

# The THOUSANDTH WOMAN

BY ERNEST W. HORNING

Author of *The Amateur Cracksman*, *Raffles*, Etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS by O. IRWIN MYERS

## SYNOPSIS.

Cazalet, on the steamer Kaiser Fritz, homeward bound from Australia, cries out in his sleep that Henry Craven, who ten years before had ruined his father and himself, is dead and finds that Hilton Toye, who shares the stateroom with him, knows Craven and also Blanche Macnair, a former neighbor and playmate. When the daily papers come aboard at Southampton Toye reads that Craven has been murdered and calls Cazalet's dream second sight. He thinks of doing a little amateur detective work on the case himself. In the train to town they discuss the murder, which was committed at Cazalet's old home. Toye hears from Cazalet that Scruton, who had been Cazalet's friend and the scapegoat for Craven's dishonesty, has been released from prison. Cazalet goes down the river and meets Blanche.

## CHAPTER V—Continued.

He had floundered to his feet as well. He was standing over her, feeling his way like a great fatuous coward, so some might have thought. But it really looked as though Blanche was not attending to what he said; yet neither was she watching her little anglers stamped in jet upon the silvery stream, nor even seeing any more of Nelly Potts in the Australian veranda. She had come home from Australia, and come in from the river, and she was watching the open door at the other end of the old schoolroom, listening to those confounded steps coming nearer and nearer—and Cazalet was gazing at her as though he really had said something that deserved an answer.

"Why, Miss Blanche!" cried a voice. "And your old lady-in-waiting figured I should find you down!"

Hilton Toye was already a landman and a Londoner from top to toe. He was perfectly dressed—for Bond Street—and his native simplicity of bearing and address placed him as surely and firmly in the present picture. He did not look the least bit out of it. But Cazalet did, in an instant; his old bush clothes changed at once into a merely shabby suit of despicable cut; the romance dropped out of them and their wearer, as he stood like a trussed turkey-cock, and watched a bunch of hothouse flowers presented to the lady with a little gem of a natural, courteous, and yet characteristically racy speech.

To the lady, mark you; for she was one, on the spot; and Cazalet was a man again, and making a mighty effort to behave himself because the hour of boy and girl was over.

"Mr. Cazalet," said Toye, "I guess you want to know what in thunder I'm doing on your tracks so soon. It's hog-luck, sir, because I wanted to see you quite a lot, but I never thought I'd strike you right here. Did you hear the news?"

"No! What?"

There was no need to inquire as to the class of news; the immediate past had come back with Toye into Cazalet's life; and even in Blanche's presence, even in her schoolroom, the old days had flown into their proper place and size in the perspective.

"They've made an arrest," said Toye; and Cazalet nodded as though



"Mr. Cazalet," said Toye, "I Guess You Want to Know What I'm Doing on Your Track."

As had quite expected it, which set Blanche off trying to remember something he had said at the other house; but she had not succeeded when she noticed the curious pallor of his chin and forehead.

"Scruton?" he just asked.

"Yes, sir! This morning," said Hilton Toye.

"You don't mean the poor man?" cried Blanche, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, he does," said Cazalet gloomily. He stared out at the river, seeing nothing in his turn, though one of the anglers was actually busy with his reel.

"But I thought Mr. Scruton was still—" Blanche remembered him, remembered dancing with him; she did not like to say, "in prison."

"He came out the other day," sighed Cazalet. "But how like the police all over! Give a dog a bad name, and trust them to hunt it down and shoot it at sight!"

"I judge it's not so bad as all that in this country," said Hilton Toye. "That's more like the police theory

was impossible, and anybody who took the other side would have to reckon henceforth with Sweep Cazalet.

Mr. Toye already had reckoned with him, in a little debate begun outside the old summer schoolroom at Littleford, and adjourned rather than finished at the iron gate into the road. In her heart of hearts Blanche could not say that Cazalet had the best of the argument. Toye had advanced a general principle with calm ability, but Cazalet could not be shifted from the particular position he was so eager to defend, and would only enter into abstract questions to beg them out of hand.

Blanche rather thought that neither quite understood what the other meant; but she could not blink the fact that the old friend had neither the dialectical mind nor the unflinching courtesy of the new. That being so, with her perception she might have changed the subject; but she could see that Cazalet was thinking of nothing else; and no wonder, since they were approaching the scene of the tragedy and his own old home, with each long dip of her paddle.

It had been his own wish to start upstream; but she could see the wistful pain in his eyes as they fell once more upon the red turrets and the smooth green lawn of Uplands; and she neither spoke nor looked at him again until he spoke to her.

"I see they've got the blinds down still," he said detachedly. "What's happened to Mrs. Craven?"

"I hear she went into a nursing home before the funeral."

"I expect we should find Savage somewhere. Would you very much

"Every inch of it!" he said bitterly. "But so I ought, if anybody does."

"But these rhododendrons weren't here in your time. They're the one improvement. Don't you remember how the path ran around to the other end of the yard? This gate into it wasn't made."

"No more it was," said Cazalet, as they came up to the new gate on the right. It was open, and looking through they could see where the old gateway had been bricked. The rhododendrons topped the yard wall at that point, masking it from the lawn, and making on the whole an improvement of which anybody but a former son of the house might have taken more account.

He said he could see no other change. But for the fact that these windows were wide open, the whole place seemed as deserted as Littleford; but just past the windows, and flush with them, was the tradesmen's door, and the two trespassers were barely abreast of it when this door opened and disgorged a man.

The man was at first sight a most incongruous figure for the back premises of any house, especially in the country. He was tall, rather stout, very powerfully built and rather handsome in his way; yet not for one moment was this personage in the picture, in the sense in which Hilton Toye had stepped into the Littleford picture.

"May I ask what you're doing here?" he demanded bluntly of the male intruder.

"No harm, I hope," replied Cazalet, smiling, much to his companion's relief. She had done him an injustice, however, in dreading an explosion when they were both obviously in the wrong, and she greatly admired the tone he took so readily. "I know we've no business here whatever; but

"You don't know how I feel this!" he exclaimed quite miserably. "I mean about poor old Scruton; he's gone through so much as it is, whatever he may have done to deserve it long ago. Is it conceivable that he should go and do a thing like this the very moment he gets out? I ask you, is it even conceivable?"

Blanche understood him. And now she showed herself golden to the core, almost as an earnest of her fitness for the fires before her.

"Poor fellow," she cried, "he has a friend in you, at any rate! And I'll help you to help him, if there's any way I can."

He clutched her hand, but only as he might have clutched a man's.

"You can't do anything; but I won't forget that," he almost choked. "I meant to stand by him in a very different way. He'd been down to the depths, and I'd come up a bit; then he was good to me as a lad, and it was my father's partner who was the ruin of him. I seemed to owe him something, and now—now I'll stand by him whatever happens—and whatever has happened!"

Then they landed in the old, old inlet. Cazalet knew every knot in the post to which he tied Blanche's canoe.

It was a very different place, on the lower reach. The grounds were five or six acres instead of about one, and a house in quite another class stood far back from the river and very much farther from the road.

The inlet began the western boundary, which continued past the boat-house in the shape of a high hedge, a herbaceous border (not what it had been in the old days), and a gravel path. This path was screened from the lawn by a bank of rhododendrons, as of course were the back yard and kitchen premises, past which it led into the front garden, eventually debouching into the drive. It was the path along which Cazalet led the way this afternoon, and Blanche at his heels was so struck by something that she could not help telling him he knew his way very well.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Diplomacy.

"Look here, Charlie," said one young underdog to another, who had been asked to run his eye over a letter which his friend had written to his father, in which there was the inevitable request for money, "you've spelled just, g-u-e!" "I know," said Charlie; "but you see I need the cash, and don't want the old man to think I'm putting on airs. That's how he spells it."

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## CHAPTER VI—Continued.

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reflection; for if he meant to stand by the hapless Scruton, guilty or not guilty, he could not perhaps begin better than by getting on good terms with the police. But his ready tact, and in that case cunning, were certainly a revelation to one who had known him marvelously as boy and youth.

"I mustn't ask questions," he continued, "but I see you're still searching for things, Mr. Drinkwater."

"Still minding our own job," said Mr. Drinkwater genially. They had sauntered on with him to the corner of the house, and seen a bowler hat bobbing in the shrubbery down the drive. Cazalet laughed like a man.

"Well, I needn't tell you I know every inch of the old place," he said; "that is, barring alterations," as Blanche caught his eye. "But I expect this search is narrowed, rather?"

"Rather," said Mr. Drinkwater, standing still in the drive. He had also taken out a presentation gold half-hunter, suitably inscribed in memory of one of his more bloodless victories. But Cazalet could always be obtuse, and now he refused to look an inch lower than the detective-inspector's bright brown eyes.

"There's just one place that's occurred to me, Mr. Drinkwater, that perhaps may not have occurred to you."

"Where's that, Mr. Cazalet?"

"In the room where—the room itself."

Mr. Drinkwater's long stare ended in an indulgent smile. "You can show me if you like," said he indifferently. "But I suppose you know we've got the man?"

## CHAPTER VII.

After Michael Angelo.

"I was thinking of his cap," said Cazalet, but only as they returned to the tradesmen's door, and just as Blanche put in her word, "What about me?"

Mr. Drinkwater eyed the trim white figure standing in the sun. "The more the merrier!" his grim humor had it. "I dare say you'll be able to teach us a thing or two as well, miss."

She could not help nudging Cazalet in recognition of this shaft. But Cazalet did not look round; he had now set foot in his old home.

It was all strangely still and inactive, as though domestic animation had been suspended indefinitely. Yet the open kitchen door revealed a female form in mufti; a sullen face looked out of the pantry as they passed; and through the old green door (only now it was a red one) they found another bowler hat bent over a pink paper at the foot of the stairs. There was a glitter of eyes under the bowler's brim as Mr. Drinkwater conducted his friends into the library.

The library was a square room of respectable size, but very close and dim with the one French window closed and curtained. Mr. Drinkwater shut the door as well, and switched on all the electric lamps. The electric light had been put in by the Cravens; all the other fixtures in the room were as Cazalet remembered them. But the former son of the house gave himself no time to waste in sentimental comparisons. He tapped a pair of mahogany doors, like those of a wardrobe let into the wall.

"Have you looked in here?" demanded Cazalet.

"What's the use of looking in a cigar cupboard?" Drinkwater made mild inquiry.

"Cigar cupboard!" echoed Cazalet in disgust. "Did he really only use it for his cigars?"

"A cigar cupboard," repeated Drinkwater, "and locked up at the time it happened. What was it, if I may ask, in Mr. Cazalet's time?"

"I remember!" came suddenly from Blanche; but Cazalet only said, "Oh, well, if you know it was locked there's an end of it."

Drinkwater went to the door and summoned his subordinate. "Just fetch that chap from the pantry, Tom," said he; but the sullen sufferer from police rule took his time, in spite of them, and was sharply rated when he appeared.

"I thought you told me this was a cigar cupboard!" continued Drinkwater, in the browbeating tone of his first words to Cazalet outside.

"So it is," said the man.

"Then where's the key?"

"How should I know? I never kept it!" cried the butler, crowing over his oppressor for a change. "He would keep it on his own bunch; and his watch, and all the other things that were missing from his pockets when your men went through 'em, and you may find his keys, too!"

Drinkwater gave his man a double signal; the door slammed on a petty triumph for the servants' hall; but now both invaders remained within.

"Try your hand on it, Tom," said the superior officer. "I'm a free-lance here," he explained somewhat superfluously to the others, as Tom applied himself to the lock in one mahogany door. "Man's been drinking, I should

say. He'd better be careful, because I don't take to him, drunk or sober. I'm not surprised at his master not trusting him. It's just possible that the place was open—he might have been getting out his cigars before dinner—but I can't say I think there's much in it, Mr. Cazalet."

It was open again—broken open—before many minutes; and certainly there was not much in it, to be seen, except cigars. Boxes of these were stacked on what might have been meant for a shallow desk (the whole place was shallow as the wardrobe that the doors suggested, but lighted high up at one end by a little barred window of its own) and according to Cazalet a desk it had really been. His poor father ought never to have been a business man; he ought to have been a poet. Cazalet said this now as simply as he had said it to Hilton Toye on board the Kaiser Fritz. Only he went rather further for the benefit of the gentlemen from Scotland Yard, who took not the faintest interest in the late Mr. Cazalet, beyond poking their noses into his diminutive sanctum and duly turning them up at what they saw.

"He used to complain that he was never left in peace on Saturdays and Sundays, which of course were his

only quiet times for writing," said the son, elaborating his tale with illal plety. "So once when I'd been trying to die of scarlet fever, and my mother brought me back from Hastings after she'd had me there some time, the old governor told us he'd got a place where he could disappear from the district at a moment's notice and yet be back in another moment if we rang the gong. I fancy he'd got to tell her where it was, pretty quick; but I only found out for myself by accident. Years afterward he told me he'd got the idea from Jean Ingelow's place in Italy somewhere."

"It's in Florence," said Blanche, laughing. "I've been there and seen it, and it's the exact same thing. But you mean Michael Angelo, Sweep!"

"Oh, do it!" he said serenely. "Well, I shall never forget how I found out its existence."

"No more shall I. You told me all about it at the time, as a terrific secret, and I may tell you that I've kept it from that day to this!"

"You would," he said simply. "But think of having the nerve to pull up the governor's floor! It only shows what a boy will do. I wonder if the hole's there still!"

Now all the time the planetary detective had been watching his satellite engaged in an attempt to render the damage done to the mahogany doors a little less conspicuous. Neither appeared to be taking any further interest in the cigar cupboard, or paying the slightest attention to Cazalet's reminiscences. But Mr. Drinkwater happened to have heard every word, and in the last sentence there was one that caused him to prick up his expert ears instinctively.

"What's that about a hole?" said he, turning round.

"I was reminding Miss Macnair how the place first came to be—"

"Yes, yes. But what about some hole in the floor?"

"I made one myself with one of those knives that contain all sorts of things, including a saw. It was one Saturday afternoon in the summer holidays. I came in here from the garden as my father went out by that door into the hall, leaving one of these mahogany doors open by mistake. It was the chance of my life; in I slipped to have a look. He came back for something, saw the very door you've broken standing ajar, and shut it without looking in. So there I was in a nice old trap! I simply daren't call out and give myself away. There was a bit of loose oilcloth on the floor—"

"There is still," said the satellite, pausing in his task.

"I moved the oilcloth, in the end; hawked up one end of the board (luckily they weren't grooved and tongued), sawed through the next one to it, had it up, too, and got through into the foundations, leaving everything much as I had found it. The place is so small that the oilcloth was obliged to fall in place if it fell anywhere. But I had plenty of time, because my people had gone in to dinner."

"You ought to have been a burglar, sir," said Mr. Drinkwater ironically. "So you covered up a sin with a crime, like half the gentlemen who go through my hands for the first and last time! But how did you get out of the foundations?"

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