

Adele Garrison
"My Husband's Love"

The Message Harry Underwood Sent to Lillian.

Harry Underwood's sudden appearance from the clump of evergreens in the hidden road startled me almost to the point of a shriek. But from somewhere I summoned the self-control to answer his query. "Can't you figure out how I managed it, Lady Fair?" in as casual a manner as if we were continuing a conversation of long duration.

"I suppose you backed the car in from the other road," I said. Knowing that he had served as an ambulance driver during the war, and remembering his reputation as a driver, I realized that the task of backing a car along two miles of winding wood path—for what was really all the road amounted to—would be only child's play for him.

"Step up and receive the pink merit card," he gibed. "That's exactly what your Uncle Dudley did do. And now I suppose you're wondering what it's all about, and why I'm galloping around this fag-end of nowhere with an escaped criminal tucked under my manly right arm."

I smiled at his characteristic little fling at the section of country around us. To Harry Underwood any spot on earth except the streets within a few blocks of Broadway and Forty-second, is the "fag-end of nowhere."

I have heard him use the expression dozens of times. "You're generally to be found in the most unexpected places, aren't you?" I countered demurely, adding the mental comment that if ever a man had a flair for theatrical appearances and actions, that man is Harry Underwood.

He never does anything in an ordinary manner, and revels in the mysterious and bizarre. I have always thought that he was born a couple of centuries too late. He would have been a wonderfully attractive swash-buckling adventurer, hampered by no troublesome scruples of convention or conscience.

Harry Underwood Is Quizzical. He shot me a keen, mocking glance. "Aren't you going to gratify big bad old man by exhibiting any curiosity, are you?" he drawled. "Well, just or that, I'm not going to tell you one single thing, although I know you're simply writhing with curiosity inside that cucumberish exterior. I came down here—no matter what for—discovered you were here—no matter how—and decided to send you that scarab by dear old Jim to let you know I was on earth. By the way, how is Jim? I hope he wasn't inconvenienced."

"Not a bit," I returned. "And—I'm sorry, but I must hurry back." Dear Mama-in-law right on the job, eh? he quizzed, and I was so furious that my cheeks flamed at the thrust.

The mockery faded from his eyes in an instant.

"Forgive me, Lady Fair," he pleaded boyishly, then he pushed on without waiting for an answer. "I want to talk seriously to you about forty seconds or so. Where's Lill?"

"In the Catskills with Marion, visiting Mrs. Cosgrove."

"The old billy goat's sister, eh?" he said with a laugh. "Lill must be in love to stay up in that God-forsaken place in this kind of weather."

"Her physician ordered her to the mountains," I said indignantly.

"Nice, accommodating doc," he interrupted laughing. "But that's neither here nor yet there. Tell me this: Why in thunder doesn't she get a divorce from me, instead of dragging along this way? I've told her often enough that I wouldn't defend it, she can bring any charge against me she likes—with perfect truth," he added with a wry grimace.

I explained patiently that Lillian was unwilling to expose her idolized daughter, Marion, to the publicity of a second divorce suit of her mother's would cause.

"I—Always—Know."

"Piffle—also poppycock!" Mr. Underwood exclaimed. "She's foxy enough, and can pull enough wires to file it where and when it won't attract attention. And if it does leak out, by the time Marion is old enough to have it matter, it will have been forgotten. And if Marion goes in for the society stunt, a twice-divorced mother will be an asset to her. I believe the average is three to each parent in our loftist circles. In any event if she and old Savarin will just time their wedding day when some movie star scandal breaks, nobody will ever know when they're married. Look here, will you tell her all this and let me know her decision? I'd go to see her directly, but there's no use giving her any unnecessarily unpleasant moments."

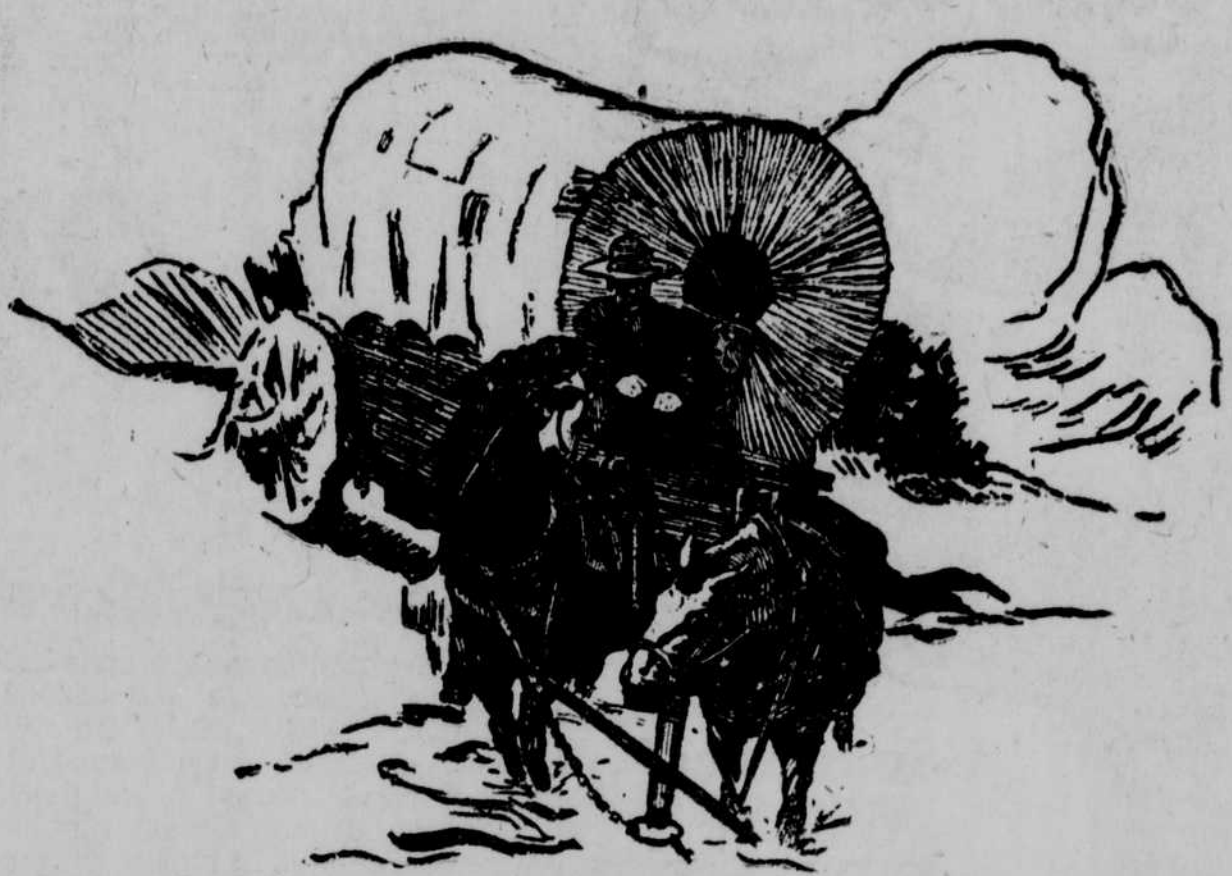
"Yes, I'll tell her," I answered. "How shall I reach you?"

"Did you ever pass that little pawn shop between—" (he named a location only a block away from the apartment which Dicky and I had taken until we could find one better suited to us).

"Yes, I have seen it," I answered. "Well, either of the two proprietors there, George or Ed Briscoe—that isn't their right name, but that doesn't concern you—will do anything for me, because of reasons. If you have an answer for me from Lill, or if for any reason you need me—and you know your Uncle Dudley will come from Kamchatka to serve you—go in there, be sure you're speaking to either George or Ed, and that no one else hears you, and give him that scarab pin I sent you by Jim. You don't need to say a word. They'll do the rest."

"But—how will you know where I am?"

"I—always—know, Lady Fair," he said, made a ceremonious yet half-mocking obeisance and vanished into the woods.



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