

THE BEST MAN

By
Grace Livingston Hill Lutz

Author of "Marcia Schuyler," "Dawn of the Morning,"
"Lo, Michael!" etc.

Philadelphia & London.

J. B. Lippincott Company.

1914.

CHAPTER II (Continued).

The spell of breathlessness was broken. The guests relaxed and went on with their dinner.

Gordon, meanwhile, tried coolly to keep up a pretense of eating, the paper held in one hand while he seemed to be studying it. Once he turned it over and looked on the back. There was a large crossmark in red ink at the upper end. He looked at it curiously and then instinctively at his host.

"That is my own mark," said Mr. Holman. "I put it there to distinguish it from other papers." He was smiling politely, but he might as well have said, "I put it there to identify it in case of theft" for every one at the table, unless it might be his wife, understood that that was what he meant. Gordon felt it and was conscious of the other paper in his vest-pocket. The way was going to be most difficult.

Among the articles in the envelope which the chief had given him before his departure from Washington was a pair of shell-rimmed eye-glasses, a false mustache, a goatee, and a pair of eyebrows. He had laughed at the suggestion of high-tragedy contained in the disguise, but had bought them with him for a possible emergency. The eye-glasses were tucked into the vest-pocket beside the duplicate paper. He brought himself to them now.

"Could he, under cover of taking them out, manage to exchange the papers?" The disguise, though resembling a red ink mark across the back? Would any one notice its absence? It was well to exchange the papers as soon as possible before the writing had been studied by those at the table, for he knew that the other man, though resembling him in general words, differed enough to attract the attention of a close observer. Dared he risk their noticing the absence of the red cross on the back?

Slowly, cautiously, under cover of the conversation he managed to get that duplicate paper out of his pocket and under the napkin in his lap. This he did with one hand, all the time ostentatiously holding the code message in the other hand, with its back to the people at the table. This hand meanwhile also held his coat lapel out that he might the more easily reach his vest-pocket for the glasses. It all looked natural. The hostess was engaged in a whispered conversation with the maid at the moment. The host and other guests were finishing the exceedingly delicious patties on their plates, and the precious code message was safely in evidence, red cross and all. They saw no reason to be suspicious about the stranger's hunt for his glasses.

"Oh, here they are!" he said, quite unconcernedly, and put on the glasses to look more closely at the paper, spreading it smoothly on the table cloth before him, and wondering how he should get it into his lap in place of the one that now lay quietly under his napkin.

The host and the guests politely refrained from talking to Gordon and laid each other incidents of the day in low tones that indicated the non-importance of what they were saying; while they waited for the real business of the hour.

Then the butler removed the plates, pausing beside Gordon waiting punctiliously with his silver tray to brush away the crumbs.

That was what Gordon waited for. It had come to him as the only way. Courteously he drew aside, lifting the paper from the table and putting it in his lap, for just the instant while the butler did his work; but in that instant the paper with the red cross was slipped into the napkin, and the other paper took its place upon the table, back down so that its lack of a red cross could not be noted.

So far, so good, but how long could this be kept up? And the paper under the napkin—how was it to be got into his pocket? He was sure to get it now, and his brain seemed to be at boiling heat as he sat back and realized that the deed was done, and could not be undone. If any one should pick up that paper from the table and discover the red mark, it would be all up with him. He looked up for an instant to meet the gaze of the six men upon him. They had nothing better to do now than to look at him until the next course arrived.

He realized that not one of them would have mercy upon him. If he looked as if he had done, not one unless it might be the tired, old-looking one, and he would not dare interfere.

Still Gordon was enabled to smile, and to say some pleasant nothings to his hostess, who passed him the salted almonds. His hand lay carelessly guarding the secret of the paper on the table, innocently, as though it just happened that he laid it on the paper.

Sitting thus with the real paper in his hand under his large damask napkin, the false paper under his hand on the table where he from time to time perused it, and his eye-glasses which made him look most distinguished still on his nose, he heard the distant telephone bell ring.

He remembered the words of his chief and sat rigid. From his position he could see the tall clock in the hall, and its gilded hands pointed to ten minutes before seven. It was about this time the chief had said he would be called on the telephone. What should he do with the two papers?

He had but an instant to think until the well trained butler returned and announced that some one wished to speak with Mr. Burnham on the telephone. His resolve was taken. He would have to leave the substitute paper on the table. To carry it away with him might arouse suspicion, and, moreover, he could not easily manage both without being noticed. The real paper must be put safely away at all hazards, and he must take the chance that the absence of the red mark would remain unnoticed until his return.

To make matters worse, just at the instant when he had decided to jump at the next dark place and was measuring the distance with his eye, his hand even being outstretched to grasp the door handle, a blustering, boisterous motorcycle burst into full bloom just where he intended to jump, and the man who rode it was in uniform. He dodged back into the darkness of the carriage again that he might not be seen, and the motorcycle came so near that its rider turned a white face and

looked in. He felt that his time had come, and his cause was lost. It had not yet occurred to him that the men who were pursuing would hardly be likely to conduct a search in the search, lest their own duplicity would be discovered. He reasoned that he was dealing with desperate men who would stop at nothing to get back the original cipher paper, and stop his hand he would carry it intact to death would be considered a sufficient silencer for him after what he had seen at Mr. Holman's dinner table, for the evidence he could give would involve the honor of every man who had sat there. He saw in a flash that the two benches whom he was sure were even now riding in the car on his right had been at the table for the purpose of silencing him if he showed any signs of giving trouble. The wonder was that any of them dared to sit at the table on a matter of such grave import, which meant ruin to them all if they were found out, but probably they had reasoned that every man had his price and had intended to offer him a share of the booty he was to receive. He asserted that he was to be understood by them that he was the right kind of man for their purpose. Yet, of course, they had taken precautions, and now they had him well caught, an auto on one side, a motorcycle on the other, and a carriage ready to get into it. He had been a fool to get into this carriage. He might have known it would trap him to his death. There seemed absolutely no chance for escape now—yet he must fight to the last. He put his hand on his revolver to make sure it was easy to get at, tried to think whether it would not be better to chew up and swallow that cipher message rather than to run the risk of its falling again into the hands of the enemy; he tried to find a way out of the door, his chief if possible; and finally that he must make a dash for safety at once, when just then the carriage turned briskly into a wide driveway, and the attendant auto and motorcycle dropped behind as if pushed back by a breeze. The carriage stopped short and a bright light from an open doorway was flung into his face. There seemed to be high stone walls on one side and the lighted doorway on the other hand evidently led into a great hall building. The youth seemed to be waiting for the car and cycle just behind. A wild notion that the carriage had been placed in front of the house to trap him in case he tried to escape, and that he had been brought to prison, flitted through his mind.

His hand was on his revolver as the coachman jumped down to fling open the carriage door, for he intended to fight for his liberty to the last.

He glanced back through the carriage window, and the lights of the auto glared at him. The man who was getting out of the car, and the motorcycle had stood his machine up against the wall and was coming toward the carriage. Escape was going to be practically impossible. A wild thought flashed through his mind. He stepped out of the carriage, and boldly seizing the motorcycle and making off it passed through his mind, and then the door on his left was flung open and the carriage was immediately surrounded by six excited men in evening dress, all talking at once. Here you are at last!" they chorused.

"Where is the best man?" shouted some one from the doorway. "Hasn't he come, either?" And as if in answer one of the men by the carriage door wheeled and called out excitedly to the man who had just stepped out of the car, "Come on quickly! There isn't a minute to wait. The organist is fairly frantic. Everybody's been just as nervous as could be. We couldn't very well go on without you—you know. But don't let that worry you. It's all right now you've come. Forget it, old man, and hustle." Dimly Gordon perceived above the sound of subdued music and the organ playing, and even as he listened it burst into the joyous notes of the wedding march. It dawned upon him that this was not a prison to which he had come but a church—not a court room but a wedding altar. He glanced at them and they took him for the best man. His disguise had been his undoing. How was he to get out of this scrape? And with his pursuers just behind!

"Let me explain—" he began, and wondered what he could explain. "I am not the best man," he explained now, man. I tell you the organ has begun the march. We're expected to be marching down that middle aisle this very minute and Jeff is waiting for us in the chapel. He'll be the signal to go. I know another to the organist the minute we sighted you. Come on! Everybody knows your boat was late in coming in. You don't need to explain a thing till afterwards."

At that moment one of the ushers moved aside, and the light shined upon him. He stepped into the light and looked fully upon his face, and Gordon knew him positively for the man who had sat opposite him at the table a few minutes before. He was a young man, well dressed, and he was smiling at him as if he had never before. He saw his only escape was into the church. With his heart pounding like a trip hammer he yielded himself to the six ushers, who swept the little party aside as if he had been a fly and literally bore Gordon up the steps and into the church door.

A burst of music filled his senses, and dazzling lights, glimpses of flowers, palms and beautiful garments bewildered him. His one thought was to get out of there as quickly as he could. He followed them into the church and drag him out in the presence of all these people, or would they be thrown off the track for a little while and give him opportunity yet to get away? He looked wildly at the ushers and sought exit, but he was in the hands of the insistent ushers. One of them chattered to him in a low, growling whisper, such as men use on solemn occasions.

"It must have been rough on you, being anxious like this about getting here, but never mind now. It'll go all right. Come on. Here's your cue and there stands Jefferson over there. You and he are in with the best man, you understand, they'll tell you when Jeff has the ring, all right, so you won't need to bother about that. There's absolutely nothing for you to do but stand by him and wait for him when he comes back. You needn't feel a bit nervous."

Was it possible that these crazy people didn't recognize their mistake even yet here in the bright light? Couldn't they see his mustache was stuck on and one eyebrow was crooked? Didn't they know their best man well enough to recognize his voice? Surely, surely, some one would discover the mistake soon—that man Jeff over there who was eyeing him so intently. He would be sure to know this was not his friend. Yet every minute that they continued to think so was a distinct gain for Gordon, puzzling his pursuers and giving himself time to think and plan and study. And now they were drawing him forward and a turn of his head gave him a vision of the stubbed head of the thick set man peering in at the chapel door and and would he get an escape? But I don't know anything about the arrangements," faltered Gordon, reflecting that the best man might not be very well known to the ushers and perhaps he resembled him. It was not

the first time he had been taken for another man—and with his present makeup and all, perhaps it was natural. Could he possibly hope to bluff his way out of this? He knew that the money was over and then escape? It would of course be the best way imaginable to throw that impudent little man in the doorway off his track. If the real best man would only stay any longer for a business card, it would be a difficult part to play. The original man might turn up after he was gone and create a pleasant little mystery, but nobody would be injured thereby. All this passed through his mind while the usher kept up his sepulchral whisper.

"Why, there are just the usual arrangements, you know—nothing new. You and Jeff go in after the ushers have reached the back of the church and stand there till Cella and her uncle come up the aisle. Then follows the ceremony—very brief. Cella had that repeating after the minister cut out on account of not being able to read the service. It's just the simplest service, not the usual lengthy affair. Don't worry, you'll be all right, old man. Hurry! they're calling you. Leave your hat right here. Now I must go. Keep cool. I'll soon be over."

The usher hurried through the door and settled in a sort of exalted hobble to the time of the wonderful Lohengrin music. Gordon turned, thinking even yet to make a possible escape, but the eagle eye of his pursuer was upon him and the man Jefferson was by his side. "Here we are!" he said, eagerly grabbing Gordon's hat and coat and dumping them on a chair. "I'll look after everything. Just come along. It's time we went in. The doctor is motioning for us, so hurry and go. How many years is it since I saw you? Ten! You've changed some, but you're looking fine and dandy. No need to worry about anything. It'll soon be over and over and over."

Mechanically Gordon fell into place beside the man Jefferson, who was a pleasant faced youth, well groomed and handsome. Looking furtively at his finely cut, happy features, Gordon wondered how he would feel what he saw as this youth seemed to be waiting for the car and cycle just behind. A wild notion that the carriage had been placed in front of the house to trap him in case he tried to escape, and that he had been brought to prison, flitted through his mind.

He walked with feet that suddenly weighed like lead, across a church that looked to be miles in width, in the face of swarms of curious eyes. He tried to reflect that these people were all strangers to him, that they were not looking at him in any way, but at the bridegroom by his side, and that it mattered very little what he did so long as he kept still and braved it out, if only the real best man didn't turn up until he was well out of the church. Then he could vanish in the dark, and go by some back way to a car, or a taxi cab, and so to the station. The thought of the paper inside the gold pencil case filled him with a sort of elation. If only he could get out of this dreadful predicament, he probably could get away safely. Perhaps even the incident of the wedding might prove to be his protection, for they would never seek him in a crowded church at a fashionable wedding.

The man by his side managed him admirably, giving him a whispered word, a shove, or a push now and then, and getting him into the proper position. It seemed as if the best man had to occupy the most trying spot in all the church, but, as they put him there, of course it was all right. He glanced furtively over the faces near the front, and they all looked quite satisfied, as if everything were going as it should, so he settled down to his fate, his white, stunted face partly hidden by the round, dusty, mustache which he wore. People whispered softly how handsome he looked, and some suggested that he was not so stout as when they had last seen him, 10 years before. His status in a foreign land must have done much for him, for he was as far as to tell her daughter that he was far more distinguished looking than she had ever thought he could become, but it was wonderful what a stay in a foreign land would do to improve a person.

The music stole onward, and slowly, gracefully, like the opening of buds into flowers, the bride party inched along up the middle aisle until at last the bride in all the mystery of her white veils and the secret of her hair in flowers and many colored gauzes were suitably disposed about her.

The feeble old man on whose arm the bride had leaned as she came up the aisle dropped out of the procession, and moving into the front seats, and Gordon found himself standing beside the bride. He felt sure there must be something wrong about it, and looked at his young guide with an attempt to change places with him. He looked at the man and against the best man's porcelain manufacturer in the world. In recognition of her great contribution to the ceramic art of the world, both France and Italy awarded her the highest honors in their power, and yet her work in this country is unglorified and unknown, and some of the rarest pieces for which collectors hereafter will pay fabulous sums have had to be sacrificed to provide for the bare means of subsistence.

In many respects in accordance with the democratic principles of this country to achieve a Sevres, a Gobelins, or a Dresden, and so far certainly the national government has been more interested in the raising of a people than in the making of porcelains, but it is high time that our manufacturers awaken to the economic significance of the American craftsman and undertake that public spirited recognition and intelligent utilization of his powers which makes Germany's art products from a position of scorn to the conquest of the markets of the world.

Couldn't Get a Drink There.
From the Pittsburgh Dispatch.
Daniel D. Moore, editor and manager of the New Orleans Times-Picayune, breezed into the McAlister before he had time to register his head to listen to a knock on his home town. He was greeted by a traveling man.
"That's a tough burg of yours," said he.
"What's the trouble?" asked Mr. Moore.
"Why, a fellow can't get a drink there. My tongue was hanging out," said the traveling man.
Mr. Moore perked up his ears. "That's strange," said he. "New Orleans is a wide open town."
"That's the trouble," said the traveler. "The saloons are so crowded one can't get near the mahogany."

SECRET NEWSPAPERS ISSUED IN BELGIUM

Deny and Baffle German Police—Methods of Publication Mystery.

Havre, France, (by mail.)—The Belgian government authorities here have received information of the continued appearance of patriotic newspapers at Brussels and throughout Belgium, in defiance of the German censorship. Despite all the efforts of the German military police, it is one of the mysteries of the German occupation of Belgium how these secret papers can be published, where they engrave their contents, and how they set the type and circulate the papers.

There is a price of 50,000 marks on the head of the editor of the Free Belgium, but it keeps on appearing just the same. Several of the supposed editors are said to have been shot. One man was sentenced to 12 years hard labor, others to three and 11 years, and a woman, Madame Scheepens, to five years. But each time that a supposed editor is imprisoned and the German authorities feel the trouble is ended, the paper appears in following days more lusty than ever with a cartoon making fun of the prosecution.

A file is kept here of these secret papers, as a matter of curiosity. Free Belgium, which has given the most trouble, prints the following notices under its title:

"A bulletin of patriotism, submitting to no censorship whatever.
"Price per copy elastic, from zero to infinity.

"Business office.—Not being handy to have an established address, we are installed in a movable automobile cellar.

"Advertisements.—Business being nil under German domination, we have suppressed our advertising page and counsel our patrons to keep their money till times get better.

"Telegraphic address: Care of German commander at Brussels.

A recent issue of Free Belgium gave a cartoon by Raemaker, adapted from Gustave More's scenes in hell, showing women and children in agony as they are trampled down by a soldier in German helmet, the face of the soldier being evidently meant for that of the kaiser. Another cartoon, entitled "Love's Chagrin," shows General von Bissing, the military commander of Brussels, trying to find the editor of Free Belgium in cellars and attics, while the editorial rooms, business office, etc., are depicted on wheels. A big sun, labelled Free Belgium, smiles down derisively at Von Bissing's vain efforts to capture the editors.

La Patrie is another of these secret newspapers. It announces under its title that it is a non-censored journal, appearing how, where and when it pleases. Another line states that it is in the second year of its publication. The bitterness of this paper is shown in a standing line carried at the head of its editorials, referring to the Germans as "barbarians and liars always." A recent number showed the Germans "en route for Calais" by way of the Yser river, with the bodies of German soldiers slaughtered by the Belgians, floating in the river.

L'Echo, another of the secret journals, announces that it prints "what censored journals dare not and cannot say." A recent number gave the speech of Premier Augustin, giving the cause of commons, declaring there would be no peace until Belgium was free. The editorial was headed: "Teuton Pirates and Vandals."

Other secret newspapers are La Verite and the Flemish Lion. The latter is also a Weekly Review of the French Press, giving articles which have been prohibited from being published in Belgium. Illustrated books also continue to appear, with handsome engravings of colored maps, giving the Belgian story as against the German.

Even a secret press bureau has been set up at Brussels, which issues typewritten sheets comparing favorably with those from the official press bureau at Paris and London. The work is well done, showing that there must be capable men to gather the material and put it in shape. The sheets, mechanically, are even better than those issued at Paris and London, showing that there must be a large staff of duplicating process somewhere beyond the power of the Germans to discover.

The Belgian officials themselves do not know how this work is done, and it is simply incomprehensible how all this editing, printing, and circulation is accomplished, getting the requisite white paper and ink, drawing cartoons, engraving and lithographing, and all the innumerable details of getting out newspapers, weeklies, books and a press service, can be accomplished in the face of the German police straining every nerve and offering prizes on the heads of editors. It takes courage and ingenuity to be an editor in Belgium under these conditions.

Great American Porcelain.
Hazel H. Adler in the Century.

In 1911 an American woman, Adelaide Alsop Robineau, sent an exquisite collection of high-fire porcelains to the International exposition in Turin, Italy, where they were awarded the grand prize, the highest award that could be given, and against the best modern porcelain manufacturers in the world. In recognition of her great contribution to the ceramic art of the world, both France and Italy awarded her the highest honors in their power, and yet her work in this country is unglorified and unknown, and some of the rarest pieces for which collectors hereafter will pay fabulous sums have had to be sacrificed to provide for the bare means of subsistence.

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Political Posters Prohibited.
Political candidates have not informed through a recent issue of Electric Railway Service, the company publication of the Detroit (Mich.) United Railway, that they will have considered in their coming bills if they will announce to their workers not to attempt to place cards, posters and such stuff on the property of the company. His workers have issued that political advertising matter must not be posted or distributed, and without its consent officials of the company it will be torn down and destroyed as soon as discovered.

FIVE BILLS SQUARE MEAL, INVENTOR SAYS

Dixon Warner, of Los Angeles, Claims He Has Devised Proper Food.

New York—There is a guest at the Waldorf who wouldn't care if he left retired to his farm tomorrow. He is Adam Dixon Warner, of Los Angeles, and he arrived yesterday carrying in his suit case enough provisions to last him two months. He is his own cook and never has to wash a dish.

Since his youthful days in a Wisconsin lumber camp cooking has been Mr. Warner's hobby. In his first season in the woods he learned that the peavey man who labored all day in icy water received only \$40 a month, while the cook who traveled light a lord in his wagon drew down \$125.

Mr. Warner resolved to be a cook. The next season he was, to the delight of himself and the camp. With the passing of the pine he drifted west. He was admitted to the bar, made \$20,000 a year, became prominent in politics, grew intimate with William Jennings Bryan and told J. Ham Lewis the latest barber shop jokes.

But in his spare moments the aroma of beans or coffee would send him harking back to his wander days in Wisconsin woods. Even William Jennings and J. Ham noticed something wrong. It was a critical moment for Adam Dixon Warner and the world in general when he nearly became a congressman. If he had not done so he never have seen the perfect ration.

Forsaking home and friends and forgetting politics, in which he had already won the title of "Silver Dick" because of the admiration he inspired in Mr. Bryan, he returned to his laboratory and a chemist. For 12 months he and the chemist cooked.

At the end of that time they had evolved the perfect ration. Warner wasn't sure of it until he tried it on his mother-in-law.

"Adam, it's just perfect," she said. "The ration comes in lumps, about the size and shape of chocolate drops. Five make a meal. Each contains wheat, corn, oats, rice, lentils, beans, peanuts, walnuts, almonds, raisins, oranges, raisins, figs, prunes, pineapple, asparagus, spinach, lettuce, onions, carrots and celery."

Mr. Warner is a vegetarian, but he says he will concoct a special edition of the ration for a Thanksgiving dinner.

Nature and the Artist.

Augusta Rodin, in the Century.

"Sincerity, conscience—these are the true bases of thought in the work of an artist; but whenever the artist attains to a certain activity, he expresses, to often he is wont to replace conscience with skill. The reign of skill is the ruin of art. It is an organized falsehood. Sincerity with one fault, indeed with many faults, still preserves its integrity. The faculty that believes that it has no faults has them all. The primitives, who ignored the laws of perspective, nevertheless created great works of art because they brought to them absolute sincerity. Look at this Persian miniature, the admirable reverence of this illuminator for the form of these plants and animals, and the attitudes of these persons which he has forced himself to render just as he saw them. How eagerly has he painted that, this man who loves and admires you tell me that his work is bad because he is ignorant of the laws of perspective? And the great French primitives and the Roman architects and sculptors! Has it not been repeatedly said that their style is a barbaric style? On the contrary, it has a formidable beauty. It breathes the sacred awe of those who have been impressed by the great works of nature herself. It offers us the strongest proof that these men had made the noblest use of life and also a part of its mystery."

"To express life it is necessary to desire to express it. The art of statuary is made up of conscience, precision and will. If I had not had tenacity of purpose, if I had not been able to do my researches, the book of nature would have been for me a dead letter, or at least it would have witheld from me its meaning. Now, on the contrary, it is a book that I constantly consult, and I go to it, knowing well that I have only spilled out certain pages. In art to admit only that which one comprehends leads to impotence. Nature remains full of unknown forces. When we see a certain object, we feel a certain reservation, she shows us these forces, she lends them to us."

Art and Happiness.

Augusta Rodin, in the Century.

Art alone gives happiness. And I call art the study of nature, the perpetual communion with her through the spirit of analysis. The admirer of nature, who knows how to see and feel may find everywhere and always things to admire. He who knows how to see and feel is preserved from ennui, that bete noire of modern society. He who sees and feels deeply never lacks the desire to express his feelings, to be an artist. Is not nature the source of all beauty? Is she not the only creator? It is only by drawing near to her that the artist can bring back to us all that she has revealed to him.

When one says that, the public thinks it a commonplace. All the world believes that it knows that; but it knows it only in seeming, the truth penetrates only the superficial shell of its intelligence. There are so many degrees in real comprehension. Comprehension is like a divine ladder. Only he who has reached the top round has a view of the world. The public is astonished or shocked when some one goes against its preconceived notions, against the prejudices of a badly interpreted or degenerate tradition. Words are nothing; the deed alone counts. It is not by reading manuals of esthetics, but by leaning on nature herself that the artist discovers and expresses beauty.

Alas! we are not prepared to see and to feel. Our sorry education, far from cultivating in us the feeling for enthusiasm, makes us in our youth become pedants who without knowing it exalt themselves and others with our pretensions. Those who too late, by long efforts, escape this demon of folly arrive only after that education has been soaped in, like strength and has destroyed the flower of enthusiasm that God had planted in them as a sign of his paradise. People without enthusiasm are like men who carry their tags pointed down to the ground instead of proudly above their heads.

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