

The STOLEN SINGER

by MARTHA BELLINGER

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SYNOPSIS.

Agatha Redmond, opera singer, starting for an auto drive in New York, finds a stranger seated in her chauffeur. Later she is accosted by a stranger who climbs into the auto and chloroforms her. James Hamilton of Lynn, Mass., witnesses the abduction of Agatha Redmond. Hamilton sees Agatha forcibly taken aboard a yacht. He secures a tug and when near the yacht drops overboard. Aleck Van Camp, friend of Hamilton, had an appointment with him. Not meeting Hamilton, he makes a call upon his friends, Madame and Miss Melanie Revolver. He proposes to the latter and is refused. The three arrange a coast trip on Van Camp's yacht, the Sea Gull. Hamilton wakes up on board the Joanne D'Arc. He meets a man who introduces himself as Monsieur Chatelard, who is Agatha's abductor. They fight, but are interrupted by the sinking of the vessel. Jimmy and Agatha are abandoned by the crew, and swim for hours and finally reach shore in a thoroughly exhausted condition. He is covering slightly, the pair find Hand, the chauffeur who assisted in Agatha's abduction. He agrees to help them. Jim is delirious and on the verge of death. Hand goes for help. He returns with Dr. Thayer, who revives Jim, and the party is conveyed to Charleston, where Agatha's property is located. Van Camp and his party, in the Sea Gull, reach Charleston and get tidings of the wreck of the Joanne D'Arc. Aleck finds Jim on the verge of death and revives him. Dr. Thayer declares his sister, Mrs. Stoddard, is the only one who can save Jim. She is a woman of strong religious convictions, and dislikes Agatha on account of her profession. She refuses to nurse Jim. Agatha pleads with her, and she consents to take the case. Hand explains how he escaped from the wreck, though he will say nothing concerning the abductor, Lizzie. Agatha's maid, arrives from New York.

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

"That is true, Lizzie; it was irregular, and certainly very inconvenient. And it is serious enough, so far as breaking my engagements is concerned. But the circumstances were very unusual and—pressing. Some one else gave the message at the hotel, and, as you know, I had no time even to get a match."

"That's what I said when the reporters came—that you were so worried over your sick relative that you did not wait for anything."

Agatha groaned. "Did—the papers have much to say about my leaving town?"

"They had columns, Miss Redmond, and some of them had your picture on the front page with an announcement of your elopement. But Mr. Straker contradicted that; he told them he had heard from you, and that you were at the bedside of a dying relative. Besides that, Miss Redmond, the difficulty in getting up an elopement story was the lack of a probable man. Your manager and your accompanist were both found and interviewed, and there wasn't anybody else in New York except me who knew you. Your discretion, Miss Redmond, has always been remarkable."

Agatha was suddenly tired of Lizzie. "Very well, Lizzie, that will do. You may go and get your own things unpacked. We shan't return to New York for several days yet."

"You've heard from Mr. Straker, of course, Miss Redmond?"

"No, but I have written to him, explaining everything. Why?"

"Oh, nothing; only when I sent him word that I had heard from you, he said at first that he was coming here with me. Some business prevented him, but he must have telegraphed."

"Maybe he has; but it takes some time, evidently, for a hidden person to be discovered in Hion."

As soon as the words were off her lips, Agatha realized that she had made a slip. One has to look sharp when talking to a sophisticated maid.

"But were you hiding, Miss Redmond?" Lizzie artlessly inquired.

"Oh, no, Lizzie; don't be silly. The telegram probably went wrong; telegrams often do."

"Not when Mr. Straker sends them," proffered Lizzie. "But if his telegrams have gone wrong, you may count on his coming down here himself. He is much worried over the rehearsals, which begin early in the month, he said. And he got the full directions you sent me for coming here; he would have them."

Agatha knew her manager's pertinacity when once on the track of an object. Moreover, the humor of the situation passed from her mind, leaving only a vivid impression of the trouble and worry which were sure to follow such a serious breaking up of well established plans. She was rarely capricious, even under vexation, but she yielded to a caprice at this moment, and one—moreover, that was very unjust toward her much-tried manager. The thought of that man bustling in upon her in the home that had been the fastidious Hercules Thayer's, in the midst of her anxiety

and sorrow over James Hamilton, was intolerable.

"If Mr. Straker should by any chance follow me here, you must tell him that I can not see him," she said, and departed, leaving Lizzie wrapped in righteous indignation.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed, after her mistress had disappeared. "Can't see him, after coming all this way! And into a country like this, too, where there's only one bath-tub, and you fill that from a pump in the yard!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A Fighting Chance.

The dining-room of the old red house was cool, and fragrant from the blossoms of heliotrope bed below its window. The twilight, which is long in eastern Maine, shed a soft glow over the old mahogany and silver, and an equally soft and becoming radiance over the two women seated at the table. After a sonorous blessing, uttered by Mrs. Stoddard in tones full of unctious, she and Agatha ate supper in a sympathetic silence. It was a meal upon which Sallie Kingsbury expended her best powers as cook, with no mean results; but nobody took much notice of it, after all. Mrs. Stoddard poured her tea into her saucer, drinking and eating absent-mindedly. Her face lighted with something very like a smile whenever she caught Agatha's eyes, but to her talk was not necessary. Sallie hovered around the door, even though Lizzie had condescended to put on a white apron and serve. But Agatha sent the city maid away, bidding her wait on the people in the sick-room instead.

Mr. Hand had been left with the patient and had acquiesced in the plan to stay on duty until midnight, when Mrs. Stoddard was to be called. Agatha had spent an hour with James, helping Mrs. Stoddard or watching the patient while the nurse made many necessary trips to the kitchen. The sight of James' woe-filled plight drove every thought from her mind. Engagements and managers lost their reality, and became shadow memories beside the vividness of his desperate need. He had no knowledge of her, or of any efforts to secure his comfort. He talked incessantly, sometimes in a soft, unintelligible murmur, sometimes in loud and emphatic tones. His eyes were brilliant but wandering, his movements were abrupt or violent, heedless or feeble, as the moment decreed. He talked about the dingy, nasty fo'c's'le, the absurdity of his not being able to get around, the fine outfit of the Sea Gull, the chill of the water. He sometimes swore softly, almost apologetically, and he uttered most unchristian sentiments toward some person whom he described as wearing extremely neat and dandified clothes.

After the first five minutes Agatha paid no heed to his words, and could bear to stay in the room only when she was able to do something to soothe or comfort him. She was not wholly unfamiliar with illness and the trouble that comes in its train, but the sight of James, with his unrecognized eyes and his wits astray, a superb engine gone wild, brought a sharp and hitherto unknown pain to her throat. She stood over his bed, holding his hands when he would reach frenziedly into the air after some object of his feverish desire; she coaxed him back to his pillow when he fancied he must run to catch something that was escaping him. It took nerve and strength to care for him; unceasing vigilance and ingenuity were required in circumventing his erratic movements.

And through it all there was something about his clean, honest mind and person that stirred only affectionate pity. He was a child, taking a child's liberties. Mrs. Stoddard brooded over him already, as a mother over her dearest son; Mr. Hand had turned gentle as a woman and gave the service of love, not of the eye. His skill in managing almost rivaled Mrs. Stoddard's. James accepted Hand's ministrations as a matter of course, became more docile under his treatment, and watched for him when he disappeared. Indeed, the whole household was taxed for James; and Agatha, deeply distressed as she was, throbbled with gratitude that she could help care for him, if only for an hour.

Thus it was that the two women, eating their supper and looking out over Hercules Thayer's pleasant garden, were silent. Mrs. Stoddard was thinking about the duties of the night, Agatha was swallowed up in the miseries of the last hour. Mrs. Stoddard was the first to rise. She was tipping off on her fingers a number of items which Agatha did not catch, saying "Him!" and "Yes!" to herself. Despite her deep anxiety, Mrs. Stoddard was in her element. She had nothing less than genius in nursing. She was cheerful, quick in emergencies, steady under the excitement of the sick-room, and faithful in small, as well as large, matters. Moreover, she excelled most doctors in her ability to interpret changes and symptoms, and in her ingenuity in dealing with them. Her two days with James had given her an understanding of the case, and she was ready with new devices for his relief.

Agatha finished her tea and joined Mrs. Stoddard as she stood looking out into the twilight, seeing things not visible to the outward eye.

"Yes, that's it," she ended abruptly, thinking aloud; then including Agatha without any change of tone, she went on: "I think we'd better change our plans a little. I'm going up-stairs now to stay while your Mr. Hand goes over to the house for me. There are several things I want from home."

Agatha had no conception of having an opinion that was contrary to Mrs. Stoddard's, so completely was she won by her tower-like strength.

"You know, Mrs. Stoddard," she said earnestly, "that I want to be told at once, if—there is any change."

"I know, child," the older woman replied, with a faraway look. "We are in the Lord's hands. He taketh the young in their night, and he healeth them that are aigh unto death. We can only wait his will."

Agatha was the product of a different age and a different system of thought. But she was still young, and the pressure of the hour revived in her some ghost of her Puritan ancestry, longing to become a reality in her heart again, if only for this dire emergency. She turned, eager but painfully embarrassed, to Mrs. Stoddard, detaining her by a touch on her arm.

"But you said, Mrs. Stoddard," she implored, "that the prayer of faith shall heal the sick. And I have been praying, too; I have tried to summon my faith. Do you believe that it counts—for good?"

Mrs. Stoddard's rapt gaze blessed Agatha. Her faith and courage were of the type that rise according to need. She drew nearer to her sanctuary, to the fountain of her faith, as her earthly peril waxed. Her voice rang with confidence as she almost chanted: "No striving toward God is ever lost, dear child. He is with us in our sorrow, even as in our joy." Her strong hand closed over Agatha's for a moment, and then her steady, slow steps sounded on the stairs.

Agatha went into the parlor, whose windows opened upon the piazza, and from there wandered down the low steps to the lawn. It was growing dark, a still, comfortable evening. Over the lawn lay the indescribable freshness of a region surrounded by many trees and acres of grass. Presently the old hound, Danny, came slowly from his kennel in the backyard, and paced the grass beside Agatha, looking up often with melancholy eyes into her face. Here was a living relic of her mother's dead friend, carrying in his countenance his sorrow for his departed master. Agatha longed to comfort him a little, convey to him the thought that she would love him and try to understand his nature, now that his rightful master was gone. She talked softly to him, calling him to her but not touching him. Back and forth they paced, the old dog following closer and closer to Agatha's heels.

Back of the house was a path leading diagonally across to the wall which separated Parson Thayer's place from the meeting-house. The dog seemed intent on following this path. Agatha humored him, climbed the low stile and entered the churchyard. As the hound leaped the stile after her, he wagged his tail and appeared happy. Agatha remembered that Sallie had told her, on the day of her arrival, of the dog and how he was accustomed to walk every evening with his master. Doubtless they sometimes walked here, among the silent company assembled in the churchyard; and the minister's silent friend was now having the peculiar satisfaction of doing again what he had once done with his master. Thus the little acre of the dead had its claim on life, and its happiness for throbbing hearts.

Agatha called the old dog to her again. This time he came near, rubbed hard against her dress, and when she sat down on a flat tombstone, laid his head comfortably in her lap, wagging his tail in satisfaction.

Danny was a companion who did not obstruct, thought, but encouraged it; and as Agatha sat resting on the stone with Danny close by, in that quiet ray full of the noiseless ghosts of the past, her thought went back to James. His unnatural eyes and restless spirit haunted her. She thought of that other night on the water, full of heart-breaking struggle as it was, as a happy night compared to the one

which was yet to come. She realized their foolish talk while they were on the beach, and smiled sadly over it. Her courage was at the ebb. She felt that the buoyancy of spirit that had sustained them both during the night of struggle could never revisit the wasted and disorganized body lying in Parson Thayer's house—her house. A certain practical sense that was strong in her rose and questioned whether she had done everything that could be done for his welfare. She thought so. Had she not even prayed, with all her concentration of mind and will? She heard again Susan Stoddard's deep voice: "No striving toward God is ever lost!" In spite of her unfaith, a sense of rest in a power larger than herself came upon her unawares. Danny, who had wandered away, came back and sat down heavily on the edge of her skirt, close to her. "Good Danny!" she praised, petting him to his heart's content.

It was thus that Aleck Van Camp found them, as he came over the stile from the house. His tones were slow and more precise than ever, but his face was drawn and marked with anxiety. He had a careful thought for Agatha, even in the face of his greater trouble.

"You have chosen a bad hour to wander about, Miss Redmond. The evening dew is heavy."

"Yes, I know; Danny and I were just going home. Have you been into the house?"

"Yes, I left Doctor Thayer there in consultation with the other physician that came today. They sent me off. Old Jim—well, you know as well as I do. With your permission, I'm going to stay the night. I'll bunk in the hall, or anywhere. Don't think of a bed for me; I don't want one."

"I'm glad you'll stay. It seems, somehow, as if every one helps; that is, every one who cares for him."

"Doctor Thayer thinks there will be a change tonight, though it is difficult to tell. Jim's family have my telegram by this time, and they will get my letter tomorrow, probably. Anyway, I shall wait until morning before I send another message."

The tension of their thoughts was too sharp; they turned for relief to the scene before them, stopping at the stile to look back at the steeped white church, standing under its spreading balm-of-Gilead tree.

"It seems strange," said Agatha, "to think that I sat out there under that big tree as a little girl. Everything is so different now."

"Hion, then, was once your home?"

"No, never my home, though it was once my mother's home. I used to visit here occasionally, years and years ago."

Aleck produced his quizzical grin. "A gallant person would protest that that is incredible."

"I wasn't angling for gallantry," Agatha replied wearily. "I am twenty-six, and I haven't been here certainly since I was eight years old. Eighteen years are a good many."

"To you, yes," acquiesced Aleck. "Which reminds me, by contrast, of the hermit; he was so incredibly old. It was he who unwittingly put me on Jim's trail. He said that the owner or proprietor of the Joanne D'Arc was a double-dog-dare on his island."

"Monsieur Chatelard?" cried Agatha. "I don't know his name."

"If it was Monsieur Chatelard," Agatha paused, looking earnestly at Aleck, "if it was he, it is the man who tricked me into his motor-car in New York, drugged me and carried me aboard his yacht while I was unconscious."

Aleck turned a sharp, though not unsympathetic, gaze upon Agatha. "I have told no one but Doctor Thayer, and he did not believe me. But it is quite true; the wreck saved me, probably, from something worse, though I don't know what."

If there had been skepticism on Aleck's face for an instant it had disappeared. Instead, there was deep concern, as he considered the case.

"Had you ever seen the man Chatelard before?"

"Never to my knowledge."

"Did he visit you on board the yacht?"

"Only once. I was put into the charge of an old lady, a Frenchwoman, Madame Solie; evidently a trusted chaperon or nurse, or something like that. When I came to myself in a very luxurious cabin in the yacht, this old woman was talking to me in French—a strange melody that I could make nothing of. When I was better she questioned me about everything, saying 'Mon Dieu!' at every answer I made. Then she left and was gone a long time; and when she came back, that man was with her. I learned afterward that he was called Monsieur Chatelard. They both looked at me, arguing fiercely in such a furious French that I could not understand more than half they said. They looked as if they were appraising me, like an article for sale, but Madame Solie held out steadily, on some point, against Monsieur Chatelard, and finally it appeared that she converted him to her own point of view. He went away very angry, and I did not see him again, except at a distance, until the night of the wreck."

"Did you find out where they were going, or who was back of their scheme?"

"No, nothing; or very little. There was money involved. I could tell that. But no names were mentioned, nor any places that I can remember. You see, I was ill from the effects of the chloroform, and frightened, too, I think."

"I don't wonder," said Aleck, wrinkling his homely face. He remained silent while he searched, mentally, for a clue.

"I found out, through my maid, who arrived today, that some one of the kidnapping party had been clever enough to send a false message to the hotel, explaining my sudden departure."

"I see, I see," said Aleck, going over the story in his mind. And presently, "Where does Hand come in? And how did Jim happen to be aboard the Joanne D'Arc?"

"Hand was some sort of henchman to Monsieur Chatelard, I believe. And he told me that your cousin was picked up in New York harbor, swimming for life, it appeared. No one seemed to know any more."

Aleck stopped short, looked at Agatha, pursed his lips for a whistle and remained silent. They had arrived at the porch steps, and were tacitly waiting for the doctors to descend and give them, if possible, some encouragement for the coming night. But the story of the Joanne D'Arc had grown more complicated than Aleck had anticipated, and much was yet to be explained. Aleck was slow, as always, in thinking it through, but he figured it out, finally, to a certain point, and expressed himself thus: "That's the way with your steady fellows; they're all the bigger fools when they do jump."

"Pardon me, I didn't catch—"

"Oh, nothing," said Aleck, half-triably. "I only said Jim needed a poke, like that beller over in the next field."

Agatha understood the boyish irritation, cloaking the love of the man. "You may be able to get more information about your cousin from Mr. Hand," she said. "He would be likely to know as much as anybody."

"Well, however it happened, he's here now!"

"Though if it had not been for his fearful struggle for me he would not have been so ill," said Agatha miserably. Aleck, with one foot on the low step of the piazza, stopped and turned squarely toward her. His face was no less miserable than Agatha's, but behind his wretchedness and anxiety was some masculine reserve of power, and a longer view down the corridors of time. He held her eye with a look of great earnestness.

"I love old Jim, Miss Redmond. We've been boys and men together, and good fellows always. But don't think that I'd regret his struggle for you, as you call it, even if it should mean the worst. He couldn't have done otherwise, and I wouldn't have had him. And if it's to be a home run—why, then, Jim would like to get far better than to die of old age or liver complaint. It's all right, Miss Redmond."

Aleck's slow words came with a double meaning to Agatha. She heard, through them, echoes of James Hamilton's boyhood; she saw a picture of his straight and dauntless youth. She held out to Aleck a hand that trembled, but her face shone with gratitude.

Aleck took her hand respectfully, kindly, in his warm grasp. "Besides," he said simply, "we won't give up. He's got a fighting chance yet."

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Browning's Disappointment.
Robert Browning's great hopes for his son were not fulfilled. One of the poet's disappointments was the rejection of a statue by "Pen" sent to the academy in the '80s.

Though Pen Browning's statue was rejected, two or three pictures painted in Belgium, clever in a hard, realistic technique, but very far from beautiful, were hung at the academy. Browning was sensitively anxious about the reputation of these works. On one occasion, when he was showing his son's pictures on a studio Sunday, he said to a friend who mentally noted the saying with his rather strained modesty: "You see, people expect so much from him because he had a clever mother." One of the pictures, by the way, represented an exceedingly large pig. There was no kind of impression about it. It was a pig seen through no temperament at all.

Misfit Labels.
"Economizing sometimes produces ludicrous results," a woman said. "When we moved last October we used travelers' tags to label the kitchen supplies, and when we went traveling in May we tried to save money by using those same tags which, as luck would have it, happened to get fastened on wrong side up, and when we got down to the pier all our luggage was labeled 'Sugar,' 'Flour,' 'Prunes,' 'Bread,' and 'Roast Pork,' instead of Laura, Margaret, and Pauline Smith, and although we finally got straightened out, you really can not blame the crew for stily poking fun at us all the way over."

Deep Childish Reasoning.
Father to Margery, who has been a long time fetching the newspaper: "When you're asked to do anything, Margery, you should always run." Margery—"Yes, I will, daddy; except, of course, I can't when my legs ache." Father—"Rubbish; your legs never ache." Margery (indignantly)—"Hoo! what's the use of the word 'ache,' then?"—Punch.

Shaving Among the Ancients.
Shaving was practiced among the Egyptians early in the eighteenth century before Christ. The first mention of it in the Scriptures is in Genesis, where Joseph made a hasty toilet when called to go before the king and "shaved himself." Nearly a century later shaving his head is mentioned. Ezekiel (B. C. 595) alludes to the "barber's razor."

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Hub—"The doctor says if I keep working at this pace after money, I shall be a wreck at forty-five." Wife—"Never mind, dear. By that time we shall be able to afford it."

Bones Act as Barometer.
The merits of bones as an indicator of fair or foul weather have been vouched for by the captain of an Italian steamer carrying a cargo of bones from the South American port of Buenos Aires to New York. When the ship was sailing toward a storm, the skipper stated recently, the bones cracked and moaned, and when fair weather was ahead they were silent again.

Intermarriage in Brittany.
In accordance with the custom which has made the picturesque province of Brittany famous, 26 couples were married at once at Plougastel one recent morning. In the village there are only some eight or nine family names, and the village folk never marry outside of their community. Last year there were 42 marriages.

Different.
Jones—"James, I heard you using profanity to the horses this forenoon." Coachman—"No, sah; no, sah; I've never cursed of do horses, sah. I was talking to my wife, sah."

Is No Longer Put First.
Much Truth About Health in Article That Probably Is Meant to Be Humorous.
Health is a matter which was once very popular, but it has long since grown into disfavor. In these strenuous days the securing of health consumes altogether too much time. It cannot be acquired without detraction from business. Not only does it interfere with business, but with pleasure as well.
Health requires too much sleep, too much fresh air, too much food of a vulgar simplicity and too many clothes which are more comfortable than stylish. Health is like anything else. In order to have it one must give attention to securing it, but when the securing of money engrosses all of one's time, manifestly health must take a back seat. We still have traditions about health much like the traditions about the soul, but these take a secondary place. Doctors, like mis-

going, or who was back of their scheme?"

"No, nothing; or very little. There was money involved. I could tell that. But no names were mentioned, nor any places that I can remember. You see, I was ill from the effects of the chloroform, and frightened, too, I think."

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"No, nothing; or very little. There was money involved. I could tell that. But no names were mentioned, nor any places that I can remember. You see, I was ill from the effects of the chloroform, and frightened, too, I think."

"I don't wonder," said Aleck, wrinkling his homely face. He remained silent while he searched, mentally, for a clue.

"I found out, through my maid, who arrived today, that some one of the kidnapping party had been clever enough to send a false message to the hotel, explaining my sudden departure."

"I see, I see," said Aleck, going over the story in his mind. And presently, "Where does Hand come in? And how did Jim happen to be aboard the Joanne D'Arc?"

"Hand was some sort of henchman to Monsieur Chatelard, I believe. And he told me that your cousin was picked up in New York harbor, swimming for life, it appeared. No one seemed to know any more."