

BANGS JOHN KENDRICK

A REBELLIOUS HEROINE

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I

STUART HARLEY: REALIST

“—if a word could save me, and that word were not the Truth, nay, if it did but swerve a hair’s-breadth from the Truth, I would not say it!”
—Longfellow.

Stuart Harley, despite his authorship of many novels, still considered himself a realist. He affected to say that he did not write his books; that he merely transcribed them from life as he saw it, and he insisted always that he saw life as it was.

“The mission of the novelist, my dear Professor,” he had once been heard to say at his club, “is not to amuse merely; his work is that of an historian, and he should be quite as careful to write truthfully as is the historian. How is the future to know what manner of lives we nineteenth century people have lived unless our novelists tell the truth?”

“Possibly the historians will tell them,” observed the Professor of Mathematics. “Historians sometimes do tell us interesting things.”

“True,” said Harley. “Very true; but then what historian ever let you into the secret of the every-day life of the people of whom he writes? What historian ever so vitalized Louis the Fourteenth as Dumas has vitalized him? Truly, in reading mere history I have seemed to be reading of lay figures, not of men; but when the novelist has taken hold properly—ah, then we get the men.”

“Then,” objected the Professor, “the novelist is never to create a great character?”

“The humorist or the mere romancer may, but as for the novelist with a true ideal of his mission in life he would better leave creation to nature. It is blasphemy for a purely mortal being to pretend that he can create a more interesting character or set of characters than the Almighty has already provided for the use of himself and his brothers in literature; that he can involve these creations in a more dramatic series of events than it has occurred to an all-wise Providence to put into the lives of His creatures; that, by the exercise of that misleading faculty which the writer styles his imagination, he can portray phases of life which shall prove of more absorbing interest or of greater moral value to his readers than those to be met with in the every-day life of man as he is.”

“Then,” said the Professor, with a dexterous jab of his cue at the pool-balls—“then, in your estimation, an author is a thing to be led about by the nose by the beings he selects for use in his books?”

“You put it in a rather homely fashion,” returned Harley; “but, on the whole, that is about the size of it.”

“And all a man needs, then, to be an author is an eye and a type-writing machine?” asked the Professor.

“And a regiment of detectives,” drawled Dr. Kelly, the young surgeon, “to follow his characters about.”

Harley sighed. Surely these men were unsympathetic.

“I can’t expect you to grasp the idea exactly,” he said, “and I can’t explain it to you, because you’d become irreverent if I tried.”

“No, we won’t,” said Kelly. “Go on and explain it to us—I’m bored, and want to be amused.”

So Harley went on and tried to explain how the true realist must be an inspired sort of person, who can rise above purely physical limitations; whose eye shall be able to pierce the most impenetrable

of veils; to whom nothing in the way of obtaining information as to the doings of such specimens of mankind as he has selected for his pages is an insurmountable obstacle.

“Your author, then, is to be a mixture of a New York newspaper reporter and the Recording Angel?” suggested Kelly.

“I told you you’d become irreverent,” said Harley; “nevertheless, even in your irreverence, you have expressed the idea. The writer must be omniscient as far as the characters of his stories are concerned—he must have an eye which shall see all that they do, a mind sufficiently analytical to discern what their motives are, and the courage to put it all down truthfully, neither adding nor subtracting, coloring only where color is needed to make the moral lesson he is trying to teach stand out the more vividly.”

“In short, you’d have him become a photographer,” said the Professor.

“More truly a soulscape-painter,” retorted Harley, with enthusiasm.

“Heavens!” cried the Doctor, dropping his cue with a loud clatter to the floor. “Soulscape! Here’s a man talking about not creating, and then throws out an invention like soulscape! Harley, you ought to write a dictionary. With a word like soulscape to start with, it would sweep the earth!”

Harley laughed. He was a good-natured man, and he was strong enough in his convictions not to weaken for the mere reason that somebody else had ridiculed them. In fact, everybody else might have ridiculed them, and Harley would still have stood true, once he was convinced that he was right.

“You go on sawing people’s legs off, Billy,” he said, good-naturedly. “That’s a thing you know about; and as for the Professor, he can go on showing you and the rest of mankind just why the shortest distance between two points is in a straight line. I’ll take your collective and separate words for anything on the subject of surgery or mathematics, but when it comes to my work I wouldn’t bank on your theories if they were endorsed by the Rothschilds.”

“He’ll never write a decent book in his life if he clings to that theory,” said Kelly, after Harley had departed. “There’s precious little in the way of the dramatic nowadays in the lives of people one cares to read about.”

Nevertheless, Harley had written interesting books, books which had brought him reputation, and what is termed genteel poverty—that is to say, his fame was great, considering his age, and his compensation was just large enough to make life painful to him. His income enabled him to live well enough to make a good appearance among, and share somewhat at their expense in the life of, others of far greater means; but it was too small to bring him many of the things which, while not absolutely necessities, could not well be termed luxuries, considering his tastes and his temperament.

A little more was all he needed.

“If I could afford to write only when I feel like it,” he said, “how happy I should be! But these orders—they make me a driver of men, and not their historian.”

In fact, Harley was in that unfortunate, and at the same time happy, position where he had many orders for the product of his pen, and such financial necessities that he could not afford to decline one of them.

And it was this very situation which made his rebellious heroine of whom I have essayed to write so sore a trial to the struggling young author.

It was early in May, 1895, that Harley had received a note from Messrs. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick, the publishers, asking for a story from his pen for their popular “Blue and Silver Series.”

“The success of your *Tiffin-Talk*,” they wrote, “has been such that we are prepared to offer you our highest terms for a short story of 30,000 words, or thereabouts, to be published in our ‘Blue and Silver Series.’ We should like to have it a love-story, if possible; but whatever it is, it must be characteristic, and ready for publication in November. We shall need to have the manuscript by September 1st at the latest. If you can let us have the first few chapters in August, we can send them at once to Mr. Chromely, whom it is our intention to have illustrate the story, provided he can be got to do it.”

The letter closed with a few formalities of an unimportant and stereotyped nature, and Harley immediately called at the office of Messrs. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick, where, after learning that their best terms were no more unsatisfactory than publishers' best terms generally are, he accepted the commission.

And then, returning to his apartment, he went into what Kelly called one of his trances.

"He goes into one of his trances," Kelly had said, "hoists himself up to his little elevation, and peeps into the private life of *hoi polloi* until he strikes something worth putting down and the result he calls literature."

"Yes, and the people buy it, and read it, and call for more," said the Professor.

"Possibly because they love notoriety," said Kelly, "and they think if they call for more often enough, he will finally peep in at their key-holes and write them up. If he ever puts me into one of his books I'll waylay him at night and amputate his writing-hand."

"He won't," said the Professor. "I asked him once why he didn't, and he said you'd never do in one of his books, because you don't belong to real life at all. He thinks you are some new experiment of an enterprising Providence, and he doesn't want to use you until he sees how you turn out."

"He could put me down as I go," suggested the Doctor.

"That's so," replied the other. "I told him so, but he said he had no desire to write a lot of burlesque sketches containing no coherent idea."

"Oh, he said that, did he?" observed the Doctor, with a smile. "Well—wait till Stuart Harley comes to me for a prescription. I'll get even with him. I'll give him a pill, and he'll disappear—for ten days."

Whether it was as Kelly said or not, that Harley went into a trance and poked his nose into the private life of the people he wrote about, it was a fact that while meditating upon the possible output of his pen our author was as deaf to his surroundings as though he had departed into another world, and it rarely happened that his mind emerged from that condition without bringing along with it something of value to him in his work.

So it was upon this May morning. For an hour or two Harley lay quiescent, apparently gazing out of his flat window over the uninspiring chimney-pots of the City of New York, at the equally uninspiring Long Island station on the far side of the East River. It was well for him that his eye was able to see, and yet not see: forgetfulness of those smoking chimney-pots, the red-zincked roofs, the flapping under-clothing of the poorer than he, hung out to dry on the tenement tops, was essential to the construction of such a story as Messrs. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick had in mind; and Harley successfully forgot them, and, coming back to consciousness, brought with him the *dramatis personæ* of his story—and, taken as a whole, they were an interesting lot. The hero was like most of those gentlemen who live their little lives in the novels of the day, only Harley had modified his accomplishments in certain directions. Robert Osborne—such was his name—was not the sort of man to do impossible things for his heroine. He was not reckless. He was not a D'Artagnan lifted from the time of Louis the Fourteenth to the dull, prosaic days of President Faure. He was not even a Frenchman, but an essentially American American, who desires to know, before he does anything, why he does it, and what are his chances of success. I am not sure that if he had happened to see her struggling in the ocean he would have jumped in to rescue the young woman to whom his hand was plighted—I do not speak of his heart, for I am not Harley, and I do not know whether or not Harley intended that Osborne should be afflicted with so inconvenient an organ—I am not sure, I say, that if he had seen his best-beloved struggling in the ocean Osborne would have jumped in to rescue her without first stopping to remove such of his garments as might impede his progress back to land again. In short, he was not one of those impetuous heroes that we read about so often and see so seldom; but, taken altogether, he was sufficiently attractive to please the American girl who might be expected to read Harley's book; for that was one of the stipulations of Messrs. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick when they made their verbal agreement with Harley.

“Make it go with the girls, Harley,” Mr. Chadwick had said. “Men haven’t time to read anything but the newspapers in this country. Hit the girls, and your fortune is made.”

Harley didn’t exactly see how his fortune was going to be made on the best terms of Messrs. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick, even if he hit the girls with all the force of a battering-ram, but he promised to keep the idea in mind, and remained in his trance a trifle longer than might otherwise have been necessary, endeavoring to select the unquestionably correct hero for his story, and Osborne was the result. Osborne was moderately witty. His repartee smacked somewhat of the refined comic paper—that is to say, it was smart and cynical, and not always suited to the picture; but it wasn’t vulgar or dull, and his personal appearance was calculated to arouse the liveliest interest. He was clean shaven and clean cut. He looked more like a modern ideal of infallible genius than Byron, and had probably played football and the banjo in college—Harley did not go back that far with him—all of which, it must be admitted, was pretty well calculated to assure the fulfilment of Harley’s promise that the man should please the American girl. Of course the story was provided with a villain also, but he was a villain of a mild type. Mild villainy was an essential part of Harley’s literary creed, and this particular person was not conceived in heresy. His name was to have been Horace Balderstone, and with him Harley intended to introduce a lively satire on the employment, by certain contemporary writers, of the supernatural to produce dramatic effects. Balderstone was of course to be the rival of Osborne. In this respect Harley was commonplace; to his mind the villain always had to be the rival of the hero, just as in opera the tenor is always virtuous at heart if not otherwise, and the baritone a scoundrel, which in real life is not an invariable rule by any means. Indeed, there have been many instances in real life where the villain and the hero have been on excellent terms, and to the great benefit of the hero too. But in this case Balderstone was to follow in the rut, and become the rival of Osborne for the hand of Marguerite Andrews—the heroine. Balderstone was to write a book, which for a time should so fascinate Miss Andrews that she would be blind to the desirability of Osborne as a husband-elect; a book full of the weird and thrilling, dealing with theosophy and spiritualism, and all other “Tommyrotisms,” as Harley called them, all of which, of course, was to be the making and the undoing of Balderstone; for equally of course, in the end, he would become crazed by the use of opium—the inevitable end of writers of that stamp. Osborne would rescue Marguerite from his fatal influence, and the last chapter would end with Marguerite lying pale and wan upon her sick-bed, recovering from the mental prostration which the influence over hers of a mind like Balderstone’s was sure to produce, holding Osborne’s hand in hers, and “smiling a sweet recognition at the lover to whose virtues she had so long been blind.” Osborne would murmur, “At last!” and the book would close with a “first kiss,” followed closely by six or eight pages of advertisements of other publications of Messrs. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick. I mention the latter to show how thoroughly realistic Harley was. He thought out his books so truly and so fully before he sat down to write them that he seemed to see each written, printed, made and bound before him, a concrete thing from cover to cover.

Besides Osborne and Balderstone and Miss Andrews—of whom I shall at this time not speak at length, since the balance of this little narrative is to be devoted to the setting forth of her peculiarities and charms—there were a number of minor characters, not so necessary to the story perhaps as they might have been, but interesting enough in their way, and very well calculated to provide the material needed for the filling out of the required number of pages. Furthermore, they completed the picture.

“I don’t want to put in three vivid figures, and leave the reader to imagine that the rest of the world has been wiped out of existence,” said Harley, as he talked it over with me. “That is not art.

There should be three types of character in every book—the positive, the average, and the negative.

In that way you grade your story off into the rest of the world, and your reader feels that while he may never have met the positive characters, he has met the average or the negative, or both, and is therefore by one of these links connected with the others, and that gives him a personal interest in the story; and it’s the reader’s personal interest that the writer is after.”

So Miss Andrews was provided with a very conventional aunt—the kind of woman you meet with everywhere; most frequently in church squabbles and hotel parlors, however. Mrs. Corwin was this lady's name, and she was to enact the rôle of chaperon to Miss Andrews. With Mrs. Corwin, by force of circumstances, came a pair of twin children, like those in the *Heavenly Twins*, only more real, and not so Sarah Grandiose in their manners and wit.

These persons Harley booked for the steamship *New York*, sailing from New York City for Southampton on the third day of July, 1895. The action was to open at that time, and Marguerite Andrews was to meet Horace Balderstone on that vessel on the evening of the second day out, with which incident the interest of Harley's story was to begin. But Harley had counted without his heroine.

The rest of his cast were safely stowed away on ship-board and ready for action at the appointed hour, but the heroine *missed the steamer by three minutes, and it was all Harley's own fault.*

II

A PRELIMINARY TRIAL

*“I’ll not be made a soft and dull-eyed fool
To shake the head, relent, and sigh, and yield.”*

—*“Merchant of Venice.”*

The extraordinary failure of Miss Andrews, cast for a star rôle in Stuart Harley’s tale of *Love and Villany*, to appear upon the stage selected by the author for her débût, must be explained. As I have already stated at the close of the preceding chapter, it was entirely Harley’s own fault. He had studied Miss Andrews too superficially to grasp thoroughly the more refined subtleties of her nature, and he found out, at a moment when it was too late to correct his error, that she was not a woman to be slighted in respect to the conventionalities of polite life, however trifling to a man of Harley’s stamp these might seem to be. She was a stickler for form; and when she was summoned to go on board of an ocean steamship there to take part in a romance for the mere aggrandizement of a young author, she intended that he should not ignore the proprieties, even if in a sense the proprieties to which she referred did antedate the period at which his story was to open. She was willing to appear, but it seemed to her that Stuart Harley ought to see to it that she was escorted to the scene of action with the ceremony due to one of her position.

“What does he take me for?” she asked of Mrs. Corwin, indignantly, on the eve of her departure.

“Am I a mere marionette, to obey his slightest behest, and at a moment’s notice? Am I to dance when Stuart Harley pulls the string?”

“Not at all, my dear Marguerite,” said Mrs. Corwin, soothingly. “If he thought that, he would not have selected you for his story. I think you ought to feel highly complimented that Mr. Harley should choose you for one of his books, and for such a conspicuous part, too. Look at me; do I complain? Am I holding out for the proprieties? And yet what is my situation? I’m simply dragged in by the hair; and my poor children, instead of having a nice, noisy Fourth of July at the sea-shore, must needs be put upon a great floating caravansary, to suffer seasickness and the other discomforts of ocean travel, so as to introduce a little juvenile fun into this great work of Mr. Harley’s—and yet I bow my head meekly and go. Why? Because I feel that, inconspicuous though I shall be, nevertheless I am highly honored that Mr. Harley should select me from among many for the uses of his gifted pen.”

“You are prepared, then,” retorted Marguerite, “to place yourself unreservedly in Mr. Harley’s hands? Shall you flirt with the captain if he thinks your doing so will add to the humorous or dramatic interest of his story? Will you permit your children to make impertinent remarks to every one aboard ship; to pick up sailors’ slang and use it at the dining-table—in short, to make themselves obnoxiously clever at all times, in order that Mr. Harley’s critics may say that his book fairly scintillates with wit, and gives gratifying evidence that ‘the rising young author’ has made a deep and careful analysis of the juvenile heart?”

“Mr. Harley is too much of a gentleman, Marguerite, to place me and my children in a false or ridiculous light,” returned Mrs. Corwin, severely. “And even if he were not a gentleman, he is too true a realist to make me do anything which in the nature of things I should not do—which disposes of your entirely uncalled-for remark about the captain and myself. As for the children, Tommie would not repeat sailors’ lingo at the table under any circumstances, and Jennie will not make herself obnoxiously clever at any time, because she has been brought up too carefully to fail to respect her elders. Both she and Tommie understand themselves thoroughly; and when Mr. Harley understands them, which he cannot fail to do after a short acquaintance, he will draw them as they are; and if

previous to his complete understanding of their peculiarities he introduces into his story something foreign to their natures and obnoxious to me, their mother, I have no doubt he will correct his error when he comes to read the proofs of his story and sees his mistake.”

“You have great confidence in Stuart Harley,” retorted Miss Andrews, gazing out of the window with a pensive cast of countenance.

“Haven’t you?” asked Mrs. Corwin, quickly.

“As a man, yes,” returned Marguerite. “As an author, however, I think he is open to criticism.

He is not always true to the real. Look at Lord Barncastle, in his study of English manners! Barncastle, as he drew him, was nothing but a New York society man with a title, living in England.

That is to say, he talked like an American, thought like one—there was no point of difference between them.”

“And why should there be?” asked Mrs. Corwin. “If a New York society man is generally a weak imitation of an English peer—and no one has ever denied that such is the case—why shouldn’t an English peer be represented as a sort of intensified New York society man?”

“Besides,” said Miss Andrews, ignoring Mrs. Corwin’s point, “I don’t care to be presented too really to the reading public, especially on board a ship. I never yet knew a woman who looked well the second day out, and if I were to be presented as I always am the second day out, I should die of mortification. My hair goes out of curl, my face is the color of an unripe peach, and if I do go up on deck it is because I am so thoroughly miserable that I do not care who sees me or what the world thinks of me. I think it is very inconsiderate of Mr. Harley to open his story on an ocean steamer; and, what is more, I don’t like the American line. Too many Americans of the brass-band type travel on it. Stuart Harley said so himself in his last book of foreign travel; but he sends me out on it just the same, and expects me to be satisfied. Perhaps he thinks I like that sort of American. If he does, he’s got more imagination than he ever showed in his books.”

“You must get to the other side in some way,” said Mrs. Corwin. “It is at Venice that the trouble with Balderstone is to come, and that Osborne topples him over into the Grand Canal, and rescues you from his baleful influence.”

“Humph!” said Marguerite, with a scornful shrug of her shoulders. “Robert Osborne! A likely sort of person to rescue me from anything! He wouldn’t have nerve enough to rescue me from a grasshopper if he were armed to the teeth. Furthermore, I shall not go to Venice in August. It’s bad enough in April—damp and hot—the home of malaria—an asylum for artistic temperaments; and insecty. No, my dear aunt, even if I overlook everything else to please Mr. Harley, he’ll have to modify the Venetian part of that story, for I am determined that no pen of his shall force me into Italy at this season. I wouldn’t go there to please Shakespeare, much less Stuart Harley. Let the affair come off at Interlaken, if it is to come off at all, which I doubt.”

“There is no Grand Canal at Interlaken,” said Mrs. Corwin, sagely; for she had been an omnivorous reader of Baedeker since she had learned the part she was to play in Harley’s book, and was therefore well up in geography.

“No; but there’s the Jungfrau. Osborne can push Balderstone down the side of an Alp and kill him,” returned Miss Andrews, viciously.

“Why, Marguerite! How can you talk so? Mr. Harley doesn’t wish to have Balderstone killed,” cried Mrs. Corwin, aghast. “If Osborne killed Balderstone he’d be a murderer, and they’d execute him.”

“Which is exactly what I want,” said Miss Andrews, firmly. “If he lives, it pleases the omnipotent Mr. Harley that I shall marry him, and I positively—Well, just you wait and see.”

There was silence for some minutes.

“Then I suppose you will decline to go abroad altogether?” asked Mrs. Corwin after a while; “and Mr. Harley will be forced to get some one else; and I—I shall be deprived of a pleasant tour—because I’m only to be one of the party because I’m your aunt.”

Mrs. Corwin's lip quivered a little as she spoke. She had anticipated much pleasure from her trip.

"No, I shall not decline to go," Miss Andrews replied. "I expect to go, but it is entirely on your account. I must say, however, that Stuart Harley will find out, to his sorrow, that I am not a doll, to be worked with a string. I shall give him a scare at the outset which will show him that I know the rights of a heroine, and that he must respect them. For instance, he cannot ignore my comfort.

Do you suppose that because his story is to open with my beautiful self on board that ship, I'm to be there without his making any effort to get me there? Not I! You and the children and Osborne and Balderstone may go down any way you please. You may go on the elevated railroad or on foot.

You may go on the horse-cars, or you may go on the luggage-van. It is immaterial to me what you do; but when it comes to myself, Stuart Harley must provide a carriage, or I miss the boat. I don't wish to involve you in this. You want to go, and are willing to go in his way, which simply means turning up at the right moment, with no trouble to him. From your point of view it is all right. You are anxious to go abroad, and are grateful to Mr. Harley for letting you go. For me, however, he must do differently. I have no particular desire to leave America, and if I go at all it is as a favor to him, and he must act accordingly. It is a case of carriage or no heroine. If I'm left behind, you and the rest can go along without me. I shall do very well, and it will be Mr. Harley's own fault. It may hurt his story somewhat, but that is no concern of mine."

"I suppose the reason why he doesn't send a carriage is that that part of your life doesn't appear in his story," explained Mrs. Corwin.

"That doesn't affect the point that he ought to send one," said Marguerite. "He needn't write up the episode of the ride to the pier unless he wants to, but the fact remains that it's his duty to see me safely on board from my home, and that he shall do, or I fail him at the moment he needs me. If he is selfish enough to overlook the matter, he must suffer the consequences."

All of which, I think, was very reasonable. No heroine likes to feel that she is called into being merely to provide copy for the person who is narrating her story; and to be impressed with the idea that the moment she is off the stage she must shift entirely for herself is too humiliating to be compatible with true heroism.

Now it so happened that in his meditations upon that opening chapter the scene of which was to be placed on board of the *New York*, Stuart realized that his story of Miss Andrews's character had indeed been too superficial. He found that out at the moment he sat down to describe her arrival at the pier, as it would be in all likelihood. What would she say the moment she—the moment she what?—the moment she "emerged from the perilous stream of vehicles which crowd West Street from morning until night," or the moment "she stepped out of the cab as it drew up at the foot of the gangway"? That was the point. How would she arrive—on foot or in a cab? Which way would she come, and at what time must she start from home? Should she come alone, or should Mrs. Corwin and the twins come with her?—or would a woman of her stamp not be likely to have an intimate friend to accompany her to the steamer? Stuart was a rapid thinker, and as he pondered over these problems it did not take him long to reach the conclusion that a cab was necessary for Miss Andrews; and that Mrs. Corwin and the twins, with Osborne and Balderstone, might get aboard in their own way. He also decided that it would be an excellent plan to have Marguerite's old school friend Mrs. Willard accompany her to the steamer. By an equally rapid bit of thought he concluded that if the cab started from the Andrews apartment at Fifty-ninth Street and Central Park at 9.30 A.M., the trip to the pier could easily be made in an hour, which would be in ample time, since the sailing hour of the *New York* was eleven. Unfortunately Harley, in his hurry, forgot two or three incidents of departures generally, especially departures of women, which he should not have overlooked. It was careless of him to forget that a woman about to travel abroad wants to make herself as stunning as she possibly can on the day of departure, so that the impression she will make at the start shall be strong enough to carry her through the dowdy stage which comes, as Marguerite had intimated, on

the second and third days at sea; and to expect a woman like Marguerite Andrews, who really had no responsibilities to call her up at an early hour, to be ready at 9.30 sharp, was a fatal error, unless he provided his cab with an unusually fast horse, or a pair of horses, both of which Harley neglected to do. Miss Andrews was twenty minutes late at starting the first time, and just a half-hour behind schedule time when, having rushed back to her rooms for her gloves, which in the excitement of the moment she had forgotten, she started finally for the ship. Even then all would have been well had the unfortunate author not overlooked one other vital point. Instead of sending the cab straight down Fifth Avenue, to Broadway, to Barclay Street, he sent it down Sixth, and thence through Greenwich Village, emerging at West Street at its junction with Christopher, and then the inevitable happened.

The cab was blocked!

“I had no idea it was so far,” said Marguerite, looking out of the cab window at the crowded and dirty thoroughfare.

“It’s a good mile farther yet,” replied Mrs. Willard. “I shall have just that much more of your society.”

“It looks to me,” said Marguerite, with a short laugh, as the cab came suddenly to a halt—“it looks to me as if you were likely to have more than that of it; for we are in an apparently inextricable, immovable mixture of trucks, horse-cars, and incompetent policemen, and nothing short of a miracle will get us a mile farther along in twenty minutes.”

“I do believe you are right,” said Mrs. Willard, looking at her watch anxiously. “What will you do if you miss the steamer?”

“Escape a horrid fate,” laughed Marguerite, gayly.

“Poor Mr. Harley—why, it will upset his whole story,” said Mrs. Willard.

“And save his reputation,” said Marguerite. “It wouldn’t have been real, that story,” she added.

“In the first place, Balderstone couldn’t write a story that would fascinate me; he could never acquire a baleful influence over me; and, finally, I never should marry Robert Osborne under any circumstances.

He’s not at all the style of man I admire. I’m willing to go along and let Mr. Harley try to work it out his way, but he will give it up as a bad idea before long—if I catch the steamer; and if I don’t, then he’ll have to modify the story. That modified, I’m willing to be his heroine.”

“But your aunt and the twins—they must be aboard by this time. They will be worried to death about you,” suggested Mrs. Willard.

“For a few moments—but Aunt Emma wanted to go, and she and the rest of them will have a good time, I’ve no doubt,” replied Miss Andrews, calmly; and here Stuart Harley’s heroine actually chuckled. “And maybe Mr. Harley can make a match between Aunt Emma and Osborne, which will suit the publishers and please the American girl,” she said, gleefully. “I almost hope we do miss it.”

And miss it they did, as I have already told you, by three minutes. As the cab entered the broad pier, the great steamer moved slowly but surely out into the stream, and Mrs. Willard and Mr. Harley’s heroine were just in time to see Mrs. Corwin wildly waving her parasol at the captain on the bridge, beseeching him in agonized tones to go back just for a moment, while two separate and distinct twins, one male and one female, peered over the rail, weeping bitterly. Incidentally mention may be made of two young men, Balderstone and Osborne, who sat chatting gayly together in the smoking-room.

“Well, Osborne,” said one, lighting his cigar, “she didn’t arrive.”

“No,” smiled the other. “Fact is, Balderstone, I’m glad of it. She’s too snippy for me, and I’m afraid I should have quarrelled with you about her in a half-hearted, unconvincing manner.”

“I’m afraid I’d have been the same,” rejoined Balderstone; “for, between us, there’s a pretty little brunette from Chicago up on deck, and Marguerite Andrews would have got little attention from me while she was about, unless Harley violently outraged my feelings and his own convictions.”

And so the *New York* sailed out to sea, and Marguerite Andrews watched her from the pier until she had faded from view.

As for Stuart Harley, the author, he sat in his study, wringing his hands and cursing his carelessness.

“I’ll have to modify the whole story now,” he said, impatiently, “since it is out of my power to bring the *New York* back into port, with my hero, villain, chaperon, and twins; but whenever or wherever the new story may be laid, Marguerite Andrews shall be the heroine—she interests me. Meantime let Mrs. Willard chaperon her.”

And closing his manuscript book with a bang, Harley lit a cigarette, put on his hat, and went to the club.

III

THE RECONSTRUCTION BEGINS

*“Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman;
Tho’ they may gang a kennin wrang,
To step aside is human.”*

—Burns.

When, a few days later, Harley came to the reconstruction of his story, he began to appreciate the fact that what had seemed at first to be his misfortune was, on the whole, a matter for congratulation; and as he thought over the people he had sent to sea, he came to rejoice that Marguerite was not one of the party.

“Osborne wasn’t her sort, after all,” he mused to himself that night over his coffee. “He hadn’t much mind. I’m afraid I banked too much on his good looks, and too little upon what I might call her independence; for of all the heroines I ever had, she is the most sufficient unto herself. Had she gone along I’m half afraid I couldn’t have got rid of Balderstone so easily either, for he’s a determined devil as I see him; and his intellectual qualities were so vastly superior to those of Osborne that by mere contrast they would most certainly have appealed to her strongly. The baleful influence might have affected her seriously, and Osborne was never the man to overcome it, and strict realism would have forced her into an undesirable marriage. Yes, I’m glad it turned out the way it did; she’s too good for either of them. I couldn’t have done the tale as I intended without a certain amount of compulsion, which would never have worked out well. She’d have been miserable with Osborne for a husband anyhow, even if he did succeed in outwitting Balderstone.”

Then Harley went into a trance for a moment. From this he emerged almost immediately with a laugh. The travellers on the sea had come to his mind.

“Poor Mrs. Corwin,” he said, “she’s awfully upset. I shall have to give her some diversion. Let’s see, what shall it be? She’s a widow, young and fascinating. H’m—not a bad foundation for a romance. There must be a man on the ship who’d like her; but, hang it all! there are those twins. Not much romance for her with those twins along, unless the man’s a fool; and she’s too fine a woman for a fool. Men don’t fall in love with whole families that way. Now if they had only been left on the pier with Miss Andrews, it would have worked up well. Mrs. Corwin could have fascinated some fellow-traveller, won his heart, accepted him at Southampton, and told him about the twins afterwards. As a test of his affection that would be a strong situation; but with the twins along, making the remarks they are likely to make, and all that—no, there is no hope for Mrs. Corwin, except in a juvenile story—something like ‘Two Twins in a Boat, not to Mention the Widow,’ or something of that sort. Poor woman! I’ll let her rest in peace, for the present. She’ll enjoy her trip, anyhow; and as for Osborne and Balderstone, I’ll let them fight it out for that dark-eyed little woman from Chicago I saw on board, and when the best man wins I’ll put the whole thing into a short story.”

Then began a new quest for characters to go with Marguerite Andrews.

“She must have a chaperon, to begin with,” thought Harley. “That is indispensable. Herring, Beemer, & Chadwick regard themselves as conservators of public morals, in their ‘Blue and Silver Series,’ so a girl unmarried and without a chaperon would never do for this book. If they were to publish it in their ‘Yellow Prism Series’ I could fling all such considerations to the winds, for there they cater to stronger palates, palates cultivated by French literary cooks, and morals need not be

considered, provided the story is well told and likely to sell; but this is for the other series, and a chaperon is a *sine qua non*

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