BY THE GRACE OF A RED HAT

By Madge Bronson...

It was such a startling bit of millinery—all crimson velvet, peacock breasts and glittering buckles!

Edith Harlowe, stepping from the elevated train, paused for a farewell glance in its direction. The next instant there came a fierce tug on her belt. Then something strong and convincing clasped her waist. Vaguely she felt that her feet were dangling in space. Then she heard horrified cries, and finally she realized that she had been dropped unceremoniously upon the seat nearest the door, with a crowd of curious people pressing upon her.

"Oh, the poor thing, she's going to faint!"

Edith drew herself up defiantly, only to drop back instantly into a more limp and comfortable position, and the downtown terminus was reached before she felt equal to walking. A faint peach blow tint crept into her face as she approached the young guard who had so pluckily come between herself and death.

"This is one of the times, don't you know, when one can't think of pretty speeches. It was all my fault—and—and if you had not"— She shuddered suggestively. "Please give me your name—and my uncle will thank you better than I can. Perhaps he"—

One glance at the guard, and the words died on her lips. The young fellow was looking into her eyes with an air which would stamp any suggestion of reciprocal favors as an insult.

"My name is Larry Creston, and I would be pleased to meet your—er—uncle. Harlem? Yes, ma'am."

And as he assisted a heavily laden Italian into the train Edith turned away with a bewildered feeling that she had been dismissed, but not discourteously.

In the great commercial world where she was but a clerical atom the kaleidoscopic life tumbled madly on without reference to hairbreadth escapes, and it was quite late in the afternoon before Edith found time to scratch off the following note:

Dear Uncle John—You have always said that when you could be of assistance to me I should feel free to call upon you. Now, I have a real favor to ask. This morning your heedless niece was saved from a shocking, if not fatal, accident by the quick wit and ready arm of a guard on the Ninth Avenue L. He impressed me as being somewhat above the ordinary. I know that from your point of view I am rather a useless member of society, but still if you agree with me that I was worth saving, will you try to place this young fellow in a line more suited to his abilities? Your "pull," dear uncle, is unquestioned. Will you kindly attach yourself to one of the numerous strings and oblige your appreciative if somewhat obstinate niece, EDITH HARLOWE.

P. S.—His name is Larry Creston.

For a week Edith heard nothing from her note. Then one noon she met her uncle rushing from his favorite cafe, and she walked at his side to the elevator door.

"Well, Edith, I've seen your hero. First rate fellow, and, strangely enough, I've had some business dealings with his father. They live out in Ohio, and the boy, fresh from college, came here imagining that New York would be at his feet. Instead he soon found himself on his uppers, glad to take the first thing that opened up and too proud to write home for help."

"Um-um!" murmured Edith. "And, what is more to the point, do you intend to help him?"

John Harlowe smiled into the piquant face of his niece.

"In good time, Miss Independence. I've several things in line, but he's at least safe where he is. Long hours and exposure won't hurt him. He's tough as a pine knot—was a member of his college eleven"—

"I guessed as much," acquiesced Edith, with a smile.

"Eh? Why?" inquired Mr. Harlowe. "Have you seen him since?"

"No, but I guess he did not tell you—just how he saved my life. I've—well, I've felt that tackle."

She disappeared in the elevator, leaving her uncle chuckling by the cigar stand.

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At rare intervals Edith made her appearance at her uncle's dinner table. Her acceptance of such an invitation was usually the occasion for christening a new gown. But on this particular evening she could extract no comfort from the fact that the chiffon applique on her bodice had been purchased at a bargain. Neither did she care about meeting the rising young novelist who was to occupy the seat on her aunt's right. The first breath of spring was brooding over the great city. The office had been musty and close. The columns of figures had danced like mad, gaunt dervishes before her eyes.

Her aunt had just confided to her that she was having new linens made for the furniture when one of the several black and white automatons scattered about the rooms presented itself before her and resolved itself into—Larry Creston.

He took her out to dinner, and she tried to cast a scornful glance at her uncle, who nodded to her across a plateau of lilies and violets. But how could one look scornful when one's head ached? Everything seemed to recall the drudgery of her daily work. The breadsticks were long, narrow columns of figures. Instinctively she began to estimate the number of almonds in the cut glass dish on her left.

Larry Creston's friendly eyes studied her face, and he secretly wondered if this were the same independent, businesslike girl who for many mornings had ridden on his train and whether the change had been wrought by the trailing gown, the bared shoulders or—A faint sigh escaped her lips, and Larry pulled himself together.

"Has your uncle told you how good he's been to me? No; of course not. He's not that sort of man. But I've a berth in the C., R. and N. office. I've been there two weeks, and the fellows are a jolly, clever lot."

Edith smiled, and the tired look faded from her eyes. During the remainder of the dinner she chatted brightly with Larry and those nearest them, but young Creston was not deceived. When they returned to the parlor, he secured for her a dim corner near a window overlooking the garden. The moist odor of spring rose from the ground, the sky was placid and starlit. He did not bore her with idle talk, and the girl was grateful.

Mr. Harlowe was very kind to this niece whose independence tried his soul, and his carriage was ordered to take her home.

Mr. Creston was closing the carriage door when Edith, with sudden compunction for her languor, exclaimed:

"Can't I drop you at your rooms, Mr. Creston?"

The young man laughed lightly.

"I'm afraid it would be rather out of your way, but if I may I'll ride as far as your flat."

So he knew she had a flat. When they turned into the dim, quiet side street, an odd whim seized the girl.

"You've never seen our little den, Mr. Creston? I know it's rather late and utterly unconventional, but won't you stop a bit? Somehow I dread my own company this evening."

The invitation was accepted with alacrity. A few minutes later they were seated in the glow of the lamp, Edith leaning restfully against the soft folds of her cloak. While Creston's quick glance took in the dainty room, whose every appointment had come from the home Edith had loved and lost, the girl was whimsically wondering what would happen if her companion, Mrs. Cornelius, in dun colored wrapper and crimpers, should suddenly appear in the doorway and ask about the dinner, as was her custom. But Mrs. Cornelius slept, and Creston turned from his polite scrutiny of the room to study Edith's face.

"You are nearly worn out, Miss Harlowe," he remarked abruptly. "Do you have your vacation early?"

"In August, I believe, though the schedule's not made out yet."

"Humph! August is a long way off. Why don't you cut it all and go with your aunt to"—

Edith was aroused on the instant.

"So uncle has been talking to you, and you've gone over to the enemy."

"Not so bad as that," replied Creston cheerily. "I shall always be on your side, of course, but then I think you are a bit unjust to your uncle and aunt when they really want you for their sake as well as yours."

"Oh, but you don't understand," protested the girl. "Why, if I were to make my home with them my salary would not pay for my dinner gowns alone."

"And you must work?"

"I must work. I would be utterly unhappy if I were dependent on any one. I love work, indeed I do."

Creston rose and drew his fine figure to its full height before the tiny fireplace and mantel. From this vantage point he gazed wistfully upon the graceful figure reclining in the wicker chair. But when she looked up at him the wistful expression had disappeared, and in its stead shone a light almost masterful.

"I think that even the most independent of you business women need some one to look after you occasionally."

Edith flushed.

"Thank you for the suggestion, and may I add that I think you have done your full share in—er—looking after me?"

In a flash he read her meaning. She thought he was reminding her of the incident at the "L" station—of her own carelessness and his so called bravery.

"Believe me, I did not mean that. I was only thinking how wan and tired and disheartened you look."

She held out her hand, with a smile that veiled tears.

"I am tired and horrid tonight, and you were very kind to come in and save me from myself. Will you come back some evening when I am more—amiable?"

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John Harlowe met his niece on lower Broadway.

"Hello, Edith! Back from your vacation? Come in and have lunch with me."

After they had taken possesion of a table among the palms and ordered the most cooling combination on the menu Mr. Harlowe glanced keenly at the sunburned face of his niece.

"Look as if you'd been living on the beach. Been having beastly weather in town. By the way, young Creston's bad luck. Rowland went over to the N. Y. and H., and Creston gets his place."

"Yes?"

"It's quite an advance for a man so young in the service, and Edith"—there was positive anxiety in the man's voice as he studied his niece's impassive face—"I hope you'll treat the boy—well, a little better after this."

"I really don't see how I can, my dear uncle. Ten days ago I promised to marry him, and I rather think that's the limit, don't you?"

"He actually asked you to marry him on that salary? Edith, that fellow will be president of the system some day. Lord, what nerve! And on a hundred a month! Think of it!"

"Yes, and just think if I hadn't turned to look at that red hat, and he'd never saved me, nor you'd never"—

"There, there, Edith! This is no game of consequences."

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He Made a Show.

An English sailor recently paid off at Malta, having only a day in which to spend the money before his ship left port, hired forty rowing boats, formed them into a procession and, seating himself comfortably in the stern of the last boat, he had himself and his forty boats rowed round and round his ship, much to the amusement of his comrades. After making the tour several times the sailor paid the boat hire and then returned to duty, evidently well satisfied.

The Convicts' Yell.

The latest in "yells," says the Kansas City Journal, is that of the convicts on their way from the jail in the county in which they are sentenced to the penitentiary. A gang of fifteen of them from Buchanan county, the sheriff's "guests" on a special car, gave vent to this yell at each railway station they passed between St. Joseph and Jefferson City a few days ago: "Two years—five years—we will stay; didn't like St. Joe anyway!"

No Megaphone Used.

"This talk about President Roosevelt conducting his heart to heart talks in the White House through a megaphone is all nonsense," said Senator Elkins to Senator Hanna the other day. "I've just come from the White House, and the president talked to me in a very low tone of voice."

"What did he say?" asked Senator Hanna.

"He asked me if this wasn't the finest weather I ever saw."

His Feet and Lips.

Teddy's a three-year-old, brave and sweet,
But, oh, his lips won't agree with his feet!
His feet, though small, are sturdy and strong,
And mother can trust them all day long.
But his rosy lips, so dear to see,
Seldom will with his feet agree.

When mother says, "Come!" the feet obey,
But the wayward lips just pout and say,
"No, no, I can't!" while with patter and slide
The feet are nearing the mother's side.

When the lamps are lighted and stars appear,
And we say, "It is bedtime, Teddy, dear,"
The feet submit to be quietly led
Up the long stairs to the little white bed,
While the naughty lips keep time all the way—
"No, no, I can't; no, no!" they say.

Those dear little feet are mother's delight,
For they try to keep Teddy in paths of right;
But, oh, that day will be glad to see
When Teddy's lips with his feet agree!
—Emma C. Dowd in Youth's Companion.