

Between Two Fires

By ANTHONY HOPE

"A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds." —Francis Bacon.

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

The old lady and the young one lived together in great apparent comfort; for they probably got through more money than any one in the town, and there always seemed to be plenty more where that came from. The Signorina was now about 23 years of age, and of remarkably prepossessing appearance. She became almost at once a leading figure in society; her parlor was the leading meeting place of all parties and most sets; she received many gracious attentions from the Golden House. She was also frequently the hostess of members of the opposition, and of no one more often than their leader, Colonel George McGregor, a gentleman of Scotch extraction, but not pronouncedly national characteristics, who had attained a high position in the land of his adoption; for not only did he lead the opposition in politics, but he was also second in command of the army. He entered the chamber as one of the President's nominees (for the latter had reserved to himself power to nominate five members), but at the time of which I write the Colonel had deserted his former chief, and, secure in his popularity with the forces, defied the man by whose help he had risen. Naturally the President disliked him, a feeling I cordially shared. But his excellency's disapproval did not prevent the Signorina receiving McGregor with great cordiality, though here again with no more than his position seemed to demand.

I have as much curiosity as my neighbors, and I was proportionately gratified when the doors of "Mon Repos," as the Signorina called her residence, were opened to me. My curiosity, I must confess, was not unmixed with other feelings; for I was a young man of heart, though events had thrown sobering responsibilities upon me, and the sight of the Signorina in her daily drives was enough to inspire a thrill even in the soul of a bank manager. She was certainly very beautiful—a tall, fair girl, with straight features and laughing eyes. I shall not attempt more description, because all such descriptions sound commonplace, and the Signorina was, even by the admission of her enemies, at least very far from commonplace. It must suffice to say that, like Father O'Flynn, she "had such a way with her" that all of us men in Aureatland, old and young, rich and poor, were at her feet, or ready to be there on the least encouragement. She was, to my thinking, the very genius of health, beauty and gaiety; and she put the crowning touch to her charms by very openly and frankly soliciting and valuing the admiration she received.

It may be supposed, then, that I thought my money very well invested when it procured me an invitation to "Mon Repos," where the lady of the house was in the habit of allowing a genteel amount of card playing among her male friends. She never played herself, but stood and looked on with much interest. On occasion she would tempt fortune by the hand of a chosen deputy, and nothing could be prettier or more artistic than her behavior. She was just eager enough for a girl unused to the excitement and fond of triumph, just indifferent enough to show that her play was merely a pastime, and the gain of the money or its loss a matter of no moment. Ah, Signorina, you were a great artist!

At "Mon Repos" I soon became an habitual, and I was fain to think, a welcome guest. Mrs. Carrington, who entertained a deep distrust of the manners of Aureatland, was good enough to consider me eminently respectable, while the Signorina was graciousness itself. It was even admitted to the select circle at the dinner party, which, as a rule, preceded her Wednesday evening reception. The Colonel was, not to my pleasure, an equally invariable guest, and the President himself would often honor the party with his presence, an honor we found rather expensive, for his luck at all games of skill or chance was extraordinary.

"I have always trusted fortune," he would say, "and to me she is not fickle." "Who would be fickle if your excellency were pleased to trust her?" the Signorina would respond, with a glance of almost fond admiration.

This sort of thing did not please McGregor. He made no concealment of the fact that he claimed the foremost place among the Signorina's admirers, utterly declining to make way even for the President. The latter took his boorishness very quietly and I could not avoid the conclusion that the President held, or thought he held, the trumps. I was, naturally, intensely jealous of both these great men, and, although I had no cause to complain of my treatment, I could not stifle some resentment at the idea that I was, after all, an outsider and not allowed a part in the real drama that was going on. My happiness was further damped by the fact that luck ran steadily against me, and I saw my bonus dwindling very rapidly. I suppose I may as well be frank, and confess that my bonus, to speak strictly, vanished within six months after I first set foot in "Mon Repos," and I found it necessary to make that temporary use of the "interest fund" which the President had indicated. My uneasiness was lightened when the next installment of interest was punctually paid, and, with youthful confidence, I made little doubt that luck would turn before long.

CHAPTER V.

Time passed on, all leading an apparently merry and untroubled life. In pub-

lic affairs the temper was very different. The scarcity of money was intense, and serious murmuring had arisen when the President "squandered" his ready money in paying interest, leaving his civil servants and soldiers unpaid. This was the topic of much discussion in the press at the time when I went up one March evening to the Signorina's. I had been detained at the bank, and found the gaiety in full swing when I came in. The Signorina sat by herself on a low lounge by the veranda window. I went up to her and made my bow.

"You spare us but little of your time, Mr. Martin," she said.

"Ah, but you have all my thoughts," I replied, for she was looking charming.

"I don't care so much about your thoughts," she said. Then, after a pause, she went on, "It's very hot here, come into the conservatory."

It almost looked as though she had been waiting for me, and I followed in high delight into the long, narrow glass house. High green plants hid us from the view of those inside, and we only heard distinctly his excellency's voice, saying with much geniality to the Colonel, "Well, you must be lucky in love, Colonel," from which I concluded that the Colonel was not in the vein at cards.

The Signorina smiled slightly as she heard; then she plucked a white rose, turned round, and stood facing me, slightly flushed as though with some inner excitement.

"I am afraid those two gentlemen do not love one another," she said.

"Hardly," I assented.

"And you, do you love them—or either of them?"

"I love only one person in Aureatland," I replied, as ardently as I dared.

The Signorina bit her rose, glancing up at me with unfeigned amusement and pleasure. I think I have mentioned that she didn't object to honest admiration.

"Is it possible you mean me?" she said, making me a little courteous. "I only think so because most of the Whittingham ladies would not satisfy your fastidious taste."

"No lady in the world could satisfy me except one," I answered, thinking she took it a little too lightly.

"Ah, so you say," she said. "And yet I don't suppose you would do anything for me, Mr. Martin."

"It would be my greatest happiness," I cried.

She said nothing, but stood there, biting the rose.

"Give it to me," I said; "it shall be my badge of service."

"You will serve me, then?" she said.

"For what reward?"

"Why, the rose!"

"I should like the owner, too," I ventured to remark.

"The rose is prettier than the owner," she said; "and, at any rate, one thing at a time, Mr. Martin! Do you pay your servants all their wages in advance?"

My practice was so much to the contrary that I really couldn't deny the force of her reasoning. She held out the rose. I seized it and held it close to my lips, thereby squashing it considerably. Then she said abruptly:

"Are you a Constitutionalist or a Liberal, Mr. Martin?"

I must explain that, in the usual race for the former title, the President's party had been first at the post, and the Colonel's gang (as I privately termed it) had to put up with the alternative designation. Neither name bore any relation to facts.

"Are we going to talk politics?" said I, reproachfully.

"Yes, a little. Tell me."

"Which are you, Signorina?" I asked. I really wanted to know; so did a great many people. She thought for a moment, and then said:

"I have a great regard for the President. He has been most kind to me. On the other hand, I cannot disguise from myself that some of his measures are not wise."

I said I had never been able to disguise it from myself.

"The Colonel, of course, is of the same opinion," she continued. "About the debt, for instance, I believe your bank is interested in it?"

"Oh, yes, to a considerable extent."

"And you?" she asked, softly.

"Oh, I am not a capitalist; no money of mine has gone into the debt."

"No money of yours, no. But aren't you interested in it?" she persisted.

This was rather odd. Could she know anything? She drew nearer to me, and, laying a hand lightly on my arm, said reproachfully:

"Do you love people, and yet not trust them, Mr. Martin?"

This was exactly my state of feeling toward the Signorina, but I could not say so. I was wondering how far I should be wise to trust her, and that depended largely on how far his excellency had seen fit to trust her with my secrets. I said finally:

"Without disclosing other people's secrets, Signorina, I may admit that if anything went wrong with the debt, my employer's opinion of my discretion would be severely shaken."

"Of your discretion," she said laughing.

"Thank you, Mr. Martin. And you would wish that not to happen?"

"I would take a good deal of pains to prevent its happening."

"Not less willingly if your interest and mine coincided?"

I was about to make a passionate re-

ply when we heard the President's voice saying:

"And where is our hostess? I should like to thank her before I go."

"Hush," whispered the Signorina. "We must go back. You will be true to me, Mr. Martin?"

"Call me Jack," said I, idiotically.

"Then you will be true, O Jack?" she said, stifling a laugh.

"Till death," said I, hoping it would not be necessary.

She gave me her hand, which I kissed with fervor, and we returned to the parlor, to find all standing about in groups, waiting to make their bows till the President had gone through that ceremony. I was curious to hear if anything passed between him and the Signorina, but I was pounced upon by Donna Antonia, the daughter of the minister of finance, who happened to be present as a guest of the Signorina's for the night. She was a handsome young lady, a Spanish brunette of the approved pattern, but with manners formed at a New York boarding school, where she had undergone a training that had tempered without destroying her native gentility. She had distinguished me very favorably, and I was vain enough to suppose she honored me by some jealousy of my penchant for the Signorina.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself in the conservatory," she said, maliciously.

"We were talking business, Donna Antonia," I replied.

"Ah, business! I hear nothing but business. There is papa gone down to the country and burying himself alive to work out some great scheme of business!"

"Ah, what scheme is that?" I asked.

"Oh! I don't know. Something about that horrid debt. But I was told not to say anything about it!"

The debt was becoming a bore. The whole air was full of it. I hastily paid Donna Antonia a few incoherent compliments, and took my leave. As I was putting on my coat Colonel McGregor joined me and, with more friendliness than he usually showed me, accompanied me down the avenue toward the Piazza. After some indifferent remarks, he began:

"Martin, you and I have separate interests in some matters, but I think we have the same in others."

I knew at once what he meant; it was that debt over again! I remained silent, and he continued:

"About the debt, for instance. You are interested in a debt?"

"Somewhat," said I. "A banker generally is interested in a debt."

"I thought so," said the Colonel. "A time may come when we can act together. Meanwhile, keep your eye on the debt. Good night."

We parted at the door of his chambers in the Piazza, and I went on to my lodgings. I got into bed, rather puzzled and very uneasy.

CHAPTER VI.

The flight of time brought no alleviation to the troubles of Aureatland. If an individual hard-up is a pathetic sight, a nation hard-up is an alarming spectacle; and Aureatland was very hard-up. I suppose somebody had some money. But the government had none; in consequence the government employes had none, the officials had none, the President had none, and finally, I had none. The bank had a little of other people's, of course—but I was quite prepared for a "run" on us any day, and had cabled to the directors to implore a remittance in cash, for our notes were at a discount humiliating to contemplate. Political strife ran high. I dropped into the House of Assembly one afternoon toward the end of May, and, looking down from the gallery, saw the Colonel in the full tide of wrathful declamation. He was demanding of the miserable Don Antonio when the army was to be paid. The latter sat cowering under his scorn, and would, I verily believe, have bolted out of the House had he not been nailed to his seat by the cold eye of the President, who was looking on from his box. The minister on rising had nothing to urge but vague promises of speedy payment; but he utterly lacked the confident effrontery of his chief, and nobody was deceived by his weak protestations.

I left the House in a considerable uproar, and strolled on to the house of a friend of mine, one Madame Deverges, the widow of a French gentleman, who had found his way to Whittingham from New Caledonia. Politeness demanded the assumption that he had found his way to New Caledonia owing to political troubles, but the usual cloud hung over the precise date and circumstances of his patriotic sacrifice. Madame sometimes considered it necessary to bore herself and others with denunciations of the various tyrants or would-be tyrants of France; but, apart from this pious offering on the shrine of her husband's reputation, she was a bright and pleasant little woman. I found assembled round her tea table a merry party, including Donna Antonia, unmindful of her father's agonies, and one Johnny Carr, who deserves mention as being the only honest man in Aureatland. I speak, of course, of the place as I found it. He was a young Englishman, what they call a "cadet," of a good family, shipped off with a couple of thousand pounds to make his fortune. Land was cheap among us, and Johnny had bought an estate and settled down as a land owner. Recently he had blossomed forth as a keen Constitutionalist and a devoted admirer of the President's, and held a seat in the Assembly in that interest. Johnny was not a clever man nor a wise one, but he was merry, and, as I have thought it necessary to mention, honest.

(To be continued.)

His Cue.

Ganner—They say this book entitled "A Step Backward" was inspired. I wonder where the author ever got his inspiration?

Guyer—Oh, I guess he watched a woman stepping off a street car.

THAW'S BEST FRIEND.

If Anyone Can Save White's Slayer It Is His Mother.

Mrs. Mary Copley Thaw, leader of the Pittsburgh society and ruler of the many millions left by her husband, the late William Thaw, has proven herself remarkable in times of stress and trouble. If anyone can save Harry K. Thaw from suffering the consequences of his crime in killing Stanford White, it will be this devoted mother, who is his best friend.

Mrs. Thaw showed her ability as a manager when her daughter, Alice, decided to marry the Earl of Yarmouth. There was opposition from members of the family, who did not like the earl. Once settled that her daughter's happiness depended upon the marriage, Mrs. Thaw consented. There was trouble over the settlement, but she arranged that to the satisfaction of all concerned.

A year or so later Harry Kendall Thaw returned from Europe with Evelyn Nesbit, announcing her as his wife. The elder Mrs. Thaw hastened to haul in the reins and arranged for another wedding. Then she took them home with her. This high-minded and devoted mother has redeemed situations that to others have seemed to be beyond hope of saving, and has controlled her offspring when only she was capable of doing so. Out of the complex love affairs of her children, when all the world scoffed, she has seen what was true and developed successful marriages.

With her other children, Josiah and Mrs. George Lauder Carnegie, Mrs. Thaw seems to have had less trouble. Mrs. William Thaw has her own views regarding the conduct of the



MRS. WILLIAM THAW.

case. What those views are remain untold. It is certain, however, that she will expend her entire fortune, if necessary, in the effort to save her son from the electric chair. Her mother love has been touched at its tenderest point, as Harry Kendall Thaw always has been her petted and best loved son. Always has she forgiven his escapades and dissipations, continually trusting that her love and devotion would tell in the long run. Now, in her old age, she faces the terrible ordeal of a son charged with deliberate and premeditated murder.

Why They Call Him "Old Beans."

"Senator Pomeroy was called by many of those who knew him as 'Old Beans.' His friends used the nickname as a term of endearment, while those who didn't like him employed it to express their derision. He obtained the title by reason of having at one time, when the people of his state were hungry, a large quantity of that nourishing food shipped from Boston to Kansas. Whenever he profited in a pecuniary way by that act, of course I don't know, but he, at least, gathered in a host of friends.

"I first heard of the soubriquet when I was one of the assistant doorkeepers of the Senate. My station was to the left of the chamber, facing the secretary's office. One day, when the Senate was in session, a big, breezy westerner came up to me, and said: 'Will you kindly send my card to 'Old Beans.' 'Well, that stumped me, and I was obliged to confess that I didn't know 'beans.' Then the stranger explained. When 'Old Beans' appeared he fairly fell into his friend's arms, and when that gentleman told him, that I was ignorant of the name the Kansans knew him by, I was told why they so designated him.'—Washington Post.

Not Long Unattached.

"The last time I passed through here," said the traveling man, "she was grieving for her husband, who had just died. I suppose she's resigned now."

"Resigned," echoed the native. "That's a new way of expressing it. Yes, she's married again."—Philadelphia Press.

Treat your parents with great tenderness and respect: You owe them something because you were not born a czar.

"What a job it is," said the father of a large family to-day, "to marry off a lot of girls."

There Was an Old Woman, Etc.

A stout little woman on an East Washington street car looked around anxiously for seats for the children who were with her. Two of the older girls had babies in their arms, according to the Indianapolis Star. People on the car did not know whether it was an orphan's home picnic or a Sunday school convention.

"Beg pardon, lady," said the conductor, "but you have given me only eight tickets."

"Didn't know you charged for babies in arms," said the little woman, as she kept her eye on all other members of her party.

"But there are nine without them," said the conductor, apologetically. Perhaps he really thought the woman had only eight tickets.

"Stand up, children," commanded the little woman. She was imperious in her command, and immediately after her order to stand up they all arose to their feet.

Counting them one by one, she presently came to a little boy of about 8 years old, and, pointing her finger at him, she said:

"Sammy, I thought you stayed at home with the rest of the children."

She Was.

A West End avenue man undertook to meet his unknown girl cousin at the station on Tuesday. He approached a young woman in blue and asked:

"Are you Miss Blake?"

"No," said the young woman, "I am not."

"I hope you will excuse me," he explained. "I am here to meet a Miss Blake. She is my cousin. I have never seen her. My sister Kate is the only member of our family who knows her, and she couldn't come. She told me I would know Jennie because she is so pretty. 'Just pick out the prettiest girl in the station and you'll be sure to strike Jennie,' she said."

The young woman blushed, the young man sighed.

"I don't know who to ask next," he said. "There doesn't seem to be anybody else in the whole shooting match that comes up to the description. I guess Jennie didn't come."

A tall girl in brown sat beside the girl in blue. She got up and glared at the young man. "She did," said the girl in brown.

"Oh, Lord," said he, "are you—"

"I am," said the girl in brown.

And of course nobody could expect a girl to be friends with a man after that.—New York Sun.

Tragedy of the Deep.

Suddenly there was a wild shriek. The passengers on the lower deck caught a momentary glimpse of a dark object falling swiftly from above.

They rushed to the side of the boat and gazed in horror at a woman's hat bobbing up and down on the rapidly receding waves.

It was all they could see. Where was the woman?

Up on the hurricane deck of the steamer, bare headed, and wringing her hands in despair.

It was her only traveling hat, and had cost her \$2.98.

Inherited.

Vincent was altogether too garrulous in school to please his teachers. Such punishments as the institution allowed to be meted out were tried without any apparent effect upon the boy, until at last the head master decided to mention the lad's faults upon his monthly report.

So the next report to his father had these words:

"Vincent talks a great deal."

Back came the report by mail, duly signed, but with this written in red ink under the comment:

"You ought to hear his mother."

Nature's Prophets.

The katydid had been insisting that there would be frost within six weeks.

"I've no faith in your long distance weather forecasts," said the tree toad, "but I'm willing to bet there will be rain inside of forty-eight hours."

Whereupon the rival weather bureaus resumed their noisy predictions.

Pale, Thin, Nervous?

Then your blood must be in a very bad condition. You certainly know what to take, then take it—Ayer's Sarsaparilla. If you doubt, then consult your doctor. We know what he will say about this grand old family medicine. Sold for over 60 years.

This is the first question your doctor would ask: "Are your bowels regular?" He knows that daily action of the bowels is absolutely essential to recovery. Keep your liver active and your bowels regular by taking laxative doses of Ayer's Pills.

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Ayer's HAIR VIGOR, AGUE CURE, CHERRY PECTORAL.