

HARPER'S WEEKLY

CHRISTMAS

1902



100 PAGES

PRICE, 50 CENTS

HARPER'S WEEKLY

EDITED BY GEORGE HARVEY

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The Himalayan Edelweiss

By van Tassel Sutphen

MR. CHETWOOD PELL, ascended, with some difficulty, the swaying gangway that led from the bridge of the mail-tender to the main-deck of the *Macedonia*. It was wet, and he made a straight line for the shelter of the smoke-room. He found that hospitable haven crowded, yet, curiously enough, recognized only one familiar face—that of Dunston Dorr, amateur chess-player and professional bore. Mr. Pell withdrew hastily into a secluded corner, and drew his cap over his eyes.

An hour later it occurred to him that it might be well to look after his luggage. The rain had ceased, and as he gained the deck he saw that the steamer had already begun her long Atlantic journey, while the tender was bobbing about in the seaway a mile or two astern. Chetwood Pell bestowed one last look on the rapidly sinking shore-line of Kingstown Harbor, and proceeded to hunt up his belongings. He could not find them, which was aggravating.

"I was the only first-cabin passenger," continued Mr. Pell, in a vexed tone, to the harassed functionary in charge of the luggage.

"There can't be any mistake."

"There's only this one lot marked first cabin," returned the functionary. "Sevink pieces, includin' at-box and portable flower-garden."

"But they're not mine," retorted Mr. Pell. "Look at the tags, will you," he added, triumphantly. "Whiston Mears—first cabin, steamship *Macedonia*. That's the mistake, of course—steamship *Macedonia*—got mixed up, and put on the wrong boat."

"But this 'ere ship's the *Macedonia*," persisted the other.

"What!" Then, with an upward glance, "Red funnels, by Jove!" Bewildered. "But where's the *Draconic*, then?"

"She's just comink out now from Kingstown; yessir, that's the *Draconic*; you can see her yellow stack."

Mr. Chetwood Pell looked dejected. "What a go!" he ejaculated. His eye fell on a hand-bag reposing on the apex of the pyramid of trunks, boxes, and portmanteaus, and he proceeded to examine its contents.

"It's true enough. Here are Whiston Mears's tickets, and key. What's that number of his state-room? Sixty—er—sixty-four, port side. This is perfectly disgusting."

A prosperous-looking gentleman, whose years would be close to that of the aforesaid state-room number, stopped and gazed hard at the young gentleman. "It's Chetwood Pell, isn't it?" he inquired, politely.

"Mr. Danforth!" exclaimed Chetwood, in surprise. He was still full of his grievance, and this was Mr. William Danforth, executor of his late uncle's will and a legal counsellor of great eminence. How fortunate that he should be on board!

It was a long story, as Chetwood Pell told it, but its gist was comparatively simple. He had come down from London intending to take the *Draconic* at Kingstown. In the railway carriage he had picked up a slight acquaintance with a middle-aged man giving his name as Whiston Mears, and had learned that he was booked for the *Macedonia*, the extra Allard boat. They had driven down to the landing-stage in the same cab; the two tenders were about to go out; it was raining hard; there was much confusion; Whiston Mears, having imbibed freely of Irish whiskey, had engaged in an acrimonious controversy with the hackman over the fare; everywhere there were noise, jostling, loud words, and some display of bad temper. Suddenly the signal for casting off had been given, and Pell, glad to be out of the turmoil, had unthinkingly swung himself aboard the tender nearest at hand. As has been remarked, the weather was wet, and he had snuggled himself down among the luggage and had not even troubled to glance at the steamer lying in the offing. "For a fact, it wasn't till I came out of the smoking-room ten minutes ago that I discovered what an asinine mistake I had made," concluded Mr. Chetwood Pell. "Everything was exchanged—hand-bags, steamship tickets, clothes; I haven't even a tooth-brush that I can call my own."

A deck steward interrupted the conversation. "Beg pardon, but if you're the gentleman as come aboard by the mail-tender?"

Chetwood Pell nodded.

"Mr. Chetwood Pell on the *Draconic* would like to speak to you. Yessir, wireless telegraph, you know. This way, sir."

As Mr. Pell entered the room occupied by the Marconi operator, he noticed Dunston Dorr sitting in a corner with a pocket chess-board in his hand. Mr. Dorr nodded genially, and put out his hand.

"Great thing, this wireless business, isn't it? Just found out that my ancient enemy, Clearwater, is on *Draconic*, and we're going to have a match. Mr. Busby, you can send P-K4 to Mr. Clearwater."

Busby, the operator, handed Mr. Pell a message. It read as follows:

"No use crying—spilt milk. Since tickets exchanged, would propose swapping names and identities as well. Have important reasons therefor. Can't speak more openly at present—the—er—diplomatic service, but you can guess the rest. Answer.

CHETWOOD PELL."

After hesitating a moment, Mr. Pell scrawled a reluctant assent to the proposition, and the message was forthwith ticked over to Mr. Mears on the invisible *Draconic*. He replied immediately:

"Good! Will mention it in Downing Street when I return. Now, another special favor. Among my traps—shallow tin box containing earth and growing plants. One of my hobbies—amateur in botany, you understand. Remarkable specimen—species of *Leontopodium*—the Himalayan edelweiss—tremendously rare—extraordinarily valuable. Beg you to give plenty sunshine and water twice daily. C. P."

Mr. Pell wrote out and despatched the following:

"Have noted request about edelweiss. Is there a young woman aboard *Draconic* accompanied by elderly lady? Wears picture-hat—snake bangle with emerald eyes—tall, dark, distinguished. Beg you to find out name and inform me. W. M."

Mr. Pell received an O. K. from the obliging Mr. Mears, the latter promising to communicate with him later. It was a fascinating novelty, this interchange of thought and written speech across the gray leagues of ocean's illimitable wash, and Mr. Pell would have liked to say something more about the young woman in the picture-hat. But under the three-minute rule his time was up, and Dorr was ready with his next move for Clearwater,

—nothing less formidable than Kt-KB 3. So our young gentleman rejoined Mr. William Danforth on the leeward side, and continued his confidences.

It was in London two days previously that he had met the young woman of the picture-hat. There had been a carriage accident, and he had had the good fortune to rescue her from the ruins of the smashed-up four-wheeler in which the two ladies had been driving to Paddington station.

They were on their way to take the *Draconic* at Liverpool—the luggage tags told that plainly enough. Mr. Pell had not learned his charmer's name, but this did not concern him greatly, for he was booked for the same steamer. They would meet again on board the *Draconic* for a whole blissful week. And now, through his own stupidity—Chetwood Pell ground his teeth.

"But for me, no other woman on earth—now or ever. It was love at first sight, and we both recognized the truth, so beautiful and overwhelming. I am not ashamed to confess, Mr. Danforth, that I am in love."

"But how about your uncle Archibald's will?"

"Of which you are executor. Just what are its provisions again? though, indeed, I ought to know them."

"Your uncle Archibald Morris, my dear Chetwood, left in trust two million dollars to you and Miss Esmé Effingham upon the condition of your marriage. Otherwise, it all goes to the Asylum for Aged Gold-beaters."

"Secondly, your final decision must be communicated to me, as



Twice he got up and watered the Himalayan edelweiss

executor, on or before the twenty-fourth day of December, 1902. To-day is the twelfth, and the Effinghams will be in New York on that date—so I am assured. We should arrive on the nineteenth, and in plenty of time. That is the situation as it now stands.”

“I have never laid eyes on Miss Effingham,” said Mr. Pell, rebelliously. “She’s the daughter of an old flame of Uncle Archibald’s—isn’t she? That’s the story, anyway.”

Mr. Danforth smiled. “Are you prepared to give me your answer?”

Mr. Chetwood Pell flushed. “I will tell you this much. I am first going to ask that girl in the picture-hat to take me for better or worse and with or without Uncle Archibald’s cold cash. If she declines, why, then, we’ll see.”

The dinner hour approached. Just as the second gong was sounding a messenger brought Mr. Pell a Marconigram. It read:

“To Whiston Mears, S. S. *Macedonia*: Young lady is Miss Esmé Effingham, of Salem. Have had myself introduced as Chetwood Pell. Lovely creature; looked somewhat frosty at mention of name, but am not easily discouraged. Understand she is an heiress—may decide to propose. C. P.”

Mr. Pell said something deep down in his throat, cleared a couple of deck chairs by a miraculous bound, and rushed into the Marconi office. But the operator was busy; Mr. Dunston Dorr was sending a reply to Clearwater’s masterly stroke of KP x QP. Chetwood fumed, but Mr. Dorr was imperturbable. Finally he spoke in a cold, hard tone. “P x QP, if you please, Mr. Busby.”

There was something wrong with the transmitter; it would not work.

“Nothing more to-night, I’m afraid, gentlemen,” said the operator.

“Will you be in communication again to-morrow morning?” asked Mr. Pell, anxiously.

The operator shook his head. It was impossible to tell. The instrument would be in order by then, but one could never be sure how long signals could be exchanged. At one time communication would be perfect up to four or five hundred miles; at another, it might cease absolutely at fifty.

Chetwood Pell spent a wretched night. Yet for all his perturbation he did not forget his promise to Whiston Mears. Twice he got up and watered the Himalayan edelweiss. Now that he thought of it, the *Leontopodium* bore a remarkable resemblance to the common or garden asparagus. It was green and vigorous-looking, certainly; in the morning he would take care to give it some sunlight.

At the earliest possible moment Mr. Pell presented himself at the Marconi office. Yet Dunston Dorr was there before him, and was waiting for the operator to take his move of P x QP and transmit it to Mr. Clearwater on the *Draconic*. So Chetwood had to bide his time, but it was satisfactory to know that communication had been restored. When his turn finally came he had the following message despatched:

“To Chetwood Pell, S.S. *Draconic*: Under no circumstances use my name in proposing to Miss Effingham. Do not propose to her at all. I forbid it—positively. W. M.”

While he was at breakfast the answer was brought to him. It read:

“To Whiston Mears, S.S. *Macedonia*: Sorry, dear boy, but have already taken the fatal step, and in your name. C. P.”

Two hours later, in reply to several wildly worded messages, the pseudo Mr. Pell deigned to vouchsafe this further information:

“Forgot to add that Miss Effingham positively declines offer of heart and hand. Please report condition of *Leontopodium*. Hope you keep it in constant sight. The Himalayan edelweiss is dependent upon human companionship.”

Mr. Pell consulted again with Mr. Danforth, dwelling at great length upon the incidents already recorded.

“Nothing mercenary about Miss Esmé Effingham,” concluded the young gentleman, rapturously. “Just to think of it! refusing that boulder point-blank, for all that he was masquerading under my name. Chucking two million dollars right over the rail.”

Mr. Danforth smiled, and assured the anxious Mr. Pell that the lady had the undoubted privilege of changing her mind up to December 25th or Christmas morning. “When we all get ashore you can assume your proper character, and get a reversal of sentence—life imprisonment, we’ll say.”

At this instant they felt a slight shock. Mr. Danforth, an old traveller, recognized the symptoms, and diagnosed the trouble promptly. “Broken shaft,” he said, tersely.

For a few moments Chetwood’s heart had beat high with hope. Surely the *Draconic*, only a few miles away, would steam over and offer assistance. He would then be able to effect a transfer, and all would be well. But the captain of the *Macedonia*, after a prolonged conversation over the Marconi instruments, finally announced that the Denman liner *Copenhagen*, six hours behind them, had agreed to stand by and take the first-class cabin passengers and mail on to New York.

“But the *Copenhagen* is a slow cargo-boat, and may not arrive until too late. I am certain that she cannot get in before Christmas morning,” said Chetwood Pell, anxiously, to Mr. Danforth.

“Get an answer, then, at once from the young lady,” replied the eminent legal authority. “If negative, you will have to run your chances of the *Copenhagen*’s arriving at New York on Christmas eve; if favorable, I will accept it as Miss Effingham’s final decision.”

“That scoundrel on the *Draconic* may hold me to my promise, and not allow me to use my own name,” faltered Mr. Pell.

“That makes no difference; Miss Effingham is required to accept or refuse the man, and not the dozen letters of the alphabet that happen to spell out Chetwood Pell. Courage! my boy; go in and win.”

In front of the Marconi office there was a long line of people, who had messages to transmit to New York via the *Draconic*. Mr. Pell had to take his place at the end of the queue and wait as patiently as he might. Directly ahead of him was Dunston Dorr, who was about to answer Q—Q Kt 6 to Clearwater’s defiant QR—Q.

When his turn finally came he had these ready:

“To Chetwood Pell, S.S. *Draconic*: I desire to resume my own name. In the event of your refusal the Himalayan edelweiss comes up by the roots. W. M.”

“To Miss Esmé Effingham, S.S. *Draconic*: Will you accord immediate interview to young man, light hair, dark eyes, who had the honor to render slight assistance in carriage—London, three days ago? Answer to W. M., S.S. *Macedonia*.”

“Reads like a *Herald* personal,” said Mr. Pell, discontentedly, “but go it must.” The answers were promptly delivered.



“But this 'ere ship's the 'Macedonia'”

Mr. Whiston Mears replied:

"Compelled to refuse request. Knowing you to be man of honor, have no fears for safety of *Leontopodium*. Don't forget to water."

Mr. Pell crumpled up the paper into a ball, and tossed it overboard, frowning darkly. Then he opened the message from Miss Effingham. It read:

"To W. M., S.S. *Macedonia*: How dreadful about the shaft breaking. Of course I shall be happy to do what I can.
ESME EFFINGHAM."

Mr. Pell had his next message all prepared. Fortunately the rush was over.

"I offer my hand in marriage, and insist upon your accepting it. My name I cannot reveal until I see you in New York, but I can assure you that it is an honorable one. An immediate answer is necessary, and it must be in the affirmative or all is lost.
W. M."

The Marconi operator ran it over, and remarked, indifferently, "Signals are getting rather faint; we may have to break now at any time."

"Rush it," said Mr. Pell, nervously.

The tapping of the return message broke the stillness. Chetwood grabbed at the paper!

"So sudden—must I really answer at once—right away?
E. E."

"Tell her—" began Mr. Pell to the operator, but Dunston Dorr started up with a yell, and pushed his way in between. "My turn," he shouted. "Send R—Q, if you please, Mr. Busby. That'll fetch him."

Pell turned on the interrupter with savage intensity.

"What the devil!" he began.

Dunston Dorr pointed to the placard on the wall. "Under the three-minute rule, I demand my rights," he said, calmly. "No; it isn't a question of money."

The operator took Mr. Dorr's message. The signals were growing fainter and fainter, and he had great difficulty in making the transmission. Then at last he began receiving again.

"To W. M.: What can I say? But if you will have it, why, then—"

The clicking stopped suddenly.

"Go on!" said Chetwood, in an agony.

There was no response. "It's the break," announced the operator. It was not until Christmas morning that the slow, old *Copenhagen* steamed up New York Bay. On the dock, awaiting them, was Mr. Whiston Mears, who advanced, smiling.

"You have it?" he said, eagerly, and extended his hand.

"One moment," said Mr. Chetwood Pell, and forthwith knocked him down. Mr. Mears, however, showed no malice. He got up nimbly, seized his edelweiss, and hopped into a cab.

"Keep up your courage, my boy," Danforth said, genially. "Even though it is the twenty-fifth and a day late, you have received a definite answer, and you have only to go and get it."

And yet Chetwood felt his heart grow heavy as he ascended the steps of the Effingham residence. He handed in his card, and composed himself as best he could for the coming interview. But suddenly he started at the sound of a voice in an adjacent room.

"Tell Mr. Pell that I am unable to receive him."

There was unmistakable decision in the tone, and our hero trembled. The servant entered the room looking somewhat embarrassed. Mr. Pell's card was still lying on the little silver salver. An inspiration struck the young gentleman.

"Of course," he muttered to himself; and snatching up the card which bore his name, he added, in pencil, the initials, "W. M."

"Take in that," he commanded.

The lady of the picture-hat entered, blushing deeply, and Mr. Pell, equally embarrassed, stumbled through a full explanation.



"What the devil!" he began

"And so," he concluded, "it was absolutely necessary for me to make that extraordinary proposal. Then came your answer—"

Miss Effingham looked somewhat surprised. "Well?" she said at length. But Mr. Pell was too agitated to proceed.

"You desire, perhaps, to recall—"

"No!" interrupted Mr. Pell, violently. "It is simply that I don't know what the answer was"; and he explained again.

But Miss Effingham professed her entire inability to comply with this request. It was so long ago—how could one remember—she might have said a dozen things and changed her mind as many times. Mr. Pell could not expect—

"I can get the original message from the Marconi operator on the *Draconic* at any time," said Mr. Pell, exasperated.

"Why don't you, then?"

"Because I want to hear it from your own lips."

"On account of that wretched money?"

"On account of you," shouted Mr. Pell. "Two letters or three?"

Well, certainly Miss Effingham did not answer audibly, but wireless communication having been completely restored, Mr. Pell found no difficulty in understanding the answer.

When Chetwood Pell finally reached home that evening he found a small package and a note awaiting him. The package contained an uncut diamond of the finest water. The note read:

"A small remembrance in honor of the day and of your deeply appreciated services. The stone has paid full duty, so you need have no hesitation in accepting it, and you may have use for a solitaire in the near future. The Himalayan edelweiss is, alas! no more. They are such delicate plants.

Ever yours,

WILFRED MORE, or if you prefer it,
WHISTON MEARS."

Extracts from daily papers:

"Mr. Whiston Mears, the well-known amateur botanist, arrived on the *Draconic* on Thursday. He brought with him a fine specimen of *Leontopodium*, the rare Himalayan edelweiss."

"The notorious diamond smuggler, Wilfred More, has again succeeded in scoring on the Treasury Department, his latest coup representing some \$70,000 worth of diamond necklaces. It is reported that the jewels were concealed from the eagle eyes of the customs officers in a portable asparagus-bed, but this theory does not seem reasonable."

Dunston Dorr met Chetwood Pell in the club the other day, and congratulated him upon his engagement to Miss Effingham. After all, Dorr is a decent chap in his way, and he was positively beaming that day. And he would tell about it.

"Have just received the report from the Marconi operator on the *Draconic*. The answer to R—Q was on file. What do you think it was? Clearwater resigned in the thirty-sixth move."