 'No, ma'am, we don't know Keats personally, as you might say, but we saw him once in a six-round go with Patsy McCue of Brooklyn.'"

Valda wanted to laugh. She wanted to do so very much indeed; yet, being more refined than the Tracy person, she choked and said nothing. Aunt Mary went on, as placidly as before:

"I have been wondering ever since what the creature possibly could mean; and Mr. Ormond also was astonished, if not mortified; for I distinctly detected him in the act of kicking Mr. Tracy beneath the table on one of his limbs."

Valda ate a chocolate from a box that lay in her lap, but offered no solution of the problem; then, while Polly and Aunt Mary discussed it in all its lights, she turned to the hole in the moonlight and hurried back to Egypt, without even checking her trunks.

**T**HIS time she hunted for the two men, brazenly, and found them in a rather odd place. It was a sort of hut place, on a river bank, and it was hot and close. One of the brown men lay in a bunk, though he wasn't brown any longer, but white, and very still, and the other man sat beside him and held his hand. It was in the night time too; but not the night time either, exactly, but very early in the morning, for the desert was gray, and a hot, red smudge was burning in the east. And smells came up from the river and made one long to run away; but the brown man stayed and held his father's hand. It was a frightfully hot spell,—horrible!—and there was no wind, no ice, and another red day was coming fast. Then the brown man stooped and kissed the other gently on the mouth; and Valda knew—although she couldn't, couldn't, look—that a man was dead. But the brown one sat there,—sat till the morning came,—and his face was pale and drawn and grim. And so—

**V**ALDA," said Miss Polly with startling suddenness, "did you notice how his hair curls up over his left ear?"

"Who?" asked Valda sharply, rather impolitely; and Polly answered with a pardonable dash of sarcastic scorn:

"Why, Captain Joe, of course! Whom did you think I meant?"

Now, whatever were really Valda's thoughts concerning the owner of the ear and hair, her reply was quite as remarkable as the Tracy person's comment on the poet Keats. Verbally, it was nothing. Dramatically, it was much. She sprang from her seat, cast the box of chocolates to an unappreciative sea, went hurriedly to her state room, and banged the door. (Next morning the carpenter came up and mended it.)

"Goodness!" exclaimed Aunt Mary. "Goodness me! Polly, my dear, I verily believe that child is about to become a sufferer from *mal de mer*."

But Valda was not seasick. She was just plain heartsick,—which is worse, for there is nothing to take for it; but Valda tried. Unlike the knights of old who always buckled up for a doughty deed, she unbuckled. That is to say, she unhooked, unlaced, untied, undid; but mainly, like millions of her sister sufferers, Miss Valda Girard unpinched. Then, when lightly garbed and ready for the fray, she prepared to make her beautiful face unbeautiful by a long and lovely, delicious cry.

She did it for twenty-seven minutes, without the inconvenience of "sob restrictors"—meaning thereby, corsets. Then she sat up and observed results in a mirror. They were not flattering. She told herself that she was simply, absolutely hideous,—which, by the way, was the biggest fib she had told yet, and she knew it. Still, she had looked much better twenty-seven minutes before; so now she proceeded to obliterate the wreck of woe by the application of cold cream and nine other unctuous articles, rubbed on and in and over and off by patient, intricate art, the while she criticized creation, generally and adversely.

"And to think," she muttered, among other things, "of Polly Thurman being such a shameless, silly little fool as to notice whether a man's hair curls up over one ear or not!"

It was simply, perfectly, positively ridiculous! "And besides," she told her pathetic, grease streaked image in the glass, "his hair curls up just exactly the same over both ears!"

#### VIII. Aunt Mary's Mutiny

**N**EXT morning—for two distinct reasons—Miss Girard got up very early. In the first place, she had not slept a wink; in the second, she wanted to observe for herself how Mr. Morson-Brown looked in the degrading costume of a common seaman.

As for the cause of this condition, she had reasoned the whole thing out after she went to bed. She reasoned it out in nineteen entirely new ways; but invariably poor old Marcus Girard bobbed up and butted into trouble, so to speak. Therefore his daughter reasoned herself into a state of mental hysteria; then finally hit upon the sensible and correct solution.

On Wall Street, she had heard, there was one infallible method employed in the purchase or sale of



Miggs, the Ministerial Steward.