

# THE DIARY OF A SHOW GIRL

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## CHAPTER XIX—Continued

## II—The Crown and Miter

In something less than half an hour of this wild driving, Kirkwood roused out of his reverie sufficiently to become sensible that the speed was slackening. Incoherent snatches of sentences, fragments of words and phrases spoken by Brentwick and the mechanic, were flung back past his ears by the rushing wind. Shielding his eyes he could see dimly that the mechanic was tinkering (apparently) with the driving gear. Then, their pace continuing steadily to abate, he heard Brentwick fling at the man a sharp toned and querulously impatient question: "What was the trouble? His reply came in a single word, not distinguishable.

The girl sat up, opening her eyes, disengaging her arm.

Kirkwood bent forward and touched Brentwick on the shoulder; the latter turned to him a face lined with deep concern.

"Trouble," he announced superfluously. "I fear we have blundered."

"What is it?" asked Dorothy in a troubled voice.

"Petrol seems to be running low. Charles here" (he referred to the mechanic) "says the tank must be leaking. We'll go as best we can and try to find an inn. Fortunately, most of the fms nowadays keep supplies of petrol for just such emergencies."

"Are we—? Do you think—?"

"Oh, no; not a bit of danger of that," returned Brentwick hastily. "They'll not catch up with us this night."

That is a very inferior car they have—Charles says, at least; nothing to compare with this. If I'm not in error, there's the Crown and Miter just ahead; we'll make it, all our tanks, and be off again before they can make up half their loss."

Dorothy looked anxiously to Kirkwood, her lips forming an unuttered query: What did he think?

"Don't worry; we'll have no trouble," he assured her stoutly; "the chauffeur knows, undoubtedly."

None the less he was moved to stand up in the tonneau, conscious of the presence of the traveling bag, snug at his feet, as well as of the weight of Calendar's revolver in his pocket, while he stared back along the road.

There was nothing to be seen of their persecutors.

The car continued to crawl. Five minutes dragged out tediously. Gradually they drew abreast a tavern standing back a distance from the road, embowered in a grove of trees between whose ancient boles the taproom windows shone enticingly, aglow with comfortable light. A creaking sign board, much worn by weather and age, swinging from a roadside post, confirmed the accuracy of Brentwick's surmise, announcing that here stood the Crown and Miter, house of entertainment for man and beast.

Slightly the car rolled up before it and came to a dead and silent halt. Charles, the mechanic, jumping out, ran hastily up the path toward the inn. In the car Brentwick turned again, his eyes curiously bright in the starlight, his forehead quaintly furrowed, his voice apologetic.

"It may take a few minutes," he said undecidedly, plainly endeavoring to cover up his own dark doubts. "My dear," to the girl, "if I have brought trouble upon you in this wise, I shall never earn my own forgiveness."

Kirkwood stood up again, watchful, attentive to the sounds of the night; but the voice of the pursuing motor car was not of their company. "I hear nothing," he announced.

"You will forgive me—won't you, my dear?—for causing you these few moments of needless anxiety?" pleaded the old gentleman, his tone tremulous.

"As if you could be blamed!" protested the girl. "You mustn't think of it in that way. Fancy, what we should have done without you!"

"I am afraid I have been very clumsy," sighed Brentwick, "clumsy and impulsive."

"Not yet, sir."

"Perhaps," suggested Brentwick a little later, "perhaps we had better alight and go up to the inn. It would be more cozy there, especially if the petrol proves hard to obtain, and we have long to wait."

"I should like that," assented the girl decidedly.

Kirkwood nodded his approval, opened the door and jumped out to assist her; then picked up the bag and followed the pair—Brentwick leading the way with Dorothy on his arm.

At the doorway of the Crown and Miter, Charles met them evidently seriously disturbed. "No petrol to be had here, sir," he announced reluctantly; "but the landlord will send to the next inn, a mile up the road, for some. You will have to be patient, I'm afraid, sir."

"Very well. Get some one to help you push the car from the road," ordered Brentwick; "we will be waiting in one of the private parlors."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir." The mechanic touched the visor of his cap and hurried off.

"Come, Kirkwood." Gently Brentwick drew the girl in with him.

Kirkwood lingered momentarily on the door step, to listen acutely. But the wind was blowing into that quarter whence they had come, and he could hear naught save the sighing in the trees, together with an occasional burst of rude rustic laughter from the taproom. Lifting his shoulders in dumb dismay, and endeavoring to compose his features, he entered the tavern.



HE STARED ON THE THRESHOLD

"It might be Brentwick," said that gentleman placidly.

"Brentwick, eh? Well, I like a man of spirit. But permit me to advise you."

"Gladly," nodded Brentwick.

"Eh? . . . Don't come a second time between father and daughter; another man might not be as patient as I, Mister Brentwick. There's a law in the land, if you don't happen to know it."

"I congratulate you on your success in evading it," observed Brentwick, undisturbed. "And it was considerable of you not to employ it in this instance." Then, with a sharp change of tone, "Come, sir!" he demanded. "You have unwarrantably intruded in this room, which I have engaged for my private use. Get through with your business and be off with you."

"All in good time, my antediluvian friend. When I've wound up my business here I'll go—not before. But, just to oblige you, we'll get down to it."

"Kirkwood, you have a revolver of mine. Be good enough to return it."

"I have it here—under the table," interrupted Brentwick suavely. "Shall I hand it to you?"

"By careful; this one's loaded, too—apt to explode any minute."

To Kirkwood's intense disgust Brentwick quietly slipped one hand beneath the table and, placing the revolver on its top, delicately with his finger tips shoved it toward the farther edge.

With a grunt of approval, Calendar swept the weapon up and into his pocket.

"More ordnance?" he inquired briskly, eyes moving alertly from face to face. "No matter; you wouldn't dare use 'em any way. And I'm about done. Dorothy, my dear, it's high time you returned to your father's protection. Where's that gladstone bag?"

"In my traveling bag," the girl told him in a toneless voice.

"Then you may bring it along. You may also say good night to the kind gentlemen."

Dorothy did not move; her pallor grew more intense and Kirkwood saw her knuckles tighten beneath the gloves. Otherwise her mouth seemed to grow more straight and hard.

"Dorothy," cried the adventurer with a touch of displeasure. "You heard me?"

"I heard you," she replied a little wearily, more than a little contemptuously. "Don't mind him, please, Mr. Kirkwood"—with an appealing gesture, as Kirkwood, unable to contain himself, moved restlessly in his chair as if to rise. "Don't say anything. I have no intention whatever of going with this man."

Calendar's features twitched nervously; he chewed a corner of his mustache, fixing the girl with a black stare. "I presume," he remarked after a moment, with slow deliberation, "you're a tractable creature. It wouldn't be wise for you to bring the police about our ears. I believe that in substance such was your sapient counsel to me in the cabin of the Althea; is it not?"

"And you, sir?"—daring Brentwick with a cold unfriendly eye. "You animated fossil, what d'you mean by telling me to go to the devil's ribs? But let that pass; I hold no grudge. What might your name be?"

"I shall not go with you," iterated Dorothy in a level tone. "You may threaten me, but I shall not go. Mr. Kirkwood and Mr. Brentwick are taking me to—friends, who will give me a home until I can find a way to take care of myself. That is all I have to say to you."

"Bravo, my dear!" cried Brentwick encouragingly.

"Mind your business, sir!" thundered Calendar, his face darkening. Then, to Dorothy, "You understand, I trust, what this means?" he demanded.

"I offer you a home—and a good one. Refuse, and you work for your living, my girl! You've forfeited your legacy."

"I know, I know," she told him in cold disdain. "I am content. Won't you be kind enough to leave me alone?"

For a breath, Calendar glowered over her; then, "I presume," he observed, "that all these heroics are inspired by that whipper-snapper, Kirkwood. Do you know that he hasn't a brass farthing to bless himself with?"

"What has that—?" cried the girl indignantly.

"Why, it has everything to do with me, my child. As your dotting parent, I can't consent to your marrying nothing but a beggar."

"I intend to marry this Mr. Kirkwood, don't you?"

There followed a little interval of silence, while the warm blood flamed in the girl's face and the red lips trembled as she faced her tormentor.

Then, with a queer that escaped her control, "If Mr. Kirkwood asks me, I shall," she stated very simply.

"That," interposed Kirkwood, "is completely understood." His gaze sought her face, but she looked away.

"But you won't," Kirkwood told him with assurance.

The adventurer stared. "No," he agreed, after slight hesitation; "no, I shan't interfere. Take her, my boy, if you want her—and a father's blessing into the bargain. The Lord knows I won't what it's cracked up to be."

He paused, leaning, ironic. "But"—deliberately—"there's still this other matter of the gladstone bag. I don't mind abandoning my parental authority, when my child's happiness is concerned, but as for my property—"

"It is not your property," interrupted the girl.

"It was your mother's, dear child. It's now mine."

"I dispute that assertion," Kirkwood put in.

"You may dispute it till the cows come home, my boy; the fact will remain that I intend to take my property with me when I leave this room, whether you like it or not. Now are you disposed to continue the argument, or may I count on your being sensible?"

"You may put away your revolver, if that's what you mean," said Kirkwood. "We certainly shan't oppose you with violence, but I warn you that Scotland Yard—"

"Oh, that be blowed!" the adventurer snarled in disgust. "I can sail circles round any ter that ever blew out of Scotland Yard! Give me an hour's start, and you're free to do all the funny business you've a mind to, with—Scotland Yard!"

"You admit," queried Brentwick civilly, "that you've no legal title to the jewels in dispute?"

"Look here, my friend," chuckled Calendar, "when you catch me admitting anything, you write it down in your little book and tell the bobby on the corner. Just at present I've got other business than standing round admitting anything about anything."

"Cap'n, let's have that bag of my dutiful daughter's."

good! You can't get away if you try. I've got other men outside, waiting for you to come out. Understand?"

Trembling like a whipped cur, Stryker meekly obeyed his instructions to the letter.

The mechanic, with a contemptuous laugh, leaving him, strode back to Calendar, meanwhile whipping off his goggles; and clapped a hearty hand upon the adventurer's quaking shoulders.

"Well!" he cried. "And are you still sailing circles round the men from Scotland Yard, Simmons, or Bellows, or Sanderson, or Calendar, or Crumblstone, or whatever name you prefer to sail under?"

Calendar glared at him aghast; then heaved a profound sigh, shrugged his fat shoulders, and bent his head in thought. An instant later he shook his head.

"To say the least," he informed the detective vehemently, "you haven't got a shred of evidence against me! What's there? A pile of oranges and a peck of trash! What of it?"

"You threaten, if you don't mind, to have to take the girl in, too. I'll not be trapped this way by her and let her off without a squeal. Take me—take her; d'you hear?"

"I think," put in the clear, bland accents of Brentwick, "can consider that matter settled. I have here, my man"—nodding to the adventurer as he took up the black leather wallet—"I have here a little matter which may clear up any lingering doubts as to your status, which you may be disposed at present to entertain."

He extracted a slip of cardboard and, at arm's length, laid it on the table edge beneath the adventurer's eyes. The latter, bewildered, bent over it for a moment, breathing heavily.

He straightened back, shook himself, laughed shortly with a mirthless note, and faced the detective.

"It's come with you now, I guess?" he suggested very quietly.

"The Banister warrant is still out for you," returned the man. "That'll be enough to hold you on till extradition papers arrive from the states."

"Oh, I'll waive those; and I won't give you any trouble, either," said Calendar, mused the adventurer, jingling his manacles thoughtfully. "I'm a back number any way. When a half grown girl, a half baked boy, a dub like Mulready—damn his eyes—saw a club footed snipe from Scotland Yard can put it over me this way . . . why, I guess it's up to me to go home and retire to my country place up the Hudson." He sighed wearily, deep; time to cut it out. But would like to be free long enough to get in one good look at that mutt, Mulready. My friend, you get your hands on him and I'll squeal on him till I'm blue in the face. That's a promise."

"You'll have the chance before long," replied the detective. "We received a telegram from the Amsterdam police late this afternoon, saying they'd picked up Mr. Mulready with a woman named Hallam, and were holding them on suspicion. It seems,"—turning to Brentwick,—they were opening negotiations for the sale of a lot of stones, and seemed in such a precocious hurry that the diamond merchant's suspicion were aroused. We're sending over for them. Miss Calendar, so you can make your mind up about your jewels; you'll have them back in a few days."

"Thank you," said the girl with an effort.

"Well," the adventurer delivered his peroration. "I certainly am blame glad to hear it. 'Twouldn't been a square deal, any other way."

He paused, looking his erstwhile dupes over with a melancholy eye; then, with an uncertain nod comprehending the girl's discomfiture, he turned, and the detective's hand under his arm, accompanied by the thoroughly cowed Stryker, waddled out of the room.

Kirkwood, following the exodus, closed the door with elaborate care and slowly, deep in thought, returned to the table.

Dorothy seemed not to have moved, save to place her elbows on the marble slab and rest her cheeks between hands that remained clenched, as they had been in the greatest stress of her emotion. The color had returned to her face, with a slightly enhanced glow of hue to the credit of her excitement. Her cheeks were hot, her eyes starlike beneath the wot, massy sunlight of her surroundings she stared steadily before her, thoughts astray in the frigid glamour of the dreams that were to come.

Brentwick had slipped down in his chair, resting his silvered head upon its back, and was smiling serenely up at the low yellow ceiling. Before him on the table his long white fingers were drumming an inaudible tune. Presently Dorothy, who had been looking at the girl's eyes and smiling sheepishly, like a child caught in innocent mischief.

"The younger man grinned broadly. "And you were responsible for all that?" he commented infinitely amused.

Brentwick nodded, twinkling. "Satisfaction. 'I contrived it all' he said; 'neat, I call it, too.' His old eyes brightened with reminiscent enjoyment. 'Inspiration' he crowed softly. 'Inspiration, pure and simple. I'd been worrying my wits for fully five minutes before Wotton settled the matter by telling me about the captain's hiring of the motor car. Then, in a flash, I had it. Well, I talked it over. Charles by telephone—his name is really Charles, by the by—overcame his conscientious scruples about playing fish when they were already all but landed, and settled the artistic details."

He chuckled delightedly. "It's the instinct," he declared emphatically, "the instinct for adventure. I knew it was in me, and somehow or other I got it this day did it get the opportunity to assert itself. A born adventurer—that's what I am! . . . You see, it was essential that they should believe we were frightened and running from them; that way, they would be sure to run after us. Why, they might have baited a dozen traps and failed to lure them into my house, after that scoundrel knew you'd had the chance to tell me the whole yarn."

"Odd!"

"Weren't you taking chances, you and Charles?" asked Kirkwood curiously.

"Precious few. There was another motor from Scotland Yard trailing Captain Stryker's. If they had run past, or turned aside, they would have been overhauled in short order."

He relaxed into his whimsical reverie; the wistful look returned to his eyes, replacing the glow of triumph and pleasure. And he sighed a little regretfully.

"What I don't understand," continued Kirkwood, "is how you contrived Calendar that he couldn't get revenge by pressing his charge against Miss Calendar—Dorothy."

"Oh—h? Mr. Brentwick elevated his fine white eyebrows and sat up briskly.

"My dear boy, that was the most delectable dish on the entire menu. I have been reserving it. I don't mind owning that I might better enjoy the full relish of this happy eyes menu, answer you better perhaps by asking you to scan what I offered to the fat scoundrel's respectful consideration, my dear sir."

He leveled a forefinger at the card. At first glance it conveyed nothing to the younger man's benighted intelligence. He puzzled over it, twisting his brows out of alignment. An ordinary oblong slip of thin white card-board, was engraved in large script as follows:

MR. GEORGE BURGOYNE CALENDAR  
31, Aspen Villas, S. W.

"Oh!" exclaimed Kirkwood at length, standing up, his face bright with understanding; "laconically assented the elder man."

Impulsively Kirkwood leaned across the table. "Dorothy," he said tenderly; "and when the young girl may answer you better perhaps by asking you to scan what I offered to the fat scoundrel's respectful consideration, my dear sir."

Then he rose hastily and went over to stand by the window, staring mistily into the blank face of night beyond its unseen panes.

Behind him there was a confusion of little noises; the sound of a chair pushed hurriedly aside, a rustle of skirts, a happy sob or two, low voices intermingling, sighs. Out of it finally came the father's accents.

"There, there, my dear! My dearest dear!" protested the old gentleman. "Positively I don't deserve a tithe of this. When the young girl may answer you better perhaps by asking you to scan what I offered to the fat scoundrel's respectful consideration, my dear sir."

"You must understand," he continued more soberly, "that no consideration of any sort is due me before one can see how unforfeited one was wrong in youth. . . . So I settled down to a quiet old age, determined not to disturb you in your happiness. . . . Ah—Kirkwood—"

The old gentleman was standing, his arm round his daughter's shoulders, when Kirkwood turned.

"Come here, Philip; I'm explaining to Dorothy what she would hear. The evening I called on you, dear boy, at the Pless, returning home I received a message from my solicitors, whom I had instructed to keep my eye on the matter. They informed me that she had disappeared. Naturally I canceled my plans to go to Munich, and stayed, employing detectives. One of them, a man named Charles, whom I had run off with an elderly person calling himself George Burgoyne Calendar—the name I had discarded when I found that to acknowledge me would impair my daughter's fortune. . . . The investigations went deeper; Charles—let us continue to call him—had been to see me only this afternoon to inform me that the girl had disappeared. This Hallam woman and her son—it seems that they were legitimately in the line of inheritance, Dorothy out of the way. But the woman was—a man! I was informed that she had disappeared with this fat rogue and together they plotted it out. Charles doesn't believe that the Hallam woman expected to enjoy the Burgoyne estates as managed by her son. He was to step in when Dorothy stepped out, gather up what she could, realize on it, and decamp. That is why there was so much excitement about the jewels; naturally the most valuable item on her list, the most easy to convert into cash. . . . The man Mulready we do not place; he seems to have been a shady character. The fat rogue picked up in the taproom. . . . I don't know what business he was doing, but he would condescend to almost anything in order to turn a dishonest penny. That seems to exhaust the subject. But one word more. . . . Dorothy, I've said enough and have suffered enough to know the wisdom of seizing one's happiness when one may. My dear, a little while ago, you did a very brave deed. Under fire you did a most courageous, womanly, creditable deed. Dorothy's rejoinder was only second in nobility to yours. . . . I do hope to goodness that you two blessed youngsters won't let any adulated scribbles between you and me—let alone the prize of Romance, your inalienable inheritance!"

Abruptly Brentwick, who was no longer Brentwick, but the actual calendar, released the girl from his embrace and hopped nimbly toward the door. "Really, I must see about that petrol!" he cried. "While it's perfectly true that Charles lied about it's running out, when we're ready to start, call it even—we're ready to start."

And the door crashed to behind him. Between them was the table. Beyond it the girl stood with head erect, dim tears glimmering on the lashes of those eyes with which she met Philip's steady gaze so fearlessly.

Singing about them, the silence deepened. Fascinated, though his heart was faint with longing, Kirkwood faltered on the threshold of his kingdom.

"Dorothy! . . . You did mean it, dear?"

She laughed, a little, low, sobbing laugh that had its source deep in the hidden sanctuary of her heart of a child.

"I meant it, my dearest. . . . If you'll have a girl so bold and forward, who cares not what she is a-trembling, throw herself into the arms of the man she loves—Philip, I meant it, every word!"

And as he went to her swiftly, round the table, she turned to meet him, arms uplifted, her heart like a-trembling, brown and bewitching lashes drooping over her wondrously lighted eyes. After a time Philip Kirkwood laughed aloud.

There was that quality in the ring of his laughter that caused the Shade of Care, which had for the last 10 minutes been uneasily luffing and filling in the offing and, on the whole, steadily diminishing and becoming more pale and wan and emaciated and indistinct—there was that in the laughter of Philip Kirkwood, I say, which caused the Shade of Care to utter a hollow creak of despair, and, incontinently, it vanished out of his life.

THE END