

# A Narrow Escape.

By **MARTHA C. SANFORD.**

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Curtiss Rollins dashed breathlessly into the Central station just as the man behind the megaphone announced, "Incoming 3 o'clock up state express on track 14." He made his way nervously through the anxious crowd surging toward the gate and took up his position in the line behind the guard ropes.

Then, serene in the consciousness that he was, after all, on time, his mind lapsed into contemplation of the business problem from which he had wrenched himself but ten minutes before. The passengers, hurrying by from the train, made no individual impression upon him. He stood there as one waiting to be recognized and set in motion. Suddenly he was aware that he was being spoken to.

"You don't remember me, I'm afraid, Mr. Rollins."

His bewilderment as he looked at the girl was quite evident.

"I'm afraid I don't," he began stumbly. Then in a flash his face lighted up, and he grasped her hand cordially. "Yes, I do," he retracted. "I remember you perfectly, but I can't recall your name."

"Eloise Kimball," the girl informed him. "I'm Margaret's roommate."

"To be sure," he assented genially, though in reality the recollection of that distant day spent in a whirl and flutter of endlessly accumulative girls momentarily disunited him.

As he bent down quite as a matter of course to take up her suit case he remembered that this wasn't the girl he had come to meet after all.

"Great heavens," he exclaimed in dismay. "I'm afraid I've missed my sister! Did you happen to see her on the train, Miss Kimball?"

At this Eloise could hardly keep from laughing outright. The man was certainly living up to his reputation. "An irreclaimable freak" was Margaret's sisterly way of describing him.

"She isn't coming until the 10:30 train tonight," Eloise informed him.



"I'M MARGARET'S ROOMMATE."

"She asked me to tell you. That's why I was so very indecorous as to speak to you."

Rollins looked dumfounded.

"Got me up here for nothing," he asked in amazement. "Couldn't she have telegraphed? Really, Miss Kimball, I can't see what good four years at college have done Margaret if they haven't taught her to realize the relative importance of things. The idea of making me come way up here in the midst of business hours for nothing! I—"

Suddenly he stopped short. A pair of mischievous brown eyes were laughing at him.

"I mean, of course," he amended humbly, "that Margaret might have telegraphed and saved us both this trouble."

At this the laughter bubbled over.

"I fear we are a pretty thoughtless lot," she admitted demurely. "But we learn very easily. That's where our education benefits us perhaps. Now, don't let me keep you away from business another second. I feel very guilty."

This sympathetic little apology had its effect on Curtiss Rollins. He became all at once aware of the girl's extreme prettiness. It would be brutal to leave her in that big station alone and helpless.

"Hang business!" was his unexpected reply. "Do you have to cross the city, Miss Kimball?"

"Yes, I leave by boat from the East river side. But please don't bother about me, Mr. Rollins. I'm quite used to crossing the city alone, really."

"What time does your boat leave?" he inquired pertinently.

"At 6 o'clock."

"It's about 3:30 now," Rollins said, consulting his watch. "That will give us time for a little fun. What would you like to do most, Miss Kimball?"

"Have a college sundae and ride down the avenue on top of the bus," she announced unhesitatingly.

"But seriously," urged Rollins.

"That's serious," protested Eloise. "Have you outgrown such simple forms of amusement?"

"Not outgrown, just forgotten," he

assured her heartily. "I think it will be a jolly lark. Now for the college sundae. What is your favorite flavor?"

Oh, shades of solemn stocks and bonds! If Margaret could have seen them now! Eloise described a complete revolution on her rotary stool at the thought of it.

And the ride down on the bus, hats off, with the brisk breeze blowing through their hair and everywhere the exhilaration as of a holiday about them!

"I never had so much fun in my life!" Rollins exclaimed, with unaffected enthusiasm.

"It's because you're playing truant," Eloise assured him. "Aren't you having fun?" he asked her.

"Of course! I could squeal I'm so happy."

"But you aren't playing truant. What?"

"I'm just playing," interrupted Eloise quickly. "And that's more fun than anything else in the world."

Rollins was the first to break the little conscious silence that followed.

"I was awfully rude to you at the station, Miss Kimball. I hope you'll forget it. I don't know what you thought of me."

"Margaret had prepared me for the worst," she said.

"What had she told you?" he demanded. "It will probably do me good to hear."

Eloise let him have the merciless truth.

"And I suppose you agree with her?" he questioned, half in jest, half in earnest.

"Margaret doesn't half know how ir-reclaimable you are," Eloise answered without a perceptible flicker of mockery.

It was with a strangely new sensation that Curtiss Rollins stood watching a ship sail out to sea long after the flutter of a certain little handkerchief had become indistinguishable before he turned his face toward town again, which, he had decided, had grown suddenly dull and lonely. In the days that followed he was absorbed and preoccupied to a noticeable degree.

"Curtiss has grown freer than ever," wrote Margaret to Eloise in desperation. "I did hope the sight of such a refreshing creature as you, my dear, would wake him up, and I'm sure he did enjoy the afternoon he spent with you. In fact, after I first got home he spoke of you several times voluntarily, called you 'intelligent and sympathetic,' which is the very acme of admiration from Curtiss."

"On the strength of this before we left town I told him all about you and your family (tactfully, of course) and what a charming summer place Cliffville is, adroitly suggesting that he'd find it an ideal spot to spend his vacation. But all to no purpose, my dear Eloise. A telegram has just come from him saying he's been called away on an urgent matter and will be gone indefinitely."

"That means that when he gets back he'll plunge into business harder than ever, and all the romantic influence of the summer season will have spent itself in vain, so far as Curtiss is concerned."

This letter Eloise hugged ardently to her until the fellest moment should come when she could laugh over its contents with Curtiss.

"You see," she told him when the moment did come. "I suspected your motive from the very day of your arrival in Cliffville."

"Margaret is a most remarkable girl," Curtiss commented, glancing again at the letter. "She understands people. I have always said so."

"Especially 'irreclaimable freaks,'" Eloise reminded him roguishly.

Curtiss made a wry face, then laughed in spite of himself.

"What made you think me worth reclaiming, dearest?" he asked her tenderly.

"Three little words," she answered mysteriously.

Curtiss waited to hear them.

"An irreclaimable freak, but a dear—that's what Margaret always called you."

For a moment Curtiss' expression was as gloomy as the fate his imagination depicted.

"Just three little words!" he repeated solemnly. "What a narrow escape! Suppose Margaret had not said them?"

"Why, I should have discovered them myself," Eloise answered him.

"How wonderful!" exclaimed her lover, reverently clasping her to him, and Eloise let him think so.

### Leading to Crime.

"Some years ago in Hartford," said Mark Twain, "we all went to church one hot, sweltering night to hear the annual report of Mr. Hawley, a city missionary who went around finding people who needed help and didn't want to ask for it. He told of the life in cellars, where poverty resided; he gave instances of the heroism and devotion of the poor. When a man with millions gives, he said, we make a great deal of noise. It's a noise in the wrong place, for it's the widow's mite that counts. Well, Hawley worked me up to a great pitch. I could hardly wait for him to get through. I had \$600 in my pocket. I wanted to give that and borrow more to give. You could see greenbacks in every eye. But instead of passing the plate then he kept on talking and talking and talking, and as he talked it grew hotter and hotter and hotter, and we grew sleeper and sleeper and sleeper. My enthusiasm went down, down, down, down—\$100 at a clip—until finally, when the plate did come around, I stole 10 cents out of it. It all goes to show how a little thing like this can lead to crime."

That fish will soon be caught that nibbles at every bait.—Italian Proverb.

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