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the
Brazen.**
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Author of "For the Freedom of the
Sea," "The Southerners," Etc.,
AND
EDWARD PEPPE,
Author of "A Broken Rosary,"
"The Prince Chae," Etc.
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Continued from last week.
Miss Renwyck's plan was based upon wisdom and sound common sense, yet to the frightened Miss Imogene it was the worst possible thing to do. She felt certain that if caught the man would put his threat into execution and expose the copies of her letters to the eager gaze of society. To prevent such a happening she would gladly pay five times the sum demanded. Therefore she decided hysterically that Harriet's plan was out of the question.

"Oh, Harriet, dear," she wailed, "you don't know how silly my letters were, and I'd go through anything to get them back again. Why, the pet names I called that creature—good gracious, Harriet—they were positively mushy!"
"What did you call him?" asked Miss Renwyck, humorously interested in this phase of the romance.
"Roddy-poddykins was one," confessed the debutante, with a vivid blush. "Then there were a whole lot more like that and worse—really, darling, I'd rather not tell them even to you. I should die of shame if Mr. Van der Awe or Lord Croyland or any one knew."

Miss Renwyck smiled, while the indiscreet Juliet went on tying her handkerchief into hard, wet knots.
"I've just got to see him, Harriet. I know I shall be just scared to death; but, no matter what you say, I'll not allow you to tell a single solitary soul, and if I'm found dead on the library floor in the morning nobody will care anyway—so there!"
The sufferer's state now became so alarming that her friend was forced to suggest another plan. It was against her better judgment, but something had to be done at once, for otherwise Miss Imogene would never be in a condition to act the part of the bird in the play that evening.

"Imogene," she said sternly, "stop crying this instant and listen to me. I believe you will do a very wrong thing in seeing Mr. Fitzgourge in the middle of the night, but of course I have no right to interfere against your wishes. I am older than you, and I tell you candidly I don't like it. How much money have you with you?"
"Fifty dollars, and I'll give him jewelry enough to make up the balance."
"That won't be necessary. I'll lend you whatever you need, and if you still insist upon seeing the man I will go down with you."
In an instant more two very shaky little arms were twined about Miss Renwyck's neck and a sobby voice was pouring delicious thanks into her ears.

When the fear of creeping down a flight of dark stairs alone was eased by the thought of companionship the sentimental young lady began to view the affair in an entirely different light. It would be an adventure which appeared to her strongly. There would be no earthly danger, she argued, as each could be a protection to the other, while if the worst came to the worst their screams would quickly summon aid.

The more Miss Imogene thought of it the more excited she became, declaring finally that she would gladly pay \$100—which somebody else had earned for her, by the way—just for the fun of the thing. She felt now that she had exaggerated the possibility of danger, as the wretched, disgraceful man was after money only and would go away instantly he had received it.
"You see," she explained, "he shows his intentions are not bad by his very letter. If he had asked me to meet him outside in the dark somewhere I shouldn't have dared, but coming here into the library, where we can call for assistance, shows that he means no harm."
"But suppose he should not come alone?" suggested Miss Harriet.
"But he will," the other continued.
"Besides, you and I will stand in the door on the opposite side of the room, and the moment we see two men instead of one, why, then, dear, we'll just begin to scream 'Fire!' or something like that, and then we can say we heard a noise and came down. Oh, Harriet, precious, do go and find a piece of white string!"

Miss Renwyck was not convinced. She did not lack courage for a woman, nor had she any actual fear of this man, who was clearly an ordinary petty blackmailer who tried to make profit out of an innocent schoolgirl's foolish correspondence. She could not imagine any other motive for his coming, inasmuch as the library window would be opened by an inmate of the house and closed and locked again immediately after his departure. Yes, clearly it was blackmail, and if Imogene had her letters returned intact perhaps it was the easiest solution after all.

"What sort of a looking person is this Mr.—Roddy-poddykins?" she asked, with a smile.
"Now, please do not call him that,"

begged Miss Imogene. "It makes me feel like such a silly. Side face he is very handsome, you know, but full face—well, there is something the matter with one of his eyes."
"How do you mean?"
"Oh, I don't know!" she answered doubtfully. "He is looking at you all the time, you understand, but his eye seems to be pointing somewhere else. I think they call it a cast."
"Oh," said Miss Renwyck, "Uncle Michael told me never to trust a person with—with a cast in his eye!"
"Did he?" asked the debutante. "I wonder why. Oh, well, I'll never trust one—never again. Now, come on, precious, and let's tie the string on the gatepost!"

CHAPTER XVII.
UPON this eventful Friday, which might justly be termed "black" by the various persons connected with this narrative, two more gentlemen mentioned herein had occasion to use the telegraph lines vigorously.

The first was the Hon. Mr. Frank Kinwatt, member of the upper house of the Texas legislature and chairman of the state improvement committee thereof. Contrary to Mr. Renwyck's positive statement, the distinguished legislator had not gone back to Austin. Instead he had quietly stopped over in Washington, held close communication with several mighty officials, then wired frantically to his most trusted lieutenant, the vice chairman of the state improvement committee at Austin, in a cipher code. These communications were imperative orders concerning the passage of a certain deep water harbor bill.

The Hon. Mr. Kinwatt while in New York had held several conferences of a delicate nature, including that luncheon at Sherry's and other meals of a similar character elsewhere, and now deemed it expedient to be far away from the capital of Texas during the passage of the said harbor bill; therefore he gave the matter absent treatment, so to speak, though his meek associates on the committee carried out their leader's instructions to the letter. They had enjoyed no dinners in New York, but they were confident in a certain hope of at least partaking of the dessert vicariously through Mr. Kinwatt.

The other person interested in telegraphy was the heavy hearted Mr. Bill Williams, himself en route for New York. Half a day before he reached Buffalo he received a dispatch from his son Richard, and for a quarter of an hour he was radiant with joy; then he received a second one couched in the same words, and it puzzled him, especially in the earnest warning to return to Texas at once and watch his harbor scheme. At Buffalo he received a sheaf of yellow envelopes which resembled a fine poker hand, in that there were four of them—all of the same kind.

In highly ornate language the cattle king expressed his belief that a trick was being played on him by his enemies, so he left the train and sought the nearest telegraph office. His friend, Mr. Leger, had failed to state the name of the hospital in which the son lay dying, and Mr. Bill Williams had not seen in the San Antonio papers the dispatch about his son, so the father wired all the hospitals in New York for information and lost three hours' time in waiting for answers. He received a number of replies from various institutions, eight of which disclaimed all knowledge of the patient, while the ninth advised him that Mr. Richard Williams of San Antonio, Tex., was truly confined in St. Luke's hospital and that his condition was not so favorable, owing to an increase of fever. Bill Williams was convinced some crafty trick was being hatched, but he hoped later on to settle with the hen. Meanwhile, whatever happened, he must go to his boy. He sent one more telegram and then hastened on to New York by the next train.

This telegram, addressed to Mr. Richard Williams, was received at St. Luke's hospital, and a pretty, fresh checked nurse took it to Lord Croyland's room.
"A telegram, Mr. Williams. Shall I open it for you?"
"Please," said the earl, with the listless indifference of a very sick man,

"I dare say it is some beastly business matter. Read it."
The girl complied, reading as follows:
Buffalo, N. Y.
Mr. Richard Williams, St. Luke's Hospital, New York.
Cher up, Dickie. Will be with you tomorrow morning. DAD.
Lord Croyland stared at the uniformed young lady while he fumbled fruitlessly for his monocle among the folds of his nightshirt.

"Rot!" he observed in languid disgust. "Haven't got a dad, you know. Some silly ass is trying to come a cropper."
The nobleman then turned on his pillow and closed his eyes, while the fair attendant looked thoughtful, took the patient's temperature and made a memorandum to the effect that his mind had begun to wander.
Meanwhile matters at Irvington were dragging along unsatisfactorily. The last rehearsal of the play had resulted in a spirited quarrel between Miss Imogene and her dismal fiancé. Mr. Van der Awe was a champion of realism, even on the stage. He considered it the height of absurdity for a passionate lover to imprint kisses upon his adored one's theatrical wig near the region of her left ear.

"But, good gracious me," stormed the indignant bird, with a dangerous snap in her big blue eyes, "don't you have enough realism when we are alone? If you think I'm going to let you kiss me before all those people you are very much mistaken. Now, one more word and we'll leave out that part altogether, sir! No, don't speak to me! Don't come near me! I think you are perfectly hateful and ridiculous. How I was ever weak-minded enough to engage myself to you at all is more than I can understand. So don't tempt me!"

The argument had become somewhat one sided, so the dismal one retreated from the field of action, crestfallen, but unconvinced on matters pertaining to realism. He was a practical young man, however, and decided to kiss the wig in the region of its wearer's left ear for the present. Later—ah!
Richard had made several desperate attempts at a tete-a-tete with Miss Harriet, but found her nervous, distrust and unsympathetic to his advances. She acted as though some shadow of impending trouble lay upon her mind, so the Texan gave up in despair, took a short lesson in British etiquette from the much subdued Bills and then went for a solitary horseback ride.

His deception could not be kept up much longer, for troubles were gathering above him like Longfellow's soaring vultures, and he fancied he knew one sick and wounded bison that would shortly be pecked to pieces, hoof and hide. And yet, no matter what happened, he would brazen it out to the bitter end. If he could only win the girl before the inevitable crash, then nothing else would matter—noting!

Shortly after dinner the final preparations were made for the evening's entertainment. A tiny stage had been constructed at one end of the double drawing room and was provided with handsome plush curtains designed to slide upon a wire—when they worked properly, which was infrequent—which when opened revealed a dainty interior scene. The drawing room was arranged with chairs to accommodate the guests, who began to arrive shortly after dinner, and Restmore soon became a sparkle of lights and laughter. A gong announced the opening of the theater doors, and the audience crowded in, took their seats and waited with a flutter of excitement.

Mrs. Renwyck had agreed to speak the prologue, but at the last moment her courage forsook her, and she vowed she would sink through the floor if forced to face her guests. Arguments and encouragements were alike in vain, so Richard was prevailed upon to take her place, which he did, scrambling through somehow, assisted by a British drawl and his ever faithful monocle. To judge by a flattering chorus of feminine approval, he made the hit of the evening, though in describing his stage fright afterward he used a most un-English simile.
"Pon my word," he confessed, "I felt as if I had swallowed a live jack rabbit that was trying to bolt eleven ways at once. Fancy!"

The play went off without a hitch, except for one trifling incident which came near spoiling it altogether. The dismal Mr. Van der Awe, true to his principles on realism, forgot about the wig and committed the indiscretion of kissing the bird plump upon her tempting lips, whereupon the ruffled Imogene gave him a most realistic box on the ears, forgot her lines, and started in on an impromptu but spontaneous denunciation. This, in a measure, made Miss Renwyck's subsequent part fall flat, but no one in the audience seemed to know the difference, while both the man and bird agreed afterward that it improved the play.
If Miss Renwyck failed to be impressive in the great denunciation scene, the same could not be said of her personal appearance. She was dressed in an evening gown of soft, dull black which brought out the snowy whiteness of her throat and arms. In her thick dark tresses a great thra glow and sparkled, rivaling, it seemed the riviera of splendid gems about her neck, while at her breast blazed a mammoth brooch. Fashioned in the form of an eagle with outstretched wings, a shimmering blaze of light, the proud bird stood as an emblem of its country's wealth and daring, perched on the bosom of a princess of the free.
To Richard, in his present state of mind, Harriet seemed the most radiant perfect creature yet produced since the world began. As she bowed,

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behind the footlights for the second time to an enthusiastic encore a large bouquet of American Beauties was tossed upon the stage, and Miss Harriet blushed as she stooped for this most apposite tribute to her own charms. When safely behind the curtains she glanced at a card attached, which bore two words, "An American." This signature was vague, yet somehow Miss Renwyck picked the donor out from myriads of gentlemen who might better have claimed the title, and again she blushed as she buried her face among the fragrant buds.
"How splendid of him!" she whispered to her roses. "If only he had been my cowboy perhaps—perhaps—"
But the rest was a secret which the roses never told.
One by one the guests departed, but not till the last of them was driven away on the gravel road did Richard find an opportunity for a word alone with his ladylove. He was seated in a darkened nook on the front veranda, sheltered from the light by thick wisteria vines. He had lighted a cigar and was dreaming, as he smoked, of how beautiful she was, when suddenly he caught the swishing sound of skirts, and she took a wicker rocker by his side.
"Lord Croyland," she murmured softly, "I knew it was you by the smell of your cigar."
Richard was not a connoisseur as regards tobacco, and he wondered idly if the real Lord Croyland's favorite brand was up to the standard of this doubtful compliment. Miss Harriet continued:
"I'm glad I found you alone, for I want to thank you for these." She held her sheaf of roses toward him. "It was dear of you to send them, and it pleased me more than I can say."
"Nonsense," he laughed. "No flower that ever grew is worthy of you. That sounds foolish, I suppose, for many people must have said the same before, but I mean it simply, honestly."
"Thank you," she said softly, and both for a time were silent.
"Miss Harriet," he ventured presently, "you are beautiful tonight." He checked her pleased laugh and continued earnestly, "I don't mean that you are not beautiful always, but I have never seen you in black before, and—"
"How absurd!" she smiled. "I shall soon begin to think you like all the rest, a flatterer—just a flatterer!"
"No, no," he protested warmly; "it is more than that, believe me. I want to carry away with me forever the memory of you as you looked tonight. I

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