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Three months, she broke in. "Cam- paigns are planned and won in less time! It had been more graceful to stay abroad than to return only to lounge about in union clubs and tudy dance officials."

"Perhaps he came here to-night on their account," McKee answered, with one of his quizzical lifts of his eye-brows. "But wasn't he soft on her once? It seems to me that at Capon, her first summer out—"

A quick, warning gesture cut off his speech and wheeled him to the light, as Mrs. Gray approached, leaning on Fitz- zugh's arm.

"You were too good," she answered, quietly. "And perhaps, in time's name, I should thank you for the implied compliment to him."

"Indubitably, no," the Virginia ex- claimed, courteously. "It was but his bounden duty, and, sometimes a little slow, time ever fulfills that."

"You compliment him again," she re- plied, more coldly. "So few do their bounden duty nowadays."

"I have asked Mr. Fitzugh to join our little party to Philadelphia for 'Wass'." Miss Nina broke in, joining the group.

"I hope he will," McKee said, courteously, intuitively feeling that the frost was growing more crisp.

"But he tells me," the Philadelphia beauty answered, with a pretty pout, "that he is pledged to join a large hunt- ing party in western Virginia next week."

"What will you go to hunt, Fitz- zugh?" Willie McKee asked, naively.

Another quick glance shot in the ques- tioner's eyes, as the Virginia answered, calmly: "Anything that may be tagged or killed. But I am risking the Wash- ington express. Good night. You ladies may possibly conjecture part of my regret in missing the Philadelphia trip."

And he drained another foaming goblet of ice-cold wine.

Somehow Fitzugh played very bad billiards, missing easy shots under his friend's good-natured banter.

"Hang it, my nerves are out of gear," he cried, as he lost a simple carom. "Finish that fizz, Carroll; it's a woman's drink at the best. I want a brace. Here, Sam!"

"Finish nothing!" the other player retorted. "That bottle's empty already. Bring two cognacs, Sam. Damn it! bring the bottle!"

Fitzugh looked keenly at the speaker, missed at last, and leaning on his cue, was about to speak earnestly, but changed his mind and only asked: "Shoot much now? Much game down in the country?"

"Let's I go down often," Meredith answered, growing more glib under the mixture of cognac and champagne.

"Say, Peyton, there's bigger game in Prince George's now—" He checked himself suddenly, with a shrewd leer at the other's impassive face.

"Rare days we did use to have in old times, eh? Guess I was rather fond of a tear for a youngster. Remember that summer at Capon, just before the war, when I fell waltzing with Carolyn—"

Again Miss Clay's lips moved, but only the half-audible sound came: "Merciful God! I thank Thee!"

Then, gliding to her side, the other girl slid softly to the floor, resting her head in her friend's lap, while the round, white arms gleamed fair in the firelight against the rough habit, as they clasped Carolyn Clay lovingly.

And her hangy head bowed over her friend, till it mingled its spun gold with the dark curls upon which she pressed her lips.

CHAPTER VI. TRAITOR AND TRUE. If Peyton Fitzugh really desired to take the midnight express for Wash- ington, his were certainly very feverish movements to reach it.

He lounged into the Maryland club— usually empty, as it chanced—lit a cigar, and sat down with an evening paper, glancing over its margin at every one entering the hall beyond. Men passed in or out, occasionally, until, at last, a tall, athletic man, bronzed and careless in dress, entered the club and strolled into the billiard-room.

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They should be struck in detail— scattered along the river," Fitzugh said, slowly, half absently.

"Damn it, sir, you'd better give your views to Gen. Sheridan," the infantry major retorted, abruptly. "I am not commanding the cavalry of the army of the Potomac."

"Beg pardon, sir," the spy answered, not raising his eyes, in which the gleam still lingered. "Am I to go over? Any orders for me?"

"No, you are to remain here— prob- ably accompany Gen. Baldwin on a prison-inspection that has been de- manded by these newspaper meddles. Good-night, Caspar." The major rose, sorting his papers, the spy turning slowly to the door, as though regretting something, when the officer added:

"By the way, what is this young fel- low McKee?"

"Nothing, sir," was the prompt an- swer, as Fitzugh glanced quickly at the questioner. "A society butterfly, without brains. He is not suspected, I presume?"

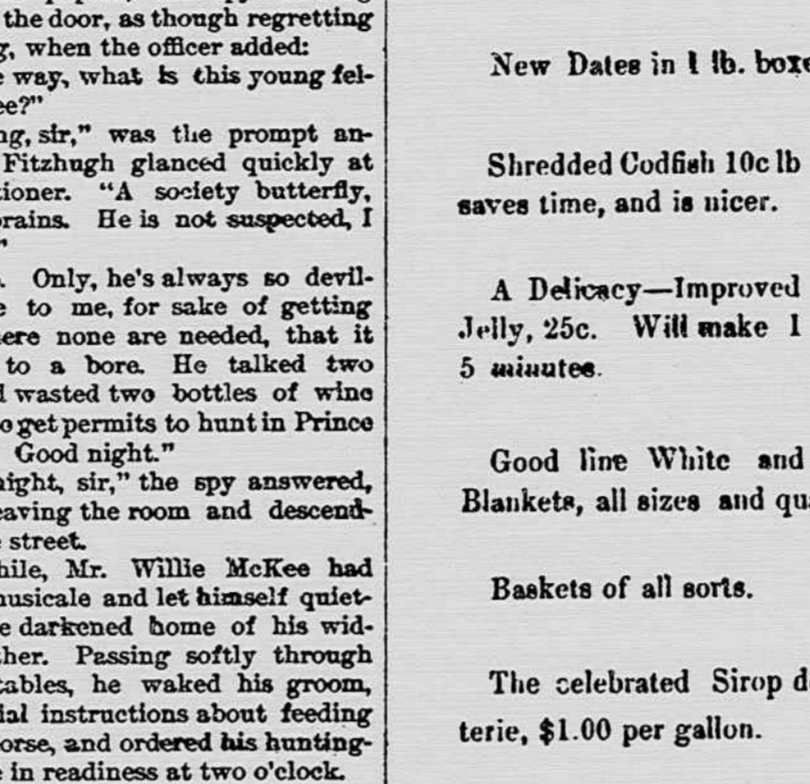
"Oh, no. Only, he's always so devil- ish polite to me, for sake of getting passes where none are needed, that it amounts to a bore. He talked two hours and wasted two bottles of wine to-night to get permits to hunt in Prince George's. Good night."

"Good night, sir," the spy answered, quickly leaving the room and descend- ing to the street.

Meanwhile, Mr. Willie McKee had left the musicale and let himself quiet- ly into the darkened home of his wid- owed mother. Passing softly through to the stables, he waked his groom, gave special instructions about feeding his best horse, and ordered his hunting- trap to be in readiness at two o'clock.

Then, mounting to his own suite, he laid out his corduroys and boots, se- lected a Winchester rifle from the sev- eral cases, and, carefully inspecting the grease on the cartridges, loaded it and tested the lock.

Next he unlocked a cupboard, taking thence and stowing in his bird-bag a strange outfit for a duck-hunt. There were carefully tied parcels from the drug- gist, hanks of silk and strong fax, papers of needles, postage-stamps, and



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