

brought to him as he was in the act of retiring to rest.

It was in Helen's handwriting, and he tore it open eagerly.

"My own dear love," it ran; "Mr Hursfield has just informed me of his interview with you this evening. It is needless for me to say how sorry I am that he should have spoken as he did. I cannot understand his behaviour in this matter. That something more than any thought of his own personal comfort makes him withhold his consent, I feel certain. Whatever happens, however, you know that I will be true to you—and if I cannot be your wife, I will be wife to no other man.

Your loving, Helen."

(To be continued.)

CHRISTMAS "GRAPHIC" Story Competition.

PRIZES, 1902.

First Prize	£5 0 0
Second Prize	£3 0 0
Third Prize	£2 0 0
Fourth Prize	£1 0 0

The Stories MUST NOT be less than 4000 or more than 5000 words in length, and free from anything unsuitable for all classes of readers. It will be seen by Rule 5 that the broadest scope is allowed. So that the scene of the story is laid in New Zealand, the choice of subjects is unlimited.

NOTICE TO AUTHORS.

1. A Motto instead of the writer's name must be written under the title of the story. The author's real name must be enclosed in a separate envelope addressed to the Editor, and ALL SUCH ENVELOPES MUST HAVE THE MOTTO AND WORDS "STORY COMPETITION" ON THE TOP LEFT CORNER. This Envelope must not be placed in the MS. packet, but MUST BE POSTED SEPARATELY. It must also contain a declaration that the work is original and entirely the sender's own.

2. Every MS. must be prepaid, and if left open at both ends will be carried at book rates. It must be addressed "Editor NEW ZEALAND GRAPHIC, Shortland-st.," AND OUTSIDE THE WRAPPER, ABOVE THE ADDRESS, MUST BE CLEARLY INSCRIBED THE MOTTO MENTIONED IN RULE 1.

3. Any Competitor who may desire to have his MS. returned in the event of it not being successful must clearly state his wish in a note attached to the above declaration, and must also enclose stamps for return postage. When such a desire is not expressed, the MS. will become the property of THE GRAPHIC.

4. All Contributions must reach the Office before May 15th, 1902.

5. Choice of subject rests with the writer, BUT THE SCENE MUST BE LAID IN NEW ZEALAND AND BE OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO NEW ZEALANDERS. It may deal with any subject—natural or supernatural, love, heroism, adventure, life on the gumfields, gold mines, or country, search for treasure, fighting, or peace—in fact, anything bright and interesting, and free from anything unsuitable for family reading.

6. Write clearly, on one side of the paper only.

7. Writers who fail to comply with the above simple rules and conditions will be rigorously disqualified.

Complete Story.

My Fellow Prisoner.

HOW A GREAT GOLD ROBBERY WAS DEFEATED.

How well I remember the first time that I was entrusted with the bullion which passes through the hands of our firm on its way to the Continent. I had to escort half-a-dozen packages of golden ingots by the night express from London to Dover, and I had accomplished that first journey in a state of waking nightmare, the recollection of which fills me with shame. But the firm had confidence in me—I justified that confidence, and after a while I grew to have unbounded confidence in myself.

One autumn evening I stood in the office ready for the journey, only waiting until the last package should be brought in; and, if the truth must be told, the one thought that engrossed me at that moment was a cricket match then going on in Australia. I was buried in the evening paper, gleaning over the splendid play when a messenger informed me that Mr. Ashburn wished to see me before I left. It was not often that the principal remained so late at the office, but important business had detained him that day. I went at once to his private room. I was an acknowledged favourite with Mr. Ashburn, and he greeted me with a friendly smile.

"Well, Watson, so you are just starting?" he said.

"Immediately, sir."

"Are you troubled with any misgivings as to this particular journey?" he went on, looking at me curiously.

"Certainly not, sir. What makes you think so?"

"I do not," he said, in a more satisfied tone. "Only I have received a mysterious communication informing me that we had better be on the alert to-night; and, although I make it a rule to pay no attention to anonymous letters, I give you a hint."

"Don't believe a word of it, sir," I cried, warmly. "Friends never write anonymous letters—they generally turn out to be some trick of the enemy trying to have us at a weak point."

"I expect you are right," Mr. Ashburn assented, smiling at my earnestness. "Well, we shall not play into their hands. But would you like one of the men to go with you? Or shall I send round to Scotland Yard for someone from there to accompany you?"

"Pray don't, sir," I entreated. "that kind of people only encumber one with their help."

"Very well, then," he said, good-humouredly; "off with you—only keep your eyes open."

Somewhat ashamed of my swagger, I begged Mr. Ashburn to remember how often I had been on similar journeys, and that I was known to every official on the line. Then I ran downstairs and got into my cab.

As I had told Mr. Ashburn, I was well known to the railway officials. The guard with whom I expected to go down on this particular journey was a man named Rogers. He and I were great cronies, and had enjoyed many a talk together. It was my habit to travel in the guard's van, as I never lost sight of my charge until it reached its destination. On this night, in spite of my boasted self-confidence, I found myself quite looking forward to Rogers' social companionship.

The six unpretending-looking clamped cases were deposited safely in the end van, and I took my place near them. The guard seemed busy, and did not come up to greet me as was his wont. Indeed, it was not until the train was actually starting, and he sprang in and took his place,

that I really saw him. Then I recognised with a start of dismay that it was not my genial friend Rogers, but a sullen, taciturn man, who had not long been in the employment of the company. How he had been promoted guard of the train I was at a loss to understand. I was angry with myself for being so disconcerted at his appearance, and addressed him civilly, but he gave me a short, surly answer, and we relapsed into silence.

The guard's van is not a luggage van proper; nevertheless, many odds and ends find their way into it. Boxes brought up late and hurried in at the last moment, or some fragile article entrusted to the guard's particular care. In the compartment with me were one or two trunks, a child's mail-cart carefully sewn up in packing cloth, and a small wicker basket. I counted and recounted them, as one is apt to do when staring at the same thing for any length of time. The basket interested me most, as I fancied it contained something alive, and, looking at the label, read "Live Pigeon," and the name of the owner, a wealthy merchant whose hobby was the breeding of carrier pigeons, or, more properly speaking, "homers."

This train of thought led me back to my school days, and so engrossed me that for a while the time slipped by unheeded. I was recalled to myself by our stopping, and knew we had come to the one break in our journey. After that we should not stop again until we reached Dover.

Very soon after we had continued our journey the carriage we were in began to rock from side to side, as though the metals were uneven, or something had gone wrong with the coupling of the van to the rest of the train.

"What is amiss?" I inquired in as indifferent a tone as I could assume.

The guard muttered some incoherent reply, and thrust his head and

shoulders out of the window as if to ascertain what was wrong. I rose from my seat, intending to look from the opposite window, but, before I could reach it, the face and figure of a man appeared there. Although the train was going at a rapid and uneven rate, he stood on the footboard, holding securely to the door, which he proceeded to open.

"It's all right, young man," he said, addressing me coolly before I could speak; "don't be alarmed. Sergeant Jones, of Scotland Yard—at your service."

For an instant I experienced a feeling of relief, as it flashed across me that my employer had warned the police after all, and I should not be left to cope with my difficulties alone; but even as the thought struck me I detected a quick look of intelligence pass between the men, and I knew that I had now two enemies instead of one to deal with.

How the plan of attack would have begun I cannot say, had not matters been settled for us. The big man had laid his hands heavily upon my shoulders, when the van we were in suddenly broke away from the rest of the train. It rocked wildly for an instant, and then darted forward, the



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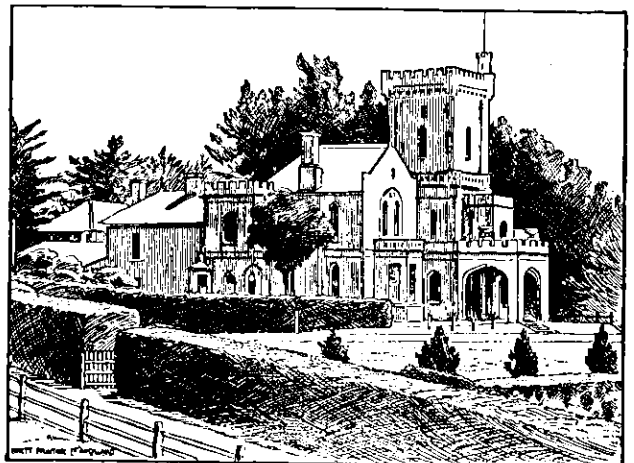
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