

The Quest of Betty Lancey

By MAGDA F. WEST

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CHAPTER XX.

Half an hour later Le Malheureux joined them in the rose and humming-bird patterned chintz drawing room. Benoni withdrew and Le Malheureux, still veiled, congratulated Larry Morris and Betty.

"If you wish to be married before you leave here," he said, "there is the old French priest who used to be my mother's chaplain still here. He is a nonagenarian, but still a priest for all that. He will marry you yet to-night. If you wish, and I think, Miss Lancey, it might be better if the ceremony were celebrated. Do you not think so? There's no knowing what may await you."

Betty blushed, but Larry hesitated not a minute.

"Bring him on, bring him on," he cried. "We'll be married to-night!"

"And I'll be the best man," shouted Johnny.

"And City Editor Burton can usher."

"Will you let Meta be the bridesmaid?" questioned Betty. "Oh, but what shall I do for a wedding gown?" "If you weren't so big," said Tyoga, surveying her critically, "we could loan you Mrs. Hackley's mother's bridal robe. I have it still upstairs in an old chest."

Meta and Tyoga had come in silently in the wake of Le Malheureux. "But, mother," interposed Meta, "there are other garments up in the old chest. Perhaps we could make some of them fit."

"Your wedding clothes will fit as well as mine, anyhow," ventured Larry.

Put a woman on a desert island and the prospect of a wedding will cause her inventive faculties to evoke the flesh-pots of Egypt from the barrenest sand!

"The old chest" proved a treasure house. The gowns, the youngest of them, were at least a quarter of a century old, and some of them were of the mode of the French empire. All were rich with rare lace and heavily wrought hand-embroidery. Some were of cloth of gold, tarnished now with the scowl of time, but exquisite still. There were quaint old slippers, and a bridal veil of the finest Honiton that ever came off a loom.

No bride could be decked with more loving hands than was Betty for her midnight marriage in mid-Africa. Meta, as bridesmaid, had a glowing frock of scarlet satin and faintest amber lace, and great topazes about her shining ebony neck, and Tyoga produced a new frock from somewhere. But Betty, ah, Betty! An old court gown of cloth of gold and yellowed satin was her bridal robe. Over it all ran delicately wrought roses in faded pinks. The marvelous web of Honiton draped her sweet face and rippled to the hem of her dress. The neck of the dress was low, and Betty's white shoulders were a sparkle of diamond pendants falling from a high diamond collar Tyoga had placed around her throat, and her plump arms were half covered with flowery bracelets. When they reached the chapel Le Malheureux himself put a diamond girdle around the bride's none too slender waist.

"My gift to the bride," he explained. Johnny's head was the brightest spot in the chapel. From the musty odor within and the drip of water on the moss-grown walls, the chapel, which had been reached through weird ways, was evidently a subterranean room. The altar was of ivory, the service dazzling beyond belief, and the altar cloths of exquisite workmanship. The ebony pews were miracles of the carvers' art, and the ever-present leopard skin rugs were on the floor. The priest, bent double with years, and with hair and skin as gray as the pet of a field mouse, mumbled through the long Latin ritual, at a slow, nerve-racking pace. The candles flickered and the scent of the jasmine and lotus with which Benoni had wreathed the altar, and filled the great vases that flanked the sanctuary, grew unbearable.

The wedding supper was laid in the little sitting room. There were many flowers, and the viands, oddly assorted to occidental eyes, rested royally on platters and dishes of pure gold. Nobody ate much, though Meta, Tyoga and Benoni served assiduously. Le Malheureux touched nothing at all.

Betty, after several urgings, forbore to press him. She had noticed that he never drank before anyone, and had long since grown accustomed to the down-dropping veil, the closely shrouded figure, the well-concealed feet and hands. When the last course was served Le Malheureux arose.

"Let me not be the skeleton at the feast," he temporized, "but Time does not pause for us. The woman you know as Cerisse Wayne, in reality Cerisse Wayne Hackley, was my full-blooded sister. The letters that were found in her safety deposit box in San Francisco bore reference to the diamond mines at Tiouga. For reasons

I cannot now make known to you, their location for years was known only to me. My father in some way discovered their situation—beneath and beyond the castle to which Miss Lancey, now Mrs. Morris, was taken when she first arrived in Africa, and from which she has so recently departed.

"You must know that though he is American born and bred, that for thirty years my father has lived in this section, as absolute king over several thousands of the most desperate race of blacks that inhabit this continent. He subdued them years ago through fear of what they considered his magic. Tyoga, there, was the wife of the rightful king, Meta, her foster daughter, and Benoni, as you have guessed, her son. For love of my poor mother, they not only served her, but have tended the family most faithfully ever since. Father has sent the blacks up there to pre-empt those mines, and charged to bring back with them a goodly load. Unknown to him his subjects have long been rebelling against him. But the half of them went to Tiouga. The other half remained hidden here, and at any time may storm the castle. Many of the house servants are with the mutineers, and that enhances the danger. I cannot blame them for revolting. My father has been a cruel and despotic master. Their woes have been many. Tyoga can usually check them. It was during her absence in America that they broke bonds. That is why she left Tiouga so long alone with but Meta and Mrs. Morris to guard it. We thought they were safer there than they would be here. We did not know that father had discovered Tiouga and had sent a force there to storm it! At that time we knew only of the mutiny."

"Then we did come just in the nick of time," exclaimed Johnny Johnson. Larry squeezed Betty's hand thankfully.

"No time for congratulations now," admonished Le Malheureux. "We must depart with the dawn."

"How many of us will there be?" asked Benoni.

"See—the two children, Mr. and Mrs. Morris, Johnson there, myself, Meta, Tyoga, my father, if he will go; the Cure, and Hackley," counted Le Malheureux.

"The murderer of your sister?" broke in Johnson.

Le Malheureux raised his hand. "Hush," he said, curtly. "You have no right to accuse! We are not lawmakers—we dare not judge nor charge. And be careful what you say before the children. I beg of you that. We will try to get to Khartoum. From there passage for you and the children to England will be easy. And it will leave me free to deal with what I must."

CHAPTER XXI.

An hour later brought the dawn. Guided by Meta, Larry and his wife, and Johnny reached the yacht that had brought Betty from America and found the children still sleeping and Tyoga and Hackley already aboard. The Cure, fat and waddly, was trying his best to clamber on. Benoni was not in sight, neither was Le Malheureux. A few moments later they appeared, Le Malheureux with a wallet in his hand, Benoni carrying the old man, who, cursing and screaming with all his might, was struggling against the iron grip of the black.

"My diamonds, my diamonds! Let me have them. What else is worth in life to me now since Cerisse has died. Murderer, murderer!" he shrieked at Hackley. "Ah, let me at him!" Mr. Wayne raved like a maniac and tried to leap on shore again, but they lashed him to a chair and put a gag in his mouth.

"Many as are his crimes, we dare not leave him to their hands," said Benoni, half regretfully. It seemed to Larry.

The yacht took the river like a gull on the wing. The morning breeze was chill and portent of rain hung in the sky, though the sun was fighting to prick the thickly banked up clouds. Fifty leagues had they gone, when City Editor Burton, who had not been left behind, to Betty's great delight, roared like a hurricane.

Following the lion's stare to the left of them on the shore, they saw advancing up the river bank toward them a horde of blacks. Benoni hurried the women down stairs where the children and the Cure already were, and reached to lift the senior Mr. Wayne from his moorings. But he was too late. The yacht was now abreast of the barbarians, whose leader with fine aim shot his quondam tormentor straight through the heart with a long, fine arrow.

Benoni drew the gag from the old man's mouth and leaned over to look at the arrow. Even superficial examination showed him the futility of aid. He knew too well the poisoned barbs of

the tribe. Hundreds of arrows whistled about the yacht, but glanced harmless from its sides, and by rare chance none struck Benoni. When he realized that Mr. Wayne was beyond human help he left the body as it was and crawling to the hatchway dropped below.

There he found the women in a torment of terror and the children, awakened by their sobbing, nervously complaining about the cramped quarters and the rocking motion of the yacht.

"What sort of fiends' work is this boat?" questioned Larry, though Benoni and Le Malheureux had both risen in his estimation since they had seen him successfully married to Betty.

"It's my own invention," replied Le Malheureux, with not a little pride in his tone. "Simple enough, too, if you just know how. Merely the scientific application of a few of the fundamental principles of electricity. This little mirror here reflects your whole course as plainly as if you were above deck or standing on the highest captain's bridge that ever was built. That's just the application of the rules of convergence and infraction of light. As for the propulsion of this boat—well, a series of buttons on this keyboard does it all. It's as easy as playing on a piano or writing on a typewriter, or a sewing machine or running a telephone switchboard, if you just know how. This is my wireless apparatus. I've found it useful—no, indeed," as he read the query on Larry's face—"no press dispatches from this. I told your wife that on the way over. And I warn you as I warned her not to tamper with it."

When Le Malheureux paused, Benoni went to him and spoke in African patois. Betty made out that he was telling him of his father's death. Le Malheureux turned his post over to Benoni. Then he went up alone to view his dead.

He was gone a very long while, and when he came back he neither questioned nor was questioned. Afterward when the Americans went above and found the body gone, and the deck freshly scrubbed, they asked Benoni what had been done with the corpse. Benoni pointed silently to the river.

All day they followed the river and its chain of lakes. At every possible interval Betty or Larry or Johnny tried to hasten the solution of the mystery still palpable before them, but neither Le Malheureux, nor Hackley, nor the Cure, nor the three blacks would speak, and the yacht sailed on and on.

CHAPTER XXII.

December was crisp in the air when they told Narcisse Harcourt she might leave the hospital.

"Not for any length of time, but just for a trip down town, if you wish," said Dr. Fothergill. "Who do you want to go with?"

"I'd like you, and Mr. Hartley," answered Mrs. Harcourt, frankly. "I want to go and buy some presents for these nurses who have been so kind to me, and I want—I want to go and see my husband."

Dr. Fothergill telephoned for Philip and he was there shortly before noon as the doctor had asked. Philip had not been able to buy a new overcoat that winter, and he felt more the Peri outside the gate than ever, when Mrs. Harcourt, in her rich furs and radiant beauty, followed the doctor into the parlor. The months in the hospital had worked wonders with Mrs. Harcourt. The old, unfathomable brilliancy had left her eyes, but there was a sweeter, a more human look within them, and the weird alabaster tones of her skin were replaced with a more babyish purity of luster. She was more a woman, less a strange, unreal phantom from another world. They did their shopping first, but curtailed it because the crowds in the stores stopped to gaze open-mouthed at the startling beauty of Mrs. Harcourt, the grim plainness of Dr. Fothergill, and Philip Hartley's assiduous attentions to both the ladies. Then in one department store, some one whispered that the woman in the luxurious furs was "that mysterious Mrs. Harcourt, you know," and Phil had much ado to get both his charges unharmed into a waiting taxicab.

Thither they went direct to the jail. Harcourt had not been told of their coming visit, as his wife had expressly wished it so. She went rapidly through the dingy hall, and rattled imperiously at the bars of the door. Harcourt was sitting moodily in one corner of the room, as had been his habit of late. He did not heed the rustle of silken skirts nor the faint perfume that aureoled his wife.

"Harold," she called, "Harold, oh, Harold."

At sound of her voice he turned and gasped. Then he rose, and like an old man, walked over and thrust his hands through the door.

"Narcisse," he faltered, and whether it was fear, or wonder, or admiration in his face and voice, one could not tell. Plainly he was ill at ease.

(To be continued.)

Very Fastidious.

"You have a wife-beater in jail here?"

"Yes."

"Here are some roses for him."

"Sorry, madam, but he doesn't accept any flowers less expensive than orchids."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Stung.

"Dear, if the old clothes man comes around this week you had better sell him what old clothes we have."

"Not till you get me some new ones."—Houston Post.

Not to repent of a fault is to justify it.—Pliny

TAXI AND DOORMAN NURSES.

Servitors Whose Duties Are Not What Their Titles Imply.

Service of the most highly specialized kind is nothing new in this city, a New York correspondent of the Baltimore News says. Indeed, with special valets for pet dogs and cats, whose only duty is to look after the comfort of their four-footed charges; governesses for pet monkeys, and instructors to teach parrots foreign languages, the limit would seem to have been reached. That is was not is evidenced by the arrival of the two newest servitors up to date—the taxi governess and the doorman nurse.

Contrary to their titles, the governess does not look after taxicabs, nor the doorman take care of a door. The field of usefulness of the former is confined to caring for children taken by their mothers in taxicabs on shopping or calling tours. Lacking a nurse of her own, the mother who wishes to give her youngster a ride without the bother of taking him into the stores or the risk of leaving him alone in the vehicle calls in the taxi nurse. Her duty it is at so much per hour to look after the youngster during the expedition.

The doorman nurse is a less expensive luxury of the same kind. Children may be left in his charge at the doors of the large stores, hotels or apartment houses by the mothers who cannot afford a taxi governess to look after them while she is inside.

Of the two the taxi governess has considerable advantage, aside from higher pay, over the doorman nurse. Her charges rarely number more than two at a time, while his may run as high as a score of restless youngsters.

ITINERANT NEWSMEN.

Owing to the wide-spread illiteracy among the poorer classes in Mexico, public newspaper readers have become a feature of Mexican life. Few men of the peon class are able to read or write. Consequently the newspaper-reader is enabled to earn a living by making the rounds of the drinking places and reciting the news of the day. In "Mexico, the Wonderland of the South," W. E. Carson tells of this custom.

A certain amount of literary skill is required to follow this strange calling successfully; the reader is, in fact, a sort of peripatetic news distributor. He selects only two or three items which he knows will interest his audience. The Orizaban reader, for example, started with the most important topic of the day. He read an article which discussed the financial panic then in progress in the United States, and the hard times it had caused in Mexico through the closing of mines and other enterprises controlled by Americans. Things were improving said the newspaper, and thousands of Mexicans who had lost employment would soon be going back to work and earning plenty of money to buy food and drink.

The reader next selected what journalists would term a "human interest" story. In tragic tones, with appropriate gestures, he entertained his audience with a dispatch from northern Mexico which related how a drink-crazed peasant had set fire to the hut of a neighbor with whom he had a feud, and had shot down his enemy as he attempted to escape. Pursued by the rurales, the murderer had fallen, riddled with bullets, after opening fire on his pursuers.

This "top of the column" story seemed to excite intense interest. Leaping down from his perch on a barrel, the reader went round, sombrero in hand, and made a collection; then bowing politely, with a "Buenos dias, señores!" he sauntered off to the next drinking-place.

Mr. "McMix."

He was a sturdy Scotchman, with no education and no vestige of a shred of humor. He stood before the new city hall, gazing up at the simple legend over the portal. Then he turned to his wife.

"Annie," he said, "d'ye see hoo the Scots will be iver cappin' them a' I dinna ken who this mon McMIX may be, but his name above the door yonder makes my heart leap with pride."

A passer-by, happening to overhear the worthy laborer's remarks, could not refrain from smiling. The building bore the date, MCMIX.

A Rush for Solitude.

"What are you going to do with that shotgun?"

"Goin' huntin'," answered Farmer Cornstossel, as he slammed the front gate behind him.

"But you never kill anything."

"Don't want to. All I'm huntin' is peace and quiet."

The Black Ostrich.

The black ostrich stands seven feet high. Its speed is that of a horse, and it can easily carry a man.

Nearly every man wants to lay off every time he sees a flag, or hears a ban!



"Jake said he was going to break up the suffragette meeting the other night. Were his plans carried out?" "No, Jake was."

"When a woman marries and then divorces her husband inside of a week what would you call it?" "Taking his name in vain."

Wigwag—I never knew such a fellow as Bjones! He is always looking for trouble. Henpecked—Then why doesn't he get married?—Boston Courier.

Willie—Ma, can't I go out on the street for a little while? Tommy Jones says there's a comet to be seen. Mother—Well, yes; but don't you go too near.

"It wasn't much trouble to wind up poor old Slezem's affairs when he died." "No?" "All the property he left behind was a silver watch."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

"My new hat is a poem," she said enthusiastically. "I have just received the bill for it," replied he. "I don't understand these stories of so many poets dying in poverty."—Washington Star.

"Why do you make that patient wait three hours every day in your ante-room?" "He needs rest," explained the doctor, "and that is the only way I can compel him to take it."—Courier-Journal.

"English is a funny language, after all, isn't it?" "Why so?" "I heard a man talking of a political candidate the other day say: 'If he only takes this stand when he runs he'll have a walk-over.'"

Fancier—This dog, madam, would be cheap at \$100. Lady—I would take him; but I'm afraid my husband might object. Fancier—Madam, you can get another husband much easier than a dog like that.

Squire Durnitt (of Lonelyville)—Our town's got the four biggest liars in the State. Uncle Welby Gosh (of Drearyhurst)—I guess that's right. You're three of 'em. Who's the fourth?—Chicago Tribune.

Chief of Detectives—Now give us a description of your missing cashier. How tall was he? Business Man—I don't know how tall he was. What worries me is that he was \$25,000 short.—Philadelphia Record.

"Have you been married, Bridget?" "Twicet, mum." "And have you any children?" "Yis, mum—I've three. One be an' third wife av me second husband, an' two be the second wife av me first."—Cleveland Leader.

"My dear brother," said the clerical looking man, "are you doing anything to keep your brother from falling?" "Why, yes," was the reply. "I'm interested in a concern that manufactures lamp-posts!"—Boston Courier.

Mrs. Starvem—How do you like the chicken soup, Mr. Newbord? Mr. Newbord—Oh—er—is this chicken soup? Mrs. Starvem—Certainly, how do you like it? Mr. Newbord—Well—er—it's certainly very tender.—Catholic Standard and Times.

Author—Have courage, my boy, I tried for ten years to sell my manuscript and finally— Literary Aspirant—You succeeded? Author—No. I was the means of raising the local postoffice from the third to the second class.—Chicago Daily News.

"I believe we ought to have a change in our constitution, providing that only citizens who could read and write good English should be permitted to vote." "What's your object? Do you want to shut out the college graduates?"—Chicago Record-Herald.

"Before we were married," sighs the fond wife, "you used to call me up by long-distance telephone just to hear my voice." "Well," retorts the rebellious husband, "nowadays you won't let me get far enough from you to use the long-distance."—Chicago Post.

"I endeavor not to make any distinction as to my servants," says the new mistress. "My rule is to treat each of them as one of the family." "Yes, mum," replies the new girl, "but if it's all the same to you I'd rather be treated with respect."—Chicago Post.

"So you think the bluffers are faking about their extended European tour?" "I should say so. They said there were so many Americans in Venice that many had to walk in the middle of the street?" "Well?" "Why, the streets of Venice are canals."—Springfield Union.

Mrs. Crimsonbeak—It is said that the five great original forests of the United States covered eight hundred and fifty million acres and contained fifty-two billion feet of lumber. Mr. Crimsonbeak—In those days, you see, there was some place for a man to go when his wife cleaned house.—Yonkers Statesman.