

# JENNIE BAXTER, JOURNALIST. G

BY COTTREL HOE.

*Illustrated by* ADOLF THIEDE.

## NUMBER I.—THE *DAILY BUGLE* MISSES "A HIT."



MISS JENNIE BAXTER, with several final and dainty touches that set to rights her hat and dress—a little pull here and a pat there—regarded herself with some complacency in the large mirror that was set before her, as indeed she had every right to do, for she was an exceedingly pretty girl. It is natural that handsome young women should attire themselves with some care, and although Jennie would have been beautiful under any conceivable circumstances of dress, she nevertheless did not neglect the arraying of herself becomingly on that account. All that was remarkable on this occasion consisted in the fact that she took more than usual pains to make herself presentable, and it must be admitted that the effect was as attractive as anyone could wish to have it. Her appearance was enough to send a friend into ecstasies, or drive an enemy to despair.

Jennie's voluminous hair, without being exactly golden, was what the poets would term the colour of ripe corn, and was distractingly fluffy at the temples. Her eyes were liquidly, bewitchingly black, of melting tenderness, and yet, upon occasion, they would harden into piercing orbs that could look right through a man, and seem to fathom his innermost thoughts. A smooth, creamy complexion, with a touch of red in the cheeks, helped to give this combination of blonde and Brunette an appearance so charmingly striking that it may be easily understood that she was not a girl to be passed by with a single glance. Being so favoured by nature, Jennie did not neglect the aid of art, and it must be admitted that most of her income was expended in seeing that her wardrobe contained the best that Paris could supply; and the best in this instance was not necessarily the most expensive—at least not as expensive as such supplementing might have been to an ordinary woman, for Jennie wrote those charming articles on the latest fashionable gowns which have appeared in some of the ladies'

weeklies, and it was generally supposed that this fact did not cause her own replenishing from the *modistes* she so casually mentioned in her writings to be more expensive than her purse could afford. Be that as it may, Miss Baxter was always most becomingly attired, and her whole effect was so charming that men have been known to turn in the streets as she passed, and say, "By Jove!" a phrase that, when you take into account the tone in which it is said, represents the furthest point of admiration which the limited vocabulary of a man about town permits him to utter; and it says something for the honesty of Jennie's black eyes, and the straightforwardness of her energetic walk, that none of these momentary admirers ever turned and followed her.

On this occasion Miss Jennie had paid more than usual attention to her toilet, for she was about to set out to capture a man, and the man was no other than Radnor Hardwick, the capable editor of the *Daily Bugle* which was considered at that moment to be the most enterprising morning journal in the great metropolis. Miss Baxter had done work for some of the evening papers, several of the weeklies, and a number of the monthlies, and the income she made was reasonably good, but hazardously fitful. There was an uncertainty about her mode of life which was displeasing to her, and she resolved, if possible, to capture an editor on one of the morning papers, and get a salary that was fixed and certain. That it should be large, was a matter of course, and pretty Miss Jennie had quite enough confidence in herself to believe she would earn every penny of it. Quite sensibly, she depended upon her skill and her industry as her ultimate recommendation to a large salary, but she was woman enough to know that an attractive appearance might be of some assistance to her in getting a hearing from the editor, even though he should prove on acquaintance to be a man of iron, which was tolerably unlikely. She glanced at the dainty little watch attached to her wristlet, and saw

it lacked a few minutes of five. She knew the editor came to his office shortly after three, and remained there until six or half-past, when he went out to dine, returning at ten o'clock, or earlier, when the serious work of arranging next day's issue began. She had not written to him, for she knew if she got a reply it would be merely a request for particulars as to the proposed interview, and she had a strong faith in the spoken word, as against that which is written. At five o'clock the editor would have read his letters, and would probably have seen most of those who were waiting for him, and Miss Baxter quite rightly conjectured that this hour would be more appropriate for a short conversation than when he was busy with his correspondence, or immersed in the hard work of the day, as he would be after ten o'clock at night. She had enough experience of the world to know that great matters often depended for their success on apparent trivialities, and the young woman had set her mind on becoming a member of the staff of the *Daily Bugle*.

She stepped lightly into the hansom that was waiting for her, and said to the cabman, "Office of the *Daily Bugle*, please; side entrance."

The careful toilet made its first impression upon the surly-looking Irish porter, who, like a gruff and faithful watch-dog, guarded the entrance to the editorial rooms of the *Bugle*. He was enclosed in a kind of glass-framed sentry-box, with a door at the side, and a small arched aperture that was on a level with his face as he sat on a high stool. He saw to it, not too politely, that no one went up those stairs unless he had undoubted

right to do so. When he caught a glimpse of Miss Baxter, he slid off the stool and came out of the door to her, which was an extraordinary concession to a visitor, for Pat Ryan contented himself, as a usual thing, by saying curtly that the editor was busy, and could see no one.

"What did you wish, miss? To see the editor? That's Mr. Hardwick. Have ye an appointment with him? Ye haven't; then I very much doubt if ye'll see him this day, mum. It's far better to write to him, thin ye can state what ye want, an' if he makes an appointment there'll be no throuble at all, at all."

"But why should there be any trouble now?" asked Miss Baxter. "The editor is here to transact business, just as you are at the door to do the same. I have come on business, and I want to see him. Couldn't you send up my name to Mr. Hardwick, and tell him I will keep him but a few moments?"

"Ah, miss, that's what they all say; they ask for a few moments, an' they shtay an hour. Not that there'd be any blame to an editor if he kept you as long as he could. An' it's willingly I'd take up your name, but I'm afraid that it's little good it 'ud be after doin' ye. There's more than a dozen men in the waitin'-room now, an' they've been there for the last half-hour. Not a single one I've sent up has come down again."

"But surely," said Miss Jennie, in her most coaxing tone, "there must be some way to see even such a great man as the editor, and if there is, you know the way."

"Indade, miss, an' I'm not so sure there is a way, unless you met him in the strate, which is unlikely. As I've told ye, there's twelve men now waitin' for him in the big room. Beyond that room there's another one, an' beyond that again is Mr. Hardwick's office. Now, it's as much as my place is



"What did you wish, miss?"

worth, mum, to put ye in that room beyont the one where the men are waitin'; but, to tell you the truth, miss," said the Irishman, lowering his voice, as if he were divulging office secrets, "Mr. Hardwick, who is a difficult man to deal with, sometimes comes through the shmall room, and out into the passage, whin he doesn't want to see anyone at all, at all, and goes out into the strate, leavin' everybody waitin' for him. Now I'll put ye into this room, and if the editor tries to slip out, then ye can speak with him; but if he asks ye how ye got there, for the sake of hiven don't tell him that I sint ye, because that's not my duty at all, at all."



"Miss Baxter sat down, ready to intercept the flying editor."

"Indeed I won't tell him how I got there; or, rather, I'll tell I came there by myself; so all you need to do is to show me the door, and there won't need to be any lies told."

"True for ye, an' a very good idea. Well, miss, then ye just come up the stairs with me. It's the fourth door down the passage."

Miss Jennie beamed upon the susceptible Irishman a look of such melting gratitude that the man, whom bribery had often attempted to corrupt in vain, was her slave for ever after. They went up the stairs together, at the head of which the porter stood while Miss Baxter went down the long passage and stopped at the right door; Ryan nodded and disappeared.

Miss Baxter opened the door softly and entered. She found the room not too brilliantly lighted, containing a table and several chairs. The door to the right hand, which doubtless led into the waiting-room, where the dozen men were patiently sitting, was closed. The opposite door, which led into Mr. Hardwick's office, was partly open. Miss Baxter sat down near the third door, the one by which she had entered from the passage, ready to intercept the flying editor, should he attempt to escape.

In the editor's room someone was walking up and down with heavy footfall, and growling in a deep voice that was plainly audible where Miss Jennie sat.

"You see, Alder, it's like this," said the voice. "Any paper may have a sensation every day, if it wishes; but what I want is accuracy, otherwise our sheet has no real influence. When an article appears in the *Bugle*, I want our readers to understand that that article is true from beginning to end. I want not only sensation, but definiteness, and not only definiteness, but absolute truth."

"Well, Mr. Hardwick," interrupted another voice—the owner of which was either standing still or sitting in a chair, so far as Miss Baxter could judge by the tone, while the editor uneasily paced to and fro—"what Hazel is afraid of is that when this blows over he will lose his situation——"

"But," interjected the editor, "no one can tell that he gave the information. No one knows anything about this but you and I, and we will certainly keep our mouths shut."

"What Hazel fears is that the moment we print the account, the Board of Public Construction will know he gave away the figures, because of their accuracy. He says that if we permit him to make one or two blunders, which will not matter in the least in so far as the general account goes, it will turn suspicion from him. It will be supposed that someone had access to the books, and in the hurry of transcribing figures had made the blunders, which they know he would not do, for he has a reputation for accuracy in figures."

"Quite so," said the editor; "and it is just that reputation for accuracy that I want to gain for the *Daily Bugle*. Don't you think the truth of it is that the man wants more money?"

"Who? Hazel?"

"Certainly. Does he imagine that he could get more than fifty pounds elsewhere?"

"Oh, no; I'm sure the money doesn't come into the matter at all. Of course he wants the fifty pounds, but he doesn't want to lose his situation on the Board of Public Construction in the getting of it."

"Where do you meet this man, at his own house, or in his office at the Board?"

"Oh, in his own house, of course."

"You haven't seen the books, then?"

"No; but he has the accounts all made out, tabulated beautifully, and has written a very clear statement of the whole transaction. You understand, of course, that there has been no defalcation, no embezzlement, or anything of that sort. The accounts as a whole balance perfectly, and there isn't a penny of the public funds wrongly appropriated. All the Board has done is to juggle with figures so that each department seems to have come out all right, whereas the truth is that some departments have been carried on at a great profit, while with others there has been a loss. The object obviously has been to deceive the public and make it think that all the departments are economically conducted."

"I am sorry money hasn't been stolen," said the editor, generously, "then we would have them on the hip; but, even as it is, the *Bugle* will make a great sensation. What I fear is that the opposition press will seize on those very inaccuracies, and thus try to throw doubt on the whole affair. Don't you think you can persuade this person to let us have the information intact, without the inclusion of those blunders he seems to insist on? I wouldn't mind paying him a little more money, if that is what he is after."

"I don't think that is his object. The truth is, the man is frightened, and grows more and more so as the day for publication approaches. He is so anxious about his position that he insisted he was not to be paid by cheque, but that I should collect the money and hand it over to him in sovereigns."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do, Alder. We mustn't seem too eager. Let the matter rest where it is until Monday. I suppose he expects you to call upon him again to-day?"

"Yes; I told him I should be there at seven."

"Don't go, and don't write any explanation. Let him transfer a little of his anxiety to fear of losing the fifty pounds. I want, if possible, to publish this information with absolute accuracy."

"Is there any danger, Mr. Hardwick, that some of the other papers may get on the track of this?"

"No, I don't think so; not for three days, anyway. If we appear too eager, this man Hazel may refuse us altogether."

"Very good, sir."

Miss Baxter heard the editor stop in his walk, and she heard the rustling of paper, as if the subordinate were gathering up some documents on which he had been consulting his chief. She was panic-stricken to think that either of the men might come out and find her in the position of an eavesdropper, so with great quietness she opened the door and slipped out into the hall, going from there to the entrance of the ordinary waiting room, in which she found, not the twelve men that the porter had expatiated upon, but five. Evidently the other seven had existed only in the porter's imagination, or had become tired of waiting and had withdrawn. The five looked up at her as she entered and sat down on a chair near the door. A moment later the door communicating with the room she had quitted opened, and a clerk came in. He held two or three slips of paper in his hand, and calling out a name, one of the men rose.

"Mr. Hardwick says," spoke up the clerk, "that this matter is in Mr. Alder's department; would you mind seeing him? Room number five."

So that man was thus got rid of. The clerk mentioned another name, and again a man rose.

"Mr. Hardwick," the clerk said, "has the matter under consideration. Call again to-morrow at this hour, then he will give you his decision."

That got rid of number two. The third man was asked to leave his name and address; the editor would write to him. Number four was told that if he would make out his proposition in writing, and send it in to Mr. Hardwick, it would have that gentleman's serious consideration. The fifth man was not so easily disposed of. He insisted upon seeing the editor, and presently disappeared inside with the clerk. Miss Baxter smiled at the rapid dispersion of the group, for it reminded her of the rhyme about the one little, two little, three little nigger-boys. But all the time there kept running through her mind the phrase, "Board of Public Construction," and the name, "Hazel."

After a few minutes, the persistent man who had insisted upon seeing the editor came through the general waiting-room, the secretary, or clerk, or whoever he was, following him.

"Has your name been sent in, madam?"

the young man said to Miss Baxter, as she rose.

"I think not," answered the girl. "Would you take my card to Mr. Hardwick, and tell him I will detain him but a few moments?"

In a short time the secretary reappeared, and held the door open for her.

Mr. Hardwick was a determined-looking young man of about thirty-five, with a bullet head and closely-cropped black hair. He looked like a stubborn, strong-willed man, and Miss Baxter's summing up of him was that he had not the appearance of one who could be coaxed or wheedled into doing anything he did not wish to do. He held



"He held her card between his fingers, and glanced from it to her."

her card between his fingers, and glanced from it to her, then down to the card again.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick," began Miss Baxter. "I don't know that you have seen any of my work, but I have written a good deal for some of the evening papers and for some of the magazines."

"Yes," said Hardwick, who was standing up preparatory to leaving his office, and who had not asked the young woman to sit down; "your name is familiar to me. You wrote, some months since, an account of a personal visit to the German Emperor; I forget now where it appeared."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Baxter; "that was

written for the *Summer Magazine*, and was illustrated by photographs."

"It struck me," continued Hardwick, without looking at her, "that it was an article written by a person who had never seen the German Emperor, but who had collected and assimilated material from whatever source presented itself."

The young woman, in nowise abashed, laughed; but still the editor did not look up.

"Yes," she admitted, "that is precisely how it was written. I never have had the pleasure of meeting William II. myself."

"What I have always insisted upon in work submitted to me," growled the editor in a deep voice, "is absolute accuracy. I take it that you have called to see me because you wish to do some work for this paper."

"You are quite right in that surmise also," answered Miss Jennie. "Still, if I may say so, there was nothing inaccurate in my article about the German Emperor. My compilation was from thoroughly authentic sources, so I maintain it was as truthfully accurate as anything that has ever appeared in the *Bugle*."

"Perhaps our definitions of truth might not quite coincide. However, if you will write your address on this card I will wire you if I have any work—that is, any outside work—which I think a woman can do. The woman's column of the *Bugle*, as you are probably aware, is already in good hands."

Miss Jennie seemed annoyed that all her elaborate preparations were thrown away on this man, who never raised his eyes nor glanced at her, except once, during their conversation.

"I do not aspire," she said, rather shortly, "to the position of editor of a woman's column. I never read a woman's column myself, and, unlike Mr. Grant Allen, I never met a woman who did."

She succeeded in making the editor lift his eyes towards her for the second time.

"Neither do I intend to leave you my address so that you may send a wire to me if you think you have anything that you think I can do. What I wish is a salaried position on your staff."

"My good woman," said the editor briskly, "that is utterly impossible. I may tell you frankly that I don't believe in women journalists. The articles we publish by women are sent to this office from their own homes. Anything that a woman can do for a newspaper I have men who will

do quite as well, if not better, and there are many things that women can't do at all which men must do. I am perfectly satisfied with my staff as it stands, Miss Baxter."

"I think it is generally admitted," said the young woman, "that your staff is an exceptionally good one, and is most capably led. Still, I should imagine that there are things happening in London, society functions, for instance, where a woman would describe more accurately what she saw than any man you could send. You have no idea how full of blunders a man's account of women's dress is as a general rule, and if you admire accuracy as much as you say, I should think you would not care to have your paper made a laughing-stock among society ladies, who never take the trouble to write you a letter and show you where you are wrong, as men usually do when some mistake regarding their affairs is made."

"There is probably something in what you say," replied the editor, with an air of bringing the discussion to a close. "I don't insist that I am right, but these are my ideas, and while I am editor of this paper I shall stand by them, so it is useless for us to discuss the matter any further, Miss Baxter. I will not have a woman as a member of the permanent staff of the *Bugle*."

For the third time he looked up at her, and there was dismissal in his glance.

Miss Baxter said indignantly to herself, "This brute of a man hasn't the slightest idea that I am one of the best trained women he has ever met."

But there was no trace of indignation in her voice when she said to him sweetly, "We will take that as settled. But if for some other paper, Mr. Hardwick, I should show evidence of being as good a newspaper reporter as any member of your staff, may I come up here, and without being kept waiting too long, tell you of my triumph?"

"You would not shake my decision," he said.

"Oh, don't say that," she murmured, with a smile. "I am sure you wouldn't like it if anyone called you a fool."

"Called me a fool?" said the editor sharply, drawing down his dark brows. "I wouldn't mind it in the least."

"What, not if it were true? You know it would be true, if I could do something that all your clever men hadn't accomplished. An editor may be a very talented man, but, after all, his mission is to see that his paper is an interesting one, and that it contains something that no other sheet does."

"Oh I'll look out for that," said Mr. Hardwick.

"I am sure you will," said Miss Baxter very sweetly; "but now you won't refuse your promise to see me whenever I send up my card? I assure you that I shall not send it until I have done something that will make the whole staff of the *Daily Bugle* feel very doleful indeed."

For the first time Mr. Hardwick gave utterance to a somewhat harsh and mirthless laugh.

"Oh, very well," he said, "I'll promise that."

"Thank you! And good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick. I am so much obliged to you for consenting to see me. I shall call upon you at this hour to-morrow afternoon."

There was something of triumph in her smiling bow to him, and as she left she heard a long whistle of astonishment in Mr. Hardwick's room. She hurried down the stairs, threw a bewitching glance at the Irish porter, who came out of his den and whispered to her—

"It's all right, is it, mum?"

"More than all right," she answered. "Thank you so much for your kindness."

The porter hurried out to the waiting hansom and held his arm so that her skirt would not touch the wheel.

"Drive quickly to the Café Royal," she said to the cabman.

When the hansom drew up in front of the Café Royal, Miss Jennie Baxter did not step out of it, but waited until the stalwart servitor in gold lace, who guarded the entrance, hurried from the door to the vehicle. "Do you know Mr. Stoneham?" she asked hurriedly, "the editor of the *Evening Graphite*. He is usually here playing dominoes with someone about this hour."

"Oh yes, I know him," was the reply. "I think he is inside at this moment, but I will make certain."

In a short time Mr. Stoneham himself appeared, looking perhaps a trifle disconcerted at having his whereabouts so accurately ascertained.

"What a blessing it is," said Miss Jennie, with a laugh, "that we poor reporters know where to find our editors in a case of emergency."

"This is no case of emergency, Miss Baxter," grumbled Stoneham. "If it's news, you ought to know that it is too late to be of any use for us to-day."

"Ah, yes," was the quick reply, "but

what excellent time I am in with news for to-morrow!"

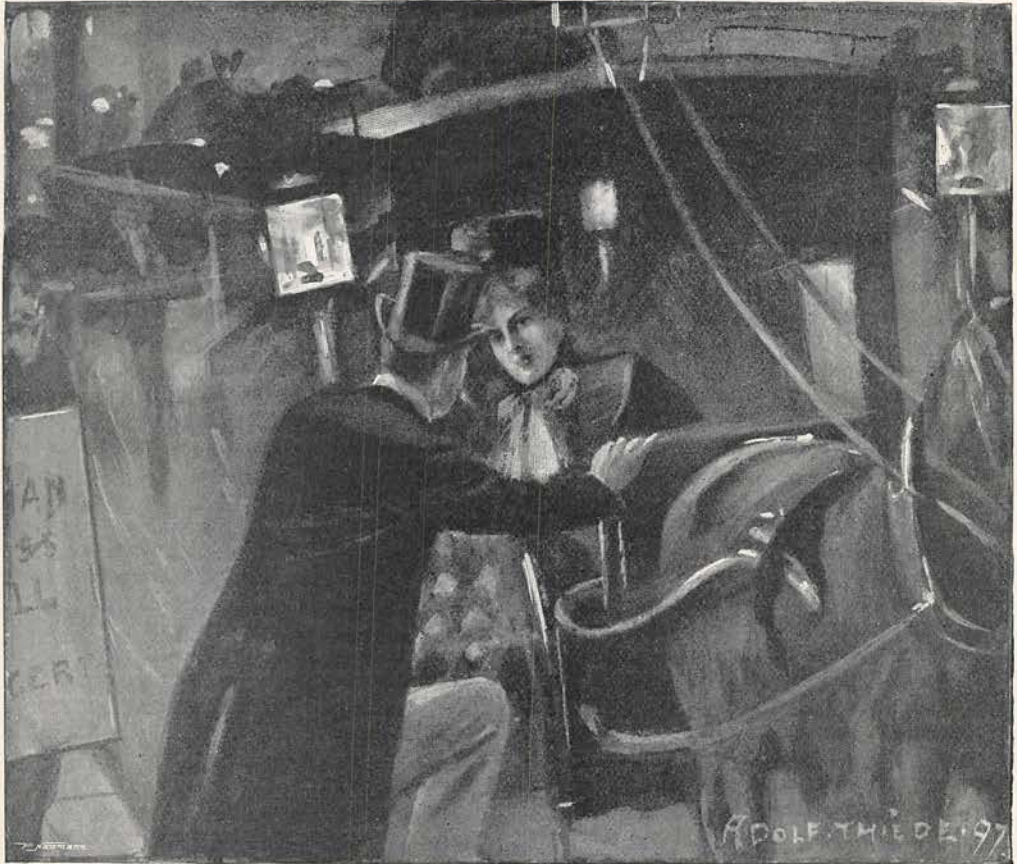
"If a man is to live a long life," growled the disturbed editor, "he must allow to-morrow's news to look after itself. Sufficient for the day are the worries thereof."

"As a general rule that is true," assented the girl, "but I have a most important bit of news for you that wouldn't wait, and in half an hour from now you will be writing

heard; and there is no place so safe for a confidential conference as in a hansom driving through the streets of London. Drive slowly towards the *Evening Graphite* office," she said to the cabman, pushing up the door in the roof of the hansom.

Mr. Stoneham took his place beside her, and the cabman turned his horse in the direction indicated.

"There is little use in going to the office



"I have a most important bit of news for you."

your to-morrow's leader, showing in terse and forcible language the many iniquities of the Board of Public Construction."

"Oh," cried the editor, brightening, "if it is anything to the discredit of the Board of Public Construction, I am glad you came."

"Well, that's not a bit complimentary to me. You should be glad in any case; but I'll forgive your bad manners, because I wish you to help me. Please step into this hansom, because I have most important news to tell you—news that must not be over-

of the paper," said Stoneham; "there won't be anybody there but the watchman."

"I know, but we must go in some direction. We can't talk in front of the *Café Royal*, you know. Now, Mr. Stoneham, in the first place I want fifty golden sovereigns. How am I to get them within half an hour?"

"Good gracious! I don't know; the banks are all closed, but there is a man at *Charing Cross* who would perhaps change a cheque for me; there is a cheque-book in the office."

"Then that's all right and settled. Mr. Stoneham, there's been some juggling with the public accounts in the office of the Board of Public Construction."

"What! a defalcation?" cried Stoneham eagerly.

"No; merely a shifting round."

"Ah," said the editor, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, you needn't say 'Ah.' It's very serious; it is indeed. The accounts are calculated to deceive the dear and confiding public, to whose interests all the daily papers, morning and evening, pretend to be devoted. The very fact of such deception being attempted, Mr. Stoneham, ought to call forth the anger of any virtuous editor."

"Oh, it does, it does; but then it would be a difficult matter to prove. If some money were gone, now——"

"My dear sir, the matter is already proved, and quite ripe for your energetic handling of it; that's what the fifty pounds are for. This sum will secure for you—to-night, mind, not to-morrow—a statement bristling with figures which the Board of Construction cannot deny. You will be able, in a stirring leading article, to express the horror you undoubtedly feel at the falsification of the figures, and your stern delight in doing so will probably not be mitigated by the fact that no other paper in London will have the news, while the matter will be so important that next day all your beloved contemporaries will be compelled to allude to it in some shape or other."

"I see," said the editor, his eyes glistening as the magnitude of the idea began to appeal more strongly to his imagination. "Who makes out this statement, and how are we to know that it is absolutely correct?"

"Well, there is a point on which I wish to inform you before going any further. It is not absolutely correct; two or three errors have been purposely put in, the object being to throw investigators off the track if they try to discover who gave the news to the Press; for the man who will sell me this document is a clerk in the office of the Board of Public Construction. So, you see, you are getting the facts from the inside."

"Is he so accustomed to falsifying accounts that he cannot get over the habit even when preparing a statement for the truthful Press?"

"He wants to save his own situation, and quite rightly, too, so he has put a number of errors in the figures of the department over

which he has direct control. He has a reputation for such accuracy that he imagines the Board will never think he did it, if the figures pertaining to his department are wrong even in the slightest degree."

"Quite so. Then we cannot have the pleasure of mentioning his name, and saying that this honest man has been corrupted by his association with the scoundrels who form the Board of Public Construction."

"Oh, dear, no; his name must not be mentioned under any circumstances, and that is why payment is to be made in sovereigns rather than by bank cheque or notes."

"Well, the traitor seems to be covering up his tracks rather effectually. How did you come to know him?"

"I don't know him. I've never met him in my life; but it came to my knowledge that one of the morning papers had already made all its plans for getting this information. The clerk was to get fifty pounds for the document, but the editor and he are at present negotiating, because the editor insists upon absolute accuracy, while, as I said, the man wishes to protect himself, to cover his tracks, as you say."

"Good gracious!" cried Stoneham, "I didn't think the editor of any morning paper in London was so particular about the accuracy of what he printed. The pages of the morning sheets do not seem to reflect that anxiety."

"So, you see," continued Miss Jennie, "there is no time to be lost; in fact, I should be on my way now to where this man lives."

"Here we are at the office, and I shall just run in and write a cheque for fifty pounds, which we can perhaps get cashed somewhere," said the editor, calling the hansom to a halt and stepping out.

"Tell the watchman to bring me a London directory," said the girl, and presently the watchman came out with the huge red volume, which Miss Baxter placed on her knees, and, with a celerity that comes of long practice, turned over the leaves rapidly, running her finger quickly down the H column, in which the name "Hazel" was to be found. At last she came to one designated as being a clerk in the office of the Board of Public Construction, and his residence was 17, Rupert Square, Brixton. She put this address down in her notebook and handed back the volume to the waiting watchman, as the editor came out with the cheque in his hand.

The shrewd and energetic dealer in coins, whose little office stood at the exit from Charing Cross Station, proved quite willing



to oblige the editor of the *Evening Graphite* with fifty sovereigns in exchange for the bit of paper, and the editor, handing to Miss Jennie the envelope containing the gold, saw her drive off for Brixton, while he turned, not to resume his game of dominoes at the café, but to his office, to write the leader which would express in good set terms the horror he felt at the action of the Board of Public Construction.

It was a little past seven o'clock when Miss Baxter's hansom drove up to the two-storeyed building in Rupert Square numbered 17. She knocked at the door, and it was speedily opened by a man with some trace of anxiety on his clouded face, who proved to be Hazel himself, the clerk at the Board of Public Construction.

"You are Mr. Hazel?" she ventured, on entering.

"Yes," replied the man, quite evidently surprised at seeing a lady instead of the man he was expecting at that hour; "but I am afraid I shall have to ask you to excuse me; I am waiting for a visitor who is a few minutes late, and who may be here at any moment."

"You are waiting for Mr. Alder, are you not?"

"Yes," stammered the man, his expression of surprise giving place to one of consternation.

"Oh, well, that is all right," said Miss Jennie, reassuringly. "I have just driven from the office of the *Daily Bugle*. Mr. Alder cannot come to-night."

"Ah," said Hazel, closing the door. "Then are you here in his place?"

"I am here instead of him. Mr. Alder is on other business that he had to attend to at the editor's request. Now, Mr. Hardwick—that's the editor, you know——"

"Yes, I know," answered Hazel.

They were now sitting down in the front parlour.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick is very anxious that the figures should be given with absolute accuracy."

"Of course, that would be much better," cried the man; "but, you see, I have gone over all that with Mr. Alder already. He said he would mention what I told him to the editor."

"Oh, he has done so," said Miss Baxter, "and did it very effectively indeed; in fact, your reasons are quite unanswerable. You fear, of course, that you will lose your situation, and that is very important, and no one in the *Bugle* office wishes you to suffer

for what you have done. Of course, it is all in the public interest."

"Of course, of course," murmured Hazel, looking down on the table.

"Well, have you all the documents ready, so that they can be published at any time?"

"Quite ready," answered the man.

"Very well," said the girl, with decision; "here are your fifty pounds. Just count the money, and see that it is correct. I took the envelope as it was handed to me, and have not examined the amount myself."

She poured the sovereigns out on the table, and Hazel, with trembling fingers, counted them out two by two.

"That is quite right," he said, rising. He went to a drawer, unlocked it, and took out a long blue envelope.

"There," he said, with a sigh that was almost a gasp. "There are the figures, and a full explanation of them. You will be very careful that my name does not slip out in any way."

"Oh, no," said Miss Jennie, coolly drawing forth the papers from their covering. "No one knows your name except Mr. Alder, Mr. Hardwick, and myself; and I can assure you that I shall not mention your name to anyone."

She glanced rapidly over the documents.

"I shall just read what you have written," she said, looking up at him; "and if there is anything here I do not understand you will, perhaps, be good enough to explain it now, and then I won't need to come here again."

"Very well," said Hazel.

The man had not the slightest suspicion that his visitor was not a member of the staff of the paper he had been negotiating with. She was so thoroughly self-possessed, and showed herself so familiar with all details that had been discussed by Hazel and Alder that no doubt had entered the clerk's mind.

Jennie read the documents with great haste, for she knew she was running a risk in remaining there after seven o'clock. It might be that Alder would come to Brixton to let the man know the result of his talk with the editor, or Mr. Hardwick himself might have changed his mind, and instructed his subordinate to secure the papers. Nevertheless, there was no sign of hurry in Miss Jennie's demeanour as she placed the papers back in their blue envelope and bade the anxious Hazel good-bye.

Once more in the hansom, she ordered the man to drive her to Charing Cross, and

when she was ten minutes away from Rupert Square she changed her direction and desired him to take her to the office of the *Evening Graphite*, where she knew Mr. Stoneham would be busy with his leading article, and probably impatiently awaiting further details of the conspiracy he was to lay open before the public. A light was burning in the editorial rooms of the office of the *Evening Graphite*, always a suspicious thing in such an establishment,

left to have the paper issued a little earlier than usual, calculating his time with exactitude, so that rival sheets could not have the news in their first edition, cribbed from the *Graphite*, and yet the paper would be on the street, with the newsboys shouting, "Orrible scandal," before any other evening sheet was visible. And this was accomplished the following day with a precision that was admirable.

Mr. Stoneham, with a craft worthy of all



"Hazel, with trembling fingers, counted them out two by two."

and well calculated to cause the editor of any rival evening paper to tremble, should he catch a glimpse of burning gas in a spot where the work of the day should be finished at latest by five o'clock. Light in the room of the evening journalist shows that something important is on hand.

A glance at the papers Miss Baxter brought to him showed Mr. Stoneham that he had at least got the worth of his fifty pounds. There would be a fluttering in high places next day. He made arrangements before he

commendation, kept back from the early edition a small fraction of the figures that were in his possession, so that he might print them in the so-called fourth edition, and thus put upon the second lot of contents-bills sent out, in huge, startling black type, "Further Revelations of the Board of Construction Scandal"; and his scathing leading article, in which he indignantly demanded a Parliamentary inquiry into the conduct of the Board, was recognised, even by the friends of that public body, to have seriously

shaken confidence in it. The reception of the news by the other evening papers was most flattering. One or two ignored it altogether, others alluded to it as a rumour, that it "alleged" so and so, and threw doubt on its truth, which was precisely what Mr. Stoneham wished them to do, as he was in a position to prove the accuracy of his statement.

Promptly at five o'clock that afternoon a hansom containing Miss Jennie Baxter drove up to the side entrance of the *Daily Bugle* office, and the young woman once more accosted the Irish porter, who again came out of his den to receive her.

"Miss Baxter?" said the Irishman, half by way of salutation, and half by way of inquiry.

"Yes," said the girl.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick left strict orders with me that if ye came, or, rather, that *whin* ye came, I was to conduct ye right up to his room at once."

"Oh, that is very satisfactory," cried Miss Jennie, "and somewhat different from the state of things yesterday."

"Indeed, and that's very true," said the porter, his voice sinking. "To-day is not like yesterday at all, at all. There's been great ructions in this office, mum; although what it's about, fly away with me if I know. There's been runnin' back and forrad, an' a plentiful deal of language about. The proprietor himself has been here, an' he's here now, an' Mr. Alder came out a minute ago with his face as white as a sheet of paper. They do be sayin'." added the porter, still further lowering his voice, and pausing on the stairway, "that Mr. Hardwick is not goin' to be the editor any more, but that Mr. Alder is to take his place. Anyway, as far as I can tell, Mr. Hardwick an' Mr. Alder have had a fine fall out, an' one or other of them is likely to leave the paper."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said Miss Jennie, also pausing on the stairs. "Is it so serious as all that?"

"Indeed it is, mum, an' we none of us know where we're standin', at all, at all."

The porter led the way to Mr. Hardwick's room and announced the visitor.

"Ask her to come in," she heard the editor say, and the next instant the porter left them alone together.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Baxter?" said Mr. Hardwick, with no trace of that anger in his voice which she had expected. "I have been waiting for you. You said you would be here at five, and I like punctuality. Without beating round the bush, I

suppose I may take it for granted that the *Evening Graphite* is indebted to you for what it is pleased to call the Board of Public Construction scandal?"

"Yes," said the young woman, seating herself; "I came up to tell you that I procured for the *Graphite* that interesting bit of information."

"So I supposed. My colleague, Henry Alder, saw Hazel this afternoon at the offices of the Board. The good man Hazel is panic-stricken at the explosion he has caused, and is in a very nervous state of mind, more especially when he learned that his document had gone to an unexpected quarter. Fortunately for him, the offices of the Board are thronged with journalists who want to get statements from this man or the other regarding the exposure, and so the visit of Alder to Hazel was not likely to be noticed or commented upon. Hazel gave a graphic description of the handsome young woman who had so cleverly wheedled the documents from him, and who paid him the exact sum agreed upon in the exact way that it was to have been paid. Alder had not seen you, and has not the slightest idea how the important news slipped through his fingers; but when he told me what had happened, I knew at once you were the goddess of the machine, therefore I have been waiting for you. May I be permitted to express the opinion that you didn't play your cards at all well, Miss Baxter?"

"No? I think I played my cards very much better than you played yours, you know."

"Oh, I am not instituting any comparison, and am not at all setting myself up as a model of strategy. I admit that, having the right cards in my hands, I played them exceedingly badly; but then, you understand, I thought I was sure of an exclusive bit of news."

"No news is exclusive, Mr. Hardwick, until it is printed, and out in the streets, and the other papers haven't got it."

"That is very true, and has all the consciousness of an adage. I would like to ask, Miss Baxter, how much the *Graphite* paid you for that article over and above the fifty pounds you gave to Hazel?"

"Oh! it wasn't a question of money with me; the subject hasn't been discussed. Mr. Stoneham is not a generous payer, and that is why I desire to get on a paper which does not count the cost too closely. What I wished to do was to convince you that I would be a valuable addition to the *Bugle*

staff ; for you seemed to be of opinion that the staff was already sufficient and complete."

"Oh, my staff is not to blame in this matter ; I alone am to blame in being too sure of my ground, and not realising the danger of delay in such a case. But if you had brought the document to me, you would have found me by far your best customer. You would have convinced me quite as effectually as you have done now that you are a very alert young woman, and I certainly would have been willing to give you four or five times as much as the *Graphite* will be able to pay."

"To tell the truth, I thought of that as I stood here yesterday, but I saw you were a very difficult man to deal with or to convince, and I dared not take the risk of letting you know I had the news. You might very easily have called in Mr. Alder, told him that Hazel had given up the documents, and sent him flying to Brixton, where very likely the clerk has a duplicate set. It would have been too late to get the sensation into any other morning paper, and, even if it were not too late, you would have had something on it, and so the victory would not have been as complete as it is now. No, I could not take such a risk."

"You credit us with more energy, Miss Baxter, than we possess. I can assure you that if you had come here at ten or eleven o'clock with the documents, I should have been compelled to purchase them from you. However, that is all past and done with, and there is no use in our saying anything more about it. I am willing to take all the blame for our defeat on my shoulders, but there are some other things I am not willing to do, and perhaps you are in a position to clear up a little misunderstanding that has arisen in this office. I suppose I may take it for granted that you overheard the conversation which took place between Mr. Alder and myself in this room yesterday afternoon ?"

"Well," said Miss Baxter, for the first time in some confusion. "I can assure you that I did not come here with the intention of listening to anything. I came into the next room by myself for the purpose of getting to see you as soon as possible. While not exactly a member of the staff of the *Evening Graphite*, it nevertheless takes about all the work I am able to do, and so I consider myself bound to keep my eyes and ears open on its behalf wherever I am."

"Oh, I don't want to censure you at all," said Hardwick ; "I merely wish to be certain

how the thing was done. As I said, I am willing to take the blame entirely on my own shoulders. I don't think I should have made use of information obtained in that way myself ; still, I am not venturing to find fault with you for doing so."

"To find fault with me !" cried Miss Jennie somewhat warmly, "that would be the pot calling the kettle black indeed. Why, what better were you ? You were bribing a poor man to furnish you with statistics, which he was very reluctant to let you have ; yet you overcame his scruples with money, quite willing that he should risk his livelihood, so long as you got the news. If you ask me, I don't see very much difference in our positions, and I must say that if two men take the risk of talking aloud about a secret, with a door open leading to another room which may be empty or may be not, then they are two very foolish persons."

"Oh, quite so, quite so," answered Hardwick soothingly. "I have already disclaimed the critical attitude. The point I wish to be sure of is this—you overheard the conversation between Alder and myself ?"

"Yes, I did."

"Would you be able to repeat it ?"

"I don't know that I could repeat it word for word, but I could certainly give the gist of it."

"Would you have any objection to telling a gentleman whom I shall call in a moment, as nearly as possible, what Alder said, and what I said ? I may add that the gentleman I speak of is Mr. Hempstead, and he is practically the proprietor of this paper. There has arisen between Mr. Alder and myself a slight divergence of memory, if I may call it so, and it seems that you are the only person who can settle the dispute."

"I am perfectly willing to tell what I heard to anybody."

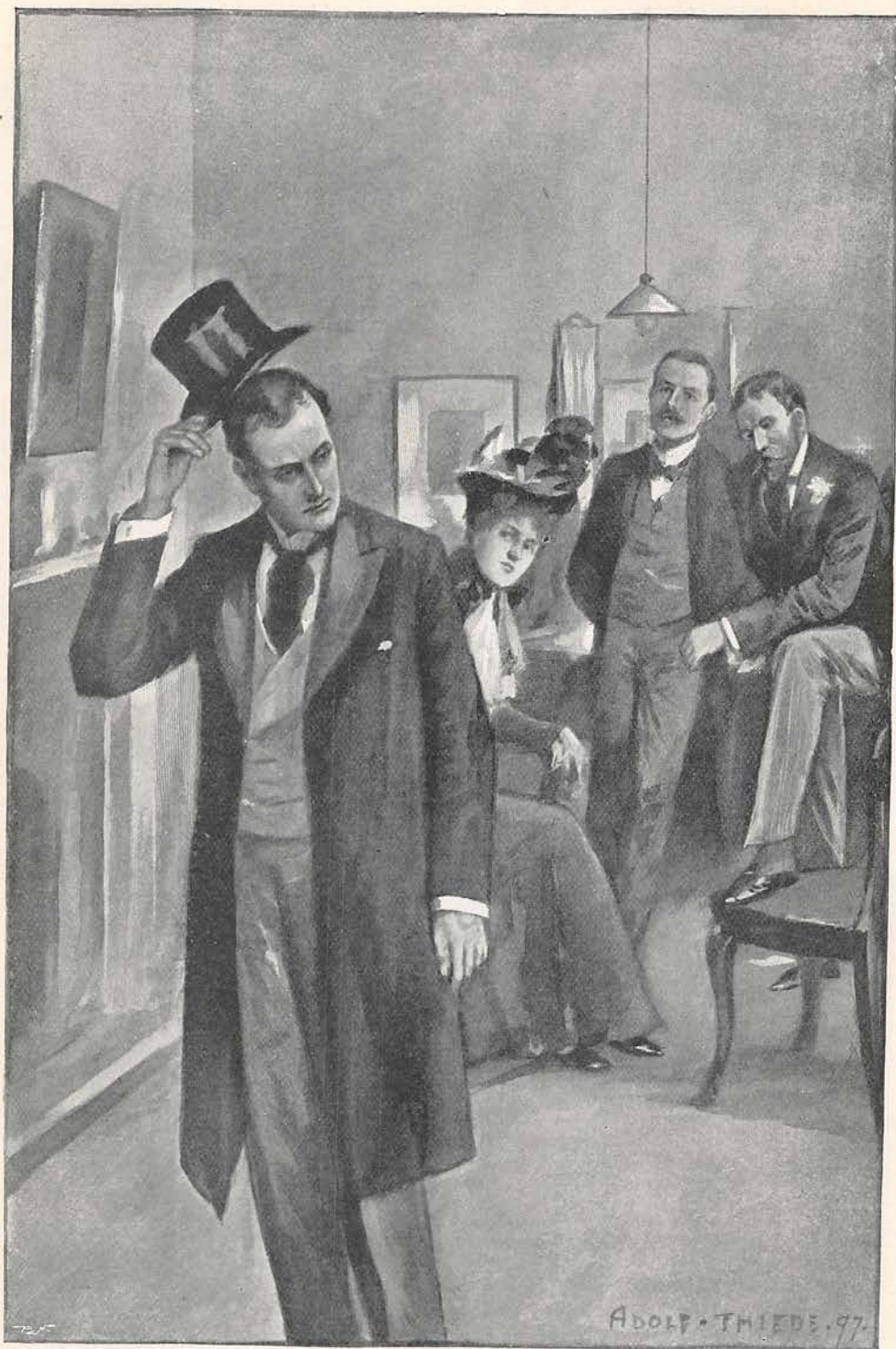
"Thank you."

Mr. Hardwick pressed an electric button, and his secretary came in from another room.

"Would you ask Mr. Hempstead to step this way, if he is in his room ?"

In a few minutes Mr. Hempstead entered, bowed somewhat stiffly towards the lady, but froze up instantly when he heard that she was the person who had given the Board of Public Construction scandal to the *Evening Graphite*.

"I have just this moment learned, Mr. Hempstead, that Miss Baxter was in the adjoining room when Alder and I were



"The irate Mr. Alder put his hat on his head and left the room."

talking over this matter. She heard the conversation. I have not asked her to repeat it, but sent for you at once, and she says she is willing to answer any questions you may ask."

"In that case, Mr. Hardwick, wouldn't it be well to have Henry Alder here?"

"Certainly, if he is on the premises." Then, turning to his secretary, he said, "Would you find out if Mr. Alder is in his room? Tell him Mr. Hempstead wishes to see him here."

When Henry Alder came in, and the secretary had disappeared, Miss Baxter saw at once that she was in an unenviable situation, for it was quite evident the three men were scarcely on speaking terms with each other. Nothing causes such a state of tension in a newspaper office as the missing of a piece of news that is important.

"Perhaps it would be better," suggested Hardwick, "if Miss Baxter would repeat the conversation as she heard it."

"I don't see the use of that," said Mr. Hempstead. "There is only one point at issue. Did Mr. Alder warn Mr. Hardwick that by delay he would lose the publication of this report?"

"Hardly that," answered the girl. "As I remember it, he said, 'Isn't there a danger that some other paper may get this?' Mr. Hardwick replied, 'I don't think so. Not for three days, at least': and then Mr. Alder said, 'Very good,' or 'Very well,' or something like that."

"That quite tallies with my own remembrance," said Hardwick. "I admit I am to blame, but I decidedly say that I was not definitely warned by Mr. Alder that the matter would be lost to us."

"I told you it would be lost if you delayed," said Alder, "and it *has* been lost. I have been on the track of this for two weeks, and it is very galling to have missed it at the last moment through no fault of my own."

"Still," said Mr. Hempstead coldly, "your version of the conversation does not quite tally with what Miss Baxter says."

"Oh, well," said Alder, "I never pretended to give the exact words. I warned him, and he did not heed the warning."

"You admit, then, that Miss Baxter's remembrance of the conversation is correct?"

"It is practically correct. I do not stickle about words."

"But you did stickle about words an hour ago," said Mr. Hempstead, with some severity. "There is a difference in positively

stating that the item would be lost, and in merely suggesting that it might be lost."

"Oh, have it as you wish," said Alder truculently. "It doesn't matter in the least to me. It is very provoking to work hard for two weeks, and then have everything nullified by a foolish decision from the editor. However, as I have said, it doesn't matter to me. I have taken service on the *Daily Trumpet*, and you may consider my place on the *Bugle* vacant"—saying which, the irate Mr. Alder put his hat on his head and left the room.

Mr. Hempstead seemed distressed by the discussion, but, for the first time, Mr. Hardwick smiled grimly.

"I always insist on accuracy," he said, "and lack of it is one of Alder's failings."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Hardwick, you have lost one of your best men. How are you going to replace him?" inquired the proprietor anxiously.

"There is little difficulty in replacing even the best man on any staff in London," replied Hardwick, with a glance at Miss Baxter. "As this young lady seems to keep her wits about her when the welfare of her paper is concerned, I shall, if you have no objection, fill Henry Alder's place with Miss Baxter."

Mr. Hempstead arched his eyebrows a trifle, and looked at the girl in some doubt.

"I thought you didn't believe in women journalists, Mr. Hardwick," he murmured at last.

"I didn't up till yesterday, but since then I have had reason to change my mind. I should much rather have Miss Baxter for me than against me."

"Do you think you can fill the position, Miss Baxter?" asked the proprietor, doubtfully.

"Oh, I am sure of it," answered the girl. "I have long wanted a place on a well-edited paper like the *Bugle*."

Again Mr. Hardwick smiled grimly. The proprietor turned to him, and said, "I don't quite see, Mr. Hardwick, what a lady can do on this paper outside of the regular departments."

"I hardly think there will be any trouble about that, Mr. Hempstead. For example, who would be more fitted to attempt the solution of that knotty question about the Princess von Steinheimer's diamonds?"

"By Jove!" cried Hempstead, his eyes glittering with excitement. "That is an inspiration. I imagine that if anyone can unravel that mystery, it is Miss Baxter."



"Oh, Auntie!"

By ST. CLAIR SIMMONS.