

AT BAY

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At bay by Mrs. Alexander

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MRS. ALEXANDER

AT BAY

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BY

MRS. ALEXANDER, pseud.

[Hector], Mrs. Annie (Frew)

CHICAGO

W. B. CONKEY COMPANY

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR
IN UNIFORM STYLE*

*ADMIRAL'S WARD
AT BAY
BEATON'S BARGAIN
BY WOMAN'S WIT
CROOKED PATH, THE
FRERES, THE
FORGING THE FETTERS
HERITAGE OF LANGDALE
MAID, WIFE OR WIDOW
MAMMON
SECOND LIFE, A
WHICH SHALL IT BE?*

*CHICAGO
W. B. CONKEY COMPANY*

A T B A Y.

CHAPTER I.

STRIKING THE TRAIL.

PARIS on a bright April morning. Can any city make a brighter, braver show under a clear blue sky and a brilliant sun, the chestnuts in the Champs Elysees and Tuileries gardens bursting into bloom, the flower-market of the Madeleine a mass of color, exhaling delicious perfume, the fair purchasers in the first freshness of their spring attire, the tide of business and of pleasure at the fullest flood. It is a sight to fill any heart tolerably free from pressing anxiety with an irresistible sense of youth.

Though the month was still young, the weather was warm enough to make open windows an agreeable addition to the comfort of a pretty little *salon* in the *entre-sol* of Meurice's hotel, where an elderly lady was seated at a table on which a dainty *déjeuner*, and a couple of bottles, inscribed respectively "Moselle" and "Pomard," was laid out.

She was not handsome, never could have been handsome, her face was broad and strong, with small twinkling black eyes, and a heavy jaw. Her figure still showed traces of the symmetry for which she had been remarkable, and the hand she had stretched out to take another oyster, was fine both in shape and color. Her rich black silk dress, the lace of her cap, the jewels on her fingers, all her surroundings indicated wealth,—her expression, comfortable self-satisfaction.

She finished her oyster with an air of enjoyment, and then looking at her watch, murmured "he is late"—as she spoke, the door was opened, and a waiter announced "M. Glynn."

The visitor was a tall, broad-shouldered man, of perhaps thirty-five or more, with very dark hair, eyes, and complexion, well dressed and easy in his bearing and movements, yet not looking quite like a club or a drawing-room man.

"This is not your usual punctuality, Hugh," said the lady smiling benignly, as she stretched out a welcoming hand, "but you make your own punishment! Time, tide, and *vol au vents*, wait for no man."

"I have a thousand apologies to make! You may be sure the delay was unavoidable or I should not have kept you waiting."

"But I have *not* waited! Take some oysters—and then tell me what has kept you, if it is a discreet question."

"Perfectly. No oysters, thank you. Do not let me delay the routine of your *déjeuné*. Just as I was leaving the 'Bourse,' I ran against Deering of Denham, who insisted on walking almost to the door with me."

"Travers Deering? I did not know he was in Paris. Is Lady Frances with him?"

"She is, for he honored me with an invitation to dinner to-morrow, mentioning that Lady Frances would be very glad to see me. I was engaged, however; I don't find dining with Travers Deering a cheerful occupation. Though Lady Frances keeps a brave front there is a profound sadness in her eyes, or I fancy there is."

"Fancy! yes; I suspect your fancy is tolerably vivid still. Now eat your luncheon, and we will talk presently." She proceeded to press various dainties on her guest, who ate moderately.

"I don't think you care for good things as much as I do," said the hostess, leaning back in her chair; "I am always vexed with people who don't care what they eat; it shows deficiency of brain power. Now tell me,—have you succeeded this morning?"

"Yes," he returned with a smile, as he poured out another half-glass of Pomard; "I have disposed of all your Honduras shares, not at par, but at a trifling decrease. Here," drawing out his pocket-book, "are bills and notes to the amount of fifteen hundred pounds. I am glad you are out of the concern, you might have lost

double the amount; pray avoid these foreign bubble companies in future, none of them are to be trusted, Lady Gethin,—none that offer high interest are."

"My dear Hugh, I never will do anything without your advice again; I have had a perfect nightmare about these horrid things. I am no miser, but I hate to lose money; I am very glad you managed to get rid of these shares so soon, for I want to go back to London to-morrow; the rooms I have had altered in that old house of mine, are ready, I am dying to furnish them."

"Well, you had better post this money to your bankers, and register your letter, than carry it about with you."

"Yes, it would be the best plan. Shall you stay here much longer?"

"Some little time; I have a special mission to execute for the House, which may keep me a few weeks."

"Be sure you come and see me directly you return; and do go and see Lady Frances Deering, she would be a charming woman if she let herself go. I was always interested in her. Why can't she get on with Deering? he is good-looking, well bred, well thought of, and not very much older than herself."

"Perhaps she does get on with him," said Glynn.

"I used not to care for Deering," replied Lady Gethin. "He had a quarrel with a cousin whom I liked very much, and who was killed afterwards, poor fellow. I have forgotten what the quarrel was about—a woman, I think, and I have an idea Travers behaved badly; but he is quite an irreproachable personage *now*, and monstrously civil to me, especially since poor dear Sir Peter bequeathed me all his real and personal property. Then, you know, we are second cousins, two or three times removed."

"Oh indeed! Well, he is very civil to me too, and I am certainly no relation but——"

"Aha! you are dearer than kith or kin," interrupted Lady Gethin; "you can give him financial tips, and chances of turning, I won't say an honest penny, but simple hundreds into splendid thousands by the varied sources of information you command. Ah! were I a man, I should like to be a financier, which is 'high falutin' for stock-broker."

Glynn smiled. "I have had very few business trans-

actions with Deering, or for him. He is wealthy enough without help from any one. By the way, he is more inflammable than I imagined; we were at the Auteuil races together the day before yesterday, and when sauntering about we were both struck by a girl who was in an open carriage with two other ladies; she was certainly pretty—more than pretty—and Deering seemed quite fascinated, he could not keep away. It was not like his usual cool, high-bred indifference to all mundane things, to go back again and again to stare at the young lady, for you know he is rather a decent fellow as men go."

"You don't say so!" cried Lady Gethin, with keen interest. "What would Lady Frances have said?"

"The last time we went to look at the bright particular star, she and her party had left their carriage," continued Glynn. "Deering then seemed to pull himself together, and to remember he was not alone; but I could see he was desperately vexed to have lost sight of her, though he tried to laugh at himself, and said she was wonderfully like some one he used to know. I was both surprised and amused by his manœuvres. I left him before the last race, and I rather fancy he was going to renew his search for her."

"Ah!" said Lady Gethin; "no doubt, thereby hangs a tale."

"Perhaps so. The young lady, however, is very young—little more than seventeen or eighteen, and she certainly did not recognize him—nor even notice him."

"The wisest have their weak moments," observed Lady Gethin, with an air of wisdom. "I certainly have never heard any queer stories about Deering. Did you see any one else you knew at Auteuil?"

"A few second-rate racing men, and George Verner."

"Oh, he generally haunts the Deerings when he is not at sea." After a good deal more talk, partly business, partly wittily told scandal, Glynn rose to take leave. "I dine at the Café de Florence to-day, with Captain Methvin and Madame Gauthier; will you join us?"

"I am unfortunately already engaged; so must forego that pleasure," said Glynn.

"I shall see you then as soon as you return to London, and be sure you tell me anything fresh about the Deerings."

"I don't fancy there will be any exciting *esclandre* in that quarter. If the weather continues as fine as it has been for the last few days, you will have a pleasant journey. Good-morning, Lady Gethin."

When Glynn left the hotel he walked briskly for a few minutes towards the Louvre, then he gradually relaxed his pace, and his thoughts disengaged themselves from his surroundings, and presented him with a picture they had frequently mirrored during the last three days.

After making a few purchases at the bookstalls of the Palais Royal, he made his way down the Rue St. Honoré, finally coming to a halt at the crowded crossing opposite the Madeleine, where the contrary currents coming from the Boulevards, meet the tributary tide of the Rue Royale. He was in no hurry; it amused him to see the huge omnibuses disgorging their contents; to watch eager women with parcels, and refractory children tightly held by the hand, make ineffectual dashes at the opposite shore, and come scurrying back again, baffled, but still resolute. To observe the little flower-girls plying their trade, and hear the sharp bargaining between them and their customers.

Suddenly, however, his eyes brightened; the expression of a lazy looker-on vanished, and was replaced by one of keen, vivid interest, as his glance fell on the original of the picture which had haunted him since the day of the races at Auteuil. A slight girlish figure, in a pale gray dress; a mantlet or scarf, edged with black lace, drawn closely round her; she was crowned by a pretty little hat, also bordered with black lace, and adorned with a large bouquet of primroses and tufts of narrow black velvet ribbon. Under the hat beamed a pair of thoughtful, earnest, dark-blue eyes—large and lustrous; eyes that none could pass unnoticed; long lashes; distinct, but delicate eyebrows; a clear, pale complexion; a sweet though not very small mouth, and abundant light golden-brown hair, made up a whole that might have attracted the attention of even a more "potent, grave, and reverend Signor" than Travers Deering of Denham.

This was the face and figure that had dwelt in Hugh Glynn's imagination since he had first seen them. In any case he must have noticed so fair a girl; but there was something in the effect she produced on Deering, that