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# CAPTURED.

By ROBERT BARR. (Author of "The Mutable Many," etc.)

Reginald Fitzgerald was not an officer and a gentleman, nor the heir to a title, as might have been surmised from his name, but was merely an ordinary every day soldier, Mounted Infantry at that, from the eastern end of London, sent out to assist in teaching Kruger the lesson he was so long in learning. This particular member of the M.I. was known to his friends as Reggie, and his seat on a horse was a little more stable than that of many of his comrades, because Reggie was stable-man at a pub on the Rounford road at the time the war broke out. His knowledge of warfare and tactics had all come to him since that time, and although South Africa seemed to him a bit larger than the county of Essex, he was getting along reasonably well on the veldt, thanks to his youth, which was 24, and his strength, which seemed impervious to privation, and his common-sense, which had on several occasions got him into trouble with his officers. He had ventured opinions which turned out to be accurate, and of course a self-respecting officer could not be expected to stand that sort of thing; he called it cheek, and Reggie suffered, so he came to know at last that silence was golden. No matter what idiotic instructions he received, he knew enough to hold his tongue, therefore it will be understood that he was rapidly learning the soldiering trade.

As the best rider in the troop, he was frequently entrusted with the carrying of despatches, and he was exceedingly successful in this work, thanks to much experience as a night poacher in the old country. He had had some narrow escapes, and was slightly wounded twice, but Reggie always took care of his horse, and the horse in return galloped Reggie out of many a tight corner.

This is an account of an occasion when the young man felt it most difficult to keep from tendering advice to the officer whose sole privilege it was to deal out instructions to Reggie. Reggie stood rigid, received the despatches, with counsel to conceal them until they were safely handed for scrutiny to Colonel Finch-Batters at Spooftfontein. This was all right, if Fitzgerald had been allowed his own head. But the little officer was definite as a piece of red tape.

"You will go direct from here to Spooftfontein, past the base of Piety Kop on the north. See that you follow orders, my man."

Fitzgerald saluted and withdrew, and thus the goddess of silence triumphed. He went to his tent and sewed his despatches in the lining of his tunic. Then he made for his horse, singing gently as he marched—

Oh fare you well, my own—a Mary Ann.

Oh fare you well for a while,  
For I'm going away and I'm going far  
to stay,  
Diddle urp diddle urp dum dan.

"Hello, Diddle urp, what's the matter?" cried a comrade.  
"Ah, Billy, I'm done for. Private-Fitz, M.I. 73109, captured." That what's they'll see in the papers at home. Ye'll go to Spooftfontein direct, says the little officer. Direct, by the foot of Piety Kop. I've as much chance of getting through that way as you have of being offered Kitchener's place to-morrow."

"After all," said Billy, "they can't hold you when they do catch you. They're taking no prisoners now."

"No, but they're stripping them stark. They'll give me a mealie sack to come back in. I say, Billy, tell the lads that when they see me approach the camp in dressing gown and slippers, they're not to shoot simply because they never set eyes on so terrible an object before."

"Well look out for you, Reggie, and have a drink reggie."

"Do," said Reggie.  
"Surely the little officer man knowa

you've no chance of getting past Piety Kop? Perhaps you're carrying information for the benefit of the enemy," remarked Billy.

"No fear," asserted Reggie, "he hasn't sense enough for that."

Which showed how easy it is for a big man to under-estimate a little one.

Reggie got on his horse and speedily disappeared across the veldt. It was rough going, a broken country of hill and valley, with Piety Kop a very efficient landmark on ahead. Fitz rode as easily as he could, singing his farewell ditty to Mary Ann, which was the only tune he knew. He was quite contented, for he was well aware that there was not the slightest chance of getting through, and when halted, he had made up his mind neither to run or to fight. There was not the slightest use in doing either, so why do either? said Reggie to himself. The Boers were hovering round the foot of Piety Kop, hoping to allure the British to attack it. The British had displayed great desire to possess themselves of various kops in the early part of the war, and the shrewd Boers were not shrewd enough to realise that this desire had abated. The commander in Fitz's camp would not have accepted Piety Kop as a gift. Therefore he wished the information to reach the Boers that he intended to attack Piety Kop within two days, so Reggie was riding across the veldt with bogus despatches, intended for capture.

He rode with more caution as he went down a valley, and noticed a small farmhouse, with a collection of sheds which looked suspiciously deserted. It was on his route, and he dared not vary that route, but he rode by, expecting a shot from this ambushade, almost wishing it would be quick about it, and end this harrowing suspense. When he got past the hut he still viewed it with distrust, gazing over his shoulder, and thus rode unseeing into the very trap he was trying to avoid. "Throw up your hands, Tommy!" came to him in excellent English.

Fitz's hands went above his head automatically and speedily. "I knew that singularly ass would have me nipped, sending me on this fool's errand," muttered the soldier, as he turned towards his captor. Then—"Oh, I say," cried Reggie, when he looked down on the prettiest girl he had ever beheld, pointing a rifle held with unwavering rigidity at the young man's heart, which had always been susceptible when femininity presented arms to it. It was bad enough to be captured, but to be taken thus by a young woman, who could not be more than 19, was adding insult to injury.

"Get off your horse, Tommy, and see that you don't lower your hands while doing so."

"My name's not Tommy, Mary Ann."

"I beg your pardon, Mary Ann," laughed the girl. "Get down, Mary Ann. I suspected you had such names in the British army, but none of you ever admitted it before. I thought your Mary Ann were all generals."

"You think you're clever, don't you?"

"I know I am. Where are you going?"

"Going to get down," said Reggie, flinging a leg over the horse and jumping to the ground, keeping his arms aloft all the while, for something in the girl's attitude and jet black eyes told him she would not hesitate to shoot. She laughed again, very charmingly Reggie thought, while he hoped his comrades would never hear of this episode. She stepped back a few paces, and placing her rifle at her shoulder covered him.

"Now, Tommy," she cried, "be very careful. Throw to the ground whatever weapons you carry. Don't try any tricks, for I will have you shot before you could get your revolver into position. Do be careful, for I don't wish to hurt you."

Fitz threw a revolver and a knife on the ground.

"Is that all you have?"  
"Yes," growled Reggie, sulkily.

"Now, take ten steps away from them."

The soldier obeyed.

"That's right, you may sit down and rest your arms," laughed the girl, with a succeeding sigh of relief. She also sat down on a rock that lifted itself out of the veldt, sitting there with the rifle across her knees, and Reggie's revolver and knife at her feet.

"Did you get lost?" she asked.

"No, I've just been found by you."

"Carrying despatches, I suppose?"

"Very likely."

"Where are they, Tommy?"

"Well, Mary Ann, if you want to know—they're sewed up in my tunic, and I'm sure you're welcome to them. I knew I'd never get past Piety Kop."

"My name's Gretchen," she said.

"Mine's Reginald."

"I don't believe it, Tommy."

"Then I don't believe in Gretchen, Mary Ann. Where did you get your English?"

"I got him with this rifle, Tommy," and she laughed provokingly as she patted the weapon referred to. Reggie, who was the best natured fellow in the world, and who by this time had partially recovered from chagrin at his ignominious capture, now smiled and began to appreciate how handsome she was.

"Well, I'm not the first," he said.

"The first what?"

"The first man to be taken in and done for by a good-looking girl."

"Oh, I've not done for you, and won't unless you try to escape."

"If I don't escape, I'm done for sure. I'm more afraid of your eyes than your rifle."

"You were more afraid of my rifle a minute ago."

"Yes, because I did not get a good look at your eyes then. The rifle was between me and them. Now I realise my danger."

She made no answer to this, but rose to her feet, and looked somewhat anxiously down the valley.

"I say, Gretchen, why don't you people chuck it?"

"Chuck what?"

"This blooming war."

"Because it is right we should win, and we shall win."

"You don't really believe that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you ever been in England?"

"No, and I never wish to see it, either. I learned the language I'm speaking in Cape Town. I saw enough of the English there."

"And you don't like them?"

"No."

"Well, I'm sorry for that. Some of 'em I don't like myself. Our officers, for instance. But what I was going to say was this: I come from the east end of London. Now if you walked from where I lived to where my officer lived, you would travel as far as I came from camp riding till now I'm hungry, and houses, houses all the way. There's ten times more people in London than there are from here to Cape Town. When I left England the war had been going on a year or two. Well, strike me dumb, you couldn't tell from the crowds that one man had left London. You can't beat us. We're too many. Even if they're all as big fools as I am, or as our little officer is, and South Africa was all as clever as you, you couldn't beat us, you're too few. Then chuck it, and let's be friends."

"We will, when you catch De Wet," said the girl, gazing at him with undeniable interest. He had spoken earnestly and his face had lit up in a very attractive way, the girl thought. The moment she mentioned De Wet a new intensity came into his countenance.

"That's true. I'd forgotten the General. Yes, the war will go on till we catch him, and we will some of these fine days."

"You never will."

"Gretchen, I wish you'd tell me where he is. I'd like to have a talk with him."

"Much good that would do you. He has been in your camp, and has ridden with your Colonial troops, and you never suspected his presence. Now here is my father coming, and this entertaining conversation must cease."

There came to her smooth brow a shade of dis-appointment, and she grasped her rifle somewhat more alertly. A bearded man on a galloping pony dashed up to them. The girl addressed him in Dutch. He showed no surprise at

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