

THE RED CROSS GIRL

WHEN Spencer Flagg laid the foundation stone for the new million-dollar wing he was adding to the Flagg Home for Convalescents on the hills above Greenwich, the New York Republic sent Sam Ward to cover the story, and with him Redding to take photographs. It was a crisp, beautiful day in October, full of sunshine and the joy of living, and from the great lawn in front of the Home you could see half over Connecticut and across the waters of the sound to Oyster Bay.

Upon Sam Ward, however, the beauties of nature were wasted. When the night previous, he had been given the assignment he had studied, and he was still sulking. Only a year before he had graduated into New York from a small up-state college and a small up-state newspaper, but already he was a "star" man, and Hewitt, the city editor, humored him.

"When I was a reporter," declared the city editor, "I used to be glad to get a day in the country."

"Because you never lived in the country," returned Sam. "If you'd wasted twenty-six years in the backwoods, as I did, you'd know that every minute you spend outside of New York you're robbing yourself."

The city editor sighed. "How young you are!" he exclaimed.

Sam Ward sat on the outer edge of the crowd of overcasted females and overfed men, and with a sardonic smile, listened to Flagg telling his assembled friends and sycophants how glad he was they were there to see him give away a million dollars.

"Aren't you going to get his speech?" asked Redding, the staff photographer.

"Get his speech?" said Sam. "They have Flagg's speech over the radio, so see that you don't escape with less than three copies. I'm waiting to hear the ritual they always have, and then I'm going to sprint for the first train back to the center of civilization."

"There's going to be a fine lunch," said Redding, "and reporters are expected. I asked the policeman if we were, and he said we were."

Sam rose, shook his trousers into place, stuck his stick under his armpit and smoothed his yellow gloves. He was very thoughtful of his clothes and always treated them with courtesy.

"I can't have my share," he said. "I cannot forget that I am fifty-five minutes from Broadway. And even though I'm starving I would rather have a club sandwich in New York than a Thanksgiving turkey dinner in New Rochelle."

He nodded and then, as the ladies' strides started toward the iron gates, but he did not reach the iron gates, for on the instant trouble barred his way. Trouble came to him wearing the blue and white uniform of a nursing sister, with a red cross on her arm, with a white collar turned down, white cuffs turned back, and a tiny black velvet bonnet. A bow of white lace chucked her hair up and under the chin. She had hair like goldenrod and eyes as blue as flax, and a complexion of such health and cleanliness and sweetness as blooms only on trained nurses.

She was so lovely that Redding swung his hooded camera at her as swiftly as a cowboy could have covered her with his gun.

Other men, on being confronted by Sister Anne, which was the official title of the nursing sister, would either fall backward or swooned, or grazed at her with soulful, worshipful eyes; or were they that sort of beast, would have ogled her with impertinent approval. Sam, because he was a reporter, observed that the lady before him was the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen; but no one would have guessed that he observed at least of all Sister Anne. He stood in her way and lifted his hat, and even looked into the eyes of blue as impersonally and as calmly as though she were a stranger, although his heart was not beating so fast that it choked him.

"I am from the Republic," he said. "Everybody is busy here today, and I am not able to get what I need about the Home. It seems a pity," he added disappointedly, "because it's so well done that people ought to know about it." He frowned at the big hospital buildings. It was apparent that the ignorance of the public concerning their excellence greatly annoyed him.

When again he looked at Sister Anne she was regarding him in alarm-obviously she was upon the point of instant flight.

Some people like to place themselves in the hands of a reporter because they hope he will print their names in black letters; a few others—only reporters know how few—would as soon place themselves in the hands of a dentist.

"A reporter from the Republic," repeated Sam.

"But why ask me?" demanded Sister Anne.

"I am sorry," said Sam. "I mistook you for one of the nurses here; and, as you didn't seem busy, I thought you might give me some statistics about the Home—not really statistics, you know, but local color."

Sister Anne returned his look with one as steady as his own. Apparently she was watching him as he spoke, but she did not disbelieve it. Inwardly he was asking himself what could be the dark secret in the past of this young woman that at the mere approach of a reporter—of one of such a nice-looking reporter as himself—she should shake and shudder.

"That's what you really want to know," said Sister Anne, "and I'll try to help you; but," she added, looking at him as one who issues an ultimatum, "you must not say anything about me."

Sister Anne fell into step beside him and led him through the wards of the hospital. He found that it existed for and revolved entirely about one person. He found that a million dollars and some acres of buildings, containing sun-rooms and hundreds of splendid white beds, had been donated by Spencer Flagg only to provide a background for Sister Anne—only to exhibit the depth of her charity, the kindness of her heart, the unselfishness of her nature.

"Do you really scrub the floors?" he demanded. "I mean you yourself—down on your knees with a pail and water and scrubbing brush?"

Sister Anne raised her beautiful eyebrows and laughed at him. "I do that," she said. "When we are probationers; there was a newer way of scrubbing floors."

"And these are probationers?" demanded Sam. "Do you wait on them? Do you have to submit to their complaints and whinnings and ingratitude?" He glared at the unhappy convalescents, although by that glance he would annihilate them. "It's not fair," he exclaimed. "It's ridiculous. I'd like to choke them!"

"One must live," she said.

"They had passed through the last corridor, the last row of right white coats, and had come out into the sunshine. Below them stretched Connecticut, painted in autumn colors. Sister Anne seated herself upon the marble railing of the terrace and looked down upon the flashing waters of the Sound.

"If you do it because you must live, then it can easily be arranged; for there

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are other ways of earning a living." The girl looked at him quickly; but he was quite sincere—and again she smiled. "Now what would you suggest?" she asked.

Sam did not at once answer. He was calculating hastily how his salary would go toward supporting a wife. He was trying to remember which of the men in his office were married, and whether they were worth the salaries were smaller than his own.

"You're so long considering Sister Anne's position that his silence had become significant; and to cover his real thoughts he said hurriedly: "The typewriter, for instance. That pays very well. The hours are not difficult."

"And manuring?" suggested Sister Anne.

"Sam exclaimed in horror.

"You'll be cried roughly—"For you! Quite impossible!"

"Why for me?" asked the girl.

"You're a reporter," protested Sam—"You in a barber's shop washing men's fingers who are not fit to wash the streets you walk on? Good Lord! His vehemence was quite honest. The girl ceased smiling. Sam was still jabbing at the gravel walk, his profile toward her—and, unobserved, she could study his face. It was an attractive face—strong, clever, almost illegally good-looking. With his eyes full of concern, Sam turned to her abruptly.

"You're working too hard," he said, smiling happily—"I think you ought to have a change. You ought to take a day off! Do they ever give you a day off with him and let him show me New York. And he offered, as attractions, moving-picture shows and a drive on a Fifth Avenue bus, and feeding peanuts to the animals in the park. And if I insisted upon a chaperon I might bring one of the nurses. We're to meet at the soda water fountain in the Grand Central Station. He said, 'The day cannot begin too soon!'"

"Oh, Anita!" shrieked the chorus. "Lord Deptford, who as the newspapers had repeatedly informed the American public had coming men out of this business into the arms of what Kipling calls 'the illegitimate sister.'"

It seldom is granted to a man on the same day to give his whole heart to a girl and to be patted on the back by his managing editor; and it was this

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porters have been making me ridiculous for the last three years; now I have got back at one of them! And," she added, "that's all there is to that."

Later Helen Page, who came to her room to ask her about a horse she was to ride in the morning, found her ready for bed but standing by the open window looking out toward the great city to the south.

When she turned Miss Page saw something in her eyes that caused that young woman to shriek with amazement. "Anita!" she exclaimed. "You crying! What in Heaven's name can make you cry?"

It was not a kind speech, nor did Miss Flagg receive it kindly. She turned upon the tactless intruder.

"Suppose," cried Anita fiercely, "a man thought you were worth \$50 a month—honestly didn't know—honestly believed you were poor and worked for your living, and still said your smile was worth more than all of old man Flagg's millions, not knowing they were your millions. Suppose he didn't ask any money of you, but just to take care of you, to slave for you—only wanted to keep your pretty hands from working, and your pretty eyes from seeing sickness and pain. Suppose you met that man among this rotten lot, what would you do? What wouldn't you do?"

"Why, Anita?" exclaimed Miss Page.

"What would you do?" demanded Anita Flagg. "This is what you'd do: You'd go down on your knees to that man and say: 'Take me away! Take me away from them, and pity me, and be sorry for me, and love me—and love me—and love me!'"

"And why don't you?" cried Helen Page.

"Because I'm as rotten as the rest of them!" cried Anita Flagg. "Because I'm a coward. And that's why I'm crying. Haven't I the right to cry?"

At the exact moment Miss Flagg was proclaiming herself a moral coward, in the local room of the Republic Collis, the copy editor, was editing Sam's story not looking at the photograph, or drink-

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