BY AN UNSEEN HAND

A Story of the Secret Society Known as the "Ragged Thirteen"

By Edward Hughes.

CHAPTER III. (Continued.)

As she was speaking the door opened and Maguire appeared. When I first caught sight of him his face was lit up with pleasure, and he was coming in eagerly as though he were the bearer of good news; then, recognising that he was interrupting a tete-a-tete, his pleasure gave way to astonishment: and as Nora, who had not seen or heard him, uttered the words, "Why, it's the Ragged Thirteen!" an awful expression of horror settled upon his features. I had never seen face change so rapidly or distinctly as his did under those varying emotions of pleasure, astonishment, and horror. I but, clutching the handle of the door, thought that he would have fallen, he steadied himself.

"Why, Jim," I said, "what good wind has blown you back? This lady is Miss Courtney, a neighbor of ours."

He pulled himself together while I went through the form of introduction, though for the few minutes that Nora remained he never opened his lips, but with dilated eyes stood staring at her, and I was glad when she bade him "Good-bye" and I had seen her to the gate.

"Your friend is ill," she said. "Go back to him and see what ails him."

When I returned to the drawing-room Jam was pacing rapidly to and fro.

"Who was that girl?" he asked.

"She's the daughter of an Irish gentleman who lives close by," I said. "I asked you to come and see him the other day when he called here. But Jim, old chap, whatever is the matter? Has the book——"

"Curse the book!" he burst out, fiercely. "What does these cards mean? Who set them out there?"

"I did," I said. "Miss Courtney was telling me something about cribbage, and I picked out these cards and asked her to count them."

He reached me in two quick strides and gripped my arm.

"Tell me the truth," he said—and his voice was somewhat steadier— "tell me the truth, Jack, for your own sake more than for mine. Did you take them by chance, or—or did you purposely choose them?"

He had fixed me with his eyes, and his face was so close to mine that I could not avoid his gaze.

"Tell me!" he said, shaking me as though he would shake the answer out of my reluctant lips.

"Steady, Jim!" I said. "Steady, you're hurting me!"

"For Heaven's sake, Tremayne, tell me the truth!" and, looking into his distorted face, I answered him:—

"I chose them on purpose. And now for a question on my side. What do you know of the Ragged Thirteen?"

"What do I know of it? By Jove! He asks me—me—what I know of it! Me! who saw her dead face! He asks me like some schoolboy, and the curse of it hanging over him and me now! Was it her spirit that was here luring him on? Has she come back like she was then, to torment me with her beauty, when I've fought with the horror for years, and was getting peace? And is your life, my friend—my more than brother—to come under the ban of this curse?"

"Jim! Jim!" I cried, "steady yourself! Try and be calm, and tell me what you know."

"I can't now, Jack, I can't bring myself to it. Let me be by myself. Let me go to my room, and to-morrow morning I'll answer your question—I'll tell you what I know. Let me go, Jack; let me go!" and, bursting away from my restraining hold, he rushed upstairs and locked himself in his room.

CHAPTER VI.

Jim Maguire's Disappearance.

This world is so ordered that sorrow and joy, tragedy and farce, pathos and bathos, jostle each other at every turn, and, even in the midst of my intense anxiety to hear what Maguire had to tell, I could not but notice the disgust that Mrs. Graves took but little pains to conceal when she heard that the dinner party had been indefinitely postponed.

"But what will I do with the things, sir?"

"What you like," I snapped. "Do them up and send them to the Cottage Hospital. Let me have a chop and a glass of sherry." And as she went out of my presence the sound of her grumbling could still be heard until she reached her own quarters.

I made several attacks upon Maguire's door, and I supplemented them by sending Graves with messages, but neither of us could get an answer from him, and I went to bed in a miserable frame of mind. Excitement kept me awake until the small hours. What was I to hear? What had Maguire meant by his strange allusions to some girl he had known? I could hear him at intervals pacing his room, but at last he was quiet, and sleep came to me.

I was up betimes, and was all impatience to get breakfast over, but although I waited until half an hour after the usual time, Maguire did not put in an appearance, so I sent up to say that I was waiting for him, and would he come down as soon as possible?

Graves came back with a curious look on his face.

"I called Mr. Maguire, sir," said he, "and he said that he'd be ready in five minutes if I'd come and show him where breakfast was laid. I told him it was the morning-room as usual, and he said: 'Oh! I daresay I'll find it.'"

I concluded that he had got the better of his trouble, and that he was prepared to go through with what I had thought would be a trying ordeal in his usual light-hearted manner, and if he were going to act so there was nothing for me to do but follow suit. So I brightened up, and looked as pleasant as possible when I heard him coming.

"Good-morning, sir," said he, bowing to me. "You are, I suppose, the master of this house, and it was your servant who called me?"

I looked at him to catch the twinkle in his eye, but he seemed to be in grim earnest, and as I said nothing, seeing that I was waiting for his freak to further develop itself, he went on:—

"I'm in a very awkward position, sir, and I hope you can help me out of it. I went to bed somewhere last night with surroundings that I suppose were familiar to me, and I get up this morning, and for the life of me I can't tell where I am. And that's not the worst of it, sir, for, to make confusion worse confounded, I can't remember my name, nor yet where I came from."

I thought he had gone quite far enough with what seemed to me a stupid joke.

"Oh, that will do, Jim!" I said, pettishly; "if you don't want to go on with what we were talking about last night, say so, and have done with this nonsense. Sit down and have some breakfast. What shall I help you to?"

"You're very kind, sir," he said, "and I'm very hungry, but who is Jim, and what do you mean by our talk last night? So far as I know, I've never set eyes upon you before, nor you upon me."

"Sit down, man," I said, and helping him to kidneys and bacon, I pushed the plate towards him.

"Coffee, or tea?" I asked, in no very good humour.

"Coffee, thanks; but really, sir, I must say——"

"Oh, stop it, do, Jim, if you don't want to drive me mad! Here have I been awake the best part of the night, expecting to hear a mystery cleared up, and now you come down and play the fool. You didn't look like doing it yesterday. There, don't say any more. Finish your breakfast."

"And now," said I, when the meal was ended, "are we to go on with this matter, or not?"

"Upon my life, sir, I haven't the least notion what you're driving at. If you know who I am, and where I came from, I'd be glad if you'd tell me, and send me home."

"Look here, Maguire," I burst out, "I can't stand much more of this!"

"Maguire? Who's Maguire?"

I was too impatient to answer him, and I thought I would bring him to the point at onee.

"Don't you remember," I said, "the girl you saw here yesterday, and what you thought of her? She was someone's spirit, according to you. Man alive, was it only acting, and is there nothing after all in the Ragged Thirteen?"

If I had expected him to wince, or to show in any way that the arrow had gone home, I was utterly disappointed. He sat looking at me as placidly as though I had been discussing the price of pigs.

"The Ragged Thirteen!" he said, slowly. "Ah! there I'm with you. It's a pretty little hand; with your six, seven, eight, and two aces, and if you can only manage to have an ace on the pack, and flush the other four, why, there's seventeen for you, and away goes your Ragged Thirteen. I haven't played crib for many a day!"

"Curse you !" I cried, "you'll drive me mad with your infernal jargon. If you've made up your mind not to tell me what you promised, say so like a man."

He looked at me as if he were dazed.

"May I walk in your garden for awhile?" he asked, "and maybe I'll come to my senses, for it's upside down I am; and if you'd lend me a pipe it might help me."

His own pipe and tobacco-jar were on the mantel-piece. He caught sight of them, or pretended to do so, as he spoke.

"Ah!" said he, taking off the lid of the jar. "Navy cut! Just the brand I like!" and fingering the pipe, he added, "May I?"

"To the deuce with you!" I cried, flinging out of the room, and as I passed through the door I caught sight of him standing with the pipe in his hand, and staring at me with a blank look of astonishment.

I had lit a cigar, and was smoking myself into somewhat of a better humour, when the impulse seized me to go back and see what Maguire was doing, and whether he was keeping up the farce now that he was by himself. With the idea of surprising him, I crept noiselessly to the breakfast-room door. But he had gone out, and was walking up and down on the lawn, puffing away at his briar-root, and evidently in deep thought. And there he continued to pace until I grew tired of looking at him, and every now and then he drew his hand across his forehead and stared at the house and its surroundings, just as a man who had never seen them before might have done.

We went through lunch precisely as we had gone through breakfast, and with the same result: namely, that I lost my temper, and left him to his own devices. I strolled away to Wilkinson's Woods, and there I met Nora, and then the passion that had held me was speedily charmed away. I asked after her father.

"Ah! didn't I have a time of it with him," she said. "I told him, when he came in about seven o'clock, that there was a message from you, and I made up some story or other. Well, nothing would do but I must help him with his dressclothes, and he made me put on my dinner-gown, and we sailed in to some cold mutton with all the airs and graces of a duke and duchess. Sure, weren't we the Courtneys of Courtney Castle, and weren't we going back to live in the state, as the Royal blood should? And then he took to the whisky and called it Moselle, and I was glad enough to get him to bed. It's breaking my heart he is, and he that clever and bright when the evil spirit isn't on him."

I tried to comfort her as well as I could, and this comforting led to some tender passages, and I walked home dreaming dreams that were so pleasant that I had forgotten all about Maguire and his curious pranks until I met Graves at the gate.

"May I speak to you, sir, for a few minutes?" said he.

"Yes, Graves. What's the matter?"

It's about Mr. Maguire, sir," he said. "A letter came for him this afternoon. I could see from the envelope that it was from the publisher. Mr. Maguire he's told the missis and me about his writing, and so I took it to him at once. 'Here's a letter for you, sir,' I says. 'For me?' says he, 'then I shall find out my name at last. Maguire, says he, reading the address, 'James M, Maguire, Esq., the Dell, Enfield. Here, my good man, this isn't for me;' and then he asked me to tell him exactly how he'd come here. Did he walk, or did they bring him in a carriage? he wanted to know. I looked at him close then, sir; and do you know," and here his voice dropped to a whisper, "I believe—I believe—"

I knew what he was going to say. I felt a shudder run through me, and I stood there shivering, in the warm, soft air.

"I believe he's mad, sir; I've been with patients before!"

The matter was clear to me now as the daylight. The terrible trouble through which he had passed had been too much for my friend's reason, and now his mental balance was upset. He was, in fact, a lunatic, a victim of the accursed society, or whatever it might be—in even worse plight than the man I had seen lying stark in our house in London, a victim in more desperate case than my friend Travers. No actor, were he ever so cunning, could have simulated the agony that had convulsed him on the previous day. No man could have mourned for the possible consequences to his friend in such terms as he did had he not had a keen appreciation of that friend's danger.

What further blight was this diabolical conspiracy to bring upon my life? Would it separate me from Nora? Should I lose her?

It was at dinner-time that Maguire was generally most brilliant, and I told Graves to see that nothing was wanting in the way of dishes or table decorations to make the meal as enticing as possible. If my friend's mind were unhinged, it might only be a temporary matter, and the impression produced by familiar objects might at last banish his weakness, and in that case I should need all the help I could get from the pleasantest possible surroundings to assist me in combating the shock and consequent depression that must ensue.

But when dinner came on there was no change in his symptoms, and long before the meal was over it was borne in upon me with irresistible force that he was, indeed, mad, and, as far as his identity was concerned, James Murtagh Maguire might as well have been in his grave. He was most cheerful and amusing, but his jests cut me to the heart.

"I must have a name of some sort," he said, "and you will have to advertise me in the papers. Something like this will do: 'Come astray, a middle-aged gentleman, answering to no name. Height, so-and-so. Strikingly handsome, with a wart in the middle of his back, and a hunger and thirst that meat and drink can hardly satisfy. If not claimed in so many days, will be sold to defray expenses.' That would make a startling advertisement, and you might show me, at so much per head, and by that means I might pay for lodgings."

"Well," said I, by way of humoring him, "as neither of us know your name, and as we can't go on calling you Mr. Nobody, how do you like the sound of Maguire? Suppose we say that you are Mr. James Maguire until you get over your extraordinary lapse of memory? There's a box of yours up stairs. We might go through it together to-morrow, and perhaps we could come across something that would establish your identity. I ought to tell you that I have noticed the initials, J. M. M. on your collars and some handkerchiefs up stairs. Well, now, for the present, shall your name be Maguire?"

"Anything you like," said he. "And now, sir, I have a serious question to ask. How did I come here?"

"For the life of me, I can't tell you," I said; and then, inventing a story on the spur of the moment, I went on:

"We have been expecting a friend of mine for some days. He is a most erratic fellow, however, and comes and goes when he pleases; and so, I suppose found the room occupied, and concluded you were he. How you got in is a complete mystery to me, and it is plain that something must have happened to upset your mental balance temporarily; and the best way for you to come to yourself is to worry no more about the matter. You can take up your quarters here until things get straight, and if you feel inclined to be grateful, please signify the same by making yourself at home."

I could see the tears start to his eyes.

"Will you tell me your name?" he asked.

"Robert Tremayne," I said.

"Then may God in Heaven bless and keep Robert Tremayne for ever and ever! You have shown me such disinterested kindness, sir, that—"

"Oh, pray, don't mention that! I dabble a little in art. Do you do anything that way?"

"Yes, I did, and I believe I had an idea of getting a living that way, and I'm rather curious to handle a brush, though maybe I've forgotton how to do that."

It was all of no avail that I related to him some of the most stirring scenes through which we had passed. His memory in regard to them was a perfect blank. His past was as though it had never been, and for him time had but two divisions, the present and the future. And so it went on, day by day. James Maguire was dead and gone, but the body that his soul had once tenanted still moved and had its being, and mocked me with its living image of him who had been my warm-hearted friend.

I opened the letters that came for him from the publishers, and answered them, saying that my friend was ill, and that he had empowered me to act for him, and the terms offered for the copyright of his book were so favorable that I agreed to them, and with the money thus obtained, I was able to set his mind at ease. I hid it in a small box belonging to him, and producing this one day, we went through its contents, and found nearly £250 in it, in notes and gold, and this I handed over to him; and, to make him feel quite comfortable, I agreed to let him stay with me, and paint, or do what he liked, at so much a month.

I had told Nora of my trouble, without, however, giving her full particulars as to the cause of Maguire's mental aberration, and she had shown her sympathy by readily agreeing to carry out an experiment I had planned. She called upon us in time for afternoon tea, and I took care that Maguire should be in her company as long as possible. He was as pleasant and polite as man could be, and it was evident that he was laying himself out to be as brilliant as possible, but his only remark when Nora left us was that she was a sweet, pretty girl, and as charming as she was pretty.

I had, as a matter of course, consulted the leading specialists in mental cases; but they could do nothing to help me, though the patient was so extremely interesting that one of the doctors visited him periodically, and he and Maguire became fast friends.

Winter was fairly upon us, when I had a letter from Hugh Travers, and he wrote to say that his uncle was much worse and would like to see me, and added that I must make no delay if I wished to see him alive. I had corresponded fairly regularly with the Travers's, and had, indeed, been to see them once since I came back to England; but the interview was painful by reason of the patient's inability to speak and the distress I felt for his position, that I had not yet repeated the visit.

Now, however, I made ready to obey the summons at once, and telling Maguire to make himself at home until my return, and that, if necessary, I should write to him under the style and title that we had agreed upon, I left him to finish a great painting that he had been working at for some time.

I found Mr. Travers very near his end, though I knew by the light that leaped into his eyes when he saw my face that he recognized me, and that he understood perfectly well what I said to him, and it was plain to both Hugh and myself that there was something of which he wished to disburden his mind, had he not been bereft of speech and the power of communicating to us by writing.

He passed away in our arms, and so peacefully, withal that we hardly knew when time had ended and Eternity begun for him, and the last loving look he gave me before he closed his eyes forever on the things of this world lived in my memory to be one of the inducements that urged me on to exact atonement from his bitter enemies.

We buried him up there in the quiet kirkyard, with the eternal hills looking down upon his resting place, and there may he sleep in peace until God wills that he waken and testify against those who robbed him of that which was more precious to him than life.

I stayed with Hugh a few days after the funeral, and during those few days I prevailed upon him to throw in his lot with me.

He was fairly well off, for his uncle, as he always loved to call him, had left him a goodly inheritance, and in this connection I may mention that we never heard anything of any member of the family to which Mr. Travers, or, as I ought to call him, Mr. Starleigh, belonged. And so, when the packing had been successfully accomplished, we sent off our luggage, and I wrote to Mrs. Graves, telling her that we should arrive on the evening of the day on which she would get my letter.

I had been away from home nearly a fortnight, and I felt quite pleased at the thought of seeing Maguire again, and I hoped that his genial nature would bring Hugh out of the shell into which he was so fond of retiring at any and every opportunity. It was so late when we arrived that dinner had been already laid, but, to my surprise, there were only covers for two.

"Where is Mr. Maguire?" I asked of Graves. "I thought he would have been here to welcome us."

"What—do—you—mean, sir?" he stammered. "You must know, sir, he went away quite a week ago."

"Went away?" I echoed. "Where did he go?"

"He went according to your directions, sir, and he left a letter for you. It's on the mantle-piece; and there's another with it, and the gentleman told me I was to be sure and let you have them at once."

"Come in here, Graves;" I said, and, closing the door of the dining room when he and Hugh had entered, I went on: "Now, before I read these letters, give me a plain account of all that has happened in regard to Mr. Maguire's going away."

"Well, sir, it was on Thursday that a carriage drove up with three people in it, and one of them, a tall gentleman, wearing spectacles, and giving the name of Dr. Denton, asked to see Mr. Maguire. He said that he came from you, and he had an open letter in his hand. I showed them into the drawing room, and Mr. Maguire came down. I heard them talking for a long time, and then they rang for me, and when I went in Mr. Maguire was standing by the fire, looking very white. 'Graves,' he says, 'will you go up and pack my things for me, and a trap will come for them from the station? I'm going away with these gentlemen, who have great hopes of restoring me to my family, and of finding out who I really am. I shall leave a letter for Mr. Tremayne, who knows all about this, and whose kind words have just reached me through Dr. Denton.' And with that he shook hands with me and wished me 'good-bye,' as if I had been his equal, and gave me a sovereign, and when he was going away he would have the missis to see him, and the tears were in his eyes as he drove off. I sent the luggage to the station, and that's all I know about it, sir."

(To Be Continued.)

Love can neither be bought nor sold.

A New Year's Romance.

The swish of a blue dress, a faint breath of violets, as in passing, and he felt rather than saw Marie Summerfield go by.

Standing a little apart from the knots of merry young people thronging the pleasant rooms, he was conscious of a thread of pain running through the last night of the old year, touching only Miss Summerfield and himself.

By he, I mean Leigh Reyburn, the owner of the old-fashioned, low-roomed grange beneath whose roof the young people of Gladbrook had gathered to keep a merry watch-night. With music and laughter and gay repartee they meant to dance a welcome to the joyous New Year without much thought for the staid old twelve-month which had served them so faithfully.

But Leigh moved uneasily,sending imploring glances after the blue gown, all to no purpose. Marie was absorbed with the fascinating company of Maurice Davenport and was smiling her sweetest—and Marie could smile divinely—and entertaining him admirably.

Reyburn was thinking hard, and it must be confessed, uncharitably. Had he worshiped and petted and lived for Miss Summerfield these two blessed sunlit years, to have hope and happiness go into the grave of the frail old year leaving nothing but memories?

What was that Marie was singing to the sweet-toned guitar she held so daintily, strapped in place with a blue riband?

"Ring out the old, ring in the new;
The year is dying, let it go;
Ring in the new; ring in the new."

Her voice seemed to falter a little on the repeat as it fell to a soft cadence. Was it possible that she was thinking of the old so tenderly—the old love, for instance? Ah! well, he did not know.

The yule log had burned out a week ago, but he had not the heart to take up the silvery ashes from the old, red brick hearth as yet. Ever since that other night he had kept his vow and closed his doors to all merriment for two long years. But somehow the lads and lassies of Gladbrook had lain their sympathies on his door-stone and worked themselves into his good graces once more, and before he realized what he was doing he had given up the silent rooms again to a Christmas party. But no more New Year frolics under his roof, he said; not until—well, maybe— He stopped short in his musings; still the remnant of the mistletoe hung in the bracket work of the old chandelier and he remembered now, as he looked at it, how pure and fair Alicia Merrill looked when Herman Montrose kissed her beneath its potent spell a week ago. She put him in mind, O, so much, of her. Covering his eyes for a moment with trembling hand, he went to the window and looked out. White and glistening as an angel's wing lay the snow on the intervening fields. Over there was her house, but she had been away now for a long time studying music, and he had heard, for she did not write to him, that her voice was simply divine, and as a musician she was wonderful.

Nevertheless, it was a night like this, nodding toward the flooding moonlight outside, that they—he and she—had their misunderstanding. A spasm of pain crossed his fine face as he caught his breath a little. He could not tell just how it came about, never clearly understanding, but that night so much like this, and New Year's Eve, too, marked the beginning of their diverging paths which came together again after awhile!

Tomorrow was the glad New Year again. Would its happy greetings be only mockery to him?

Suddenly a thought, which had smoldered in his mind for days, flashed up like a gleam of heavenly light, radiating his whole being.

She was coming home tonight on the late train; and he was so hungry to see her; only God knew how famished of heart he wos!

He would take the down town train get off at Rockland when she changed cars for Gladbrook. No one could prevent him from riding home in the same coach with her; and even that would be a blessed comfort. Then, maybe, something would come of it. Who knew?

In fifteen minutes he was inside his great coat, and locking the hall door, with a nervous, glad excitement stealing over him, like the coming of a new day. A ten-minutes' walk brought him to the station.

"Going away for the New Year?" queried the agent pleasantly, handing Reyburn the required pasteboard.

"O, a little way," he replied, absently, pulling on his gloves.

Scarcely had he settled himself in the outward bound train than Joe Antrim thumped him on the shoulder and sang out: "Hullo! Going away on a blow-out, I suppose? Well, so am I. Some are going away, and some are coming home."

In the awkward silence which followed Joe's voluble introduction, he seemed to read Reyburn's thoughts, for, without looking further for reply, he began again: "Miss Summerfield is coming tonight, they say; and they say, too, that she is bringing her best fellow with her. Gladbrook looks for a wedding at the Summerfield home tomorrow. But, of course, I don't know; it is only gossip, maybe."

Having thus delivered himself, Joe Antrim, without waiting for reply, betook himself to the smoker, leaving Reyburn in just the state of mind he intended, half-way between insanity and desperate intent.

But by and by Reyburn's mind cleared to Joe's last sentence. Only gossip. Of course that was all; but Joe was mean to hash it over, to him of all persons, and in such an insinuating manner, too. Well, he would go on to Rockland now if he met her complete bridal party; he would see for himself, and if it was all true, why, he would not go home that night, and perhaps Gladbrook would never see him again.

At Rockland he had only a few minutes to wait between trains, and already the home bound one was waiting on a side track. Purchasing his ticket he ensconced himself where he could plainly see the passengers leave the cross train.

"Now for the bridal party, at least the bride and groom," he said, trying to be jocular with himself, although his face was very white and his mouth twitched nervously.

At the cry "train, train," everybody began to bustle about. Friends, baggage and good-bys were mixed up indiscriminately, but Leigh was very still. He could hear his anxious heart beat out its suspense in great suffocating leaps, as the fateful train thundered in.

Sure enough, there was Miss Summerfield; and the fine looking young man who helped her alight also took charge of her baggage.

Heaven have mercy! Were gossip and Joe Antrim right, after all? But pshaw! any chivalrous fellow traveler would have done as much.

Notwithstanding this plausible thought, Leigh slipped into the home bound coach like a thief, taking the corner seat in the rear end of the car.

When Miss Summerfield came in, the terrible groom-to-be, to whom the bridal party had dwindled, even he, was not in attendance. Marie carried her own "grip."

The man felt a tremor of hope quiver all over him, something like an electric current. She took the third seat from the door and leaned her head on her hand wearily. A strange air for a bride, thought the man in the corner. He could not see her face, but some way felt that this New Year's Eve was not what she wished. O, was she in trouble, too? He had half a mind to go to her; the seat directly behind her was providentially empty; he could whisper "Marie" over the back of her seat when his courage warranted it. At the next stop he took advantage of the stir of the passengers and slipped into the coveted groove. Blessed privilege! He had not been near, so near her for years, and his heart was on fire. When he could wait no longer, he whispered over the barrier: "Marie!"

She looked up surprised and startled. After the confusion had left her lovely face, she gave him her hand gingerly and asked in strained tones: "How came you here, Mr. Reyburn?"

"I could not help it," he confessed, flushing, but looking straight at her. "I wanted to be near you once more. You don't know how miserable I am without you."

There was a world of emotion in the undertone, but he kept bravely on:

"I came down to Rockland for nothing else than that I might get a glimpse of you. I felt it would comfort me to ride home in the same coach—tonight of all nights."

He stopped and looked at her in such a pitiful, hungry-hearted way. It was all out now, this confession of his. He meant to make it at the risk of everything before his heart failed him—and he had done so.

Of course she could do what she pleased with it, and him, too; he had staked and would win or lose, all. Putting his elbow on the barrier and leaning a little toward her, he waited for her to speak. And her face was a study. Presently she gasped out: "Then you aren't to be married tonight?"

The interrogation snapped the last thread holding Leigh Reyburn's great love in reserve.

"Marie, darling! Could you—did you think—O, Heaven! as if I could love anyone but you! O, Marie!"

The whiteness of her face was terrible to see; but it all dawned upon her at once.

"I—I—O, Leigh!"—she put out both her hands, and two great tears stole down her cheeks to finish the sentence more eloquently than words.

When the train stopped at Gladbrook, a very happy couple alighted. And out across the moonlit snow, from the belfry bars of the gray stone church came the merry chime of bells:

"Ring out the old, ring in the new;
The year is dying; let it go."

"Ring in the new," said Leigh, drawing her arm through his. "The years of misunderstanding are dead; let them go, dearest."

"We will," she answered, softly and happily.

And Joe Antrim laughed in his sleeve, and said to the bright New Year morning: "I am glad I set those two simpletons right by a bit of strategy. A little prevarication, ahem! But all is fair in love and war."

There is no such thing as an insignificant enemy.

DEFECTIVE PAGE