

## *At the Risk of Life*

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They met together for the last time, and the meeting was a sad one. Poor Amy wept as if her little heart would break, and I am certain that a tear glistened in Robby Bertrand's eye, although he was a man. They had met to part.

Amy Raymond was the daughter of a wealthy merchant in a large town in one of the Western States, and Robby Bertrand was the son of a Scotch gentleman. His father had owned a large estate north of the Tweed, but by some means it had been for many years in that peculiar condition which, in England, is called "being in Chancery," or, in other words, the claimants to the estate got nothing from it, but the lawyers did.

Robby's father had been dead about a year, and almost hopeless of regaining the paternal acres, his son had come to this country, and about a month after his arrival had had the good luck to fall in with Amy Raymond, who had now for some time acknowledged artlessly her affection for him.

So far all was well; but their future did not depend upon the wishes of the lovers alone.

Mr. Raymond was a very wealthy man, and he naturally expected that his only daughter, Amy, should make "a good match." Robby Bertrand had entered into an engagement from which he hoped, but very vaguely, to realize as large a fortune as that which he laid claim to in his own country—"bonnie Scotland," as her loving sons call her. How all his plans were frustrated we shall see presently.

This was to be his last meeting with Amy, at least for a long time, for Mr. Raymond had sternly pronounced against the lover, whom he had never seen, and whose name even he did not know, directly he learned that he was poor. But fate had other things in store for the young couple. Young Bertrand was to go South about business—but he never went. Amy, so she *said*, was try to forget him, but she never did. So much for the permanency of human—lovers'—devices! The lovers, however, bade a most doleful farewell to each other, after the fashion of lovers in all ages, with many promises, and many sighs, and many k— There! I had nearly written the word. But you know what I mean, and as I am now going to talk seriously, I must not jest about the little love affairs of Amy and Robie. Lovers will ever be lovers—to the end of the world. Who can blame them?

When Amy got home, she was well scolded by her father for being out so long. He was no longer a young man, and any irregularity vexed him. People as they grow older become more precise. Amy, knowing that she could not justify herself, said nothing; but between the angry sentences which he uttered, she watched her time, and when there was at last a pause in his eloquence, she rushed up to him and throwing her arms around his neck, kissed him, saying:

"There now, papa, dear, I now I've been out long, but I won't do so again, if you'll forgive me

this time.”

Mr. Raymond was mollified, for he really loved his daughter. Kissing her tenderly, he said:

“Well, well, never mind; it is all past. We’ll say no more about it.”

Amy gave him his tea, and performed many loving little acts xxxxx how to practice. Her father’s ill-temper gradually passed away, but Amy grew more and more thoughtful, thinking of poor Robie.

Her father, who had for some time been watching her, said:

“You are absent tonight, Amy; how is that? If I were with you more, you would not look so sad. I have been thinking lately of taking a partner, but it is no easy thing to find a proper man. By the by,” he added, starting, “I forgot to say that I must be off tomorrow early. I have a long journey before me.”

Amy expressed her surprise, and asked a few ordinary questions about the proposed journey, and then set about seeing that everything was ready for her father.

The next morning at daybreak, after bidding a fond farewell to his daughter, the merchant set out. He took with him a large sum of money, as he had many heavy payments to make in connection with the particular business about which he went, but the journey was made in safety, and he found himself at the Newton station as well as could be expected at his age. He remained in Newton for several days, and transacted a good deal of business. The money which he brought with him he paid away; but he unexpectedly received several sums, so that when he was about to return home, he found that he had now nearly twice the amount which he had taken from home. This rather annoyed him, as not only might he have dispensed with bringing with him a sum which was rather inconvenient to withdraw from business at the time, but having so much money about his person made him anxious, for a reason which I shall explain. The road from the station to his own house, which he would be obliged to visit before he could go up to town and pay the money into the bank, was a long and lonely one, and a good many reports of highway robberies had been just then floating about. He had left his house in haste, and so had neglected to order the horse and trap to be sent over for him, and now he feared that in all probability he would have to walk the whole way from the station. As we before said, Mr. Raymond was a wealthy man, and at any other time the loss of such an amount, although it would have greatly annoyed him, would not have distressed him in his business to any extent. But just now money was very scarce, for it was a time of panic, and although hitherto the house of Raymond & Co. had been able to pay their way, any large loss at such a time might bring about a very critical state of affairs. Besides which, he had lately observed that several contracts which he had made, and which he was assured ought to have been very successful, had turned out signal failures. In fact, only the day before he started, he had mentioned the matter to Mr. Norton, his manager, a respectable young man in whom he placed every confidence, and had instructed him to examine

the books, etc., before he returned. To lose so large a sum would be very inconvenient just now. He must take every precaution.

These thoughts passed through the mind of the old gentleman as he sat in the car, journeying toward home. He was vexed with himself for not thinking of the difficulty before, and preparing against it: but he solaced himself with the remembrance that he had written to his manager, Mr. Norton, saying when he expected to return, and it was very possible that he would forward the intelligence to Miss Raymond, and Amy would be sure to send over to the station for her father. However, he thought he would make all things sure; so taking the bills which he had received from a small travelling desk, he enclosed them in a large envelope, and sealed them up, placing the packet in his pocketbook with other papers and a small sum of money which he carried for use.

He had before directed the envelope to a Mr. B. Noel, but it had no address, as he met Mr. Noel, and so never sent it. Still it was the only large envelope which he had about him there, and though spoiled, it served the purpose of keeping the bills safely together.

The train arrived at the station, and Mr. Raymond alighted. He was the only passenger who got out there; and he found, as he had feared, that he would have to make the rest of the journey alone and on foot.

Grasping a stout stick which he always carried with him, he set out, and had already walked nearly half the distance without meeting anyone or suffering any molestation. His apprehensions began to abate. But about midway there was a sort of hollow, a very lonely part of the road, with tall trees and bushes growing on either side, which gave it a very gloomy appearance. He looked carefully around him when he reached this spot; but although the twilight was coming on, he could see pretty fairly, and he could discover nothing to give him the slightest cause of alarm. He walked rather faster, holding his stick firmly, and intending to fight to the last, should he meet with any of the cut-throats of whom he had heard.

The overhanging trees made the path very obscure, and Mr. Raymond did not hear the sound of footsteps which were near him, for the villain who tracked his steps wore padded shoes. In an instant, and without the slightest warning, the old gentleman was knocked down by a fearful blow upon the back of the head!

The thief bent down over him, and was soon busy rifling his pockets. The man wore a black crape mask over his face. He ripped open the travelling bag, but appeared dissatisfied with what he found. He examined the person of his victim, and opened his pocketbook. The letter directed to B. Noel was there, but he cast it angrily into the bush, muttering, with an oath:

“That’s of no good to me.”

He then put the trifle of loose money into his own pockets, and again renewed his search; but as

fruitlessly as before.

“Confound it!” he exclaimed, with an oath; “the old rascal must have left the cash at Newtown. All my trouble is for nothing.”

He was about to flee, but a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he turned back, muttering to himself:

“Perhaps it would be safest; who can tell what he might suspect? Besides, dead men tell no tales.”

So saying, he withdrew his hand from his pocket, and produced a revolver, which he levelled at the bleeding form of his victim. At that instant the sound of a horse’s hoofs upon the road struck his ear, and he paused, and ere he had time to collect himself, the horseman himself appeared. It was too dark now for the villain to see who the intruder was; he could only discern the outline of the approaching figure. The horseman, too, could only see that one man was lying prostrate on the earth, and another was standing near, apparently taking aim at him; but he had good reason, as we shall presently see, to suspect that some foul deed had been perpetrated, and reining in his horse, shouted out:

“Hold, there, you villain! Would you shoot a fallen man? I am armed, and if you stir an inch I’ll send a bullet through you!”

Rendered desperate, the robber turned upon the speaker, and ere he had time to perceive his intention, discharged his revolver full at him, exclaiming:

“Take that, for a meddling fool!”

The horseman fell, and his steed, terrified by the report, dashed off at headlong speed. The murderer bent over his victim, and lighting a match, held it over the pale and death-like face—the face of a young and handsome man; but the murderer knew him not.

“No,” he said, “he must be a stranger; but he is safe now. He’ll never interfere with me again. That hole in his chest has settled him. Now for the other!” and with these words he discharged two of the chambers of his revolver into the apparently dead body of the old merchant; and thus having doubly secured himself from any chance of detection, he fled, and was soon lost in the darkness of the night.

[The clock was on the stroke] of two when the inmates of Mr. Raymond’s house were alarmed by a loud knocking at the door. A servant looked out of an upper window, and demanded the cause.

“Quick! quick! for your life!” said a voice below. “Here’s your master, Mr. Raymond; make

haste!”

The servant descended and opened the door, and four men carried in the body of the old man. As might be supposed, the whole household was soon astir. Poor little Amy came down to learn the cause of the confusion, and the first object which met her eye was the body of her father, as she supposed dead. She was a stout-hearted girl, and did not faint, but she felt more than many who would have made loud lamentations. Claspings her hands, she cried in anguish:

“Tell me, O tell me, for God’s sake, who has done this? How did he die?”

A rough, uncouth looking fellow, into whose eyes the tears almost started as he saw her piteous face and heard her bitter cry, came forward, and said:

“If you please, mum, he an’t dead. Me and Bill was a goin’ from the station, when we heerd a pistil goin’ off three times. We runs to the place, and there finds two gents dead; at least they orter bin dead. We looks at them, and we knows Squire Raymond, but t’other we never seen. So I sends Bill on for help, and I stays and tears up my shirt and stopped their bleeding till Bill could bring a doctor. Bill couldn’t bring no doctor, cos there wasn’t none; so he brought a lot o’ chaps, and we carried the Squire here, and t’other gent we left at the hotel; and the doctor’ll be here in a wink, Miss. And they’re not dead yet; so don’t fret so, mum.”

The rough, but well-meaning man finished his speech unheeded by Amy, who was, now she saw that life remained, busily engaged, with the help of the servants, in preparing a bed for the wounded man upon the couch in the same room. It was heart-rending to see her turn to give directions to the servants, and then, forgetful of all else, weeping over the senseless form of her father, and covering his face and hands with kisses.

Fortunately the doctor soon arrived. By his direction the sufferer was laid upon the couch, and he proceeded to examine his wounds. In a few moments he turned to Miss Raymond, and said:

“You need not distress yourself much, for I find that he is not dangerously hurt. He has fainted from loss of blood, and it might have been much worse if these good fellows had not come up in time and had the sense to stanch the wounds. Your father has certainly not received any pistol shot; he is wounded in the head by some blunt instrument, but it is not dangerous; with care he will soon recover. The other gentleman has been wounded far worse, and I must hasten to him.”

He then gave proper directions, and left, promising to call again in an hour’s time.

The wound of the younger man, who had been left at the hotel, was of a much more dangerous nature. The doctor at first thought that some vital part had been touched, and in fact it seemed not at all improbable that the exhaustion produced by so great a loss of blood would result fatally. But the doctor was a skillful man, and the bullet was at length extracted, although it was quite evident that had it but slightly diverged from the course which it had taken, it would have pierced

the heart. Everything which human skill could do was done for the sufferer, and the doctor left to return to his other patient.

It was many hours before Mr. Raymond recovered consciousness, and could give any account of what had taken place. All that he could say was, that as he came from the station, someone had struck him from behind: but of everything that afterward transpired he knew nothing. He was even ignorant that the murderer had twice shot at him, for in the darkness the wretch had aimed badly and had only pierced his clothes; the marks of the bullets still remained. His money was all gone, but his other valuables had not been taken, which clearly proved that the crime had not been perpetrated by any ordinary thief. This was all that Mr. Raymond knew of himself; but the next day, when in some measure recovered, he was amazed to find that he was not the only victim, for he had seen no one else at the time when he was assaulted.

He sent immediately up to the hotel to inquire after the young man, and to see if anything could be done for him. The messenger brought back word that the gentleman was too ill to be spoken to, and that ever since the ball had been extracted from his breast, he had been in a half-fainting condition, and was unable to speak, but that hopes were entertained of his ultimate recovery. Thus the whole affair remained shrouded in mystery, and various speculations were hazarded as to the true state of affairs.

Meanwhile Amy, who, as her father gradually recovered, had time to think of other things and of her absent lover, was in a state of no small anxiety. When they parted he had promised to write to her, but she had not received a single line. She could not think that he had forgotten her, but his silence gave her great pain and alarm.

Mr. Raymond, the first day he was allowed by the medical man to think of business, sent for Norton, his confidential clerk and manager. From him he learned that business was going on very badly. Many firms had failed, and large claims would soon be pressing upon him, which he could not see his way to meet. The loss of that large sum which had been taken from him the night of the robbery he now felt more than ever. He hardly knew which way to turn. In fact he was perplexed, for he had always acted so prudently that he could not understand how so many claims should now fall due, with little or nothing in hand to meet them, and he began to think that there must be error somewhere; resolving, the moment he could enter his office again, to begin a full investigation of the affairs of the firm. This he told Norton, bidding him see that everything was ready, which that excellent young man was only too ready to do.

Mr. Raymond's first walk was to the hotel. The invalid there received him gladly, though still too weak to sit up in bed, or talk much. In answer to Mr. Raymond, he said that he was riding along the road toward the station, on the night in question, when he suddenly came upon two men—one lying apparently dead or dying, and the other pointing a revolver at him. He, he said, had interfered, when the assassin, without any provocation, fired at him. This was all his story. It was the truth, but not the whole truth. The mystery was still unraveled.

Another week passed, and troubles came upon Mr. Raymond. Upon fully investigating his affairs, he found that although, if he only had time, all would be well, yet in some most unaccountable way he was so driven into a corner that unless within a fortnight he could realize a certain sum—just the amount which he had lost, or nearly so—he would certainly become bankrupt. He went about with a heavy step and a weary heart, and poor Amy forgot her own trials almost in thinking of her father's cares. She had not once heard of her absent lover.

One morning the father and daughter were sitting at breakfast. Both were silent and thoughtful. Suddenly Mr. Raymond exclaimed, dashing down the paper which he had been reading:

“Good Heavens! can it be true?”

He started up, and without a word of explanation rushed from the room, seized his hat, and left the house. Amy took up the paper, but she could see nothing in it to explain her father's singular conduct. So she waited patiently but anxiously till he should return.

Meanwhile Mr. Raymond walked, or almost ran, to the post-office, and eagerly asked the clerk there if he could give him the address of “R.B.” The clerk looked inquiringly.

“I saw,” said Mr. Raymond, “an advertisement in the *Mercury* this morning, inquiring for a Mr. B. Noel, or the person who lost a letter directed to that gentleman, and an address was given here. I have lost such a letter, and it is of the greatest importance to me. Can you give me any information?”

“Oh, certainly,” replied the clerk. “‘R.B.’ is the gentleman stopping at the George Hotel, who was wounded a little time back, of which you have probably heard. His name is—”

Mr. Raymond did not stay to hear more. He knew that the name of the young man who had nearly lost his life in endeavoring to save him began with those initials, and he hastened to the hotel.

The invalid received him at once, and Mr. Raymond explained the object of his visit.

“It is very strange,” said the younger of the two gentlemen; “but if you will kindly sit down I will explain all I know. Will you first tell me how and where you lost the letter?”

Mr. Raymond did as requested.

“All I can say,” replied the other, “is, that when I was at last able to do anything, I took out my pocket-book, and in doing so, found the letter, with other papers, in my pocket. I inquired, but everyone told me that my things had not been touched. I could not understand how it got there, for I never associated it with our mutual trouble; but now I come to think of it, I imagine that one of the honest fellows who helped us must have found it near me, and supposing it mine, thrust it

into my pocket. Of course I did not open it, and I hope you'll find it all right."

Mr. Raymond took the letter eagerly and opened it. The money was safe. He incoherently poured forth his thanks, and after a short conversation, and expressing many earnest wishes for the speedy recovery of his young friend, he left.

Upon entering his library, Mr. Raymond found Amy sitting there. She had a piece of fancy work in her hands, but her fingers were still, and she was lost in meditation. Her father's troubles and her lover's strange silence were the source of intense grief to the poor girl.

"He has saved me! I have found it!" exclaimed Mr. Raymond.

"Saved you! Found it! Who? What do you mean, father, dear?" asked Amy.

"The young gentleman who was nearly killed in helping me, had my money all the time, and I have it now. He didn't know it was mine. But we are saved now, Amy," he replied; and sitting down, he told her all that had happened.

The recovery of the money was most opportune, and prevented the threatened bankruptcy of the firm. Mr. Raymond and his faithful clerk, Norton, were now busy night and day with their books and papers, and before a fortnight had passed, the old merchant's affairs were placed upon a firmer footing than ever. Still there was much in the crisis which he had passed, and much in the state of his affairs at that time, which he could not at all understand. The clear-headed Norton alone seemed to understand every intricacy in the accounts.

One afternoon Mr. Raymond entered the sitting-room, where Amy was, and said to her:

"My dear, I have come home on purpose to tell you that I am going to visit my young friend; will you go with me? I should like you to know him, for he is a fine young fellow, and we owe him much."

Amy agreed to her father's proposition, although she would have preferred to remain at home with her thoughts, and ten minutes later they entered the carriage, and were soon at the George Hotel, and ushered into the invalid's room.

Amy was leaning upon her father's arm as the young man rose to receive them, but when he saw Amy he sank back into his easy-chair, as if overcome by emotion and surprise. Mr. Raymond did not observe this, but said, leading Amy forward:

"My dear Mr. Bertrand, I am happy to introduce my—Good gracious! what is this?"

Amy had fainted in his arms. Water was brought in, and in a few minutes Amy opened her eyes and began to recover. Mr. Raymond was lost in astonishment, for Amy was not given to the



fashionable amusement of fainting; but an explanation soon made all clear to him. Mr. Raymond and Bertrand had never seen each other, although each had heard of the other, before the night of the robbery. From what Bertrand now said, it appeared that in the course of business he had come across certain facts which led him to think that Mr. Raymond was the victim of [fraud] and foul treachery, and that on the night of the outrage he had ridden in haste to the station, hoping to meet him there, and to induce him to telegraph to certain parties about the matter, but on his way found a defenseless, and to him unknown man being murdered; had attempted to rescue him at the risk of his own life, and had himself nearly become a victim. Strange to say, Mr. Raymond's name had never transpired since they met. Bertrand did not state to whom his suspicions pointed. Mr. Raymond also had neglected, in his trouble and excitement, to mention the name of her lover to his daughter, and from her he had never heard it, though he had heard from others of their supposed attachment, and had forbidden it.

The merchant's views were now, however, completely changed. He and Amy daily visited the invalid, who, under such nursing, rapidly recovered strength; and Mr. Raymond hinted that *he* was now old, and might himself perhaps need "a partner" as much as his daughter, who was young, seemed to think one desirable *for life*.

One day young Bertrand entered Mr. Raymond's office for the first time, with a bundle of papers in his hands. Mr. Norton was in the outer room, and rose politely to greet him. Bertrand bowed, and entered the private office muttering to himself:

"Yes; that is certainly the same voice. I should know it anywhere. Oh, the viper!"

He closed the door, and taking a seat near Mr. Raymond, said, in a low voice, that he wished to speak to him on a most important matter. The merchant supposing it to be of the love affair, was prepared to return a favorable reply. He was, however, thunderstruck at the information which he received, and which the papers which Bertrand produced proved beyond the shadow of a doubt. They conferred long together, and a plan of action was agreed upon.

The next day Mr. Raymond told Norton that he had engaged a new cashier in the place of one who had recently left, and introduced a middle-aged, reserved looking man to the manager, who of course received him politely, although he was much disappointed, as he had wished to secure the appointment for a friend of his own.

The new cashier was a very quiet man, but very diligent and careful. He entered the office very morning punctually at ten, and left as punctually at five; but neither Norton nor any of the other clerks knew that every night, for many hours, Mr. Raymond and Robby, with the new cashier and a professed accountant, were closeted together in the private office, examining strictly the books and accounts of the firm.

At the end of a week the cashier told Mr. Norton that Mr. Raymond had instructed him to go to New York to collect a sum of money owing by a rather shaky firm there, and that the assistant

cashier was to take his place for two days, when he expected to return.

Norton was annoyed, as Mr. Raymond generally employed him on such occasions, but he could object nothing.

The cashier took the next train, and all went on as usual.

On the third day he returned, and entering the office went straight up to the manager. Laying his hand upon his shoulder, he said:

“Mr. Norton, I am a detective, and I have a warrant to arrest you for forgery, embezzlement and attempt to murder. Do not resist, for I have two officers outside. You are my prisoner.”

Shortly after, Norton’s trial came on. It was proved that he had falsified the books, and forged the name of his employer; and that it was *he* who had committed the dastardly attempt at assassination, in the hope to secure the money which Mr. Raymond was supposed to have about him, and also in order to hide his peculations.

He was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment at the expense of the State.

Mr. Raymond recovered most of his property. Robby Bertrand was taken into partnership with him. The following year Robby recovered his ancestral property in the old country; and now the firm, more wealthy and prosperous than ever, rejoice in the fact that “Raymond, Bertrand & Co.” are not soon likely to be classed among extinct “Co.’s” in the commercial world. And Amy, now Mrs. Robert Bertrand, is preparing to celebrate the christening of a second charming little boy whose surname beings with a B.

A.M.

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