

Richard the Brazen

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... By ...
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AND
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Continued from last week.

Once more the merriment twinkled in the little gimlet eyes whose owner held his sides and shook from shoe to collar button. Richard waited patiently for Uncle Michael to speak, but that gentleman sat puffing his cigar and apparently studying the momentous question in all its lights and bearings.

"Dick," he said abruptly, "you have got yourself into a nice mess, haven't you? It's up to you to do something original. Any ideas on the subject?"

"Yes," said Richard; "I'm going to Mr. Renwyck this evening and make a clean breast of it. It's the only thing I can do."

Mr. Corrigan whistled softly. "After which brilliant move I dare say you will apply for board in the state insane asylum."

"Any place will do for me after that," admitted the unfortunate adventurer.

"You would find its inmates congenial after you followed that course, I am sure, but if I were in your place I'd do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?"

"For various reasons. In the first place, what good will it do? Would you then be in a position to tell your father? No; you see that clearly for yourself. You will be invited to leave Irvington and will accept the invitation promptly. Thus endeth the first lesson, Miss Harriet Renwyck being the principal subject matter. Mr. Jacob Renwyck will then institute proceedings against one Bill Williams for obtaining information by fraud in the person of his son."

"But, my dear sir," cried Dick, with some asperity, "I had no such intention. I assure you. The information was—well, it was forced on me."

"Aha!" exclaimed the old lawyer knowingly. "That's just the delicate point. I'm speaking legally. Of course you're innocent. You know it, and I believe it, but how about a jury of your peers? To put it bluntly, you have taken the name of a wounded and helpless man without his knowledge or consent. You have bribed his servant. Bad point, Dick—very bad. Then you creep into a confiding old gentleman's house and worm away the secrets of his inmost heart. The alleged pursuit of the girl is merely a blind to cover your deep laid, crafty, nefarious designs, which—"

"Hold on, for God's sake!" vehemently protested Richard, appalled at the revelation of his perjury by the lawyer's merciless logic, which was about as hard to bear as if it had been a truthful indictment. "Don't put it that way! You make me feel like an actual criminal. Next I'll be stealing their cut glass and silver hairbrushes."

"I am merely looking at it from a legal point of view," said the little man solemnly. "To confess to Jacob now is the very worst policy imaginable."

"Then what am I to do?" demanded the young man savagely.

"Brazen it out," advised his counsel, striving to suppress the dancing humor in his eyes. "But, for the Lord's sake, Dicky, boy, do brush up on English history."

"And what of dad?"

Mr. Corrigan began to chuckle and to rub his hands violently.

"I'm afraid," he said, with great conviction, "that Bill will have to play this hand alone. You can't help him, young man, and you've got to trust to luck. If your father finds out about the deal he may pull down Jacob's ladder; if not—well, I'm almost as sorry for Bill as I am for his son."

Richard drew his brows together in a troubled frown.

"And is that all the advice you can give me?" he asked, hoping against hope.

"No," said the little man; "there is one more suggestion, and a sound one, too, by George! My vision is a shade imperfect owing to creeping age, but I think I see Harriet over yonder under the trees. As, as your counsel, direct you to go and talk to her."

This last piece of advice was too good to be neglected, and Richard, dismissing his cares, followed it forthwith.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN the young Texan had got out of earshot Mr. Corrigan leaned back and laughed till his plump sides could stand the strain no more. Rarely had he passed so amusing and delightful a half hour. He lived the lonely life of a wealthy old bachelor, and the comedy had come to him in the shape of a godsend. He liked what he had seen of the young man immensely, and he was prepared to like him more for his father's sake, but he determined to make him suffer as much as possible in payment for his reckless assurance. Besides, he had another end in view, the success of which depended largely upon the son of his old friend Bill Williams. Every feature of the game was a joy to his merry heart, and in order to watch its progress he determined to be a frequent visitor at Restmore, which promised to belie its name and

become a troubled spot, after all. Rising from the bench at last, he cut across lots toward his own home, half a mile away, measuring every stride with a sort of chuckling pedometer.

Meanwhile Richard followed the lawyer's counsel, not only as to closing his mouth with regard to Mr. Renwyck, but as to opening it without delay with regard to Mr. Renwyck's daughter. This at least was his intention, but he found himself once more disappointed. Miss Harriet was in her favorite seat on the lawn, with an open book resting in her lap. Richard's footsteps made no sound on the soft green turf, and, unconscious of his approach, before he was within halting distance she arose abruptly and went into the house. He followed her forthwith, but just as he reached the veranda steps a sprightly little figure bounced out and greeted him effusively. Needless to say, it was not Miss Renwyck. Miss Imogene Chittendon was more fluffily irritating to the adventurer than usual. Her motions, like her manner of speech, were nervous and spasmodic, not unlike the movements of a hummingbird over a bunch of honeysuckle, with the lord representing the fragrant blossoms.

"Why, Lord Croyland!" she twittered, with something between a giggle and a shriek, "how very fortunate! I was just going out to pick wild flowers. I've never picked wild flowers with a real nobleman. Please say you are just dying to give me a new experience."

She looked up at him with a baby-like air of innocence and admiration and laughed again.

"I—I should be delighted," said Richard, telling the first downright lie which had passed his lips since arriving at Irvington.

He relieved her of the absurd basket she was carrying on her arm and started across the fields, cursing inwardly at the fate which linked him with this troublesome and irresponsible little creature and striving outwardly to be decently polite to her. Unconscious of his cogitation, Miss Imogene sputtered at his side, now murmuring idiotic small talk into his bored ears, now pouncing with little squeals of delight upon some gaudily colored weed and depositing it in the basket.

"It is so good of you to come," she confided, with a melting glance. "It isn't heavy enough to tire you, is it? You are so strong, you know, and so brave."

She alluded to the basket, which weighed perhaps four ounces. Richard assured her that he thought he could stand the strain and that he was not in the least afraid of butterflies, the only living thing they had met so far, which brought forth a fresh outburst of gigglesome joy. Presently she took a seat upon a stone, begged him to do likewise and began fanning herself with her hat.

"Do you know," she whispered, "I think I shall trust you and tell you a secret."

"All right," he said carelessly. "Fire

me."

"I never picked wild flowers with a real nobleman."

"—er—I mean do so, by all means." He seated himself and added dramatically, "Believe me, maiden, it shall be sacred with me."

"There!" she cried in triumph. "I knew you could do it, though Harriet says daily—just daily—that you couldn't."

"Couldn't what?"

"Act."

"Well, she's right," agreed Richard. "I can't. I've been told so before. Where do you get your strange delusions?"

Once more her big baby eyes looked upward with a pleading glance.

"But you'd try if I asked you, wouldn't you? You couldn't resist if I begged you—er—real hard, could you?"

"Nothing short of assassination could make me refuse you," said Richard, emphasizing the pronoun and looking sadly out across the Hudson. It was wrong, of course, but he couldn't help it, and really she was pretty enough to excuse so venal a lapse.

"Oh, you dear, delightful man!" chirped the little lady. "Now, listen. Don't look at the river. Look at me."

"I dare not."

"Nonsense! You said you were not afraid of butterflies."

"I was wrong. I am of one."

"Don't be afraid of me. I won't hurt you," said the highly flattered girl laughingly.

"I breathe again. Go on."

"Well, Lord Croyland, we are going to have a little one act play on Friday evening, and you are in it, because you just said you would, and I know you will do it just beautifully, because I told Harriet you could, and, having promised, of course you can't refuse now, when everything has been—"

"Hold on; hold on!" interrupted Richard. "I'm sort of losing my grip on things. Slow down to a trot and let's get our bearings."

This sounded very unlike an English nobleman, but the young lady in her excitement failed to notice.

"You see," she began again, "the play is called 'The Man and the Bird.' You are the man, and—"

"And you are the bird," completed Richard. "I thought as much. Well, go on."

Miss Imogene dimpled with pleasure and applauded his quick perception.

"Yes," she said; "I am the bird, and you—it's only a play, you know, of course—and you're just desperately in love with me."

"I couldn't act that part. It's too real, and—"

"Oh, yes, you can! I thought you wouldn't find it difficult. I'll help you."

"That settles it. I'm lost."

"And, besides, it will make Cornelius Van der Awe just frantic. He isn't in the cast, you know. We've put him in the audience, and he has just to sit there and be wretched. Oh," she cried, "it will simply be too delicious! Don't you think so?"

"Rapturous, but dangerous for me," assented Richard gravely. "Is Miss Renwyck in the play?"

"Why, of course she is, stupid! She's getting it up herself and has the leading part."

Richard brightened. Private theatricals were not so silly, after all.

"What sort of a part will she play?" he asked.

"Oh, the serious part!" his companion advised him. "It's more real acting than mine, of course, but I like the love part best, don't you?" Richard nodded, and the debutante continued: "Harriet is the rich heiress, you know. And, oh, she's going to wear the Renwyck diamonds! Her father will bring them up from the city tomorrow night. She'll look awfully stunning in them. You are engaged to her—in the play, I mean—but you'll find out that you love me best, and it's an awfully exciting scene. You and I—in the play, I mean—and you tell me how much you love me—"

"Hadn't we better practice a little bit now?"

"Don't you think you could do it without practice?"

"I shall need to acquire—er—restraint in the presence of such temptation, you know."

"Oh, I see. I guess it won't be necessary for you to be too restrained. It's beautiful, so impassioned—the language, you understand—"

"I shall try to live up to it."

"And just when you kiss me—"

"I'm sure it would be best for us to try that in private."

"Not at all. We can make believe about that part, you know."

"That's not true acting."

"Isn't it? Oh, well, see about that later, and we needn't rehearse that anyway."

"But I'm sure to be so awfully awkward about that. I've had so little practice in my short life."

"You poor little innocent Englishman! We'll fix that later."

"Oh, happy hope!"

"Will you listen to me, Lord Croyland?"

"I'm silent."

"Harriet comes in and denounces you. Don't you think it's perfectly delicious?"

"Dazzling!"

"That's settled. I'm so glad. Come on and let's dig up more roots."

was frustrated, and he found himself in the clutches of some one else, an inquisitor like Michael Corrigan, a chatterbox like Miss Chittendon.

He was not so occupied with his thoughts, however, as to forget a plainman's training, and during the latter half hour of his wild flower hunt he was conscious of a spy upon his trail. He had turned at some remark of his companion and had chanced to see a figure that dodged swiftly behind a bowlder some fifty yards away. He had paid no special heed to the occurrence. But when it was repeated twice he became convinced that some one was watching them—why, he could not imagine. As they neared Restmore Richard wheeled suddenly and spied the figure crouching along a boxwood hedge. It seemed a very strange affair, and he determined to get to the bottom of it. So, excusing himself on the steps of the veranda, he made a circuit of the house, cut across the rose garden and vaulted a fence into the road. The hedge ended at this point, and, to the vast surprise of two gentlemen, Richard came near to landing on the head of Mr. Cornelius Van der Awe.

CHAPTER XI.

"OH, it's you, is it?" said Richard, the first to recover from astonishment. "Do you know, I almost fancied it was some one with designs on the poultry."

Mr. Van der Awe flushed, drew himself up and folded his arms in a strikingly dramatic pose.

"No," he answered without the first vestige of humor; "I was not after the poultry. To be perfectly frank, I was after you."

This was another one! Was everybody lying in wait for him this morning? Could he have speech with all the world but her?

"I admire candor," coolly remarked Richard in return, "and I rejoice in the fact that your desire is gratified. How may I serve you?"

"Lord Croyland," said the dramatic young gentleman, "there is a matter which must be settled between us here and now. Upon it depends my future happiness."

"All right," responded the Texan cheerily. "Shall it be rifles, pistols, lariats, bowie knives or arbitration?"

Once more Mr. Van der Awe flushed. He had a faint idea that the English nobleman was laughing at him, a point on which extreme youth is sometimes oversensitive.

"I think it can be settled by arbitration," he answered coldly. "Will you kindly follow me to some less public place?"

The two young gentlemen walked up the road for a short distance, stopping at the brow of a hill which overlooked the river. It struck Richard that this being continually led away from the house of his ladylove for secret conferences was growing rather monotonous. This was the fourth time in two days, and each excursion seemed to involve him more deeply in some quagmire of trouble. They sat down under a tree and for a time remained silent.

"Smoke?" asked Richard, holding out his cigar case.

"Thank you, no," said the young man sadly. "I have no heart for pleasure just at present. If you don't mind, we'll get down to business."

The Texan lit his cigar and expressed a willingness to open negotiations with the enemy, while the enemy collected his thoughts and dug holes in the ground with a short sharp stick.

"Lord Croyland," he began at last, "in this country openness and squareness are the first principles. I've heard that gentlemen have the same ideas in England. Is this true?"

Richard bowed.

"Very well. I'm going to ask you a plain, blunt question, without any intention of offense, and I want you to give me a straight, plain answer. Which one are you after?"

Richard's cigar nearly dropped from between his teeth, while he gazed at his questioner in extreme astonishment.

"Which one of what?" he asked when he recovered himself.

"The girls," said Mr. Van der Awe. "Perhaps I didn't put it clearly."

The Texan tried hard to conceal his amusement and succeeded imperfectly.

"Ah, I see," he returned. "Which one are you after?"

"Miss Imogene," confessed the young man without reserve, "and if you don't object to my confidence, Lord Croyland, I love her as no man ever loved a girl before. It's—well, hang it, it's painful!" He fell into a thoughtful pause, then looked up again. "Now, I think I've been perfectly candid with you, and I want you to be quite frank with me. If it's Miss Chittendon we can decide what to do later."

"My dear fellow," said Richard, "you can't imagine how I appreciate your openness and squareness. It throws new light upon your glorious American people. Allow me to give you a cigar and be equally unreserved. While I admit without hesitation that Miss Imogene Chittendon is a most charming and utterly desirable young lady, I beg to assure you, sir, that never for a single fraction of a second have I entertained the least idea of—in your own phrase, of going after her. Is that satisfactory?"

"Happily so," said Mr. Van der Awe, holding out his hand with the nearest approach to happiness he had yet shown. "I'm glad to know you in your true, real light. You are not a bit like other Englishmen I have met. Fact is, you don't even talk like one."

"Thanks," bowed Richard, prudently screwing in his monocle. The eyelass

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always made him feel like an idiot; but, on the other hand, it gave a dash of local color to his appearance without which he would have been lost. "Is there anything else in which I can serve you, old chap?"

"Yes, Lord Croyland, there is. You have very kindly stated to me that you have no intention of making a bid for Imogene. That's very square of you, and I appreciate it. But would you mind telling her so?"

Richard laughed a long, free, bubbly laugh that came echoing back in merry mockery at this most ingenious proposition.

"Well, he said, "that's rather a difficult thing to do, isn't it? Strikes me as rather—er—indelicate."



"I should like her present fancy for you disillustionized."

"Not at all," protested Mr. Van der Awe. "Imogene is a sensible girl"—oh, the blindness of love!—"and would understand you perfectly. You see," he explained, "she's young. Her mind, I confess frankly, is immature. She's apt to be—well, dazzled, I might say, by foreign titles and brass buttons and things of that description. It's a wo-

man's natural instinct, you know, and I have no logical right to blame her. You see, I have reasoned it all out and am speaking from a standpoint of superior age and experience. Now, you can't find fault with that line of thought, can you?"

"Not a flaw," answered Richard gravely. "It's simply perfect. Go on."

The lover proceeded earnestly.

"As Imogene's future husband it is my duty to surround the child with every possible safeguard, and for that reason I should like her present fancy for you disillustionized. She refused to let me go with her to pick wild flowers this morning and chose you, merely, I suppose, because you are an earl. That's why I followed you. Now, I'm not asking you to do anything that I would not do for you cheerfully, and so I ask you again if you would mind dropping a rather broad hint to Imogene that a union with you is out of the question. You might explain that you are unworthy of her, or something like that. I don't care how you fix it just so it's fixed. What do you say?"

Richard thought for a little space, especially of his harmless but decidedly imprudent remarks to Miss Imogene of half an hour ago. Then he flung away his cigar and turned to his companion.

"Look here," he said, "I'm going to help you out in this matter, but I'll have to do it in my own way. I have a brilliant idea as a starter. Just listen and don't interrupt me. They're going to have a play next Friday night called 'The Man and the Hoe'—no, I beg pardon—the 'Bird.' I'm the man, and Miss Imogene is the bird. You see, the rough idea is this: I'm engaged to Miss Renwyck, but am in love with Miss Imogene to the point of frenzy—in the play, of course. So far so good. The man is in the room with the bird and declares his passion in language which is simply beautiful, making other demonstrations that are realistic both to the actors and the audience. Of course I'd rather set my heart on doing this role; but, by Jove, I'm going to chuck the thing and let you do it!"

(To Be Continued)

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