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#### CHAPTER VIII—Continued

-8-"The best trained automobile in America," said Sanmy, with his customary modesty. "Kindness is what does it."

"So sorry to be late." said Mrs. Sage, as Oliver ceremoniously handed her out of the car.

"What is that I hear, Oliver?" said the minister as he stepped out of the car. Jane and Mrs. Sammy had preceded him. "Is it true the detectives are here and expect to start this ridical lous search tomorrow?"

"They're here all right," replied Oliver, "One of them tried to sell you a set of Dickens the other day." "What !" cried Jane, gripping Oli-

ver's arm. "What, that man a detective?" She was startled.

"No less a person than Mr. Sherlock Hawkshaw Malone, the renowned sleuth," said Oliver, smiling.

"The beast the beast!" she cried hotly, "Good heavens! That accounts for the interest he took in your father's disappearance."

"At any rate," said Mr. Sage, complacently, "he did not succeed in selling us a set of Dickens."

Jane started to say something, but, joined the other women on the porch. A queer little chill as of misgiving speech seemed to fail him. stole over her. .

"Hey Oliver" called out Sammy from down the drive where he was Oliver?" she asked tremulously. parking the car. "Come here a minute, will you? Say," he went on low- "It's about you, Jane. You've hist got ering his voice as Oliver came up. "I've just picked up something rich Fellow, came in day before yesterday and showed me a volume of the 'Arabian Nights, absolutely unexpurgated-" "I know. And you fell for it, didn't

"Sh. Not so loud. My wife doesn't know a thing about it. But say who told you about it?

Then Oliver told him Sammy. feaned against the mudguard and swore softly.

"Say, I wish I could remember what I said to the guy about about your father. Lord, he had me talking a blue streak. Darn my fool eyes! You'd think I'd have sense enough to- Oh. well, go ahead and kick me. Offie. Right here Just as hard as you like." "Come on. They're waiting for us." You needn't worry, old boy."

Sammy and Oliver entered the sitting room, Mrs. Sage was standing almost directly under the chandelier. talking to dumpy Mrs. Grimes; the light from above fell upon her auburn crown, flooded her magnificent shoulders and arms, and then wavered timidly, almost helplessly, as it first came in contact with resplendent opposition. The actress was a head taller than Mrs. Grimes, who nevertheless bravely stood her ground and faced comparison with all the hardihood of the righteons.

Mr. Slage, with a distinctly bewildered and somewhat embarrassed expression keeping company with the proud and doting smile that seemed to be stamped upon his lean visage, stood across the room with his daughter and Mrs. Sammy.

"Do you mean to tell me Oliver, that those blighters intend to begin digging up your place tomorrow?" Josephine asked incredulously,

Oliver laughed. 'I think we'll all rather enjoy the excitement, Aunt that led to the swamp rond. Josephine," he said. "I suppose they'll begin prying up the kitchen floor to Then fiercely; "Who are you going to morrow, or digging trenches in the

cellar, or tearing up the flower-beds." She looked at him narrowly. "What the kitchen floor?

"They don't expect to find him at most mockingly. all," replied Ofiver, with unintentional shortness.

Jane. Their eyes met and their gaze was suddenly conscious of what must ber before he spoke. have seemed to her a serious intensity in his own. He knew now that be was his lips and fought against the to marry you?" strange, mad impulse to shout that he was in love with her, that she was

take her away from him. And she? She was thinking of that dry, hot night when he came to see her after leaving his father, out of breath, his shoes covered with fresh black mud. There had been no rain for weeks. The roads were thick with spoken to her about them, he had wondered where Oliver had been to her to-to become a widow?"

And she, herself, had never ceased to wonder.

Oliver was strangely restless during dinner, and immediately after the company rose from the table at its conclusion he asked Jane to come with

him for a little stroll in the open air. "I want to speak to you about something," he urged. "Better throw something over your shoulders. The night

"Ought you to go off and leave the others, Oliver?" she began, a queer little catch, as of alarm, in her voice. Muriel and Sammy-"

"Come along," he pleaded, "They won't mind. I must see you alone for a few minutes Jane."

"I will get my wrap," she sald, after a moment's hesitation. "It may be chilly outside." "Why, you're shivering now, Janie,"

he whispered anxiously, as he threw her wrap over her shoulders, "Are you

She did not reply. He followed her out upon the porch and down the steps. No word passed between them until they had turned the bend in the drive and were outside the radius of light shed from the windows. He was the first to speak,

"See here, Jane," he blurted out. instead, abruptly turned away and "I'm-I'm terribly troubled and upset." That was as far as he got,

> She laid her hand on his arm. "Is it about about the detective.

"No." he answered, almost roughly.



He Started Violently, the Words Dying on His Lips.

to answer me. Are your going to be married?

"Yes," she said, her voice so low he

could scarcely hear the monosyllable. They walked in silence for twenty paces or more, turning down the path

"I-1 was afraid so," he muttered.

She sighed. "I am going to marry the first man who asks me, 'she re atter tot.' Do they expect to find your plied and, having cast the die, was father buried in the cellar or under instantly mistress of berself. "Have you any objections?" she asked, al-

If he heard the question he paid no heed to it. She felt the muscles of He glanced over his shoulder at his strong forearm grow taut, and she heard the quick intake of his breath. held for some seconds. He detected She waited. She began to hum a vathe clouded, troubled look in hers and grant little air. It seemed an age to

"Jane," he said gently and steadily, "if you were a man and in my placein love—that he always had been in I mean in my predicament—would you jove with Jane, that he always would go so far as to ask the girl you love be in love with her. He compressed better than anything in all the world

"There couldn't be any harm in asking her. She could refuse you, you is-all his-and that no man should know."

> m irmured thickly. "It-it may come "It-it cannot come true," she said

"There's the gypsy's prophecy," he

"It cannot. Oliver." "Still it is something to be considered," he said heavily and judicially. dust. And Lansing, too, had noticed His hand closed over hers and gripped that his shoes were muddy. He had it tightly. "If you were in my place wouldn't you hesitate about inviting

get into mud up to his shoe tops! Oh, I love you, Oliver, when your I didn't ask any one how to do it."

voice sounds as if it end a haugh in

it." she whispered "In a month I will be thirty," he went on, his heart as light as air. "I might ask her to give me a therty-day option, or something like that."

"You goose!" He pressed her arm to his side, and was serious when he spoke again, after a moment's pause.

"I have never asked a girl to marry me, Jane. Never in all my life. Do you know why?"

She buried her face against his shoulder. A vast, overwhelming thrill raced through him. His arms went about

her and drew her close, "I never realized it, Jane I never even thought of it till just a little while ago but now I know that I

have always loved you." Her arm stole up about his neck, she raised her chin.

"I began calling myself your wife, Oliver, when I was a very little girlwhen we first began playing house together, and you were my bushand and the dolls were our children."

He kissed her rapturously, "Oh, my God!" he burst out, "You'll never know how miserable I have been these last few weeks how horribly jealous I've been."

She stroked his cheek-possessively, 'I haven't been very happy myself." she sighed. "1-I wasn't quite sure you would ever, ever ask me to be your wife."

"That reminds me." he cried hoyishly. "Will you marry me, Miss

"Of course I will. Didn't I say I would marry the first-what was that?"

As she uttered the exclamation under her breath, she drew away from him quickly, looking over her shoulder at the thick, shadowy underbrush that lined the road below them.

"I didn't bear anything," said he, turning with her. "It must have been my heart trying to burst out of itsh! Listen. There is someone over there in the brush. D-n his sneaking eyes, I'll-"

eried, clatching his arm. "You must fume. No toilet table is complete size Mandalay St. Der not leave me glone. I'm I'm afraid, without them .- Advertisement, ollie. I am always afraid when I am near that awful swamp."

"Let's walk down the road a little way, Jane," said he stubbornly, "Don't be afraid. I'll stick close beside von." "You won't go down into the tions?

swamp," she cried anxiously.

"No. Just along the road." They ran down the little embankment into the road. After fifteen or twenty paces Oliver pressed her arm warningly and stopped to listen. Ahead of them, some distance away, they heard toottalls, the slow, regular trend of a may walking in the fond. They stond still listening. Suddenly

the footfalls ceased. "He knows we have stopped," said Oliver. "Ne's listening to see if we

are followink She was glent for a moment. "You remember what I said about being spied upon Oliver. I feel it. I feel it all about me. You are being watched all the time, Oliver. Oh, how hateful,

how unfair!". "See here, Jane, I've been thinking. It's wrong for me to ask you to marry me till all this mess is over. It's wrong for me to even ask you to consider vourself engaged to me."

"Nobody believes that you had any-

thing to do with-"My dear girl, hobody knows what to believe," said he seriously. "That's the worst of it. My father is gone. I was, so far as anyone knows, he last to see him. As you say, no one may believe that I had anything to do with it, but where is he? A queer thing has just happened You know Peter Hines that queer old bird who has always lived in the cabin at the lower end of the swamp? He has skipped out. Boarded up the door and windows and -'

He started violently, the words dying on his lips. OT to the south, beyoud the almost impenetrable wall of night, gleamed far-off lights in the wall of Peter Hines' shack.

"He must have returned," he said, in an odd voice. "Those lights-"

"Let us go in dear," she pleaded. 1-1 hear something moving among the weeds down there. It's grisly, Ollver-creepy." Oliver yielded to her entreaties and they made their way back to the house.

Mrs. Sage was holding forth in her most effective English when the two entered the sitting-room. She may have eyed them narrowly for a second or two, but that was all.

Sammy Parr, however, who had been observing Oliver very closely, got up from his chair and marched across the room, his hand extended.

"Congratulations, old man!" he shouted joyously.

And little old Mrs, Grimes, from her place on the sofa, remarked, as she leaned back with a sigh of content : "Well, goodness knows it's about and eften for months-or must you

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"Oh I would love to compose, too," interrupted the prodigy; "how shall I set about it?"

"You will have to learn a great deal more and become older." "But you composed when you were

thirteen." "Yes," acknowledged Massenet, "but Historic Caboose

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Ethel (with a smile and a sky little to es. t idush) I don't know, pa. You see, he keeps me er se much in the dark. Mansfield Journal

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