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Aunt Diana

The Sunshine of the Family

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

"Roger," exclaimed Alison, passionately, "this must be Ferguson's doing; he must have tampered with your letter and cut out the entry in the ledger, and of course the check is in his possession."

"Wait a moment, Allie," returned Roger, looking very stern and pale. "The check was cashed the next morning by a clerk of ours who was turned away for dishonesty, but the bank did not know that, and thought him still in our employ, so the money is lost to us. My father is dreadfully angry and puzzled about the whole affair, but he does not suspect Ferguson. He flew in a perfect rage when I hinted about his gambling debts. He blames me for carelessness; he says I ought not to have left the office without locking up both the check and the ledger in the iron safe. Ferguson the clerk we dismissed, hanging about the yard talking to the men. He declares that while we were in the yard, Ibotson must have got into the office, turned over the letters and abstracted my receipt; he must have read the entry in the open ledger, and he knew all the keys, and would easily find the check. He has actually made him believe that, in ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour at the most, Ibotson could get out the paper in the ledger, track the check to the private drawer, hunt out my receipt and make his escape—and all this without any precaution being taken. Why, the whole thing is monstrous and utterly improbable. I am positive that the only thing Ibotson has done is to cash the check."

"Roger, oh, how dreadful it all is! Of course, there can be no doubt in your own mind who did it!"

"There is not a shadow of doubt in my own mind, Allie; but how am I to bring my father to believe it? Ibotson has left the place, or he was actually going to set the detectives on him. Ferguson has completely hoodwinked him. Circumstantial evidence is strong against Ferguson, to my thinking. Judge for yourself, Allie; he was with me in the office when I opened the check; he saw me make the entry in the ledger, as well as write the receipt; he also must have seen me thrust the check hastily into the private drawer before I ran out into the yard. No doubt he returned to the office as soon as my attention was engaged with poor Ibotson. A few minutes was all that was needed to accomplish the job, Allie. I have found out today that he is terribly involved, and that his creditors are threatening him. I told you things are coming to a crash. I am afraid we shall lose more than the sum we received from Simmonds Brothers."

"Oh, Roger, how blind your father is! What are you to do to open his eyes?"

"I am going to watch Ferguson," returned Roger, with a frown of anxiety. "Allie, I never meant to have told you this. I have been about the town gleaning facts to-day, but I mean to keep them to myself for the next four-and-twenty hours. Ferguson has arrived at some sort of crisis in his affairs. I am afraid he will do something desperate. A sum of money has come into our hands today after banking hours, in notes and gold. I wanted my father to bring it up to the house, but he scouted the idea as ridiculous, as though any thief could open an iron safe; but, Allie, I am not comfortable in my mind. Supposing Ferguson has a duplicate key? My father is so hopelessly stupid that it is no use saying any more to him. I have made up my mind to watch the office to-night."

"But not alone, dear?"

"Yes, of course. Timothy will be there, if I need help; but I don't mean to take him into confidence. There is a barge that passes at ten to-night. The barge is an acquaintance of mine. I told him to look out for me by the bridge. I will get him to land me at the lower end of the yard. Timothy will be in his shed by that time, thinking about his supper. I don't want him to see me, or he will enlighten Ferguson. There is a handy wood-pile just outside the office where I can lie snug."

"Roger!" exclaimed Alison, in a quick, determined voice, "you shall not go alone; I shall watch you." And as he was about to interrupt her she went on quietly. "You know Missie and Miss Leah will be out until half past ten. Papa is always in his study. They will think I am in bed. I can lock my door and put the key in my pocket, and you have the latch-key. I will be no trouble to you. I will be as quiet as a mouse, and not hinder you. I could not rest—I could not sleep, knowing you were with that bad man. I will be useful as a witness. You must take me, Roger."

"Are you sure that you mean it—that it will not hurt you?" he asked, slowly.

"What should hurt me on a summer's night? And the barge will be snug fun."

"Very well, you shall come if you like. You are a plucky girl, Allie."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was still early in the evening when the young conspirators returned to the house, and the next two hours passed very slowly to Alison.

At half past nine Mr. Merle was shut safely in his study. Alison went quickly into her room and made her little preparation. A brown hat she had discarded as being too showy; her dress was dark, and turned purpose; her hair was dark, and a warm jacket was all she needed; and, carefully turning down her gas and locking her door, she crept quietly downstairs

to find Roger waiting for her in the dark entry.

He nodded and held out his hand to her without speaking, until they were outside the gate and were walking rapidly down the road that would lead them to the bridge.

"I have brought this plaid," he observed presently, showing it to her. "I was so afraid you would find it cold if we should have to wait many hours. I don't think I ought to have brought you, Allie."

"I could not have stopped at home," was Alison's quick answer. "Is this the bridge where we are to wait, Roger? How black the canal looks!"

"Here was a very good place to have waited," he returned, in a velvet voice. "I do not mind the moon being absent; the darkness is in our favor. But what am I to do with you, Allie, if we have a wet night? You will catch your death of cold."

"Nonsense," replied Alison stoutly. But nevertheless she felt an inward twinge of discomfort. Neither of them had thought of the weather. How wind and rain were everything looked in the obscure light, the dark towing path and the sluggish canal, the tall factories, and beyond them the dim woodpiles and sheds stretching away into the distance. The very large that came floating toward them out of the darkness seemed to hold dark, grimly shapes upon it.

In a few minutes Roger was helping her to scramble on shore. They were now at the extreme end of the timber yard, and had some way to walk.

Long before they had reached their destination the heavy pattering of rain drops warned them to make haste; but in the uncertain light, and with so rough a path, their speed was greatly retarded.

"Here we are at last," whispered Roger. "Follow me closely, Allie." And she obeyed, holding his coat to give her courage. A piteous blackness was round them; Roger's groping only led them still further into the darkness. Alison experienced a sense of suffocation until a ray of murky light showed her where she was—at the further entrance of one of the wood piles, with the office windows within a few yards of them.

Alison breathed more freely when she recognized her position. The interlaced planks formed an arched chamber, where they could move with comfort and be sheltered from the rain. Roger spread the plaid near the entrance, and bade his sister make herself as comfortable as circumstances permitted, while he went a little way to reconnoiter.

"I hope I have not brought you on a wild goose chase," he said when he returned. "Timothy is eating his supper. We shall have to be careful when he goes with his rounds. Hush! What is that?"

As a slight sound was plainly audible. "Don't move, I implore you, Allie," and Roger cautiously raised himself on his hands and knees and crept a few paces nearer to the entrance, but in a moment he returned and bade Alison to move further into the darkness.

"It is Ferguson," he heard his voice, he whispered. "Come a little further; Timothy has his lantern, and he might turn it on us; and now not a word if you can help it. Are you frightened, dear?"

"No," returned Alison, a little unsteadily, but at that moment she was certainly wishing herself and Roger safely at home. Roger's caution was not in vain; a sudden flare of light penetrated the entrance of the wood pile; they could see two men; but at the moment the lantern was lowered and Timothy's face was turned to his companion.

"A wet night, master," he said, in a grumbling voice. "I'll just go on my beat, and then back to the shed again."

"All right, Timothy," returned the manager, briskly. "I must just hunt for the paper I told you about. Possibly it may be a quarter of an hour in the office; but I will call out to you when I am ready for you to let me out of the yard."

"Ay, ay, I will let you out, sure enough, Master Ferguson, if so be as you strike upon the little window in the shed." And the old man moved on slowly.

"Don't move, Allie; I'll be back in a moment," whispered Roger in her ear.

And Alison remained where she was, feeling the dampness all around her, an unpleasant moisture beginning to trickle down her neck. The rain was pouring in torrents outside; its very violence promised short duration. Presently Roger crept back to her.

"It is just as I said," he began, hurriedly. "He is unlocking the safe; he has a duplicate key—I was sure of it. There is not a moment to lose. I dare not trust Timothy. I must go for my father. Allie, may I leave you here? You are perfectly safe—no one would harm you. But one of us must watch Ferguson; which shall it be?"

"You must go, Roger," she exclaimed. "You will go more quickly, and will know how to avoid Timothy."

"Very well, keep up your courage, Allie, and do not lose sight of the villain," he returned. "I will bring father back in no time. Wait where you are until Timothy has passed again."

Alison's reply was inaudible, but her mute assent testified obedience. That moment she was literally beyond speech; the horrid darkness seemed to swallow her up again; a nervous oppression made her heart beat with distressing quickness. It was quite a relief when Timothy passed again; the familiar figure in the heavy watchman's coat gave her a comforting sense of human support.

She stole cautiously across the open path, and in another moment she was standing outside the office window. There were two windows; for this one was necessarily darkened by the woodpile, but over the other the blind had been lowered to shut out prying glances. Alison supposed, as Roger had, that he had locked himself in to carry on his unhallowed work. The dark background of piled-up

planks quite overshadowed the white girl, her face peering in at the uncurtained window.

She was frightened at her own daring, but she remembered that she was Roger's witness; it was necessary for her own eyes to testify to Ferguson's dishonesty. Now there could be no mistake; the open safe was conclusive, and so were the notes and gold that he was snowing away in that great black bag. Alison watched, half fascinated by horror. He had nearly finished; yes, he was locking his bag and closing the safe, the candle stood fluttering beside him on a chair, not on the table; he almost pushed against it as he went to the door and set it open. Yes, he had locked himself in, for she could see him take the key out and fix it carefully in the outer lock, and then he went back into the room. Oh, what had become of Roger? In another moment he could have escaped with his booty. The main entrance to the timber yard was in the opposite direction to the private door opening into the garden of The Holmes. Even if Roger and his father were coming in this moment, Ferguson would have no difficulty in eluding them. It was true the door was locked and Timothy had the key, but he could easily swim across the canal and reach the towing path.

A bitter factional fight occurred in the United Mineworkers' convention. The American battleships Maine and Missouri received a warm welcome at Havana harbor.

The mayor of Portland declares that the entire police force shall become a "moral squad."

A serious clash occurred between American naval officers and the police at Marseilles, France.

Rescued passengers and crew of the lost liner Republic heartily praise the bravery of the captain.

Montana farmers have lost their suit against the smelters to compel abatement of the smoke nuisance.

Eleven miners are entombed by an explosion in a Pennsylvania mine, and there is little hope for any of them.

A recent conference at the White House decided that a private family is the best possible place to raise children.

Carrie Nation attempted to lecture in London, but was forced to quit by hisses and rotten eggs from the audience.

The Supreme court of the United States has refused to define the law on rebates, as requested by the Alton road in appealing from its recent big fine.

The Oregon Short Line is surveying for a new road along Snake river.

A Thurston, Oregon, farmer was found dead in bed after an attack of nightmare.

The House has refused to increase the pension of the widow of Rear-Admiral Oughlan.

The Duke de Abruzzi is the only man who has ever reached the top of Mt. St. Elias, Alaska.

A prominent congressman says Japan appears to have the power of veto over American legislation.

A Denver woman has been stealing to ward off starvation, and left a note for one of her victims asking forgiveness.

A universal earthquake has been recorded by observatories all over Asia. It is believed to have centered in Turkestan.

The Atlantic liner Republic was rammed in midocean by the liner Florida. Wireless messages for help saved all on board.

Three Russian desperadoes killed three persons near London, England, and wounded five others. When closely pursued two of the thugs committed suicide.

Jay Gould has volunteered as probation officer in New York.

The Japanese government is cutting expenses everywhere possible.

Indications are that floods in Oregon, Washington and Idaho are over.

Another venieman in the Calhoun case reports an attempted bribery.

A water-front fire at Galveston destroyed \$500,000 worth of property.

An anti-race track betting bill has been passed by the California house.

The eruption of Lagnas, in the Philippines, has entirely changed the form of the mountain.

The California floods are worse in some places, but for the most part the waters are subsiding.

Cogrove is on his way north to be inaugurated governor of Washington and will then return south.

Harriman declares he will cut wages of employes in Wyoming if the legislature passes a 2-cent rate law.

One hundred and seventy-five persons are known to have lost their lives through heavy floods in the Transvaal country.

The widow of Rear Admiral Coghlan is in destitute circumstances and will have to look for work unless the government grants her a pension.

Senator Flint, of California, says he does not believe anti-Japanese bills will be passed in his state, but says immigrants are still pouring in.

San Pedro harbor is to be extensively fortified.

The National Child Labor conference is in session in Chicago.

Marshall Field's daughter has sued for the income of the estate.

The Canadian Pacific plans to build another line across the country.

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(To be continued.)

Apri Comparison.

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EVENTS OF THE DAY

Newsy Items Gathered from All Parts of the World.

PREPARED FOR THE BUSY READER

Less Important but Not Less Interesting Happenings from Points Outside the State.

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JAPAN TAKES NOTICE.

Would Discourage Emigration and Continue Friendly Relations.

Washington, Jan. 26.—Marquis Katsura, prime minister of Japan, and Count Komura, minister of foreign affairs, recently explained at Tokio to Francis B. Loomis, commissioner-general to the Japanese exposition, in a series of interviews of uncommon interest and of great political importance, the attitude and position of the Japanese government in respect to the main questions at issue between Japan and the United States.

"I was deeply and agreeably impressed," said Mr. Loomis, "with the direct, explicit and what seemed to me satisfactory statement of Count Komura, minister of foreign affairs, respecting the United States. His utterances were frank, clear and cordial."

"Count Komura and Japan's aspirations were for peace and that, so far as the United States was concerned, his country most heartily desired to preserve unbroken and unimpaired the history of the friendship between Japan and the United States. He said the people of Japan had long felt that the United States had been not only a kind friend to Japan, but a very dependable and helpful one, and that this government earnestly desired this amicable relationship to continue and would loyally endeavor to do its utmost to maintain it. He declared the actions of this government had borne out its words and promises."

"In the matter of emigration of Japanese laborers," said Count Komura, "we are doing our utmost to work in harmony with the government of the United States and to meet its wishes. We are energetic in discouraging emigration to the United States and elsewhere except to Corea, Formosa and parts of Manchuria. It is the definite policy of the government of Japan to concentrate its surplus population—that which is disposed to emigrate—in these parts of the Orient which I have mentioned. There is opportunity for a very large number of our people in Corea. They can be of general assistance in modernizing the development of that country and can add vastly to its productiveness, and at the same time better their own class."

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CAN'T GET DECISION

Supreme Court Leaves Railroads in a Hole.

OBEEDIENCE TO LAW MEANS RUIN

Not Allowed to Pay for Use of Industrial Tracks—Will Make New Attempt to Secure Decision.

Washington, Jan. 26.—The supreme court of the United States today denied a rehearing in the case in which the Chicago & Alton and two of its former officers were fined \$60,000 for paying rebates to the packing firm of Schwarzchild & Sulzberger. The petition was presented to the court because that body was divided equally with reference to the law points involved in the case. Only eight judges sat, Justice Moody declining to participate, as it was under his administration as attorney-general that the case was begun.

The result of the refusal of the court bids fair to be serious to the railroads, as it leaves a number of important questions arising under the Hepburn act undecided. All the more uncertainty exists, as the court of appeals also split upon the questions of law, are majority deciding in favor of the trial court. The gravity of the questions involved was made the basis of a petition for a writ of certiorari to get the case before the supreme court. Such writs are granted in less than 10 per cent of the applications, and having granted it in this case and having failed to decide the issues, the Supreme court refused to give the defendants another opportunity to present the case.

The act which was declared by the court below to be the payment of a rebate was the payment to the packing firm of \$1 per car for the use of its switching tracks leading from the packing-house to the tracks of the Alton at Chicago. Under the terms of the decision of the court below, no railroad company can lease, pay for the use of, or operate under any agreement any such industrial sidetrack belonging to a shipper. If this is the law, it was pointed out to the Supreme court, it would bankrupt the railroads involved to change, for example, the Chicago stockyards district, to conform with the law. Such a revolution in the methods of conducting transportation, it was urged, should not be forced upon the railroads until the highest court of the land declared it to be the law.

As a matter of fact, hundreds of traffic contracts have been held in abeyance awaiting the decision of the court, and now the railroads will not know what to do regarding this "new commercial crime," which the lower courts say was created by the Hepburn act. Owing to the fact that so much is involved, it is more than likely that the railroads will agree among themselves to make no changes, in the hope that the government will start another prosecution, which may result in a decision by the Supreme court.

STAYED BY THE SHIP.

Captain of Ill-Fated Liner Republic Last to Leave.

Woods Hole, Mass., Jan. 26.—The story of the sinking of the big liner Republic and the dogged heroism of Captain Sealby in sticking to his vessel until it had sunk beneath him, was told today by Lieutenant Scott, executive officer of the revenue cutter Gresham.

Lieutenant Scott said that when the Gresham found the Republic Sunday morning the passengers and all the crew but Captain Sealby, the second officer and 35 men, who had volunteered to stay by their chief, had been transferred to the Baltic.

"At 8 o'clock Sunday night," continued Lieutenant Scott, "the bow of the Republic, illuminated by the rays of the searchlights, was seen rising fast. Five minutes later two pistol shots were heard and two blue lights were burned. At 8:10 the Republic's bow shot up high in the air and she sank in 38 fathoms of water, in a position 15 miles west-southwest of Nantucket south shoals lighthouse.

"A lifeboat was dropped from the side of the Gresham and a crew under the command of Gunner Carl Johansen started off. The boat returned in three-quarters of an hour with both the captain and the second officer on board. They had been picked up clinging to wreckage. Neither had life preservers.

Pirates Attack Pearlers.

Manila, Jan. 26.—Word has reached here of an attack on the Pareng pearling fleet by Moro pirates January 20, seven of the pearl fishers having been killed in the fight. The insular government has dispatched several patrol boats to the scene of the attack with instructions to search for the pirates.

FIRE SCARES PASSENGERS.

Kenmore, Ireland, Jan. 26.—Twenty-four passengers on the packet from Liverpool to Cork had a thrilling experience on Saturday night. Fire was discovered on the ship and with great difficulty all the passengers were transferred to a passing ship. They were landed at Holyhead this morning. The packet was beached and burned to the water's edge.