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SIEGEL COOPER & CO. CHICAGO

soned thought for his madness, addressed Spenser with easy complacency while Barth was unrolling them. "Why did you believe that I was doing a risky thing in stopping to assist Stampa?" he asked.

"I guess you know best," was the uncompromising answer.

"Yes, I think I do. Of course, I could not argue the matter then; but I fancy my climbing experience is far greater than yours, Mr. Spenser." His sheer impudence was admirable. He even smiled in the superior way of an expert lecturing a novice.

But Spenser did not smile. "Do you really wish to hear my views of your conduct?" he said.

"No, thanks. The discussion might prove interesting, but we can adjourn it to the coffee and cigar period after dinner."

His eyes fell under Spenser's contemptuous glance. Yet he carried himself bravely. Though the man he meant to kill, and another man who had read his inmost thought in time to prevent a tragedy, were looking at him fixedly, he turned away with a laugh on his lips.

"I am afraid, Miss Wynnton, that you will regard me in future as a broken reed where Alpine excursions are concerned," he said.

"You were mistaken—that is obvious," said Helen frankly. "But so was Barth. He agreed that the storm would be only a passing affair. Don't you think we are very deeply indebted to Mr. Spenser and Stampa for coming to our assistance?"

"I do, indeed. Stampa, one can reward in kind. This sort of thing used to be his business, I hear. As for Mr. Spenser, a smile from you will repay him tenfold."

"Herr Spenser," broke in Stampa, "you go on with the signorina and see that she does not slip. She is tired. Marcus Bower and I have matters to discuss."

The old man's unwonted harshness appealed to the girl as did the host of other queer happenings on that memorable day. Bower moved uneasily. A vindictive gleam shot from his eyes. Helen missed none of this. But she was fatigued, and her feet were cold and wet, while the sleet encountered on the upper glacier had almost soaked her to the skin. Nevertheless, she strove bravely to lighten the cloud that seemed to have settled on the men.

"That means a wordy warfare," she said gaily. "I pity you, Mr. Bower. You cannot wriggle out of your difficulty. The snow will soon be a foot deep in the valley. Goodness only knows what would have become of us up there in the hut!"

He bowed gracefully, with a hint of the foreign air she had noted once before. "I would have brought you safely out of greater perils," he said; "but every dog has his day, and this is Stampa's."

**EN ROUTE!** cried the guide impatiently. He loathed the sight of Bower standing there, smiling and courteous, in the presence of one whom he regarded as a Heaven sent friend and protectress. Spenser attributed his surlyness to its true cause. It supplied another bit of the mosaic he was slowly piecing together. Greatly as he preferred Helen's company, he was willing to sacrifice at least ten minutes of it could he but listen to the "discussion" between Stampa and Bower.

Therein he would have erred greatly. Helen was tired, and she admitted it. She did not decline his aid when the path was steep and slippery. In delightful snatches of talk they managed to say a good deal to each other, and Helen did not fail to make plain the exact circumstances under which she first caught sight of Spenser outside the hut. When they arrived at the carriage road, which begins at Lake Cavlocchio, they could walk side by side and chat freely. Here in the valley matters were normal. The snow did not place such a veil on all things. The windings of the road often brought them abreast of the four men in the rear. Bower was trudging along alone, holding his head down, and seemingly lost in thought.

Close behind him came Stampa and the Engadines. Karl, of course, was talking—the others might or might not be lending their ears to his interminable gossip.

**WE** are outstripping our companions. Don't you think we ought to wait for them?" said Helen once, when Bower chanced to look her way.

"No," said Spenser.

"You are exceedingly positive."

"I tried to be exceedingly negative."

"But why?"

"I rather fancy that they would jar on us."

"But Stampa's promised lecture appears to have ended."

"I think it never began. It is a safe bet that Mr. Bower and he have not exchanged a word since our last halt."

Helen laughed. "A genuine case of Greek meeting Greek," she said. "Stampa is an excellent guide, I am sure; but Mr. Bower does really know these mountains. I suppose anyone is likely to err when forecasting Alpine weather."

"That is nothing. If it was you or I, Stampa would dismiss the point with a grin. You heard how he chaffed Barth, yet trusted him with the lead? No. These two have an old feud to settle. You will hear more of it."

"A feud! Mr. Bower declared to me that Stampa was absolutely unknown to him."

"It isn't necessary to know a man before you hate him. I can give you a heap of historic examples. For instance, who has a good word to say for Ananias?"

The girl understood that he meant to parry her question with a quip. The cross purposes so much in evidence all day were baffling and mysterious to its close. "My own opinion is that both you and Stampa have taken an unreasonable dislike to Mr. Bower," she said determinedly. The words were out before she quite realized their import. She flushed a little.

Spenser was gazing down into the gorge of the Orlegna. The brawling torrent chimed with his own mood; but his set face gave no token of the storm within. He only said quietly, "How good it must be to have you as a friend!"

"I have no reason to feel other than friendly to Mr. Bower," she protested hotly. "It was the rarest good fortune for me that he came to Maloggia. I met him once in London, and a second time, by accident, during my journey to Switzerland. Yet widely known as he is in society, he was sufficiently large minded to disregard the sneers and innuendoes of some of those horrid women in the hotel. He has gone out of his way to show me every kindness. Why should I not repay it by speaking well of him?"

"I shall lay my head on the nearest tree stump, and you can smite me with your ax good and hard," said Spenser.

She laughed angrily. "I don't know what evil influence is possessing us!" she cried. "Everything is awry. Even the sun refuses to shine. Here am I storming at one to whom I owe my life—"

"No!" he broke in decisively. "Don't put it that way, because the whole credit of the relief expedition is due to Stampa. Say, Miss Wynnton, may I square my small services by asking a favor?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"Well, then, if it lies in your power, keep Stampa and Bower apart. In any event, don't intervene in their quarrel."

"So you are quite serious in your belief that there is a quarrel?"

The American saw again in his mind's eye the scene in the crevasse when Bower had raised his ax to strike. "Quite serious," he replied, and the gravity in his voice was so marked that Helen placed a contrite hand on his arm for an instant.

"Please, I am sorry if I was rude to you just now!" she said. "I have had a long day, and my nerves are worn to a fine edge. I used to flatter myself that I hadn't any nerves; but they have come to the surface here. It must be the thin air."

"Then it is a bad place for an American."

**AH,** that reminds me of something I had forgotten. I meant to ask you how you came to remain in Maloggia. Is that too inquisitive on my part? I can account for the presence of the other Americans in the hotel. They belong to the Paris colony, and are interested in tennis and golf. I have not seen you playing either game. In fact, you moon about in solitary grandeur like myself. And—oh, dear! what a string of questions!—is it true that you wanted to play baccarat with Mr. Bower for a thousand pounds?"

"It is true that I agreed to share a bank with Mr. Dunston, and the figure you mention was suggested; but I backed out of the proposition."

"Why?"

"Because your friend Mr. Hare thought he was responsible in a sense, having introduced me to Dunston; so I let up on the idea,—just to stop him from feeling bad about it."

"You really meant to play in the first instance?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was very wicked of you. Only the other day you were telling me how hard you had to work before you saved your first thousand pounds."

"From that point of view my conduct was idiotic. But I would like to carry the story a little further, Miss Wynnton. I was in a mood that night to oppose Mr. Bower for a much more valuable stake if the chance offered."

"It is rather shocking," said Helen.

"I suppose so. Of course, there are prizes in life that cannot be measured by monetary standards."

He was not looking at the Orlegna now, and the girl by his side well knew it. The great revelation that flooded her soul with light while crossing the Forno came back with renewed power. She did not pretend to herself that the words were devoid of hidden meaning, and her heart fluttered with subtle ecstasy. But she was proud and self-reliant,—so proud that she crushed the tumult in her breast, so self-reliant that she was able to give him a timid smile.

"That deals with the second head of the indictment, then," she said lightly. "Now for the first. Why did you select the Engadine for your holiday?"

"If I could tell you that, I should know something of the occult impulses that govern men's lives. One minute I was in London, meaning to go north. The next I was hurrying to buy a ticket for St. Moritz."

"But—" She meant to continue, "you arrived here the same day as I did." Somehow that did not sound the right thing to say. Her tongue tripped; but she forced herself to frame a sentence. "It is odd that you, like myself, should have hit upon an out of the way place like Maloggia. The difference is that I was sent here, whereas you came of your own free will."

"I guess you are right," said he, laughing as though she had uttered an exquisite joke. "Yes, that is just it. I can imagine two young English swallows, meeting in Algeria in the winter, twittering explanations of the same sort."

"I don't feel a bit like a swallow, and I am sure I can't twitter, and as for Algeria, a home of sunshine—well, just look at it!" She waved a hand at the darkening panorama of hills and pine woods, all etched in black lines and masses, where rocks and trees and houses broke the dead white of the snow mantle.

**THEY** happened to be crossing a bridge that spans the Orlegna before it takes its frantic plunge toward Italy. Bower, who had quickened his pace, took the gesture as a signal and sent an answering flourish. Helen stopped. He evidently wished to overtake them.

"More explanations," murmured Spenser.

"But he was mistaken. I was calling Nature

to witness that your smile was not justified."

"Tell you what," he said in a low voice, "if this storm has blown over by the morning, meet me after breakfast, and we will walk down the valley to Vicosoprano for luncheon. There is a diligence back in the afternoon. We can stroll there in three hours, and I shall have time to clear up this swallow proposition."

"That will be delightful, if the weather improves."

"It shall. I will compel it."

Bower was nearing them rapidly. A constrained silence fell between them. To end it, Helen cried.

"Well, are you feeling duly humbled, Mr. Bower?"

He did not seem to understand her meaning. Apparently, he might have forgotten that Stampa still lived. Then he roused his wits with an effort. "Not humbled, but elated," he said. "Have I not led you to feats of daring-do? Why, the Wraggs girls will be green with envy when they hear of your exploits." He swung round the corner to the bridge. After a smiling glance at Spenser's impassive face, he turned to Helen. "You have come out of the ordeal with flying colors," he said. "That flower you picked on the way up has not withered. Give it to me as a memento." The words were almost a challenge.

The girl hesitated. "No," she said; "I must find you some other souvenir."

"But I want that—"

"There is no 'if.' You forget that I took it from—the boulder marked by a cross."

"I am not superstitious."

"Nor am I. Nevertheless, I should not care to give you such a symbol."

She caught Bower and Spenser exchanging a strange look. These men shared some secret that they sedulously kept from her. Perhaps the American meant to enlighten her during their projected walk to Vicosoprano.

**STAMPA** and the others approached. Together they climbed the little hill leading to the summit of the pass. In the village they said goodnight to the two guides and Karl.

Helen promised laughingly to make the acquaintance of Johann Klucker's cat at the first opportunity. She was passing through a wicket that protects the footpath across the golf links, when she heard Stampa growl.

"*Morgen früh!*"

"*Ja!*" snapped Bower.

She smiled to herself at the thought that things were going to happen to-morrow. She was right. But she had not yet done with the present day. When she entered the cozy and brilliantly lighted veranda of the hotel, the first person her amazed eyes alighted upon was Millicent Jaques.

#### CHAPTER XI

##### Wherein Helen Lives a Crowded Hour

**MILLICENT!** You here!" Helen breathed the words in an undertone that carried more than a hint of dismay.

It was one of those rare crises in life when the brain receives a presage of evil without any prior foundation of fact. Helen had every reason to welcome her friend, none to be chilled by her unexpected presence. Among a small circle of intimate acquaintances she counted Millicent Jaques the best and truest. They had drifted apart, but that was owing to Helen's lack of means. She was not able, nor did she aspire, to mix in the society that hailed the actress as a bright particular star. Yet it meant much to a girl earning her daily bread in a headless city that she should possess one friend of her own age and sex who could speak of the golden years when they were children together,—the years when Helen's father was the prospective Governor of an Indian province as large as France; when the turf hunters now gathered in Maloggia would have fawned on her mother in hope of subsequent recognition.

Why, then, did Helen falter in her greeting? Who can tell? She herself did not know, unless it was that Millicent rose so leisurely from the table at which she was drinking a belated cup of tea and came toward her with a smile that had no warmth in it.

"So you have returned," she said, "and with both cavaliers!"

Helen was conscious of a queer humming noise in her head. She was incapable of calm thought. She realized now that the friend she had left in London was here in the guise of a bitter enemy. The veranda was full of people waiting for the post. The snow had banished them from links and tennis court. This August afternoon was dark as mid-December at the same hour. But the rendezvous was brilliantly lighted, and the reappearance of the climbers, whose chances of safety had been eagerly debated since the snowstorm began, drew all eyes. Some one had whispered too that the beautiful woman who arrived from St. Moritz half an hour earlier, who sat in her furs and sipped her tea after a long conversation with a clerk in the bureau, was none other than Millicent Jaques, the dancer, one of the leading lights of English musical comedy.

The peepers and whisperers little dreamed that she could be awaiting the party from the Forno. Now that her vigil was explained, for Bower had advanced with ready smile and outstretched hand, the Wraggs and Vavasours and de la Veres—all the little coterie of gossips and scandal-mongers—were drawn to the center of the hall like steel filings to a magnet.

**MILLICENT** ignored Bower. She was young enough and pretty enough to feel sure of her ability to deal with him subsequently. Her cornflower blue eyes glittered. They held something of the quiet menace of a crevasse. She had traveled far for revenge, and she did not mean to forego it. Helen, whose second impulse was to kiss him affectionately, with ex-