

The Mississippi Bubble

HOW THE STAR OF GOOD FORTUNE ROSE AND BET AND ROSE AGAIN, BY A WOMAN'S GRACE, FOR ONE JOHN LAW OF LAURISTON

A Novel by EMERSON HOUGH.

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CHAPTER XVI.

The Escape.

On a certain morning a messenger rode in hot haste up to the prison gate. He bore the liver of Montague. Turnkey after turnkey admitted him until finally he stood before the cell of John Law and delivered into his hand, as he had been commanded, the message that he bore. That afternoon this same messenger paused at the gate of the house of Knollys. Here, too, he was admitted promptly. He delivered into the hands of the Lady Catharine Knollys a certain message. This was of a Wednesday. On the following Friday it was decreed that the gallows should do its work. Two more days and there would be an end of "Jessamy" Law.

That Wednesday night a covered carriage came to the door of the house of Knollys. Its driver was a man of a certain fashion that he could hardly have been known. There stepped from the house the cloaked figure of a woman, who entered the carriage and herself pulled shut the door. The vehicle was soon lost among the darkling streets.

Catharine Knollys had heard the summons of her fate. She now sat trembling in the carriage.

When finally the vehicle stopped at the curb of the walk which led to the prison gate, a second carriage, as mysterious as the first, came down the street and stopped at a little distance, but close to the curb on the side nearest to the gate. The driver of the first carriage, evidently not liking the close neighborhood at the time, edged a trifle farther down the street. The second carriage then drew up into the spot just vacated, and the two, not easily distinguishable at the hour and in the dark and unlighted street, stood, each apparently watchful of the other, each seemingly without an occupant.

Lady Catharine had left her carriage before this interchange, and had passed the prison gate alone. Her steps faltered, it was hardly consciously that she finally found her way to the court, through the gate, down the evil-smelling corridors, past the sodden and leering constables, up to the last gate which separated her from him whom she had come to see.

She had been admitted without demur as far as this point, and even now her coming seemed not altogether a matter of surprise. The burly turnkey, a thelast door and ready to meet her. With loud commands, he drove out of the corridor the crowd of prison attendants. He approached Lady Catharine, hat in hand and bowing deeply.

"I presume you are the man whom I would see?" she said faintly, almost unequal to the task imposed upon her.

"Aye, madam, I doubt not, with my best worship for you."

"I was to come," said Lady Catharine. "I was to speak to you."

"Aye," replied the turnkey. "You were to come, and you were to speak. And now, what were you to say to me? Was there no given word?"

"There was such a word," she said. "You will understand. It is in the matter of Mr. Law."

"True," said the turnkey. "But I must have the countersign. There are heads to lose in this, yours and mine, if there be mistake."

Lady Catharine raised her head proudly. "It was for Faith," said she, "for Love, and for Hope! These were the words."

Saying which, as though she had called to her aid the last of her strength, she staggered back and half fell against the wall near the inner gate. The rude jailer sprang forward to steady her.

"Yes, yes," he whispered, eagerly. "It is all proper. These are the words. Pray you, have courage, lady."

There came into the corridor a murmur of voices, and there was audible also the sound of a man's foot approaching along the flag. Catharine Knollys looked through the bars of the gate which the turnkey was already beginning to throw open for her. She looked, and there appeared upon her vision a sight which caused her heart to stop, which confounded all her reason. From a side door there advanced John Law, magnificently clad, walking now as though he trod the floor of some great hall or banquet-room.

The woman waiting without the gate reached out her arms. She would have cried aloud. Then she fell back against the wall, where she had stood, and she must have sunk down to the floor.

Upon the arm of John Law, and looking up to him as she walked, there hung the clinging figure of a woman, half hidden by the flickering shadows of the torches. A deep cloak fell back from her shoulders. It might have been the light fabric of the alorigine. Upon the foot of Mary Conynge, twirling in and out as she walked, showed the crudely garrisoned little shoe of the Indian princess over seas, dainty, bizarre, singular, covering the smallest foot in all London town.

"By all the saints!" Law was saying, "you might be the very maker of this little slipper yourself. I have won the forty crowns, I swear! Perforce, I'll leave them to you in my will, and you shall mean my ruin! Get ye gone, all of ye, and give me time to think. Out with ye, all for I must lock the gate!"

John Law passed as one stupefied, the slender form of Mary Conynge still upon his arm. Hands of men hurried them.

"Quick! Into the carriage!" one cried. And now the sounds of feet and voices approaching along the corridor were heard. The jailer swiftly swung the heavy gate to and locked it. Catharine Knollys caught his last gesture, which bade her begone as fast as might be. Her feet were strangely heavy, in spite of her. She reached the curb in time to hear only the whir of wheels as a carriage sped away over the stones of the street. She stood alone, irresolute for half an instant as the crunch of wheels spun up to the curb again. A hand reached out and beckoned; involuntarily she obeyed the summons. Her wrist was seized, and she was half pulled through the door of the carriage.

"What?" cried a voice. "You, Lady Catharine! Why, how is this?"

It was the voice of Will Law, whom she knew, but who certainly was not the one who had brought her hither. The Lady Catharine accepted this last situation as one no longer able to reason. She sank down in the carriage seat shivering.

"Is all well?" asked Will Law, eagerly. "He is safe," said Lady Catharine. "What does this mean?"

"His carriage—there it is. It goes to the ship—to the Pool. He and Mary Conynge are only a few rods ahead of us. You may hear the wheels. Do you not hear them?" She spoke with leaden voice, and her head sank heavily.

"What! My brother—Mary Conynge—in that carriage? How can you mean? My God! Lady Catharine, tell me, what do you mean?"

"I do not know," said Catharine Knollys. All things now seemed very far away from her. Her head sank gently forward, and she heard not the words of the man who frantically sought to awaken her to speech.

From the prison to London Pool was a journey of some distance, and across the streets of London. Will Law called out to the driver with savagery in his voice. He shouted, cursed, implored, promised, and sometimes held one hand and the other heavy tresser of the head now sunk so humbly forward.

The mad ride ended at the quay on Thames side, where the shadows of the tall buildings lay dark and thick upon the water. Here, where tall and ghost-like in the gloom, shadowy, suggestive, bearing imprint and promise of far lands across the sea.

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The wherryman touched his cap and quickly made ready his boat. Will Law, understanding the import of this swift call of events, and not daring to leave Lady Catharine behind him at the carriage, made down the stairway, half carrying the drooping figure which now leaned weakly upon his shoulder.

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"Hold the horses, man!" he cried to the nearest by-stander, and sprang swiftly to the head of the stairs, where a letter or two stood, already taking out into the mist which overhung the water.

"Saw you aught of a man," he demanded, "young, coming out of the water, a tall one?"

"Was the Polly Greenway that you should have mentioned. Tell me, for God's sake, has any boat put out from this street?"

"Why, sir?" replied one of the wherry-men who stood near by, pipe in mouth and hand in pocket, "since you mention it, there was a boat started but this instant for midstream. They sought McMaster's brigantine, the Polly Perkins, that lies waiting for the tide. 'Twas, as you say, a young gentleman, and with him was a young woman. I misdoubt the lady was ill."

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"To the brigantine beyond!" cried Will Law to the wherryman who came up.

"We want Captain McMaisters of the Polly Perkins. For what sake, you say? There's the safest must be caught up within the moment, do you hear?"

The wherryman touched his cap and quickly made ready his boat. Will Law, understanding the import of this swift call of events, and not daring to leave Lady Catharine behind him at the carriage, made down the stairway, half carrying the drooping figure which now leaned weakly upon his shoulder.

"Pull, now, man! Pull as you never did before!" cried he, and the wherryman bent to his oars.

Yet great as was the haste of those who were going, the foggy Thames, it was more than equalled by that of one who crept upon the dock, even as the creak of the oars grew fainter in the distance. There came a sound of wheels upon the quay, and the sound of a driver lashing his horses. A carriage rolled up, and there sprang from the box a muffled figure which resolved itself into the very embodiment of haste.

"Hold the horses, man!" he cried to the nearest by-stander, and sprang swiftly to the head of the stairs, where a letter or two stood, already taking out into the mist which overhung the water.

"Saw you aught of a man," he demanded, "young, coming out of the water, a tall one?"

"Was the Polly Greenway that you should have mentioned. Tell me, for God's sake, has any boat put out from this street?"

"Why, sir?" replied one of the wherry-men who stood near by, pipe in mouth and hand in pocket, "since you mention it, there was a boat started but this instant for midstream. They sought McMaster's brigantine, the Polly Perkins, that lies waiting for the tide. 'Twas, as you say, a young gentleman, and with him was a young woman. I misdoubt the lady was ill."

"Get me a boat!" cried the new-comer. "A sovereign, five sovereigns, ten sovereigns, a hundred—but that ship must not weigh anchor until I board her, do you hear?"

"The ring of the imperative voice, and moreover the ring of good English coin, set all the dock astir. Straightway there came up another wherry with two lusty fellows, who laid her at the stair where stood the impatient stranger.

"Hurry, men!" he cried. "'Tis life and death—'tis more than life and death!"

And such fortune attended Sir Arthur Pembroke that forsooth he went over the side of the Polly Perkins, even as the gray dawn began to break over the narrow Thames, and even as the anchor-song of the crew struck up.

(To be continued to-morrow.)

To California.

Through Pullman Tourist sleepers to California via the Sunshine Route (Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul and Santa Fe lines) every Tuesday, commencing October 14th. Berth rate, \$5. Ticket rate, \$32.90 during October. Ticket office, 328 Nicollet avenue, or address W. B. Dixon, N. W. P. A., St. Paul.

"I do not know," said Catharine Knollys. All things now seemed very far away from her. Her head sank gently forward, and she heard not the words of the man who frantically sought to awaken her to speech.

From the prison to London Pool was a journey of some distance, and across the streets of London. Will Law called out to the driver with savagery in his voice. He shouted, cursed, implored, promised, and sometimes held one hand and the other heavy tresser of the head now sunk so humbly forward.

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