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Sergeant Blixton's Romance

By ORME AGNUS, Author of "Love in Our Village," Etc.

I SPENT my vacation this summer at a little watering place on the Dorset coast called Lutton, a charming spot unsexed by railways and cheap trippers. It was a delightful holiday, and before the six weeks were over, the fishermen on the beach, the Vicar, and Sergeant Blixton, of the County Constabulary, were my good friends, and the landlord and landlady of the Lutton Hotel, where I put up at, had supplied me with the biographies and genealogies of the village notabilities.

Sergeant Blixton introduced himself to me one afternoon soon after my arrival. I had taken my writing-pad with me, and in the field near the church sat down in the shade and began to write, feeling in the mood. Blixton must have been watching me for some time, but at last his curiosity got the better of him, and he sauntered up to me.

"Good afternoon, sir," said he, "A fine, warmish day."

"Good afternoon, Sergeant," I said, glancing at the stripes on his arm. "You do seem to be doing a powerful lot of writing, sir."

"Well, a little," I replied. "It struck me, when I saw you come, you were a Baptist. We get a goodish few of ladies and gents here, in the course of the year drawn things—they're very fond of drawn the church from just here. I thought at first you was drawn, sir, till I seen you use one piece of paper after another. You write for the papers, I suppose, sir?"

"Well, sometimes, Sergeant, but generally I write books."

Blixton was very much interested. He was fond of reading novels himself, he told me, and his wife was even more addicted to it. "I get a goodish few lent me," he said, "but I don't remember readen any of yours, sir. Mr Rilldale, they tells me at the 'Crown,' your name be."

I smiled, quite content to let the Sergeant pump me. If I must receive confidence it was only fair that I should impart some.

"I don't write under my own name," I said, "I call myself Alex Blood."

"Oh, then, I've read one of yours, sir, and that's not long ago. What was it called? Sir Sonmat?"

"Sir Jasmine, perhaps?"

"That's it, sir. I did enjoy readen about his adventures in China. I called it real good. Fancy meeten the man who wrote it."

Sergeant Blixton and I were friends from that moment. He always found time to stay for a chat with me, and I learnt much from him. From my host I learnt that Blixton indulged in wood-carving as a hobby, and was considered to be very clever at it. The next time I saw Blixton I mentioned that I would like to see his work, and his face flushed with pleasure.

"You can and welcome, sir," he said, "but it won't seem nothin to a gentleman as understands it. Do you see, sir, I took it up to pass the time away, when I was laid up with a broken leg two years ago, and I've kept at it since in my spare time. If you'll call at seven to-night when I'm off duty I shall be glad to show you all I've done."

Blixton had executed some really creditable work, and I made him proud and happy by purchasing a carved stool. His wife, who was evidently diligent at having a real live author in the house, had, I fancied, made great preparations

for my visit; at any rate, the house was spotless. She was a good-looking young woman, with good temper written plainly on her smiling features. It was easy to see that in their case marriage had not begun to cool affection, and there was no doubt the Sergeant was prouder of exhibiting his wife than his carvings. When, presently, she left the room, he remarked with emphasis: "Perhaps I'm not the best judge, sir, and you haven't asked my opinion, but that's the best woman in England, bar none."

"Certainly no one can be a better judge of that than her husband," I said.

"Quite true, sir, quite true. It's somewhat nowadays for husbands and wives to speak well of each other, more's the pity. The best day's work I ever did was when I took Lily to the Church. You might call it romantic, too, the way we came together, and I've often thought it wouldn't make a bad yarn if it was put together properly."

"May I hear it?" I asked a little diffidently. I was doubtful whether Blixton would think this a case for "copy."

"With pleasure, sir, if you are not in a hurry. Sit down, sir, and I'll get some cider—the wife comes from Devonshire, and her people send us some every year—the real genuine stuff it is, too."

It was indeed the genuine stuff, and when I had duly praised it, the Sergeant, nothing loth, began his story.

"We've been married nearly three years, sir, and what I'm goen to tell you about happened when I was stationed near Weymouth. I was as strong and lusty as any man in the Force, and for that matter am still, except the leg I broke troubles me a bit now and then. My beat at that time was where there's a goodish few gentlemen's houses in their own grounds, and just before Christmas particular orders were sent round that we must keep a sharp look-out as a lot of burglars had taken place uplong. I kept such a sharp look-out meself that I arrested one gentleman I saw getten in a drawn-room window at two o'clock in the mornen. He explained that he lived there, and had lost his latchkey, but I didn't believe him, as he wasn't dressed like a gentleman, and I marched him to the station, but the Super recognised him and apologised. I felt a big fool over the business, but the gentleman was very pleasant about it, and, instead of complainen, gave me half-a-crown. He was a writer of scientific books, and had been out with the fishermen; that was why he was dressed so poorly."

"That made me extra careful, but some weeks afterwards I had a genuine case. It was one night about the middle of January, a bitterly cold night with a bit of fog that made you shiver. I was passen 'The Planes,' a house that stood by itself, with a goodish-sized lawn and shrubbery at the side and a garden in the front, when I saw a light move in one of the downstairs rooms that made me a bit suspicious. Mr. Courey, one of our magistrates, lived there, but I knew he had gone abroad for the winter because his wife was in a poor state, and he had asked us to keep an eye on the place, as only the cook and housemaid and gardener were left to look after it. I didn't think it was likely they would be roamen about at three o'clock in the mornen, and I felt sure I'd get a chance at last to distinguish meself.

I opened the gate as quietly as I could, and crept round to the window—the drawn-room window as it turned out—which opened on the lawn. But there was more than me about, for as I was creepen along there was a noise like an owl hooten from the shrubbery the other side of the lawn. I knew what that meant. There was a burglar inside, and the noise came from the chum left on guard outside, and the hoot was a signal that there was danger. It was no use hopen to take him unawares, and I made a rush for the window which was open, as I expected. But just at the moment I reached it there came a rushen to it to get out, not one burglar but two, and I saw I'd got a big job on hand. One of them was half through the window before he saw me, and I laid hold of him and pulled him out. He laid hold of my legs, and pinched 'em till he took the skin off, but I didn't mean to let go. 'Come and knock him on the head, Chummy,' he called to his mate.

"All right, Art, I'm here," ses the other, as he jumped out of the window and came for me. Luckily by that time I'd got uppermost, and kneelen on Art's chest, and holden his head down with my left hand I drew me truncheon with the other, and waited for Chummy. I'd have given 'anytlen just then for another hand, so that I could have blown me whistle for help, but I dared not let go of Art nor put down me truncheon for an instant. However, I shouten for help at the top of me voice. I didn't know then but Jaken's, the gardener, had gone away for a couple of days, and there was only the two women in the house. However it turned out my shouten did some good, for the fellow on the look out in the shrubbery, luckily for me, thought more of his own skin than of helpen his mates, and took to his heels.

"I kept shouten and whiren me truncheon round to keep off Chummy, who was goen round and round me, looken for a chance to dart in. If help didn't come soon it was certain I should be bested. How long it lasted like that I can't say, but suddenly Art, the chap I was kneelen on, stopped strugglen and lay quite still, mounen and groanen that he was choked. But it was all a "fake," for suddenly he made a big effort, caught my left hand in his teeth, and bit two fingers to the bone, and at the same instant caught hold of me beard, and pulled me on the top of him. That was Chummy's chance, and he made the most of it. He sprang at me and caught hold of me right arm, and tried to wrench the truncheon from me. "Knock his brains out, Chummy," Art cried, and when Chummy found he couldn't make me leave go he hit me sagely in the face again and again. My nose was bleedin, two teeth were knocked loose, and my lip was cut, for he was a reg-

lar brute, and didn't care, but still kept bashen me savagely. I was fast loosn me senses, I suppose, for I had only a hazy notion I must hold on to the fellow on the ground at any cost, when help came from where I should never have expected.

"It turned out, sir, when we talked about it after, that the cook had been wakened by the noise of the burglars moven about, and she wakened the housemaid. 'There's burglars downstair, and we shall be murdered,' cried the cook, and with that she covered her head with the bedclothes, and lay quaken. But the housemaid, Lily Dale was her name then, was of a different sort, sir. 'Well, she ses, 'they're not goen to do as they like,' and she jumped out of bed, and began dresen herself, though the cook begged and beseeched her not to go or she'd be murdered. It was just then that I saw them, and while she was putten on her clothes as fast as she could she heard the struggle, and heard me call for help. A policeman has got them, and they're tryen to murder him, she ses to the cook. 'I'm goen to help.'

"Now, I think you'll agree, sir, that most women would have been like the cook, and lain thumblen, and the most you would expect an uncommon woman to do would be to open the window and scream 'help,' or 'murder.' But Lily was a braver maid than that. She ran downstair, and picked up the poker and un-locked the door, when an idea struck her. She rode a bike, and once she'd been thrown off by a dog comen for her. Somebody had told her to carry cayenne pepper in a squirt, which would keep off the fierest dog that ever was, and just as she was comen out she thought of it, and went back to get the pepper-box. She came runnen to us just as I was getten too weak to struggle any longer. 'You villain!' she cries, 'what are you doen? Let go at once!'

"My strength was gone, and Chummy, tellen her to take herself off or he would do for her, pulled me off his mate, and gave me a blow behind the ear at the game time. I should have been completely at their mercy but for her. She said after that she was so frightened that she thought her heart was goen to burst, but she didn't show it. At Chummy knocked me over she aimed a blow at him with the poker; but he knocked it on one side, with the truncheon he'd wrenched from me, and then the cowardly brute gave her a knock with it that nearly broken her arm, and make her giddy with the pain. But she had her wits about her still, and before he was aware she took a step or two towards him, and gave him a good dose of pepper in his eyes, nearly blinden him for the time. You never heard a man rave and curse and yell so much in all your born days, for, besides the pain, he was as helpless as a baby. But that was not

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