UNRAVELLING A Tangled Skein

By RICHARD CAMDEN. Author of "A DUEL OF HEARTS."

She was sitting astern, in a pretty frock of blue and white, and a big hat shading her eyes from the sun. She was reading a book while waiting for the boat to start. The Spray, a small pleasure steamer, tugged at her mooring ropes off Brighton pier.

The Honorable Geoffrey Mannering watched, from the deck of the West Pier, this fragile figure of a girl. There was something more than admiration in his gaze.

"I've been caddish enough," he muttered. "The girl is scarcely more than a stranger to me. The loan of an umbrella in a soaking downpour made us acquainted. I should not have presumed upon such a triviality, but—but"—he broke off as the siren of the Spray shrieked impatiently—"but I fell in love with her upon the spot," he added, "and that's the plain, sweet, maddening truth."

A band commenced to play softly under the bridge of the boat. Verna Moore glanced up at the sound, and Geoffrey turned away swiftly, moving off with long strides.

"I must not go; I must not, really," he told himself. Heaven forbid that I should win her heart!"

Verna had seen Geoffrey as he turned away. A glow of color swam into her cheeks, followed by a look of disappointment.

Verna Moore was a governess. She had been sent to Brighton to recover from the effects of an illness. She had met Geoffrey Mannering there for the first time.

"Yes, I'm in love; but, having made the confession to myself, I must forget it, drop this affair like a hot coal," Geoffrey told himself. "It is just madness, and Claire coming down to Brighton to-day!"

Madness, it was. For the Hon. Geoffrey Mannering was engaged to be married to Claire Ashberry, a baronet's daughter, and an heiress. It had been an early attachment; it had gradually developed into an engagement, partly because everyone expected that it would, and Society insisted upon it. Yet now, Geoffrey remembered certain

"IT WAS NOT GOOD-BYE—AFTER ALL!"

words which Claire Ashberry once spoke to him.

"I have always liked you," she had said, "and am willing to become your wife; yet I must tell you that another—you need not know his name—awoke a feeling deeper than liking, and claimed my heart. But there were obstacles in the way; my parents came between us, and he went abroad, promising never to see me again."

Again the Spray shrieked for more passengers for her trip to Worthing. She would start in five minutes. Geoffrey hesitated.

A hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice said, speaking in a low tone:

"Why, Mannering, is it you?"

Geoffrey turned. He was face to face with an exceedingly handsome man.

"Molyneux—you!"

"Hush! for heaven's sake!" expostulated the other, turning pale.

"Ah! You are watched—as usual? Still playing your deep and perilous games?

"Yes, yes. I'm in a bad fix, a tight corner, I must hide for a spell."

"What—in England? In Brighton? I could understand it in Vienna—where we met last six years back. A political spy who steals a secret from the Austrians might as well be in Vesuvius as on Austrian soil, and——"

"No, you are wrong. I'm wanted in England. Certain papers I obliged the German Government with. You understand?"

Geoffrey drew back, his face flushed with anger. "What!" he exclaimed, you stooped so low as that?"

"A fortune was in it."

"You traitor!"

"Curse it! Speak quietly. I belong to no nationality. I serve all who ask me. You know that. Come, hide me somewhere! For old times' sake!"

A bell clanged on board the Spray. Geoffrey snatched at his card case, scribbling a line. "There," he said, "go to the Hotel C—, give my man that card. He'll look after you until I come."

"A thousand thanks, Geoffrey. If ever—" The sentence was left unfinished. Mannering's resolution had broken down at the last moment. He would make the trip to Worthing after all.

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"Put your hands higher up, Verna, nearer to my neck. We are safe if you keep still."

The swimmer rose on the crest of a long green swell, travelling shoreward.

A terrible explosion had occurred in the engine room of the Spray. She had sunk in less than fifteen minutes, with her return journey but half accomplished. There had been no panic, but her two boats were filled to the very gunwales with their human freight. Six men were venturing to swim to meet the boats, putting off from the shore. Geoffrey Mannering was one of them. He had assured Verna of his ability to save her if she would trust herself to him rather than to the overladen boats.

Verna kept perfectly still. Her feet trailing in the water gave her a terrifying sensation as of floating upon infinite depth.

The strong frame of the swimmer supporting her moved forward with its steady strokes. How calm he seemed; how confident! At that moment she loved him most; yet at that moment she knew that she might never be his.

On the return journey to Brighton, Geoffrey had told her all; had made his confession. He had said: "I love you; loved you from the day that we met. That is all my defence."

There had been a long and dreadful pause, while she wrestled with her pain, with her temptation. Then she had answered: "We must say goodbye. We must never meet again. When we land, we must shake hands for the last time. You could not help loving me any more than I could help loving you. Yes, I love you; but this is a barrier which we cannot overcome."

And then, almost immediately afterwards, the accident had occurred. The sea was very cold; the warm suns of summer had not yet penetrated its chilly bosom. He was becoming stiff with cold. The girl's weight, which had felt so light at first, now pressed him lower and lower. The sea kept washing over his face. Onward he swam, though drawing now upon that strength which despair will give. At a furlong from the shore he was seen. A boat turned his way. Then came a final struggle to keep afloat. He was dragged on board with his burden when at the point of utter exhaustion.

The journey shoreward gave him time to recover strength. With his own hands he lifted Verna into a cab. They were driven to her lodgings in Old Steyne. He took her in his arms and gave her one long, passionate kiss. Then, with a repressed sob, he left her. He was never to meet Verna again. She had pointed his way of duty, and he must follow it.

Geoffrey turned his steps toward his hotel.

It was afternoon. A procession of every conceivable kind of carriage rolled along the King's Road. By the Brunswick lawns, tearing along the front at a mad speed, came a powerful motor car. The driver was a man, and at his side, closely veiled, sat a lady. Scarcely perceiving the rushing car, Geoffrey crossed in front of it. A loud shout and a furious bellow from a horn made him look up as he dashed forward.

Surely he knew the driver? And that veiled lady? Something in the poise of her body suggested a name—but no, he told himself that he was half silly, nearly dropping with fatigue.

Geoffrey staggered into his rooms. His valet met him just in time to save him from falling. For at that moment his senses left him, and he lost consciousness.

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It was an hour before the accident which sank the Spray in six fathoms off Brighton beach.

Richard Molyneux, ex-army officer, gamester, spy, duellist, waited in much perturbation in Geoffrey's private sitting room at the Hotel C——.

Molyneux noticed that the space between the portico grounds and the distant sea was patrolled by a gentlemanly-looking fellow.

"Again!" growled Molyneux. "I seem unable to give that brute the slip."

Through the open window he heard the roar of a motor-car. It ceased as it drew near to the building. Up and down paced the fugitive, fuming and fretting.

Suddenly he turned swiftly. The door was open, and he heard the voice of Geoffrey's servant:

"No, he will not be long, madam; and if you will wait—ah, I had forgotten."

A well-dressed and beautiful figure entered the room. Seeing Molyneux, she uttered a cry of astonishment. Molyneux, whose feelings never betrayed him, turned to the servant and dismissed him with a couple of words. Then he faced the newcomer; he took her hands; he looked long and ardently into her face, which paled, then burned with crimson.

"Claire! You here? After all these years!"

The woman trembled. In a moment the deeps of a passion she believed she had sealed forever, broke forth. She clung, almost fainting, to his broad shoulders. Richard Molyneux it was whom she had loved in the past. He exercised an extraordinary fascination over Claire Ashberry.

"I came to see Geoffrey," she explained hurriedly. "I am staying at Hastings. He expected me at Brighton to-day. I came over to tell him that I must defer my visit. That is all. And you—you—what are you doing here, in this room? Geoffrey's room?"

"Didn't you know that he was a friend of mine?"

"A friend—to you?" Claire disengaged herself from those strong arms.

"I met him two hours back. He promised to hide me."

"To hide you?" The voice rang out in alarm. "True enough."

Molyneux laughed bitterly. "Come here," said he, drawing her to the window. "You see that man—ah, there are three of them. Trapped!"

Forgetful of everything save his danger, Claire Ashberry clung to Molyneux's arm. "Who are they, Richard? Who are those men?" she demanded imperiously.

"Police officers. Let me go, dear one. Yes, the old game. State papers; a secret sold. You'd better let me go. I must escape.

"You must escape; you shall!" cried Claire, wildly.

"How?" The thing's impossible. If I had a fast car—"

You have! There is mine; it is waiting for me. Come—oh, come quickly!" she implored.

For an instant Molyneux stood irresolute; then he said quite calmly:

"I will. And you?"

"I go with you," said Claire steadily.

"I shall strike northward into the Dover road, if possible, and quit England to-night," he answered.

"Where you go, I go also," said Claire.

They ran from the room. The car waited at the rear of the hotel. A minute later they were flying like a gale down the King's Road.

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"You mean to tell me, Clarkson, seriously, that I have been in bed three days?"

"Three days, sir," answered Geoffrey's servant.

"A queer yarn, this, that you tell me about those two visitors," went on Geoffrey, thoughtfully. "They went off together, you say? Geoffrey broke the seal of the letter which had just arrived, and which bore a foreign postmark. He sat as if stunned, while his eyes read again and again one passage in the communication:

"Call my conduct madness, or by whatever term you will. I cannot fight against fate. I have married Richard Molyneux. We shall live abroad. He has promised me many things. Forgive me, Goeffrey; or if you cannot forgive, forget me."

Geoffrey rose after a long silence. He turned his steps toward the Old Steyne, but he had not covered a hundred yards before he saw her—Verna—sitting on a chair on the Brunswick lawns. She was looking out to sea. A gorgeous sunset had purpled the waters of the channel.

Geoffrey went up to her, softly, slowly, so that she did not hear his approach. And, leaning over her chair, suddenly, he whispered in her ear:

"Verna, it was not good-bye—after all!"

LION AGAINST TIGER.

Greater Bravery Shown By the Smaller Animal.

The owner of a one-ring circus traveling through the West this summer found himself in sore straits through the death of a much advertised lion which was the star attraction of the show. With a fertility born of necessity he advertised in the nearby papers for a "brave man." A good, strapping Irishman applied for the position.

"My pet lion has just died," said the showman, "and I will give you $5 a day if you will robe yourself in his skin and go through his tricks. All you have is two performances a day; cash money." The Irishman readily assented to the proposition and being of bright wit and intelligence soon learned all that was required of him. The first afternoon of the show he went through the paces well, enclosed in a large iron cage and occasionally emitting a roar to startle the guileless countrymen. In the evening the manager thought he would cap the climax by announcing to the audience that he would place the lion in the tiger's cage. On hearing this the son of Erin was terrified beyond comprehension. However, with trembling steps he went into the tiger's cage, but at once crept up into a corner, praying to himself. "Faith, God help me in this terrible trouble," he moaned. "Kape away from me the scratches of the big cat."

"G'wan," replied the tiger, "phwat yer snaking up there like that, ain't meself too a wearer of the green?"

Flight of Balloons.

On his recent visit at Ostend, the Shah of Persia had a whole lot of fun when he cut a string holding 100 toy balloons which a woman was offering for sale. He laughed heartily at her distress, but later paid her amply for his joke.

Experience of an Old-Timer in the Wilds of Idaho.

"In the winter of '67," said an old miner, now in Uncle Sam's service, at Washington, "I was living in a cabin by myself in the mountains of Idaho, about seven miles from Idaho City, my nearest and only neighbor the postmaster, an Irishman and bachelor, who kept the toll house between Idaho City and the adjoining mountain towns.

"My cabin was about two miles to the East, directly among the mountains. The snow which had been falling at intervals for several months, lay about 10 feet on a level around my cabin, and my only method of travel was by snow shoes.

"I had made my tri-weekly run to see if the stage had brought any letters to the toll house for me; and while adjusting my snow shoes, preparatory to starting back, I heard a bellowing and pawing. A Texas steer, which had separated himself from the herd which had lately passed toward the town, was angrily shaking his head at me about 100 feet distant. He had run past the house from the road up the little straight path which Pat had kept open to his spring, and after drinking and turning around, had become bewildered, the snow being at least eight feet deep on either side of the path.

"This was my direct route home, and although, if I had kept on top of the snow, he could not have pursued me, the spirit of my school-boy days revived, and I removed my snow shoes and immediately made two little icy snow balls. At right angles with the path to the spring another and a similar path had been cleared to a cabin about the same distance from the toll house. As I fired the two

MADE A DASH FOR THE CABIN

balls in rapid succession, striking him with one in his eye, and with the other on his forehead, the steer again bellowed with rage, and lowering his head, made a rush for me. Of course I could have simply turned and gone in the toll house, but I thought to prolong the excitement and so made a dash for the cabin. As I neared it, I saw with dismay that it was unoccupied and fastened with chain and padlock on the outside. The path ended at the cabin with ten feet of snow piled at my left and in front, the walls as smooth and perpendicular as a house.

"One thinks quickly at such moments, and the ridge pole which usually extends from miners' cabins a foot or more beyond the main building on which to hang meat and game proved my salvation. I do not know how high a jump I made to grasp it, but I am sure that I never equaled it before or since.

"As I swung my body over the pole the horns of the infuriated animal ripped off the lower part of my outside woollen shirt, and while I smiled down serenely from my point of vantage, I most devoutly thanked the good Lord that He never fails to keep good watch over drunken men and fools."

WHEN LOST IN THE WOODS.

If You Have an Axe, You May Not Have a Bad Time.

To get lost in the woods is not an uncommon occurrence, and what to do under the circumstances is so well told by Horace Kephart in "Field and Stream" that readers fond of camping and woodcraft will be interested:

"The first thing that one should do when he realizes that he has lost his bearings in a wild country is to stop and sit down. Don't take one more step until you have recovered your wits so that you can trace on the ground with a stick your probable course since leaving the camp, and mark on it the estimated location of such watercourses and other landmarks as you have passed. Then make up your mind that if you must stay out all night, alone in the woods, it is no killing matter, but likely an interesting adventure. Having recovered your mental balance, take note of the lay of the land around you, the direction of its drainage, the character of its vegetation, and the hospitalities that it offers to a night-bound traveler, in the way of drinking-water, sound down wood, natural shelter and browse. Then blaze a tree on four sides—make big blazes that can be seen from any direction. Do this even though there be several hours of daylight ahead, and although you have no present intention of staying here; for you do know that this spot is only so many hours from camp by back trail, and that you may have good reason to return to it.

"Now try to get an outlook over the surrounding country. In flat woods this will be difficult. If you can risk climbing a tall tree do so. Select one that you can climb, and having gained your outlook, note the compass direction of watercourses and other landmarks, mapping them on a bit of paper, for a lost man's memory is treacherous. The courses of small streams show where the main valley lies. Decide where to go, take the compass direction, note how the sun strikes it, and descend.

"Now, as you travel, make bushmarks by making blazes on trees or breaking a shrub here and there along the trail, so you will easily follow your way back should you have to pass the night in the woods."

Americans Going to Mexico.

During the last two years over 1,500 immigrants from Oklahoma and other parts of the Southwest have located in the single State of Tamaulipas, Mexico. They have made a settlement known as the Blaylock Colony, just west of Escandon on the Gulf Railway, and have built churches, school houses and stores, and enjoy the fullest liberty of action. So it seems that Americans are crossing the southern boundary as they are the northern one to Canada.