

the first magnitude," so he wrote in his diary. But there were five days till Sunday.

He examined his pouch, and being essentially a man of the moment, he was for that day content. True, at night he looked critically at his very last pipe-full, wondering if he should leave it until the morning; but the moment afterwards he was scraping out his bowl and filling up luxuriantly.

The next morning he sniffed at his empty briar, and placed it carelessly between his teeth, hastily withdrawing it as he heard Benson on the stairs.

All that day he maintained a nonchalant attitude, and the paper lay white on the desk.

For three hours that night, he could not rest for the blood-curdling denouncements that were rioting through his brain.

The next day he capitulated.

He tore up the first couple of sheets, then fell to work—wrote until he forgot everything—till the ground was littered with the flying sheets.

Benson coming in later, immediately withdrew at the sight, and returned with the tobacco allowance, which he placed within reach of the writer.

The Author grumped at him absently, and went on with his work.

Yet, as the door closed, the recovered treasure was grasped with a pathetic ecstasy, and as those irreplaceable fumes once more waivered around him, the Author unconsciously changed the threatened tragedy of his tale into buoyant comedy.

And meanwhile the "All Round" prospered gloriously. Posters triumphantly announced the sole engagement of the great Anthony Boyle.

The name of Anthony Boyle, and the "All Round" became indissolubly linked in the public mind.

The Editor truly received curious specimens of threatening letters, over which she smiled as she locked them in a private drawer. On the days of their receipt she sent off to Mrs. Benson selections of the most seasonable delicacies calculated to soothe the manly palate.

But the circulation flew up by tens of thousands, and the rival paper became hysterical.

The waiter at the Author's Club grew anxious as letters accumulated for Mr. Anthony Boyle. But his directions had been unmistakable.

"Don't you send me on any of my wretched correspondence until you hear from me."

It was not even possible to get up a scare of foul play, for his copy was coming out week by week regularly in the "All Round."

The conclusion arrived at by Boyle's intimates was, that he "was a beastly clever dog" and had proved his word "up to the hilt" about effectively "doing a bolt."

It was the twenty-third of December, and the Author, having dispatched his final batch of copy, suddenly realised that the six months was over, and as he usually took his work and play in fits, as all his friends knew—a desire for a very riot of play consumed him.

Presently he was conscious of a strange voice outside, and he could scarcely control his excitement as he heard someone talking to Benson on the stairs.

"Mr. Edward Meaburn," announced Benson, and a brown, weather-beaten man came in.

"I beg your pardon, Boyle, for coming in at this unearthly hour—but I am just back from Australia—a boat earlier than my sister expected me by—so I ran down for the night. Benson tells me my sister let these rooms to you."

"Is that how she puts it?" asked the Author with a half-laugh. "Delighted to welcome you to my room! Have some breakfast?"

"If you can put up with my company. I am dying to hear all the English gossip. I hope you have found plenty of good plots in this neighbourhood. Reeking with queer tales if you know how to get at them!"

"I don't doubt it! I have discovered one at any rate of quite absorbing personal interest!" and he smiled a little slyly, the visitor thought.

"I wired my sister that I should come up to town to-day. She has been editing the "All Round" in my absence—but there—you must know all about that! There is some of your stuff in this week. I see. You may be sure I bought an "All Round" the moment I came off the boat. She made

me swear that I would keep my hands off it while I was away. They must be pretty flush to afford you! I should never have ventured within a bowshot of you!" And Edward smiled his boyish sunny smile, which his sister would have rejoiced to see. "I hope they make you comfortable down here! Benson caught a rattling good cook for his wife!"

"The cooking has suited me quite excellently," said the Author.

"Got the hump about something or other," thought Edward, so he went on cheerfully.

"Staying down for Christmas?"

For the life of him Anthony Boyle could not bring his mind to explain the absurdity of his position.

"I thought of going up to Town tomorrow; but if you are going earlier, perhaps you would be good enough to take your sister this last lot of copy. You might present my compliments and tell her it is my turn now."

"I don't understand the message—but I'll take it gladly. But Boyle, why can't you come up to-day? You could cram your things together in half an hour surely!"

"Five minutes, so far as that goes. Yes—I believe I will. The racket of London will be a relief after six months' burial."

"You look as if you had been sticking to it," said Meaburn innocently.

When Benson was called by his master to help with the packing, he did as he was told, and kept his own counsel astutely.

"You are an excellent servant!" said the Author on parting, as he thrust some crisp paper into the man's hand. "Your mistress is fortunate!"

"Orders sir," said the man, as he grinned his thanks.

"Beautiful district, don't you think?" asked Edward as they drove off.

"What I have seen of it—very. But it grows monotonous in time."

"Perhaps!" said Edward dubiously.

On the journey, Edward found it impossible to keep off the subject of the Magazine and his sister's enterprise.

"Now just look at this paper! Not a dull paragraph in it! Fact, is, she's a brick of the finest clay. All the time I was going to pieces, she stuck to the office, and plodded through the detail. How on earth she persuaded the proprietor to let her take over the Editorship I can't conceive, and as for your engagement! Well I am confounded. The risk of it!" and he laughed joyously. "Why Graveson flew at me like a tiger once, when I proposed you! I'd uncommonly like to know what we are paying you!"

The Author smiled.

"The terms are at present between me and the Editor—Ask her!"

"I will! Do you know it is the queerest thing, but I am wild to see her, and to smell the stuffy odour of that office. It is odd that a trip to Australia should have that effect upon a man!"

"And it is odd that a six months' residence at Stagholve Tower should have precisely the same effect!" said the Author mildly.

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"Edward!" exclaimed Nan delightedly. "Oh how splendid you look—you dear old boy. Wherever did you spend the night?"

"At Stagholve."

She started, but he was too excited to notice.

"And—what a good sort that man Boyle is! He tells me he has been boarding there," and Edward began fumbling in his breast pocket.

"Oh yes—here it is!" and he gave the message. "I persuaded him to come up with me."

"And he told you nothing more?" she asked incredulously.

"Tell me anything!" he looked at Nan suspiciously.

"Yes—tell you that I—Edward it is fearful! It never struck me as so fearful until I see you safe and sound! But I did it deliberately. I meant to do it, and I will stand to it whatever happens!"

"What do you mean?"

"You see I kidnapped him."

"You what?"

"I kidnapped him. He has been locked into Stagholve Tower ever since the 23rd June. I bound myself to Mr. Graveson to get the copy out of him, somehow, as a bribe to get the editorship, and it was the only way I could get the copy at Graveson's price."

"You mean you have imprisoned a man for six months?"

"Yes—and now I suppose I shall have to go to gaol myself! But nothing matters any more. You are well again. The

"All Round" is a secured success, and I—"

"Mr. Anthony Boyle. Will you see him?" asked the office boy, in some excitement, knowing that his world had been searching for this man.

"Certainly," said Edward, resolutely, though he had turned quite grey.

"How do you do, Miss Meaburn, after all this time?" said the author. He was hopelessly at his ease.

She put out her hand mechanically. "Did your brother give you my message?"

"Yes!" and she raised her eyes. The fright had already fled from her face. "I carried it through, you see, Mr. Boyle."

"The first part," he said. "It is now my turn to—"

"To put me in gaol!" she interrupted. "You are at liberty to do your worst now. I shall not shirk! You can't get damages out of me, for I have no assets. I am tired of editing—very tired—and gaol will come as a welcome relief. As for the advertisement of the trial for you, Mr. Boyle—it will be tremendous, and the 'All Round' will share in the triumph. You see I have thought it all out."

"Yet the fare in gaol will hardly be the fare of Stagholve," suggested the author.

But Edward interferred.

"Boyle, I am absolutely dumbfounded at what my sister has only this instant told me! That you should have suffered in this outrageous way, and that my sister should be—"

"Such a consummate genius," suggested the author. "My dear sir, to tell you the truth, when this little plot dawned upon me in all its superb completeness, I was amazed with the keen relish of amazement. But I now admit to you,

Miss Meaburn, that I never thought you would carry it out to a consummation. I was patient, because I expected day by day that you would come down and beg my pardon!"

But Edward was not to be put off. "Sit down, Boyle!" he cried, impatiently. "Let us talk this thing over! I would not have had—"

"Let Mr. Boyle go, Edward!" exclaimed Nan, impatiently. "Let him bring his warrant. It is not fair to delay him!"

But Edward went on, ignoring his sister.

"As to compensation, Boyle—hang it! Why, I have only the Tower to offer you. If you will accept that—"

"Thanks! My soul no longer lusts after Stagholve Tower!"

"Then, how can we square you?" asked the returned editor. "Anything which either I or my sister can compass—"

"Suppose you invite me for Christmas!" said the author, dryly.

Nan's cheeks were suddenly dyed scarlet.

"How dare you compound felony like that!" she said, with a dying effort after rally.

But the author had risen.

"Then you will come?" said Edward.

"I will certainly come," said the author, and he regarded the glowing cheeks of the editress with merciless coolness. She was stooping over a drawer.

Suddenly she raised her head.

"See! This is yours, Mr. Boyle—the balance owing you from the 'All Round.' Payment at as high a rate as you ever mentioned to me. I wrung it from Mr. Graveson this afternoon."

He put out his hand—took the cheque and looked at it thoughtfully. "That was very good of you," he said, with an odd lift of his brows. "To-night we will consider the personal debt, shall we?"

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