

Copyright Story.

The Kidnapped Author

By THEODORA W. WILSON, Author of "Bess of Hardendale," Etc.

HARLEY-STREET in the blazing sun seemed interminable. "You see!" exclaimed the young editor of the "All Round Magazine," with great irritation.

His sister's face was as white as his own.

"It will dry straight, Edward!" she returned, cheerfully.

"Six months' complete rest! The man is a villain! It is tremendous. It is ruin, Nan!"

"Tremendous if you like; but not ruin. Let us find a tea shop."

Settled in the luncheon rooms Edward began with renewed excitement. "You see the 'All Round' was running the 'Up-to-Date' neck and neck! And we were winning. However, it is all over now. I'll see Graveson this afternoon, and put an end to the whole sickening business!"

Nan looked at her brother thoughtfully. Yet there was a half comical, half wistful expression in her bright eyes.

"You don't think, my beloved brother, that I have been editor's assistant in cog for all these months to be set aside when the pinch comes? It is I who am determined to beard the snarly old dog in his den!"

"As you like!" he said, with a weary indifference. His head felt gripped by a tight band, growing smaller every minute.

A spasm of misery shot through his sister's heart at the tone.

"Buck up, Edward!" she exclaimed. "We have pulled through worse than this!"

"Have we?" She could have cried at the look in his eyes.

"Don't be idiotic!" she said.

"Miss Meaburn to see you, sir."

"Ah—Miss Meaburn!" said the proprietor of the "All Round," dubiously. "What can I do for you? Oblige me by sitting down."

"Anything to oblige him!" she thought, as she sat down.

"Very important business, you say?" and the proprietor turned over her card.

"It is about my brother, Edward Meaburn."

"Ah—his sister! Well?"

"Dr. Ray says he is on the borders of a severe brain collapse. He is to travel for six months, and I have called to ask if you will be good enough to allow me to keep his position open until his return."

"You edit the 'All Round,' madam?" Mr. Graveson's face was a study in incredulity and scorn.

"Only just for six months!"

"Only for six months!" he repeated, in a dry, satirical voice. "Perhaps, madam, you are hardly aware of the extremely critical position of the magazine. I am stretching every point to place it above the front rank. At this precise juncture a new man—"

"That is it!" Miss Meaburn broke in, eagerly. "You cannot afford a new brain with untried traditions. We have found the line that has caught on, and we must go forward!"

"We?" and the proprietor knitted his brows.

"I beg your pardon!" and she dropped into her easy, nonchalant manner. "Perhaps I ought to confess that I have worked intimately with my brother—written the editorials and—"

"You have written the editorials?"

"Most of them, lately, and—"

"I never heard of such a thing! It is monstrous! Why, I was intending to have a long talk with your brother to-morrow. We must somehow get round some of these popular authors without paying their preposterous charges. I am setting my face against them, and—"

"Yet the 'Up-to-Date' takes them on," suggested Miss Meaburn mildly.

"Yes, yes!" he muttered uneasily.

If the proprietor had not been so consumed with himself, he might have noticed a faint blush on the cheek, and

a quick flash of excitement lighten the eyes of his visitor.

"Suppose I could get Mr. Anthony Boyle—the great detective writer for you?"

"You are a novice, evidently, madam!" and the man laughed sarcastically.

"Yet if I could get you Mr. Anthony Boyle's exclusive work for the 'All Round' for six months, would you guarantee me the editorship?"

"At ordinary column rates?" snapped out the proprietor.

"At ordinary column rates, of course, unless the circulation justified an additional fee later."

"It is not the usual method!" sniffed the proprietor.

"No, it is not usual, but it is workable," said Nan.

Two days later Miss Meaburn took the express to her old home near Redthorpe. She only stayed a few hours at Stagholme Towers, but during that time she talked instructively to her housekeeper, Mrs. Benson.

But she talked to Jonah even more. Jonah was an old army man, who took her instructions intelligently enough.

"For the honour of the family, Benson. Remember that!" she said on leaving.

"Mr. Edward's good fortune depends entirely on you!"

"Very good, miss," he had returned, and there was a look of responsible anticipation on his clean-shaven countenance.

Mr. Anthony Boyle was exceedingly pleased with his new quarters up the old peel turret of Stagholme Tower. As he walked up the narrow winding stair, he noticed by the light of the June evening, and the lantern, the thickness of the walls, the narrowness of the windows, and the old Norman arches. "Ideally romantic!" he thought instinctively.

Then the quiet luxury of the small suite was unexpected, and then again these were her rooms evidently.

Moreover, he was exceedingly pleased with himself. Worried to death by friends and relations, he had at last found a refuge where none should find him: Peace and comfort, and infinite leisure for writing.

After sleeping late next morning, he rose and descended the stair to discover if there were any sign of breakfast.

"Where on earth is the handle?" he muttered impatiently, as he came upon a massive oaken door.

"Step back, sir, and I will open the door," and the key turned heavily in the lock.

A tall, massive Westmorelander came through the narrow entrance, and the door closed with a snap.

"Breakfast, sir!" and he saluted. "What did you lock that door for?" asked Boyle irritably.

"Orders, sir."

"Whose orders?"

"I've had my orders, sir, from Miss Meaburn that you was coming to lodge here, and that I was to keep off all intruders. 'Like grim death'—them's her own words, sir. And Jonah Benson, late of Her—I mean His—Majesty's 18th Westmorelanders, and sent to the colonel himself—he understands orders, sir."

"You great fool!" laughed the author. "Keeping intruders off is one thing, but I don't intend to reside in this tower for the rest of my natural life! Come, get out of the road!"

"It is best to be straight, sir," said the man, noticing that nature had not adorned the gifted author with a superabundant bodily frame. "My orders is, sir, that you make yourself comfortable here until this day six months!" And he drew a letter from out of his breast pocket.

In his astonishment, Boyle ascended the stairs, and, gaining the sitting-room, read the epistle.

"Dear Mr. Boyle.

"With reference to our talk in the of-

see the other day, I may say that I shall be glad to receive your copy at your earliest convenience. For this copy I am, of course, prepared to pay our ordinary column rates; but should the circulation of the 'All Round' justify it, I shall advance on this price.

"According to your own instructions, I have given the very strictest orders to my man to guard you from intrusion, and to forward me the copy when completed.

"Trusting that you will be comfortable,

"Believe me,

"Yours sincerely,

"THE EDITOR."

The great detective novelist stared at the letter, and Benson looked at him warily.

"Hurry up with that breakfast, there's a good fellow!" was all the Author said, to the man's infinite disappointment.

The moment he had gone, Boyle examined his quarters critically.

But the editor had known what she was about. The place was indeed a survival from the thirteenth century. From the narrow windows there was a wild view over the sandy stretch, scantily covered with coarse herbage, over which a few Stagholme sheep wandered.

Escape was apparently out of the question, apart from a bloody conflict with Benson, and bloody conflicts of paper were not to the author's liking.

Taking out his pocket-book, he wrote a note therein:

"I, Anthony Boyle, Detective Novelist, have at this date been kidnapped by Helena, otherwise Nan Meaburn."

"Extraordinary woman! Wants cheap copy, eh? What a stroke of genius!"

He spoke with artistic admiration, for according to that recent conversation in the "All Round" office, one hundred and fifty thousand words was the task coolly set him by this girl, for a paltry 150

guineas, out of which he was going to pay her two guineas a week for his board!

In a flash as he sat there, he recalled a certain afternoon at a tennis party, when Miss Meaburn had laughingly maintained that if he once got inside one of his own detective stories he would never get out with credit to himself.

Kidnapped in 1908! He could not get over the idea at all, so taking up his pipe, he applied himself to the situation.

"She will get frightened in time—women do. They can't carry out schemes of this sort to a consummation! Meanwhile she is profoundly mistaken if she thinks she will get her copy.

"By-the-by, Benson," he said, after a comfortable morning in an easy chair, lazily examining Miss Meaburn's library; "you don't happen to have any tobacco on the premises fit to smoke?"

"Certainly, sir. 'Brown Rover,' sir."

The Author brightened, for "Brown Rover" was his pet of pets.

"You have not done much writing, sir," said the man meditatively.

"And pray what has that got to do with you, sir?" said the Author stiffly.

"My orders was that no tobacco was to be supplied unless there was writing done. Three full sheets for a pipe. Them's my orders, sir."

The Author positively gasped.

"Hang it all, then!" and he threw a sovereign down on the table.

"Three sheets to a pipe, sir, and free pipes on Sunday," said the man, ignoring the gold and quietly leaving the room.

Now Anthony Boyle was not devoted to exercise, as any one might see. To do without his liberty was a trifle, until he saw his way to the next move. To stop the swelling of his already over-swollen bank account was also comparatively unimportant—but to do without his pipe!

"Miss Helena Meaburn is a genius of



The Hero's Wife: Henry, think of me before you do it.