A KNIGHT OF THE HIGHWAY

By CLINTON SCOLLARD,
Author of "A Man at Arms," "The Son of a Tory," Etc.

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CHAPTER XIV.

COMMENCEMENT AT MONROE COLLEGE.

It was the evening of commencement day at Monroe college. Upon the wide veranda of one of the fraternity houses sat Philip Rossiter smoking a cigar and gazing through an opening in the trees at the moonlight-flooded valley. A very different man he was in thought and appearance from the individual who had strolled about the college campus that Sabbath morning more than a year and a half previous. The sky of fortune began to clear for him the day he became a member of the staff of the Evening Star, and there had been no recurrence of cloud. Early in his career upon the paper, in the absence of a more experienced reporter, he had interviewed a distinguished personage with unwonted tact, and thus leaped at a bound into the graces of the editor-in-chief. Inspired by his success, he tried sketch writing, the line of effort in which he had formerly won praise. His vivid pictures of the slums, of tramp life, of unusual police court episodes, quickly attracted attention. From these sketches to fiction was a natural and easy transition, and he suddenly found himself a contributor to one of the best magazines.

Rossiter was again the neatly dressed man of yore, and to the ease of manner which had always been his was added a subtle trace of independence of assurance that was wholly new to him. He bore in his heart but one burden, his love for Sylvia Densmore; and yet he often confessed to himself that the memory of her winsome personality carried with it more of sweetness than of sadness. Her image and the recollection of the hop-field days, more than the importuning of friends, had drawn him back to Hintonville and the reunion with his college classmates.

It was his first holiday since he had begun work upon the Evening Star, and it proved to him a time of restful delight—delight within whose translucent amber he was conscious of but a single flaw. Three of the four days for which he had been granted leave of absence had slipped by. Should he on the morrow drive over to the Merton farm and have a chat with the good people—Jack Parmelee and Mr. and Mrs. Merton and their daughter? Every night since his arrival in Hintonville he had put to himself this question, but the visit was yet to be made. Passionately as he longed for some news of Miss Densmore, he dreaded to hear of what he reflected must, in all probability, have long since taken place—her marriage.

For nearly an hour carriages had been passing, conveying students and young ladies and their chaperones to the gymnasium, where the senior ball was that night to be held. Rossiter's special friends were making calls in town, and within the fraternity house the under-classmen were entertaining several prospective freshmen. Rossiter was hence left quite to himself, yet he was in no wise lonely, his thoughts being very agreeable company. Presently strains of music floated down to him across the campus. For a while he listened to them dreamily, then it occurred to him that it might be interesting to see what an up-to-date college ball was like, so he rose and sauntered towards the gymnasium.

As he emerged from the maple shadow, he found the combination of music and moonlight so beguiling

HE SEATED HIMSELF ON THE STEPS OF THE CHAPEL.

that he was in no hurry to venture farther, so he seated himself upon the steps of the chapel, which adjoined the gymnasium, directly beneath the symmetrical finger of the spire.

To the north he could mark the spasmodic twinkling of the electric towers of Illica, and there, in the vague purple distance to the southeast, lay the Merton farm.

His face was set in this direction when an unusually lively air from the orchestra stirred him from his reverie. With something like a sigh he turned towards the gymnasium, and was soon climbing to the third floor. As he wheeled about to survey the room, on reaching the top stair, a gay spectacle met his eye. Great streamers of old gold and blue—the college colors—were festooned from beam to beam above the whirling dancers, and at intervals flags and trophies captured at intercollegiate meets were suspended. There was a general flutter of gauzy fabrics and a blending of talk and laughter that ever and anon surged above a dip in the music.

Among the patronesses, sitting not far from where he stood, Rossiter espied the wife of one of the professors, a lady who had formerly shown him many kindnesses, and he crossed to speak with her. He then found a seat about half way down the room in one of the deep windows. Could anything be more blithesome, more full of debonair life, he thought, than the scene before him? They were draining the clearest wine of the cup of youth, these gay dancers!

For an instant the floor at his right was nearly clear, and as his eyes traversed this space they fell upon a woman of middle age and a young lady sitting upon an improvised divan on the opposite side of the room. He started as though touched by an electric current. Was it—could it be? Did his vision not deceive him? He sprang up, but at that instant two dancers swept between him and the face on which he had suddenly become strenuously intent.

The dancers passed. Yes, he was not mistaken. It was the girl he had known as Sylvia Densmore. His heart gave a throb. One of the ball committee was hastening by, a student whom Rossiter had spoken with that day at the fraternity house. Rossiter seized him by the arm.

"Can you tell me," said he, "who that girl is yonder?" indicating the place with a nod. "The one upon the divan."

The student leaned forward so that he could see between the spinning couples.

"That's Miss Densmore, of Illica," he answered. "Would you like to be introduced to her? She's——" He stopped, amazed. Rossiter had caught only his first words, and was already making his way around the edge of the gyrating throng.

She was Miss Densmore still! A new hope sang in his brain, and his heart began dancing in rhythm to the violins. He was perhaps 20 feet distant when Miss Densmore realized that some one was approaching and glanced towards him, casually at first, then with a quick, amazed intentness. He saw the color (she had more than formerly) recede from her cheeks and then flood back again. She rose a little unsteadily.

"Is it—is it possible?" she exclaimed. "Mr. Rossiter!"

"Yes," he answered, beaming upon her as he clasped the hand which she extended.

She surveyed at a glance his trimly clad figure.

"Then you deceived us, after all," she said, with a shade of reproach in her tone. "You were masquerading!"

"No! no!" cried Rossiter. "If you will permit me, I will—"

Miss Densmore seemed suddenly to recollect herself, and presented Rossiter to the lady with whom she had been chatting—her mother. With Mrs. Densmore (a refined, low-spoken woman) Rossiter exchanged a few polite words, and then, at the daughter's suggestion, seated himself by the side of the latter upon the divan. He could but realize that the girl was agitated, and as for himself, his wits seemed all at once to have flown to the four corners of the earth.

"Monroe was my college," he after a little heard himself saying; "that's how it happens that I'm here. There was a class reunion, you know. I'm not in array, as you see, but it's so long since I've been at a college ball that I couldn't resist when I heard the music. I didn't dream of meeting you."

"I haven't attended the college parties for a year or two," Miss Densmore replied, "and it's quite by chance that I'm here to-night. Mamma and I drove out with a cousin of mine from Buffaland who is engaged to Mr. Wolffe, an old Illica friend."

Wolffe! That was the name of Miss Densmore's visitor the last night at the Mertons'. It was burned deeply into Rossiter's memory. But how strangely mistaken he had been! An intoxicating elation seized him, and then the music ceased! He glanced eagerly at Miss Densmore's card, which she was nervously fingering, and noted that all save one of the remaining dances were taken. She caught his look, and there was something assuring in her smile.

"May I have that?" he said, pointing to the unengaged dance.

"Yes," she replied softly, still smiling, and then an exuberant senior rushed up and bore her away.

Rossiter's eyes followed her with a gleam of rapture. For a brief space lights, music, whirling figures were as naught to him. He saw only the delicate contour of her face; heard only the low cadence of her voice. With a violent effort he shook off this waking spell and turned towards Mrs. Densmore, but someone had engaged her in conversation and he was free. He slipped into a vacant window-seat and watched for Miss Densmore's reappearance. Presently she floated by (or so it seemed to him), and after that only for an occasional instant did he lose sight of her.

So pleasurable was his occupation that he was not inclined to rail at time as a laggard. Could he not possess his soul in patience for a few moments when so short a period before he had thought to wait at the gate of the court of love, a poor, starving mendicant, for a lifetime? Doubt never assailed his heart; what he should say never entered his mind. He did not try to reason out this or that, to analyze his joy. He felt a wonderful thrill go through him, and realized that at last he had risen to a complete mastery of himself. Love, working through one of the sweetest of womankind, had wrought the miracle.

The music was silent when Miss Densmore placed her hand upon Rossiter's arm, but there were several couples promenading, with whom they fell into line. As they passed an open window a gentle breeze touched their faces and lifted ever so lightly the lace about Miss Densmore's throat. She glanced out into the night, and Rossiter's gaze followed hers.

"How like the evening of the hop-dance!" she exclaimed,—"the moonlight and the whispering of the leaves! Do you remember?"

"Remember!" echoed Rossiter; "indeed I do. There are some seats upon the campus," he continued; "shall we not go out for a little as we did then?"

"Yes, if you wish it," she said.

In an ash cluster, a few yards across the sward and directly opposite the gymnasium, they discovered an unoccupied bench reaching from tree to tree.

Rossiter did not hesitate, did not now hang back, did not trifle with his fate. He had done with indecision forever.

"I wonder if you ever dreamed," he began, as they seated themselves, "that your cousin once interrupted me when I was on the point of telling you the story of my life—and something else?"

Miss Densmore did not reply.

"I would like to tell you the story now," continued Rossiter—"that is, if I may, and then——"

"But suppose I know," interrupted Miss Densmore, "since you have assured me you were not masquerading when I met you? Suppose I have guessed it?"

With her fine sensitiveness, she thought to save him from what might be a humiliating confession. He was not, however, in a mood to spare himself.

"Not at all!" he cried. "Why, I was an outcast, a common vagabond!"

"Never quite that!" she remonstrated. "But whatever you were, you are your better self again. You have conquered."

"Conquered!" he repeated fervently; "yes, thanks to you, my love, to you! Can you," he went on, his voice growing husky with emotion, "will you help me to be the conqueror still?"

"I will," she answered simply, and there was an infinite trust and tenderness in her tone.

Their hands met and their lips. Within the music burst into a jubilant air; above, there was a rythmical rustle among the leaves as the breeze swept them aside and let the moonlight crown the final scene in Rossiter's regeneration.

[THE END.]

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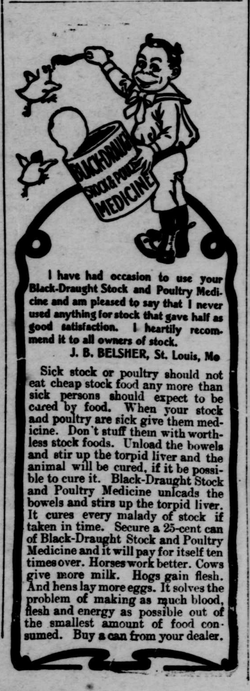

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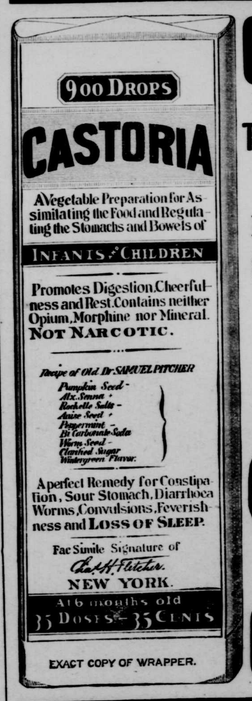

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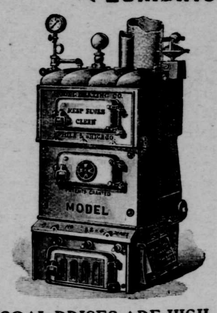

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P. M.	P. M.	A. M.	A. M.	Miles				A. M.	A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	
2.00	3.15	.....	7.00	.....	Lv.	Baltimore	Ar.	11.40	.....	9.00	7.40	.....
3.55	5.10	.....	8.55	25.00	Ar.		Lv.	9.40	.....	7.00	5.40	.....
4.00	5.15	11.15	9.05	.....	Lv.	Love Point	Ar.	9.32	10.53	5.58	5.05	.....
4.07	5.22	11.30	9.14	28.81		Stevensville		9.24	10.45	5.48	4.56	.....
4.10	5.25	11.45	9.21	30.41		Chester		9.21	10.38	5.43	4.52	.....
f 4.13	f 5.28	f11.48	f 9.23	.....		Narrow		f 9.18	f10.33	f 5.38	f 4.48	.....
4.18	5.33	12.00	9.28	34.50		Winchester		9.13	10.28	5.32	4.43	.....
f 4.20	f 5.35	f12.03	f 9.31	35.82		Wallace		f 9.10	f10.24	f 5.24	f 4.39	.....
4.25	5.40	12.10	9.37	38.07		Queen-town		9.04	10.18	5.14	4.33	.....
4.45	5.58	12.27	9.55	44.36	Ar.	Centreville	Ar.	9.55	.....	.....	.....	.....
4.00	4.50	.....	8.35	.....	Lv.		Lv.	8.35	10.00	4.50	4.00	.....
f 4.30	f 5.45	.....	f 9.44	40.40		Bloomingdale		f 8.59	.....	f 5.08	f 4.18	.....
f 4.35	f 5.50	.....	9.52	43.45		Wye Mills		f 8.53	.....	5.01	4.11	.....
f 4.42	f 5.56	.....	10.00	46.43		Wilkinsby		f 8.47	.....	4.53	4.03	.....
.....	6.04	.....	.....	.....		D. & C. Junction		f 8.40	.....	.....	.....	.....
4.53	6.06	.....	10.12	50.48		Queen Anne		8.38	.....	4.39	3.49	.....
5.00	6.12	.....	10.20	53.68		Downes		8.32	.....	4.30	3.40	.....
f 5.04	f 6.15	.....	f10.24	55.05		Tuckahoe		f 8.29	.....	f 4.25	f 3.37	.....
5.11	6.21	.....	10.33	57.99		Denton		8.24	.....	4.20	3.30	.....
5.17	6.27	.....	10.48	60.89		Hobbs		8.18	.....	4.04	3.14	.....
5.26	6.35	.....	10.58	64.57		Hickman		8.10	.....	3.52	3.02	.....
f 5.30	f 6.39	.....	f11.02	66.40		Adamsville		f 8.06	.....	f 3.44	f 2.54	.....
f 5.35	f 6.44	.....	f11.08	68.55		Blanchard		f 8.00	.....	f 3.37	f 2.47	.....
5.43	6.50	.....	11.18	71.80		Greenwood		7.55	.....	3.30	2.40	.....
f 5.51	f 6.57	.....	f11.31	75.47		Owens		f 7.47	.....	f 3.10	f 2.10	.....
f 5.56	f 7.01	.....	f11.36	77.57		Oakley		f 7.42	.....	f 3.05	f 2.05	.....
6.04	7.08	.....	11.43	81.07	Lv.	Ellendale	Ar.	7.36	.....	2.48	1.58	.....
f 6.12	f 7.15	.....	f11.51	84.91		Wolfe		f 7.29	.....	f 2.29	f 1.39	.....
6.20	7.22	.....	11.58	87.57		Milton		7.22	.....	2.21	1.31	.....
f 6.28	f 7.30	.....	f12.08	91.57		Whitesboro		f 7.14	.....	f 2.11	f 1.21	.....
f 6.31	f 7.33	.....	f12.11	92.82		Overbrook		f 7.11	.....	f 2.08	f 1.18	.....
6.40	7.42	.....	12.20	96.32	Ar.	Lewes	Lv.	7.03	.....	2.00	1.10	.....
P. M.	P. M.	P. M.	P. M.					A. M.	A. M.	P. M.	P. M.	

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2 50	6 35	Baltimore	11 23	6 48
3 20	7 40	Philadelphia	10 54	5 44
4 02	8 23	Wilmington	10 06	5 00
5 22	9 48	Clayton	8 56	3 44
5 31	9 57	Kenton	8 41	3 35
f 5 40	f 10 06	Hartley	f 8 32	f 3 26
f 5 47	f 10 08	Slaughter	f 8 30	f 3 24
5 49	10 15	Marydel	8 23	3 17
f 5 55	f 10 21	Henderson	f 8 17	f 3 13
f 6 01	f 10 27	Goldsboro	f 8 11	f 3 05
6 10	10 36	Greensboro	8 02	2 56
6 19	10 45	Ridgely	7 53	2 47
6 27	10 53	Queen Anne	7 44	2 38
f 6 36	f 11 02	Cordova	f 7 35	f 2 29
f 6 42	f 11 08	Chapel	f 7 29	f 2 23
6 54	11 20	Easton	7 20	2 14
f 7 08	f 11 31	Trappe	f 7 04	f 1 58
7 17	11 42	ar. Oxford lv.	6 55	1 49
P. M	A. M.		A. M	P. M.

"f" stops only on notice to Conductor or Agent, or on signal.

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