EQUAL PARTNERS

By HOWARD FIELDING

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CHAPTER I.

AN ITEM OF NEWS.

THE little newsboy had the face of an imp, and he must have come up through the floor, as an imp should by all the best traditions. Surely the creature could not have squirmed through that tangle of humanity between Brenda and the door of the car. Yet there he was, standing close against her knees and looking straight up into her face.

Often the eyes of children seem to read our hearts. It is because they are new in the world and are content with superficial views. Adults try to look in through our eyes, and they fail, and we note the failure; but children do not try, and we, seeing them satisfied, tremble for our inmost secrets.

Brenda shook her head to intimate that she had no wish to buy the news, but the boy did not move. He continued to hold his papers before her, gazing over them into her face meanwhile with an unwinking stare.

It was probable that if she bought a paper the boy would pass on, so Brenda laid a hand upon her purse. The hand remained there rigid, and for some slow seconds the ragged urchin and the smooth product of all the social refinements were like figures on a canvas, both for fixity of pose and for balance of contrasting expressions, the child still calmly staring, his utter ignorance counterfeiting wisdom, the woman tense and eager, her eyes searching and unsatisfied.

"I will take this paper," she said, speaking with considerable effort, and she gave the boy a coin.

Presently she stood upon the sidewalk of Broadway, gazing across at the ugly brick front of the opera house with a confused notion that it could give her important information, but was perversely refusing to do so.

She merely wished to know where she was, and the familiar scene impressed her as if she had not been there in a long time and had forgotten. Then her mind became clear. She paused in deep thought and at its end raised her hand as if to beckon to a cabman; but, changing her purpose, she stepped into a doorway and read once more the item in the paper that the little boy had thrust under her eyes.

At the first glance one who knew Brenda might have said that the story lay outside her world and could not interest her. However, it was what a journalist might call "good news," and therefore it was printed with the lines very far apart by way of emphasis, and it bore the marks of haste. Thus it ran:

Elsie Miller, an actress living at 148 West Thirty-eighth street, was stabbed by some person unknown in her room this afternoon.

It is a lodging house owned and occupied by Mrs. Alice Simmons. Miss Miller had lived in the rear room on the first floor for some months.

The crime was discovered by a servant, who entered the room and found Miss Miller unconscious on the floor. Dr. A. G. Blair of 160 West Thirty-eighth street was hastily summoned, and he pronounced the wound mortal. It is just below the collar bone, on the left side, extending sharply downward within the body and undoubtedly piercing the outer wall of the heart. That Miss Miller should have survived the wound longer than a few seconds is regarded as miraculous by Dr. Blair and other physicians, several of whom, including Ambulance Surgeon Carrington of St. Winifred's hospital, were at the house within a few minutes after the discovery of the crime.

The weapon was a hunting knife, having a long blade and a deer's foot handle. The blade is peculiar, being much thinner than that of the ordinary hunting knife. It was found on the floor beside the body. A servant says that she has seen the knife in Miss Miller's room within the last few days.

On a table in the room was a letter which may explain the whole affair. The police have it and refuse to divulge its contents, but it is known that the writer is Clarence M. Alden, a broker with an office on Broad street. He is the only son of the late St. Clair Alden, who practically disinherited him.

Miss Miller is a very beautiful girl, tall and of the brunette type. She is 20 years old. She played the part of Nannie in "The Honeybee," an unsuccessful comedy produced in this city two years ago. Since then her work has not been seen here.

Brenda walked down Broadway to Thirty-eighth street and turned westward. Immediately she perceived the motley crowd which the news of the crime had brought together, and she hesitated. Then, shutting her lips firmly together, she resumed her original purpose.

The house numbered 148 had a high stoop and a yard the size of a dinner table, in which the grass was green and well watered, though the neighboring yards were brown with the heat and drought of that remarkable month of June. The house itself had an air of neatness and the flavor of home, but its privacy had been invaded first by crime and then by all the train that follows it. The door stood ajar for prying eyes, and the two gigantic policemen lounging at the head of the steps seemed the chief intruders rather than the guardians of the place. Brenda, for all that was upon her mind, felt the desecration and shuddered at it.

The policemen, who had been leaning against the railings, stood erect and put their shoulders together as Brenda ascended the steps. They seemed to fill all the space and their heads to tower to the house top. But the thing must be gone through with now, and Brenda gathered all her force.

"I am a friend of Miss Miller," she said. "Please let me go in."

"Nobody can go in now," replied one of the men.

"Is she dead?"

Brenda was framing other questions in her mind, but this one uttered itself.

The policemen exchanged a glance. Then one of them replied with a single word, "No." At this moment there was a stir in the hall. Hearing it, the policemen began slowly to descend the steps. Brenda retreated before them, and not a word was spoken. She was pressed into the edge of the crowd at the foot of the stone stairs, and she remained there while a litter was brought out on which lay something perfectly still and covered from end to end with a white cloth. It was put into a great black vehicle. A brisk young man, wearing a blue cap, and a grave, elderly man with a long white beard climbed in after it, and then the somber equipage moved away by the power resident within it. And to Brenda the familiar spectacle of a self propelling carriage assumed the aspect of a miracle, and all things seemed to move or stand by virtue of a new force, silent and resistless.

"Could I go in?" she whispered to the policeman who had stationed himself beside her. "Can I speak with some one who knows?"

"Knows what?" he replied.

"Whether she will recover, whether she has spoken."

The man looked at her with a ponderous curiosity.

"You wait here," he said. "Give me your name, and I'll see what I can do?"

Miss Maclane was affected by a touch of caution.

"No one knows me here," she replied. "My name would mean nothing to them. But you may say that Miss Williams would like to speak with the physician who was called in—a Dr. Blair, I believe."

The policeman began to ascend the steps, but he paused at sight of two men who appeared above. One of them was of medium stature and very heavy, having the build of an ape, with preposterously long arms, which swung aimlessly when he moved, as if they were artificial. He wore the uniform of a police captain. The other was of a conventional type by comparison—

Her gaze was fixed upon the coarse, scarred face of the captain.

that is, he looked like a human being, and Brenda noticed little else about him. Her gaze was fixed upon the coarse, scarred face of the captain, brutally cynical and smiling without purpose, like an image hacked out of wood.

The policeman saluted his superior and addressed him in a low voice. Without waiting for him to finish the captain turned quickly to the man who had come out of the house with him and asked a question which Brenda did not hear. When this man looked at her, Brenda became aware that he was tall and thin and that he wore a loose gray suit.

"I don't know," said the man in gray thoughtfully. "I can't be sure."

The captain descended the steps and lifted his cap with the politeness of a trained animal.

"Miss Williams?" said he. "Yes, indeed. I understand that you are a friend of Miss Miller, the girl that got hurt, and that you'd like to talk to Dr. Blair. This gentleman is Dr. Blair. So perhaps we'd better all go into the house, where we can talk more convenient."

Brenda tried to pass him, but she immediately found herself between the captain and one of the policemen, by whom she was escorted into the house, the physician walking ahead. Thus they came to a small parlor, opening from the hall, to the right.

In the presence of Dr. Blair, whose manner was that of the world wherein she had moved, Brenda regained a part of her self possession. The simple elegance of the room, far beyond anything that she had expected, helped to put her at her ease, and she began to feel the sense of personal dominance to which she was accustomed.

"Dr. Blair," she said, "I really don't know why I should have come here. I am not a friend of Miss Miller. I am merely interested in her. Seeing the story of her terrible misfortune in a newspaper by the merest accident, I obeyed an unaccountable impulse and came to this house."

"An unaccountable impulse," said the captain in a perfectly meaningless voice, as if he had been an echo.

"I can tell you very little," replied Dr. Blair. "No one knows who committed the crime nor why it was done"—

"But will she die? Such a young girl, with so much to hope for, and they say she was very beautiful!"

"She was, poor child!" responded the physician. "And that fact may or may not have had something to do with her misfortune. As to her chance of recovery, I greatly fear—indeed, to be frank with you, I doubt whether she is living at this moment."

Brenda was as white as paper, and her hands were twined together.

"She has not spoken"— she began, and it was the captain who replied.

"Not a word," said he. "But we shan't need anything from her. We shall get to the bottom of this affair all right."

Brenda turned slowly toward him.

"The name of a gentleman," said she, "an acquaintance of mine, was mentioned in the newspaper account, a Mr. Alden. Of course it is impossible that he should have had any connection with this wretched crime, but perhaps he knew the young woman and"—

"Yes," responded the captain, "they were acquainted. And, by the way, perhaps you're familiar with the young gentleman's handwriting. We found a note on the letter head of his firm. Let me see, what did I do with it? Oh, here it is. Perhaps you'd like to glance it through."

He extended his hand, but Brenda did not take the sheet of paper which he offered.

"I could not read this," she said, with a slight shudder. "It was not meant for me."

A faint expression of surprise humanized the officer's face for a moment.

"That don't make any difference," he said. "It'll have to be published. Everybody 'll read it."

Brenda glanced at Dr. Blair, who bowed his head.

"In that case," she said, "though it seems an outrageous intrusion"—

"There's no help for it," rejoined the captain, with a grin, which he used in place of a frown. "We've got to find the person that done this deed, and we've got to make use of this note to do it."

Brenda took the paper and read these words:

"My Dearest Dear—All goes so well that I must send word to you at once. I can't wait till evening, when I may see you, and, indeed, dear love, there is some doubt whether I shall be able to quit work before midnight. At any rate, it bids fair to be so late that I should not dare scandalize Mrs. Simmons by calling upon you. So I write this and make bold to put a little money into it—five hundreds. Don't let them frighten you. I remember perfectly that you weren't to touch a penny, but I rely upon the letter that I wrote last evening to knock all your arguments into smithereens. I thought of a lot of points after leaving you, and I cited the best precedents. If a fellow is rich—as I am today, thank heaven—he may help his sweetheart to buy her trousseau. If you don't believe it, write to your mother, and while you're waiting for an answer buy the pretty clothes anyhow. Ah, my beloved"—

Brenda had come to the end of the first sheet. Her face, that had been so pale, was flushed, and her voice was not quite steady as she said:

"I can't read any more. It is dishonorable and unnecessary."

"Ah, my beloved," said the captain, taking the letter and reading the remainder aloud in a stumbling voice, with half an eye on Brenda all the time—

—"we shall be so happy, youth and love and money and the whole world before us—the summer in Norway, the fall upon the continent, the winter on whatever Mediterranean shore you like the best, and next June shall find us in Venice and our twelfth honeymoon in the sky. Think of this, sweetest of travelers, whose favorite book has always been the atlas. Think of it as you go shopping this afternoon with your pocket full of money. It is all settled; the chains are broken. We are to be married as soon as your mother can come east to behold the ceremony. And then away to see the world and the shrines of 20 centuries of lovers. My heart and my faith to you. CLARENCE."

In the captain's mouth these love words had the sound of blasphemies, and Brenda shrank back to the limit of the room with Dr. Blair, who seemed to be scarcely less affected by the desecration.

"The money wasn't found," said the officer after a brief, shrewd scrutiny of Brenda. "The note was on the table, but none of those hundred dollar bills that we read about. Come; I'll show you where we found it."

"I don't think I want to go in there," said Brenda faintly. "I am going to the hospital to see whether I can be of any help to her."

"You'll have to arrange that through the police," was the reply, "and it can't be done until I get some word from there. So I suggest that we take another look at the scene of the crime."

He stepped back from the door, and Brenda passed out of the room, intending to leave the house, but again she found herself between the captain and one of his men, and again she obeyed an unspoken order, following one of them while the other followed her.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG THE PICTURES.

ELSIE'S room opened straight from the hall, at the rear. There was a sort of vestibule, with a sliding, glass paneled door at the farther end, and this space was divided lengthwise by a curtain, behind which Brenda saw the gleam of a great white tub, an unusual luxury in cheap lodgings.

Beyond the vestibule was a room of good height and size, with a shallow alcove on the left, in which stood a pretty brass bedstead. Upon the right was an unused open fireplace beneath an old fashioned marble mantelshelf which was covered with a quaint and picturesque collection of souvenirs.

There were two tall windows in the southern wall. The lower sashes were hinged at the sides, opening inward, and one might step out upon a wooden balcony of the length of the room, which was the width of the house.

Some crude, familiar pictures hung upon the walls. Obviously they antedated Elsie's coming and expressed Mrs. Simmons' idea of home decoration. Elsie's contribution to the adornment of the scene consisted almost entirely of photographs of men and women. One might guess the calling of the tenant after a glance at the portraits, for nearly all of these people were obviously in "the profession." They appeared singly or in groups formed by fastening the photographs together with dainty bits of ribbon, so that half a dozen might be suspended in the fashion of a banner.

Whatever may be said of the artistic value of this decoration, it certainly brightened the room. It was impossible to be lonely with so much company and such vivacious people. Nine in ten of the women were smiling and many wore fancy dress. The men struggled to seem chivalrous and courtly, except the comedians, most of whom were in grotesque attire. Two photographs, larger than the average and well placed between the windows, represented young men in

"She must have been about here when it happened."

the dress of cavaliers with drawn swords in their hands. There they had stood, these friends of hers, thus armed, with their eyes upon her when the assassin had struck her down.

"From all I can learn," said the captain, "she must have been about here when it happened."

He took his place beside a couch that was between the windows and turned his face to the wall.

"The murderer," he continued, "was behind her. The murderer pulled her head back and stabbed almost straight down. The girl fell on the couch; here's the blood. And the murderer, convinced that she was dead, dropped the knife and fled."

He turned to Brenda with a questioning look. She was more calm than she had been; her mind was more alert. She had noticed his peculiar avoidance of a pronoun, and she asked him without emotion whether there was any doubt that the assailant was a man.

"We don't pretend to know anything about it," he replied, "but there are certain circumstances which lead us to suspect that it might have been a woman. A gentleman who was passing the house about the hour when this thing must have been done saw a woman coming out. Now, except for Miss Miller, the lodgers in this house are all men, and we can't get any trace of this woman. We don't know how or when she got into the house nor what she did here. It's sure that she didn't ring the bell nor make any more noise than she could help. Nobody let her in, so far as we can learn, and we've covered the ground pretty thoroughly."

"Perhaps she didn't come in at all," said Brenda. "She may only have ascended the steps and then, finding that this was not the house that she had supposed it to be"—

"Or changing her mind for any reason," the captain continued. "Quite right. I see your point. But the woman wore a heavy veil; she seemed to be somewhat excited, and she hurried away eastward— I think you said eastward, Dr. Blair?"

"Toward Broadway," responded the physician, with embarrassment.

"It's a pity you didn't notice her more particularly," said the captain. "I'd give a dollar or two for her description just now."

"You can't get it from me," replied Dr. Blair. "There was no reason why I should pay any particular attention to her. She was a well dressed, stylish looking young woman, and that's all I know about her."

Brenda looked at him steadily for some seconds.

"Dr. Blair," said she, "what did this officer ask you on the steps just before I came in?"

The doctor blushed and glanced uneasily at the captain.

"I asked him if he could pick that woman out of a crowd," said the captain, "and he told me that he didn't know; he couldn't be sure."

"I fancied that it might have been something of the sort," rejoined Brenda. "And now, Captain"—

She paused, and the officer supplied the name.

"Captain Neale, at your service," said he, with a bow.

"Thank you. And now, Captain Neale, I wish you would get the message from the hospital for which you are waiting as quickly as you can, for I am impatient to go there."

"I'm expecting it any minute," he replied. "Ah, perhaps this is it."

A tall young man of a German type of countenance, with wide blue eyes, entered the room and stood by the door, as if he had no errand, but had simply been impelled by a gentle, superior force. There was silence for half a minute. Then the captain advanced to the young man and led him by the arm into the vestibule.

"What are you here for, Elmendorf?" he demanded in a low voice. "Headquarters don't need to mix up in this case. I can look out for it."

"Orders," replied Elmendorf. "That's all I know. The chief wants a report."

"Well, he'll get one, won't he?" asked the captain. "Now, see here; don't take a step till I say so. I know what I'm about."

Elmendorf strolled into the room and sat down in a large chair, with a sigh. Then, perceiving that Brenda was standing, he rose hastily, very much to the young lady's surprise.

"By the way," said the captain, "while we're waiting I want to ask you about Mr. Alden. We've sent word to his office, but he isn't there. They don't know where he's gone. You knew him quite well, didn't you? I noticed how quick you recognized his handwriting."

"Yes," said Brenda, "I knew him quite well."

"And you knew Miss Miller?"

"I never saw her," replied Brenda after a moment's hesitation.

"Why, Miss Williams," exclaimed Neale, with a grotesque attempt to speak softly, "I thought you said you were a friend of hers!"

"I hardly knew what to say to the policemen at the door," replied Brenda calmly. "I was very anxious to get in. And let me add that I am at present very anxious to get out."

"Just one minute," said the captain. "You knew Mr. Alden. Now, did you happen to know of any young woman that he was particularly sweet on?"

"I have heard," replied Brenda slowly, "that he was at one time engaged to a girl who had a great deal of money and some social standing, but I understand that that has been broken off. It can have no possible bearing upon this crime, which was plainly the work of a thief."

"You're thinking of the money," said Neale, caressing his projecting chin with a great, square hand, "the money Alden is alleged to have put into the letter. It can't be found, and that's a fact."

"Is alleged to have put into the letter!" exclaimed Brenda. "Why, he says so himself."

"Yes," responded the captain, "that's what he says."

An interval of silence followed. Brenda was leaning forward, her right hand resting on the table, her eyes intent upon the officer's face. They were gray eyes ordinarily, and their expression spoke of the cultivated self restraint by which the natural emotions are held in check. On this occasion, however, they seemed to be of a dark blue and to emit a light which even Dr. Blair, who saw the lady in profile, did not fail to perceive.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN NEALE RESENTS AN IMPUTATION.

SOME one put a key into the lock of the front door, and the faint sound of it was distinctly audible in that room. The growling voice of a policeman in the hall said:

"Hold on! You can't go"—

And seemingly in the same instant a young man appeared upon the threshold of the room. He took two steps forward and then halted, the others facing him.

He was one of those men whose tremendous vital energy declares itself unmistakably. As he stood there, perfectly still, the power within him seemed to affect the air. It was as when one feels the tension of an engine that is at rest, but ready. When such a man advances, neither the ordinary obstacles nor even his own will can stop him.

"Brenda!" he said in a singularly restrained voice, very ill suited to his words. "Why in the name of heaven are you here?"

"If I know," she answered, "it was because I wanted to help her, because I couldn't have her die like this. I"—

"Where is she?"

"They have taken her to a hospital—St. Winifred's."

The young man snatched up his hat, which had fallen to the floor.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Neale. "You're Alden—Clarence M. Alden?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to talk to you. Wait! If you go down there, you can't get in nor find out anything; that's orders. You'll get more information here."

"Is she living?" demanded Alden.

"Yes," replied the captain. "If she dies, I shall know of it within five minutes, and that's quicker than you could learn of it anywhere else. Let me manage this. I'll take good care of you. I'll see that you get every word of news. Meanwhile let's get down to business. You sent that note to her?"

"I did."

"With $500 in it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At ten minutes after 2 I sent it by John Robinson, a clerk in my office."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know," answered Alden. "I didn't wait for him to come back. Now, answer my question. Who did this thing?"

Neale spread his hands abroad with a grotesque gesture intended to disclaim the possession of the information.

"We're all at sea," he said. "Somebody got into this room and stabbed the girl with this knife."

He suddenly lifted a newspaper that had lain on the table and disclosed the weapon beneath it. The long blade was open and visibly stained with blood. Brenda's hand had been within six inches of it, and at the sight she started back with such alarm that Dr. Blair stretched out his arm to support her. She did not fall, however, but stood rigid, staring at Alden.

The color rushed to his face. He put up his hand and pushed back the tangle of light brown hair that was lying moist upon his forehead.

"Recognize it?" said Neale, with his mirthless grin.

"It is mine," replied Alden in the same repressed and steady tone that he had used throughout this scene. "I gave it to her."

"When?"

"A few days ago," said Alden. "I don't exactly remember."

"Queer present," rejoined the captain, "for a girl."

"She was cutting some pictures out of the magazines," replied Alden. "I happened to have the knife in my pocket. She used it, and I didn't take it back."

The captain slowly nodded his head, as one who has reached the end of a topic and is preparing for the next.

"And now," said he, "how long have you known this young lady?"

He waved his hand toward Brenda.

"I have known Miss Maclane a long time," said Alden. "Why do you ask?"

"Miss Maclane, eh?" said the captain, elevating the strange tufts of parti colored hair that were his eyebrows. "I understood that her name was Williams."

"I have done an absurdly foolish thing," said Brenda, addressing Alden. "I was afraid my name would be published, and so I tried to deceive these people."

"Big mistake," rejoined Captain Neale, shaking his head solemnly. "This whole story will have to come out, and if the facts are known to the police at the start it will come out straight; otherwise there's no telling what the reporters will do with it."

"There is no reason whatever," said Alden, "why Miss Maclane should be brought into this affair."

"There isn't, eh?" said the captain. "Why is she here? Sympathy for a woman that she says she never saw? No; I guess we'll have to have something better."

"If you don't get it," said Alden, "what then?"

"I'll have to hold her as a witness."

"You mean that you will put me under arrest?" demanded Brenda, her face and even her lips absolutely colorless.

"I'll have to," said the captain.

"And suppose that I answer all your questions now?" she asked.

Neale struck his hand down upon the table.

"You can go home just as soon as you've done it," he declared, and at that moment a man in plain clothes, but with the unmistakable stamp of the police upon him, entered the room and saluted his superior.

"Excuse me for a minute," said Neale, and, accompanied by the man who had just appeared upon the scene, he stepped out into the hall.

Brenda turned to Dr. Blair, who was leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Dr. Blair," she whispered, "you will not say that it was I whom you saw leaving this house?"

"No," replied the physician slowly; "I will not."

"What does this mean?" demanded Alden.

Dr. Blair regarded Alden steadily for some seconds before he said with that careful measuring of words that doctors learn:

"I have informed the police that as I was passing this house, very near to the time when this deed was done, I saw a person—a woman—come out and walk away hurriedly toward Broadway."

"A woman!" repeated Alden, as if speaking without volition.

"She cannot be accounted for," continued the doctor. "No one knows who she is or why she was here or how she got into the house. As to the last point, however, I will say this: I had a room in this house for a few weeks while repairs were in progress at No. 160, where I live, and I then noticed that the spring lock on the front door did not always hold. If the lock has not been repaired, there may be an explanation of some mysterious points in this case."

If there had been an eye upon Detective Elmendorf at this moment, it would have noted that he was much interested, but no one was looking at him. He himself was observing Brenda closely.

Alden had begun to pace the floor, his hand upon his forehead.

"I can't stay here any longer," he said suddenly. "I must see Elsie. I must know— Jack! How came you here?"

The question was addressed to a young man who entered with Captain Neale. He was in his normal state, a rather handsome fellow, with [illegible] eyes that the Greeks admired (in men) and a broad forehead above them, but in this moment his face was distorted with excitement and striped with perspiration that trickled from his forehead. The total effect was somewhat grotesque, especially because the man was inclined to fatness and was a trifle conspicuous in the matter of attire.

"This is dreadful, dreadful!" he cried. "I can't believe it."

"You're Mr. Robinson, who carried the note to Miss Miller," said Neale. "That's why I sent a man to your house."

"Yes," said Robinson, turning to Alden. "I didn't go back to the office immediately. I went over to the place where I live. I was just going down town again when a policeman met me at the door."

"Did you know what was in that note?" asked Neale.

"I knew there was money," was the reply, "but I didn't know how much. It was sealed when Mr. Alden gave it to me. He said there was money in it. That was why I brought it instead of giving it to a messenger boy."

"What happened here?" the captain asked.

He took two steps forward and then halted.

"Nothing," answered Robinson. "I gave the note to Elsie"—

"To whom?" said the captain.

"To Miss Miller; that is what I said. I gave the note to Miss Miller, and she opened it by the window. I didn't see any money. I wasn't in the room ten seconds—merely long enough to ask if there was any answer, and she said no. Then I went away."

"Meet anybody?"

"The servant who let me in was passing through the hall as I went out."

"That's important," said the captain. "It fixes you all right. The servant stopped at Miss Miller's door, knocked, asked a question and got an answer. Then she went along down stairs."

"Fixes me!" gasped Robinson. "Is anybody crazy enough to think I did this?"

"No," said the captain. "You're out of it. And now, Mr. Alden, let me tell you that I've just had a report from the hospital. The girl is alive, and the doctors think she has a fair chance."

"What does she say?" exclaimed Robinson.

"She hasn't said anything yet," replied the captain. "And now let's get on with our little affairs here. I guess you can't help us any, Mr. Robinson, so if you'll just take a seat in the parlor"— He waited till the young man had passed out of the room. "Now, Miss Maclane, I'd like to know a little more about you if it's perfectly agreeable."

"I am the daughter of Duncan Maclane," said Brenda.

At the mention of this wealthy and widely known man Neale softly whistled.

"It ain't possible," he said, "that you are the young lady with a lot of money and a high social position that you mentioned awhile ago as being engaged to our friend here?"

"I am the woman," replied Brenda.

"And the engagement's been broken off? When?"

"Captain"— began Alden, but the officer raised his hand.

"A bargain's a bargain," he said. "I was to have the truth. When was the engagement broken off?"

"This afternoon," answered Brenda firmly. "I went down to Mr. Alden's office at half past 1. I had expected to see him last evening, but"—

"He didn't come?"

Brenda inclined her head.

"I went to his office," she said, "and in the conversation between us there I released him from his engagement."

"That must have been a hard blow for you, Mr. Alden," said the captain.

"What do you mean?" demanded Alden. "If you have the delicacy to appreciate my feeling"—

"I was thinking especially about your business," said Neale. "I'm told your firm is in the last ditch, and that your engagement to Duncan Maclane's daughter is about all that holds you up. That's what my man told me just now."

"He told you a lie," said Alden, but with the same monotonous tone, as if his utterance was mechanical and his mind upon another matter. "My affairs were never before so prosperous as they are today."

"That won't do," responded the captain. "I have positive proof"—

"You know nothing about it," said Alden. "I have other interests than those of my firm."

"What other interests?"

"I decline to answer."

"Where did you go when you left your office after sending that note?"

"I will not tell you."

"Why not?" queried the captain in his most persuasive tone. "Oh, perhaps you don't know these other gentlemen. They'll step into the hall or out on to the balcony, I've no doubt."

"It will make no difference" replied Alden.

"What you say will be confidential, of course."

"Captain Neale," said Alden, "this is a business secret that is worth a good deal of money. If I should tell it to any man, he could force payment for his silence."

"You don't mean to say that I'd do a thing like that?" demanded Neale.

"I have no wish to offend," said Alden, "but you want the truth, and you shall have it. Your reputation, like that of many another man high up in the department, is bad—as bad as it can be. Remembering that this business matter involves others than myself, I won't trust you with a hint of it. That is my last word on that subject."

Neale's face turned red and white in strange, irregular spots.

"Now hear a word from me," he said. "I've been looking you up. You are a ruined man. You were engaged to this girl, and it was all that saved you. But you couldn't be honest even with her. You made love to this Elsie Miller, and you neglected Miss Maclane, and she wouldn't stand for it. But by that time you were so involved with Miss Miller that you couldn't break away. So what did you do? Why, you wrote her a note telling a fairy story about a lot of money, knowing that the note would be found and would make the case look like robbery. You told her how busy you were, and five minutes afterward you quit work and came up town. You had a key to this house; you came here"—

"Do you mean to accuse me of this?"

The words came from between Alden's teeth, and he strode toward Neale, who put the table between them and drew his revolver.

"Wallace!" he called.

A policeman entered from the hall.

"That man is under arrest," said Neale. "Take him in."

"This is monstrous," said Alden, but he spoke coolly. "You shall answer for it."

"We'll talk about that later," rejoined the captain. "You go with that man."

Brenda crossed the room quickly and took Alden's hand.

"I will do everything that I can for you," she said, "and for her."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Stop It.

A neglected cough or cold may lead to serious bronchial or lung troubles. Don't take chances when Foley's Honey and Tar affords perfect secusity from serious effects of a cold. Denton & Ward.

The United States has a coast line of 5,715 miles to defend.

The prevention of consumption is entirely a question of commencing the proper treatment in time. Nothing is so well adapted to ward off fatal lung troubles as Foley's Honey and Tar.—Denton & Ward.

A light-house of bamboo has just been constructed in Japan. It is said to have a greater power of resisting waves than any other wood.

Pneumonia and LaGrippe

Coughs cured quickly by Foley's Honey and Tar. Refuse substitutes.—Denton & Ward.

Germany celebrated recently the thousandth anniversary of the sausage, which dates back to 897 A. D. The frankfurt sausage began to be made in 1500.

Fatal kidney and bladder troubles can always be prevented by the use of Foley's Kidney Cure. Denton & Ward.

A kind of paper is made from seaweed which is so transparent that it may be used instead of glass for windows.

A Life at Stake.

If you but knew the splendid merits of Foley's Honey and Tar you would never be without it. A dose or two will prevent an attack of pneumonia or la grippe. It may save your life. Denton & Ward.

At Folkstone, Eng., an undertaker rode a bicycle on the handlebar of which was strapped a coffin containing a child.

Children Poisoned.

Many children are poisoned and made nervous and weak, if not killed out right, by mothers giving them cough syrups containing opiates. Foley's Honey and Tar is a safe and certain remedy for coughs, croup and lung troubles, and is the only prominent cough medicine that contains no opiates or other poisons.—Denton & Ward.

Japanese economy is remarkable. Even the charcoal dust is saved and moulded into balls with chaff, for fuel.

In Bed Four Weeks With La Grippe.

We have received the following letter from Mr. Rey Kemp, of Angola, Ind. "I was in bed four weeks with la grippe and I tried many remedies and spent considerable for treatment with physicians, but I received no relief until I tried Foley's Honey and Tar. Two small bottles of this medicine cured me and I now use it exclusively in my family." Take no substitute. Denton & Ward.

The old fashioned dictionaries derive "luncheon" from "nuncheon" or "noonshun"—the refreshment taken at noon, when laborers withdraw from work to shun the sun.

The many friends of G. H. Hausan, Engineer L E & W R R, at present living in Lima, O, will be pleased to know of his recovery from threatened kidney disease. He writes, "I was cured by using Foley's Kidney Cure, which I recommend to all, especially trainmen who are usually similarly afflicted." Denton & Ward.

Improvement of Corn.

"Uncle Henry" Wallace, is devoting a good deal of space in his paper, Wallaces' Farmer to the improvement of Iowa Corn. He calls attention to the fact that while the Iowa Farmer has been improving his live stock for twenty years and more he has given very little attention to the great Iowa crop, corn. Among the many articles which have appeared in Wallace's Farmer on this subject has been a series by Prof. Shamel, of Illinois, the corn expert, and these are illustrated by a number of photographs showing different varieties of corn, perfect and imperfect ears, the most profitable to raise, etc. The average Iowa farmer thinks he knows as much about corn as anybody does but we miss our guess if he cannot learn a lot from these articles in Wallaces' Farmer.

In this connection we wish to say that Wallaces' Farmer is one of the best agricultural papers that comes to this office. It is handsomely printed on paper of fine quality, filled with attractive illustrations, and in addition to its regular features, its editorials by "Uncle Henry," its departments of Dairying, Horticulture, the Hog and Poultry, its Home Department, for the women; contains full reports of the leading fairs, live stock shows, and sales, agricultural meetings, etc. It is published weekly at Des Moines, Iowa at $1.00 a year, all subscriptions payable in advance and the paper stops when the time is out. We can send Wallaces' Farmer and the Democrat both one year for only 2.25 and you get one of our nice premiums. Apply at the Democrat office.

A Profitable Inyestment.

"I was troubled for about seven years with my stomach and in bed half my time," says E Demick, Somerville, Ind. "I spent about $1,000 and never could get anything to help me until I tried Kodol Dyspepsia Cure. I have taken a few bottles and am entirely well." You don't live by what you eat, but by what you digest and assimilate. If your stomach doesn't digest your food you are really starving. Kodol Dyspepsia Cure does the stomach's work by digesting the food. You don't have to diet. Eat all you want. Kodol Dyspepsia Cure cures all stomach troubles.—Smith Bros.

Vicksburg Veterans Visit

The Old Battle Grounds

AND THE

NEW ORLEANS MARDI GRAS

The surviving veterans of the Campaign and Siege of Vicksburg, and their friends, will rejoice to know that the Illinois Central Railroad Company will run a low rate excursion to the New Orleans Mardi Gras, with a two nights and a day stopover at Vicksburg, leaving Chicago at 6:10 p. m. Tuesday February 4th. Both Standard Pullman and Excursion Sleepers will be run from Chicago to New Orleans, and the price per double berth, whether occupied by one or two people will be $8 00 in the standard and $3.50 in the excursion sleepers.

Applications for berths should be made to the undersigned at Dubuque, accompanied by the price of same, on or before, January 28.

The railroad fare from Manchester to New Orleans and return will be $25.45, tickets good to return until February 15th, and they may be extended at New Orleans until February 28th.

This will be a great trip, and every veteran, every son and daughter of a veteran, and everybody else who wants a good time, should at once apply for their sleeping car accommodations from Chicago.

The price of berths as quoted above includes the two nights at Vicksburg, and this special excursion will arrive at New Orleans, Friday morning, February 7th, in ample time to secure rooms at nominal prices, and to take in the attractions in and about the city before the Carnival of fun and frolic that begins Monday morning, February 10th. Write the undersigned at once for a copy of "Historical Vicksburg," "Survivors of the Vicksburg Campaign," and the "Tourist Guide to New Orleans."

J. F. MERRY,
Asst Genl Pass Agent,
Dubuque, Iowa.

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Most all diseases are caused by poisonous secretions, which clog the wheels of NATURE.

The name and the symptoms may be different but the cause of disease can usually be traced to the imperfect action of the millions of pores of the human body. A bath in accordance with scientific requirements is the best preventative and remedy known. The methods employed by me are the most scientific ever invented or discovered for dispelling disease. Results tell the story. Give me a trial. This is the Conant system of baths. A competent lady attendant in charge of the ladies department.

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