

A Woman Interferes.

BY ROBERT BARR.
Author of "The Face and the Mask," "In the Midst of Alarms," Etc.

CHAPTER VII.

Miss Jennie Brewster was very much annoyed at being interrupted, and she took no pains to conceal her feelings. She was writing an article entitled "How People Kill Time on Shipboard," and she did not wish to be disturbed; besides, as she often said of herself, she was not "a woman's woman," and neither liked nor was liked by her own sex.

"I desire a few moments' conversation with you, if I have your permission," said Edith Longworth, as she closed the door behind her.

"Certainly," answered Jennie Brewster.

"Thank you," replied the other, as she took a seat on the sofa. "I do not know just how to begin what I wish to say, but I will be better to commence by telling you that I know why you are on board this steamer, and why am I on board the steamer, may I ask?"

"You are here, I understand, to get certain information from Mr. Wentworth. You have obtained it, and it is in reference to this that I have come to see you."

"Indeed, and are you so friendly with Mr. Wentworth that you know his affairs?"

"I do not know Mr. Wentworth at all," replied Jennie Brewster.

"Then why do you come on a mission from him?"

"It is not a mission from him. It is not a mission from any one. I am speaking to Mr. Kenyon, or rather, Mr. Kenyon was speaking to me about a subject which troubled him greatly. It is a subject in which my father is interested. My father is a member of the London syndicate, and he naturally would desire to know the latest cable message sent to New York."

"Really, are you quite sure that you are not speaking less for your father than for your friend Kenyon?"

"Anger burned in Miss Longworth's face, and flashed from her eyes as she answered: 'You must not speak to me in that way.' 'Excuse me, I shall speak to you in just the way I please. I did not ask for this conference, you did, and as you have taken it upon yourself to come into this room uninvited, you will have to put up with what you hear. Those who interfere with other people's business, as a general thing, do not have a nice time.' 'I quite appreciated all the possible disadvantages of coming here when I came.' 'I am glad that, because if you hear anything you do not like, you will not be disappointed and will have only yourself to thank for it.' 'I would like to talk about this matter in a spirit of friendliness, if I can. I think no good is to be attained by speaking in any other way.' 'Very well, then. What excuse have you to give me for coming to my steamer to talk about business which does not concern you?' 'Miss Brewster, it does concern me—it concerns my father, and that concerns me. I am, in a measure, my father's private secretary, and am intimately acquainted with all the business he has in hand. My father's business is his affair, and therefore mine. That is the reason I am here.' 'Are you sure?' 'Am I sure of what?' 'Are you sure that what you say is true?' 'I am not in the habit of speaking anything but the truth.' 'Perhaps you flatter yourself in that case, but it does not deceive me. You merely came here because Mr. Kenyon is in a muddle about what I am going to do. Isn't that the reason?' 'Miss Longworth saw that her task was going to be even harder than she had expected. 'Suppose we let all question of motive rest. I have come here—I have asked your permission to speak on this subject, and you have given me the permission. Having done so, it seems to me you should hear me out. You say that I should not be offended.' 'I didn't say so, I do not care a rap whether you are offended or not.' 'You at least said I might hear something that would not be pleasant. What I wanted to say is this: I have taken the risk of that, and, as you remark, whether I am offended or not does not matter. Now we will come to the point.' 'Just before you come to the point, please let me know if Mr. Kenyon told you he had spoken to me on this subject already?' 'Yes, he told me so.' 'Did he tell you that his friend Wentworth had also had a conversation with me about it?' 'Yes, he told me that also.' 'Very well, then. If those two men can do nothing to change my purposes, how do you expect to do it?' 'That is what I am about to tell you. This is a commercial world, and I am a commercial man's daughter. I recognize the fact that you are going to cable this information for the money it brings. Is not that the case?' 'It is partly the case.' 'For what other consideration do you work, then?' 'For the consideration of being known as one of the best newspaper women in the city of New York. That is the other consideration which I have in mind.' 'I understood you were already known as the most noted newspaper woman in New York.' 'This remark was much more diplomatic than Miss Longworth herself suspected. Jennie Brewster looked rather pleased, then she said: 'Oh, I don't know about that, but I intend

New York Argus will pay you. Is that not a fair offer?"

Jennie Brewster had arisen. She clasped her hands and spoke nervously. "For a small space of time nothing was said, and Edith Longworth imagined she had gained her point. The woman standing looked down at her, and she said: 'Do you know all the particulars about the attempt to get this information?' asked Miss Brewster.

"I know some of them. What particulars do you mean?"

"Do you know that a man from the Argus tried to get this information from Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Wentworth in Canada?"

"Yes, I know about that."

"Do you know that he stole the reports, and that they were taken from him before he could use them?"

"Yes."

"Do you know he offered Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Wentworth double the price the London syndicate would have paid them, on condition they gave him a synopsis of the reports?"

"Yes, I know that also."

"Very well, then. Now you ask me to do very much more than I have asked them; because you ask me to keep my paper completely in the dark about the information I have got. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, you can keep them in the dark until after the report has been given to the directors; then, of course, you can do what you please with the information."

"Ah, but by that time it will be of no value. By that time it will be published in the London financial papers. At that time anybody can get it. Isn't that the case?"

"I suppose so."

"Now, I want to ask you one other question, Miss—Miss—I don't think you told me your name."

"Very well, Miss Longworth. I want to ask you one more question. What do you think of the conduct of Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Wentworth in refusing to take double what they had been promised for making the report?"

"What do I think of them?" repeated the girl.

"Yes, what do you think of them? You hesitate. You realize that you are in a corner. You think Mr. Wentworth and Mr. Ken-

ny such idea passed through the brain of the newspaper woman she thought better of it. For a few moments she stood silent, and Jennie Brewster said, in a voice of unusual calmness: 'You are quite welcome to your opinion of me, Miss Longworth, but I presume I am entitled to my opinion of Kenyon and Wentworth. They are two fools, and you are a third in thinking you can control the actions of a young woman whose two young men have felled. Do you think for a moment I would grant to you, a woman of a class I hate, what I would not grant to a young man like Wentworth? They say that he is no fool like an old fool, but it should be said that there is no fool like a young woman who has had everything her own way in this world. You are—' 'I will not stay and listen to your abuse. I wish to have nothing more to do with you.' 'Oh, yes, you will stay, cried the other, placing her back against the door. 'You came here at your own pleasure, you will leave at mine. I will tell you more truth in five minutes than you ever heard in your life before. I will tell you, in the first place, that my business is quite as honorable as Kenyon's or Wentworth's. What does Kenyon do but try to get information about mines which other people are vitally interested in keeping from him? What does Wentworth do but fret about among accounts like a detective trying to find out what other people are endeavoring to conceal? What is the whole mining business but one vast swindle, whose worst victims are the people who are connected with mining fears publicity. If your father has made a million out of mines, he has made it simply by swindling unfortunate victims. I do my business my way, and your two friends do theirs in their own way. Of the two, I consider my vocation the more honorable. Now that you have heard what I have to say, you may go, and let me tell you that I never wish to see you or speak with you again.' 'Thank you for your permission to go. I am sure that I cordially echo your wish that we may never meet again. I may say, however, that I am sorry I spoke to you in the way I did. It is, of course, impossible for you to look on the matter from my point of view, just as it is impossible for me to look upon it from yours. Nevertheless, I wish you would forget what I said, and think over the matter a little more, and if you see your way to accepting my offer it will be always open to you. If you will forego the sending of that cable-

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of "Life at Sea," and which were recently issued in book form.

As everybody is already aware, her sketches of the general New York politician and also of the Englishman are considered the finest things in the little volume. They have been largely copied as typical examples of American humor. When Jennie Brewster doctored the deck she walked along up and down the promenade, with a sort of half-defiant look in her eye as she glared at Kenyon and Miss Longworth, and she generally passed them without a word.

On this particularly eventful Saturday morning Kenyon and Miss Longworth had the deck to themselves. The conversation naturally turned to the subject which had occupied the minds of both for the few last days.

"Do you know," said Miss Longworth, "I have been thinking all along that she would come to me at the last for the money."

"I am not at all sure about that," answered Kenyon.

"I thought she would probably keep on the tenter hooks just as long as possible, and then she would come and say she would accept the offer."

"If she does," said Kenyon, "I would not trust her. I would give her to understand that she would not be allowed to see me were certain the article had not been used."

"Do you think that would be the safe way to act if she came and said she would take the money for not sending the cablegram? Don't you think it would be better to pay her now and let her go with a clean conscience?"

Kenyon laughed somewhat sarcastically. "I do not think I would trust much to her honor."

"Now, do you know, I have a different opinion of her. I feel sure that if she said she would do a thing, she would do it."

"I have no such faith," answered Kenyon. "I think, on the contrary, that she is quite capable of such an action as asking you for the money and still sending her telegram."

"Well, if she would do it, I think the girl really believes she is acting rightly, and imagines she has done a very creditable action in a very clever way. If she were not so sure of herself, she would not have shown as much temper as she did—not but that I gave a deplorable exhibition of temper myself, for which there was really no excuse."

"I am sure," said Kenyon warmly, "you did nothing of the kind. At all events, I am sure everything you did was perfectly right; and I know you were completely justified in anything you said."

"I wish I could think so," said Kenyon. But what that question was and when Edith Longworth inquired about it some time later the question had entirely gone from Kenyon's mind. The steamship, which was ploughing along through the water as smoothly as if it were not shaken by an earthquake; there were three tremendous bumps, such as a sledge might make by going suddenly over logs concealed in the smooth sea. Both Kenyon and Miss Longworth were thrown off their feet. There was a low roar of steam, and they saw a cloud rise up from the smoke, and the ship began to lurch. Kenyon and Miss Longworth realized the situation, she found herself both thrown to Kenyon, clasping his arm with both hands.

"What—what is it?" she cried in alarm.

"Something is wrong," said Kenyon. "Nothing serious, I hope. Will you wait here a moment while I go and see."

"Certainly," she answered, releasing his arm. "It is stupid of me, but I feel very nervous, and I don't know what to do."

"Perhaps you would rather not be left alone."

"Oh, no, it is all over now, but when the other terrible shocks came it seemed to me we had struck a rock."

"There are no rocks here," said Kenyon. "The ship is apparently pouring out of every dent out of our course. Something has gone wrong with the machinery. I imagine. Just wait a moment, and I will find out." As Kenyon rushed toward the companion way he met a sailor, hurrying in the other direction.

"What is the matter?" cried Kenyon.

The sailor gave no answer.

On entering the companion way door Kenyon found the place full of steam, and he ran against the officers.

"What is wrong?" he asked the matter.

"How should I know?" was the answer. "Very well, the best to do is not ask any questions. Everything will be attended to."

This was scant encouragement. People began crowding up the companion way, and Kenyon, who hurried to and fro soon the deck, that but a moment before had been almost without an occupant, was now crowded with excited human beings in all states of dress and undress.

"What is wrong?" was the question on every lip, to which, as yet, there was no answer, and whirling in the steam, and from time to time, or gave short and unsatisfactory replies to the inquiries which poured in upon them. People did not pause to reflect that even an officer could hardly be expected to know off-hand what the cause of the sudden stoppage of the engine was. By and by the captain appeared, making a bland. He told them there was no danger. Something had gone wrong with the machinery exactly what he could not say, but he had no doubt that everything would be all right in a short time; if they merely remained calm. These, and a lot of other nautical lies, which are always told on such occasions, served to calm the fears of the crowd, and by and by after another half-hour or so, the engine was found to be running again, and the vessel was not going to sink immediately. They all appeared some time afterward in their usual ap-

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gram I will willingly pay you three times what the New York Argus will give you for most of its news as a bribe. I merely offer it so that you will not suffer from doing what I believe to be a just action. It seems to me a great pity that two young men should have to endure a serious check to their business advancement because one of them was foolish enough to confide in a woman in whom he believed."

Edith Longworth was young, and of course could not be expected to be a mistress of diplomacy, but she might have known the fact that Miss Longworth had spoiled the effect of all that had gone before.

"Really, Miss Longworth, I had some little admiration for you when you blazed out at me in the way you did, but now, when you coolly repeat your offer of a bribe, adding one-third to it, all my respect for you vanishes. You may go and tell them that you think that nothing under heaven can prevent that cablegram being sent."

In saying this, however, Miss Brewster somewhat exceeded her knowledge. Few of us can foretell what may or may not happen under heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

Edith Longworth went to her stateroom and there had what women call a good cry over her failure. Jennie Brewster continued her writing, and Kenyon and then, as she thought, with regret, of some sharp thing she might have said, which did not occur to her at the time of the interview. Kenyon spent his time in pacing up and down the deck, hoping for the reappearance of Miss Longworth, an expectation which, for a time at least, was the hope of the whole party. The heart sick, Fleming, the New York politician, kept the smoking room merry listening to the stories he told. He varied the proceedings by frequently asking everybody to drink with him, an invitation that met with no general refusal. Old Mr. Longworth dozed in his time in his stateroom chair. Wentworth, who still bitterly accused himself of having been a fool, talked with no one, not even his friend Kenyon. All the time the great steamer apparently pouring out of every dent out of our course. Something has gone wrong with the machinery. I imagine. Just wait a moment, and I will find out. As Kenyon rushed toward the companion way he met a sailor, hurrying in the other direction.

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