

A TALE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:

## THE ABDUCTION OF ALEXANDRA SEINE

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*Illustrated by R. W. Wallace.*

"HEIGHO! this is gruesome work," exclaimed Bowden Snell, as he leaned back in his old Victorian chair and placed a cocaine lozenge in his mouth.

A particularly atrocious crime had been committed that morning in the suburb of Slough, and Snell, in his capacity of graphist to the *Hourly Flash*, had been sent to procure a record of it, by means of the Antegraph, then coming into general use with the news offices.

He had the advantage of possessing a good instrument, and five or six minutes had been sufficient in which to obtain good retrospective views of the crime, from the first frown of the murderer to the last dying throes of the victim.

Bowden Snell was now developing the film in his room at the *Flash* office, and the aerocar which had brought him was still outside the large bay window swinging gently to and fro at its moorings in the summer breeze.

It was now sixteen o'clock, and the pictures were needed for the seventeen o'clock edition. The murderer had been caught of course; a constable, equipped with the new collapsible wings, had swooped down on the guilty ruffian ere he had reached Windsor, whither he was making, doubtless with the intention of taking an aerocar from the rank on Castle Hill.

Bowden Snell was not young, being over fifty, and the more rapid methods of the times made it difficult for him to compete

with younger men; but the *Flash* people retained him chiefly because of his extensive knowledge of the great province of London.

His films completed and despatched by tube to the lower offices, Bowden Snell mechanically pressed a button in the wall beside him, and commenced to apply himself voraciously to the resulting salmon cutlets. The apartment and its conveniences were placed entirely at his disposal by the proprietors of the *Flash*, and being a lonely man—a widower in fact—Bowden Snell made it almost his home.

He had scarcely eaten a mouthful when the room was suddenly darkened by the apparition of a second aerocar of strange old-fashioned construction, which bumped clumsily against Snell's own machine, and ultimately drew up at the window.

Immediately a young man, clad in white from head to foot, leaped into the room. His face was brown with exposure to the sun, and he looked anxious and travel-worn. "Arbutnot!" exclaimed Bowden Snell, "you here? What on earth—?"

"Ah, how familiar it sounds to hear one of your dear old-fashioned sayings, Mr. Snell," said the new-comer. "On earth indeed! when I haven't touched earth for sixteen hours. Do give me a bite of something, for Heaven's sake; I'm famishing," and the young man looked longingly at the salmon cutlets.

Still bewildered, the other turned to the wall and hurriedly pressed a number of buttons.

"Steady, I say; steady," said the young man, with a faint smile. "Roast turkey, cold salad, mushrooms, fried soles, Burgundy—a bit of a mixture, eh?"

Somewhat confused, the elder man checked himself and turned from the buttons.

"But how is it you are here?" he asked. "I thought you were in Japan, helping to develop that part of the empire."

"I must talk and eat at the same time," replied Arbuthnot. "Potatoes, stuffing, and green peas, if you don't mind—thanks. Mr. Snell, I am in great trouble."

"All right," replied Arbuthnot, with his mouth full, "I won't waste more time than I can help. Listen: I took to Japan with me two telephatic instruments."

"Ah, a lady's whim, eh?" suggested Bowden Snell.

"Something of my own idea as well," replied the young man, a slight flush overspreading his handsome face. "You see, one couldn't be running home here to England every few weeks, and Ally and I thought it would be nice to sit and talk to each other sometimes, even though thousands of miles of clouds floated between us."

Bowden Snell nodded indulgently; and Arbuthnot, leaning back with a sigh, lit a cigarette—he was a steady young man, and abstained from drugs.

"Now this morning a strange thing happened," he continued. "You must understand I have one instrument upstairs and the other down in my sitting-room; it isn't always so easy to hit the mark in Japan, you know, owing to the earthquakes, so that when Ally missed one with a message the chances were that she would hit the other."

"I see."

"Well, I was sitting down having a smoke after the day's work—of course it was evening there—when the signal of the instrument clicked, and I instantly placed my ear to it. Then dar—Ally's voice, I mean, seemingly in great distress, calling me, saying, 'Help, help, Jack! I am being carried away,' and then there was a dead silence."

The young man paused, and passed a trembling hand across his damp brow. He went on—

"I rushed upstairs to the other instru-



"A YOUNG MAN SPRANG INTO THE ROOM, LEAVING HIS AEROCAR OUTSIDE."

"Hum, it hasn't affected your appetite, at any rate," said the other.

"Perhaps not; but I can tell you the air of the Ghauts is pretty keen, at least I found it so this morning as I came through."

"Well, don't hurry yourself; I'll go on with my own luncheon," said Snell, reseating himself.



"THEY ROSE OVER THE DOME OF ST. PAUL'S AND SPED AWAY IN AN EASTERLY DIRECTION."

ment, thinking that possibly it might be catching what the other missed, but I heard nothing more, though I shouted continually."

"Shouting's never any good; only rattles the mechanism," said Bowden Snell. "Of course you took the direction?"

"Yes, I thought of that," replied Arbuthnot. "It was due west, and two degrees from normal."

"Two degrees from normal, eh!" repeated the other, musingly. Then he took a scrap of paper from his pocket and made a few rapid calculations, at the end of which he exclaimed—

"Hullo, she must have been in the air then."

"Of course," answered the young man, "that is how I worked it out; three hundred feet from the ground, and fifty miles south of Greenwich."

"About that," concurred Bowden Snell. "Well, what are you going to do, and what do you want of me?"

"I thought of you immediately," said Arbuthnot, "and, placing a few food-pellets in my pocket, I jumped on my machine and came away just as I was. Luckily my aerocar, which

is, as you see, one of the old-fashioned ones—I can't afford a new one—was charged, and I can tell you I made her rattle coming along over Thibet, Russia, and Germany. Once I caught up the daylight, yet it took me sixteen hours to do the journey," he concluded, apologetically.

Bowden Snell smiled grimly. He thought of the old days of his boyhood, when a voyage from Japan was considered a very serious undertaking, occupying weeks of wearisome crawling over land and water.

"And now," cried the young man, jumping up from his chair, "I have come to you, my father's old friend, to ask you to help me. You know this great province of London as well as any man, and, moreover, your particular occupation gives you immense facilities for discovering what I want to know."

"And that is?"

"I want to find Ally," said Arbuthnot. "I am to blame for wasting time as I have, but I was really famishing."

"What is she like, to begin with?" asked Bowden Snell.

"Oh, I forgot; you have never seen her, have you?" replied the young man. "Look," and taking a small case from his breast-pocket he handed it to Snell, who said as he took it—

"I was in Canada the afternoon you brought her to my house remember, so that, as you say, I never have seen her." He then applied his eye to an aperture in the case, and pressed a knob. Instantly a faint ticking sound was heard, and the holder started violently. "Young man, who is this girl? What is her name?" he asked agitatedly as he returned the case.

"Do you know her?" said Arbuthnot in surprise at the effect the vitograph had produced on his companion. "Her name is Seine; at least—" and the young man hesitated a moment—"that is the name she goes by—Alexandra Seine. To tell you the truth, her real name is not known. She was discovered in Paris when we entered the city in '30. Of course, she was only a tiny child then, and as no clue to her identity could be found, they christened her Alexandra, after the then Dowager Empress, and Seine after the river on the banks of which she was found. An English lady adopted her, and that's all her history."

Bowden Snell had been sitting with his

face buried in his hands whilst the young man had been speaking.

"Paris!—1930!—my little Violet—can it be?" he cried disjointly; "the very same smile—her very movements!"

"Your daughter!" exclaimed Arbuthnot in amazement, momentarily forgetting the urgency of his errand.

"Yes, yes. Come here a moment," and the elder man led him to the far end of the apartment, which was curtained off, and there facing a blank white wall stood, on a pedestal, a box-shaped machine somewhat resembling the old magic-lanterns pictured in the books of our boyhood. It was evidently fixed there for film-testing purposes.

Snell drew the curtains after them, and they stood almost in darkness. Carefully taking a small square sheet of gelatinous substance from his pocket-book, he inserted it in the instrument and pressed a knob at the side. Instantly a bluish flame kindled within, and on the blank wall appeared the life-sized figure of a pretty woman dressed in the late Victorian style—large sleeves, curled hair, skirts reaching to the ankles and all. She smiled bewitchingly, yet with a slight touch of sadness, and held out her arms towards the mute observers, her lips moving at the same time; then she seemed to step forward, and the vision faded.

"My Ally to the life!" exclaimed Arbuthnot; "but how did you get her graphilm? And in that queer costume! Was it a masquerade?"

"That was not 'Ally,' as you call her," replied Bowden Snell; "it was her mother, and my dear dead wife. If I could have inserted her voice-record at the same time, I have no doubt it would have been a further proof, but the cylinder is at home."

"Your wife!" cried Arbuthnot. "Can it be?"

"I served with the City Imperial Volunteers at the Siege of Paris in '30," replied Bowden Snell as he carefully replaced the film in his book. "My wife and child were in Paris when the war broke out. My wife was killed by a chance shell; our babe, it seems, escaped." Then, subduing his emotion with an effort, he seized Arbuthnot by the arm and exclaimed, "Come, come, let us find her; don't ask questions now, let us away!"

"Yes," said Arbuthnot, "but whither? We have no clue."

"Let me think, let me think," said Snell,

passing his hand over his forehead; then, stepping quickly across the room, he pressed a knob in the wall, causing a little shutter to fall.

"What place?" asked a faint voice.

"Give me the whole of East London, from Greenwich to St. Paul's," replied Bowden Snell, "in sections of square miles."

"It's rather dark," said the voice, grumblingly, "but I'll try."

"Come, Arbuthnot, you had better look as well," said Snell, motioning the young man to his side.

The two men applied their eyes to circular orifices in the wall, and waited.

"Do you see anything?" asked Arbuthnot, presently.

"Nothing," replied the other, "only the usual crowd of aerocars above and athletes walking in the streets below. It is almost too dark to discern faces. I can see no car that is suspicious. Stay! Ah, no!—only some air-sailors drinking absinthe."

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Arbuthnot, despairingly.

"You there?" called Snell.

"Yes," came the voice in reply.

"Give me a line due east of Greenwich straight away to the sea."

"Apparatus only reaches Swanley; line broken down," came the reply.

"What a nuisance! When will they perfect these things?" said Arbuthnot, impatiently.

"Give me as far as you can then," cried Snell.

"Right."

"Now then, keep your eyes open," warned the elder man.

"Look!" Arbuthnot



"HE SHOUTED LUSTILY TO TRAVERS IN HIS CAR THE 'MINUTE GUN.'"

cried suddenly, "there she is!" and then Snell clicked a switch on his left.

"I've checked it," he said, in tones of suppressed excitement. "You are sure it is she?"

"Quite," said Arbuthnot, agitatedly;

"That is all right, thank you," said Snell. "That explains it," he said, turning to his companion; "but let us watch. How is this—they seem stationary?"

"They are stationary," cried Arbuthnot, after a moment. "Come, let us away."

Bowden Snell turned off the knob and followed the younger man to the window.

"My machine," he said briefly, "it is the swifter."

Arbuthnot leaped in, and Bowden Snell followed him.

With a whiz and a flutter they rose through the cool evening air and, after soaring undecidedly over the ancient dome of St. Paul's, sped away in an easterly direction.

The air was fairly full of business cars, which rose in shoals

from the heart of the province and dropped in various suburbs about

Essex, Suffolk, and Kent.

Once away from the great centre, however, our travellers were able to put on full speed, and in a few minutes the sil-

very gleam of the Channel appeared in sight.

They searched the air with strained eyes as they sped along; but, beyond the usual Continental and Far East cars, they saw nothing of consequence.

As they neared the sea they decided to descend, and dropped lightly at the very water's edge, on a secluded beach between Dover and Folkestone. They stepped out on the yielding sand, and stood by the rippling waves.

A huge full moon was just appearing above the horizon, and its pale beauty was reflected in touches of silver on the darkening sea. Far above them a few aerocars wafted their way towards their various destinations, and the alert customs officers in their crimson-painted machines flitted restlessly hither and thither.



"HE PICKED UP SOME BALL-SHAPED OBJECT AND HURLED IT AT HIS INTERRUPTERS."

"but who is the man with her? I cannot see."

"Great Heavens! 'Eagle Malvowley; I might have guessed it, the fiend!" cried Bowden Snell.

"Malvowley! What, he that owns the secret castle in the Balkans?" queried Arbuthnot, breathlessly.

"The same," answered Bowden Snell; "he is bearing her thither, the villain. But where are they? We must follow at once."

"I cannot understand," said Arbuthnot, straining his eyes at the aperture, "there is open sea beneath, and yet the operator said—"

"You there?" came the voice.

"Well?" said Snell, quickly.

"The instrument is a little out of order. By mistake I started you from the French end; you have checked it in mid-channel."

The two men stood silent for a few moments, awed by the beauty and solitude of the scene.

"We are beaten," bitterly exclaimed Arbuthnot at last.

"Wait," said Bowden Snell as he narrowly scanned an approaching car; "if I am not greatly mistaken that is Jim Travers of the *Minute Gun*. It looks like his machine; yes, it is. Above there, Travers!" he shouted lustily.

"Hello, Snell!" came the reply, "what's amiss?" and the car swooped gracefully to within a few yards of their heads, Travers looking over the side at his fellow graphist.

"Have you seen 'Eagle Malvowley in your travels?" asked Snell.

"Just passed him about half way across," was the welcome answer; "he had had a breakdown—jammed lever, I fancy—and is fluttering about like a wounded gull."

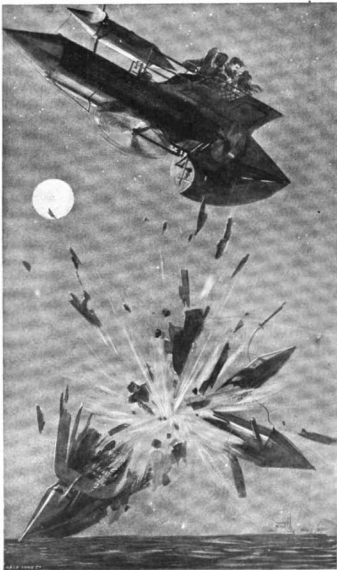
"Anyone with him?" shouted Arbuthnot, as with Snell he stepped hastily aboard their machine.

"Couldn't see: too dark," replied Travers, as he resumed his progress Londonwards. "Anything special on?" he called back. "If so, telepath us at the office, there's a good fellow."

But, with a shout of thanks, Bowden Snell and Arbuthnot were already soaring over the sea.

"He's just back from Baden Races—lucky I saw him," muttered the former, as he pulled out all the speed-bars.

Arbuthnot was in a state of fierce



"THE BOMB FELL BACK ON MALVOWLEY'S OWN CAR, SCATTERING THE MACHINE INTO A MILLION FRAGMENTS."

excitement; he peered anxiously forward, and at length his bloodshot eyes detected a fluttering object between himself and the full-orbed moon.

Mutely he grasped Snell's arm and pointed.

"I see," said the other, laconically; and with a skilfully executed upward swoop he guided the machine to within a dozen yards of the apparently uncontrollable fugitive car, in which a tall, slight man with a dark, saturnine countenance was uttering vicious oaths, and spitefully hammering at some part of the machinery.

Arbuthnot jumped recklessly on to the high platform of their car, and with a gasp of mingled fear and relief beheld the beloved object of his search lying on the bottom of the other machine, to all appearance lifeless.

Malvowley was so engrossed in his task that he had not noticed the approach of his pursuers, but a fierce hail from Arbuthnot caused him to leap up.

With an execration he picked up some ball-shaped object and hurled it at his interrupters, but in his sudden surprise he missed his aim.

Bowden Snell hastily seized a lever and drew it back with a jerk. The car rose vertically some fifty feet above Malvowley's.

"Rippite bomb," said Snell, with a white face, as the missile struck the water below and burst with the soft seductive whirr of that deadly explosive.

"You are helpless, Malvowley," cried Arbuthnot. "Hand over Miss Seine at once."

"Come and take her," yelled Malvowley, defiantly; "I won't miss you a second time," and he seemed to apply himself again to the task of repairing his gear.

"We must board him," said Snell; "it is our only chance. If he once gets his machine in hand again he will be the other side of Europe in five minutes. She's a racer, built for the America Cup Race of last year. I will swoop close to him, and you must leap for it."

"I'll try it," said Arbuthnot, desperately. "If I miss, you must descend on the chance of picking me up."

"Now, then!" cried Snell, as they swept down.

With a fast-beating heart Arbuthnot hurled himself into the car, knocking the surprised Malvowley into a corner, where he lay momentarily stunned.

With lightning movements the young man seized the unconscious girl in his arms and passed her over to Bowden Snell, who, pale as death, stood ready to receive her. Arbuthnot had scarcely time to leap back after when Malvowley recovered himself, and, with horrible oaths, rushed to the side of his car.

"Curse you!" he shrieked, "I'll wreck you; I'll send you all to eternity!"

"Up—up—quick!" shouted Arbuthnot, "another bomb!"

They rose with sickening speed, and Malvowley, foaming with demoniacal rage, hurled another deadly missile up after them, putting all his strength into the attempt.

They were too quick, however, and the bomb fell back again on Malvowley's own car, exploding on the contact, and scattering the machine and its unhappy occupant into a million fragments.

Some of the wreckage struck the victors as they still soared upwards, but they were rising too rapidly to suffer any injury. When at last, pale and trembling, they found courage to look down, only a few pieces of floating wood and aluminium far below remained as witnesses of 'Eagle Malvowley's fearful end. To their great joy, Snell and Arbuthnot discovered that the rescued girl had merely fainted, and in a short time the keen upper air revived her.

It appeared that Malvowley had swooped unexpectedly down upon her as she was walking on a lonely road near Reading, and despite her cries had carried her off. She had retained presence of mind enough to note the sun's position and rapidly make the mental calculation necessary in order to obtain her lover's exact direction; she then telephated, but ere many thoughts had left her brain, her captor had suspected something, and brutally flung her into the bottom of the car.

Having telephated to allay the natural anxiety of her guardian at Reading, they sped back to Snell's private house at Bexley. The happy girl smilingly caressed her lover's hand, and leaning her head against her newly-found father's shoulder, said brightly—

"Rescued maiden; long-lost daughter. It seems like one of the old-fashioned novels, doesn't it?"

"Romance is never old-fashioned, my dear; it is for all time," said Bowden Snell.