

That Mysterious Major...

...BY...
ETHEL A. SOUTHAM

CHAPTER VI.

"It is very awkward, but then it is just exactly what one might have supposed would happen." Lady Howard spoke in a strangely perturbed tone. For the past few minutes she had been occupied in reading the London paper, but the remark, which was accompanied by a faint sigh, was evidently the outcome of a previous conversation. "If one has a particular antipathy for a certain individual, one may be quite sure that, as ill-luck will have it, one will be brought in contact with that very individual at every turn and corner; and it has just been so with Major Brown. During the past four or five days we must have had occasion to speak to him at least a dozen times. What with lending us his umbrella on the day we were caught in that thunder shower, helping in the search for Sambo when you lost him the other morning, and to crown all, rescuing you almost from under the hoofs of that tiresome horse upon the shore yesterday, we seem to have passed our time in saying nothing but 'thank you,' to him. Really everything has happened as awkwardly as it could. Of course accidents are constantly occurring; still I cannot imagine how you managed to get under the hoofs of that horse."

"Well, yes—it was troublesome of me. It would have been almost better if it had killed me outright," was Evelyn's answer from the deep embrasure of the window, where she was sitting before a small writing table busily scribbling off several notes. "But, anyhow, we were under an obligation to him for getting wet through on our account the other night, when in that pouring rain he found us a cab after the theater. After that, we were obliged to be polite to him."

"Yes—polite of course," agreed her ladyship, twisting her rings somewhat thoughtfully round and round upon her fingers; "but you have to be more than

"No—I do not say that there is; but I dislike making promiscuous acquaintances. Mr. Falkland was talking about him only this morning, and he seems thoroughly to understand my feelings upon the subject."

"Yet a month ago Mr. Falkland was quite as promiscuous an acquaintance himself. It was only by chance we got to know him; and in his case he had not even done anything for which we were under any obligation to him," was Evelyn's prompt reply.

"My dear child, what are you talking about?" Lady Howard's tones were slightly impatient. "Mr. Falkland's was quite a different case. We made his acquaintance by chance; but I should have been just as reluctant to have anything to say to him as I am about this other man if we had not discovered in him an old friend of both my husband and your father. At the same time I must say I never met anybody before in whom I could place such complete confidence. He is so different from the general run of young men, who can talk of nothing but their shooting, their horses, and their dogs."

"Oh, yes—he is very nice, of course; but"—Miss Luttrell paused for a moment—"he is not exactly a young man!"

"Possibly not." The touch of impatience in her ladyship's tones was superseded by one of distinct annoyance. "Neither," she added, "is this mysterious individual with whom you have struck up such a warm friendship. I should imagine there are only a very few years difference in their ages."

"Now, Aunt Lydia, do not talk nonsense! Major Brown may be as old as Methuselah for all I care! And, as for saying that I have struck up a friendship with him—well, that is really mean of you!" Evelyn pushed back her chair, advanced to the middle of the room, and with her hands clasped behind her, gazed serenely at her aunt. "You surely know that you



THRUSTING IT INTO HER WRITING CASE, LOCKED THE KEY.

ordinarily polite to a man who has saved your life."

"Yes—that is it," said Evelyn lugubriously.

"It is very annoying—the whole affair has been so unfortunate," proceeded Lady Howard with emphasis. "If it were absolutely necessary that you should be rescued by somebody, all well and good; but there is not another person in the hotel whom I would not have chosen to undertake the task in preference to that man."

Evelyn received the information in silence. Leaning her elbows on the side of the table, she let her chin sink slowly into her two palms and gazed out reflectively through the open window.

"Still there is nothing really against him," she suggested at length, with slight though perceptible diffidence. "He—he is very nice to talk to. The only objection is that nobody knows who he is, and that his name is Brown—plain common 'Brown'—without even an 'e' to add a little elegance to it. And of course one generally considers that an officer is at least a gentleman."

"An officer? Nonsense, child! Because he calls himself 'Major Brown,' do you suppose that is any criterion of his position in society?" Lady Howard spoke quite disdainfully. "He may be an officer, certainly—he has the appearance of a soldier—but it is far more likely, since nobody can discover what regiment he is in—and there is no such name in the retired Army list—that he is merely a major of volunteers in an obscure country town, following a vulgar but honest trade as soap boiler or sugar refiner."

"He may be, of course. Figs, I believe, may fly," returned Evelyn, nibbling the end of her pen with a perfectly unconvincing expression. "But there is nothing suggestive of either soap or sugar about Major Brown."

did more towards making that acquaintance in the ten minutes when you talked to him last evening and overwhelmed him with thanks for rescuing me than I could have done in a whole year! Why, if I had not known to the contrary, I should have thought he was the one person in the hotel for whom you had the greatest respect!"

"Yet, what else could I do, when, but for his timely aid, you might at this very moment be lying lamed for life or even dead?" returned Lady Howard, with a little shudder.

"Oh, no! You did quite right, of course!" said Evelyn thoughtfully. Perhaps nobody realized more fully than herself how much she had to be thankful for. "But do not say it is my fault if he—well, if for the future he does not merely take off his hat and pass on with a distant bow when he chances to meet you!"—laughing lightly.

No; the distant bow was quite a thing of the past, their acquaintance was on a totally different footing now—a state of affairs to which Major Brown himself was thoroughly alive when, half an hour later, he chanced to meet Miss Luttrell in the garden. He welcomed her warmly, persisted in showing her some new plans for a projected golf course, and was still walking by her side when a turn in the path brought them face to face with Gilbert Falkland.

"So there you are, Miss Eve!" he began by way of greeting, utterly ignoring her companion. "I was just wondering where the bird had flown." The words were spoken lightly, in the same familiar half-patronizing strain which Mr. Falkland usually adopted towards the daughter of his old friend. "Five minutes ago, when I was passing along the verandah I noticed that the window of your sitting room was wide open, that the apartment itself was empty, and that

a check book was lying on the table."

"A check book?" Evelyn nodded. "Ah, I dare say it was mine."

"So I suspected," observed Falkland calmly. "Are you aware, though, that it is a most dangerous practice leaving your check book about like that?"

"Dangerous!" Evelyn laughed. "Well, yes; I suppose that it would be considered dangerous by some people who go on the principle of locking up everything, from the wine cellar itself down to such trifles as penny stamps and halfpenny post cards."

"Yet check books, I should imagine, scarcely come under that category," remarked Falkland with quiet sarcasm. "But perhaps you have forgotten our conversation of a week ago?" he supplemented, with a significant glance from Evelyn to Major Brown, who was standing silently passing his stick along the edge of the gravel path, an edified listener to the discussion.

At his words the hot color rose quickly to Evelyn's cheeks, mounting to her forehead and spreading over throat and ears. Like lightning her thoughts had gone back to that morning when her first encounter with Major Brown had taken place; and, as she realized to what Mr. Falkland was alluding, a feeling of the utmost annoyance took possession of her.

But worst of all was the knowledge that Major Brown had raised his head and was wanderingly surveying the crimson hue of her cheeks, and probably even divining the cause of her confusion. This last thought was too much for her. Without another word, and giving Gilbert Falkland only one flash of her angry eyes, she suddenly turned away and walked off indignantly towards the house.

"The wretch!" I hate him!" she murmured a moment later, as she stepped through the open window of Lady Howard's sitting room and threw herself into a low chair.

One contemptuous glance she gave at her check book as it lay open on the table by her side, and then, as though annoyed by the very sight of it, she took it up, and, thrusting it into her writing case, locked the key angrily upon it.

CHAPTER VII.

It was two days later—a soaking wet afternoon. Ever since early morning the rain had been descending in a steady persistent downpour, beating upon the scorched grass, dashing to pieces the rows of stately calceolarias and geraniums, and converting every path and flight of steps into as many miniature streams and turbulent cascades of seething waters.

Major Brown, driven almost to despair by the depressing prospects of the day, wandered aimlessly from billiard room to smoking room, from smoking room to library, and at last sat down before one of the writing tables and hastily dashed off one or two unimportant letters. His correspondence completed, he directed and sealed the envelopes, and was leisurely affixing the stamps, when his attention became suddenly arrested by something on the sheet of blotting paper before him.

What was it? With the exception of a number of indecipherable hieroglyphics and the impression of a line of more boldly written characters, which had evidently been hastily blotted, the surface of the pink sheet was perfectly blank. Putting up his eye glass, he scanned them for at least a couple of minutes in absolute silence, and then, giving a cautious glance round the room, as though a sudden thought had struck him, he advanced, blotting book in hand, towards a fantastically-framed mirror which stood above the marble mantel. This further scrutiny was, to all appearance, even more successful, for, as Major Brown held up the strangely interesting sheet close to the glass, a smile of satisfaction immediately lit up his face.

(To be continued.)

Two Happy Thoughts.

From far-away Ceylon comes a funny little story. A tea planter who had a glass eye was desirous of going away for a day's shooting with a friend, but he knew that as soon as the natives who were at work on the plantation heard that he was going they would not do a stroke of work. How was he to get off? That was the question. After much thought an idea struck him. Going up to the men, he addressed them thus: "Although myself will be absent, yet I shall leave one of my eyes to see that you do your work." And, much to the surprise and bewilderment of the natives, he took out the glass eye and placed it on the stump of a tree and left. For some time the men worked industriously, but at last one of them, seizing his tin in which he carried his food, approached the tree and gently placed it over the eye. This done, they all lay down and slept sweetly until sunset.—Waverly Magazine.

Strong Glasses.

Mr. Stubb—Can Sally see good through her new glasses? Mrs. Stubb—Yes, John, but she says they exaggerate. Mr. Stubb—Exaggerate, Maria? Mrs. Stubb—Yes, outrageously. The other night she declared the moon had a golden rim, and then she found out it was her glasses that had a golden rim.

Grounds for It.

Quinn—I wore one of those new rubber collars to save laundry bills. De Fonte—Was it a success? Quinn—No, I had to throw it away. Every one I met yelled "Rubberneck."

Spain's Sunday Schools.

In all Spain there are only 3,230 children in the Sunday schools.

JOHN AND PHILIPPA.

In the middle of the fourteenth century John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster, the famous son of King Edward III. of England, married the Infanta Blanche, heir to the throne of Castile. Unfortunately the lady had been supplanted by her cousin, who had seized and held the throne.

Twenty-five years after this marriage war broke out between Portugal and Castile. England was the ally of Portugal. The duke of Lancaster headed the English forces. He fought with a will. Victory meant that his wife, the duchess, would be queen of Castile.

The king of Portugal, too, interested him. He was a fine young man of 26. He was tall and handsome and had wavy black hair and large dark eyes. He was a brave soldier and a good horseman.

In some ways he was unlike most kings. He cared nothing for the drunken bouts and coarse pleasures in which his companions indulged. He was noted for the remarkable purity of his life. His people called him John the Perfect. They were devoted to him.

In one thing only he failed to please his subjects. He would not marry. They could not understand his reluctance. Yet he had a reason, though he kept it secret.

Three years before an English knight, on a visit to the king of Portugal, had died suddenly. At the last moment he placed in the hand of the king a miniature painting. He attempted to say something in explanation. It was too late.

The picture was of a beautiful, but unknown, maiden. Rippling fair hair shaded her round pink cheeks. Her blue eyes gazed steadily into the king's dark ones. Her lips were curved in a half smile as if she were amused at the mystery he faced.

Days, weeks, months passed, and the king still studied the miniature. He was enthralled by the fair unknown.

"Had I but learned her name before my good friend died!" he sighed a thousand times. "Who can she be?" he wondered. There was no response.

Several years passed. At length he felt that he must put sentiment aside and yield to the wishes of his people and marry.

After Philippa had rested from the fatigues of the journey, she prepared to give audience to the king in the great drawing-room of the castle.

She was attired in a magnificent robe of white satin embroidered with gold. It had a court train of royal purple velvet bordered with pearls. Her golden hair was dressed high and in its coils was set a tiara of amethysts.

Her ladies withdrew that the young people might have no witness to their meeting. She was alone.

From a window the girl watched the approach of the king. She noted how handsome he was in a suit of fine green velvet with silver satin trimmings. Yet she was angry with herself that she admired him.

"Nothing does he care for me!" she thought, bitterly.

She drew herself up with great dignity as he entered the room. He bowed low before her and commenced some formal speech. Then the words died upon his lips. The shock of a great surprise kept him silent. Before him stood the lady of the miniature. His joy may be imagined. He told the story to Philippa. She in turn confessed her love. The marriage next day was no formal affair of state, but a union of two fondly loving hearts. And all his life long the people wondered how the king who had been so cold a suitor had been transformed into such a loving husband.—Lydia Kingsmill Commander in New York Evening Journal.

DRESS IN BAD TASTE.

English Women Wear Costly Fabrics at Miscellaneous Public Gatherings.

Ida Husted Harper, one of the American delegates to the international woman's congress recently held in London, left the British metropolis with a very poor opinion of her English sisters' taste in dress. "Before leaving for London," she wrote the other day, "we were told by persons who wanted us to be a credit to our country that we must be careful not to dress too gayly over here, that 'nice, genteel tailor-made suits' were the proper thing. So we bankruoted ourselves on 'tailor-mades' of various weights and colors—and we have scarcely seen an Englishwoman wearing one since we arrived. Even in the morning at public meetings the most delicate fabrics are worn, with long



SURPRISE KEPT HIM SILENT.

To cement his alliance with the English people he proposed to the duke of Lancaster that he give him one of his daughters. The duke was pleased. It would advance his plans.

"I have two daughters," he said—"Philippa, who is 20, and Catherine, who is 17. Your majesty can have which you choose."

"In these affairs of state it matters little," said the king, sadly. "Let it be the older, to more nearly match my own age."

The duke returned at once to England to prepare his daughter for this royal marriage. He carried with him portraits of the king, and described in glowing terms his graces and virtues.

There was no choice for Philippa. Fortunately, the fair English maid was pleased with the dark beauty of the king. She wondered if he would admire her. She had heard of his indifference to women, and knew that he had not even asked for her picture.

"At least he shall not know that I care at all for him," she thought, for she was a high-spirited girl.

The marriage was by proxy. This was not uncommon in royal families long ago. The dignity of the king forbade him to go from his own land to seek his bride. Yet the Lady Philippa of Lancaster was granddaughter of the king of England. She must be married in her own country.

The king sent as his proxy a great archbishop. He traveled in royal state, attended by many nobles.

After the ceremony Philippa, as queen of Portugal, went, in care of the archbishop and all his train, to the husband whom in her heart she loved, and whom she knew cared not for her.

On her arrival in Portugal she was taken to a grand castle, where the marriage ceremony was to be performed on the following day with the king instead of his proxy.

trains, elaborately trimmed and often with thin kid slippers or white shoes. They are dragged about with utter disregard on the dirty floors of halls, theaters and the courtyards, which everywhere abound. When we saw chiffon dresses trailing through the parks we said to our escort: 'Those women must be hardly respectable,' 'The very first ladies in the city,' he answered. After becoming acquainted I talked with some of the Englishwomen on the subject and they said: 'We do not wear tailor-made suits in the season,' that is, in May, June and July, but the other nine months of the year we live in them.' So we put ours in the bottom of our trunks and packed the steamer rugs on top of them. We have been fortunate enough to see the 'smart set' over here at a number of functions, and it has been interesting to compare their dressing with that of the fashionable women on similar occasions in our own country. My opinion is that in the fit, quality and style of gowns, those in America are quite equal to those in England, if not superior; but in laces and jewels the English women are ahead. I think we do not have any gatherings where as many women have magnificent laces and jewels as one sees here. The reason is not hard to find. It takes time to collect these things, even where one has money. Here they are the inheritance of many generations, each adding a few rare pieces to the collection, and in London more of these old and wealthy families congregated than in any one city in the new world."

Must Leave a Trade.

Every boy in Germany, from the Crown Prince to the meanest subject, is obliged to learn some useful trade.

THE LAST MAN.

Fates That May Overtake the Survivor of the Human Race.

Astronomers tell us that the day must come when the earth will, like the moon, wheel through the heavens a dead and barren ball of matter, airless, waterless, lifeless. But long, long before that time man will be extinct, and will have disappeared so utterly that not so much as the bleached skeleton of a human being will be visible on all the millions of square miles of the surface of this planet. Unless by some huge and universal cataclysm the whole race is swept at once into eternity, it is but reasonable to suppose that man, like any other race of animals, will disappear slowly and that eventually there will be but a single human being left—some old, old man, gray headed and bearded, and left to wander alone in a solitude that may be imagined but not described. How will he die, this last relic of the teeming millions that once transformed the globe and ruled undisputed master of every other living thing? There are many fates that may befall him. He may go mad with the horror of loneliness and himself end his miserable existence. He may be eaten by the vast reptiles or giant insects which will then probably infest the solitudes. But his fate may be far weirder and more dreadful. Scientists say that as we burn the coal and timber we are still so richly supplied with we let loose into the atmosphere an ever-increasing volume of carbonic acid gas. Much of this is taken up by plants, but not all. It must increase and eventually poison the breathable air, filling the valleys and mountains slowly to the hills tops, where the last remains of animal life are striving for existence. The last man will climb higher and higher, but eventually the suffocating, invisible fluid will reach and drown him.

EASY CORRESPONDENCE.

How a Clever New Orleans Couple Manage It.

One of the houses on my route is the home of a traveling man who spends about half his time out of town, said a New Orleans letter-carrier to a Times-Democrat reporter. When he goes on a trip he and his wife exchange a postal card every day, regular as the clock. The lady always gives me her cards to mail, and I couldn't help noticing that both they and the ones she received were always perfectly blank. All they ever contained was the address, and those that came to the wife had even that printed instead of written. I confess the thing made me curious, and I thought up all kinds of theories—sympathetic ink, secret marks on the edges and a lot of other nonsense for which I never discovered any evidence. I happened to know the drummer pretty well, and meeting him one day, I couldn't resist asking him about the blank cards. "So you've been trying to read 'em, have you?" he said, laughing. I expected that, and took it good-naturedly. Then he explained. "My wife and I are naturally poor letter writers," he said, "but we want to hear from each other every day, so as to know that nothing has gone wrong. We used to write like other folks, but it was a hard job, and one evening we got to looking over some of our old letters, and they seemed so stupid and forced that we were really ashamed of ourselves. Then we thought of this blank card scheme, and it has worked like a charm. It means simply that all is well. Before I go on the road each of us knows the other's programme and the receipt of the cards means that nothing has happened to change our plans. The saving of ink and imbecility has been enormous."

Cheap Water in Glasgow.

In Glasgow a \$75 householder obtains for \$1.42 per annum a continuous, never failing, unrestricted stream of the purest water in the world delivered right into his kitchen, wash-house and bath-room. It is calculated that 350 gallons of pure water are delivered to the citizens of Glasgow for every penny paid. And it is water of such peculiar softness that the householders of Glasgow can pay their water rate out of what they save on soap. Loch Katrine water is not only soft—it is remarkably bright, clear and free from vegetable matter because of the bare and precipitous character of the hills which drain into the loch. It is uniform in color, temperature and quality, is absolutely free from pollution, and must remain so because the corporation have now bought up the building rights of the whole drainage area; it needs no filtration and is practically unaffected by the change of seasons.—Engineer Magazine.

Not Qualified to Judge.

Benedict—I have about decided to go to Mexico for the summer. Bachelor—Why, that's the hottest place on the face of the earth. Benedict—Excuse me; but you're not married.—Richmond Dispatch.

Don't Need Another.

Lady Traveler—Allow me to detain you one moment, sir. I have here a neat and pretty little letter-opener—very handy. Gent (interrupting)—So have I—at home. I'm a married man, you see!

Not Worth Having.

Sir Jung Bahadur, the prime minister to the king of Nepal, has a hat made of diamonds worth over \$2,500,000, and perched on top is a single ruby of incalculable value.

Man is an imitative creature, and whoever is foremost leads the herd.—Schiller.