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BREEME HOUSE

By Katherine Newlin Burt

"Ah! then it's all right. But—my goodness! Here's medicine time, and Mr. Tremont is waiting downstairs to help me with my Indian stuff. Just ring for Thomas, will you, Alec? Thank you. Don't blame your mother for tattling, will you? Don't grudge me my diversions."

"Indeed, sir, I shan't."

Alec turned in the doorway to see his father twinkling with a finger up.

"Don't let your Yankee cousin cut you out that's all."

Alec half started. Whatever was selfish and primitive in his nature resented this notion of a rival in the field. He might not love Claire, but he had thought of making her his wife, and he would brook no other dog in the manger.

Alec took the letters to his own room downstairs to answer them. Rapidly he tore open the letter from the money-lender, and read it. Yes—it was an appeal to the earl, an attempt at threat of publicity if the loan were not promptly repaid. The bullying tone of it made Alec cold with mingled anger and fear. In exasperation he tore it to bits and threw it into the waste-paper basket. But its closing words persistently shouted themselves in his ears.

"The law will be duly invoked unless we receive complete satisfaction, and that immediately. We should be glad to be spared the painful necessity of giving this matter publicity, and rely upon your lordship to take prompt action accordingly."

The effect of this threat of imminent disclosure and the interview with his father was cumulative. Soreness of heart, a sensation of being trapped, a mighty desire to please the people who anxiously loved him, fear of losing by hesitation a prize within his grasp, and the pressing anxiety of his unconfessed debts began so to torment the poor fellow that work became an impossibility. He sat with his elbows on the desk, one long hand propping his face, the other pricking meaningless pen-patterns on the blotting-pad.

Was there no one to whom he could turn for advice or help? Things were closing in on him, threatening him with fiasco in every direction. How about consulting Sir Geoffrey Brooke? He was level-headed and understanding. But Alec stood in awe of him; Sir Geoffrey, he felt, would call for a very full and complete accounting, on other subjects than that of finance, before he would raise a hand to release him from the immediate predicament of this Unterberg.

Or Rufus Tremont? Alec had sat up with him over their pipes last night, and somehow the keen-minded American had led him on to talk of himself and his affairs, so that his listener had obtained a pretty clear view of the penury of the heir of Breeme. Alec was impressed by Tremont's quick mentality and resourcefulness, and evidently the man had money. With characteristic hopefulness Alec rehearsed imaginary conversations with his American "cousin," leading to a successful outcome. And yet, he was a guest; had not been with them for twenty-four hours! At least it couldn't be done just yet.

Alec started to design pen-patterns on another corner of the blotter.

Then Humphrey, outside in the passage, shouted, "I say, Miss Aline let a fellow go!" and there came a little laugh from Aline, and a banging of naughty heels up the panels of the door.

Alec, starting up, flung it open. The rebel tumbled in upon him in a struggling heap, Aline barely recovering herself from a elik disaster, and Alec caught up his step-brother and gave him a smart cuff.

"Hold your noise, young 'un," said he sternly, "and do as you're bid. What's up? Can't you manage him, Aline?"

Humphrey's half-laughing scream had dissolved into heart-broken tears. He turned to Aline, burying his hot cheeks in her skirt. Her cheeks, too, were hot.

"Alec, how could you! It was half fun."

"That will teach him to keep

his fun in the nursery, where it belongs. He's getting a bit beyond you, Aline."

"Nothing of the sort. I can manage him without blows. I didn't know you were here."

"I'm usually here at this time in the morning."

"Come, Humphrey," said Aline. "Tell Alec you're sorry you disturbed him, and we'll go back, shall we?"

Humphrey ruefully obeyed, looking up for his apology with such round, grieved eyes that Alec, all on edge as he was, felt something like a twinge.

"You'll get over it," said he gruffly, rubbing Humphrey's curls. Then, wistfully, "What are you doing, Aline? May I come too?"

She hesitated, the flush coming and going in her thin young face.

"The children have their lessons," she began. "Oughtn't you to get through with your letter-writing?" And—and—Miss Wilton said something about a ride with you."

"You don't want me," said Alec bitterly. "Do you want me Aline?"

He came closer to say this, and she started away, trembling, but found herself held by the wrists.

"Aline, do you want me?"

She gave him another of those wild, dumb looks. Her lips were pinched and pale, like a person's in pain. Alec could not tell whether she did not speak because she couldn't, or because she wouldn't.

"Humphrey, go away," she said suddenly in a strained tone, and the child instantly obeyed without looking back.

She stood in Alec's grasp for a moment, then:

"You like to hurt me," she said, very low.

He kissed first one of the imprisoned hands, then the other with hard lips.

"I like to hurt you so and so," he said violently.

They were both talking in whispers. Aline let her eyelids fall. She spoke in an expressionless voice, not looking at Alec, but past him.

"I am engaged to marry Sir Geoffrey Brooke," she said.

Alec crushed her hands, then dropped them.

"It's a secret," she went on, with the same tone and look, "so you won't say anything about it, please—even to him. I shouldn't have told you if you hadn't forced me to."

Alec said nothing. He narrowed his eyes to slits and looked at her.

Suddenly those darkened eyes of hers swept over him. Then she slipped away.

Alec went back to his desk and sat there pricking patterns in the blotting-pad.

He didn't pay any attention to time; there might never have been such a thing. All that seemed of any importance to him just then was to prick ten little black dots in an orderly row directly under ten other black dots.

"Alec," said an uncertain voice.

Jane, well-trained little sister that she was, had been waiting for him to look up.

"Don't you feel well?"

He scowled at her, and she went on quickly:

"I just asked because you were frowning so. I thought you must have a headache. Were you busy?" Jane had watched the black dots in considerable mystification. "You don't feel like talking, do you?"

"Why, yes," in a flat tone, returning to the dot.

Jane shut the door and came back, standing with her hand on the desk.

"I want to talk to you about Mr. Tremont."

"What of him?"

"Have you told Mr. Tremont about your debts," she got out with difficulty.

He drew himself coldly away from her and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking hard and pale.

"On my soul, Jane, I don't see what business it is of yours"

The tears came, but she went on bravely.

"You don't understand, Alec. Please. It's for a reason. I—I

don't believe you know Mr. Tremont yet. He's not so simple as he seems. Behind everything he says and does there's a purpose. He—he has fixed himself upon us. He wants something."

"What the dickens does he want, Miss Sherlock Holmes?"

"He wants"—Jane stood up and looked at him, drawing a big breath—"the Van Dyke."

The change in Alec's face was extraordinary.

"What do you mean?" he asked bluntly, his jaw locking longer and his eyes narrowing than usual.

"That's the way I felt," she cried.

"Do you mean to say that he has told you so?"

"Yes. It is amazing. But he came to Breeme House for that purpose and no other. I laughed at the notion. I begged him to give it up at once. I hoped he had. But, Alec, somehow, after my asking him not to approach father, he fastened his eyes at once upon you. And I feel that he means to get at you so that—"

"Confound his impertinence!" said Alec. "He comes here as our guest and walks about appraising our property. He wants to buy us out, I suppose."

"He wants," said Jane quietly, "the Van Dyke. Just that; no more, no less."

"He can want it, then," sneered Alec "and he can leave wanting it. So that's what he was after! I did tell him about my debts. You're right. He wormed it out of me last night, over our pipes."

"I thought so. You couldn't help it, I fancy. He has a way of looking at me."

Alec stared at her.

"It's time he packed. I'll go to father."

"Ah, no! Please don't!"

He turned half-way to the door.

"Well?"

She was nervously protesting. "It will disappoint papa, hurt him, insult him; and he's loving the situation so. And Mr. Tremont is helping him with the book. It's such a good sign that he should get to work again with real zest."

"What am I to do, then?"

"Couldn't he be made to feel that our selling anything to him is out of the question—preposterous?"

Alec colored.

"Not after what I've told him, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I did hope you hadn't told him. It will have made him feel so confident."

Jane actually whipped her hand with her gloves. Her eyes were extraordinarily clear of dreams. They were proud, excited, angry—a little frightened, perhaps.

Alec said nothing. Into his silence came the sound of a man's step. It went leisurely past the door and down the passage that led to the picture gallery. A voice that followed the swinging rhythm of the step began softly to sing:

"If I give you a coach and six—

Six black horses, as black as pitch,

"Madam, will you walk?"

Madam, will you walk and talk with me?"

The voice was tauntingly confident and gay, with only a mocking wistfulness—the voice of a suitor who loves his lady the better for her mightiness, being sure of her surrender.

Jane's hand tightened.

"It's Mr. Tremont," said she, half laughing, half angry, with a bright color in her cheeks. "He's singing to Lady Jane. Oh, Alec, she is in danger."

"If I give you the keys to my heart?"

If I give you the keys to my heart?"

Madam, will you walk? Madam, will you walk and talk with me?"

That voice had its effects upon Alec. He took up his riding-crop from a chair and put a finger under Jane's chin for good-bye. His eyes were coldly bright.

"I'm going to ride with Claire now," he said, and added, with a satirical half-smile: "Wish me good luck—since it's for Lady Jane."

Her eyes glowed with understanding and happiness.

"Oh, Alec!—I do; indeed I do!" she whispered.

Riding with Claire, Wilton through the joyous young green of early summer, Lord Tremont was obsessed with a queer complexity of feeling and purpose.

He was more and more determined to have her for his wife, more and more proud of her beauty, more and more desirous of the power that was hers. Far within him Aline's dear familiar face made of his heart a ball of fire. But the more fiercely it burned the more positively his will reacted, against her. He was not a man to succumb to suffering, or to learn forbearance under it. It filled him with rage—with the will for action. It prevented any clearness of vision. It prevented, also, fair judgment. His mind was merciless to Aline. It snarled at her as an animal snarls in pain.

"She wants me to marry Claire. Very well, I will marry her, and Aline shall be cut off from Breeme House—from all its intimacies, at any rate. She can take her Sir Geoffrey, and get out."

"Show me, please," asked Claire suddenly, "Aline Parkes' old home—the rectory?"

With tightened lips he turned down a certain bank-snuggled lane. They crossed a bridge, he pulled up, pointing with his whip. The house stood beside a tiny old stone church; it was low and grey and many cornered. The turf was tucked closely about it. It seemed to be packed like a box with gay, old-fashioned flowers, which overflowed from every window and spilled in streams against and under the vine-grown walls. Bees droned. The sun soaked into it all.

"What a dear, squat, humming, snugly house!" said Claire. "Who lives there now?"

"Mr. Bottomley. He will marry one of the Meriden girls—we can't distinguish yet which one it's to be."

"I can see Aline here," went on Claire; "not that she's the rosy cottage type, but she's such a quiet, quick figure. She'd go so lightly and purposefully in and out."

Alec stared at the place with eyes that saw very little.

"Was she happy there?" asked Claire clearly.

"Aline?"

"Yes; of course, Alec," Claire was rather curiously watching him.

TO BE CONTINUED

BANDITS' NOTCH STEERING WHEEL

Pretty Girl, Mother of Two Children, Acted As Look-out in Crimes

Indianapolis, Ind.—Bandits who proclaim their criminal accomplishments by notching the handles of their six-shooters, are being superseded by a different type of desperado, who cuts a notch in the steering wheel of his automobile.

And, while the picturesque bad man of the west was supposed to record only killings, the modern bandit takes note of each felonious "job" by adding a notch to the wheel.

This was the discovery of local police who recently apprehended a trio of motor car bandits and found the steering wheel adorned by nearly 100 such notches.

Girl "Lookout."

One of the three was comely May Conrad, 21-year-old bobbed haired banditress and the mother of two children. She was arrested acting as "lookout" for Charles and George Maggard, 22 and 19, respectively, while they looted a house.

All were arraigned before Criminal Court Judge Collins and sentenced to from 2 to 14 years' imprisonment. They admitted, according to police, that they had staged nearly 100 robberies in eight states. Notches on the steering wheel of the car they used bore mute evidence of the fact.

When Judge Collins pronounced sentence upon her, the girl-bandit burst into tears.

Wants Her Babies.

"I want my babies," she cried. It was the first indication that the nerves of steel which had withstood the strain of the many jobs in which she confessed taking part, had given way.

"I'll promise never to go wrong again," she sobbed, but Judge Collins refused to modify the sentence.

Mrs. Conrad said she was the mother of a girl, 13 months old, and a boy of four years. The children, she said, are being cared for by her mother in Riverview, Pa.

Evil influence, rather than a quest for thrills, was responsible for her starting upon a life of crime when she was 20, the girl told police.

Labor Saving. From the Washington Star. "You appear to like speaking over the radio."

"It means less physical exertion than the old way," answered Senator Scrghum. "There isn't a crowd in waiting to shake hands with you."

The Canny Scot. From the American Legion Weekly. Randy: "Why do you roll your own cigarettes, Mr. McTavish?" Sandy: "Aweel, ye ken after I smoke a bag o' baccy, I can always get two smokes out o' the vacuum cleaner."



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Melba's voice made her famous in every part of the civilized world, but when she was struggling for a career, in her early days, she met with some rebuffs which would have effectually discouraged many another person. She was called to the attention of Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1889 and he did not think enough of her voice to warrant him in putting her in his Savoy Opera company. She was also declined as a pupil by Sig. Alberto Randegger.—Columbus Dispatch.

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Community Basket

Bern has established a "community wastebasket." It takes the form of a huge tin receptacle placed in the heart of the public square, where the citizens of Bern will be expected to throw all their trash. The receptacle has a capacity of several hundred tons.

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The High Cost of Postponing Permanent Highway Building

Poor motor roads stifle industry and agriculture; waste huge sums annually in high maintenance costs, and greatly increase gasoline, tire and repair bills.

There is not a state, not a county, not a community, that isn't paying a heavy price for having too few permanent roads.

There are still many sections of the country—even whole states—that are trying to operate twentieth century traffic over nineteenth century roads.

This is costing millions of dollars every year, and will keep on costing millions until we have well developed permanent highway systems everywhere.

Even what we often call the more progressive communities are far behind the demands of modern highway traffic with its 15,000,000 motor vehicles.

From the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada to Mexico, we need more concrete roads—the roads for twentieth century traffic.

Your highway officials want to be of the greatest possible service to you. Get behind them with ways and means that will provide more concrete roads and streets. Such an investment will pay you big dividends year after year.

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