

# The Home Reading Circle



CLINTON ROSS

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SCARLET COAT, THE MIDDLING HUSSY  
(Copyright, 1897, by Clinton Ross.)

### SYNOPSIS.

Robert Merrivale has succeeded his father as the head of the great Merrivale Mills. He is young, but still unmarried, and his mother determines that if he won't find a wife for himself she will. She picks out Sallie Pentland, Robert and Sallie are great friends, but they don't confess to each other that their friendship is not love. Sallie, however, asks Robert to keep up the pretense of courtship, saying that she has a particular reason for so doing. While this comedy is in progress Clarissa Henlow is engaged at the office as a stenographer. She is of a fine southern family, reduced in fortune by the war. Robert finds himself more interested in Clarissa than he is willing to admit, and even experiences pangs of jealousy when he meets her. He is just in time—and then faints. Merrivale sends for a cab to take her home.

### PART II.

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"I wish I could do something for you," I said.  
"Aren't you?"  
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"How did you know that about my father?" she asked, "quickly."  
"Oh, I inquired," she said.  
"You shouldn't," she said.  
"Well, you shouldn't have interested me then."  
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"Well, Miss Henlow, where's the because?" I asked.  
"Our positions are different."  
"I would like to know why," I cried.  
"Your father was a soldier, on one side—mine on the other. Your father was a gentleman, who gave up all to the south; mine, after the war, by shrewdness, chanced to make a fortune. Now you have saved my life."  
"It wasn't yours, Mr. Merrivale; it was my man's. I could have done just as well for him as I could have done for you."  
"I know it, I know it. Still I wish it had been for me—myself. I went on most surprisedly. (What would my mother have said?)

"Well, of course, you have been very kind to me; of course it was partly for you—but really, that's all," she rambled on, her face turned from me; but suddenly she faced me again. "Now you know I appreciate all the trouble you are taking."  
"Well," said I, giving her tit for tat, "I should do it for anybody who was to take the pains of saving my life."  
She laughed softly. "Why, of course you would," she said. "And then we both laughed, and I felt I was getting to know Miss Henlow very well, indeed."

At the boarding house on Eighth street, a very nice-looking little old lady met us. I told of her daughter's bravery with a great deal of gusto.  
"Oh, really it wasn't anything," said the daughter, pulling off her gloves.  
"Well, I choose to think it was a great deal. Yes, I insist. I really hope, Mrs. Henlow, that your daughter will put it to report at the office again this week."  
"No, no, she oughtn't. I hope you're not hurt, Clarissa."  
"It's all very ridiculous," Clarissa said. "I'm not a bit indeed. In fact it wasn't necessary for Mr. Merrivale to come up with me."  
Then she gave me her hand, and said she would be down in the morning;

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"Why, yes," she said, "of course. I am going up to see her. I think Sallie Pentland would like to call."  
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"We, of course, shall settle some money on the family," said my mother, grandly. "As for Sallie, you know you are going to."  
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"I never saw you look so much like your father in your life," she commented.  
"Well," said I, "thank you for coming down. You will call on Miss Henlow—and that is all."  
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"What should I have done if you had been hurt?" she said. Then she wiped her eyes, and I took her to her carriage; and we didn't speak of the Henlows again.

The worst of the affair was the way it was published about; and I saw several pictures of myself and my stenographer, "Robert Merrivale, the well-known society man and millionaire, being saved by his stenographer." I thought how those two poor ladies would be bothered. In fact, on my way up, I stopped at Eighth street—just to find out. She herself arose to meet me, coloring prettily.  
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"It was so good of Mrs. Merrivale to call on us," said her little mother, in the background.  
I looked around suspiciously, for I wondered just what my mother had felt called on to say. But, at least, she made a distinct impression.  
"Miss Pentland was so nice, too," the girl went on.  
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"Yes, Mr. Merrivale," she said. "Yes, I wasn't a bit hurt. And I said nothing; I was embarrassed."  
That night, after dinner, my mother said: "There was a very nice young man down there. He seemed particularly interested in Miss Henlow. His name was Sladding. I think they would make a very good match—of the same class."  
"That's where you are mistaken," said I.  
"You are rather enthusiastic, Bob," my mother said.  
"I will go around to the Pentlands," I said, taking my hat.  
My mother looked rather troubled when I left her. I knew that what was on her mind. It was ridiculous that it should be, I said, but I ended by thinking it was ridiculous for that good mother to have any objection in the world.  
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the millionaires in the world one less. If he hadn't exactly succeeded in that, he had increased my list of delightful acquaintances; I might have gone until doomsday without having been able to break the armor of reserve Miss Henlow had put about her. Just as I reached the stair foot, the front door was thrown back, and the young man I had seen with her that day on the avenue rushed past. He turned and looked back.  
"She's not hurt!"  
"Miss Henlow, you mean? I think not," said I. "How did you know?"  
"It's all in the papers."  
"And he ran up the stairs. I didn't half like it; he had too much of the air of a proprietorship. Why should this insufferable youth named Sladding—here I paused, seeing the ridiculousness of the situation. Why indeed shouldn't he?"  
Then I drove down town, where the excitement had died away. Jobson.

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"Oh, is that the only reason? I will have Miss Pentland herself explain that away."  
"Then there are other reasons."  
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And I tried to take her hand, when Jobson's voice came from the door.  
"Did you call me, Mr. Merrivale?"  
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She rose rather wearily.  
"I am sorry you said that."  
"I never can be sorry," I exclaimed.  
"Is it," I demanded, "another man?"  
"Will you let me go now? I shan't be down tomorrow."  
"I am to come here no more. Yes, of course."  
"Oh, you must be here, too."  
"Can't I? I can't. Why do you make it hard?"  
She turned out of the room. What would my mother have said, I reflected, suddenly. The dull roar of the town sounded a melancholy chorus to my mind. What a stupid mess life could become! I went down into the street, but she had gone.

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She turned out of the room. What would my mother have said, I reflected, suddenly. The dull roar of the town sounded a melancholy chorus to my mind. What a stupid mess life could become! I went down into the street, but she had gone.

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"How did you know that about my father?" she asked, "quickly."  
"Oh, I inquired," she said.  
"You shouldn't," she said.  
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"Well, Miss Henlow, where's the because?" I asked.  
"Our positions are different."  
"I would like to know why," I cried.  
"Your father was a soldier, on one side—mine on the other. Your father was a gentleman, who gave up all to the south; mine, after the war, by shrewdness, chanced to make a fortune. Now you have saved my life."  
"It wasn't yours, Mr. Merrivale; it was my man's. I could have done just as well for him as I could have done for you."  
"I know it, I know it. Still I wish it had been for me—myself. I went on most surprisedly. (What would my mother have said?)

"Well, of course, you have been very kind to me; of course it was partly for you—but really, that's all," she rambled on, her face turned from me; but suddenly she faced me again. "Now you know I appreciate all the trouble you are taking."  
"Well," said I, giving her tit for tat, "I should do it for anybody who was to take the pains of saving my life."  
She laughed softly. "Why, of course you would," she said. "And then we both laughed, and I felt I was getting to know Miss Henlow very well, indeed."

At the boarding house on Eighth street, a very nice-looking little old lady met us. I told of her daughter's bravery with a great deal of gusto.  
"Oh, really it wasn't anything," said the daughter, pulling off her gloves.  
"Well, I choose to think it was a great deal. Yes, I insist. I really hope, Mrs. Henlow, that your daughter will put it to report at the office again this week."  
"No, no, she oughtn't. I hope you're not hurt, Clarissa."  
"It's all very ridiculous," Clarissa said. "I'm not a bit indeed. In fact it wasn't necessary for Mr. Merrivale to come up with me."  
Then she gave me her hand, and said she would be down in the morning;

"OH, REALLY, IT WASN'T ANYTHING," SAID THE DAUGHTER.

and her mother shook hands with me very cordially and gracefully. I left them; and as the door closed I suddenly felt that the town outside that room was a very dull place. I even felt under considerable obligation to the "crank" who had tried to make

me looking at me rather curiously, inquired for Miss Henlow.  
"I think she will be all right," said I. "And the man—who is he?"  
"A western merchant, who went mad because he lost all his money in the Alaska-Pacific deal. He was recently discharged from an asylum."  
"Why did he single me out? Oh, that Alaska-Pacific directorship!"  
"I suppose he saw your name in the papers."  
"Those blessed papers!"  
"And Mrs. Merrivale is down here?" he asked.  
"I, of course, rushed to my mother. I don't believe she had been below Washington square in ten years."  
"You are alive, Bobbie!" she said.  
"I hope I don't look anything else," said I. "It's a shame to worry you so."  
"You might have sent word up to me."  
"Well, really, I couldn't do two things. Naturally, I had to take home the young lady who has saved my life."  
"Why, yes," she said, "of course. I am going up to see her. I think Sallie Pentland would like to call."  
"I think it would be nice of you to call," said I, at last. "But, as for Sallie—"

"We, of course, shall settle some money on the family," said my mother, grandly. "As for Sallie, you know you are going to."  
"Oh, no," I began; then I remembered that Sallie had agreed to this game of pretense. "That's, of course, as Sallie wants."  
"Oh, she's desperately in love with you. But as for the stenographer, you can't have her down here after this?"  
"Why not?" said I.  
"This episode," said my mother, "naturally will make the relation of employer and employe—well, rather difficult."  
"You are not going to throw the poor girl out of work—because she was so unkind to save my life?"  
"I am told," said my mother, "that she is very pretty. Robert," she continued, severely, "for I did not answer, 'I know you better than you know yourself. As I have said, we, of course, will provide for them.'"  
"That may not be so easy; they may object. You know, my dear mother, they happen to be two gentlemen." Then my temper rose a bit.  
"Now, I hope you won't think me unfeeling, for I am not. But when I am determined, nothing can stir me. You can go up there—and inquire about them. But I won't have you meddling, or making a suggestion, while I seriously object to Sallie going with you." As I spoke she trembled a little. "I beg your pardon," I ended.  
"I never saw you look so much like your father in your life," she commented.  
"Well," said I, "thank you for coming down. You will call on Miss Henlow—and that is all."  
Yet I hadn't a notion that it would be all. I, indeed, hadn't much faith in my ability to conquer my mother in any little skirmish. Now, she suddenly began to cry; and her arms were around me—as if I were a small boy again.

"What should I have done if you had been hurt?" she said. Then she wiped her eyes, and I took her to her carriage; and we didn't speak of the Henlows again.

The worst of the affair was the way it was published about; and I saw several pictures of myself and my stenographer, "Robert Merrivale, the well-known society man and millionaire, being saved by his stenographer." I thought how those two poor ladies would be bothered. In fact, on my way up, I stopped at Eighth street—just to find out. She herself arose to meet me, coloring prettily.

"Now really, you needn't have come up at all," she said.  
"It was so good of Mrs. Merrivale to call on us," said her little mother, in the background.  
I looked around suspiciously, for I wondered just what my mother had felt called on to say. But, at least, she made a distinct impression.  
"Miss Pentland was so nice, too," the girl went on.  
"Oh, Miss Pentland." I really felt myself coloring like a girl. "I suppose I may expect you down tomorrow," I said. Now, that wasn't what I intended saying at all.  
"Yes, Mr. Merrivale," she said. "Yes, I wasn't a bit hurt. And I said nothing; I was embarrassed."  
That night, after dinner, my mother said: "There was a very nice young man down there. He seemed particularly interested in Miss Henlow. His name was Sladding. I think they would make a very good match—of the same class."  
"That's where you are mistaken," said I.  
"You are rather enthusiastic, Bob," my mother said.  
"I will go around to the Pentlands," I said, taking my hat.  
My mother looked rather troubled when I left her. I knew that what was on her mind. It was ridiculous that it should be, I said, but I ended by thinking it was ridiculous for that good mother to have any objection in the world.  
"Look here, Sallie," said I, when Miss Pentland entered. "We are only pretending."  
"I told you it couldn't be anything else," she said.  
"Well, let's call it off."  
"You can't do it," she said, pelling.

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"It is a matter of absolute indifference to me," she said, very sadly. "It may be, but it