

female it may seem, remains. No explanation is attempted, for it would be futile and vain. The why and wherefore is perhaps beyond our ken, as are most of the mysteries encountered on our voyage over the unknown sea of life. One thing I know, I was free, who had been bound. Was I to forego the freedom those sweet eyes had won? Surely not!

Not at any cost! Better, far better to hang at the yard-arm yonder, to rest in the bosom of the heaving sea forever far from the land that bred me and the only creature who cared whether I lived or died. It was better to explore the blessed regions of Kingdom Come, than exist the thing that Sheen could make me, if I again yielded to his control.

Sheen motioned Stewart, whereupon they left me and went up on deck. As they did not return, I at last lay down in my bunk, tired out. Despite my demeanour, in my heart I still felt life was dear—life that held for me a thousand possibilities—life, the dearest thing, when it comes to the point, to all men. And now to die the death of a criminal—that would make the loss the keener. I had been driven from the right course by the tempest of Sheen's will, but now I held the wheel, and would resist him, even at the cost of life itself. Sleep brought forgetfulness, and I knew no more, till the light stole through the porthole on the morrow that threatened to be my last.

(To be continued.)

BABY'S SENSITIVE SKIN.

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Two of a Trade.

By RICHARD MARSH.

Author of "The Beetle: A Mystery," Etc.

"Fare please!" The omnibus conductor stood in front of a lady, young, and not ill-looking; and waited. As he waited he flicked his packet of tickets with the forefinger of his right hand. The lady addressed seemed to experience some difficulty in finding the sum required. She felt in a bag which was hanging at her waist. She dived into the recesses of a pocket which was apparently placed in an even more inaccessible position than a lady's pocket is wont to be. Without result. Her proceedings attracted the attention of all her fellow passengers; and the bus was full indeed, her manoeuvres were the cause of some inconvenience to her immediate neighbours. At last she delivered herself of a piece of information. "I've lost my purse!"

The conductor eyed her stolidly. He was not so young as he had been. Possibly a long experience of bus conducting had brought him into intimate relations with ladies who did lose things; so that his sympathies were dulled. "Lost your purse?"

He echoed her words as if the matter was not of the slightest interest to him. "Yes—that is, I had it when I came in to the bus; I'm afraid it has been stolen."

"Stolen?" echoed the conductor, still with an air of complete indifference.

"Yes," said an old man, who was on the seat opposite, at the end farthest from the door; "and that man sitting by you is the man as took it."

Since Bruce Palliser was the only man sitting by her, the allusion could only be to him. He turned on the speaker in surprise.

"Are you suggesting, sir, that I have stolen the lady's purse?"

"That's it; that's what I'm suggesting. Only it's more than a suggestion. I see you fumbling with the lady's skirt. I wondered what you was up to. Now I know."

A woman sitting on the other side of the purseless lady interposed.

"Here's a penny, if that's any good—or, for the matter of that, here's twopenny. It's not nice for any of us to be crowded in the same bus with parties who say they've had their purses stolen."

"I'm afraid it isn't," admitted the sufferer. "I'm very sorry, but—all my money was in my purse. If you would let me have a penny I should be very much obliged."

The penny was forthcoming. "Do you make any charge?" inquired the conductor, as he handed over the ticket in exchange.

"No," rejoined the lady. "I do not." "He's got it on him now," asserted the old gentleman in the corner. "If you'll hand him over to a policeman you will find he has."

"I trust," exclaimed Mr Palliser, "that you'll afford me an opportunity to prove that what this person says is absolutely false."

The young lady stood up. "Please stop the bus. I'm going to get out."

"You call a policeman," persisted the old gentleman. "You'll soon find where your purse is."

"But, madam!" cried Mr Palliser. The bus stopped. The young lady began to move towards the door, Bruce Palliser following, appealing to her as he did so. "Madam! if you will give me your attention for a single instant!"

The young lady slighted. Mr Palliser slighted also. The bus went on. "I see him take it," announced the old gentleman in the corner. "Put it in his pocket, I believe he did."

Bruce Palliser, standing in the roadway, tried to induce the young lady to give him a chance to establish his innocence.

"If you will permit me to explain who I am, I will make it quite clear to you—"

She cut him short. "Have the kindness not to address me."

She climbed into a passing hansom. He

had to spring to one side to avoid being cut down by a furniture van. By the time the van had gone the cab had gone also.

Later in the day he rushed into the station with just time enough to enable him to catch the train which was to take him home. He had already entered a compartment before he realised that a seat near the door was occupied by the young lady of the omnibus. The recognition was obviously mutual. Something in her attitude made him conscious of a ridiculous sense of discomfort. He felt that if he did not leave the carriage she would—although the train was about to start. Scrambling back on to the platform, he was hustled into another compartment by an expostulating guard. When the train stopped at Market Hinton, and he got out, he observed that the young lady of the omnibus was emerging from the compartment from which he had retreated with so small a show of dignity. Apparently she also had reached her journey's end. He thought he knew most of the people who lived thereabouts, at least by sight. He had certainly never seen her before. Who could she be?

Stupidly enough, he hung about the station, allowing himself to be button-holed by an old countryman who was full of his sufferings from rheumatism—one of that large tribe with which every doctor is familiar, the members of which never lose a chance of obtaining medical advice for nothing. He was not in the best of tempers by the time that he reached home. Nor was his temper improved by the greeting which he received from Jack Griffiths, who had acted as his locum during his enforced absence in London.

"You're not looking any better for your change," declared Jack, who had an unfortunate—and exasperating—knack of seeing the pessimistic side of things. "You're looking all mops and brooms."

"I'm not feeling all mops and brooms—whatever state of feeling that may be. On the contrary, I'm feeling as fit as I ever felt in the whole of my life."

"Then you're not looking it, which is a pity. Because it's my opinion that you'll want all the stock of health you can lay your hands on if you're to continue to hold your own in Market Hinton."

"What might you happen to mean?—you old croaker!"

"It's easy to call me a croaker, sir; but facts are facts; and I tell you that that new doctor's making things hum—cutting the grass from under your very feet."

"What new doctor?" "The new doctor. I wasn't aware that there was more than one. If there is then you're in greater luck even than I thought you were."

"Are you alluding to that female creature?"

"I am. I am alluding to Dr. Constance Hughes, M.D. (London). Mrs. Vickers is of opinion that she's a first-rate doctor."

"Mrs. Vickers!—Why, she's one of my oldest patients."

"Precisely—which is perhaps one reason why she feels disposed to try a change. Anyhow she called Dr. Constance Hughes in one day, when that medical lady happened to be passing; and I'm inclined to think that, if she could only see her way, she'd like to call her in again."

"Pretty unprofessional conduct!—what does the woman mean by it?"

"Which woman? Dr. Constance Hughes? She's nothing to do with it. She had to go in when they stopped her on the high road; but, from what I understand, when she learnt that Mrs. Vickers was your patient she declined to call again. Than her conduct nothing could have been more professional. But it isn't only Mrs. Vickers. I hear golden opinions of her on every side. And she drives some of the finest horses I ever saw."

"No I've been told. Thank goodness, so far I've seen neither the woman nor her

horses; but if half they say is true, she knows more of horse flesh than of medicine."

"Then, in that case, she must be a dabbler. Heaps of money, I'm informed; taken up the profession simply for the sake of something to do, and because she loves it. Bruce, Dr. Constance Hughes is going to be a dangerous rival!"

Such, ere long, was to be Bruce Palliser's own opinion.

When, the following afternoon, he returned from his rounds, he learned that an urgent summons had come for him, earlier in the day, from Mrs. Daubeny, one of his most influential patients. He hurried round to her. On his arrival at the house the maid who opened the door informed him that the other doctor was upstairs. As he had not come, and Mrs. Daubeny was in such pain, they had sent for other assistance. While she was speaking the maid conducted him upstairs. Opening a door, she ushered him in, announcing his appearance.

"Dr. Palliser."

He found himself in a bedroom; with someone lying in the bed, and two women standing on either side of it. One of the women he recognised as Foster, Mrs. Daubeny's housekeeper; and the other—as the lady of the omnibus. He stared at her in blank amazement. Although she had her hat on, her sleeves were turned up, and she was holding in her hand a thermometer. Foster went awkwardly enough—through a form of introduction. "Oh, Dr. Palliser, I'm so glad you've come! This is Miss Hughes—I mean Dr. Hughes. Mrs. Daubeny has been so bad that if she hadn't come I don't know what we should have done."

Mr. Palliser bowed;—so stiffly that the inclination of his head only just amounted to a movement. The lady was as stiff. Although she looked at him full in the face there was that in the quality of her glance which almost hinted that she did not notice he was there. She explained, the position; in a tone of voice which could hardly have been more frigid.

"Mrs. Daubeny has had an attack of acute laryngitis; rather a severe one. Fortunately, however, the worst is over; unless, that is, it should recur."

"I am obliged to you. I have had the honour to treat Mrs. Daubeny on former occasions. I will see that all is done that is necessary."

The lady returned her thermometer to its case. She turned down her sleeves. She donned a sable jacket which Mr. Palliser could not but feel was not unbecoming. With the curtest possible nod to the newcomer she quitted the room. At his solitary meal that night, the more Bruce Palliser turned matters over in his mind the less he liked them.

"This is a nice kettle of fish! To think of her being Dr. Constance Hughes! For all I know she may actually be of opinion that it was I who stole her purse; as that



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