

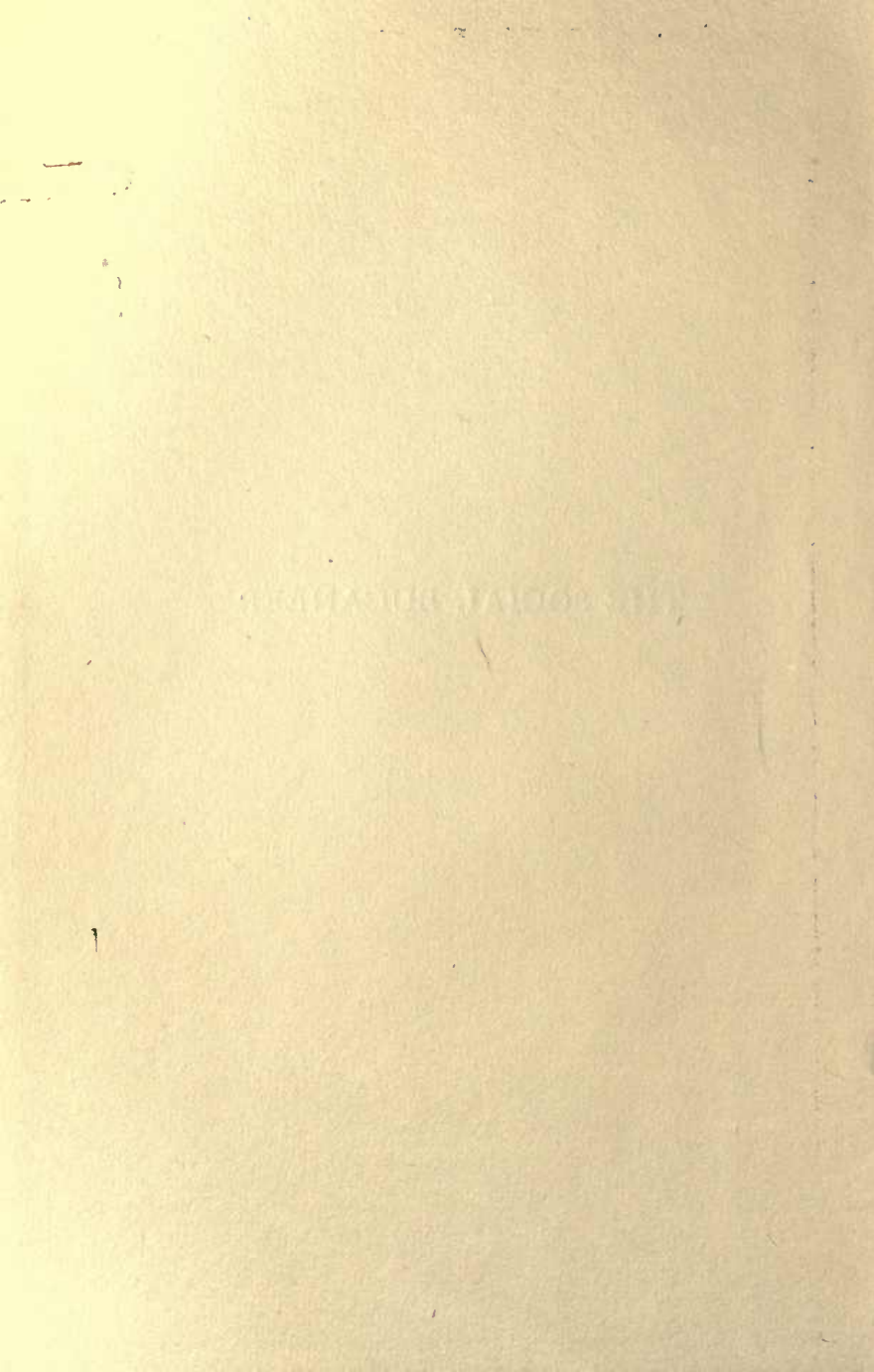
THE
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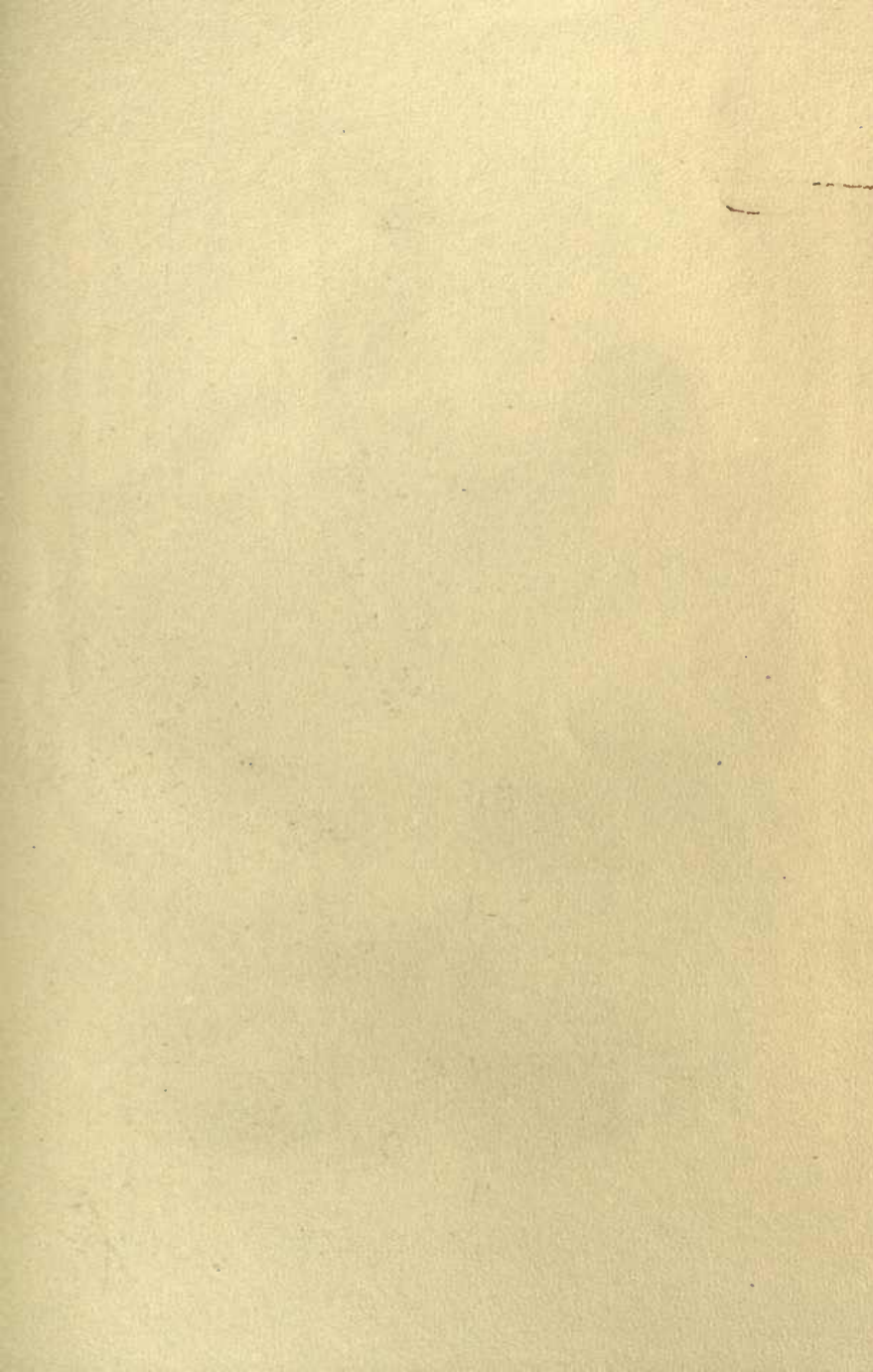
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THE SOCIAL BUCANEER







"A man would fight hard for you"

THE SOCIAL BUCANEER

By

FREDERIC S. ISHAM

Author of

UNDER THE ROSE
HALF A CHANCE, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

W. B. KING

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THE SOCIAL BUCANEER

CHAPTER I

THE LOST BONDS

“WHAT? Another contribution from Mr. Chatfield Bruce?”

“Yes, ladies of the board, your treasurer received this morning a check, drawn on the People’s National Bank, for ten thousand dollars, the amount needed by the settlement for the new playground.”

“Mr. Bruce seems very much interested in our work; but then he enjoys the reputation of being a most charitable young man.”

Madam President beamed benignly about her; most of the ladies were beaming; for the moment, the routine of business was neglected.

“Quite a remarkable case!” It was the treasurer who spoke. “Here we find a young man, not more than six and twenty, preferring to spend

his money in charitable matters, instead of flinging it away in idle frivolities!"

"I have heard he doesn't spend any of his inheritance on himself; that he lives only on what he earns in some sort of clerical capacity in a wholesale store on lower Broadway."

"And yet"—the speaker was a young girl, with dark hair and blue eyes—"Mr. Bruce does not convey the impression of one so charitably inclined! I met him for the first time last evening and his expression was that of veiled raillery,—ironical amusement, I might almost term it, when I spoke to him of his numerous gifts: 'Believe me, Miss Wood, I get more pleasure and diversion out of giving, than the ladies of the board do in receiving.' It was not so much his words as his manner!"

"By his deeds we will judge him," said Madam President urbanely. "This is a cynical age; although if you had seen him, as I once did—"

"How was that?" asked the girl quickly.

"It was in one of the poorest quarters; I chanced to go there on an errand for one of our societies. In a horribly squalid room Mr. Bruce

— who is immaculate himself — sat surrounded by a score of children, dirty, unkempt, eating some sticky stuff he had given them and listening to him talk. And what," impressively, "do you think he was telling these poor waifs?"

"A biblical story?"

"Not at all. Something that sounded like the Arabian Nights and related to the benevolent deeds of a certain old Chinese river pirate."

Miss Wood laughed. "Well, I'm sure they were interested."

"They were. I felt almost like murmuring something disapproving to Mr. Bruce; but of course could not, remembering —"

"He would probably take upon himself to support, send to school and to care for these little disreputable mites of humanity."

"Exactly! Besides the stories, although about pirates, were not quite what you would call immoral. They seemed to teach a lesson in their way; not the conventional one, it is true!"

"At any rate he is charming," observed the treasurer. "He is welcomed in the smartest sets in spite of his peculiarities."

“I hear he is to take part in the little Japanese play to be given at your home, Miss Wood?”

The girl answered in the affirmative.

“Mr. Bruce should be well-fitted for a rôle of that sort,” observed another lady. “He was born in the Far East, or lived there. His father was a missionary, I understand.”

“No; a physician!”

“Official adviser to one of the viceroys, I have heard!”

“From whom”—a lady of the board who had not yet spoken, raised her voice—“did he inherit his money?”

“That,” said Madam President, “is a question I can not answer, Mrs. Van Dusen. Perhaps some one else—” She looked around her.

“I have been told his uncle was a forty-niner.”

“Ah, one of those California fortunes!”

“But I really know nothing about it,” Miss Tucker, who had vouchsafed the information, conscientiously hastened to add.

“Any other business, ladies, to come before the board?” The president’s tones were again short, matter-of-fact. “If not—”

“One moment before we adjourn!” The secretary spoke; she was a plump, well-dressed woman—a little overdressed, perhaps. “Our special gymnasium fund, I beg to report, has not quite realized the proportions we had hoped. All the people on our list have been seen; unfortunately, the usual number of them had ‘other calls.’”

A suggestion of a cynical smile appeared on one or two faces; that on the countenance of Miss Tucker, the treasurer, was the most pronounced. She was a lady of excellent qualities, descendant of an “old” family; not being blessed with means, she contributed her time to the cause.

“I suppose Mr. Samuel Page was on your list?” she said with a tightening of the lips.

“Yes.” The secretary laughed good-naturedly. “One always sees him just as a matter of form, because he is so rich. Not that he ever gives; or ever will! Mr. Page certainly dislikes to part with any of his worldly possessions.”

“He *has* recently parted with a few of them, if the morning paper is to be depended upon,” remarked Madam President vivaciously.

“To charity? No?”

“Didn’t you read about it? My husband called my attention to it. Mr. Page claims to have lost some bonds from his box in the People’s National safety deposit vault. Of course, the officials of the bank think he is mistaken; that he must have mislaid them. No one ever loses anything that way. I asked my husband and he said: ‘Stole ’em himself, most likely!’” Madam President imitated a gruff voice. “‘He’s mean enough to rob himself, if he can’t anybody else!’” The members of the board laughed, all save Miss Wood, who seemed rather preoccupied.

“The People’s National,” observed Miss Tucker when the brief merriment had subsided. “That,” looking at a check she held in her hand, “is one of the banks Mr. Bruce does business with. At least, he has an account there.”

“And a box, too, no doubt, if the amount of his wealth is not overestimated!”

“No doubt,” said Madam President, with a smile. “The People’s National has vaults that are supposed to be as impregnable as those of the Bank of England.”

“Which makes this alleged occurrence the more

curious! But how much does Mr. Page claim is missing?"

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

"And haven't they any theory of how they might have been taken?"

"No. Mr. Page hasn't been to his box for some time. It is his belief the bonds, extracted in some inexplicable manner, have already been sold. If they had been registered he could better substantiate his claim and trace them; but they weren't, for fear, no doubt, of the information 'leaking out' to the tax commission. Anyhow, Mr. Page has repeatedly sworn to having no personal property like taxable bonds, and now his explanation of their not being registered puts him in a peculiar light, especially as the newspaper published a reproduction of his own sworn statement that he never had any. My husband says that under the circumstances the bank people can afford to laugh at his claim."

"Serves him right!" From Miss Tucker, *sotto voce*. She had approached Mr. Page several times herself with a subscription list.

"If there *was* a thief, and I suppose of course

there was, I'll warrant, he, also, is having a fine laugh," said the secretary, smiling.

"Especially as the tax commission are threatening to sue Mr. Page on his own statements!" went on the president. "But I am forgetting. There was one thing it is alleged the thief did leave behind him, that Mr. Page showed to the police. A tiny drawing on a scrap of paper; something that looked like a spike, or a nail or needle, and an animal that might have been a buffalo or a camel — anyway it seemed to have hump. This, Mr. Page claimed, lay in the place where the bonds had been. The police couldn't make anything out of the crude drawing."

"Might not the thief have had in mind a certain biblical quotation?" suggested one of the board.

"Mr. Page thought it might be the device of some secret society; but the detectives scout the idea. They seem, in fact, to take the bank officials' view of the situation."

"But why," asked Miss Wood, "should Mr. Page stir up all this trouble for himself to no purpose?"

"Since he had the grippe, some people say — well, he hasn't been quite the man he was," an-

swered Madam President, tapping her forehead lightly.

“And besides,” said the secretary, “you forget, my dear, the boxes in the security vaults are absolutely closed to all who have not the right of access to them.”

The girl did not answer. “It is true, however, there has been an unusually large number of robberies in New York lately,” observed Miss Tucker tentatively.

“An epidemic,” asserted a voice.

“It is really reprehensible the police do not find the perpetrators!” said the president in her most severe tone. “A family coronet of diamonds here, and wonderful rubies and sapphires there — missing and never found; no trace of them! ‘Another Mysterious Robbery in High Life,’ sensational head-lines in the newspapers; and, after that — ‘no clue to the perpetrators.’ An outrage on society, I call it — this inaction of the authorities.”

“Perhaps they are too busy collecting perquisites in what is called the ‘tenderloin,’ to look after these other matters,” commented the secretary cynically.

“Ladies” — warningly the president of the board

spoke —“ I fear our talk has to-day drifted into unusually irrelevant channels. The blame is partly my own.”

“ I believe we had transacted all necessary business, Madam President,” the secretary ventured to remark, in mild apology for herself and her sister members of the board — if, indeed any apology were needed!

“ Before we adjourn, there is one other little matter,” observed the treasurer. “ Mr. Chatfield Bruce’s gift of ten thousand dollars — his past generosity — I believe some action on the part of the board —”

“ Move the board pass a resolution of thanks and that the same be forwarded to the gentleman by the secretary.”

The motion was carried; also a motion to adjourn. The ladies began to put on their wraps; Miss Wood was the first to go. As she descended the steps of the old, down-town mansion, home of one of the ladies of the board, a young man walking briskly by, glanced up. A sudden quick look of recognition swept his face.

“ Who is he; the young man who just bowed to

Miss Wood?" a new member of the board inquired.

"That"—Madam President, emerging from the front door, paused at the head of the steps, to regard the retreating figure of the person indicated—"that," impressively, "is our very good friend, Mr. Chatfield Bruce."

CHAPTER II

A MEETING

MR. NATHAN GOLDBERG, importer of French silks and ladies' goods, gazed in indubitable satisfaction at the latest consignment of boxes filled with divers articles from Paris. They occupied a good deal of space in the rear of the large store on lower Broadway, after having successfully passed the customs.

"We are in a position to undersell the trade, Mr. Bruce," he observed in a low tone to the young man, head of one of the principal departments of the large wholesale firm.

"I congratulate you." The speaker, hammer in hand, turned. He was a young fellow, tall, athletic, with light brown hair, fine, immovable features, enigmatic mouth, and eyes which seemed at once ironically humorous and impenetrable. His dress was simple but immaculate. "Bought cheap, I suppose," he added in a quiet voice.

“Yes, and —” Mr. Goldberg paused; half-questioningly, half-tentatively regarded his employee. He liked the young man whose social position and little eccentricities dazzled as well as sometimes bewildered him. There were moments even, as now, when the employer would have liked to “get nearer” the other, but Mr. Bruce gave him not the slightest pretext for confidences, apart from the regular routine of business; his manner was respectful, but distant. Somehow any desire on Mr. Goldberg’s part to create a closer, more personal relationship with his clerk slowly vanished; the keen sharp eyes of the business man met the well-contained gray ones of his employee. “Got the goods at the lowest figure,” said Mr. Goldberg. “Our buyer was unusually fortunate.”

The impersonal gaze of Chatfield Bruce fell; he began to work on the box. “Came through all right at the customs, then,” he remarked in a matter-of-fact tone.

Mr. Goldberg’s glance shifted. “Naturally. Our firm always deals square with the government, and so we never have any trouble. Honesty’s the best policy; that’s my maxim; eh, Mr. Bruce?”

A faint trace of some emotion passed around the corner of the young man's lips; he pounded at a nail. "You may be sure I know that, Mr. Goldberg, or —"

"You wouldn't work for me! That's what you mean?" jocosely.

Mr. Bruce made a deprecatory gesture; continued his task. Mr. Goldberg watched the supple movements of his figure; the hands, thin, long, muscular; well-kept. Those hands rather fascinated Mr. Goldberg.

"See here, Bruce!" He liked occasionally to call the young fellow by his last name, the way the latter's swell friends did. "You ought not to be doing that sort of thing, you know."

"Opening boxes?" Bruce laughed. "Yes; I'm aware my salary demands a higher kind of labor, but"—straightening—"things were for the moment slack up-stairs, and—well, it seemed as if I wanted the exercise. But I shan't be at it long; I promise shortly to return to my more important duties."

"Oh, I was only thinking it wasn't the kind of job for a man with hands like yours. You've got

the swagger society thing in hands. Now look at mine," extending a stubby pair. "Not much alike, are they? But if you find things slack, take a half day off, not forgetting," jocularly, "to tell your friends that the retailers will soon be supplied with Goldberg's —" Here he mentioned several brands of articles that masqueraded under the firm name.

Bruce's smile was enigmatic. "Never forget that," he remarked. And Goldberg, though slightly puzzled, knew he told the truth. He lived in a big house himself; the prestige of employing a man like Bruce counted for something. Besides, oddly, the young fellow really earned his salary. Not that he needed it; Chatfield Bruce, Mr. Goldberg knew, kept two sets of books.

One dealt with his inheritance which this eccentric young man for some inexplicable reason never touched, save for charitable purposes; the other comprised a journal and ledger of his actual personal earnings and expenditures. He made a good salary, lived modestly and was a careful spender, although moving in the most exclusive sets. His habits, which were orderly, made it possible for one of his limited earning capacity to keep alive a

large circle of friends; he could waive certain extravagances with good grace: "Not for me, thank you! You know my salary? Wait," with inimitable imitation of his employer's accents, "until I am a member of the firm of Goldberg and Company." Protests of this character were indulgently received; he was humored as an "original."

"By the way, Bruce," the elder man continued, "we're going to open our new country home at Comscot with a grand house party. Will it be swell enough for you to come?" A little earnestness mingled with the facetiousness of his tone.

"Why not?" said the young man evenly. "When is it?"

"In August; your vacation time."

"Ah! I had made other plans. Still it may be possible." Mr. Goldberg regarded him suspiciously. "Shall we say for the first day or two, if I can make it?"

"All right. There's going to be a big band (Mr. Goldberg said 'pig pand') and all kinds of such nonsense, and the women will wear their biggest diamonds — in fact, I promised my wife the real, bang-up thing. I can afford it." His glance shifted

a moment to the boxes. "Business looks very good just now."

"I shall do my best to accept, Mr. Goldberg, and on second thought I really think I can arrange it, — many thanks!"

"Don't mention it!" A moment yet the employer lingered. "You haven't met my daughter, I believe? She is one of those 'buds,' this year's, don't you know, and will wear the Goldberg pearls for the first time."

"Indeed? That should make the occasion interesting. The famous Goldberg pearls!"

"You couldn't possibly find sixty-seven better matched beauties anywhere; weight over fifteen hundred!"

"Sixty-seven? Over fifteen hundred?" repeated the young man slowly. "And perfect in color, I presume?"

"All pure white; couldn't tell them apart, so near the same size!"

"Spheres, of course?"

"Of course; with no perceptible flaws; cost over three hundred and seventy-five thousand francs, my boy."

“Including the duty?” Bruce’s voice had a faintly peculiar inflection.

“Oh, yes; of course!” hastily.

“But aren’t you”—Mr. Bruce smiled—“rather reckless in taking them out of the strong box into the country? So many articles of value mysteriously disappearing nowadays, don’t you know?”

“Ever hear of anybody taking anything from me?” Mr. Goldberg’s chest perceptibly swelled. “Was born with my eyes open. But we can rely upon you, then, for the house party?”

Mr. Bruce’s reply was positive. Mr. Goldberg turned; he felt satisfied with the assurance. Bruce’s name would look very well among those who were to congregate at the Goldberg house. Many wealthy people would be present, but no others of the really inner set. Perhaps Mr. Goldberg, also, seemed to see in print something like “Miss Goldberg, wearing the Goldberg pearls, went out to an elaborate collation on the arm of Mr. Chatfield Bruce.” And the father of that young lady hummed lightly as he walked away.

Mr. Bruce continued to work at one of the boxes. Slowly but surely he conquered iron bands and

fastenings; he removed long wire nails without injuring those of his own supple fingers. Sometimes he paused to survey contemplatively the box, and at such a moment his tall, slender figure appeared to advantage among those other employees, the regular corps of husky, perspiring box-openers. Bruce's shirt—for he labored without a coat—was spotless; it was equally so when, after washing his hands, he put on the coat he had carefully hung on one of the pegs near by. The pointers of the office clock indicated that the noon hour had come and the young man walked to the door and went out.

He stopped at two places, one a florist's, where he purchased a tiny orchid of deep purple, almost odorless. This he set in the button-hole of his coat. The flower was unobtrusive, Malayan in origin. Few knew its rarity. In buying it, Mr. Bruce permitted himself a slight extravagance. But he atoned by a frugal luncheon. His second stop was at a restaurant of the white porcelain variety, where a person with white gloves manipulated pan-cakes in the front window.

Mr. Bruce mounted a stool, gave his order and

and had started to read the newspaper he had purchased at the door, when his neighbor at the long table spoke to him. At the sound of that metallic voice, the young fellow looked around into the harshly wrinkled face of a man about seventy; a countenance whereon parsimony and avarice had set their seal.

“Ah, Mr. Page! Any news about the bonds?” perfunctorily.

“No, there isn’t,” curtly. As the old capitalist spoke he glanced sidewise at some one on the other side of him. This individual, stocky, commonplace-looking, continued, however, to gaze unconcernedly before him, while deliberately using his knife and fork; only the lids of his nondescript eyes lifted slightly.

Chatfield Bruce regarded the mirror in front of them, the divers visages reflected there, and smiled. The sight of a row of men eating at the “hurry-up” counter has its comical features. The young man stroked lightly, meditatively his upper lip. “Do you know, I have a little theory about those bonds, Mr. Page,” he drawled.

“Perhaps you think they weren’t taken at all?”

snapped the other. "Like some folks"—viciously—"pretend to tell me. That it's only a mistake on my part. A mistake!" he repeated. "That they're mislaid somewhere."

"No; I don't think that. You know I have a box at that vault, or did have," quietly, "until this mishap of yours led me to make a change."

"Glad of it! That you've left them! I hope they'll lose all their business."

"Of course I may be mistaken," Bruce continued in the same even voice. "A theory is but a theory, and I dare say, you've listened to a great many already."

"A bushel of them!" Mr. Page's tones conveyed no great respect for theories. Again he started to look in the direction of the man on the other side.

"Have you ever thought of this? It came to me the other day when removing my papers and other little matters from the People's National. Suppose another customer of the bank, while ostensibly attending to the combination of his own box, should manage to look over your shoulder and learn the combination of yours when you were

operating it. Perhaps your eyes are not so strong as they once were and you might have to take your time with the combination—which would favor his observation.”

“Is it very likely I’d let any one look over my shoulder long enough to find out the combination? If there’s any one standing near, I always know which way he’s looking and what he’s about,” succinctly.

“Suppose he managed to get one part of it, one time; another part of it, another time?” continued the other in a dispassionate, argumentative tone. “Suppose he found out the first number of the combination a year ago; the second, some while later, and so on? Suppose he had made a systematic study of your habits, your business routine, and determined at all hazards, no matter how long it took him, to accomplish the seemingly impossible? Suppose he had a bit of the gambler’s streak in his moral make-up? Liked to work long chances? I put myself these questions, because I, too, have securities that need to be guarded; not exactly my own; left, as it were, in trust for a purpose.” Bruce’s eyes dropped slightly.

“Though practically mine, if I chose to call them so,” he added.

Mr. Page did not seem to hear the latter portion of the young man’s remarks; with the first part he was principally concerned. “I’m a careful man,” he said, “and a person would have to have eyes in the back of his head ever to stand near enough to me under the circumstances, to be able to learn —”

“A customer, papers in hand, could pass at the right moment and detect more than you think, perhaps, if he wore very strong glasses. Or”—glancing casually before him—“there’s the mirror idea. The shiny lifted lid of a bright security box of tin, in the hands of some one near by, apparently searching for something therein, or depositing something, might answer a sinister purpose. Or—” He broke off; the reflection in the glass of the man on the other side of Mr. Page had for the moment caught Bruce’s eye. “There are a dozen different ways,” he went on again, in the same tone, “but I won’t weary you with my amateur theories. Will only call your attention to the fact that in these calculations, the officials of

the safety deposit company are, also, to be reckoned with."

"I reckon there isn't much in your theories," said the old man dryly, "that hasn't already been considered. I'm not saying a great deal; however" — the thin mouth shut tightly — "I'm like a cat after a mouse, for patience, when it comes to —"

"Waiter!" the man next to Mr. Page called sharply; the aged capitalist suddenly paused in what he was saying. Bruce, too, spoke no more; with an occasional glance at his newspaper, he ate the frugal luncheon set before him. He did not linger over it long, finished before his neighbors, paid his check and walked out. As he turned at the front door, however, he looked back. The stocky commonplace individual had at that moment leaned over to speak with Mr. Page.

Bruce bent over the orchid. He seemed lost in the contemplation of its beauty; breathed on the leaves. They, strangely sensitive, opened wider. The young man laughed softly.

CHAPTER III

“LAVENDRE AMBREE”

SEVERAL days later, Mr. Bruce sauntered meditatively along Fifth Avenue toward the park. It was bright spring weather, and the air was full of tonic qualities from the sea. Little whiffs of perfumes, too, borne by the breezes from near-by verdure and beds of flowers, regaled the senses of passing pedestrians, susceptible to delicate fragrance. The young man had a far-eastern keenness in this regard; had he been born in the shadows of a Golden Pavilion, set in the conventional lake of tranquillity, he would have delighted in the incense box and the amicable competition of guessing illusive odors.

On a day like this, all classes and conditions were astir in the people's breathing space as he stepped into and down one of the paths. The tramps dozed; the children romped. A few more

horsemen and women than usual were in evidence. Machines of all the "makes," from the silent and insinuating electric to the noisy and self-assertive taxicab, moved hither and thither. Mr. Bruce's income at Messrs. Goldberg and Company's was not sufficient, at least so he thought, to enable him to own and to maintain a machine. So he walked.

He had not gone far, however, when a shiny vehicle, of a beautiful blue, with a pretty monogram on the door, passed him noiselessly; then stopped at the side of the path. Mr. Bruce saw white flowers — a tiny bouquet that adorned the interior of the dainty vehicle — then buds of other colors and a girl's face beneath; blue eyes below a wave of black hair, red lips slightly apart as she bent forward in the sunlight.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bruce." She looked out of the window. "I was just thinking of you."

Another would have expressed himself as fortunate. Mr. Bruce only bowed and very deferentially waited for her to go on.

"We have at last settled on a Japanese play, the one we plan to give in the autumn," she explained, "and as you have consented to take part, I — that

is, we — wanted to ask if it, and your rôle, would be acceptable.”

“As I said when the matter was first broached to me, I am quite at your disposal, Miss Wood. But what is the play?”

“*San Tankyo; The Beggar-Prince.*”

Bruce straightened slightly. “Not by—?” He mentioned a name.

“Yes; I remember, because”—the girl’s lips curved—“we once gave it in school.”

He looked down. She fancied his expression had changed in the least; that he was thinking deeply, though he swung his stick with an assumption of lightness. This surprised her, she did not quite know why; she regarded him in the least curiously.

“If you have any objections?”—she began.

“None at all,” quickly. “What part”—an enigmatic expression crossing his clean-cut features—“did you wish me to take?”

“There is but one man’s rôle of any consequence, that of the beggar-prince; the other men — notably the great Shogun — are only talked about.”

“The beggar-prince who —” Bruce stopped suddenly; his laugh sounded a little strange to her.

The girl's blue eyes widened in the least. "But certainly"—he checked himself—"that is, if you think I am equal to the rôle. Odd, though," he added, "you should have chosen that particular piece. Rank socialism, most people would call it!"

"Then I venture to disagree with them."

His eyes dared to be amused. "You will set a new fashion in problem plays," he observed. "But what part did you take, Miss Wood, in school, if I may ask?"

"That of the beggar-prince."

"Ah!" He looked at her, tall and straight; an ideal Rosalind—or a beggar-prince. Yet he was not thinking of her. She knew, too, his thoughts were at the moment far off; remote from school-girl entertainments, enthusiasms of the class-room. Somehow he vaguely offended her; at the same time, it may have been interest, or that other feeling, her sex's legitimate inheritance, swayed her to linger.

"I will send you the part," she observed, her tone rather reserved.

"It will not be necessary," he answered. "I have it."

“Indeed?” interested in spite of herself.

“Both in the original and the English.”

“And you can read the former?”

“Oh, yes. It is one of many in a little drawer of the desk of a tiny princess who lived two hundred years ago. The manuscript is a dainty plaything tied with a ribbon and beautifully decorated with appropriate flowers. It looks both pretty and — harmless,” he laughed.

Miss Wood had heard people say they did not understand Chatfield Bruce; that he was a *poseur*, a dilettante, or an *arbiter elegantiarum*, at will. She might well believe that; he certainly seemed in an eccentric mood at the present moment. The girl felt inclined to leave him alone. Her gloved hands tightened on the handle of her machine; she was about to nod, very stiffly, hardly perceptibly, but instead, did something perverse.

“If you have any objective point, Mr. Bruce?” Miss Wood’s glance vaguely indicated a place in her car.

“Alas; I haven’t!” He laughed. At the instant he seemed to her suddenly more natural. “A half-holiday, you see, and Mr. Goldberg, my em-

ployer, gives me an afternoon off. That is, on condition."

"On condition?" She deigned to ask him the question, although she held herself quite erect and allowed her eyes to wander indifferently above him.

"That I don't fail to mention, incidentally of course, some of the Goldberg specialties to my 'swagger friends,' as he calls them."

"Should I be included in that class?" She laughed in spite of herself.

"Can you ask? But in this instance I will forbear all mention of the specialties, even at the risk of my employer's displeasure."

"Thanks." Her eyes began to show a slight impatience. "But if you —"

"I am afraid you will think me ungracious," in a matter-of-fact tone, "but —"

"You prefer to walk!"

"It is my custom. You see I can not afford to cultivate the motor taste."

"No?" He *was* very eccentric, she concluded.

The daintily gloved fingers again touched one of the handles of the machine. He lifted his hat and

tall, graceful, he stood smiling at her. His expression was very impersonal; the look of one pleased by the contemplation of something charming. So a connoisseur might regard an imperishable work of art, that held enshrined a spark from the illusive flame of the beautiful.

She bowed at that moment to some one passing on a horse, a well-put-up, stalwart man of about thirty-five, with blond hair and sleepy-looking eyes. The young fellow's glance followed hers; then swung back.

“Isn't that —” He paused.

“Sir Archibald Bamford. An eastern traveler and scholar of note,” she added perfunctorily.

“*Au revoir!*”

The car glided away as noiselessly as it had approached. Mr. Bruce stood smiling after it. Then he seemed to forget his intention to exercise, and sank on to a bench. People went by; people looked at him. His eyes studied the green foliage. The squirrels scampered; the children played; he did not move. Not far distant a fellow in shabby attire who had long been watching him, threw himself now on the green and stretched himself luxuriously.

“ This here game is about the best I’ve had for some time,” said the man in shabby attire to himself. “ Dozing on the green! I’ll have to ask Mr. Bolger, the chief, to label this job: ‘To be continued in our next’!”

But the “ game ” was so easy the man fell asleep. He awoke with a start, a guilty twinge of conscience, and looked quickly toward the bench where he had last seen Mr. Bruce. The “ shadow ” breathed a sigh of relief; that gentleman was still there. On his knee sat a child, one of the tots of the park, and he was talking to it. At the moment Mr. Bruce’s face wore an illusive, innocuous expression, not unlike that of the strange “ deity of the child ” in the heathen temple at Canton. It would have puzzled one to say whether the young man was interested, amused, or only ironically sedulous over a mite of a human book whose pages would record — What? No doubt the usual commonplace story.

Mr. Bruce at length set this budding document of life gently down; bade it go to “ nursie ” (talking with a policeman); then observing the day was

waning, the young man got up and stepped again briskly on his way.

That evening he passed in the seclusion of his rooms. They were oddly furnished from a western standpoint. In one corner a pale light sifted down upon a beautiful silver Kwan-on, goddess of mercy. Where had Mr. Bruce procured it? A museum would have given a large sum for it. Two ancient Chinese gold screens, with ever vernal foliage of powdered malachite, had been set in one of the walls. A single vase, which had been a-making when the Celestial Kingdom was in its infancy, reposed on an unpretentious stand.

An anomalous note — it might have been so intended — a single red bud, one such as Marjorie Wood had worn that day in her gown, stood out on a straight stem from the receptacle. It constituted a ringing, singing little bit of color. A faint smile swept Mr. Bruce's lips as he looked at it.

He was not especially fond of roses, yet he had purchased this one and set it there, out-of-place, in the wonderful old vase. For a few moments he

continued to regard it; then started. His keen sense detected another scent than that of the bud. He knew many perfumes and their classifications well; had studied closely the odoriferous principles of balsams and plants, the endless combinations sold under fancy names. Some one had been in his rooms. A lady! One who used *lavendre ambree* as a scent.

For some time Mr. Bruce sat thinking. Then he walked over to the Kwan-on and looked at it steadily; the eyes seemed to change in the shadows, to become more mysterious. A sudden gleam of intelligence, enlightenment sprang from Chatfield Bruce's gaze. He sank down before the lovely green of the cypress and the pine, with the imperishable white plum blossoms shining between, an amused look in his eyes. From consideration of *lavendre ambree*, his thoughts led him, where? He put out his hand for a book.

The Japanese play! What a peculiar, whimsical, human document! And what a coincidence that, way back in feudal times, there should have been — Truly was there nothing new under the sun! Bruce fingered the delicate parchment; re-

garded the beautiful Japanese characters. He, play that part! And commanded to, by her?

The lamp shone softly as he continued to read. An insect fluttered near. He waved it from destruction; then reached toward the rose, drew it closer.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE CIRCUS

“**Y**OU admitted some one to my rooms during my absence yesterday, Stebbins?”

The janitor of the Macleroy apartments regarded the speaker in surprise. “No one, Mr. Bruce.”

The young man’s gaze passed over the other. Mr. Stebbins’ honest physiognomy withstood that look unflinchingly. Bruce moved toward the door opening upon the street.

“Of course, sir, many people go in and out of the building in the course of the day,” called after him the janitor. “And a body can’t always keep track of them all, what with showing new parties unoccupied apartments, and the wife down sick, and no one to help me in looking after the place!”

“Not to mention the time occupied in certain necessary little excursions to a small German place

around the corner," interrupted Mr. Bruce with a sympathetic smile.

Mr. Stebbins smiled, too. "You don't mean to say there's been a thief—"

"Shall we say an intruder?"

"Anything missing?"

"Nothing of importance. Apparently only a little of my stationery gone!"

"I'll mention the matter to the police, sir."

"Not worth while. The person left no clue that would be tangible to them." And Mr. Bruce stepped out.

Pausing before Madison Square Garden not long thereafter, an announcement of a circus being given inside attracted him. It was an idle Saturday afternoon; the hours promised to hang heavily, so he went in. As he was passing to his place, a young woman in a box turned to regard him. She had bright golden hair, eyes rather greenish, and figure, opulent.

"How do you do, Mr. Bruce?"

He stopped; looked down upon the pink and white features of Miss Flossie Burke, niece of Mr. Samuel Page. She put out her hand.

“It is some time since we have met, Mr. Bruce,” she went on lightly.

“I believe it is some time since I have had that pleasure.”

“Pleasure?” she laughed, her gaze upon him. “If it had been such a pleasure it would not have been such a long time.”

His look narrowed in the least. Occasionally it could be very hard and cutting, seeming to peer through the gloss of personalities, feminine and otherwise. Perhaps he remembered he had once found diversion, a very little, in going about with Miss Flossie. Perhaps they had flirted, slightly. She had not been adverse to the pastime, with him as with others. But he had soon tired of it and found the ennui which had suggested her as an antidote, returning. So he had quietly dropped out of the train of her admirers.

“Who would have thought to see you here?” she now went on, with flattering glance, as if she had never had cause to feel piqued with him.

“Rather surprised myself!” he answered, his look swerving toward her friends.

A merry party for the day, they were not quite,

however, of the set Miss Flossie had once mingled with; she had rather "dropped out," the last year or so. Lack of clothes, said cynical rumor. Uncle Samuel Page was too "near" to "dress up" his impecunious niece, who had come to live with them, to the high Paris standard. Party gowns at two hundred and fifty dollars or so each, had, repeated the gossips, become out of the question for her. A ten dollar hat Mr. Page regarded as more than adequately decorative for any young woman; especially since he had sustained monetary losses! It was even rumored Miss Flossie had threatened to join the innumerable band of her sister toilers and take to millinery out of revenge. She had already embarked in sundry enterprises; tried china-painting, book-binding and decorating, and, it was whispered, had done her turn at surreptitious and distinctly enterprising reporting for the social pages of one of the very sensational New York newspapers.

"Must have been the allurements of the posters at the door brought me in," went on Mr. Bruce, regarding with rather critical eyes his whilom friend. As he spoke, he bent slightly over her;

inhaled softly, once or twice. Her gaze suddenly lifted; her form with its rich lines, more suggestive of Titian than Botticelli, stirred.

“*Lavendre ambree!*” he laughed. “You are still partial to it.”

“Yes,” she said; “it is not very expensive.” And then—“Odd you should remember it!” she added hastily.

Her glance fell, lingered an instant on one of his hands on the back of a chair—or on a massive gold ring he wore; odd, oriental in design.

Bruce answered carelessly. His look in the least questioning, met hers that lifted, a peculiar gleam now in the greenish depths; then with a conventional word abruptly he turned.

Miss Flossie looked after him; her lips were compressed. Some one spoke to her; she did not hear.

At the far end of the auditorium, an usher guided Mr. Bruce to an orchestra place. In front of him a long row of seats was occupied by children in holiday attire. They buzzed like busy bees. Several ladies seemed to have charge of them; one of the former in the immediate proximity of

the young man spoke to him. He answered, not quite certain, at first, whether she was Mrs. Wolcott, president of one of the charity boards — he couldn't remember which one — or Miss Tucker, its secretary.

“Yes, Mr. Bruce,” said the lady. It *was* Miss Tucker, he remembered now. “Here they all are!”

“They?” he repeated.

“The little tots from the settlement to whom you were good enough to send tickets for the circus.”

“Oh, did I?” said Bruce absently. “Rum little beggars, aren't they!” languidly.

Another lady near by, a friend of Miss Tucker, and herself secretary of the influential board of another charity, now broke into the conversation:

“Mr. Bruce! The very person I wanted to see! Good news!”

He looked at her; placed her also. She was beaming with satisfaction.

“We have raised the necessary amount.”

He betrayed no enthusiasm.

“You remember, Mr. Bruce, you pledged seventy-

five thousand dollars toward our new buildings, provided we could raise a like sum. I — we have realized that happy contingency.”

“And the time clause to my offer?” The young man spoke slowly.

“Does not expire until next week. We can depend upon you?”

“Of course.” Mr. Bruce did not remain long. Perhaps he found the anomalous antics of the elephants tiresome, for he soon got up and went out. He seemed a little absent-minded.

Seventy-five thousand dollars! That was a good deal of money to raise in a few days. Of course he could not repudiate a promise. Did he regret for the moment his own generosity? The charity was an excellent one, no doubt —

But seventy-five thousand dollars? Why did he hesitate? He had not hesitated in the past when called upon. He experienced an unusual restlessness. Whither should he wend his way now?

To his friend, Ting Lee's? Ting, the philosopher! He, Bruce, wanted to, must consider a matter of moment; the little shop offered an excellent

place for quiet and meditation. But it would be best to wait until dark before going there.

“Seventy-five thousand dollars!”

Does gaiety ever really reign along the “Great White Way”? Sometimes it seems to. It bore the semblance this night as on other nights. Millionaire phantoms mingled with beggar phantoms. Self-satisfied ghosts rubbed elbows with less contented wraiths. The theaters belched forth ephemeral hosts; the restaurants swallowed many of them; others vanished somewhere. Mr. Bruce smiled slightly; these abstract fancies occurred to him at times.

They mingled with practical considerations; the abrupt need of eliminating the possible effect of another’s star, momentarily in juxtaposition with his own, and evincing strong symptoms of being influenced by some law of specific gravity or mutual attraction. The elusive taxicab, a Teutonic restaurant with two entrances and the subway combined to assist to the consummation wished for. The superfluous influence, a masculine skulker from off-

cialdom, a police spy, was lost in the unknown. Mr. Bruce was alone shortly after he had ascended from the subterranean tube; he had dispensed with this *fidus* Achates of the "force," who showed a predilection to cling closer than a brother. The stars, burnished to their brightest now, called his solitary attention to the heavens' great white way.

It is a long stretch from Rector's to Ting Lee's; from the place of pandemonium to the palace of tranquillity. Once in the latter abode, the metropolis and its fevered activities faded from the young man's mind.

Ting knew his occasional caller's mood. When the latter had seated himself, the other did not disturb him; nor did Mrs. Ting. She moved as serene in her own household as the mists across the heavens; one was dreamily aware of, without resenting her presence. Bruce sipped his tea; a beautiful piece of milk-white jade, suspended by a scarlet thread, stirred in the air.

"Good pearls, Ting!" The young man, looking at a case near by, observed. "Where from?"

"The branch of the Hwang-ho, near the sea of stars," answered in dialect, the host.

“ You planted them? ”

“ Yes; Ting’s garden.”

“ And the matrices? ”

“ Take out; fill with white wax. No see? ”

Bruce looked down; his lip curved; perhaps he recalled a questionable traffic of the unsophisticated children of the plains. But any expression on his face passed as a breath from glass.

“ Allee same weight other pearls,” said Ting softly.

“ But the skin? ”

“ Allee same.”

The caller was silent. Ting waited patiently. Why not? He had a son who would finish any business left undone. Mrs. Ting sank placidly down somewhere; shimmered to rest. Bruce continued to surround the citadel of his purpose — if he had a definite one — with that multiple circumlocution his host could understand and appreciate. The young man observed formalities; lapsed into Chinese and began:

“ Ting, there is a favor I am here to ask. I want you to procure for me — ”

“ S-sh! ” The soft sound from Mrs. Ting’s lips

was like the whirring of the night beetle's wings. It was followed by ruder noises; voices, laughter without.

Those within looked at one another; understood; a party was "doing Chinatown". The young man stepped quickly into a back room. Almost immediately afterward a gay gathering of both sexes under the chaperonage of a loud-voiced guide, invaded with no ceremony Ting's place.

They did not, for the most part, linger long, however. Here was not much suggestive of mystery, or novelty; only an orderly little shop and an orderly little shopkeeper and his wife.

"Really, it doesn't seem as if we have a right to 'break in' quite like this," a girl's voice said.

"One doesn't 'break into' an Oriental's house, Miss Wood," a man's buoyant voice returned. The speaker was large, florid-looking, handsome. His tones betrayed amusement. "One just enters; if he objects, one ejects him, and takes possession."

She answered; Bruce could not hear what. "Sir Archibald Bamford is quite right, Miss Wood," said a man's softer voice. "Sir Archi-

bald has had a large experience in the Far East and knows.”

“Oh, you, Señor Caglioni, are his secretary and have to say that,” gaily.

“Really, Miss Wood, you are wrong.” The voice was again Sir Archibald’s. “The only way we English ever get on with the beggars is to make them fear us.”

“Do you ‘get on’?” she laughed. “From newspaper accounts, I should say you are always ‘getting out’ with them.”

She and nearly all of the others left. The florid Englishman and his secretary lingered. The former’s face was cold, commanding; the latter’s eyes, like Ting’s, seemed to veil strange shadows; peeped like shiny, soulless black beads out of a face, almost, not quite, European. Sir Archibald Bamford spoke in the Pidgin-English of Shanghai where the dialect is elaborate.

“Where does that door lead? What’s behind? There’s always something behind. Pipes, eh?”

“No pipes; nothing,” said Ting.

“That means something, of course.”

“No go in,” put in the owner.

“Too anxious by half!” And laughing roughly the honorable gentleman brushed Ting and Mrs. Ting unceremoniously away with his big elbows. Then walking to a door, he looked in. The room was vacant; only the curtain of a low window waved suggestively.

“There’s been no opium here,” said the secretary in a subdued tone, sniffing. “And — you will miss the others.”

“That wouldn’t do,” laughed Sir Archibald. “At least to miss one of them!” he added and went out.

Ting looked down; neither he nor his wife spoke, but in their eyes was a new, strange light. Between them, the wonderful milky jade wound and unwound on its scarlet thread.

CHAPTER V

AN EPISODE

MR. SAMUEL PAGE sat in his office in the sky. In the old days Mr. Page had been a dusty mole with a nook in a basement; but times change, and in the process of evolution, the mole and the rodents alike take wings. Mr. Page's office, in dimensions suggested a big nest; not a particularly tidy one. He peered down upon the city like a bird looking for titbits; he usually sat near the window-sill.

He occupied that favorite place now. A stocky, commonplace man, with nondescript eyes, was seated in the center of the room.

"Well, Mr. Bolger, what I'd like to know is, are you going to get the bonds?"

"I expect to."

"Expect?" Mr. Page's tone was not exactly agreeable.

A resentful light shone for an instant in the

other's glance, but he was accustomed to unreasonable patrons and answered now steadily: "The case isn't an easy one. There has been only one real clue to go by: the fact that in the safety deposit vault a record is kept of every one going in or out, and the time put down."

Mr. Page did not reply immediately; he was not in the best of humors. Bolger apparently had "nothing definite" to offer him; the old story! The impatient capitalist felt prone to speak his mind, but refrained; perhaps he gaged his man. Mr. Bolger had a certain professional independence; having done his best, he refused to be criticized. He had, too, a number of successful coups to his credit. He had brought the powerful Macduffie crowd of wire-tappers to justice; had enabled the police to convict the celebrated Major B. E. F. Harold de Mohnville, Bond Street diamond swindler, and had landed in a prison cell one Augustus — Gus, for short — Young, equally noted express robber.

Mr. Page by an effort now managed to suppress the irritation he experienced over the tardy progress of his own case. "Well, you looked up all the

people who were at the vault at the same time as myself?"

"As I told you, I investigated their habits, their haunts, if they had any. Was there a clique; any connection between them? I could discover none. Nearly all belonged to separate and distinct walks in life. One," thoughtfully, "moved in the smart circles, where most of the affairs occurred. Was at the reception at Morrow's—remember him, head of the Venezuelan asphalt deal, some called it a swindle? When his wife's emeralds were taken, Morrow called me in but the only clue in that case was a certificate of asphalt stock, value nil, left where the jewels had been."

"The man that took my bonds left a bit of gibberish drawing."

"You have that drawing, still?"

Mr. Page shifted. "Thought I had," he said testily. "Locked it in a desk drawer at home, but it's gone."

"Gone? You are sure?"

"There isn't any one can tell better when he's lost anything, than I can," was the irritated retort.

"But who would take it in your own house? What object would any one have?"

"That's it!" Mr. Page made a gesture. "I have questioned everybody and no one knows anything about it."

The detective considered. Mr. Page was advanced in years; his eyesight was poor, and in cleaning out the drawers of his desk the bit of crude draftsmanship might have gone the way of all rubbish. A simple explanation was probably the most reasonable. He saw that the old gentleman, who had obstinately insisted upon keeping the paper, was chagrined by the incident, and changed the subject. "Do you happen to know Sir Archibald Bamford, Mr. Page?"

"I know of him," was the somewhat surprised reply.

Bolger answered the unspoken question on the other's lips. "He is among those who chanced to be at the vault on one occasion when you were there. He took a box shortly after his arrival in this country and not long before the disappearance of your bonds."

“Others took boxes about the same time, I presume?”

“Of course.”

“Some of whom were there afterward when I was?”

“Quite true. Please do not infer —”

Mr. Page coughed dryly. “Sir Archibald has wealth and large estates in England; has represented his government in the Far East in some confidential capacity, and —”

Bolger waved his hand. “His name came up only incidentally. There’s no doubt of his prominence. But,” rising quickly, “this is neither here nor there. What is more to the point is, I am leaving town for a short time and you may not hear from me for a few days.”

“You are going in connection with this business of mine?”

“Perhaps.”

“Where?”

“That, I prefer not to say.”

The old man looked at him; after all, Bolger *was* considered most capable. “I believe you know

more than you claim to about those bonds of mine," said Mr. Page eagerly; "that you're on the track?"

But the detective was not to be lured from his manner; that professional bearing, impregnable, mysterious, the other had come to detest, would not be lightly discarded. "I may have an idea," answered Mr. Bolger, "but ideas," modestly, "aren't what you want."

On that same day about the same time Mr. Bolger was departing for somewhere, on business known only to himself, Chatfield Bruce, on pleasure bent, arrived at the picturesque little village of Comscot. The trip had been a hot and dusty one, but the young man, unlike some of his fellow travelers, appeared neither sooty nor ill-humored. A summer pongee suit, as immaculate as when the silk had left the looms at Chefoo, fitted perfectly the lithe figure; his shirt was very fine and cool; he carried his light straw hat in his hand. Although of a frugal disposition, he more than liberally tipped a stout lad for looking after his small baggage. Then, while others, in a fine perspiration, waited in the closed omnibus or dilapidated hacks, to be taken

to their destinations, he started to walk across the village to the road up the hill.

The day was pleasant, though sultry; the shady paths enjoyable. On either hand queer little stores and houses offered a homely and agreeable change from the monotonous sky-scrapers or Fifth Avenue palaces. And if the casual stranger did not find a wealth of poetry about old-fashioned American clapboards, there were glimpses of the sea through green interspaces, to appeal to the imagination and gratify the visual longings.

These latter effects, to Chatfield Bruce, appeared essentially worthy of contemplation. Close at hand, the intrusive large-small object, the twig of a vine, the branch of a tree, seemed to insist on the importance of little things in nature's larger panorama. A rose danced against the illimitable; a fly on a leaf was outlined upon the infinite. He paused, then moved slightly; the picture changed. A white pleasure yacht suddenly became apparent on the blue sea, twined around before him with honeysuckle buds. The boat appeared very pretty in that irregular frame of bright, waving flowers; an imposing pleasure-craft, no doubt, at closer range.

Bruce tried to decipher the name. He could make out an "M," but no more.

Minnie; Mary; Molly; it might be any of these; or Marjorie! Why Marjorie? An odd name; what had made him think of it? Some one he knew, or had met—?

The chug! chug! of a heavy motor-car laboring upward caused him to turn, to see a girl's figure, the film of a veil, black hair athwart a white brow and blue eyes—a face distinct, yet intangible, with dust around it like mist, red lips shining through, as a flower afar in some shadowy screen. Bruce stepped back slightly—the road was narrow. A man's form screened hers from his; Sir Archibald, big and florid, sat at her right on the front seat. An instant Bruce heard, amid those explosive, persistent, mechanical sounds, vague protestations in a masculine voice concerning American roads, then a girl's light laugh; then he, she, vanished from view.

Bruce gazed after them while the cloud of dust slowly settled. For a time he seemed to forget himself at the wayside. Then once more he walked on; at first slowly, then more quickly. The road became steeper. On one side the hill descended

with considerable abruptness; on the other, the bank had been cut into for the thoroughfare, leaving a perpendicular wall of earth about six feet high. Beyond this, a tangle of green wood that had been allowed by the owner to run wild was further guarded by a thick hedge.

From somewhere in the distance amid this large estate, the young man fancied he had heard once or twice the report of a firearm — the proprietor or his friends after rabbits, perhaps. He had turned his head, on his face the sudden, alert expression of one not unaccustomed to danger, when the sound of a weapon was heard from the thicket, near at hand. Instinctively Bruce moved; as he did so, a bit of lead grazed his hat.

Quick as a flash he sprang toward the hedge, but the sandy earth gave way before him; his hands seemed to touch only thorns. At the same time he heard a branch break as before retreating footsteps. Realizing the fruitlessness of pursuit, he stood motionless and listened. Only silence!

No; the death-like hush was broken by a bird's song. The young man wheeled and dusted his clothes. Fortunately the sandy soil left no marks

he could not remove. He regarded his hat; it was chipped. Rather ruefully he smoothed the straw with his finger; fortunately, the injury was not irreparable. He moved the ribbon slightly to cover it; one does not like to buy two new straw hats a season.

CHAPTER VI

A HOAX?

THE Goldberg country mansion, built on the brow of a hill, commanded a felicitous prospect. On three sides were to be seen other houses on rather lower hills. Below nestled the town; beyond shone the waters of the sea. By day the waves gleamed like diamonds, twinkling unceasingly at Comscot's latest landed proprietor, as he gazed contentedly down from his spacious and lofty balcony.

"Very fine, eh, Bruce?" said Mr. Goldberg to his employee. The latter had but a short time before arrived and was being guided over the place by the other. "That view of the bay alone is worth the price. No better outlook anywhere! Needn't be bothered with one's neighbors here; they're far enough away."

"Who are they?"

The host mentioned several names; then point-

ing with his finger to the left —“ Mr. Wood’s place. Good house, but he can hardly see the water from where he is.”

“ Mr. Wood spends the summer, here, then?”
Bruce remarked carelessly.

“ When he and his daughter are not on the other side of the pond?”

Mr. Bruce continued to look in that direction. “ The grounds appear extensive; plenty of forest reserves, the real primeval sort. Passed them on my way up,” he added, running a long white finger, slightly scratched, around the band of his hat.

“ If it were my place, I’d clean up a bit; have cinder paths and a road for automobiles. That little place to the right, farther down,” again indicating with a gesture, “ belongs to Colonel Mangan, an old army officer. The dilapidated, rambling shack you can just see through the trees over there is the property of Mr. Samuel Page. He got the place on a mortgage for almost nothing; squeezed a widow, client of his,” with a wink. “ Pet game of the old fellow; makes a business of being professional trustee. Pretty small graft!” contemptuously.

“There are certainly less reprehensible forms of grafting.” Some thought, as Mr. Bruce’s glance passed over the grounds of his employer’s estate, caused the young man to smile. Was it at Mr. Goldberg’s assumption of virtue; that “holier than thou” pose he involuntarily assumed on certain occasions?

“Heard he had rented it,” went on the elder man; “but am not sure. Sorry for the man he does business with. The old skinflint’s got a nice niece, though,” he added. “Miss Flossie Burke. She and my daughter have struck up quite a friendship lately. She’s going to be one of our guests here.”

“Here?” quickly.

“Yes; glad you got around early, Bruce; you can help ‘make things go.’ There’ll be a lot of people; special car from the city, and what with the neighbors”—Bruce regarded him with sudden inquiry. “Sir Archibald Bamford is going to be here,” he added.

If Mr. Bruce experienced surprise, he did not show it; his features, perhaps, appeared a trifle more immovable. The other, then, had met — knew

Sir Archibald! Through what combination of circumstances?

“Sir Archibald, passing here the first time with Mr. Wood and party in their motor, seemed struck with the house, and asked to stop. As they were admiring it, I happened along, and Mr. Wood—we’re both on the Metropolitan New Process Gas Board—introduced me. I invited Sir Archibald in to inspect the interior, and he accepted. We became quite friendly.”

Bruce was looking out over the bay; he did not speak.

“They told me they knew you—” The young man lifted his eyes. “That is, Miss Wood did, after asking if I wasn’t the Mr. Goldberg she had heard Mr. Bruce mention? She had evidently been talking about you to Sir Archibald. You must know her well?” with interest. To know at all, Miss Marjorie Wood, of one of the wealthiest and most exclusive old circles, was, from Mr. Goldberg’s point of view, an achievement for any young man and stamped him with a big hall-mark of social eligibility.

Bruce’s firm lips smiled faintly. “I can scarcely

claim that honor; I have met Miss Wood but once or twice."

Mr. Goldberg returned unctuously to Sir Archibald. "Told him about the little doings we were going to have to-day, and—'Of course, you are intending to ask all the neighbors?' he laughed. Which, I took it, was a way of including himself. So I sent invitations to Sir Archibald, his secretary, Señor Caglioni, and the Woods," concluded the speaker, "and they are coming."

The young man said nothing; he seemed almost absent-minded. The elder noted that lack of enthusiasm—perhaps was a little annoyed by it. But then, he remembered Bruce had the entrée of places where lords and sirs were not unknown quantities; where, indeed, they congregated rather plentifully at times. So Mr. Goldberg strove himself to assume an indifferent air. "Democratic sort of chap, Sir Archibald," he observed, "in spite of his formal manner."

Mr. Bruce's comment, if he had seen fit to make one, was interrupted by the approach of a workman who had come from the house, in his hand a bag filled presumably with tools.

“Think you’ll find the job all right now, Mr. Goldberg,” he remarked cheerfully, and, upon that person’s curtly observing “it was quite time,” retorted something about its not being his fault; that one or two delicate pieces of mechanism, for the locks, taking time to make, had not come until the last minute. Which excuses being silently received, the man walked a little uncertainly down the steps, and, shouldering his bag below, passed out of the premises.

“Confounded safe people!” As Mr. Goldberg spoke, he involuntarily raised his hand to something slightly bulging in the inner pocket of his carefully buttoned coat. “Did you smell the fellow’s breath? Whisky! That’s what caused the hitch. The idea of not finishing their work until noon to-day!”

Bruce’s glance had caught the movement. “You have concluded, then, to let your daughter wear the pearls, Mr. Goldberg?”

“What’s the use of having pearls, if you don’t let people see them? Which reminds me,” jocularly feeling in his pocket, “here’s a letter came to-day.”

The young man took it. The scrawl was rudely written; he read:

“The same party, or parties, who got the Page bonds, the Morrow emeralds and a few other trifles, accept with pleasure the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Goldberg to attend the garden party and housewarming at Comscot.”

Bruce laughed. “Well, what do you think of it?”

“A hoax. One of my friends who’s been seeing that French Raffles — what’s his name? — Lupin, at the theater, is having a little fun with me. You have no idea what jokers those ‘scat’ and ‘peenuckle’ fellows of my club are. Or,” shrewdly, “it may have been sent by one of those women folks who are envious of the pearls and thinks it might scare my daughter into not wearing them. In any case, I’ve had one of the best private strong-boxes in the country fitted up here. And what’s more, only the architect and the safe people and myself know where it is. But amuse yourself any way you want while I look after these electric light chaps,” with a glance at several men

stringing bulbs in the garden. "You're to have a room here, you know."

"On the contrary," said Bruce, "I've engaged one at the inn. You'll be pretty well crowded here, and, as I told you, I prefer it down in the town. More independent, you see."

The other, likewise accustomed to plain speaking, answered Bruce could suit himself, and walked away. Left alone, the young man stepped into a billiard-room that opened upon the balcony. For a few moments he touched the balls idly, his stroke singularly firm and caressing; then set himself a most difficult test. The balls scampered around the table wildly, came together gently, and finally nestled almost touching. An instant he regarded them, as if well-satisfied with the accuracy of his eye, the sureness of his nerves, then leaned on his cue.

His shapely, yet muscular fingers, showing slightly the scratches from his vain endeavor to break through the hedge back of Mr. Wood's place, held briefly his attention. He regarded the marks with an intentness that told he was thinking deeply.

At the same time his expression seemed one of alertness, that of some woodland creature intent upon an unexpected sound, or interruption, real or fancied, in his forest fastness. A faint indentation appeared on his brow; he looked out through the screened door, to where, afar, a dark fringe marked the outline of the forest on the green hillside.

Some one passed on the lawn below, a person with a dark face; viewed profile-wise, it might have seemed the set, bronze countenance of an American Indian. From Bruce's point of view, the slant eyes were hardly discernible. This person, like the workman who had gone down a short time before, carried a bundle. He went by like a shadow, with characteristic gliding motion, around a corner of the house, and a few moments later, from presumably kitchenward (the big house had a half-open summer kitchen) came a grudging voice that greeted this last-comer.

It was better late than never — the speaker was the housekeeper, no doubt — though things had come to a pretty pass when one was glad to get

even heathen for servants in the country. There were Irish gardeners, an English coachman, German and Swedish housemaids, and this latest arrival constituted a second Oriental for the kitchen, or to serve the guests. The house might soon be compared to the tower of Babel. Did he know how to "wait on" people?

The answer was not discernible to Bruce; he seemed in nowise amused. The tones died away, silence ensued. Apparently the belated one had merged quietly into his place, after the deft way of his kind; henceforth there would be no ruffling of the surface on his account. He was now but a cog that moved without friction.

Bruce had started to turn once more to the billiard table when from down the road came a rattling of wheels.

A vehicle drew near, drove in the grounds and stopped. It was one of the antiquated "hacks" from the station, but the gay garments of her within brightened it. She sprang out with a fluttering of skirts, asked a question of the driver, and ran hurriedly up the steps.

“How do you do, Miss Burke?” Chatfield Bruce had stepped out through a long French window on to the balcony. As he stood there, cue in hand, his glance, for the first few seconds, seemed to dart incisively upon her.

“Mr. Bruce!” A faint flush came to the creamy cheek, an instant’s perturbation to the greenish eyes. “I didn’t expect —”

“Don’t say it!” he laughed.

“Then I won’t!” She straightened; bit her lip as if momentarily annoyed, then laughed too. “Of course I should have expected you here, if I had given the matter any thought.”

“Quite so!” he said easily, almost too easily. And then — “Pardon me!” reaching before her to touch the bell of the front door.

“Thanks!” She suddenly as if by an irresistible impulse looked at him; had he been watchful now, he might have seen in that glance something to ponder over. Though brief, it might have been likened to the casual light on a gun that betrays to the observant scout the hostile outpost in the deep gloaming. But Mr. Bruce had not seen; his manner had relaxed, become careless, unmindful.

The front door of the house opened; he heard skipping girlish steps within, and, a moment later, the sound of Miss Flossie's ardent kisses.

CHAPTER VII

INCIDENTS

CHATFIELD BRUCE had drawn a little aside from the merry throng to observe the sunset. He had to manœuver deftly to this end, but finally was enabled to avail himself of an opportune break in conversation to step into a slightly secluded angle of the house. There, he seemed to forget his surroundings, to become wholly absorbed in shifting hues and effects. These in turn had faded and now, from the darkening dome, shone a myriad of critical stars.

A moment Bruce yet continued to regard them, his face pale in the white light; then abruptly wheeled. As he stirred, some one in the shadow, not far off, who had been observing him, also moved; but the young man seemed not to have noticed this person. Had he done so, it is unlikely Mr. Bruce would have recognized in him the individual he had seen in the spick-and-span white

restaurant several weeks before, sitting near Mr. Samuel Page. The nondescript eyes the young fellow had studied in the mirror on that occasion were now dimmed by glasses just in the least shaded; an "imperial" adorned Mr. Bolger's chin, and a mustache, conservatively French, his upper lip.

The detective's gaze was puzzled as Mr. Bruce walked away; he peered down the hill below where the young man had been standing, but only the spectral trees and the dim landscape afar met his look. He fancied that in one of the bushes half discernible below he could hear a sound as of a person moving, but was not sure. He concluded at length it was only the rustling of the leaves and turned to the grosser flare of the artificial lights in lamps and lanterns now illumining the grounds and gardens.

He saw Mr. Bruce again, his face no longer wearing that intent, rapt look, but marked with an expression, at once light and conventional. Withal, keenly alert! While Chatfield Bruce's lips breathed witticisms, or permitted themselves platitudes, his eyes seemed to see, to telegraph a good deal to his

brain. He talked now to Colonel Manyan, a nearby resident, and Mr. Bolger vaguely felt the young fellow was intuitively weighing, considering the rough and the fine points of that particular individuality. Why? Through a habit of quiet analysis?

The military, or ex-military man (he had retired, or been retired, from the army) seemed rather an important person; a bachelor. Financial adversity had, the detective knew, buzzed about his ears; he appeared, however, one not easily abashed by creditors. His bearing was more erect than that of many people who pay their bills. Bolger approached; while seeming to study the architectural outlines of the new house, he strove to catch their words. He heard but part of them. Their conversation was conventional; it bore upon Uncle Sam's bizarre little group of islets in the Far East. Then the tones of others intervened; among them, Miss Flossie Burke's. That young woman talked gaily; the observer noticed, however, a slight irrelevancy in her replies. He became also presently aware she took a furtive interest in something, or somebody beyond those she conversed with.

The green eyes, lifting capriciously, now this way, then that, seemed to focus, for a moment, on the clean-cut profile of Chatfield Bruce. Bolger looked thoughtfully down; when he lifted his gaze again, Bruce had gone. Perhaps it was a part of his social policy to bestow upon any one but a few moments of his time and attention. Miss Flossie Burke, however, still remained near; she was not conversing quite so rapidly as she had been; the least touch of constraint had fallen on her gaiety. Bolger now studied an almost imperceptible petulance of the girl's full red lips; then his eyes shifting, met those of Mr. Goldberg, not far from them.

There was a faintly preoccupied expression on that person's face. The observer could guess at the cause. Had the host become somewhat anxious at Sir Archibald's non-appearance? No doubt he had given one or two of his guests to infer that the distinguished visitor, whose family occupied several pages in Burke's *Peerage*, was going to be there, and the news had become disseminated throughout the gathering. People glanced quickly, questioningly at every new-comer; the late arrivals fell

under a mild bane of silent disapproval because they were not some one else.

Mr. Bolger was also slightly disappointed. He had wanted to see Sir Archibald. The latter's acceptance of the invitation to be present at Mr. Goldberg's that evening the detective had regarded as a fortunate coincidence; he even found in it subject for thought. There were acts within acts in this drama he did not understand. He wanted to converse with Miss Burke, to become acquainted with her, but refrained for reasons of prudence. That young woman might have heard his voice once or twice on other occasions. Her faculties were keen. So he discreetly annexed unto himself a gossipy old dowager and asked her to supper, which was now announced.

Chatfield Bruce had been delegated to take Miss Goldberg in—or rather, out, for the elaborate collation was served out-of-doors, beneath the greenwood trees. There were buffets and many tables that would accommodate from six to eight or ten guests. Mr. and Mrs. Goldberg, the latter a refined pretty woman, were at one of the tables and the former called to Mr. Bruce and his daughter

to join them. Bolger found another table close by.

At Mr. Goldberg's table were, also, Miss Flossie Burke, Colonel Manyan, and two other couples. Miss Burke, who was opposite Mr. Bruce and Miss Goldberg, regarded them with seemingly casual, though really sharp scrutiny. Miss Goldberg would have been generally considered merely nice-looking, but the ornaments she wore were regal.

"Are they real?" The voice must have belonged to one of those "jokers" of whom Mr. Goldberg had spoken.

The company, moved by the daring facetiousness of the remark, laughed. "How about it, Mr. Bruce?" The jovial one on the other side of the hostess was a short, red-faced man, the head of a big wholesale store, a block below Mr. Goldberg's on Broadway. "You're nearest them."

Between Bruce and the detective a vase of flowers on the latter's table intervened; Bolger moved it slightly, as if unconsciously. He discerned the other's now grave features, his earnest downward look toward the somewhat embarrassed, not wholly displeased, Miss Goldberg. "They appear so to me," said the young man quietly, in the

tone of one who felt, perhaps, the conversation had taken a turn in rather questionable taste.

But others were not so fastidious. "Are you a judge?" Colonel Manyan, next to Miss Burke, asked in his habitually loud military manner; he had been partaking rather freely of the punch and champagne.

Bruce met his gaze. A slight impediment in the other's accents impressed itself on the young man accustomed to note trifles. In his youth the colonel had probably been a stutterer; had cured himself, almost; only in moments of excitement, or alcoholic stimulation, a trace of the old affliction became manifest. "Are you a judge?" he repeated.

"That depends," Bruce said lightly.

"Upon what?" Miss Flossie leaned forward.

"Upon what you would call a 'judge.'" Chatfield Bruce smiled back at her. "Pearl collecting," toying with his boutonniere, "is rather too expensive a hobby for many of us. Outside of the buyers and sellers, actually in the pearl business, there are not many, I fancy, who can claim to be real experts."

"Right!" Colonel Manyan's accents rang out.

“Nevertheless, some of us think we are versed. In my own time I have seen a lot of fine pearls, many the best product of the Sulu Seas, and allow me to observe,” to Mr. Goldberg, “your daughter’s seem truly magnificent. Transcendently lovely!” The long word cost him a slight effort. “That is,” he added, with a laugh, “from this distance!”

“Oh, they won’t look any worse close to,” retorted the proud owner. “Those pearls will bear inspection. My dear,” to his daughter, “let Colonel Manyan see them.”

At his table Bolger started slightly and shifted the vase of flowers farther aside. Miss Goldberg unclasped the shining rope; it slid from her hand over the military man’s outstretched fingers. Colonel Manyan’s gaze lighted. “By Jove!” he said.

“Ever see anything finer?” Mr. Goldberg demanded, leaning back.

“Never!” Some of the vibrant quality had gone out of the military man’s voice. “By Jove!” he repeated, thickly, almost in a murmur.

“May I see them?” Miss Flossie’s breath seemed to come a little faster.

“Certainly; pass them along,” said the owner.

Colonel Manyan released them reluctantly. The girl gave a rapturous exclamation:

“Ah!” The pearls nestled in her rosy palm. “How nice they feel!”

“Put them on,” said Goldberg.

“No; no! It would be so hard to take them off!” She made a gesture. “Begone, temptation!”

The rope of pearls went now to Chatfield Bruce. The young fellow had moved his chair slightly away from the table. A servant was just filling his glass, the one that contained a light claret, for Bruce had not touched his champagne. This servant was swarthy, an Oriental—a Chinaman. He stood back now in the half-light, without motion; only a slight sheen on some silk material he wore varied to the flutterings of the night wind. Behind, the lanterns on the tree branches seemed imbued with a sudden spirit of life. They waved, danced. Trailing shadows ran this way and that. Mr. Bruce glanced at the pearls.

“There is one test,” he said lightly, “you might have applied.” His shoulder turned slightly from Mr. Goldberg; the necklace flashed in the air;

lights gleamed on it. His fingers, somewhat scratched, caught Miss Flossie's eyes; but the expression of his face that had been conventionally nonchalant now arrested and held Bolger's glance.

Against a darker background, Bruce's features seemed chiseled with cameo-like distinctness. A light that comes of the calm contemplation of the faultlessly beautiful shone for a second time that evening from his eyes. They seemed to caress, without covetousness, the pure, iridescent spheres; to linger on them with a high, unselfish delight. The pleased curvings of his fine lips paid them tribute.

"Two rings, one within another, on every perfect globule," they heard him say in low tones; then he paused, and got up, as if the better to return the ornaments to their owner. His tall figure threw a shadow across the lawn; he was smiling once more down on the people at the table. "The test is not infallible, but —"

With a gallant gesture he was about to replace the rope on Miss Goldberg's neck, when his purpose was accidentally arrested. The Chinaman, apparently mindful only of glasses that needed re-



He got up as if the better to return the ornaments—Page 80

plenishing, had stretched out his arm toward the delicate crystal between that young lady and Bruce; but instead of filling the glass, the Oriental had suddenly straightened.

At the sound of a voice — a footstep behind, that caused him to throw a quick glance over his shoulder? The abrupt movement brought him in sharp contact with Bruce's arm. A few drops of wine splashed on the young man's sleeve and the pearls slipped from his fingers. With a quick movement Bruce stooped and caught them before they fell to the ground, and, whipping a handkerchief from his coat, he wiped away the moisture.

The Oriental, recovering himself, bent very low, murmuring an abject apology. A frown had sprung to Bruce's face; he said something hastily, in some dialect, his tone sharply rasping. Bolger would have given much to have known what it was. The detective had, at that instant, involuntarily risen from his seat. What was happening; was anything happening — of moment? A puff of wind agitated the lanterns; one or two went out. Along the horizon the vague warmth of heat-lightning made

itself manifest; a hemlock, on the second, stood out with spectral-like vividness.

Bolger's pulses beat faster. Around him, heads began unaccountably to nod this way and that, as if a gust of air had affected them; a murmur rose. What was it? What were the people at his table saying? Chatfield Bruce yet held the pearls, the wonderful white glowing pearls. But a few moments had elapsed since he had taken them.

"Sir Archibald! Sir Archibald!" Yes, that was what they were murmuring, whispering — not exactly agog, or agape — but very curious, undeniably!

"Beastly motor broke down, don't you know. — Deuced inconvenient! — Sorry! — Very!" A voice, broadly accented, slightly bored, fell upon gratified ears; it was Sir Archibald himself who was speaking. Mr. Goldberg had not raised expectations in vain.

The Englishman came forward from the direction of the house, followed by the other late arrivals. Bolger's glance swerved an instant to him, then returned to Chatfield Bruce.

That gentleman no longer had the pearls; he

had returned them to Miss Goldberg. There was no doubt about that; Bolger saw them very distinctly. He gave a half sigh, as of relief; he had momentarily felt quite unlike himself. Decidedly the Page case had got on his nerves; yes, decidedly, he said in his own mind as the host's daughter, moving with a proud inner consciousness of the fortune she again wore on her neck, stepped forward with her parents, to greet Sir Archibald and those who had come with him.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE GREEN

MR. BRUCE held back; he even, perhaps, showed a tendency to withdraw a little. But no one regarded him; the last arrivals — Sir Archibald and his explanations which he, in the same language and the same cold, monotonous tones, reiterated several times — absorbed general attention.

Did Mr. Bruce feel himself deposed, overshadowed by another in the estimation of the proud possessor of the pearls? Any young man of democratic predilection might have felt slightly piqued under the circumstances. Miss Goldberg's smile for nobility was not to be measured. Bruce's expression, however, seemed only that of a person listening courteously, observing conventionally a scene in which he had no great concern. His eyes passed casually over Mr. Wood and lingered but a

moment on Sir Archibald. Yet in that brief period his gaze appeared to harden.

Or was it only the light of one of the lamps, shining on his features, that threw a glint like a spark from his look? It faded almost immediately; melted into vague distance, as he turned from the Englishman's rather massive face to an indefinite background. From the distance, beyond the house, came the pounding of the engine of a car. Some one was endeavoring to repair a defect in the mechanism of the motor that had finally conveyed Sir Archibald thither.

"How delightfully unaffected Sir Archibald appears — just like one of us!" the dowager, Mr. Bolger's companion remarked enthusiastically.

Sir Archibald *was*, in his heavy way, very courteous to all, notably to Miss Goldberg, regal with gems.

"But what a magnet, those pearls, for him who took the Morrow emeralds, the Page bonds," went on the dowager. "That subtle and mysterious person whose detection is so much desired!"

Chatfield Bruce moved farther away. The supper was practically over and Miss Goldberg evinced

an unmistakable desire to attach herself to Sir Archibald. Perhaps Mr. Bruce argued that, on the whole, he would not be committing a social *faux pas* by almost imperceptibly eliminating himself from the proximity of that prominent central group and merging into the general, kaleidescopic whole. At any rate, with charming modesty and unobtrusiveness, he was about to do so, when Miss Marjorie Wood's eyes chanced to rest on him. Of course, he came forward at once; there was nothing else to do. Did she, however, divine from his manner what had been his intention, notice even now an instant's hesitation in moving toward her — she, who was accustomed to being seen first, and sought out, too, by those with whom she was acquainted, however slightly?

The hint of coldness in Miss Wood's blue eyes soon vanished. The young man laughed it down; he seemed to charm her as he did so many others. His greeting of Sir Archibald was easy, conventional; his long, slim fingers met the other's big ones with apparent glad frankness. The gaiety on Bruce's features contrasted with the stolid reticence of the Briton.

“You and Bruce should enjoy knowing each other,” Mr. Wood, a refined looking man of about sixty, said in his friendliest fashion. “You have something in common—the Orient. I have noticed that people who have lived long in the Far East seem to like to get together, to exchange odd experiences, no doubt.”

The younger man disclaimed any adventures out of the ordinary. Mr. Wood, as if pleased by this modesty, smiled indulgently. He and Bruce were members of the same club; the elder had rather sought out the other on occasions, finding him interesting to talk to, when he *would* talk. He appeared disposed to do so now; in fact, exerted himself and was at his best. Mr. Wood laughed, but Sir Archibald’s face remained Sphinx-like.

It may be, he was interested in Miss Wood, or a conversation between her and Miss Flossie Burke. That young woman had rushed to the other. They had met somewhere once, an occasion probably remembered more by Samuel Page’s niece than by Mr. Wood’s daughter.

Miss Marjorie responded lightly to that effusive greeting. She had come prepared to enjoy the

novelty of the event; of being set down among those to whom she was for the most part a stranger. It was Sir Archibald who had evinced a desire to be asked here. Why? She couldn't imagine. Of course it was jolly; and it had been jollier still to meet with a mishap on the way. Sir Archibald had taken it so seriously; seemed so unduly annoyed! Her look swept the gaily lighted grounds; the house with every window agleam, then returned to the damask-spread board, the half-filled glasses. "I'm afraid we have interrupted your little table party?"

"Not at all. We were only admiring Miss Goldberg's pearls; passing them around, don't you know."

"Indeed?" Miss Wood, herself, wore no ornaments.

"And Mr. Bruce was just alluding to some test, or something of the kind." Sir Archibald looked around.

"Mr. Bruce?" Marjorie Wood's tones conveyed an accent of surprise. "Then that was what he appeared so taken with when we came up that when the servant brushed against him, he —"

“Dropped them upon Miss Goldberg’s neck!”
laughed Flossie Burke.

“No; I meant — I thought —”

“Isn’t it charming? The arrangement of the grounds, I mean — that pavilion for dancing?”
Sir Archibald had taken a step or two in their direction and directed his remark to Miss Wood.
“A pavilion? Just fancy!”

As he spoke, he twirled his heavy mustache, while his lazy eyes, slightly expectant, turned now to Miss Burke; she, among many others, had not yet been presented to him. If the observer wanted a reason for that gentleman’s rather abrupt action at the moment, here was a simple one. Miss Flossie’s charms were unmistakable; she at once began to entertain Sir Archibald, her manner, that of society, a haphazard, frothy way of talking *at* not *to* one.

The host’s basso, calling for chairs and another table to be placed against the one from which they had risen, broke in on them, and they seated themselves again.

Señor Caglioni appeared presently. Undersized, wiry, the secretary carried himself with an odd

briskness. A black beard adorned a countenance, at once swarthy and secretive. With all his assumption of Portuguese ancestry, there was something un-European about him. Perhaps that alien intimation lay in the eyes that offered to the observer only the surface lights of dark shining beads, and, yes, conveyed in their setting, though remotely, some reminder of a "slant." He held himself with an assurance in the least forced, and when the host made him acquainted with those at the table, bowed to each after the ceremonious fashion of the East. As he regarded the people, however, his gaze lacked somewhat in steadfastness. This was especially marked when the host called Bruce by name.

It might have been the secretary found the incisive directness of Chatfield Bruce's glance in the least disconcerting to eyes grown sensitive from the glare of oriental suns. For, meeting that gaze, Señor Caglioni's lids fluttered like the wings of an insect, his body described, possibly, a greater curve. Bruce nodded carelessly, almost curtly, and turned again to Miss Wood.

"The motor has been repaired, Sir Archibald,"

Caglioni murmured, taking a place near the foot of the table.

“Good! My secretary is quite a mechanic,” explained Sir Archibald. “Couldn’t resist helping overhaul the parts, don’t you know.”

“Mechanic?” observed Mr. Wood lightly. “And a linguist, a stenographer, a sportsman! A man of many accomplishments!” he added.

“A sportsman?” exclaimed Miss Burke vivaciously.

Mr. Wood laughed. “Don’t know as I ought quite to call the señor that, though! He put in a good part of to-day among the tangles and underbrush of my place, but brought back only one solitary bunny.”

The señor made a deprecatory shrug. “I am not a very good shot.”

“Aren’t you?” Bruce had turned and was looking at him curiously; then his gaze became more distant, as if some far-away baffling impression had suddenly assailed him. An instant, and he regained his customary light poise. “Your place, Mr. Wood, or the rear of it, looks a likely spot for poachers.”

“As a matter of fact it is inaccessible,” Mr. Wood replied. “You may not have noticed, just walking by.” Again Bruce’s eyes lifted to Caglioni, and he drummed with his fingers on the table.

The evening wore on. Bruce talked very little now. The wine before him, neglected, had long since ceased to effervesce; became but a flat golden surface. On Marjorie Wood’s cheeks the rosebuds that had unfolded their hues to the rush of the night wind on the way thither had deepened; she was speaking; he, resting his head on his hand, seemed content to look at her and listen.

Across the lawn a faint mist, the end of a cloud hanging low, passed like a wraith; in the grass a sibilant sound of insects mingled with the human murmur. It, both, were drowned by the band; a waltz — this time, *The Merry Widow* — again vied with the bursting bubbles for votaries. People of an accord deserted buffets and tables.

As Sir Archibald and Miss Goldberg passed toward the pavilion, the watchful Bolger saw Señor Caglioni leave his chair and approach them. But although his lips addressed Sir Archibald, the secretary’s gaze caressed furtively the rope on Miss

Goldberg's neck; as it did so, the pupils of his brown eyes seemed slowly to dilate. The smoke of a cigar in the hand of a neighbor floated before the intent look of the observer. A second it blurred the picture. When that slight haze had swept away, Sir Archibald and his partner had moved on. Señor Caglioni had turned, as if involuntarily, toward the host; a gleam of sardonic humor shot from his eyes. The detective who saw, experienced momentary wonder, half-apprehension. What did it mean?

At that moment Chatfield Bruce, with Miss Wood at his side, each mindful only of the other, stepped lightly toward the dancers.

CHAPTER IX

A STARTLING SEQUENCE

BRUCE guided without effort, faultlessly; he could not have done otherwise. The young man was pagan in his appreciation of certain forms of dancing and rhythm; the motion-epics of the Far East, based on the varying moods of nature, were for him especial delectation. The Viennese waltz he had not liked so well, even while he had perforce glided to its three-four reiteration. The dance had seemed, as it were, naïve; wanting in suggestion of symbolism. Its barrenness in this regard failed to impress him now.

He gazed down. The girl's face, so near his shoulder, revealed no cynical doubts; he regarded it on a sudden, with an airy, almost boyish trust. He experienced an unreasoning pleasure; yes, joy! He did not know why; he did not care. It did not admit of argument or reason. It was as if,

standing at the foot of a temple's steps on the dull banks of the Pei-ho, in the first flush of youth's golden dream, he had been about to embark, when at the river's edge he saw her, with hair dark as an eastern princess' and eyes like the blue flowers that lie in the desert beyond the walled cities — saw her and took her with him, wherever that might be!

It happened like something out of space, out of time — like the birth of a star or the death of one! Only the environment now, the actual surrounding figures, seemed unreal, wooden. His eyes had a new ardor. An odd sense of possession dominated him. She was his! — his! Did he not always attain what he coveted? His! He drew her closer, very gently; so gently, she did not seem to notice. Oh, for the magic carpet of China, that might whisk them up to the plain of Han, the sea of stars! But one could take, carry off what was of great worth without oriental sorcery! If he only would — One! two! three! the rhythms continued.

After the first few tentative moments, the important, crucial test of a partner, Marjorie Wood had resigned herself to Bruce with a confidence all

would be well. She yielded unreservedly to the glad measures; it was quite primeval, dancing like that, under the stars. The latter seemed to whirl around bewilderingly; mad, dancing stars, when one tried to sort them out! Chimerical points of light!—Venus, Mars, the Dipper, all became merged, mixed! She laughed softly, and Bruce again looked down—at blue eyes—like bright merry flowers now, dancing in the breeze. The parted red lips were curved to a smile; a flying tress of dark hair touched his cheek. At that moment Chatfield Bruce and Marjorie Wood nearly collided with Sir Archibald.

The young man, just in time caught sight, for an instant, of the heavy, now rubicund face; a flare of white pearls, agitated by the swift whirling and Miss Goldberg's rapid breathing. Then Bruce, with a slight tightening of his arm about the slender, supple waist, swept deftly away from the threatening danger, and Miss Wood remained unaware of that narrow margin of escape from what, in this instance, owing to Sir Archibald's bulk, would have been a distinct physical shock.

The music came to an end. She regarded Chat-

field Bruce blithely; he had not disappointed her.

“Thank you, Miss Wood!” Mocking irony, futility of words, though he bent to the part, eyes agleam.

Her small, white-gloved hand rested now on his arm; she found herself walking away with him quite naturally across the lawn, through shaded paths to the verge of the more thickly wooded park. She hardly noted which way they went; he still seemed to guide her as he had in the dance. Only now he talked — joyous fantastic nonsense, like a boy! She answered, unreasoningly vibrant, responsive to his mood, as if some of the magic of the night had crept into and swayed her thoughts, too. Though now and then she looked at him with eyes a little questioning, whimsically surprised, as if asking, was he the incisive, sometime ironical, man of the world she had conceived him to be?

Did he read, between her gay words, the intrusive query? If so, he swept it aside, light as thistle-down and continued to lead her on arbitrarily, with implied authority. Her hand like a lily leaf seemed about to fall from his black sleeve. He looked at it; it yet lingered — though so lightly,

as if it might float off and away for ever, on an instant.

They paused, at length, where the bank descended precipitately. How beautiful the valley sleeping beneath its diaphanous mantle of haze! The world, typified by the concourse of small red dots of light, human habitations, how far away! The blithe words died on the girl's lips; her gaze, beneath sweeping lashes, looked out from shadows of ineffable dreaminess. Bruce, too, ceased to speak, but the glad light of his glance rested only on her; the pale perfect contour of her face, the hair, black as the wing of a night bird. He who a few moments before had held her in his arms, a white-robed, youthful Aphrodite, radiating with life, would not now have dared to touch her. Yet a spell of wonderful nearness seemed to have fallen on them.

To hold them so still! A moment; an eternity! Below, a stone or bit of gravel became loosened and fell. She stirred; their glances met. A brighter, more intense light shone abruptly from his, as if the glad diffused rays were suddenly gathered and focused into points of fire and warmth, that played

on her like a clear white flame, sending with disconcerting swiftness a flood of color to her cheeks, stirring fuller, stronger pulsations from finger-tips to throat, awakening something, beneath her breast, that beat hard, wildly!

Loud sang the insects; their rhythmic intonations seemed to fill the land. Afar, the wood appeared to fade away; only the trees, near at hand, were very insistent, very black, and yet unreal, too, as if with their up-curving branches they had been metamorphosed into many-storied pagodas, standing in some far-eastern garden, full of odors and strange fragrances. Out of the night she heard her name whispered — or was it but fancy?

Near by, a distinct sound, the sharp crackling of a branch, broke startlingly the stillness. Again — as if a footfall in the wooded park, close to them, had encountered a dead limb on the ground. She looked that way; her hand brushed her brow. Stepping toward them from beneath one of the pagoda-like trees, she saw a dark form, that stopped, seemed to hesitate at sight of them, then came forward and turned, acting as if he had not observed them, and stole with quick, now noiseless

tread toward the brightly lighted house. The reflection of pale rays played on him; the curious profile with high cheek bones; the glittering eyes. Then he was gone.

“Why”—she gave an odd little laugh—“that was a Chinaman.”

“One of the servants.” Bruce suddenly straightened, throwing back his head, as if at the same time to throw something from him. “Mr. Goldberg has several of them.”

“How strange —” The words died away.

“On the contrary, they make excellent servants.”

“I mean his appearing like that, from the —”

“My dear Miss Marjorie!” The voice was Sir Archibald’s. He had approached from the direction opposite to which they were looking. “I have been searching for you everywhere; to claim my dance, don’t you know.” The words were commonplace, but his glance, passing from one to the other, seemed to darken.

Bruce laughed lightly; his eyes now had the cold gleam of a simitar in the moonlight.

“The dance is half over,” Sir Archibald went on.

Marjorie Wood turned. "I am sorry." In her voice was an accent of constraint.

"The fault is mine," murmured Bruce.

Sir Archibald did not answer, but held out his arm stiffly. With a quick backward glance the girl moved toward him and Bruce watched them walk away.

When a short time later, he again started toward the house, the lawn was nearly deserted; most of the guests had crowded to the platform. Toward the west a bank of black clouds had blotted out the stars; a faint reverberation, afar, made itself heard. In the direction from whence it came, above the tree-tops, the red moon, like a sickle, swung menacingly. Bruce regarded it. Not far from the lunar effect, grim shadows were reaching out; creeping farther across the sky.

From them, his glance turned slowly to the well-filled platform. Through rapidly moving figures the young man saw, for an instant, Miss Wood; above the broad, rather heavy shoulders of her partner, he caught a fleeting impression of her face. Did she dance as lightly as she had danced a short

time ago? The flutter of her white gown held his look, then, like the creamy tip of a wave that ere the eye has hardly seen it is lost in effervescence, it vanished in the vortex.

He looked down; his long fingers pressed close his palm; the shadows lay on his face.

“A penny for your thoughts!” The voice was Miss Burke’s. She had stepped to his side from the buffet, where a number of couples yet lingered. “But, perhaps, you are wondering with the others,” not awaiting his answer, “what Sir Archibald’s mission to this country may be?”

“Sir Archibald’s mission?” He looked at her quickly, with, she might almost have fancied, swift inquiry.

“A tender one, if rumor can be relied on!” Her laugh sounded the least bit artificial. “He met Miss Wood first in Europe,” she continued.

He did not answer. Did she find his silence disappointing — as if something she had reached for, had proved illusory?

“It may be, though, that you know more of Sir Archibald’s mission than the rest of us?”

“I?” crisply.

“As a friend of Mr. Wood!”

“Acquaintance,” he corrected.

“Oh!” Her glance swung toward the platform; again he suffered the silence to grow. Her foot tapped the earth and her brows drew together.

“Do you see that person over there?” she said suddenly.

“What person?” Her backward glance had been swift, significant.

“The French-looking one, with the imperial, standing near the platform. He is watching Miss Goldberg—or the pearls! That,” she added sharply, as noting the effect of her words on him, “is Mr. Bolger.”

“Bolger?”

“You have never heard of him?”

“Is he,” perfunctorily, “a detective?”

Miss Burke’s laugh rang out; it was rather a peculiar laugh, caressing or cruel, one could hardly tell which. “By the way, did I ever speak to you about that drawing left in my uncle’s box when the bonds were taken?”

“Did you?” he murmured politely. “I hardly remember.”

"You are not interested?"

"On the contrary!" patiently.

"Perhaps," she observed, more quickly, "he who left the drawing in Mr. Page's box would be. Interested, I mean! If he knew it may prove of importance yet, in the case! Although neither Mr. Bolger nor my uncle noted at the time, that bit of paper *did* bear something distinguishing; incriminating!" Did he start now? At last! She was not sure. His countenance, in the shadow, could hardly be seen; he raised his head suddenly.

"Let us hope you are right." He smiled. "If I were to give you any advice it would be: Guard carefully that paper!"

The reply that sprang to her lips was interrupted; with a sudden exclamation, half-apprehensively she caught his arm. A zigzag fork of lightning was launched unexpectedly from the sky. It left the eyes dazzled, almost blinded. At the same time the summer squall that had been gradually drawing nearer, suddenly broke. The wind dissipated the dancers, played havoc with the festoons of flowers, the electric bulbs and the many Chinese lanterns. It tore some of the last, lighted with candles, from

the trees and sent them scurrying hither and thither. A few caught fire, soared across the lawn like great blazing beetles, and, vanishing over the hill-top, were lost in the night.

Under the shelter of a tree, Bruce, with Miss Flossie clinging closer, stood a moment watching those who hurried from the platform.

“It is such a moment as this,” the young man laughed, “that he to whom you referred just now would avail himself of for his nefarious purpose.”

As he spoke, his eyes rested on Miss Goldberg, running, with Señor Caglioni, toward the house. But Bruce’s glance lingered only an instant on her, then passed to one behind, gay as a nymph laughing at the terrors of the storm-god. For Miss Wood, the squall was a diverting incident; fitting, it may be, her mood, now mercurial, restless, welcoming any change.

A second, Bruce so saw her, a fleet, blithe vision; coming after her, Sir Archibald, somewhat too far behind for the buoyant cavalier the moment seemed to call for. A second, or the part of a second, the flash of Bruce’s gaze thus perceived her; and then

something, startling, unlooked-for, altered the picture.

One of the lanterns, a flaming mass of paper, swept directly toward her. The burning tissue, caught in the gusts, seemed to spring almost viciously at her. The wind held it to her gown. She tried to brush it away, but in vain; her dress, of the flimsiest material, in turn, became ignited.

Miss Flossie Burke heard Chatfield Bruce say something, felt his arm fiercely whipped from her fingers which had involuntarily closed upon it. What followed afterward she hardly knew. She only saw in her bewilderment, a turmoil of people, one more conspicuous than the others, who threw off his coat, wrapped it around the flames, beating them with his hands.

His movements had been lightning-like; she had scarcely followed them. He was kneeling on the grass now, striking in that same fierce manner, with the incredible swiftness she was vaguely cognizant of when he had torn himself away from her. Sir Archibald, too, lent his assistance — rather late, Miss Burke afterward remembered thinking.

CHAPTER X

A NEW ENVIRONMENT

IT all happened very quickly and was soon over; what harm had been done remained to be seen. Miss Flossie with others pressed excitedly forward. Was he much injured, badly burned? She had seen his hands and arms enveloped by the flames. None noted the shape her inquiries took; the excess of agitation in the girl's greenish eyes. She and a number of others were waved back. Authority stepped in; among the guests was a doctor.

Miss Wood, happily, proved to have been unharmed by the flames, but Mr. Bruce had suffered a few actual injuries; his right hand, especially, showed several bad burns. He, however, made light of it; not, apparently, through a desire to emulate the conventional after-rôle in instances of the kind, but rather to escape the importunities of those who insisted on making too much of it.

The hand was duly bound and bandaged, where-

upon Bruce announced his intention of returning to his inn in the village. To this Mr. Wood offered strenuous objections. The least he, Mr. Wood, could do under the circumstances, he asserted, was to offer the young man the hospitality of his home, not far distant. To permit Bruce to walk down to the tavern in the town, in his condition, was out of the question; not to be thought of! The young man needed care and attention.

To which Bruce replied he had been "looked after" already, very well indeed; felt now quite able to look after himself. Besides — he dwelt on this — were not all his little belongings at the inn? He had with him, with a faint attempt at jocularly, but the clothes he had on and those were slightly damaged. Mr. Wood, equally persistent, answered his grip or trunk could be sent for; he would speak at once to his man about that.

Perhaps the twinges in his hand, arms and shoulders made Bruce less combative, under pressure, than he wished to be; perhaps Sir Archibald's unexpected intervention at the moment assisted further in undermining his resolution. A remark, interjected by the Englishman, urged the advisability of

sacrificing for that night what would be, at best, a questionable freedom and independence in a stuffy little inn, for the charming thralldom of a home.

There was a glint behind the lazy light in Sir Archibald's eyes as he voiced this sentiment; the words, well-modulated, drawling, were, nevertheless, in the least challenging. Bruce regarded the stolid, emotionless face an instant; then, with a faint smile, acquiesced. So, willy-nilly, not long after he found himself carried off, Mr. Wood's guest, and Mr. Bolger, who had both heard and seen, stared after the young man when he had really gone or been whisked away.

It may be the detective reflected at the moment on the mockery of fate; the irony of circumstances. Here was the *mauvais sujet* of his investigations set on the pedestal of a Hector! It constituted a new page in his experiences; anger, and chagrin mingled in his emotions. He, too, took his departure; he had no further interest in the pearls that night. They were safe; the garden party was practically over; this little contretemps had taken the edge off further merry-making.

Chatfield Bruce, between Miss Wood and her

father on the rear seat of the car, was whirled on. He said nothing, nor did they, after a few desultory remarks, speak; a tacit silence seemed to have taken possession of them. In front, the forms of Sir Archibald and his secretary, in the vague light, wavered this way and that, like shadows. The Englishman and Señor Caglioni were, also, in either quiescent or reflective moods; the latest, unlooked-for member of the party might have wondered what thoughts moved them during that journey.

But the young man leaning back, seemed oblivious of them; sitting as still as he might; mindful, no doubt, only of physical pain. Sometimes Miss Wood's blue eyes turned furtively to regard him at her side. Once Bruce's injured arm was thrown slightly against her as they encountered a rut the driver negotiated rather too quickly; the young man made no sound to indicate the ensuing twinge that must have shot through him. But she saw his lips press tightly; noted a slight movement of the upper muscles of the cheek. An ornament on her breast stirred. She bent forward quickly and spoke to the driver; in clear, well-controlled tones told him to go more slowly.

Whereupon Bruce, for the first time, swerved his look to regard her, half-gratefully, half-deprecatoryly. She, however, had turned her head from him and was gazing from the car. He saw very little of her face; but he felt, as before, the flutter of her veil. All the strange, unreal journey — which lasted, in truth, but a little while — he was aware of that. Out of the darkness and the night, amid acute sense of pain, he had continued conscious of the fine silk now flecking his cheek like the touch of a butterfly; then whipping faintly against his breast.

A few more jars, slighter ones owing to the chauffeur's caution, a turn in the road here, another there, and the car drew up. As Bruce got out he was dimly aware that the squall passing with its fierce patter of rain, had left the night more beautiful than before. Every cloud, every convolution of mist had been driven from the sky; the stars were almost too bright.

It was Sir Archibald who assisted Miss Wood from the car; she went toward the house with him and the secretary and waited at the top of the steps for her father and Mr. Bruce. Mr. Wood paused

to speak to the chauffeur, telling him to go down to the tavern in the village for his new guest's luggage, whereupon the latter intervened. It was late now, he observed — after midnight; landlord and help went to bed early in these country inns, but they were up with the sun. The next morning the chauffeur could procure for him, Bruce, his suitcase, all he had brought with him; he would not need it until he rose, which might not be until long after the barnyard fowls.

Mr. Wood listened courteously to these remarks and then bade his man consider them his instructions. After which the old gentleman, with a felicitous phrase, waved Chatfield Bruce toward the open door of his home.

The young man, however, lingered yet a moment. While speaking about the baggage, he had glanced about him as if to convey to his mind an impression of the outer aspect of the house, spacious and rambling, and the grounds surrounding it. He even held back a moment longer to refer now to the giant trees that lined the roadway through which they had come. Yes, the place was not one of those newer estates being created on every hand; Mr.

Wood who loved the old house and gardens for their associations answered warmly.

Sir Archibald remained at the side of Marjorie Wood as the two men ascended the steps; his eyes, slightly questioning, rested an instant on Chatfield Bruce, but the latter did not seem to notice. They entered now a home whose interior did not belie its outward appearance. Rosewood, of the early American school, adorned the two front lower apartments. Chandeliers, with egg-like crystals, threw a soft luster on several portraits, one or two of which, in the flowing attire of a past period, suggested a strong family resemblance to Marjorie Wood.

Passing on, up the broad staircase leading to the second story, Mr. Wood showed his guest into a great chamber in the wing. It was rather remote, he remarked, throwing open the glass doors leading to a veranda; but its quietude commended it for a guest, a "little done up"; laying momentarily his hand on Bruce's shoulder. He would send at once his man Simpson, with dressing-gown and other little necessities. If, during the night, his guest needed anything, he had but to ring. To which

Mr. Bruce answered he did not anticipate the necessity of disturbing the household, and Mr. Wood, with a few last friendly words, took his departure.

The young man seated himself; waited. On the mantel a clock ticked loudly. "After twelve!"—"after twelve!" The pendulum seemed to beat the words; his eyes lowered to the rug on the floor. Simpson was slow—an English servant, no doubt. An irregularity in the hand-woven stuff at his feet held his glance. Why had the oriental workman turned this one detail upside-down? To differentiate from a factory-fabric? Or through mere childish whimsicality?

"After twelve"—"after twelve"—A loud persistent little clock, it had a very pronounced way of telling off the seconds. How rapidly they were passing! Bruce stirred; some one rapped, entered—Simpson!

He was well-laden, with this and that dangling on one arm, and a vase of roses held to him. He laid over the back of a chair the articles that dangled; "Mr. Wood's compliments!" Placed on a table, the flowers; "Miss Wood's compliments!" That is, the servant hastened to add, presumably

voicing his young mistress' words, if the gentleman didn't mind them in his room; some people were averse to sleeping with them.

Mr. Bruce entertained no prejudice of the kind. No; there was nothing else he required; Simpson could go. Only, a last injunction; let no one rap on the door in the morning; if he, Bruce, could sleep late, he wished to. Simpson went. The young man stepped to the table, bent over the flowers and breathed deeply; then suddenly straightened. The receding footsteps had died away; he was alone.

But was he? On the veranda he fancied he heard a slight noise and went swiftly to the long glass doors opening upon it. Drawing aside the curtains which closed behind him, he stepped out.

Only the shadows met his gaze; against the rail, a branch, swayed by the wind, grated. It was that sound he had heard; his eyes, sweeping along the veranda, striving to penetrate the surrounding darkness, could detect no human form. The rain had enhanced the fragrance from the garden below; the sweet odor of *her* flowers seemed augmented an hundredfold; to assail him with sense-drugging per-

fumes. He could almost forget the burning sensation of pain. The insect tones that pierced the air were as shrill as those in the spirit-haunted forests of the Shoguns. His glance swept toward the trees confronting him now; he looked down toward the ground.

His next move, sudden, unexpected, that of one who had made up his mind to some hazardous course, would have greatly surprised Mr. Wood, or his daughter, could they have seen it; two other members of the household, perhaps, would not have been so amazed.

When Chatfield Bruce was shown by Mr. Wood to his room, Caglioni and Sir Archibald, after wishing Miss Wood good night, passed into those apartments reserved for their accommodation at the other end of the hall. The Englishman, with a significant look at his secretary, left the door of his sitting-room partly ajar; then motioned Caglioni to sit at a table, commanding a view of the door of the distant apartment into which Bruce had been ushered for the night. Bamford himself sank into a chair, with his back to his own threshold and the hall,

lighted a cigar and bent over a Chinese checker-board of many squares, that lay on the table.

“Tell me when Mr. Wood comes out,” Sir Archibald, apparently engrossed only in the men on the board, observed.

It was a game he and his secretary often played at night before retiring, even to the wee hours, a complicated pastime invented by a complex people. But this evening Sir Archibald and Caglioni — who had now slipped into a business suit — made but a pretense of engaging in a battle of “go.” The former smoked fast; his big fingers toyed only in desultory fashion with the small pieces. They seemed very tiny, diminutive buttons of stone, for his large, strong hands; but he was known to move them with unerring, magic precision; one or two viceroys, over sour “champagne” in a tea-pot, had, in the past, confessed the Englishman’s victory.

Mr. Wood, Caglioni shortly afterward murmured, *had* left Mr. Bruce’s room. Simpson, the host’s man, would, no doubt, soon repair thither, Sir Archibald in a low voice answered. Meanwhile they continued to wait; talked in suppressed tones.

The door of Caglioni’s room commanded a view

of the veranda? Yes; then the secretary knew what he was to do; must hold himself in readiness. It was really fortunate circumstances had compelled Bruce to come here to-night; but what did the other think of the pearls? abruptly.

“*Ma foi!* Mr. Goldberg is wise,” Caglioni laughed softly, “a veritable Nathan of his kind! The multitude gaze and admire. His daughter gets all the credit of being bedecked like a duchess; he rubs his hands, and, *sapristi*, takes no risk.”

“What do you mean?” Sir Archibald looked up quickly.

“That the Midas of lower Broadway emulates the example of the noblesse of Park Row, or Kensington; he keeps the priceless gems under lock and key, and parades for the ignorant or uninitiated —” He finished the sentence with a snap of the fingers.

Bamford, although not prone to outward signs of emotion, started now. He forgot the pieces on the board and stared ahead through waves of smoke.

“*Diable!* You did not perceive?” Caglioni’s hand waved airily.

The other’s face wore a strange expression. “Not — that!” he said slowly. Then the hand

over the board closed. "But why did you not tell me this before?"

"When you were with Miss Goldberg? In the automobile?" Caglioni's accents were furtively querulous. "Is it important?"

Sir Archibald did not answer at once. "You are sure?" he said at length.

"I?" he shrugged. "With my experience? Who once dealt in that very kind of merchandise? I could almost tell from what stream in the Celestial Kingdom those substitutes were taken."

Sir Archibald was silent. The secretary twitched nervously, then suddenly stiffened. "The man Simpson!" he half-whispered, his tones tense, his eyes no longer bead-like, but glittering like those of a viper. "He is going in."

"He will soon come out. 'And then—"

Caglioni glided into the room adjoining. Sir Archibald leaned back as if surveying a strategic arrangement of the bits of stone on the board. Simpson at length came down the hall. The Englishman closed his door leading to it, crossed to the secretary's chamber and entered. The apartment was vacant. Sir Archibald looked out upon the ve-

randa; that, too, was now deserted. He fancied he saw something dark below, gliding toward, then into the forest, but was not sure. The leaves, wet with rain, glistened between; the cigar went out in his hand as his eyes continued to scrutinize the darkness.

CHAPTER XI

A NIGHT GUEST

CHATFIELD BRUCE'S procedure that would have awakened the surprise of Mr. Wood had he witnessed it, consisted of a series of odd acts. Reëntering quickly his room, the young man shot the bolt of the door leading into the hall, then stepped to the doors opening on to the veranda. A key on the inside of one of them he took out, placed it on the outside, and was about once more to leave the chamber, when he paused.

His glance swerved involuntarily back; some new thought seemed to move him. Crossing the apartment again, he pushed the bolt from the detaining clasp, fastened that door with the key and then slipped the latter into his pocket. After which, adjusting the curtains carefully before the double glass doors, so that no one without could see in, he returned to the balcony, drew those doors to, locked them, and kept possession of that key also.

At one end of the upper veranda was a heavy trelliswork which he had foreseen might serve his purpose. Now by its aid, he let himself down from the balcony to the ground. It was not easy to do so; but no other course remained. He had to do it, and quickly; though he experienced a consciousness of taxing his less injured, left hand, almost beyond endurance. He endeavored, however, to set aside the pain with a kind of Manchu fortitude, to call whimsically to mind at the moment a far-eastern stoicism. But a well-defined ego in him repudiated, perhaps a little to his surprise, a philosophy of the melting-pot; that nothing matters very much. He had not lost his capacity to feel.

In spite of the danger and tenseness of the moment, he could smile at his thoughts; he was still very young; the Old East had not aged him; the ingenuousness of the West yet vibrated in his being. He glanced toward a lighted curtain at the side of the house. Was it fancy, or had he detected for an instant the silhouette of a girl's head and shoulders passing thereon, the brief uplifting of an arm? Now was the curtain only blank; a dull yellow!

One self of him seemed to crave no more than the

privilege of standing there; to dream — sonnet-fashion, or in madrigals! Another self, acting subconsciously, it may be, made him vividly aware of a footstep — it was not a branch this time! — on the veranda above. The sound acted like a stimulating tonic to that second self, and transformed him into life and action. With senses alert, he moved swiftly from the house.

The earth was wet, soggy; but, though he stepped with the lightness of a forest creature, on soft sodden leaves, the twigs on the ground broke beneath him; might have been heard by others, very attentive at the moment; but he did not look back. Had he done so, he would have noticed the yellow curtain he had regarded, thrust aside a little, in the thin slant of light, a girl's face gazing out an instant. Then the curtain fell back into place; the white gleam went; the succeeding yellow, too.

Bruce plunged into the darkness, but he knew whither he was going. Through interspaces in the foliage, the stars held him to his course. To all appearances he had been able to leave the house without attracting attention. Stopping many times, he could hear no one coming after him; caught only

those murmurings like a deep pulsation from the heart of the woodland. He did not, however, tell himself with certainty his absence would not be noticed, nor even that he would escape being followed. He did not underestimate a certain wakefulness and watchfulness under the circumstances on Sir Archibald's part. Bruce knew well that individual's reputation for alertness and persistency. Sir Archibald, in his capacity as private agent and adviser of his majesty's government in the Far East, displayed the same traits that made him renowned as a pursuer of big game. He would wait for hours, days, on his platform for a tiger, knew how to entice what he wished to bring down, beneath his stand, or how to get others to "drive" for him—quick, agile ones, like Caglioni! Where had Bruce seen the secretary? A fugitive resemblance he had felt earlier in the evening again played hide-and-seek in the young man's brain. Even in this moment of excitation, he found himself trying to recall under what possible circumstances they could have met before that night.

He continued to move on. A lack of evidence he was followed did not altogether serve to reassure

him on that score. Of course, the possibility existed of the secretary's being even closer than he thought; the slant eyes, with their suggestion of an ancestry, not altogether Portuguese, recalled to him certain wonder-tales of the East; of mysterious, half-human creatures, possessing the power to track others, dog-humans, themselves always unseen; unheard.

Absurd superstition! Bruce dismissed the phantasy. He paused once more, at the side wall of the estate which he had now reached, to listen. Time was precious; nevertheless, he allowed a minute or two to pass thus. Leaning against the damp stone, he caught only the tinkle, tinkle of the rain-drops, loosened from the leaves by the wind; the hardly audible pit-a-pat of some tiny creature he had himself, most likely, disturbed. Then lifting his arms high, he reached up to grasp the top of the wall, of modern construction, replacing the hedge at this side of the estate.

Not long afterward, Bruce stood again on the verge of the wooded park near the Goldberg mansion. Dark and deserted now were the grounds. Against the sky the structure loomed, with few

lights showing in its windows. From it, in the deep gloom, all newness seemed to have vanished; it held itself in portentous fashion on the brow of the hill, like a feudal place that had a history.

A moment Bruce looked attentively around him, then glided silently into the dim wood. He remained there for some time, lost to sight, during which a figure looked furtively out from a black corner of the house in the direction he himself had gone.

The moments went by. Did the person, lurking, watching, become impatient? Flat on the grass, he began to draw himself forward, without sound; every muscle seemed trained for the sinuous movement. In the shadow of the platform he paused. Still he who had vanished into the wood did not reappear. How long it took him for what he had to do! The man on the grass again continued his progress forward, with singular swiftness over the more open places, where the starlight showed him, a faint blotch on the earth. At length, reaching a shaded spot on the edge of the obscure fringe, he half-raised himself; another stood suddenly at his side.

“What are you doing here?” Bruce asked harshly. “Do you know the risk? You did what you should,” glancing over his shoulder toward the shaded park. “Why overdo your task?”

“I came, illustrious one,” answered the man in Cantonese dialect, sitting now on his heels, “to warn! Against the English Elephant, here to-night; he who is with him, the brown fox! As the illustrious one knows, foxes are not good, and the Elephant is the enemy of the Nine-times-Nine; in my country, and in India, the lands of great Buddha.”

“What have I to do with your Nine-times-Nine,” came in crisp tones from the young man, “or any other of your societies?”

“They have to do with the illustrious one,” bending humbly to the earth. “They never forget.”

“It seems, then,” ironically, “I have vassals untold for ever?”

“The master can not escape gratitude.”

“Any more than the illustrious ghosts, the perpetual, eulogistic tablets!”

“It is written!” phlegmatically. “When the

master, on the river of mist, that night in the waning evil of the moon, stepped between the traitor-assassin and my father, the object of his vengeance —”

“ Ah! ” Bruce’s eyes became on a sudden very keen and bright; he breathed deep, as if exhilarated. “ Did a beard then so blind me? ” he murmured to himself. “ And a few years? That I could not recognize, even though I had felt the teeth — once? Here! Tell me, Ting’s younger brother, ” he said aloud, gaily, turning to the Oriental, “ do foxes like rabbits? ” The other pondered, as seeking in vain the answer to a parable. The young man did not wait for him to find a solution, but shifted with sudden swiftness the talk. “ And it was the mere sight of the Elephant, ” in accents, half-scoffing, “ that caused you to forget yourself and blunder like a child, at the table, to-night! Never mind, though! ” with an odd laugh. “ Mishaps sometimes serve. ”

“ It was seeing him suddenly, over your shoulder! The enemy of our people! Why should he have come, and his servant, the unknown fox? Unless they suspected; knew! I did not think the

illustrious one would appear at the wood to-night, according to the compact; although I obeyed! After leaving to-night as he did! After what happened when the flame gods were angry!"

"Hush!" Bruce murmured a sound; his eyes had bent toward the house, to a faintly lighted window where a dim figure seemed standing. A woman? Yes; robed in white!

"The witch-one; she who has stolen the eyes of the sacred green!" A sibilant whisper came from the grass; Bruce made a motion.

A spell of silence followed. The young man continued to gaze toward the structure. Those guardian stone creatures, its gargoyles, seemed to grin; to gibe, into the night. The clear intonation of a tiny fountain sounded mockingly; too crystalline, with its high musical pitch! The man in the grass, squat, like one of the frogs on the brim of the water's marble basin, suddenly shifted; his eyes burned.

"There is some one near, illustrious one!"

"How do you know?" without turning his look from the house.

"The insects yonder were singing together."

“Bah!” immovably. “Insects sometimes stop singing.”

“Several great moths flew up, all together, from a small space of shadow.”

“An ideal night for moths to fly.”

“These saw, it may be, a brown fox.”

Bruce’s hand went swiftly down to the shoulder of the crouching one. “What does it—” He suppressed an exclamation; the fingers of his left hand bit into the hard flesh of the Oriental through the silky material that covered him. “What—”

“It sounded like a woman.”

“You, too, heard, then?” As he spoke, a light gleamed in another window.

“The witch-one is no longer there. It was she who called out—”

“But why?”

A strange, questioning look shone from Bruce’s gaze; between him and the house, a leaf fluttered, like a black butterfly, to the earth.

“Why?” he repeated. Suddenly the muscles beneath his hand stiffened; the man’s head had shot forward. In the house something startling, unexpected was happening; had happened.

CHAPTER XII

A SHIFT OF HAZARDS

THE festivities over, at the mansion on the hill, Mr. Goldberg put away the pearl-rope carefully. The guests, staying in the house, had gone to their rooms; he, apparently, was the last to retire. He permitted himself the luxury of a last glance at the delicate-textured spheres before allowing them to slide, in all their translucent beauty, to the little pink cotton nest in one of the drawers in his new safe. Then he closed the steel door, and turned the knob to throw off the combination and slid over it the concealing oak paneling, a device of his architect.

A moment the proprietor of Comscot house stood in the dim light and his thoughts seemed pleasant. His sigh was not a dolorous one; the affair had been a great success. He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets; started to whistle *Caro Nome* — he had an ear for Italian opera — but stopped. These

exuberances of a latent artistic soul would sometimes sweep over him. He suppressed them now, and was about to leave the anteroom, but paused.

Beneath the door of the chamber beyond shone a light. This apartment, a private sitting-room of the superbly decorated Goldberg suite, was occupied, for the time being, because of the press of visitors, by one of them.

“Not to bed yet, Miss Flossie?” the host buoyantly called out.

She answered, he couldn't quite hear what, for the door was heavy mahogany; then, stepping in an opposite direction, he passed through a bath-room, closing the door behind him, into his own sleeping apartment. It was big, lonesome-looking; he commenced to feel sleepy. Until now the wine had stimulated him, fanned his capacity for pleasure and made him more keenly observant. This agreeable effect, however, seemed slowly wearing away; a desire to sink unreservedly into the arms of Morpheus began to succeed it. He went to bed and slumbered heavily.

In her room Miss Flossie still sat up; her hair unbound, hung around her. She was seated at a

table, her chin resting on her bared arm; before her, one or two papers and a photograph. Her brows were drawn; she stared ahead of her; then down.

The paper engrossing her attention at the instant, was the anonymous note Mr. Goldberg had received. She had laughingly asked the host's daughter to get it for her, to look at; she, Flossie, confessed lightly to all the curiosity of her sex. The other had complied; placed the paper in her guest's rosy palm, and the latter had forgotten as yet to return it.

She held the paper now to the light; compared it with another on the table containing one or two crude drawings — that might have been construed as a camel and a needle's eye. Then she put down the host's message and looked long at the other white sheet in her hand. As she did so her eye kindled; something on it seemed to fascinate her gaze — an indentation of a circle, with tiny keen points set about it, above a straight line, faint to the unaided vision, but plainly discernible through the strong glass she now regarded it with. That circle and the straight line had been made inadvertently by some one leaning slightly on the paper. The

impress was that of a ring she knew; and it belonged to Chatfield Bruce. She had often seen it on his finger — indeed, had asked what the symbol meant and he had told her, where he had got it and all it portended.

A slight clue, perhaps, very slight; but men had been convicted on less evidence. She felt certain the sharp edges of the odd, most unusual design of the ring would fit absolutely that indentation, and the knowledge thrilled her with malicious joy and triumph. She allowed her gaze to linger — as if she had not studied the paper so often before! And a few perfunctory little letters that lay in front of her in Chatfield Bruce's hand; a photograph of him!

Her face flushed as she thought how she had procured the last. A snap-shot by a newspaper man, showing Mr. Bruce, in an amateur athletic contest, she had begged, on some pretext or other, from the editor to whom she surreptitiously furnished occasional spicy society items. Ah, she had been mad, mad! Was she so still?

This photograph now alone held her, to the exclusion, even, of the more insignificant detail her

eyes, like a cat's, had, a moment before, sharpened upon. A certain dreaminess replaced the hard light; there were times when she did not know herself, moments such as these! She looked at the casual likeness of a lithe, splendid figure, straight as an Indian's, a masculine profile Phidias might have longed to copy, lips, fine, expressive of determination, eyes alight with one purpose — to win. And he had won — though he had seemed to care so little, afterward! His gaze, then, wore that illusive, indifferent light she had become so accustomed to, even when she had turned in her most engaging manner to him — a light, as clear but frostily distant as that of a star.

A star! She could laugh to herself mockingly. Her eyes sought fiercely, once more, the paper she had taken from the desk where Mr. Page, her uncle, had secreted it. She brought down her hand; her red lips pressed closely; one of her white shoulders, partly seen, gleamed like hard marble. She regarded the definite evidence on the paper — for her to make use of some day as she saw fit or not. The alternative always came; she wondered why. Was she a little afraid of him? What nonsense!

Yet she had read of women who served, docilely enough, those harsh to them; she was not of that kind, however. Oh, no! She but held her hand and waited. For what? Rising suddenly, she stepped to the window. She wanted to breathe more freely. She tore back the curtain and looked out into the night.

How lightly had he parried with her that evening and turned her words! Bolger — who was Bolger, indeed? As if he had not reason to know! But though Bruce had held her and her words and what lay beneath them, with an indifference almost scornful, how swiftly he had turned to another when danger befell her, surmounted it, beat it out, regardless of injury to himself, or pain. Again she seemed to see him as she had seen him then; and before, in the dance!

With Marjorie Wood! The two had moved as if oblivious to the rest of the world! Did she, Flossie Burke, not know; could she not divine? It was not hard to read the swift new interest in his glance, something stronger, more sedulous, than she had ever beheld there before, that seemed, as

he held the girl's slender form to him, to sweep down from the crown of dark hair dreamily, tenderly, over the beautiful, young face.

For Miss Wood *was* beautiful — Miss Flossie reluctantly conceded it; but men had also acknowledged her own charms. She had had but a short time before a circle around her; he, however, had not been of them. He had forgotten even to ask her to dance; he had preferred to stand off there, near the park, with Miss Wood. He had hardly known the young girl before that night, yet they had walked away, as if accustomed to starlight talk and confidences.

It was different from the conversation that evening between him and herself. Once more she seemed to hear the mocking laughter of his words, when first the storm had swept down on them; that such a night as this, he who had designs on the pearls would find to his liking for his nefarious purpose. The sentence or what it implied, recurred to her again and again, and brought more sharply to mind the precious ornaments. She, Flossie, had been one of the last that night to look on them,

just before Miss Goldberg, about to retire, had reluctantly taken the pearls from her neck, to give them to her father. Who had put them away — where?

Miss Burke looked suddenly over her shoulder; a sound had caused her to turn. Was it in the great hall or the anteroom adjoining? A door, she fancied, had opened, then closed softly, as if some one had come into the anteroom from the hall. The host? He had but a short time before called out to her and retired. Of course it could not be Mr. Goldberg; yet it must be. She remembered that the door from the anteroom to the hall was always kept locked; she had inadvertently tried it once or twice. Then, how could any one have come in, that way, unless —

She felt a sudden nervous excitement; her mood had been tense; she was in a highly imaginative state. Those last words of Chatfield Bruce continued to move trippingly through her brain; they would not leave her. They seemed to say, locked doors would open readily to some people, deeply skilled, able to move silently, stealthily!

She was positive she heard a sound now of

some one stirring softly. Her heart beat faster. Was it — could he have come back? Impossible! And yet there was a glamour about him who had taken the Morrow emeralds, the Page bonds, and many other valuables! Had he not achieved the seemingly impossible before that night; a number of times? To return thus strangely, madly, to the Goldberg house, would be in keeping with one as temerarious and devil-may-care as he was clever and ingenious. She endeavored to dismiss the fancy, when an indubitable faint clicking in the next room held her.

She trembled but not altogether with fear, then moved, still as a ghost, from her window toward the door to the anteroom; stood near it, motionless, her hand to her breast. Beneath her fingers came a wilder throbbing now; her fancy conveyed the picture to her mind. That faint clicking she had dimly caught before, when Mr. Goldberg had been in the anteroom — she divined now what it meant. Of course, Mr. Goldberg would have prepared a secure place for the pearls; and, where else, naturally, than near his own bedroom?

In a safe, presumably; not visible to the eye!

When she had inspected that little room with the rest of the big house, no steel strong-box was visible; but Flossie knew that people, who had in their residences these awkward receptacles, took the pains to have them set in somewhere, out of sight, if not, as a matter of precaution, then because bulky steel safes are not ornamental and can not be made to harmonize with Louis-Quinze or Seize furniture.

Click! In the stillness, straining to listen, she still was aware of the persistent little sound, no louder than beads dropped, one by one, to the floor. At the same time, a tiny streak of light held her. It came from the key-hole. Dropping to her knees, she looked through the small aperture. At first, she saw nothing; then — yes! — a hand moving on a shiny knob. She breathed quickly. That hand:

It was distinct, unmistakably revealed to her. And it was not Mr. Goldberg's hand, covered with black hair; he had not returned to the room then — nor was it Chatfield Bruce's; the knowledge came to her with startling force. She had been so certain of the identity of the intruder, had almost welcomed her own perspicacity which had led her thus to place him. And now to learn — was she

disappointed at this perversion of what she had expected?

She continued to look. Bruce's long, shapely fingers were most unlike these well-kept, but short ones, that swung now, apparently, a safe door open; held, an instant later, something white dangling from them! She tried to find her voice, and was surprised she could not at first. She endeavored to rise, but her knees seemed unaccountably weak. She was not exactly frightened. What then?

The hand passed from her gaze; she found herself, thereupon, suddenly able to call out in a voice unlike her own, faintly, louder. Whoever the intruder, she heard him flee; where he went, she could not tell.

Another, however, not in the house, but in the garden below, near the wooded park, witnessed the sequence. Chatfield Bruce, with odd wonder and quizzical interest, saw the intruder take his departure. It was like an unexpected scene in a play; he, Bruce, spectator or critic, but gazed on. The man's form passed like a shadow down one of the great stone pillars; at the same time he touched

the ground, the spacious front room became flooded with light. A sound of distant voices, perturbed, excited, was wafted toward Bruce and his companion; between long French curtains, a woman's hair waved and flashed like the yellow wheat-tops blown by the wind. Bright colors came and went, vague gleamings of dressing-gowns and garments hastily assumed.

"The pearls!" Bruce whispered. There was irony in his eyes; his voice thrilled. "Some unscrupulous person has inconsiderately learned of the secret hiding-place, the combination of the strong-box."

The Oriental's face, uplifted to him who spoke, expressed blankness; the characteristic drooping lip seemed to hang more loosely.

"You mean —" he stammered.

The young man did not answer. A lower door of the house had suddenly slammed. He could hear now, plainly, the expected words always called forth by the circumstances, and saw him to whom they applied in the shadow of the dwelling, moving from bush to bush, at right angles from where they stood, toward the road where it swung down in

the direction of the village. Close at hand, some one who had been hiding to watch Bruce and his companion, moved involuntarily forward a little into the starlight.

“Quick!” The young man’s tones abruptly sharpened. “Back!” He thrust the Chinaman from him, one poignant thought assailing him. He — they — must needs beware lest they, too, become actors in the new strange drama.

The Oriental vanished with wondrous celerity; Bruce, himself, wheeled. About to spring toward the wooded park, he felt himself suddenly grasped; lithe, strangling arms wound around him. A hot breath swept his cheek; near his ear a shrill, panting voice, Caglioni’s, called out loudly: “This way! — He is here!”

Bruce tried to shake himself free, but in vain. He found himself at a great disadvantage, with this, his old enemy; he had walked, as it were, like a mouse into a trap. If he were taken now — what a grim conclusion! The gods would prove themselves indeed derisive. His eyes flashed in the darkness; there seemed nothing whimsical in the comedy now. His right hand was of no assistance

to him; the acute realization of being overpowered, that the end was not far, smote him, when as a phantasmagoria of something that has been comes to a drowning man, he seemed transported back into a garden in ancient Kyoto. He stood near the matings of fine bamboo fiber not far from the tinkling fountain and saw, in a dream, the mountains, the sacred edifices, a setting for the strange little man, no bigger than a boy, their ju-jitsu instructor.

Slap! Slap! He heard the forms fall; strike limp, with muscles relaxed, the matting. Then he observed the little master tie to his side an arm, and one of the pupils essay to overthrow him. With what result? That the former suddenly found himself as one who steps from the sunlight into the inner sanctuary of the lacquered Buddha and becomes lost in darkness; for the moment had the flow of his life been stopped. By only one of many devices; but what a trick!

The fingers of Bruce's free hand reached out, supple, terrible.

Cagliosi did not, at first, seem to understand or divine that expedient; he had probably never heard of it. But seeking once more to call out, he ex-

perienced a sensation of sudden surprise; spots began to dance before his dimming gaze, objects to whirl around. He strove to whip the long, pressing fingers from the artery they held closed. As well endeavor to shake off the clutch of a panther! It happened with incomprehensible swiftness; his heart seemed to stop beating; he became strangely inert. Consciousness was leaving him, when he was flung off — afar, like an unclean thing. He did not move now, but lay still, huddled-up in a clump of black bushes.

Bruce swayed for a moment. The warning cries of the secretary had been heard; voices were approaching; people, coming toward him fast, from the house. His whole body racked with agonizing throbs, yet he had no time to pause. He hardly knew what he did, but leaped into the path below. They saw him and came after.

As in a dream he realized that the chase was on.

CHAPTER XIII

PURSUIT

BRUCE had no idea where he was going; dazed by the shaping of events, he fled without thought of direction. As if the night's adventures had not already been sufficiently thrilling without this mad sequel! Fortunately the way, blindly chosen, favored him; the shadow of the hill threw its impress on the road the path zigzagged into; overhanging foliage blackened certain places. But his pursuers were near; he could hear the sound of their feet and the loud shouting. Truly a merry pursuit; a hot hue and cry! They were holding the course, taking to the scent like hungry hounds in the scramble of a haphazard steeple-chase. He would have to play his part, for a time; needs must when — His brain began to clear.

And, thinking more distinctly, he at first blamed himself for not having dashed back into the wooded park, taking his chances there, instead of here. Or

would they have been better, after all, had he acted otherwise than without thought, consideration? The little patch of trees could soon have been surrounded; he would have been free to grope around among them, no doubt, without being discovered while darkness lasted. But with the coming of daylight? Chance had, perhaps, served him better than he would have served himself; the comparatively open stretches of the country around were surely preferable to the park, a maze to enmesh him! Besides, the Chinaman had taken refuge there; he, too, would have been discovered, had Bruce fled thither. Now the fellow would be safe; the young man had no desire to involve the Celestial in the complicity of the events of the night.

Fleet-footed, Bruce continued to run on; the shadows danced by him. Save for the pain he suffered from the burns, the bandages of which had been a good deal disarranged in the recent struggle, he was not in bad "form." He had before him, he knew, no mere hundred yard dash; but his endurance was that of a ricksha lad. He speeded with lithe, even stride; a swinging, unvarying gait that tells in the end.

But fast as he went, the pursuers kept him in sight; where the road, shorn of shade now, turned sharply, horse-shoe-like, they from above could look down and see him. A few of those following, knowing certain "short-cuts," had taken them. At such times he could hear the crashing of branches, the breaking of dry limbs; then, would catch sight of the men coming after. Nearer; dishearteningly so!

The stake was great. A necklace of pearls, representing a fortune! A large reward would await him able to return it to the owner; and he who had it was, apparently, so close. They would not allow him to get away; among them were a number of husky farmer lads, assistant gardeners at the Goldberg place, well prepared for a test of physical capability. Every man strove to be first; strained to that end. One or two that had weapons used them, and, although the leaden missives went wide, a new source of hazard ensued for Bruce.

In the valley, where had been but spectral shadows of houses, pin points of light now sprang into the darkness. Some of those who dwelt in the village and outside, were aroused and looking out

of their windows, divined something unusual happening; saw on the top of the hill the Goldberg house which had become dark at the conclusion of festivities, once more brightly, fully illumined. Why?

Bruce knew but too well the average villager to be of an inquiring turn of mind, curious about all that goes on in his little world. And here was enough, not only to awake, but to cause him to dress hurriedly and send him forth to the public highways. To learn what it meant; the reason people should be thus, vociferously and indecorously, hurrying downward, in the small hours, from the great house on the hill! Enough, also, to disturb the slumbers of even the sluggish proprietor of the town tavern, and his few transient guests, among whom might be Mr. Bolger! The prospect ahead would soon be, perhaps was now, little preferable for Bruce to that in an opposite direction. Already he fancied he saw, far away, little moving specks of shadow, beneath the lamplight in front of the hostelry, vague spots that would presently resolve themselves into indubitable human figures, advancing upward to intercept him.

Unless he could find, somewhere as he went on, a fit turning-place! Now he looked for it, but in vain; to his right, stretched gently upward an open field. The faint breeze laughed and wantoned with young tassels of grain; they seemed to sway and toss mockingly. From them his eye, passing swiftly to the left, met an outlook equally unsuited for his purpose; a steeper descent, without tree or bush.

The young man kept on his way. Some distance ahead an old road, descending, ran into the one he was on; the former had been abandoned as a highway, being too steep and rough for practical purposes; the township had outgrown it. Through Bruce's brain now flashed how, earlier that day, he had idly noted the ancient, weed-overgrown thoroughfare, swinging around in rather eccentric fashion, below the Goldberg place. He determined to dash into it and trust to its hazards rather than those he might encounter farther down in the valley. The thought stimulated him to increase the distance between himself and his pursuers.

But, as he neared the fork, a figure approaching fast on the old road, toward the new, became dis-

cernible afar. Some one bent on heading him off, of course, Bruce decided quickly. With muscles set, he prepared for an encounter he feared would be brief; he was not very sanguine of favorable results to himself. The man reached the more modern highway a hundred yards or so before Bruce came up to the fork. There the latter expected to see him turn, halt, and prepare to put a stop to further flight on his, Bruce's, part. To his intense wonder, this person did nothing of the kind; he ran on ahead of Bruce, and at a surprising rate of speed.

Moreover, his rapidly moving figure continued to keep well to the front. The seemingly inevitable contest the other had been far from courting, he could not now have brought about, had he so desired. Fear seemed to lend the stranger wings; he, apparently, had not the remotest desire to meet and try conclusions with Bruce. Or the others?

The query shot suddenly into the young man's mind. He passed the fork without darting into the old road as he had intended; he hardly knew why he changed his mind, until the opportunity to wheel about and retrace his way toward the top of the hill, by another route, had gone by. With the

unexpected figure before his eyes, he kept on; their feet beat now almost in unison on the road.

The situation would have seemed whimsical, were it not for a black element of tragedy in the threatening dénouement. An expedient did occur to Bruce; to attempt to wait somewhere at a turn of the road in the shadow, to merge, as best he might, with the others; explain, if needs be, and join in the man-hunt of this miscreant. Who had been in Mr. Goldberg's anteroom; at his strong-box, and taken — what?

Did a motive of pity or false compassion in the oversensitive young man's breast for the poor wretch, fleeing for liberty, move Bruce at the instant and cause him to hesitate to yield to that other natural and proper impulse — to half-waive, and then again weigh the matter, until it was too late to act?

For, with a sudden leap, the fellow left the road. Springing over a fence into the great orchard of a large estate he had just reached, he dashed into the shadows. Had those coming behind perceived the unknown and obviously self-proven guilty one

who had been fleeing ahead of Bruce? The latter did not believe so. He found himself more disturbingly face to face with his own predicament and considered again only the immediate imminence of being taken himself. Unfortunately, it would be out of the question now to say that he whom they had wished for, longed to capture, had gone there, and stupidly point to the trees. They would take him, Bruce, instead, and, if they did not find the pearls in one of his pockets, would conclude he had thrown them away.

No; he had let a chance slip, foolishly, thoughtlessly; it was gone beyond recall. And—the realization smote him sharply!—people *were* beginning to come up the road from the village; Bruce now was certain of the fact. His own glance swept toward the fence; he, too, sprang over.

Into Mr. Samuel Page's place! He realized where he was almost at once. Running beneath the trees he made his way toward the dim outline of the run-down untenanted structure. He was cognizant of treading the young apples beneath his heel, of suddenly slipping and catching himself,

then striking hard, as he lurched forward, a low branch he had not seen. At the shock, he seemed suddenly to become dizzy; a throb of pain gripped his side. He could hardly stand. With an effort, he steadied himself against a tree-trunk. But he realized he could not long remain thus; an instant, and he went on. To pause, meant the others would soon come up to him; luckily, they were now running by.

A bend in the way had, for the instant, concealed him from them when he had vaulted the palings of the Page estate. They would before long, however, understand where he had gone; when they reached the near-by straight prospect of highway and failed to see him, they would at once return. At best, a brief interval only would be lost by them; Bruce had to make the most of it.

He staggered toward the house. A dark form had preceded him, but he did not see it now; he was mindful only of himself. At the rear of the deserted dwelling he looked out over a private road that stretched back, across a broad meadow. The narrow way held, wooed derisively his glance, but ere he could traverse that open space, he knew he

would again, in all likelihood, be caught sight of and he felt no longer able at the moment to continue the hard, racking pace. The blow he had struck his side must have injured the muscles; his heart, leaping fast, protested against the sharp, shooting twinges.

He moved to the half-rotting door of the kitchen. The big, dilapidated old mansion frankly made no pretense of keeping out any one seriously bent on entering. Many of the windows had been broken; a few sashes were out, and burlap was tacked over the openings in lieu of any cheaper substance. The rickety structure had an indifferent name with the local authorities; its reputation assigned it as an occasional domicile for those of the peripatetic species who chanced a-wandering that way. But Mr. Page did not mind the disreputable nomad, or any other trespassers; if an incendiary busied himself there, all the better; one or two policies in his strong-box provided for that contingency. The land could not be injured, or carried off; it represented a snug, and ever-increasing profit.

Bruce pushed and the back door yielded. It might have been nailed, to keep it closed, earlier in

the season, but now it balked no one desirous of going in. The young man stood in the darkness. Feeling a hard projection, he half-fell upon it — a sink. Resting thus, he strove to suppress his panting, to regain his strength. The moments passed; the pain in his side grew less; he felt relieved and began to think now what he should next do. He listened. No sound of his pursuers!

Could it be, by some lucky chance, they had continued on their way? Hope throbbed in his breast. He would, however, remain in this black shelter only a short time longer; then he would be sufficiently himself to go on and meet what might come. He made a movement; suddenly stood stock still.

Some one else was in the house, not far from him standing or crouching in the darkness. He had caught the sound and knew he could not be mistaken. Bruce hardly breathed as he stared into the night. A faint creaking, as of a heavy body stirring, he could not tell where, now assailed his ear; he could fancy he caught a low sibilant respiration. Some object struck lightly, intermittently the wall. A bit of burlap, loosened by the

wind? Tap! tap! Bruce's figure drew back to spring. Click! a finger was at the trigger of a revolver.

Bruce did not leap forward; instead, he stepped swiftly aside, at the same time calling out.

CHAPTER XIV

A MEETING IN THE DARK

“**D**O you want to bring the others here?” he said in a sharp tone. “They’re apt to come back soon enough, anyway. If you only wish to add to your predatory transgression,” ironically, “by gratifying a homicidal impulse, wouldn’t it be less stupid — pardon the word from a stranger — to accomplish it in a quieter and more delicate manner? For your own sake, of course!” he ended softly.

The silence grew. Noiseless as a shadow, Bruce again moved; a possible leaden answer would not find him in the place whence he had spoken.

“Who are you?” The voice was hoarse; vibrated harshly. In the bare room, the echoes seemed to distort the sound. There could be divined, however, in the hollow, unfamiliar accents, an abject pusillanimity. He who had dared to enter

the Goldberg house and rifle the safe, had lost the cool pluck that must have nerved him to the risky and difficult coup.

Bruce whistled softly. His foot came in contact with a bit of wood on the floor; he stooped for it and answered: "Never mind!"

"But I do," in shriller accents. "Quick, or —"

"Hush, fool, or they will be here. And put down your revolver. Do!" persuasively. "I'm not half so afraid of an armed adversary who is a man of metal as," contemptuously, "a poltroon with a weapon."

Did the fellow lower his arm? The stillness ensuing lasted only a moment, but it seemed very long. The unknown, in an uncertain voice, repeated his first question.

"That is little to the point," replied Bruce. Perhaps, just for the instant, he forgot his own danger in a derisory interest, called forth by the situation. "I might indulge in a like curiosity, but do not. As far as I am concerned," languidly, "let the darkness keep its secret. You may be a mere vulgar *chevalier d'industrie*, professional housebreaker or cracksman. Or you may be a

gentleman, subjected to temptation and fallen — one of Mr. Goldberg's guests!" shrewdly.

Again came the ominous, preliminary click; Bruce knew the finger, acting in conjunction with the palm, was about to apply the necessary second pressure. Lithely he shifted once more; the hammer did fall; but the cartridge only snapped.

"Lucky for you!" exclaimed the young man, and leaped forward. His own hand swung here, there! Then the billet of wood struck something hard; the revolver clattered to the floor. "Let it lie!" A suppressed sound answered; the fellow seemed to shrink back; to occupy a small space in a corner. "If you got your deserts, I'd leave you, senseless, beside it, with the pearls in your pocket; for them to find —" He broke off, held his head toward the door and listened. He thought he heard stealthy footsteps without, but could not be sure. The silence now was that of the grave.

"Don't give me up! Don't!" the man cried out in a sudden agony of fear. "I was mad; I did not know what I did. It was the first time. Those cursed pearls, they bewitched me. I am not my-

self now. For the love of Heaven," broke from him, "tell me, is it real? No terrible dream?"

"I'm afraid it's real enough," observed Bruce dryly. "Although, no doubt, it would be very agreeable if it were not! If both of us could just wake up, and find ourselves in our own comfortable bedrooms! Turn over and go to sleep again. That would be jolly, wouldn't it?"

His jesting tone had a ghastly sound; he could fancy the other's shudder. He remembered somewhere having once witnessed, or rather, heard, the scene of a play in which the characters moved and spoke in a blackness like that of the pit. He tried to think of them now; those people at cross-purposes in the depths; what tangle was it they were trying to straighten out?

He could not recall. He wondered vaguely if the burns, the pain, had not made him a little feverish. He was once more resting against the sink. It seemed to him an interminable period since he had entered the deserted Page dwelling; in reality but a few moments had passed. He experienced a sudden lethargy and should have liked to yield to

the feeling. To throw it off, however; to regain possession of himself, his alertness, he laughed:

“You’ve got a bad attack of afraid-you’re-going-to-be-found-out,” he observed with light accents. “Cheer up! No doubt, you’ll take a rosier view of the situation in the morning. That is,” he added, “if you act at once!”

“You mean,” uncertainly, “you’re going to let me go?”

“If you *can* get away — from them!” he supplemented.

“But why should you do that? Why are you here? Were you, too, running away from someone?” vehemently.

Bruce moved toward the door. “I was standing near the Goldberg house; they took me for you,” wearily. “It would have been inconvenient for me to have stopped just then. A young lover dreaming beneath his dulcinea’s window,” mockingly, “might be averse to explaining his romantic presence to a hard and unsympathizing world.”

Did the other, even in his terror, detect the derisiveness of those tones? His own voice came out of the night, now, in a sudden, sharp whisper:

“I see! You, too, were after the pearls — pard!”

The last word seemed added, after an instant's hesitation, as if the fellow made a belated attempt to veil his position, a possibly respectable standing in the community.

“Will you share?” Bruce spoke swiftly.

“Since you honor me by calling me ‘pard’!”

“I — I —” cupidity struggled with alarm in the man's voice, “— didn't get them. They raised the alarm before I cribbed the swag!”

“That's unfortunate,” coolly. No lie was ever more apparent. Something else, too, had become apparent to Bruce; the fellow's voice; he had heard it before. Where? He could not remember at that moment.

“I didn't get the swag,” reasseverated the voice.

“Well, I'll take your word for it!”

A sigh, as of relief, floated in the air.

Bruce opened the door which he had closed on entering. “Time to be off,” he spoke curtly. His head throbbed, but he strove to hold himself with alertness, with every fiber on the *qui vive*.

“You mean together?” the other asked in obvious trepidation.

Bruce answered quickly in the negative. He had no more desire that night for the fellow's company, than the latter had for his. They had met in the complete obscurity of darkness; they would part, each unknown to the other. Under different circumstances, the young man might, he said, with equivocal accent, have been charmed to continue an acquaintance so interestingly begun.

Now it but remained for him to point out that there were two ways by which they could separate, and, incidentally, escape: one a private road over the meadow; the other, a side course. The former led up the hill reaching the top some distance beyond the rear of Mr. Goldberg's place; the latter would take him who elected that choice of direction, to the fence of some one's — he didn't know whose — estate adjoining. That house, also, however, was not occupied, and one or two others, beyond, were still vacant, the owners having not yet taken up their abode at Comscot, for the summer.

"I'll take my chance from the side," said the fellow eagerly.

Bruce stepped yet farther from the door to allow him, unidentified, to pass. "Colonel Manyan's

house is the fourth or fifth. He lives there the year around," significantly. "After you!" He waited; he thought he had seen the fellow stoop to pick up his revolver.

The latter, however, hesitated to go first. "How do I know you won't —"

"Bestow upon you a *coup de grâce* as you pass? You," softly, "will have to take a chance at that. And at once!"

The man moved to the threshold; but instead of stepping out, he, with an exclamation of sharp terror, bounded back. A number of persons who had either just entered the grounds, or been concealed in the bushes, now sprang fiercely, exultantly, toward the house. The fellow wheeled; stayed not on the order of his going, but ran from the kitchen back through the dwelling, toward the front. Apparently he knew the place well.

Bruce also did not pause. He stepped quickly behind the door, and none too soon.

Those in the yard, rushing forward with loud cries, now swept in and went stumbling on after the retreating footsteps. The young man listened to the pursuers' eager, more or less blundering move-

ments; a few moments later he heard the front door slam. Bruce slipped out at the back, at the same time the fellow emerged from the front.

All concern now focused on the latter; he had not yet been captured. Amid other sounds Bruce caught that of a loud voice — surely Bolger's — ringing out in stern command to the fugitive to throw up his hands and surrender. The fellow did not heed; fear seemed to lend him extraordinary agility and strength. He discharged his weapon freely, used wildly his fists and arms. A number of those who tried to stop him, he evaded; he struck one or two down, leaping past them into the shadows. Bruce heard the din of hoarse exclamations, anathemas; then the confused coterie of people seemed moving farther aside, away from the house.

Unperceived, he ran out. He saw no one, only heard them, the voices becoming more distant. A shadow of a smile crossed his lips. "Thanks, Monsieur Incognito," he murmured to himself. Nevertheless, he was not confident the danger was past; there seemed a chance; that was all. He accepted the hazard boldly.

Every fiber of his being responded as he dashed from the house and set out at a breakneck speed along the private road, up and across the broad meadow.

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF THE FOREST

MARJORIE WOOD awoke early; she had not slept well that night. Perhaps the excitement of the evening, after the dance with Sir Archibald, followed in her dreams and made them troubled. It was still dark without, when she slipped from her bed and looked at her watch.

Not yet three o'clock, she saw by the tiny light left burning in her room; it would be some time before the others in the house would be stirring. A moment she stood uncertainly; then moved to the window, and, drawing the curtains, looked out.

How still it was! Not a leaf seemed to move. She listened, watched; then her gaze became more intent; it fastened on a particular spot. From the black fringe of forest that reached like a triangle toward her room she thought she discerned in the gloom something moving toward the shrubs on the lawn — an object, a figure? No; a shadow; that

now was gone. Strive as she might, she could not again locate it.

A shadow, of course! One of many shadows waving everywhere around; that came and went. Mechanically she drew back; how many ephemeral fancies had assailed her that night? She regarded her bed, but she knew she would court sleep in vain at the moment. She had no desire to lie awake there longer. Perhaps if she read? — But what? It did not matter.

She stepped to the chair over the back of which hung her dressing-gown and slipped two shapely young arms, with their lacy covering, into the garment. Her slippers were near; she thrust her feet into them and went to the door. Opening it quietly, she stepped into the hall.

The house was but dimly lighted; the old boards of the floor, though covered with heavy rugs, creaked slightly beneath her soft footfall. At the head of the stairway she paused. From the opposite end of the hall a brighter streak of light came from beneath the door of a room — Sir Archibald's! A slightly questioning look shone an instant from her eyes; then she went on. He had probably over-

looked turning off the electric current before retiring. Slowly she descended. A few white marbles, pale semblances of classical folk, seemed to confront her at the foot of the stairs in rather more ghostly fashion than usual as she passed on to the library, now a sombrous place, with black lines of shade thrown this way and that across the floor.

The girl reached up and turned on one of the side-lights. The answering gleam, though not bright in that spacious apartment, served to banish some of the deeper blurs from nooks and corners. She put out her hand toward the book-shelves. Her fingers rested on a volume at random, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, when, at that moment, her attention was abruptly arrested, held by a sound, distinct, unmistakable.

Some one had approached, very lightly, across the gravel walk to the house, stepped on to the lower balcony and stood now without. She was certain of the fact; what she had thought she had seen some time before, had not been a shadow then. The book fell from her hand; she stepped quickly behind one of the heavy long curtains. Shielded

by its folds from being seen, her eyes tried to penetrate the darkness.

She saw nothing, however, except, again, the glimmer of the night; the sky, hardly so full of stars. Then, with senses alert, she caught once more the footfall and made out a figure, at first, dark, uncertain; afterward, plainer.

He stood on the veranda somewhat aside, looking toward one of the library windows. His figure was framed by the black timbers of the porch; they lent it an odd prominence. The shadowy form and the sky made a picture, a nocturne rimmed by straight Cimmerian lines. In the distance, faint quiverings lent depth to the background; fairy fingers seemed weaving intangible cobwebs of light across the somber sky. Something, vaguely white, added a dim intrusive note to the impression; the girl started.

That bit of white was against his side, on his arm, or — around it! She discerned now what it was; a bandage! That was strange! — Why — then the intruder was, must be —

In the surprise of the moment she suddenly

stepped back and in so doing parted the curtains. A glow of light from the room gleamed abruptly upon the porch. It lay like a bright sword amid the darkness at the intruder's feet.

Was he startled, moved, for his part, to some quick, involuntary action? The girl did not see; she was momentarily too dazed, bewildered. She held the curtains farther apart, and looked out at him. And he, stepping at once forward, looked in at her, with the glass door between them. He was smiling now; he held himself lightly erect, though at what pain, what cost, to himself, she might little know.

As in a dream she swung open the long French windows. A moment still he lingered without, his gaze, very bright, on her; the crown of dark hair that seemed to catch up and hold the light behind her, the deep eyes—too deep, in the wondrous shadow, to be blue!

“You are—surprised?” he murmured. The words were spoken so faintly they seemed a part of the breeze that stirred about her now, waving slightly the folds of her gown; her hair. “I'm afraid I startled you.”

“I — just a little —” She saw now, with a new responsive thrill, how worn and drawn was his face!

His eyes, however, yet strove to mask an expression of pain, acute, almost overpowering.

“But why —” she began. “Why did you —” And stopped; she seemed suddenly to understand.

The burns! They had been severe; had she not herself seen? He, with all his fortitude, had been unable to sleep, to endure the confinement of his room; had felt impelled, driven to go forth, through physical pangs, anywhere, out into the night, anywhere, to be moving!

“Ah!” she breathed impulsively. Her eyes were like stars; the lace at her throat stirred quickly. He came in.

“Why — why did you not call some one?” she faltered.

“Call some one?” he repeated, as if not understanding. His gaze burned; her lashes half-lowered.

“The bandages — they are disarranged. Shall I not call some one now?”

“What? Wake the household? It is unneces-

sary; quite!" He spoke lightly, though very low, with a forced jauntiness in his accents.

But even as he replied, his figure swayed slightly; she noted the quick growing pallor of his face. He leaned hard, with his hand on the table, sought yet to stand erect, then seemed to sink, through no volition of his own, to a large chair. A faint cry was stilled on her lips; she looked at him, then glanced quickly around her, when, as if divining some intention on her part, he again moved and made a gesture with his hand.

"Call no one," he repeated. "It is nothing. I'm a bit done up; that is all. Quite myself now," he added with an effort.

"But — you are not," she said.

"Hark!" He seemed listening. "I hope we — I haven't awakened any one."

"It wouldn't matter," quickly. "Let me —"

She bent over. Before he had time to expostulate, had he thought of so doing, she began to rearrange the bandages of his hand. He felt too absurdly weak at the moment to resist. As through a haze, he saw the beautiful, down-bent head; her fingers, light, sedulous.



She bent over and began to rearrange the bandages—Page 174

“It is really all right now,” he murmured, an accent of self-scoffing in his low voice at this enervation, the unheroic part it forced upon him.

“Wait!” She would not be put aside; she had not quite finished. Her fingers trembled slightly; her lips were not set with their usual composure. It may be she was vividly cognizant at the instant how the burns had been acquired; in whose service he had received injuries, so painful —

“You are too good,” he breathed.

“I?” She half-knelt on the cushion, absorbed, forgetful of all save what she was doing. He said no more, though the smile, slightly derisory at his own momentary helplessness, still lingered on his lips. From the lawn matutinal perfumes were wafted through the opened glass doors. He breathed deeply like one in a lotus dream. She was so near! — But only for the moment; as a vision, evanescent, that would soon vanish from him for ever, leaving nothing but a haunting memory.

Through half-closed lids he watched the dim light playing on the dark hair that rippled over her shoulders; beneath the loose folds of the heavy,

shimmering gown, he imagined she breathed once or twice quickly, a divine movement more eloquent than words.

The stillness continued for a few seconds, then was suddenly broken by the unmistakable sound of something above, a door opening softly. His hand involuntarily lifted; his figure straightened. The girl, too, heard and rose. The task she had set herself, however, was done; she looked hurriedly toward the stairs, then back at him. But he seemed not to see her now; his fingers rested on something in an inside pocket at his breast, something hard, slightly projecting. The girl did not notice his gesture. Over her face a flush had slowly spread; her eyes, which had swept first upward and then swiftly aside at Bruce, suddenly lowered.

The glass door of one of the library sections limned a pale reflection of herself; the long, flowing gown; the flash of a white bare arm; the untrammelled hair, and an abrupt realization of much that was unconventional in her appearance came over her. Her next words were constrained; he, however, seemed hardly to hear; replied vaguely he would stay there in the library a little while longer.

She was glad his eyes were turned from her as he spoke. He, too, had risen, was standing now, deferentially waiting, his features slightly down-bent. A word or two further, and she moved across the threshold and up the stairway, with cheeks still brightly tinted, but head proudly erect, gained her own door and went in. Bruce heard it close gently.

A few moments he continued to stand motionless, as if listening; then moved to a table upon which rested a decanter, near a box of cigars. Pouring out a glass of wine he drank it quickly. Through the partly opened door leading out on to the lower balcony, the earliest tint of dawn could be seen on the eastern horizon. A bird's note, afar in the forest, smote the sky. He looked out; the lawn was deserted. No one had followed him; none of those he had met below had seen him enter here.

For the instant, that last impression of the unknown he had encountered so strangely in the Page house recurred to Bruce; the din occasioned by this person's mad, desperate dash. Had the fellow escaped, with his booty? If he had been taken? A certain new contingency in that event insinuated

itself in Bruce's brain. It brought an odd look to his face. The morn?—what tidings would it bring? Already Aurora's light palm had rubbed the nebulæ from the heavens; the solitary canticle of the feathered songster had by this time evoked an enthusiastic chorus.

Bruce listened again for sounds from above, but heard nothing; the big, rambling house was wrapped in silence. An ominous, deceptive stillness? He yet waited; his face was pale, but the overpowering sense of complete physical collapse had passed away. His muscles became suddenly tense; a light, clear, if somewhat reckless, shone from his eyes. About to step toward the stairway, an object on the floor caught his glance; caused him to pause yet a moment.

A book! He stooped for it, gazed at the volume, then, holding it carelessly, he walked out into the hall and ascended the broad stairs. At the top he paused to look around him; the upper hall was dark, but his rapid glances pierced the shadows. He did not wait long. With light, elastic step, he moved noiselessly toward the corridor leading to his own room.

To reach it, he was obliged to pass Sir Archibald's apartments. Approaching them, he seemed to hold himself with figure very alert; as if waiting, expecting something sudden to happen — a door to open — Sir Archibald, or his secretary, or both to appear abruptly on the threshold, then and there to hurl themselves upon him, to end at once a silent contest, a strenuous, secret strife. But nothing of the kind occurred; the chambers before him continued as hushed as the grave.

A slightly puzzled expression crossed Bruce's features as he paused at his own threshold. Sir Archibald was not one to hesitate, once sure of his ground. Could it be that now? — Caglioni? A sudden light broke upon the young man. The secretary might not yet have returned to the Wood mansion. Was the theory tenable? Had the Portuguese been more injured than he, Bruce, had expected? Had aught else happened to detain him? What would the next few hours show?

The gods seemed to have granted him a respite. For how long? He must not lull himself with false security; vain hopes. A moment's exultation became succeeded by clearer afterthoughts. His

fingers rested on a single key in one of his pockets; mechanically he drew it forth. Unlocking the door, he stepped in. The light was still burning as he had left it; the dressing-gown lay where he had thrown it; nothing seemed disturbed. No one had been in there; of course not; he had hardly expected it.

He turned again the key in his door; then felt once more in his pocket for the key to the other door, the one opening on the upper balcony.

He could not find it. He hastily turned everything out of his pockets on to a table — a match box, a small knife, a cigarette case, his watch, money — but, not that for which he sought. It was gone. Where? Again shadows seemed surrounding him, deeper, darker than before. He shook his shoulders, as if to shake a gathering of ominous forces from him.

A key? It was a little thing, derisively he told himself, hardly to be seen, let alone to be noticed, even if any one should chance upon finding it somewhere without, which was most unlikely.

Bruce began to undress. His clothes were decidedly the worse for wear; fortunately, Mr. Wood

had instructed the chauffeur to bring up from the inn his new guest's hand-bag. It would, ere long, be there; the young man awaited its coming with interest.

CHAPTER XVI

AN UNEXPECTED FINALE

“**C**AFFE *au lait*, for two,” said Sir Archibald tersely, to his valet early that morning.

“Very good, Sir Archibald!” And the man, a thin, deferential-appearing fellow, who had been in the other’s service many years, bowed out of the room. Sometimes his master and the secretary breakfasted, American fashion, *en famille*, as it were in the bright apartment down-stairs; on other occasions, when they expected to put in a busy morning with correspondence or papers for certain learned societies, they sipped their coffee and ate their rolls and eggs, continental-wise, in Sir Archibald’s cozy sitting-room. In this last contingency, however, the Englishman usually lounged, clad in a sober Scotch dressing-gown, pipe in hand, near his table. Now the valet noted his master was engaged in putting the finishing touches to his toilet. He adjusted with strong, precise fingers his neck-tie

and set squarely in the middle a small horseshoe of rubies and diamonds.

As the door closed and the valet disappeared, Sir Archibald permitted, privately, an expression of considerable feeling to sweep his usually stolid countenance. He walked once or twice back and forth across the thick carpet, hands in pockets, his tread, aggressive, heavy. At that moment, his eyes, full, old-looking — for a man not yet much past thirty! — expressed indubitable signs of annoyance, if not anger, which faded as a discreet knock announced the valet's return. The latter set down a tray quietly, removed the Chinese checker-board, and laid the table, noiselessly arranged the dishes, and, after a last low customary inquiry, "if there was anything further?" effected once more his unobtrusive exit.

Sir Archibald, although he had ordered coffee for two, drank it alone; he appeared not at all sedulous about his secretary's share of the beverage getting luke-warm or cold. He even helped himself from both cups, and ate one of the eggs designed for Cagliani. Having partaken, he rose, regarded his watch, then the closed door leading

into his secretary's room. As he did so, his brow darkened and he stepped out upon his veranda.

The French windows opening from Bruce's room to command a felicitous prospect, mellow in the soft morning glow, were fastened, and Bamford's glance, swerving, passed to the fringe of forest, where it lingered. A big muscular fist closed; he brought it down softly upon his open palm. Caglioli's continued absence tied his employer's hands and Sir Archibald longed to use them.

What had happened during the night? Had anything? He stood impotent, in the dark. The game was yet a waiting one, but there was such a thing as waiting too long. He had done so once or twice on his *macham* in an Indian jungle, and the panther had not only got away, but taken the bait with him.

Sir Archibald stirred restlessly. Had not his patience, however, been sorely tried? When he had heard whispered voices in the library some time before and had wished to play, not a listening, but an acting part! A cruel glint shone from his cold gaze; then his set jaw relaxed, and returning to his room, he, in methodical fashion, completed his

toilet, which done, he stood ready for the events of the day, whatever they might be. He had a premonition the hours to come would be exciting ones.

Passing out into the hall, he paused long enough to tell one of the housemaids that Señor Caglioni, after breakfasting, had retired to his own room. The secretary was not feeling well, a bad headache, and so she or any of the other servants whose duty it was to care for his room, could defer that task until later in the day. Saying which, Sir Archibald walked quickly down the stairs.

As he was stepping by the library he stopped an instant to glance through the open door, but no one was there. Only the vacant gaze of a number of ancestral portraits above the book-shelves concentrated upon him with a cold British-like fixedness, met his own searching look. It seemed to grow blacker; he looked around with new interest for the place, then regarded the outer doors now wide open, admitting the morning air, the sound of the bees in the honeysuckle vines. One of the latter appeared a little disarranged; a streamer of green, torn from its fastening, floated erratically in the fresh, early breezes. Bamford's large, thick

lips murmured something softly to himself, as he walked on, out of the front door and into the garden.

There his glance sought again the wing of the rambling mansion; he even moved to one side to be afforded a better view of it; the trellis-work; the ground beneath. Engaged in the consideration of a decidedly limited, profitless and axiomatic "two and two makes four" mathematical process, beginning at certain footprints on the ground and ending at a closed room overhead, he did not at first hear a motor-car approaching the house along the public highway in front. It had turned into the grounds ere he raised his head to look around; the machine swept quickly down the private way through the lawn and suddenly stopped.

The chauffeur leaned at first from his car, as if to answer some one who had spoken to him, then, shutting off the noise of the machine, respectfully got out. At the same moment Sir Archibald walked forward. He saw now who the "some one" was—a girl in a rose-colored linen gown. His lips set rather firmly, in an abrupt hard line; but only for an instant. He became once more

heavily *débonnaire* as a Piccadilly masculine fashion-print, and greeted Miss Marjorie with conventional blandness. She, however, appeared more interested in a certain bit of information she had just received than in him.

“Oh, Sir Archibald,” she exclaimed, “James here tells me the wonderful Goldberg pearls have been stolen! A thief or thieves entered the house last night.”

Bamford started, and looked at the girl. In her hand were scissors with which to cut flowers; she wore no hat. “Stolen?” he repeated crisply, his glance shifting quickly to the chauffeur. “Explain yourself, my man.”

“That’s all there is to explain, Sir Archibald.” The answer came a little stiffly. An American chauffeur is not a British flunkey, and the sharp and autocratic “my man” jarred, perhaps, on the national spirit. “Every one down in the village tells a different story, but the gist of it is, the pearls are gone.”

“And you didn’t learn anything more definite than that?” impatiently.

“Not even when they were taken, James, and —

if they had any clue to the miscreants?" added his young mistress.

"I didn't stop to try to learn further details, Miss Wood," returned the man, "as I had to come back at once with this," nodding toward a suitcase in the car. "There was a detective from New York at the inn; a Mr. Bulger or Bolger. They had evidently sent post-haste for him. But he wasn't saying anything."

Sir Archibald swished rather hard with his heavy stick at the foliage; obviously the chauffeur's incomplete account annoyed him.

"Oh, I did hear some one say the burglar might have been a gentleman—one of the guests," observed the driver of the car suddenly.

"What an impossible conclusion!" exclaimed the girl.

Sir Archibald looked at her more sharply. There were shadows beneath her eyes—eloquent of what? Sleeplessness? The proud face might have seemed paler than its wont, save for the rose-colored gown which imparted to it a subtle reflection of its warmth. She had cut but one or two flowers, which she wore. They, too, were of a red tone.

He flattered himself he was a profound student of womankind; any strong and particular feeling he might entertain for one of them could not cast a glamour over his perspicacity. Love might be a garden of delight, but the rational being, especially an Englishman, treads it with his eyes open. Sir Archibald's now were lazily alert, sleepy, almost reminding one of a big cat's. They disconcerted Marjorie Wood, at that moment, for some inexplicable reason, as if they were plunging deep, deep into hers, to wrest from her something. What?

"I hardly agree with you," she heard him say with a slight smile, as if conscious of his own power. "About it's being impossible, don't you know? For my part," he added, "I find it, at least, conceivable."

"Do you?" Her face was a little colder. The chauffeur returned to his car; waited yet a moment, in case they might wish to speak further with him.

The voice of another approaching, broke in upon them; it was the gardener who had been working in one of the beds near at hand. "I beg your pardon, Miss Wood," he said, with broad accent, "but I could nae help overhearing what you were

saying about the burglars at the Goldberg house, and," he added, pressing his thin lips tight, "it's my opinion those same gentry were aroond here last night."

"I don't understand." The girl looked at him quickly, a little startled.

"If you will be so gude as to follow me, Miss?"

She did so, as did also, Sir Archibald; the chauffeur, glancing over his shoulder as if he, too, were interested, controlled, however, his curiosity and guided his car slowly toward the house.

"Look at this, and at that!" The gardener pointed indignantly to one or two broken flower stems, footprints on the edge of the soft earthy beds. "I raked over here yesterday just before sundown and those must ha' been made during the night. Who by?"

"H-mm!" Sir Archibald made a slight sound; eyed sidewise the girl.

A delicate crimson came slowly to Miss Wood's face. "How ridiculous!" broke from her. "Your burglar theory, I mean."

"Perhaps, Miss, perhaps!" said the man; but his countenance showed he retained his own opinion.

“Let us see!” Sir Archibald’s tone became livelier; he bent low. “A shapely, aristocratic foot,” he laughed. “Too shapely for your vulgar house-breakers! Unless,” he added, but he did not utter that which he had been on the point of saying. Instead, he indulged once more in that enigmatic murmur: “H-mm!”

“It’s making a great deal out of nothing,” exclaimed the girl. “The explanation is, no doubt, very simple,” impetuously.

“Yes?” Sir Archibald observed quietly, looking up at her.

She did not answer; why? Did something, covert, in his gaze hold her silent? Last night!—the sound!—they had heard above!—Sir Archibald—he had, then?—She pressed a crimson lip with her teeth and held herself more erect; annoyed; irritated. She could not have defined exactly her feeling. She was about to speak, more plainly, she knew not just what words; but to do away with any further misunderstanding about footprints, or a paltry broken rose-stem or two, when Bamford abruptly straightened.

“Your father”—he observed, looking toward

the house. Mr. Wood, on the front steps, was speaking now to the chauffeur.

She turned quickly; perhaps, at the instant, was glad of the pretext to do so; for, murmuring something in a low tone, she moved away. Sir Archibald followed with slow footsteps. Mr. Wood had heard the story by the time they drew near, and having listened to the meager details, proposed at once that they set out immediately for the Goldberg mansion to learn what had taken place. Sir Archibald hesitated; the chauffeur removed the suitcase from the car.

The Englishman's eyes rested on it absently. Suddenly his manner became decisive, and, signifying his intention of being ready in a moment to accompany them, he turned and entered the house.

Chatfield Bruce, from one of his windows in the second story of the wing, had seen the car turn into the grounds of the Wood estate, and now, not long after, he observed it go out once more and noted the occupants. As the sound of the motor receded down the road, he rang the bell sharply. Simpson answered.

“ My suit-case, that was brought from the inn — send it up here.”

“ Very well, sir. I’ll see to it myself, sir.”

But time passed; the young man pressed the bell again, impatiently.

When, at length, Simpson did return, his countenance was troubled, his manner, gravely apologetic. He regretted the circumstance; some mistake must have been made, for the suit-case could not, at the moment, be found. Presumably, it had been forgotten and left in the motor.

“ Nonsense!” said Bruce, regarding him keenly.

“ I beg your pardon, sir,” somewhat taken aback.

“ And I yours!” laughed the young man. There was no mistaking this old servant’s rectitude. “ You are positive you have made a thorough search? Yes? Then, you may go, and — thank you, Simpson.”

“ You are quite welcome, sir; but I’ll have another look around, and if —” He started to open the door; through the crack Bruce became suddenly aware of a lurking figure which moved quickly away. Sir Archibald’s valet! Had he, too, then,

been pressed into new service, that of watching, spying upon him?

Bruce laughed. "Don't bother any more about the suit-case. It'll only be a waste of time. I hardly think you'll find it until the car returns." And as Simpson again moved away, the latest guest laughed once more.

At the tragic-comic conclusion! Or, predicament? The loss of a suit-case! Sir Archibald was showing himself rather fine and subtle. Possibly, even, the big Englishman understood a joke, and was smiling to himself now, as he sped down the road. But for Bruce, it was no smiling matter; he remained here a prisoner, at the moment when he wished most for his freedom.

He looked again out of his window. At a corner of the veranda, a shadow, which might have been a man's, athwart the boards, moved slightly. Below, the flowers nodded at him, but he remained oblivious to the dancing consociation of gay colors. A hearty breakfast had given him new strength. His pulses throbbed protestingly for action. But what should he do? What *could* he do?

His restless glance, roaming aimlessly, fell upon

the discarded evening clothes; continued to linger on the garments. An expression, oddly whimsical, played about his lips. "When between Scylla and Charybdis"—his eyes shone with abrupt decision—"one must steer a course, somewhat precipitous." To conclude, with Chatfield Bruce, was to act; he did so, quickly.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISCOVERY

MR. WOOD and his party set out in their car prepared to arrive at a place of repining; they reached, instead, the gay terrace of a palace of rejoicing. Mr. Goldberg, one of the most animated among those sauntering and talking there, radiated satisfaction; his wife's countenance shone with kindred emotion; his daughter's aspect was the antithesis to that of a drooping Niobe. Miss Marjorie Wood and Sir Archibald surveyed them in some surprise; Mr. Wood was not so observant.

"We called," he remarked in his fine stately manner, as the car drew up near the front portico, "to tender our condolences, and incidentally, our services. As one of the oldest residents at Comscot, allow me to observe the neighborhood has heretofore enjoyed an unimpeachable reputation."

"That's all right," said Mr. Goldberg, waving his hand lightly. "We don't mind a little episode

like that of last night!" with airy jocularly.
"Pearls? Poof!"

Mr. Wood stared in mild amazement. Sir Archibald inserted a monocle. Miss Goldberg, unable to contain herself longer, burst forth with the glorious news: "Do not mind him!" she said indulgently. "The pearls have been found!"

"Eh? What! I mean, congratulations!" murmured Mr. Wood.

"By Jove! Oh, I say!"—The single glass fell from the Englishman's eye; his surprise, now, seemed even greater than that of the others'; his jaw sagged.

"Yes; Mr. Bolger found them." The speaker was Miss Flossie; she directed her words to Sir Archibald, rather than to the others.

He did not reply; a slight contraction manifested itself on his brow. Of course, there could be no mistake; the faces around him were more eloquent than words, and proclaimed the tidings with irrefutable certainty. And yet?—Here, again, was chance interfering with his checker-board, mustering the pieces with new fantastic groupings. The pearls found!

“Don’t you believe those women-folks!” interrupted Mr. Goldberg in colossal high spirits. “It’s only one of their little hallucinations!”

Whereupon the feminine contingent referred to, laughed; a happy laugh. The host of Comscot mansion might be in as facetious a mood as he wished at that moment; they humored him gladly.

“Will you kindly unravel this tangle, Miss Burke?” said Sir Archibald slowly.

Miss Flossie looked at him, then at Marjorie Wood. “I will try to,” she answered. “But first, tell me,” with light irrelevancy, somewhat forced, “how is your gallant rescuer, this morning, Miss Wood?”

“I—we did not see Mr. Bruce before leaving the house,” replied the other with a touch of constraint. “It was best not to disturb him, you see.”

“No doubt he passed a restless enough night,” put in Sir Archibald, with a casual glance at Marjorie Wood’s profile.

“Yes?” Miss Flossie’s green eyes seemed to gage more than casually the speaker; his face, however, was mask-like.

“As you did here,” he observed, studying her

in turn — “unless I am mistaken. But the story — and from the beginning, if you please. Consider our impatience, Miss Burke.”

She told of the night's happenings, with reservations. Occasionally he interjected a question, in a seemingly careless tone, but his queries were pertinent, once or twice, in the least disconcerting. Her lids narrowed; she experienced a vague wonder. He set little traps in cross-examination for her; she evaded them with feminine adroitness.

No; she had not seen the intruder's face. Well, any part of him — his back, his feet, his hands? The key-hole, Sir Archibald buoyantly suggested, had been there; was she above the weakness of certain of her sex? That “certain,” she laughingly replied, constituted for him a saving clause; but, with scoffing accent, he had only just escaped seriously offending her. A key-hole, forsooth!

Yet even as, without actually disclaiming, she lightly waved the suggestion aside, he could not but note how she forbore to answer directly. Nor could he, unless inexcusably insistent, force an issue; deftly she eluded him, as a winged creature the too eager etomologist. And, at the same time, he

felt the green surface lights of her gay glance prying into his eyes; she was a very deep young woman, he mentally concluded. But what motive could be hers in holding back, for only the moment perhaps, anything, however small? In what way did the thread of her personality interweave itself in this already complex and many-colored tissue of events?

He reverted from the question of the identity of the intruder to the surprising sequence, the climax which had first greeted them on the bright lawn to-day. Personally, he had felt like one who reads the act of a play backward. The scenes leading to the culmination were very simple; Miss Flossie narrated them with graphic ease.

After the miscreant had fled from the Page house (fancy his having found refuge in her uncle's place!) he got into the grounds next door. There Mr. Bolger caught up to him, but the fellow again fought desperately and got away. But in the tussle, he dropped, or lost, the pearls; anyhow, the detective afterward found them and brought them with him to Mr. Goldberg, who (Miss Flossie's light head nodded toward that last named gentleman) at

this moment had them once more safely in his possession.

Sir Archibald pondered; where was the weakness in the story? There seemed none.

“But could not Mr. Bolger or any of the others tell what the fellow looked like?” he asked finally.

“Was he heavy or slight, short or tall?”

“In the darkness it was not easy to discern very much,” answered Miss Flossie. “It is generally conceded, however, he wore an evening suit.”

“Then he *was* one of the guests,” murmured Sir Archibald, with glance still resting on Marjorie Wood.

“Easy enough for any one to get a dress-suit,” interjected Mr. Goldberg. “Plenty of places that rent them. I don’t attach any importance to the fact he had evening togs on. He knew he had to hide or lurk around the house, somewhere, before making his attempt; if he came properly dressed and the servants happened to run across him, they wouldn’t think so much of it on account of his clothes. People sometimes,” jocosely, “are apt to be a bit erratic after a champagne supper.”

But Sir Archibald, it could be seen, maintained

his own opinion, though he remained silent, contenting himself with a shrug of his big shoulders. There were, Mr. Goldberg cheerfully went on, other peculiar features to the case; to wit, the mysterious voice calling out to direct the pursuers just after the fellow had fled the house and was speeding toward the road. What had become of the unknown assistant? Who was he and why had he so completely vanished? Why also had one of the Chinese servants? The Englishman's face had become graver as he listened. His secretary! Sir Archibald was thinking of Caglioni, of a more tortile element, savoring of the Orient, subtly introduced into the case.

While talking, they had been walking toward that point where the sparsely wooded park began. As in a dream, Marjorie Wood again looked down into the valley. How different it appeared, than when she had stood there, only the night before, with Chatfield Bruce! Now the landscape lay bathed in a glorious, golden light. Every house afar showed plainly in embowering garden and orchard; beyond, the ocean lay in shining somnolence.

Pearls! — fleeing people! — detectives! — midnight marauders! —

As from way off, the voices of the others came to her; in a vague hum and buzz of talk. Miss Flossie's purring accents flowed like the demulcent strains of a soprano in a concerted piece; they mingled with Sir Archibald's basso; gave way before Mr. Goldberg's stridency.

From the girl's brow, the caressing breeze swept back the dark hair. She did not seek to analyze her thought, but continued to look out, down the hillside, marked here and there by a road like a silver ribbon, half-crumpled, unfolding haphazard fashion, to the village. Her eyes followed its course; she was aware now of a few words in a more acute masculine pitch: "Here, the fellow sprang down; here, he started his flight."

Suddenly something at her feet, in the grass, caught her down-bent glance, something bright and gleaming, which might have been passed unseen many times by many others, unless chancing to stand at the exact angle to receive the glimmer of the sunshine reflected from it.

Marjorie Wood stooped and picked up the object, regarding it, first in surprise, then with growing amazement. Her lips parted in a low, quick exclamation. She could not believe, and yet her gaze rested again on it in the palm of her hand — an object she knew, recognized, was not mistaken about!

“How ever did it come here?” Her figure suddenly stiffened. The sea threw its lights in her eyes, but they looked abruptly beyond, into unfathomable depths.

“Are you so absorbed in the view?”

“Or, have you discovered some clue to the mystery?”

Voices broke in upon her; Sir Archibald’s; Flossie’s. Her hand closed hard; the sharp edges of something metallic hurt her fingers, as she held them to her side, but she managed to laugh.

“Yes, and no. Who wouldn’t be lost in admiration of the view?”

Sir Archibald’s gaze clouded. Her words recalled, on a sudden, over-sharply, the night before — a shadowy form at the girl’s side, a man’s figure,

tall and straight, his face, eager, sedulous. But Miss Flossie's keen look seemed to have seen more than he had. It followed the white hand as it fell and lingered to survey the folds of the fluttering gown which half-concealed the girl's fingers and wrist. Miss Wood did not turn toward the two; at that moment, her father and others approached; she mingled quickly with them. Again Bamford heard her laugh gaily, too gaily.

At his side, Miss Flossie hummed; her full red lips were curved to a smile.

"What is your theory, Sir Archibald?" she said softly. "I have been told you have had experiences for your government in solving many intricate and puzzling matters."

"Who said that?" At the moment she acted more as an irritant than an anodyne.

"I couldn't really tell you just who," she laughed. "But you are interested; very much interested, aren't you?" shrewdly.

He experienced an indefinite suspicion he was, in the vernacular, being "sounded" and, perhaps, asked himself why this young person had selected

him for her inquisitorial purpose? He forgot his own close interrogations of her but a short time before; tentatively drifted.

“Last night’s affair was a very bungling job, was it not?” he drawled, looking into eyes that seemed to invite fuller inspection. “*The* person all New York has been talking about—who has Claude Duval, Dick Turpin, and all the other gentlemen, classic or modern, ‘beaten to a finish’—couldn’t have been concerned in it, could he now?” in an ingenuous murmur. “And yet, the pearls should have proved for him a proper bait, as the saying is.”

“They were well enough advertised in the newspapers, before the event!” she flashed back. “*The* person you speak of must have known.”

“And resisted the temptation to come here?”

“Naturally!” her eyes narrowing. “Since the affair *was* so bunglingly handled and the pearls *were* so easily recovered!”

Sir Archibald looked at her closer. “Possibly,” he said, “it is you who have a theory?”

“I? Oh, dear, no!” she answered hastily.

A moment, confronting each other, he fancied a

lightning in her eyes, as he had seen the green stone of an idol's suddenly flash when the sun touched it. And again came the question he had asked himself before: What did she know that she was keeping from him and the others? Sir Archibald suddenly shrugged his shoulders; *n'importe!*

“Well, I will be frank and plead guilty to entertaining a little one, myself,” he remarked lightly. “A theory, I mean.” And bowing, he turned from her and walked away.

The host, with Mr. Wood and Mr. Bolger, who had again appeared, were at that moment “talking it over” in a little summer house. On the table rested a bottle of Moselle and some strong Havanas. The detective spoke proudly; it was his privilege. True, the miscreant had slipped from his hands; but to him, Bolger, lay the credit of the fellow's not having got away with the spoils. It was more than a half-victory, where the booty had been so considerable; it constituted a great triumph in the detective's own estimation of his accomplishment.

Sir Archibald, who had quietly drawn near, paused; his rather massive figure threw a shadow across the table. His heavy face seemed expres-

sionless; he held a half-consumed cigarette in his fingers as he listened phlegmatically. Bolger did most of the talking. His countenance was flushed, and he exhaled big, generous whiffs of smoke.

“By the way, Mr. Goldberg,” Sir Archibald interrupted in soft, lazy tones, “you have the pearls, so unexpectedly restored, with you?”

“Right here!” said Mr. Goldberg tapping his breast. “Hereafter, I eat, sleep and drink with them until they are safely tucked away in New York.”

“Ah! — May I look at them?”

The host at once took out a case, opened it and would have passed it with the contents, to Sir Archibald. But the latter waved it away. “No; no,” he laughed. “I said ‘*look.*’ You may hold them yourself, Mr. Goldberg. I call these gentlemen to witness,” lightly, “my fingers have not come in contact with them.”

“I guess I can trust an English nobleman — especially when my own eyes are on him,” observed Mr. Goldberg facetiously.

“But for my own sake!” Sir Archibald’s gaze was, in the least, brighter; he puffed at his cigarette.

“This case which seems bound to become *célèbre* is already sufficiently involved.”

“Seems very simple to me,” interposed Bolger, with a touch of importance. “Principal thing is, Mr. Goldberg’s got his pearls back!”

“Indeed?” Sir Archibald bent over the opened leather case held out for his inspection; a faint smile came to his lips. He looked at the gleaming white rope closer and sat down. Through the hazy spirals, floating from his lips, he had once more, across the lawn, caught sight of Marjorie Wood. She talked with a number of people, but her hands were closed tightly. His gaze sharpened. He would have sworn she hardly saw those she spoke with. Why?

Mr. Goldberg’s ever-recurrent question jarred on a train of speculation: “Well, Sir Archibald, what do you think of them?”

“The pearls? Oh!” He started; flecked deftly the ash from his cigarette. “You want a frank opinion?”

“Frank?” There was an accent of surprise in the host’s voice. “Of course!”

“Did you ever,” said Sir Archibald deliberately,

“hear of Manchu pearls?” Mr. Goldberg stared, and Bamford went on. “A very clever people,” musingly, “who have learned to insert tiny matrices of brass or bone in the valves of the molusk and then plant the shells in the streams behind their gardens, and wait for results. Afterward, by an ingenious process, the matrices are removed, the cavity filled with wax and neatly sealed. Pearls from Soo-choo,” with a laugh, “that are well calculated to deceive!”

“What do you mean? Get to the point!” Mr. Goldberg threw courteous manner to the winds.

“I mean,” said Sir Archibald calmly, “that these pearls you have just shown me were grown in such fashion as I have described. As for their value”—he snapped his fingers—“I wouldn’t give you a ten pound note for them!”

Mr. Goldberg leaped to his feet; Mr. Bolger’s eyes protruded. Sir Archibald alone sat apparently unmoved.

CHAPTER XVIII

CURRENTS AND COUNTER-CURRENTS

CHATFIELD BRUCE folded his dress-suit neatly; in fact, he seemed to enter upon the task with great care and scrupulousness. He wound the garments around with heavy sheets of light brown paper which he tied into a compact parcel with good stout twine. He had been somewhat particular about the quality of the paper, that it should be strong enough; and the twine he had tested before using. The knots he had drawn very taut, but even then, surveying his handiwork, there appeared a dubious look in his eyes which he seemed to endeavor to conceal from Simpson, standing respectfully near. Toward that individual he assumed a light manner, asking his views in the matter. Would the parcel do?

Mr. Wood's man thought it certainly would do and expressed the opinion it was an exceedingly

creditable and secure bit of work in that line for a gentleman.

“Ah, but,” said Mr. Bruce deprecatorily, “I can not claim to be altogether a novice; what is it the poet says about our playing many parts? And I have done up a parcel, or two, before, in my time. But breathe it not in Gotham, I mean, in Britain, or to British ears; I would not have Sir Archibald know, good Simpson!” with a tragic gesture. “You are the trusted guardian of my dread secret.”

Simpson smiled at Chatfield Bruce's last whimsical asservation. He detected only an easy spontaneity in those tones; was pleased to see the other in such good humor; and with his arm paining him, too, no doubt. A game one, this latest guest, ruminated Mr. Wood's man, who could treat you like a human being, if you please, and not an automaton; and yet all the while let you know your position, and his. Mentally, perhaps, Simpson compared him, with his light cheery ways, to Sir Archibald, whose manner of ordering people about as if they were so many “China boys” had rather got on the nerves of some of the serving staff. Moreover, the rumor of Mr. Bruce's exploit had

sifted through the servants' quarters, and he who had sprung to Miss Marjorie's rescue became there elevated to an especial pedestal of his own.

"Sorry to trouble you, Simpson," went on the young man, his eyes returning quickly to the bundle. "But you know how it is, when you have only one evening suit to your name, and that's been damaged."

"In a good cause, sir!"

Bruce raised his hand. "Don't!" he said, in a slightly altered tone. And Simpson knew he meant it.

Mr. Bruce did not want, at the moment, to think of Marjorie Wood. Had he not figuratively determined to close his eyes to her; only to learn that the mind has its own especial retina whereon faces, or a face, may come and go, persistently, tantalizingly, playing hide-and-seek with the brain, now calling out, as it were, "Come and find me"; then, dancing away with illusive sparkle of starlike eyes and musical mocking laughter? Or, was the last but the breeze tossing the myriad leaves of the poplar, near by, making merry with a million and one shining cymbals? Bruce looked at them now,

all the lightness, the daredevil luster gone from his eyes.

Without on the veranda a shadow stirred, the dark outline of the figure of a man, Sir Archibald's valet, holding close to the side of the house, peering, listening, now, to Simpson's voice that next was heard:

“The address, sir?”

“Of course!” From where Bruce stood, near the partly opened window, the shadow of the eaves-dropper on the veranda floor became visible; but if the young man was aware of it he gave no sign. It was not easy to discern from the crude, shapeless dark outline that the source of the silhouette was a person. Bruce turned and picked up a pen, his manner again blithe, animated. “There! Do you make that out?”

“It's Chinese.”

The man outside caught the bewilderment in Simpson's tones, and Bruce's seemingly gay answer:

“Well, we'll also put it in good American, lest the officials of the express company at Comscot and New York are only learned in that language and Irish. But didn't you ever hear, Simpson”—was

the *allégresse* in his tones the least forced? —“ that the Chinese are among the best tailors and *costumiers* in the world? To them, hie your true foreign dandiprats of the Far East,” with a vivacious gesture. “ While, when it comes to ‘ touching up ’ a suit, a bit the worse for wear, or accident, they possess a positive genius; they can even hide a patch!”

“ Not necessary in this case, sir, I trust,” returned the responsive and sympathetic Simpson.

Bruce handed Mr. Wood’s man the parcel, but his fingers seemed yet to linger on it as he delivered a few last instructions. Simpson was quite sure he had no objection to taking it personally to the little express office in the village?

That worthy answered positively; he had other business, in connection with household matters, needing attending to at once in the town, and he would be pleased to forward the package, by express, to the address given.

Simpson went; the young man heard the door close. The fellow on the veranda also heard the sound, and glided swiftly away. Bruce now stepped to the window and looked out and around.

No one was there; he breathed deeply. With relief? A new impending sense of danger? He smiled grimly; but the maid who several moments later entered, to remove the breakfast dishes, found him seated, apparently unconcerned, in the heavy dressing-gown, at a window, in his hand, the little volume that had slipped from Miss Wood's fingers the night before in the library. The sunshine bathed him. At first occupied with his own thoughts, he hardly saw the young woman with the tray. Inadvertently she rattled the dishes; then he looked at her, but as from a great distance.

Meanwhile, Simpson, having made ready, prepared to issue forth on his journey to the town. A brisk walk to and from the village had been a detail of his daily program during the many summers he had served at Comscot; the trip back and forth kept him young. Also, truth to tell, Simpson, although a seemingly unobservant and introspective person, while engaged in the performance of his household duties, was not above, or averse to, a bit of gossip with the postmistress, or the station-master; it was the prospect of this, as well as his entire willingness to serve Mr. Bruce, that acceler-

ated his pace when he started to go down into the world.

But as he stepped briskly out now along the path, which led to a certain little by-way he always took, his progress was abruptly arrested at sight of a figure crossing the lawn toward the house, at an angle which brought him nearer. It was Sir Archibald's secretary, and he looked haggard, more yellow, thoroughly "done up."

"Bless my soul!" said Simpson to himself. To Caglioni, he observed: "I beg your pardon, sir, but Sir Archibald said you had decided to keep your room."

"Did he, indeed?" snapped the secretary.

"That you were not very well!" added the other wonderingly. This he could well believe, by the evidence of his eyes; also, by the humor the odd, foreign-looking man was in. His eyes had an ugly gleam; his white teeth, showing between thin, drawn lips, seemed more pronounced than usual.

"Well, I decided *not* to keep to my room," remarked Caglioni. "Speaking of which," he went on with a smile which vainly sought to be amiable, "how is Mr. Bruce? He is in his room?"

“Oh, yes; and feeling rather better, I should say,” returned Simpson cheerily.

Caglioni’s eyelids fluttered in their peculiar fashion. A few moments he stood gazing before him, as if forgetful of the other; then suppressing any sign of emotion, asked, in as casual a voice as he could summon, one or two other questions. If Sir Archibald was home; where he had gone; when would he return?

Simpson answered as best he might, and was about to wheel, when the secretary’s look chanced on the bundle, and lingered tentatively.

“You’re bound for the village, now, I suppose?” he said. Simpson replied affirmatively. “Something of importance, when you take it yourself?” with a nod at the parcel.

“Not at all, sir,” returned the man absently. “Just a little cleaning and fixing to be done.”

“Oh?” observed Caglioni. “For Miss Wood, I presume?”

Simpson, about to answer, hesitated; perhaps Mr. Bruce might not care to have it known that he, a type of masculine elegance and immaculate neatness, was sending his dress-suit to be repaired, or

even, if necessary, "patched up." Most young men, less fastidious, would have cast the offending garments aside and promptly ordered new clothes. For Simpson had seen that the cloth was actually burned through in one or two minute places; but he was a frugal mortal, himself, and approved of that virtue in others. The possession of it had lifted Bruce to a distinctive place in the old-fashioned servant's estimation. Others of his set in over-extravagant Manhattan town, were wasteful and prodigal to a degree positively sinful. He unqualifiedly approved of Mr. Wood's latest guest; anyhow, it was not his, Simpson's, business to proclaim Mr. Bruce's little economies to one who had on many occasions showed himself, in a subtle way, rather too inquiring and inquisitive.

So Simpson answered quietly, even with a certain dignity he could on occasions assume:

"I often take things down to the village for Miss Wood, sir."

As he passed on, Caglioni's glance suddenly changed; Simpson had shifted the bundle and the secretary's eyes had caught sight of certain characters on it. Chinese? He was not quite sure; his

brain seemed to move sluggishly; he felt surprised; uncertain what to do. He did think of calling out after Simpson; to what end?

That person's figure blended, afar, with the shadowy streaks in the path; became now a part of the more unbroken, darker tones farther on. There, Caglioni could scarcely distinguish the servant's form; only that which he carried under his arm, the compact little bundle, continued to be visible to the secretary's gaze. It, lighter in hue than the garments Simpson wore, yet remained plainly apparent; Caglioni still saw it, though the man, bearing it away, had merged into the background. A last gleam, and it, too, finally became lost to sight; ceased to impress itself, like something important, on his visual organs.

Caglioni drew himself up. "A little cleaning and fixing!" His mind felt slightly dazed. One thought predominated: the need of further enlightenment from Sir Archibald. He, the secretary had got out of touch with events. Simpson had said Sir Archibald would return shortly; should he, Caglioni, go back to the house and wait there, or — His thoughts persistently reverted to Simp-

son. As he yet stood, hesitating what course to pursue, the sound of a motor down the road decided him; Sir Archibald was returning. Caglioni started toward the house.

The secretary met his employer near the front steps. As that gentleman got out of the car, his heavy face expressed none of the surprise he must have felt at sight of the other. Had Caglioni been less concerned, just then, at seeing once more Sir Archibald, he would have noticed that Mr. Wood's usually tranquil countenance was disturbed, and that a pallor and a certain cold apathy marked his daughter's appearance. But the secretary's gaze was only for Sir Archibald; the latter lingered, instead of repairing at once to the house, and Caglioni waited, also. Mr. Wood, however, followed his daughter, who had descended quickly from the car, and entered the house.

"Well?" Sir Archibald and the secretary had stepped now aside. "Why did you not get back?" His tone veiled a quiet scorn; Caglioni knew his employer; all the latter cared for was results, not excuses. Hence, he cut short his story, though strange invectives did creep into it, crisp odd phrases

which smacked of the devilish atmosphere of some far-away, fan-tan place.

“So you let him get the better of you?” The other gave a short, brutal laugh. “He!—partly disabled!”—

Caglioni’s face assumed a more sickly hue. “Wait until I’m done with him!”

Sir Archibald made a gesture. “What happened next? Stick to your story!”

The continuation of Caglioni’s narrative was commonplace enough. Recovering consciousness, he had crept back into the wooded park. Now that Bruce was gone, the secretary dared not let his own presence be known; he realized he could not satisfactorily account for how he himself happened to be there, when his proof of the other’s presence and all that meant was wanting. So he had hidden and skulked, and was working his cautious way through the Wood forest when he had lost himself in that dense tangle of underbrush and been obliged to wait until the dawn before he could escape from the cursed maze.

Sir Archibald listened. “Enough!” he said, and started to walk toward the house.



"So you let him get the better of you?"—Page 222

“Wait!” said Caglioni excitedly. “You, too, must tell me all. And quickly! I have a reason.”

The other answered impatiently. There was only time now to act.

“You mean —” A thrill of venomous joy shone from the secretary’s eyes.

Sir Archibald answered laconically.

“He has them here then?” said Caglioni swiftly. “You are sure?”

“As sure as that he went to the Goldberg park last night to get them!”

“Yes, I know that. And those worthless Manchu pearls Miss Goldberg wore, how do you account —”

“The pearls she had on just prior to our arrival at the house — very close to our coming,” ironically, “were her own; the celebrated Goldberg pearls. She thought she had them still, was in blissful ignorance of anything to the contrary, when you observed that they —”

“I understand,” said the secretary with shining eyes.

“I even fancied I saw how it was done,” murmured Sir Archibald. “The fellow, however, is

so clever, I dared not be quite positive, then; it might have been only a detail of a very elaborate scheme. When one of the supernumeraries is a Chinaman, the drama is apt to be more involved than appears on the surface."

"But now?" suggested Caglioni. The other made no reply. "Mr. Wood and his daughter?"

Bamford's usually apathetic eyes permitted an unholy gleam for the instant to transform them. "Mr. Wood and Miss Wood know that he who picked the strong-box got poor pickings; they also know the real pearls were taken earlier in the evening by some one else."

"Ah! And have they any inkling who the *some one* may be?"

"Not the slightest — yet. It will be my unpleasant task to enlighten them."

Caglioni was observant now, as he had been the night before at the dance. "Mr. Wood and Miss Wood seem to have been rather taken with the fellow," he remarked.

Sir Archibald looked up to regard a small white cloud slowly dissolving. Perhaps the blue of the heavens to-day reminded Sir Archibald of skies far

off in Italy, where he had first met Miss Marjorie Wood.

“After the little service he performed for Miss Wood,” began the secretary, “they will naturally —”

“Of course, the matter will have to be handled delicately,” returned Bamford softly. “Delicately and regretfully — also firmly, as a diplomat would treat it; not,” contemptuously, “a detective! With due regard,” spreading out his big fingers, “for the sensitive feelings of all parties concerned!”

Caglioni looked at his principal admiringly; he had learned to know Sir Archibald’s ability in the “diplomatic” field; the big man could be almost caressing in his manner when driving the spike of his purpose through the hard plank of all opposition.

“Last night, I was in the dark, not knowing about you,” Bamford went on. “Now —”

“One moment!” cried the secretary, his thoughts on a sudden, more confused, but the glimmer of an idea flashing through them. “You have been away from the house; then you left him here, alone, knowing he had the —”

“I did not *know* it then,” sharply. “But James has had his instructions to keep an eye on him and not let him once out of his sight — to follow him, if necessary. And,” smiling, “I had his suit-case removed. Which, I fancied, even without surveillance would be enough to keep him and the pearls safely indoors, until I got back.”

“True!” observed Caglioni, in a more acute tone. “But — desperate straits, you know, call for desperate shifts,” he said suddenly. “And what if —” He paused abruptly and pressed his hand to his head.

The other looked at him; uttered one or two brusque interrogations.

Haltingly, as if uncertain of himself, his own suspicions, the secretary replied; spoke of meeting Simpson; the bundle Mr. Wood’s man carried. At that Sir Archibald stopped short. The veins began to stand out on his brow, his big fingers to close.

A footstep sounded near him, but he did not hear it; the valet had approached. “I beg your pardon, Sir Archibald.” It was James’ voice interrupting. “I thought you ought to know at once. You told me not to let Mr. Bruce out of my sight,

and I didn't; but he has got Simpson to take a parcel of his old clothes that were damaged to the express office in the village and —"

"But Simpson told me they were for Miss Wood," stammered Caglioni.

"I was outside his door on the veranda, sir, and heard him give Simpson the directions. And, sir, he was that particular about the twine and the paper, and all the rest, for a lot of old clothes, that, thinks I, sir, here's an exceedingly fussy and pottering young gentleman —"

"You caught the address?" Bamford asked shortly, smoldering anger on his face.

"No, Sir Archibald — only that it was in Chinese, as well as —"

"Quick!" Sir Archibald, waving the valet sternly aside, out of ear-shot, wheeled on Caglioni. "Go to the express office! Get the address, or better still, the parcel! If too late, follow it — around the world, if need be!" A suppressed exclamation, like an anathema, fell from his lips. "In this case, we have to get the 'goods' to get the man," he said. "You understand? There is not enough evidence without."

Caglioni vanished; the other again moved toward the house.

“Good morning, Sir Archibald!” A light voice greeted him from the head of the steps; Chatfield Bruce, neatly garbed in a business suit, looked down with a smile. “Beautiful day, isn’t it?” he said in his friendliest manner.

The Englishman’s countenance went purple. “I — you” — He had almost forgotten himself, blurted out some accusation, when something in the young man’s eye held him. A spark, a flame, a mocking light of assurance, certainty, that beat back full-blooded, unreasoning passion, laughed at it as a senseless torrent, as Bruce himself was laughing now.

“But, perhaps, you consider platitudes on the weather essentially superfluous!”

Sir Archibald looked down; as he passed into the house, he dared not trust himself to answer.

CHAPTER XIX

A FLYING TRIP

WHEN not long afterward, however, Simpson returned with the receipt for the parcel and the news that Caglioni had appeared at the express office in the village, a slight but perceptible emotion might have been noticed on Chatfield Bruce's face. He paused near the flower plat where he encountered Simpson and fixed upon that person a gaze obviously interested or concerned.

"So he said there was a mistake and I wanted the parcel back?" queried Bruce, leaning on his light stick.

"Yes, sir; that you had changed your mind. I tried my best to get the parcel again for you, but it was too late." He spoke a little sourly; Mr. Wood's man did not like vacillating temperaments; he felt inwardly disappointed with this latest guest from whom he had expected better things.

But Bruce smiled indulgently on him. "I'm

afraid Señor Caglioni rather misunderstood," he observed.

"Then you didn't want it back?" asked Simpson, amazed.

"I'm very well satisfied as it is. Rather a mistake on the secretary's part, don't you know. Not worth mentioning, however. You say the parcel had already gone, when he got there?"

Simpson answered that he had fortunately, or unfortunately, reached the express office, just in time for the morning train. Bruce inwardly wondered if Caglioni had procured the address to which the parcel had been sent. No doubt! Then the secretary's next step would be — Bruce looked at his watch, then asked Simpson when the next train left for New York. There was one, the accommodation, at half past eleven, half an hour after the train that had taken the express parcels. Rather late for that accommodation, remarked the young man, with a laugh somewhat strained, regarding at the same time the hands of his watch indicating twenty-five minutes after eleven.

The eleven-thirty! Would Caglioni take it? Perhaps; in which event — But it was a very de-

liberate train, Simpson had said; it obligingly stopped at every station. When was the next train after the accommodation, the young man then inquired. At twelve o'clock, said Simpson; it arrived in New York but a short time after the slower one; it was called the "flyer." As he was not sufficiently opulent to possess a real flyer, or "aëro" of his own, Bruce answered jestingly he would perforce content himself with this one, that he might not miss an important business engagement in town. He should have left earlier that day but for this little incident — touching his arm — as he would now explain to Mr. Wood, his kind host.

The young man's tones were blithe, ingratiating; Simpson quite forgot any slight umbrage he had brought back with him from the town; expressed regret the other should have been put out by the suit-case's having been so inexplicably lost for a short time. But to these last words Bruce waved an indifferent "it didn't matter"; mistakes would sometimes happen, in the best — He did not complete the sentence, but gaily took himself off.

Half an hour later found him seated in one of the ordinary cars of the flyer. As the train yet

paused for the engine to take on water, he reviewed Mr. Wood's last hospitable words, the pressing invitation to remain longer at his house. Miss Wood had not come down; she was in her room changing her gown, Mr. Wood thought. She had, of course, not known that he was leaving so suddenly, or would, her father explained, have surely arranged to present herself in person, bid him *au revoir* and again thank him.

Did Mr. Bruce intend to return to Comscot? It was unlikely. Well, then, the elderly gentleman would see him somewhat later in town; his daughter had told him about the Japanese play, to be given at their home for sweet charity. Good-by; until then.

"Then?" Into the young man's gay eyes had come a sudden light. He wondered if he and Miss Wood were destined ever to hold the oriental mirror together up to nature.

A singular circumstance had been on his mind all the while he talked with Mr. Wood those last moments on the front steps. The key to the French door of his room that he had felt sure he had lost had been returned to the lock. He had,

on going back to his apartment for the last time, seen it there; passed his fingers, dubiously, incredulously over it. What did it mean — that he had dropped it somewhere, in the house, or on the lawn — that some one, presumably a maid, had picked it up and put it back, where it belonged? Of course, that must be the solution.

He had so concluded in his own mind when on his way to the station he had passed Colonel Manyan's house. There he had stopped, or rather had been stopped, by that gentleman, all curiosity about the pearls. In the morning light the colonel had looked older and worn. The slight impediment in his speech again caught Bruce's attention; it brought with it sudden recognition — indubitable certitude!

The man he had met in the dark in Page's house? He had thought he knew the voice then, but had been unable to place it. Now, however — Bruce laughed in his questioner's face. Colonel Manyan, the thief who had opened, robbed the safe! No doubt — no doubt!

What had seemed an inconsequential incident gave Bruce an understanding of how the colonel had manœvered in a desperate attempt to satisfy

rapacious creditors. For, going down to the inn to dress, the evening before, Bruce had observed, coming from Colonel Manyan's house, the safe company's trusted workman, encountered at Mr. Goldberg's earlier in the day. The man had shown slightly, then, the effects of liquor; now, he was decidedly the worse for it. From this fellow and his appearance, to the procuring of the combination of the safe on Colonel Manyan's part, constituted, along general lines, no very difficult problem for Bruce to solve. The finer details, just how the ex-military man had been enabled to get the desired information, mattered little. The fellow might have been an innocent tool or a guilty accomplice.

In either event, it was of no moment to Bruce, and, murmuring something light to the anxious colonel, standing at his front gate, the young man continued his way to the station. Exit Colonel Manyan, the other's expression had seemed to say, exit, for all time, from the comedy!

But the play was going on; for him, Bruce, the action was quickening. He leaned back now in his seat in the car. A shrill whistle replaced the panting without; the train moved.

As it started, a man ran hurriedly across the platform and swung himself up on to one of the cars, but not before Bruce had caught a quick glimpse of his face. He experienced no surprise; from Caglioni's hasty visit to the express office and the secretary's presumably precipitate flight to New York on the train before this one, a very simple method of effect-to-cause reasoning had led Mr. Bruce directly, inevitably to a single human agency — the innocent-looking James, Bamford's valet. Sir Archibald had more than one *mouchard*, or informer, at his beck and nod. "It would seem," murmured Chatfield Bruce to himself, as the train gathered impetus, "it would seem from an extraneous point of view, that a rather serious mistake has been made — the mistake of having overlooked a pawn!"

But mistake or not, he had to go on with the game. "Check" had been said by Caglioni; other forces pressed for a "mate." That, however, had not yet come. Not yet, sang the wheels, not yet! His brain was exhilarated, his eyes brilliant with excitement. Comscot, with its little homes, nestling so cozily on a green lap between verdant hills, faded

from view; Mr. Wood's place was the last to be seen.

The train made but one or two stops on the way to the city. The first time it drew up, Bruce rose suddenly and left the car. How long did they remain at this station, he asked the conductor. A couple of minutes, came the reply, and the young man darted into the telegraph office and started to write a message. Some one followed and stood near, professing to be occupied in a like task. Bruce did not turn his head, but he knew well, of course, who he was. He shaded the yellow paper with his elbow and scribbled in fine, almost illegible characters.

The clerk who received it started to read the message aloud, while counting the words. The young man stopped him; he was not to do that, sharply; how did the telegraph operator know it did not contain a hint or an important tip on the market? The man finished in silence, perusing the contents and estimating the charge; then, pointing downward with a reproving finger, "What is that word?" he asked severely of this rather too particular person.

At the question, he who had come into the office directly after Bruce bent his head more expectantly; but that young gentleman did not answer audibly. Taking the telegram and grasping the pen once more, Bruce, with a somewhat ironical look on his face, printed the word there had been doubt about — the word “meet,” after which he again returned the message to the operator, paid for it, and started away.

The conductor’s “All aboard” greeted him at the threshold. Bruce closed the door of the telegraph office sharply, so sharply that he almost swung it hard against the valet’s face. But that person again managed to get the train by clutching the hand-rail of the last car; Bruce, however, felt fairly assured that the fellow had caught only part of the address and nothing in the telegram that would be of service to him. A smile came to the young man’s face. He forgot the dangers and thought only of the zest of the new contest. It had opened fairly and promised varied interest and piquancy of situation. He tried in fancy to look ahead, but mists seemed waving before his eyes. Of one fact he felt certain: the battle royal was swinging itself

into a larger field and greater hazards. His expression changed; his gaze suddenly grew more intent.

Through the open door at the far end of the car, he caught for a moment the whisk of a woman's skirts as she changed her seat in the coach ahead — a gown he knew and remembered, draping a form, young, yet full. After a brief thoughtful interval, Mr. Bruce rose and looked into the parlor coach. Miss Flossie Burke was there, and conversing confidentially with none other than Mr. Bolger! The sunshine glinted the girl's hair; her crimson lips babbled. Of what?

Bruce moved softly toward them; the coach was a Pullman. He dropped into the section behind Miss Burke and Mr. Bolger. They sat with their heads close together, and neither noticed the young man. Other people were passing to and fro; it was a particularly noisy bit of track they traversed at the moment; Mr. Bolger lifted his voice slightly. Miss Flossie seemed to have ingratiated herself somewhat quickly and cozily into the confidence of the man employed by her uncle; she permitted her green eyes rather free, bolder scope. In her hand

was a little russet bag, with silver-gilt trimmings; her gloved fingers fondled it.

Had the detective been an expert at dropping a sounding-line into the almost fathomless depths of womankind, he would have caught beneath the playful surface-lights of her gaze, indications that Miss Flossie was not entirely in the coquettish or charmingly idle mood her manner seemed to imply. But Mr. Bolger had no special training in this direction. He had never attended that college where woman constitutes the text-book, the primer, the abecedary and all the rest; he was no master of arts feminine. He could, however, in a crude, inartistic masculine fashion appreciate that outward semblance which, in common parlance, constitutes a "good-looker." His truant eyes occasionally paid lingering, but respectful, tribute to Miss Flossie's perfections. Her darting glances seemed to draw him somewhat from himself.

"Yes," he said; "it is my opinion, they are in New York; that they were taken there by the Chinese servant who disappeared."

She regarded the speaker tentatively; again passed caressing fingers over the bag. Bruce, from

the side of a newspaper he held before him, observed the gloved fingers moving softly over the leather. The movement held, fascinated him. He could not see her face now; he saw only an ear which peeped like a pink sea-shell from threads of gold.

“Suppose —” the girl’s tone had become abruptly, irresistibly hard, though she still used the battery of her light glances — “that paper, left in my uncle’s box when the bonds were taken, should again turn up? And suppose it really contained some distinguishing mark pointing directly to one person, only, one? Suppose all this, I say; could you convict that person on this paper?” She bent involuntarily a little closer to Mr. Bolger; the green eyes burned somewhat brighter.

That gentleman seemed to shrink back. He remembered a certain conversation with Mr. Samuel Page in the latter’s office. The elderly financier had spoken of having lost the scrap of paper referred to by his niece. The detective had, on that other occasion, concluded Mr. Page had mislaid it. But now? Mr. Bolger continued to study Miss Flossie; his gaze more critical, steadier, full of a growing knowledge of her, of all her words implied.

It may be that she began to feel slightly uncomfortable.

“Of course,” she laughed rather nervously, “this is all ‘supposing.’ I have ‘supposed’ a thousand such theories, most of them just as wild, no doubt.”

He slowly opened his lips. What he had intended saying, however, was not uttered; the train had come gradually to a stop. People looked out over a houseless landscape. A little accident ahead of them, said the porter, passing at that moment down the aisle. Number Eight, the Wells-Fargo express, had met with a slight mishap to a car-coupling, a defective spring, or something of the kind. They would have to wait here a few moments; the eleven-thirty accommodation was also held up, farther down the line. Bolger rose with an expression of annoyance. Bruce held the newspaper before his face, but neither the detective nor Miss Burke looked back at him. Both moved toward the front and stepped out upon the platform to peer ahead; all the other occupants, except Bruce, sooner or later followed their example.

That young man lingered a brief while longer in the Pullman, then sauntered back into his own

coach. Through the window he could see James, the valet, on the green; farther toward the front of the train, Mr. Bolger and Flossie. The breeze swept the latter's skirts exhilaratingly around her; the loose bits of blonde hair seemed to dance in consonance with the daisies in the field. Bruce noticed, however, the young woman's lips were set hard with a determined expression that rather marred their vivid fullness. Miss Burke had finally and irrevocably made up her mind to something — to what?

Not long before, Bruce had considered a seemingly unconsidered pawn; now, into the game, had been unexpectedly introduced a new and more important piece — a queen, full of cogency and power. The contest, already sufficiently acute, on the face of it, suddenly developed a very one-sided aspect; with Bruce, apparently hoping against hope, looking for some happy chance to extricate himself from the constantly enlarging circle of hostile forces.

“ You didn't hear any details at the last station? ” he now asked the conductor as that individual, with a look of superior unconcern, approached. “ Whether any damage was done to the passengers

or — the car carrying the express parcels? By the way, what would become of the latter, in case the train should have been somewhat badly wrecked?"

"Oh, I suppose they'd be transferred to the accommodation."

Bruce's long, shapely fingers moved slightly on the edge of the cane seat; the accommodation, that Caglioni had taken! Was it very close to the train that was delaying them? It might be, came the reply.

Bruce forgot about Miss Burke now; he had no room in his thoughts, on the instant, for Sir Archibald's valet. In his mind's eye he could see only one figure: a little brown man, very useful, very helpful, anxious to be of any assistance to the express employees, moving about vivaciously among the parcels and packages, big and little, prying, peering, peeping, in the confusion, the crowding about, securing possibly one of the packages. Bruce leaned back and half-closed his eyes.

How long they had remained here stationary, already! He took out his watch. Only five or six minutes, at best? He could hardly believe the interval had been so short. Mechanically he watched

the passengers without; three or four were playing leap-frog. James looked on; there was a rather disapproving expression around the valet's prim lips. The game was, however, soon interrupted; people scrambled back to the train.

All clear now to town — the statement circulated from lip to lip. Half an hour, and they would be at the station in New York. Again the wheels began to rattle and hum. People bedecked with big, bold daisies filled the seats; Bruce, alone, sat there unadorned. His fingers were closely interlocked; a fine indentation appeared on his brow between the keen, searching eyes. In half an hour! — and after that?

CHAPTER XX

HOSTILE ACTIVITIES

AS the train drew up at the end of its journey, Bruce got out quickly and started toward the gate. The eleven-thirty accommodation had, but a few minutes before, pulled in on the next platform, said the man carrying his grip. And the Wells-Fargo, before that? It, too, had arrived; the accident wasn't worth speaking of, the man had heard — something trifling gone wrong with the engine. Outside the gate, a throng of people awaited the passengers, and, close to the narrow opening, Bruce held back to allow Miss Flossie and Bolger, who were some distance ahead of him, to disappear from sight.

James, the valet, a good deal in the dark, watched the young man at a respectful distance and wondered; he saw him, however, after a few moments, again press on through the gate and walk rapidly toward one of the main entrances. But he did not

reach it without a trifling mishap. Some one, neatly attired, hurrying for a train, ran into him. The young man's hat was knocked off; he halted with an exclamation of annoyance to recover it. The stranger, however, at once stopped, stooped, and, with an expression of regret, tendered it politely to Chatfield Bruce, then hurried on toward the information office.

Stepping into the street, Bruce hastened past a carriage-stand; no, he would not take a cab. Caglioni, not thinking any one followed him on the flyer, would probably content himself with that less speedy and expensive equipage, in which event, he, Bruce, in a taxi, might reach a much desired point as soon as Sir Archibald's secretary. The express parcels, no doubt, were on their way there by this time; a possible contingency he had thought of on the train, had not arisen to divert the packages, et cetera, out of their regular, routine channel: from the express car to the express van, thence to the express office.

He had marked his little bundle, sent through Simpson, "to be called for." Who would call for it? Caglioni knew the address on it and could

describe it. The secretary was not one lightly to be doubted. He wore good clothes and looked prosperous, for a foreigner. Bruce felt almost positive the ordinary express clerk would deliver him the parcel, or if he refused, could at least be impressed with the importance of not giving it up to any one until after further investigation.

Bruce sprang into a taxi; in a low voice, gave his directions, and they started off. As they passed with some difficulty through the much congested traffic in this locality, the young man looked out through the little opening at the back. Not far behind, James lolled at his ease in a similar vehicle, appearing as if he rather enjoyed an experience out of the line of his ordinary duties. To one side, Bruce, himself unseen, noticed Mr. Bolger, bargaining with a driver. That individual appeared obdurate over the fare offered; it was a long way to go — to Chinatown!

Bruce caught the detective's destination with a thrill of surprise. As the taxi emerged slowly from the press of carts and wagons he saw that Miss Flossie had already entered the closed cab. From out of the shadows her eyes seemed to shine

like those of a fair but ruthless Nemesis. The young man pressed back farther in his seat and passed his fingers over his lips which were twitching slightly. The gesture might have been construed as inspired by nervousness, apprehension, even fear — of a net closing tighter and tighter about him, a close net, with no large apertures, sweeping around, apparently covering all the ground, every point. At this crisis in his affairs, however, it may be he told himself he had no time to think of Bolger, or Miss Flossie, while one single, more important incursion against his defenses was in progress — Caglioni's!

Here was a foeman, wily, subtle, with many expedients at his finger-tips, that he had learned long ago — in that region where the "Golden River" enters the plain, under the title of the Sorrow of Han. But Bruce had beaten him then; ah, yes, he had beaten him then, he could repeat to himself, with eyes brightly gleaming, this yellow wolf in sheep's clothing! And again the young man seemed to hear the great river flow; the sob and sigh through its rushes.

A momentary retrospection! The sound of horses' feet replaced it; the rattle of wheels; the wheezing and whizzing of motors; the clatter and banging of street-cars, transferring their human loads from one part of pandemonium to another.

Bruce drew a cigarette from his case. They went so slowly at times, now were delayed altogether, where the street was torn up, and the way, for one vehicle to pass at a time, had become blocked. Bruce toyed with the delicate smoking cylinder until they began slowly to forge ahead once more. After that, they progressed more speedily; Bruce watched street-corner after street-corner pass, until abruptly the taxi again stopped, this time at his destination, the express office. Swiftly he sprang out.

Only to learn he was too late! A man had already called for the parcel, observed the clerk in some surprise, consulting one of his books. The clerk remembered well the parcel referred to, for it was among those that had just come in from the station; it bore a name in English and also several peculiar marks, outlandish eastern characters of some kind. His recollections were the

more distinct in the matter on account of those odd tracings in ink.

Bruce felt the eyes of James, the valet, now waiting without, fixed upon him as he pursued these inquiries and received the information that the parcel was undoubtedly gone, had passed into Cagliioni's possession and was now in that person's eager, clutching fingers.

"Why do you ask?" The clerk's gaze bent across the counter upon Bruce more curiously. It may be, the man divined, or thought he divined, something beneath the surface that held the caller there, mute, thinking, as if he had received important news or a shock of some kind.

"Why do you want to know about it?" he repeated.

Bruce regarded him as from afar. "This person who called for the parcel, what was he like? Did you happen to notice?"

The man *had* noticed; after a moment's hesitation, he described Cagliioni. The name of him to whom the parcel had been directed was Chinese; Sir Archibald's secretary had a fugitive oriental look about the eyes. He appeared of high-class, a

mandarin, maybe, thought the clerk, who had vague ideas of far-eastern personages.

Mr. Bruce turned. Not a movement on his part had escaped the vigilant watcher in the taxi without. But before leaving the express office, the young man inadvertently paused at the sight of a newspaper lying on the counter, an "extra" whose flaring red color seemed fairly to call out: "Where are the Goldberg pearls?" Bruce picked up the sheet, for a moment, and forced, even, a jaunty accent to his tones:

"Quite a mysterious affair, eh?"

"Won't be for long," vouchsafed the individual behind the counter. "When the yellow papers get after it! They'd run down anything."

Bruce did not controvert the statement. To one observing him, walking out, his stride might have been construed as that of a light-hearted, care-free person; the on-looker would have failed to guess from his bearing that the news he had just received had awakened his worst fears, despondency, unmitigated hopelessness, the despair of one who, it might be, has seen a last hope doomed to failure, who sets foot again on the pavement to go he knows

not whither, but always accompanied by the black shadow clutching, drawing him down.

Deeper — deeper — into a black gulf; a bottomless pit —

Four or five blocks distant from the express office, at that moment, a little man, in excellent spirits, holding close in his arms a package, dashed in a cab down one of the principal thoroughfares. Every now and then he looked down at the parcel. It was tied around and around both ways many times with twine. There were indications of knots galore, buried beneath the sealing-wax Simpson had plentifully deluged them with at the little office in the village of Comscot. And every red daub bore plainly the stamp of the express company at that town. Mr. Wood's man, acting under instruction, no doubt, had done his share of the work well.

The package might have contained debentures and bonds, for all the care bestowed upon it; an exceedingly "fussy and pothering young gentleman," truly, as James, the valet, had remarked. Dress-suit, forsooth! Done up with such care no

one could open it, or peep into it without leaving evidence of his prying fingers! Caglioni, however, had no desire to burst the bonds of the precious parcel yet. It was more precious as it stood; he would not, for a fortune, have touched a fastening. Perhaps Bruce at that moment might vainly be hoping he would do so at once, without witnesses, and thus furnish a possible loop-hole, or leeway, for protest. But Caglioni was wily; he would only lift the lid of this Pandora's box when the time seemed right. And that would be soon — soon!

Even now at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-third Street he saw a large maroon-colored car draw up and stand waiting, as near by as the regulations of traffic permitted. The splendid equipage was covered with dust and dirt; the chauffeur had been plentifully splashed; two occupants in the rear were fairly coated.

Apparently the car had been speeding at a high rate over a road in places none too good, such as those that ran out from Comscot, generally anathematized by the automobile-loving contingent. The little brown man in the cab espied, almost im-

mediately, beyond the swirl of vehicles, the maroon-colored car. He called up to his driver, indicating it, and waved an excited hand toward the occupants. They, too, now observed him and responded to the secretary's gestures.

The cab dashed up. Caglioni got out and stepped quickly toward the others.

"Eureka!" observed Sir Archibald grimly, eyeing him from his seat. "I think we may congratulate you," he added to his companion.

Mr. Goldberg made a gurgling sound in his throat. "It was all right, then?" he asked tremulously.

"All right," answered the secretary, barely able to conceal his satisfaction.

"Then get in," said Sir Archibald quietly.

CHAPTER XXI

NEEDS MUST

JAMES, the valet, not long afterward, standing at one end of a lower hall in the Waldorf, motioned to a page who passed at that moment. Slipping a coin into the lad's hand, he asked him to see if Sir Archibald Bamford had yet returned to his suite of rooms on the sixth floor. If the gentleman would send up his card at the office, began the boy, when the other interrupted; he preferred to wait here; let the lad do as he told him; just find out if Sir Archibald had come back to the apartments he kept reserved for his town use. Whereupon the young Ariel in uniform, discerning that the individual with the high English accent for some reason wished to remain where he was for the moment, vanished on his errand.

He was gone but a short while. When he came back he conveyed the news that Sir Archibald had

not yet returned to town, but that word had been received that he expected soon to reoccupy his suite. Having conveyed which information, Ariel lingered as if he thought there might be a tip both coming and going; such things had happened. James, about to wave him loftily away, hesitated.

Scribbling hastily a note, he placed it in an envelope he found near at hand; sealed it and bade the lad give it to the young lady at the desk on the sixth floor, with very especial instructions that Sir Archibald was to get it at once on his arrival. "At once," repeated James, and emphasized the words, though reluctantly, with the obviously expected second tip; he even, in concession to distorted Yankee ideas and in view of the extreme importance of the matter in hand, compromised with himself by stretching the gratuity to rather liberal proportions.

Perhaps the fact that the valet was in good humor may also have had somewhat to do with his unwonted generosity. Mr. Bruce, eating his lunch at a little side table in the palm room, no doubt thought himself now free from espionage. He might, indeed, with good reason, fancy he had es-

caped from his troublesome follower in one of the crowded department stores into which he had taken refuge; but James, keen as a fox terrier, had managed to keep to his task. He had even changed his vehicle for one different in appearance, and that the young man was unaware of his presence at the moment in the big hostelry he felt fairly well assured.

To keep Mr. Bruce better in view, James shifted his seat to one in the Turkish room. There, amid an atmosphere of luxury, with a murmur of soft voices around him and a swish of feminine draperies sweeping the perfumed air to his senses, the valet settled himself, well-contented, at his post of reconnoissance. Between green palm branches and curtain-folds, he could distinguish a part of Bruce's figure; but he could not see his face. James clasped his fingers over his knees and waited. He had no idea what these new, unwonted activities forced upon him, meant; just why he was there; he did not much care.

He had served Sir Archibald in many places in the East and in the West, and, in this life of variety, flutter and ferment, James availed himself

gladly of all periods of rest. Some of the calm of the Orient that he had unconsciously breathed into his being, descended on him now; he needed only the sound of the temple bells, with the almost interminable interval between strokes, to set him a-dreaming.

Mr. Bruce dreamed, without that incentive; but whether they were pleasant dreams or not, who shall say? Why had he come there? In a spirit of bravado? Or, had he reasoned, as well there as anywhere else? That amid very many, one may be like the proverbial needle? Here, in the palm room, scores flitted this way, scores that. There were about him movements comparable only to those of the butterflies in a sunlit meadow; up-flutterings, brief agitations, momentary tranquillity, noddings and bowings, curvings and bendings.

What a place for a man, alone, bowed down, perhaps, by gloomy thoughts; regrets! No cave of despair, no slough of despond, this! At least, on the surface! *Gaieté de coeur!* Fanned by creature comforts! Titbits and sauce piquant. The dishes of Frederic or Paillard; atmosphere, à *l'Americaine!*

Bruce looked into space as he gave his order ; his mind was far away. Now he leaned his head on his elbow and watched a woman's graceful form.

She had the straight, slender suppleness of another who, it may be, came to his mind at that moment ; she turned her head ; he saw her features. Then he gazed aside ; why make comparisons ? So unfair to others, no doubt passable enough in their own way ! If he wished to think of her, he could, perhaps, the better do so by gazing up at the lights. They twinkled mockingly, hundreds of them, as if to remind him that they, with their paltry luster, were not stars ; the stars he might remember because of her.

Here, amid light, as much as one could wish for, the shadows again seemed descending, gathering around. He had forgotten James.

A millionaire gambler and bucaner of the Street paused to speak with him. Bruce looked up gaily ; perhaps he was conscious at the moment this casual acquaintance might have caught a rather somber expression on his face. The young fellow felt keenly alive to even the most trifling possibilities ; but the bucket-shop "broker," well-fed, followed

by two gorgeously dressed women, sauntered unconcernedly on.

At the same moment a stocky individual, standing in the doorway, caught the young man's eye. Mr. Bolger, slightly flushed, seemed seeking some one. The match Bruce was at that instant holding to a cigarette did not waver, although he shaded his face slightly more with his hand; but the sharp eyes of the detective had seen him. He came forward.

"May I sit down?" he observed brusksly.

The young man regarded him; seemed to be looking through and through him. Bolger shifted with the least embarrassment in the chair he had dropped into.

"It seems to me you have," said the young man, with straight gaze and immovable features.

The other made a gesture. "I was going down town when I saw Sir Archibald in his car," remarked the detective. "After a few words with him I thought it as well to come back. In fact," with much satisfaction, "Sir Archibald has entrusted to me a little commission. He has at this moment returned to his rooms here and would be

pleased to have you honor him for a few moments with your company."

There was a satirical look on Mr. Bolger's commonplace countenance as he spoke, an expression that seemed to say: "That was very well done for outward politeness; come now, wasn't it? Quite worthy the surroundings, eh?"

Bruce blew a whiff of smoke over the other; he did not regard the detective now. The young man's mind was, no doubt, very busy at the moment; perhaps, in his mind's eye he saw, on a sudden, a map of his surroundings, considered the entrance and exits. Alack, the palm room had been located in almost the center of the ground floor, the very inner parlor of the spider's web, as it were. Bruce looked at the merry people around him, then glanced casually toward a door. Waiters moved here and there, between him and it, and, outside, were numerous attendants; a liveried man and one for the vehicles had their station at the main entrance. Bolger, as if reading all that might have flashed through the young man's brain in the brief interval, smiled cruelly.

"You wouldn't disappoint Sir Archibald, I hope,"

he observed with a suspicion of a grin. Large vistas had begun to open up before Mr. Bolger's inner vision. Pathways leading to fame, new honors, and, what was better, new emoluments seemed, surely, within grasp. He began to entertain a kind of friendly feeling for the young fellow; he didn't wish to hurry him, he observed, but —

Bruce's manner suddenly changed. He was no longer thoughtful, meditative; a haphazard, reckless gaiety that became him well, appeared on his young handsome face. He called for the waiter and paid the bill. Taking the hat and stick that person deferentially handed him, he got up and passed his arm slightly through Bolger's — as if there was any danger of *that* individual escaping from *him!*

“So Sir Archibald's come to town, has he?” he remarked blithely. “That is good news, indeed. Just got here, you say? How delightful! Yacht, or car? By motor, of course! He could hardly have reached the hotel, otherwise, so soon. But by what good fortune, may I ask, did you come to know where I was to be found, my good fellow?”

He paused, with his head tilted slightly. The other looked at him with ill-concealed admiration; here was a cool one! "It was James, the valet," answered Bolger. "He left a little note Sir Archibald found waiting for him, up-stairs."

"Ah!" For a moment Bruce said no more. Here again was James, a "piece," uncaptured, unfortunately, not disposed of; a live pawn, still in the game. But the young man's features showed no chagrin. He walked with light footstep; an athlete, every inch of him. Once or twice he nodded and spoke to some one. It was a concert afternoon; many of the town's élite had begun to arrive. Bolger commenced to feel a certain awe and wonder, as the young man mentioned by name several of the notables who bowed to him in passing. Oddly, the detective experienced an anomalous thrill of pleasure at the pressure of the arm of one acquainted with these stars of fashion and leaders of the upper ten thousand.

"Mr. Bruce!" It was not a member of that "higher" life who addressed him, but Miss Flossie. Her face wore a new look. "One moment!"

He greeted her with the grace of a Chesterfield.

Bolger suffered them to move a little to one side, just out of earshot, no farther.

“ You know — what is going to happen? ” Miss Burke breathed agitatedly. He looked at her; the girl seemed to have undergone some subtle change since last he had seen her.

“ I have just been informed that Sir Archibald is here, ” he answered lightly. “ Such a charming surprise! ”

“ ‘ Surprise ’! ” she repeated, her green eyes upon him. “ Perhaps; but as for ‘ charming,’ for you — ” Her voice seemed in the least unsteady; he raised his brows slightly, quizzically. Instinctively she pressed nearer; her eyes with their quick changing lights were feline. “ Listen, ” she said; “ I had almost given them something very valuable to you. I don’t quite know why I’ve changed my mind at just this last moment, the last instant we may say ” — with a catch in her breath — “ but I have. I’ll not give it to them — now; I’ll not do anything to add to what they may have against you! ”

“ I beg your pardon, ” he said, with a blithe air of incredulity, “ if I don’t seem quite to understand! ”

“You do!” she returned curtly. “Don’t play, or I may —”

“My dear Miss Burke,” he expostulated, “it is, believe me, you who seem to be playing at enigmas; to mystify me — perhaps —”

Her hand shot angrily into her bag; she seemed to forget Mr. Bolger.

“I think,” remarked the soft voice of Bruce still studying the new-comers, “Mrs.—” he mentioned a name — “must have recovered from the agony of her second divorce. She appears very well, as you may note — over there.”

Miss Flossie’s face was a study; she had looked into her bag, and, apparently, had not found what she sought. Bruce laughed, as at something in the vague distance.

“I thought I saw you on the train,” he observed, his glance returning casually to her. “Weren’t you in the parlor car? I usually patronize the common cars myself.”

Her eyes were big with growing enlightenment, chagrin, overweening anger. “When I got out of the car that time the train stopped, I forgot and left my bag behind on the seat. And you —” She

paused. "I wish I had that paper now," she flashed at him. "I wouldn't be such a fool as not to —"

Bruce waved a playful finger. "Enigmas!" he said. And then lightly — "Women, I'm afraid are sometimes as mysterious as — changeable!" Again he laughed; but as Bolger stepped forward, some of the merriment faded from his lips.

Was he weakening at the supreme moment, Miss Flossie now asked herself. Yes, she was sure. Angrily, triumphantly she crumpled her handkerchief in her hand. His face looked a little strained, in spite of all his acting, as he walked away; and she who had been sorry a short time before for a very brief while, was now glad! — glad! He hadn't a chance, she knew, not one! And he, Chatfield Bruce, must know it, too, as he stepped on, with gayness, at best now but simulated. She saw his tall figure, a moment yet, in the distance, the flash of his pale face; then he and Bolger stepped into the elevator. But that final look she got of him seemed to reiterate to her brain that he was not so assured as he seemed, that he felt certain the crucial, disastrous moment, long hanging over him, had, at last, arrived.

CHAPTER XXII

FANTASIA AND CAPRICCIO

“COME in!” called out Sir Archibald, and Bolger and Chatfield Bruce entered the elaborately furnished parlor of the suite on the sixth floor.

Had Miss Burke seen Bruce at that moment she would have found certain of her surmises going by the board. If the young man had felt himself wavering, he had recovered; he had never appeared to better advantage than now. His clothes draped to perfection his tall figure; even his tie had a delicate, definite distinctness of its own; upon his finger gleamed the curious ring of oriental design. Bruce's features were composed, indicating only a gentle inquiry and pleasure at this unexpected meeting again with Sir Archibald. The latter shot his glance steadily before him; then into his gaze came an expression of satisfaction.

“Good breeding,” thought the Englishman, and

thrust his big hands into his trousers' pockets. This was an antagonist worthy of his mettle at every stage, even the last.

Sir Archibald had pushed Mr. Goldberg rather hastily aside from a table over which the latter was bending when Bolger's knock sounded. The parcel, which the owner of the pearls had quickly started to undo, Bamford had taken pains to conceal beneath a few newspapers, before calling out for the new-comers to enter. Bruce's casual glance, Sir Archibald now surmised, sought to find it, when the young man turned his careless eyes, after a few moments, from the other.

"Excellent quarters," Bruce remarked, his stick at his chin, looking around in apparently appreciative survey of draperies and rugs. "Although these steel cut engravings are a bit conventional. Too much just what you'd expect in any hotel, don't you know!" he laughed.

"Yes; they're comfortable enough quarters," Sir Archibald also laughed, rather shortly. "Although it was not exactly for that reason I again sought them." Briton-fashion, he leaped, without too much delay, into the trench.

Bruce, if he caught the remark, betrayed no inordinate curiosity as to what reason had brought Sir Archibald there; his seemingly tranquil look turned to Mr. Goldberg, a flurried, confused, rather strange figure, or detail of the picture.

At another time, the young man might have smiled at the manner in which the other had repeatedly thrust his stubby fingers into his hair until now it stood up somewhat preposterously; but Bruce appeared to find nothing comic in that feature of the general composition; his eyes continued to linger tentatively on Mr. Goldberg, as if he hardly saw or comprehended that individual, in the light of a specific entity.

Across the room Caglioni, seated on the edge of a great chair, noted and watched. Bruce's glance passed over, then returned to him, as a connoisseur might bestow a second look on a curiously alive Japanese carved figure, or animal, poised somewhere, about to spring. The young man even suffered a slightly whimsical expression to cross his features. Caglioni could divine in it a thought of the night before, the plight he had been left in.

Bruce's gaze now seemed to say: "Well, how did you get out of it?" The little man sat farther forward; still only his eyes spoke; the other swung his stick lightly, as if inadvertently. The secretary yet managed with an effort to hold himself very immovable; for the sake of what remained to come. Sir Archibald spoke:

"I trust we are not inconveniencing you?" with sardonic humor.

"Not at all!" said Bruce. "As I informed your affable commissioner," indicating Bolger, "I was quite charmed to receive the glad tidings that one so distinguished had again appeared in our midst."

Bamford colored slightly; his look began to be disagreeable. "Then we aren't interfering with any of your numerous engagements?" came from his lips with a barely perceptible sneer.

"When I accepted your charming invitation, I could think of no other engagement at the time," answered the young man. "Since then — our little conversation in the palm room" — to Bolger — "a small matter has occurred to me which may, I fear, abridge somewhat our delightful interview."

“‘Abridge,’ eh?” the other laughed harshly. “You are in a hurry to get it over?”

“There is another call on my time,” observed Bruce gently. “Not an imperative one, not exactly necessary, still, one that appeals to the inclinations, you understand.”

Sir Archibald drew out a big cigar; he had been initiated into the national game of poker and had had his experiences, on shipboard and on the native soil, with that innocent manoeuvre, called “bluffing.” His expression of hostility became tintured with a small measure of commendation; the young man was, after all, playing his cards with desperation, daring, rare sang-froid,—poor cards that gave him no opportunity to win out, resourceful and skilful, though he might be. Sir Archibald, in his own mind, was quite sure of this, and he felt positive that Bruce knew it, also; the latter but kept stubbornly to his place at the green board, fighting, as it were, until the last, figuring every chance, preserving a bold front, a blithe, easy one; he would go down with a gay laugh. The Englishman had the grace to offer him a cigar; Bruce refused courteously.

From somewhere, far below, came a few notes of music; a trill, dying in the distance, was wafted in through an open window. The socially most popular cantatrice whose actually last farewell could even summon people to town, was, no doubt, now engaged in charming her admirers with one of her grand arias.

"Let's get down to business!" Mr. Goldberg broke forth, rather explosively. His feet fidgeted.

"Business?" observed Bruce.

"Yes; this ain't no social occasion," viciously.

The young man allowed his gaze to rest once more on the other. "There is a little matter of business," he said, half to himself, musingly.

"Thanks so much for reminding me."

"Little?" repeated Mr. Goldberg. "I don't know," with ill-concealed fury, "that I should call it very 'little.'"

"True," murmured Bruce, "it might be deemed of some slight importance to you, but to speak of it here"—deprecatorily. "For your own sake," he waved a hand slightly, "shall we not take it up later, by ourselves? It would really seem more proper, don't you know."

"I guess there's no time like the present," blurted the other, his glance swinging stormily toward the table and what lay on it, concealed beneath the newspapers. He took a hurried step in that direction, when Sir Archibald put out a detaining arm.

"If you please!" he expostulated. "All in good time, my dear sir!"

Bruce's glance now saw something peeping out from beneath the white papers — a bit of yellow, an end of the parcel. His figure seemed to stiffen. Sir Archibald observed the involuntary movement. His thick lips relaxed; his jaw, less firmly set, showed evidence of returning good humor. How much longer would the other hold to his high-handed manner? When would he cast it aside and break down altogether?

Sir Archibald had seen pretty stiff men lose their grit before this, fellows gone wrong who came of good sporting breed; he had, on occasions, even acted in the rôle of disciplinarian and magistrate in the course of his varied career in the service. To observe to what depths of funk and white feather a mettlesome spirit may, in extremity, be cast, had

constituted, once or twice, a rather curious study for him.

“You were speaking,” he remarked with grim irony to Bruce, “of a little matter of business with Mr. Goldberg. We are all acquaintances here,” there was a world of unctuousness behind the words, “and what you have to say, you may, with Mr. Goldberg’s permission”—that gentleman nodded over-vigorously —“tell us all.”

“No; no,” said Bruce, recovering on the instant his *débonnaire* bearing; “I really shouldn’t, believe me.” Caglioni’s eyes became more piercing; a deep breath escaped him. “Well, since you desire to make a rather unimportant private matter, public,” went on Bruce in the same tone, “it was on my mind to speak to Mr. Goldberg about tendering my resignation, because”—as that person opened his mouth to speak —“my conscience (pardon the use of a word, almost obsolete!) has for some time suggested to me the advisability of such a course.”

“Your —” began Mr. Goldberg, with bulging eyes.

“‘Conscience!’” repeated the young man, with a certain whimsical, firm dignity. “I fear it is a somewhat lost attribute among certain of our bustling, striving classes. Be that as it may, shall I,” with quizzical self-interrogation, “constitute myself my neighbor’s keeper? No.” Sir Archibald got up; took a step back and forth.

“However,” went on Bruce airily, “we are all our own keepers. Perhaps I should not in this case be too particular,” meditatively; “all the other houses are ‘in it.’ However —” He made a gesture.

“‘It?’” came quickly from Goldberg.

“Or against it!” lightly. “A stupid tribute, forsooth!” There seemed a pithy pungency in his inflections now.

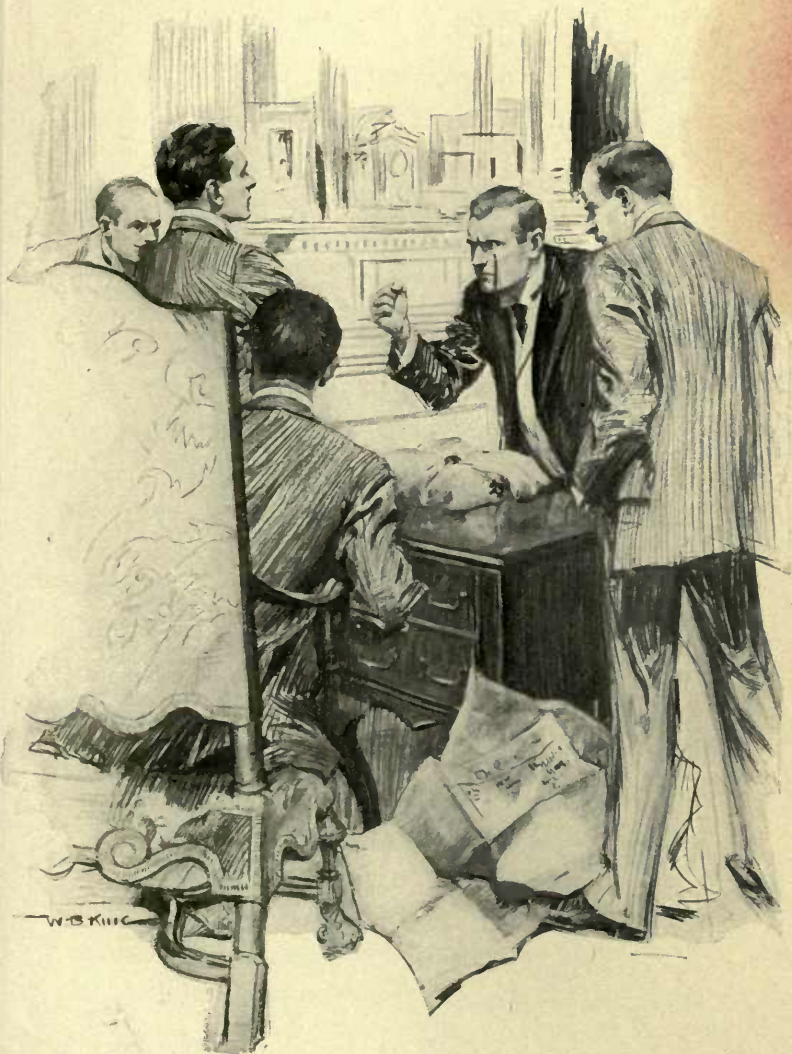
Sir Archibald halted; he did not quite understand; all this was certainly Greek to him. Mr. Bolger began to shift about. He, too, did not comprehend the drift of the talk, or why it had been suffered to “drift.” From his standpoint, there was but one thing to do, and that, to his official sense, seemed so simple. Goldberg’s face, however,

began to be a study in enlightenment; some of the red faded from it; the surface presented rather a mottled appearance.

“Perhaps since you force me to speak publicly,” said Bruce to this last person, “it would be better for yourself, if we employ the language of your fatherland.” He uttered these words in German and went on in that same tongue: “Sir Archibald does not understand; one can tell from his expression. He speaks French, of course, but German, the *Sprache* of his hated rivals,”—with a laugh—“no, he would never condescend to that. Bolger, I’m sure, knows only American, and, as for Cagliani, he, too does not comprehend one word I’m saying. *Nicht wahr, du dummer Kerl?*” He addressed the secretary suddenly. That person only glared; Bruce continued cheerily:

“But we were speaking of conscience, and evaded tributes to Uncle Sam for the alleged protection of our overgrown infant industries. *Du lieber Gott!*”

He took from his pocket a cigarette case and held it poised delicately in his fingers. Sir Archibald stood like a statue of strength; endured and



"Mr. Goldberg can't compromise in this case now"—Page 279



waited, with a strong man's patience. What mattered a little comedy, more or less, before the tragedy? He felt himself master.

"Protection?" observed Bruce, in the same frivolous tones, with faultless Teutonic accent, extracting as he spoke, from the case a cigarette, which, however, he did not light. "A ridiculous archaic, Chinese kind of great wall? Perhaps! Still, one that exists to exact toll from the merchandise-laden camels and mules that stop at its gates—or from some of them—for there are those that slip through! One might not stick at a small evasion. But when it reaches a figure of say, one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars in a single year! You will accept my resignation, will you not? Yes? I read it in your face. And now —"

He did not finish the sentence. The ironical look faded; the smile returned, became apologetic.

"It is really too bad to talk business on such a day!" broke from him now in English. "All sunshine without! Would it not be more fitting to speak of lighter matters—music, for instance?" as, again, the faint sound of a woman's high tones

was heard. “ ‘ *Amico — amore* ’ — What a beautiful phrase ! ”

Mr. Goldberg said not a word. Caglioni leaned forward as if he divined the quarry had somehow drawn back a little too far from them; he even cast a quick, faintly apprehensive look at Sir Archibald. The Englishman's poise was that of a Colossus; his powerful face wore a derisive look; as he grasped the back of a chair, the big veins stood out upon his hand. He was a study of vigor, of resistless, puissant purpose. Beside him, Bruce looked slender, slight.

“ *Farceur!* ” Sir Archibald's lips breathed contemptuously; his heavy shoulders were expressive of positiveness; brute hostility. His eyes shone with that deadly look the hunted animal in the wilds must have seen in them, when the Englishman, with irrevocable intent; glanced over the brown, shining tube of his rifle. Between him and Bruce was ever the suggestion of another presence, existing there, only in the mind, yet as tangible as if it stood there in the flesh.

A girl's figure; the blue of her eyes; the raven

blackness of her hair! Sir Archibald regarded Bruce; Mr. Goldberg; all evidences of zest had unaccountably departed from the latter. Sir Archibald frowned deeply. With a brusque gesture, he whipped the newspapers from the parcel and brought down a heavy fist on the edge of the table.

“Mr. Goldberg can’t compromise in this case now,” he added resiliently. “It’s too late. Hocus-pocus with him won’t do. There’s more than the pearls, in clearing this affair up; Mr. Page stays back of it.” He indicated with his drawn brows the detective, Bolger. “And it’s going to be settled here — now!”

Bruce had the courage not to wince; he may have paled, but his face had half-turned from the speaker. Toward the door?

Mr. Bolger stepped to it; the sharp, metallic click of a key followed. Bruce’s hand rested against a bit of drapery, as if to derive a little needed support from it. His gaze turned to Goldberg, but that person looked down. At a loss? Weighing the pros and cons? One of Sir Archibald’s hands was in a side pocket; the young man

instinctively knew what his fingers grasped and held in readiness there. Caglioni's lips protruded; the yellow teeth were in evidence.

Bruce, though so outnumbered, drew himself up straight. Sir Archibald saw no signs of flinching now; even at the moment when the knife, poised over Bruce, seemed about to fall, the young man's eyes continued to rest on the parcel. With forced surprise? Casual wonder? Of course!

Sir Archibald's thick lips indulged in a sound like a laugh; the secretary inhaled his breath after the hissing fashion of little Nippon. Bolger's fingers sought his hip pocket. He drew nearer, watchful, ready for the climax. One could not tell, in cases of this kind, what a person, desperate, driven into a corner might do, or at least might attempt to do —

"I really beg your pardon," said Bruce curtly; "but I think that is my parcel."

"It is a parcel you sent," corrected Sir Archibald.

"To be called for at the express office," went on the young man, with sharp accents; "but not by you."

“No? You did not expect that, did you? However, not only have we called for it,” observed Sir Archibald calmly, “but we are going so far toward taking the law into our own hands, as to open it.”

“I forbid you,” said Bruce trenchantly, with flashing eyes. “You have absolutely no right; a purloined parcel —”

“Purloined?” exclaimed the Englishman, and tore contemptuously, roughly, at the fastenings. His strong hands soon broke them, cast the twine aside and ripped open the heavy paper.

Bruce stepped quickly forward, with menacing gesture, but Bolger stopped him. “No, you don’t!” said that person, and something gleaming in his hand, emphasized his words.

Sir Archibald unfolded the garments that were revealed and shook them savagely. An expression of surprise came to his face. He shook them again, with more violence; then his — other hands began to search hastily, frantically.

“What’s this?” breathed Sir Archibald thickly.

“Not here!” muttered Caglioni.

A sudden consternation fell upon all except

Bruce. "If you have done shaking my clothes," he began, with just resentment.

No one replied. He walked toward the door; they did not try to stop him.

"I shall expect," said the young man, "my evening suit to be returned to me at my rooms without delay. It is the only one, such as it is, that I possess, and, I'm quite sure, it won't fit any of you."

The key clicked. The door opened, then closed. The three men looked at one another.

"Find that damned valet of mine," roared Sir Archibald to Bolger, "and send him up here at once."

"Nothing important happened, eh?" said Sir Archibald to the now rather pallid James, standing before them. "You say, however, some one ran into him at the station, just after he had left the train?"

"Yes, sir; a dark man, well-dressed."

"Might have been an Oriental?"

James conceded he might have been.

Sir Archibald, in an unusual outburst of tem-

per, threw open his hands. "It is quite clear!" he exclaimed with a savage oath.

The singer had just executed a beautiful *cadenza* and received much applause and a gorgeous bouquet, as Bruce, who had remembered he had sometime ago subscribed for the occasion, entered the concert-hall below and sank unobtrusively into a seat at the side. He saw but a final flutter of her; then the orchestra burst into melody, or discord; a modern piece resounded. The metaphysics it conveyed filtered through the discerning listener's brains. What superb tangles, what irreconcilable intricacies!

Bruce yielded to the spell. Leaning back, he half closed his eyes; it promised to be a delightful afternoon.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WARNING

BUT Bruce had not calculated on a few disagreeable after-moments more trying than any he had heretofore undergone. Buttoning his coat, about an hour later, he started to walk to his rooms. The concert, a special, out-of-the-season affair, had terminated early, to give people time to flit back to their summer places. The gaiety of Fifth Avenue was not that of the metropolis at its best; nearly all of the dwellings were closed; a monotonous array of windows with curtains drawn looked out upon the park.

At length, the young man's brisk pace brought him to the big building on a comparatively quiet street where his rooms were located. At one side of the marble entrance hall was a little waiting-room for visitors. Passing it, to reach the elevator,

Bruce noticed the draperies move. Then he saw some one, and stopped, as if stunned. Recovering himself with a great effort, he stepped in.

For the first time that day composure seemed to leave him; his face had gone pale. Assurance and he were surely strangers; he looked at her as one might stare at a ghost.

“Miss Wood!” he said.

Her eyes were brilliant. Beneath her composure, could be felt a great perturbation; she looked at him strangely.

“I don’t quite know why I came, unless —” She paused, her hands tightly clasped. It was easy to see she was not herself. She stood there as if beneath a spell.

His face was troubled. “Never mind!” he said, in a low tone.

Did he not know — did she herself not know what had brought her there?

“I — I found the key near Mr. Goldberg’s,” she said, with an uplift of the dark lashes.

“Indeed?” he answered. No more.

Why did he not say something else? She waited.

“I came because I thought you might, *must* be

in great danger — terrible trouble.” The words faltered.

“No danger!” he exclaimed, almost bruskiy. And then, with less severity, he added, “It was rather foolish of you.”

“No danger!” she repeated, as if not hearing his last words. “But I overheard Sir Archibald and his valet —” A flush dyed her face. “I caught words, I do not know just what — terrible words — or what seemed beneath them — his tone. And you had gone —”

“Believe me,” he said gravely, “all is as well with me as it ever can be. Your father knows you are here?” abruptly.

“I — I believe I said something about the subscription concert.”

He looked at his watch. “You have just time for the last express.” As he spoke, he held back the curtain; she walked out and followed him to the front door. A taxi was passing. Bruce nodded to the man; he drew up to the curb. The girl now was very pale.

“I — I — don’t understand,” she said; “I wish I did.”

He looked at her. "Perhaps, it is as well not," he said slowly.

"You mean we shall never meet again?" she said.

"Yes." His face, too, was pale.

"Then I shall never know more than now — always be in the dark, the terrible dark —"

"Wait!" He considered. "Will you see me once more, just once, so that, perhaps, you may understand just a little better?"

"I remember," she said, "you were brave for me, and," with a trembling smile, "I liked you for it. When one makes a friend —"

The words died away. A cold draft from the half-open door of the hall swept out upon them; she shivered slightly.

"Why," he said, "if you will so honor me, we shall meet then once more. Perhaps I can explain better — such little explanation," bitterly, "as there may be, to make!"

"When?" said the girl, with clearer, more steadfast eyes.

"The night of the Japanese play — at your house, if you will."

“Yes, yes!” she said. “Somehow, I believe in you. I can’t understand; I don’t. Anything you may say, to make me know, to —” She hesitated.

“To clear up the horrible doubts?” he suggested.

A mist sprang to her eyes. She moved toward the curb and stepped into the waiting vehicle.

“Grand Central station,” he said to the driver.

“Aren’t you —” She looked at the place by her side.

A radiant light came to his face. She did not understand; she was full of doubts; but she did not altogether disbelieve in him. He bent his head as to a princess, peerless, unattainable, beautiful. Her hair was a dark cloud; the mist in her eyes like rain, momentarily dimming the blue.

“Thank you; but if you don’t need me —”

She sank back and said no further word. “He is not in danger; what a mad, foolish trip! — a horrible dream!” Thus she may have thought. The taxi moved away. Bruce stood with his hat in his hand, even after it had disappeared.

“I slipped your mail under your door, sir.” The voice was that of Stebbins, the janitor.

Bruce moved automatically back into the hall, and took the elevator to his rooms.

His mail was large and comprised many invitations. Hunting, fishing, yachting, golfing and polo-playing constituted a few of the inducements held forth to summon him here and there, away from the noisy metropolis. He set them aside, to be answered punctiliously, with conventional regrets. He had not realized how popular he was until he surveyed the bulging pile of snow-white envelopes.

Popular? He looked at his statue of Kwan-on; that astute young woman, in silver, seemed to smile sardonically at him. What humor, what irony lurked in the corners of her lips; she had never appeared less gracious, his lady of mercy!

He returned to his mail. A letter from China fell from the next envelope he opened — news of business, good business. He had almost forgotten there was such a business. He read to the end of the polite communication, indifferently; with no second thought, laid it down. But the next missive held his attention longer. His brows drew together. Near his elbow in the one vase he permitted himself,

a dried rose, with every semblance of its roseate life gone, hung feebly over the cold porcelain rim.

Bruce, regarding the paper before him, read again; looked more closely at the signature.

“Ting! Urgent need!”

A new, more pressing and dangerous complication had unexpectedly arisen. Bruce got up. Leaving the room hastily, he carefully locked his door, descended to the street and made his way to a near-by station of the Elevated. For what seemed to him an interminable time, the train whirled him on. At length, however, he got out and walked some distance. Night was falling; the lights of the squalid neighborhood in which he found himself seemed battling with the shadows.

As he made his way quickly up this street and down that, he became for the first time aware of two slouching figures he remembered having noticed in the train. They moved after him, keeping him ever in sight. They were rough, unpleasant-looking fellows. He did not know them, but that signified nothing; they had merely superseded James. Sir Archibald was by no means yet beaten; he confessed only to a temporary rebuff. Bruce

had reason now to entertain an even greater respect for this leader among his adversaries. With singular swiftness had Sir Archibald shifted his tactics; concentrated with adroitness and skill his forces into a channel which would lead whither? Bruce feared he knew only too well.

A little farther, and he stopped abruptly, on pretense of looking in a miserable shop window. The fellows following almost rubbed elbows with him; nevertheless, he seemed not to notice.

Near by, his alert senses caught a faint tinkling, made by tiny bits of glass that, hanging pendant and swayed by the wind, gave forth a crystalline murmur. An odd, half-timorous little sound, that seemed to shrink from mingling with the multisonous intonation of the great metropolis, to whisper apart, as if, indeed, according to certain affirmation, the more or less honorable spirits of the dead babbled their messages through this dulcet medium.

A moment Bruce stood; then he wheeled suddenly and crossed a threshold. He found himself in one of the tea-houses and restaurants, frequented mostly by Orientals. Seemingly not a large place,

it was really a net-work of rooms of sufficient size to accommodate many guests, transient and otherwise. At a far end of one of the front apartments, a little girl with that Raphael face and expression encountered so often in the Orient, picked from a musical instrument the stray single notes of what was intended to be a melody.

Bruce took his place at a small side table and an Oriental brought him a pot of white, steaming liquor. The young man toyed with the egg-shell-like cup into which it was poured while he glanced around. The two fellows he had observed on the Elevated and afterward had remained without, near the front entrance, presumably. From the next room came the low murmur of voices.

The young man listened. A native banquet was evidently in progress, for a waiter went by with the steaming towels the guests were wont frequently to mop their faces with. Bruce stopped his own waiter; paid, and spoke to him. The latter nodded, indicated with his hand and the young man followed him to the back of the place through a side hall. Here were several winding ways and a number of doors. One of these the young man opened,

then crossed a narrow court and found himself not long afterward in another little passage which led into a small room.

The one he had stepped into that night when Sir Archibald, his secretary and Miss Wood had interrupted a certain visit on his part at Ting's! He had hardly known her then; much had transpired since. It was only the night before he had danced with her.

Could so much history be compressed in a day? He stood in darkness now, thinking of her. But twenty-four hours before had been movement — joy — dazzling lights! Now his hands reaching out touched but that emptiness, his future portion. Another would woo her and win her — this strong aggressive Englishman, with his titles and landed interests; she would rule in the stately and superb home of the Bamfords. The romance for Bruce had been very brief; the awakening had come with stunning abruptness. Dreams, dreams! That's what one got for dreaming. An hour of wonderful glamour; and afterward — how he could laugh at himself there in the black night!

He threw back his head abruptly; it was no time

for such thoughts. The need for action pressed on him; he had use for his wits now, truly. Caglioni had hit upon a definite trail at last. He held the thread delicately but surely; the net was out, and the secretary, masterhand in that oriental environment, was drawing it in — with what delight, what feverish zest!

Or, came the chilling possibility, perhaps it had already been drawn in! Bruce held his head to the door communicating with the inner room. From it came no sound; an ominous stillness reigned. His fingers pressed somewhere on the framework. The door opened; he stepped in.

The room, dimly lighted with wax candles, was empty; a faint aromatic odor filled the air; on its scarlet string, the bit of jade was the only thing that moved. Bruce stood still, in the center of that strange apartment; grotesque trifles on shelves melted into shadows; a crimson cloak in a dim corner looked like a sanguinary pool. He held his head somewhat high; his eyes gleamed. The last stand! Well, so be it! His gaze caressed a small vial he took from his pocket, then suddenly sharpened, shifted.

A soft patter — patter without caught his attention. They had come. The other way was guarded, the more devious way out through the restaurant. They had set the snare and he had walked into it. And yet he could not well have done otherwise.

But stay! The hand busy at the complicated Chinese lock was a quiet one; now one bolt shot back softly, then another. Bruce waited; a breathless moment and the door suddenly was flung noiselessly open; as quickly closed again and relocked. Ting, panting, agitated, with consternation, fear in his eyes, stood before the young man.

“They are following?” Bruce spoke quickly.

“Yes.”

“How many?”

“One; but there will be more.”

“What is he like?”

“Yellow, with a black beard.”

“Caglioni!” murmured Bruce. “Of course. You wrote me from where?”

“The messenger office.”

The other looked down. “And he let you do it?” half to himself. “Why?” It was not

difficult to surmise; now were they, two, there together, they, and the — “But how,” said the young man, in a tense, clear, though low voice, “did it happen that he chanced to catch sight of you in the first place?”

“He is cunning as the fox. He learned what ship sailed to-day for the Orient, and saw Ting as he would have gone aboard.”

“And so you dodged back?” The young man laughed recklessly. Cunning, truly, was Caglioni, as Ting said. “And swift!” the young man added in his own thoughts. While he, Bruce, had been listening to modern musical idiosyncrasies, with dolt-like absorption, the secretary had called for a paper, looked at the steamship list and acted accordingly.

From consideration of what James might have said about some one bumping into Bruce at the station, to this searching the press for news of the first outward-bound steamer for the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, had constituted a logical and quick mental process on the part of Caglioni.

“Perhaps you got rid of him. It may be, he

did not follow you here?" observed Bruce with sudden hope in his voice.

Ting's answer dispelled any possible optimism on the subject; he gazed out through a narrow aperture in the heavy blinds into the street. "He is there," he said, "and another — a big man."

"Sir Archibald," murmured Bruce. Again he looked at the tiny vial, a dainty, beautiful curio in its minute way, and once more put it back. "*Tiens!*" he laughed. "Not yet!"

"They are coming this way!" said Ting.

"Well, let them! As the gods, or the immortal spirits will!" A precipitate light shone from his eyes. "We'll play out the game."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SNARE

THE thoroughfare was narrow and dark in places, but at that point the gleam of a street lamp not many yards distant cast an uncertain glimmer on surrounding objects. Through a fine slanting rain, almost a mist, that had begun to fall, the wavering light revealed for an instant two figures who had now stopped in a doorway across the street and a little aside from Ting's modest establishment. Then, having lent grudging visibility to them and the immediate environment, the glow suddenly sputtered and nearly went out, but seeming to reconsider its threatening intention of plunging that section of the thoroughfare into total gloom, flared up once more and showed another person, roughly dressed, coming around a corner and approaching at a quick, shambling gait.

This third man paused at the sight of the two men in the semi-shelter of the doorway; one of

the latter who held a cigar that glowed like a tiny coal, spoke to the new-comer with sharp, imperative inquiry.

“He’s gone into the restaurant,” replied the third person, “and he’s there now, unless —” He broke off. “There’s a back entrance from that place into this shop,” he added abruptly, nodding toward Ting’s door. “And maybe he’s made use of it and is in there.”

Sir Archibald replied with a brief order; the man at once turned and walked hastily back the way he had come. Caglioni’s eyes followed him, a black shadow on the faintly shining stones, then returned watchfully toward Ting’s house.

“No mistake, this time!” observed Sir Archibald in curt short tones, turning up the collar of his coat.

“None,” said Caglioni, without removing his bright gaze from the door. “I didn’t want to take chances and so summoned you and told you to communicate with the others.”

“You are quite sure of your man — that you’ve followed the right one who got the pearls at the station?”

“Not only did he answer the description James gave of him, but I recognized in the fellow, a dealer in curios and artificial pearls we had met before. You remember, surely, this very place; he had in his show-cases the pearl Buddhas made by the process discovered by Ye-jin-yang in the thirteenth century. Oh, there’s no room for error now!” Caglioni’s voice vibrated. “I would stake my life on it.”

“I wonder,” said Sir Archibald cynically, and a little curiously, “why you bring so much of that Latin temperament of yours into this matter — on a cursed damp night, too — as if there might be something almost personal between you and — this Bruce!”

“Personal!” Caglioni shrugged. “I do not forget last night near the Goldberg house.”

“Only that?”

The secretary’s eyes burned into the night; he did not answer. Sir Archibald, too, remained silent a few moments. Perhaps he was just then thinking of something “personal,” himself, between him and this fellow. His wooing had, somehow, come to an abrupt standstill. But after to-morrow,

when she would know, when he could speak and tell all — when all the world would know, for that matter — ah, then! Delectable consummation!

And Sir Archibald's look, fastened on the doorway opposite, seemed at that instant as grimly eloquent as the glint of a bayonet, bent on the business of the empire.

"Time Bolger was here," he observed abruptly in harsh accents, puffing harder at his cigar.

"There he comes now!" Caglioni's voice was full of eager malice. "And he has his men with him!"

"Of course! In a raid of this kind there must be no slipping through the meshes."

Both men looked down the street, at the distant, dimly seen forms, drawing nearer. At the same moment the arc lamp began once more to sputter. Red, sullen sparks fell from it; leaping shadows danced this way and that. The wind set a street sign to creaking dolorously. Another sound mingled with it, that of a door hurriedly swung out and back again, as some one — an Oriental, by his dress — slipped from Ting's place and started swiftly down the street.

“The Chinaman! He’s discarded his European clothes!” exclaimed Caglioni.

“Quick! After him! He must not escape. I’ll see that Bruce doesn’t get away. It may only be a ruse to draw us from the door.”

The secretary waited no longer, but sped at once after the fleeing figure. In the momentary darkness it seemed to elude him, to fade from view. Then, by the aid of another street lamp, less capricious, he caught sight of Ting’s form once more. But the rain coming down faster, aided the fugitive; it had sent people indoors. The block ahead was deserted, as seemed the little alley into which the frightened Chinaman next turned.

Caglioni began to breathe low maledictions; it was not difficult to divine the cause of the Oriental’s sudden, desperate flight. He had learned there were men in front of the restaurant and guessed the next move of the aggressors. Returning the pearls, no doubt, to Bruce, Ting had trusted to his legs and the darkness to extricate him, once and for all, from the affair. On the morrow, he would not be found; his shop would be deserted, and no trace of him would ever again be discovered by those of the

Occidental race. Did not Caglioni know, had he not had experience with Ting and his kind, who can slip out of the narrowest places, and disappear as completely as if they had faded into thin air?

The secretary set his teeth. This yellow devil was pursuing his tactics of earlier in the day; but he would get him now. He was a necessary link in the chain of evidence to rid himself of one whom he had such excellent reason to fear — Chatfield Bruce, a constant menace to Caglioni's own peace of mind, his safety, his life, even. The secretary ran faster; he saw with gratification the distance between him and the other lessening.

Ting, at first, had given evidence of unusual fleetness, greater even than Caglioni himself could boast; obviously, however, the Chinaman's "staying power" was not now all it might have been. He appeared to slacken and weaken, running like a man who could go but little farther. They were now a couple of blocks from the scene of the proposed raid. Caglioni did not doubt his ability soon to return there with his man. He did not imagine the other would resist; the Chinaman, by nature, is

essentially a man of peace and will yield, without striking back, when pushed into a corner.

Near the street Ting went on yet more slowly. There would be, however, no convenient cab for him to slip into when he reached that thoroughfare. Caglioni felt fairly assured of this; the other would not now escape the secretary's longing fingers.

Peremptorily Caglioni's voice rose above the patter of the rain. The fellow heard; he had no choice apparently but to obey the stern command. He paused, seemingly out of breath, his hand pressed to his side. But the secretary took precautions not to be deceived by a ruse; he understood the Oriental's inborn cunning, and, as he stepped briskly forward, was prepared for any artifice or emergency.

“Lift a finger to resist, and —” His voice conveyed a sibilant menace; the gleaming weapon in his hand lent it emphasis.

Ting's response was immediate, piteous, scarcely distinguishable for want of breath; Pidgin-English and Chinese dialect mingled confusedly in his imploring tones. He hoped, trusted, the honorable

one would not take the most unworthy Ting back; he would pay, reward handsomely the honorable one; he who was more exalted than the moon and the stars.

The secretary contemptuously interrupted him; there was no mistaking the genuineness of Ting's apprehensions, expressed in that strange jargon.

"Come!" said Caglioni scornfully, laying a rough hand on the other's shoulder. "You'll pay and no mistake, but not me. March!"

The fellow obeyed; but his shoulder seemed to shrink at that touch and his implorings to become more earnest:

"Most honorable and illustrious—I implore—me, miserable one, lowly as the dust"—

He was trembling now, or—a shaft of light, between walls, suddenly fell on his face as they went forward. He was laughing! Caglioni started back.

"You!" he stammered, in amazement, consternation.

"Drop it!" said Bruce smilingly. "Don't lift that arm, please; and just let that little plaything fall from your fingers. You will not hesitate, I

trust"—the weapon in his own hand was against Caglioni's side—"to grant this slight request. Believe me, as a friend, I advise you not to."

The secretary did not hesitate; it was he, now, who appeared unmanned. The alley was lonely, deserted, the very spot for a darksome deed. Bruce bent suddenly forward and whispered a name into the secretary's ear. His low voice was at once gay and thrilling, very mocking, too. Caglioni trembled and leaned back against the wall as if for support; he had not heard that name for many years.

"Hush! Not here in this neighborhood of all in New York!" Afar, through the storm, came the faint twing-twang of a Chinese musical instrument.

"Come!" said Bruce facetiously. "Our little walk—shall we not take it? And our little talk—we must not miss that. I regret the weather is not more favorable for a charming heart-to-heart conversation and stroll."

"How long have you known?" the secretary managed to say. All the antagonism had left him

now; he glanced over his shoulder into the darkness as a man might turn for a moment to look back into a black past.

"I think," said Bruce easily, "I half-placed you when first I saw you, although you have changed much and have a beard. It was your eyes that gave me the first inkling of the truth; I never forget eyes."

They walked on, out into the street, on and on, away from Ting's place.

"You thought I might recognize you, sometime," murmured Bruce, very close to the other, a hand in his pocket, holding now the something hard that just touched, made itself felt to his companion. "And so, at Comscot, as I passed the back of Mr. Wood's place, you sought to make me a slight present, but only succeeded in notching my new straw hat."

"Would you believe me if I denied it?"

"You?" murmured Bruce in mild surprise. "Who have made lying a profession? Beside whom, Cateline, Lazarillo de Tormes and all the other *menteurs à triple etage* of history, appear

models of candor and veracity! You! My dear friend!" An accent of pained reproof manifested itself in his tones.

"I wish the 'slight present,' as you call it, had done more than notch a new hat," muttered Caglioni.

Bruce gave a care-free laugh. "How charming! To see you recovering your spirits, my good fellow!" He stopped. "But alas! soon now must we part. And never more do I expect to see you. Never more," he repeated—"mournful words!"

Caglioni waited; looked at him. "I suppose that's not all, is it?" he asked.

"Almost." Bruce regarded him up and down. "I've arranged that if anything happens to me tonight your secret will not be kept. There's a bit of paper in my strong-box with a little writing on it that will become the property of others, in case— You understand?" The secretary swallowed.

"The Nine-times-Nine numbers only a few million members, more or less. I neither condemn nor approve of them; but they exist. I accept them merely as a fact. They never forget, nor forgive— if they know," he added significantly, "where

to put their hands on whom they seek, the traitor, he who betrayed them.

“Let us go back. You belonged to them; you sold their secrets. You even managed to capture, for the reward offered, a certain benevolent pirate, when — Well, I, as you know, with a small band, hurriedly organized from the ‘children of the plain,’ interfered. We freed Ting’s father, the pirate, for good and sufficient reasons. It was great sport.” Caglioni bestowed upon him a malicious look.

“You did not find it so? You managed to escape, disguised, made your way by devious routes, as a priest, into upper India, where you fell in with our good, but rather stupid friend, Sir Archibald —” the secretary’s teeth made a sound — “who was engaged by his government in the vain task of eliminating the Nine-times-Nine in India — eliminating by substitution, *à la* Anglo-Saxon; giving them something better! Unfortunately for you, wherever Buddhism reigns your life would have been forfeited if it became known who you were. Chance brought you here. You knew me — a possible menace to your own safety and probably repre-

sented to Sir Archibald I was a member of the Nine-times-Nine — a mistake, though they forced on me this symbol of power among them, out of gratitude for having saved one of the number — a better man than you!”

Bruce showed a ring with a design, the “Dawn,” a circle above a straight line, the sun rising above the earth. “Very eloquent, these Chinese characters! Don’t you think so?”

“I have no opinion,” said the secretary sourly.

“And yet you should have; you who are part Chinese. Your mother was a Manchu girl. Are you ashamed of her?”

“Come to the point!” said Caglioni hoarsely. Rage, terror, humiliation burned in his eyes.

“Oh, most filial son!” murmured Bruce softly; then his voice suddenly changed. “You,” he went on crisply, “are thought to be dead; it was cleverly arranged, on your part. Lo, you are found to be living! Is there a spot in this world where you would be safe from death? Worse! From torture? You know these people.”

Caglioni’s expression showed that he did. “What do you want?” he said.

Bruce's eye lighted approvingly. "I see you appreciate the point — fully!" he observed, with merry accent on the last word. "Too bad we did not understand each other better before, eh, *mon ami?* Since last night you have been to me slightly irritating, like a disagreeable insect. But I forgive you; between us in the future exist only halcyon thoughts."

"Anything more?" observed the secretary. His face wore an odd pallor; the rain dripped from him.

"You will leave New York to-night," said Bruce in the same gentle tones. "Make what excuses you please to Sir Archibald. You," waving his hand airily, "have ceased to be a factor in the New World, to all intents and purposes, have never been here or heard of such vain baubles as the Goldberg pearls; they have passed from your mind, as if they had never existed. And all the small array of mortals, more or less interesting, or vivacious, that fluttered around them! They, too, have passed like the figment of a dream. You have entered into another metamorphosis; only no Ovid will ever sing of your new transmutation."

A moment he stood, a bizarre figure, in saturated

silken garments, his face clear, finely chiseled, outlined against a slant of rain. Then the long, white hand made another gesture, half-playful, though the light of his eyes had never been brighter, more compelling. Caglioni turned; moved softly, silently away.

Bruce looked after him, as more and more indistinct became the secretary's figure. At last it vanished, and only the fine drops of rain, making countless oblique lines against the yellowish, sodden-appearing background, met the observer's gaze.

CHAPTER XXV

THE JAPANESE PLAY

TWO months passed and nothing more was heard of the Goldberg pearls. The social season had opened at high pressure. New York was at its gayest, and the little affair at Comscot was apparently soon forgotten by every one except a few of the principals who were closely concerned in it.

The raid on Ting's place had revealed nothing; the European clothes that unassuming dealer presumably had worn at the station and later, could not be found. Caglioni, who could have brought evidence against the Oriental, had vanished, no one knew where, leaving a very unsatisfactory message behind him for Sir Archibald's puzzled scrutiny.

That last gentleman and Mr. Bolger found themselves at an absolute standstill. Since the afternoon

in Sir Archibald's rooms at the Waldorf, Mr. Goldberg had developed a bad case of what the Englishman, in poker parlance, designated "frigid extremities"; he seemed reconciled, nay, rather anxious, to let the matter drop. Sir Archibald, secretly enraged, folded his arms, concealed his disgust, and looked around for a new secretary. He found one, a nice little man, with innocuous face, and no past.

With the opening of the season, the usual number of charitable occasions were, of course, in evidence, and, of these, none was looked forward to with more interest than the oriental evening planned to take place at the spacious town house of Mr. Gordon Wood, especially as it was known that Mr. Chatfield Bruce had consented to appear in a little Japanese play. That young man's histrionic ability was conceded to be of a high order; people said he would have made a character actor of much distinction had he adopted the stage as a profession, so great was his charm of manner and personal repose. He was at least the star of all the amateurs the city could boast of.

The night of the entertainment Mr. Wood's house presented a scene of animation. The large concert room of the mansion had been transformed into a fair imitation of a Japanese theater; the characters in the play made their entrances and exits in far-eastern style along the flower-walk leading to the stage.

The audience assembled, for the most part, in the little squares divided off for them in the orchestra; at the back of the room were a half dozen improvised boxes. As a concession to civilized occidental muscles that refuse to adapt themselves to the posture of Buddha, low chairs had been placed in the squares. The effect was rather incongruous, but no one criticized; comfort had to be considered. There were a few effective flower "arrangements"; not many.

These Chatfield Bruce, now waiting for his cue in the men's greenroom, tentatively, in the least critically, regarded as he peered through an opening out into the theater. On the stage a trio of genuine acrobats, paid performers from the land of the chrysanthemums, were entertaining the

audience with juggling; between hangings of antique priest-ropes, could be seen the people assembled in the cause of charity. They accepted diminutive tea-cups of hot saki or tea; a few of the men endeavored to make use of the tiny Japanese pipes, with more or less success and good-natured comment.

All seemed to enjoy the novelty of the entertainment; Bruce listened to the sounds of merriment. He was alone in the greenroom. Those of the men who later had "parts" to fill now mingled with the people, as did the Japanese princesses and geisha girls who afterward were to appear in the play. These last, laughing and gay, moved about among the guests, according to the fashion on such occasions; among them the young man saw Miss Marjorie Wood.

With eyes very brilliant under the black lashes, and cheeks deeply tinted, she paused here, to chat; there, to join in the laughter. She appeared the young hostess, par excellence, gracious and beautiful in her clinging oriental robe of some silken, lustrous material, violet and blue in tone.

Bruce's gaze followed her. He noted with what

pride she held her head, the exquisite distinction that characterized her every movement. The watcher's lids lowered very slightly, as an artist's may, when suddenly confronted by something inexpressibly lovely in nature. A bit that appeals to all that is poetic, dreamy in him, that he looks at as through a silvery, hazy medium! Because, perhaps, it is set so far away from him, so remote, unattainable, save as a vision!

Bruce turned. But the violet and blue tints of May-time continued to play in his fancy; to dispel them, he reached for his "part" from a divan and started to study it.

As if he did not already know it well! The mocking thought insinuated itself in his brain. So well, it had not been necessary for him to attend rehearsals; never mind about him, he had written the ladies of the committee; let them just arrange all the rest of the "business," the other details of the playlet, and he promised to "fit in" without the slightest friction. As his rôle constituted practically the entire one-act little piece, they could not very well demur; especially as he had informed them that otherwise he would find it absolutely im-

possible to proceed with his part in the performance, at all.

So the chorus was drilled and the supernumeraries, and Mr. Bruce, "too busy, no doubt, to attend rehearsals," in the general verdict of all the ladies, save Miss Wood, was suffered to have his way. The young girl, appealed to in the matter, had voiced no opinion; during the flitting moment they had met and spoken to each other that night, but a few conventional words had been said; her eyes, starlike, had met his; seemed as if they would have held him yet longer. But with blithe mien and manner, he had gaily made way for others; her laugh, a little forced, at some one else's words or witticism, had followed him as he turned from her.

It rang in his brain; thrilling, silvery! It would follow him down the pathway of time, amid strange, far-away scenes. *Che sara, sara!* What was written, was written! One must pass through different lives, gehennas, realms of Pluto, and all that.

Again he bent over the "part," his present momentary concern, and as he did so, he sank down, native fashion, upon a rug. His supple muscles

adapted themselves readily to the attitude, his thin lips, as he merged into the rôle he considered, wore a suggestion of that illusive irony one occasionally encounters in a bronze of the Ming period. Suddenly the enigmatic lids lifted and showed the full radiance of his eyes. They were rather remarkable eyes now, replete with lights, like the play of bright moonbeams between dark clouds. He had turned his head to listen to a peremptory tapping from without; the little Japanese play had begun.

To most of those in the audience the plot of the little play went for nothing; the production seemed mainly picturesque, replete with unreal people and titles, with many fantastic scenes. But the costumes and the acting of Chatfield Bruce and Marjorie Wood more than saved the day, or the evening.

The young hostess, in the rôle of Miss Happy-for-a-Thousand-Years, presented, as the society reporters afterward affirmed, an adequate "interpretation of that ironically felicitous part." When her lover, the beggar-prince, who robs the rich to give to the poor, was, in the natural course of events,

or vicissitudes, led to the executioner, at the command of her future lord, the great Shogun, she "changed her state," very beautifully, in other words, died. And with artistic consistency she refused to come out again, in answer to numerous recalls, as did Mr. Bruce, after he was supposed to have paid the final penalty.

Instead, the curtain again went up and the audience was regaled with the sight of a single cherry tree. Had they remained quiet, they would have heard the faint sound of the wind. They could see, however, the branches of the tree move, the blossoms fall one by one as the curtain went down for the last time on the pretty fluttering things. What did it mean? Several in the audience looked at one another. Was it symbolical?

The pupils of Miss Flossie's eyes, bent on the stage from one of the boxes, were slightly dilated; with fingers pressed closely against her warm palms, she had witnessed the lovers' parting. The scene was, of course, most unnatural from the European, or American standpoint. Ceremonious bows! That leave-taking seemed pitifully cold. Only the eyes spoke, yet how much they said!

Those of Chatfield Bruce seemed to express in that brief moment more than a volume of words; Marjorie Wood's puzzled Miss Flossie. What did she read in their depths? Incredulity; wonderment; half-understanding? Miss Burke had not followed the plot; she liked her plays *allegro, vivace*; this stage representation was double *adagio*.

Had she seen the play within the play, the chances are she would have been more interested; had she looked behind the curtain a moment later, her curiosity, if no livelier feeling, would have been greatly stirred.

Chatfield Bruce and Marjorie Wood stood there, now, on the stage alone. Forgotten were the characters of the play; it was two real people who looked at each other.

"You said I might see you once more, and so I came to-night," he began.

"Yes," she answered. All the bright color had gone; she was very pale.

"I — I promised to explain a little," he went on, inexorably, with seeming ease. He could not show her any of the pain that the knowledge of the immeasurable gulf between them made him feel.

"But it would have been much easier just to have left, to have gone away, without that."

She lifted her eyes slightly. "You are going away, then?" she managed to say.

"Yes; oh, yes," he answered carelessly.

The shining draperies about her stirred. "Far?" came from her lips. She seemed speaking without volition of her own.

"As far as may be!" he said, with a reckless laugh.

He had to keep to his part now; no playing the craven at that moment, though this was the hardest task he had ever set himself. She drew a little from him; perhaps the laugh and the precipitate light shining from his eyes, in some way, cut her. A belated blossom fell and clung to her. He looked at the tiny trifle; it would long cling to his memory.

"I'm sorry you found that key," he spoke with what seemed brusque, terrible bluntness. "But it was chronicled in the book of fate. One of the sisters three led your footsteps straight to it. Why did you not give me up?" She did not answer. "It would have been easier for me than this."

His long shapely fingers lifted involuntarily to his brow; the last words had broken from his lips in a different tone than she had ever heard from him before. She put her hand back of her and touched the stage tree. He straightened. Again, light, careless, easy, he was very handsome to look at; a figure to have found favor in any woman's eyes. "Wouldn't it be better, if I did just go now, without —"

"Oh, no," she said. Her voice was very still, unlike her own; she did not seem herself at all, to him, nor to herself.

"Ah, well!" He would have to go on to the end; did he not know he would be forced to do so, when he came there that night? The play had been but the text, the key-note; the real drama came after the curtain was down. Without now, in front of the stage, the servants were beginning to clear away the little partitions of the boxes and squares, for the dance that would follow. "Where shall I begin? That is the point," he observed with light helplessness. "It all seems so incomprehensible, unexplainable, when one attempts to explain," he remarked. "I didn't know how ex-

traordinarily difficult it would be. Of course, you know, I'm a thief!"

She shivered. Her lips were very uncertain. She seemed to try to speak, but could not; the cherry blossoms lay mockingly bright at her feet.

"I guess that's the best way to start," said Chatfield Bruce contemplatively. He looked at her now, but did not seem to see her; some vista, far beyond, engrossed his look. "A plain Dick Turpin, Robert Macaire, Jack Sheppard, or any of that ilk, if you please. *Voilà!* So much established, one can go on—or rather, go backward!" he laughed. He did not spare himself now.

"It began far up one of the rivers of China, where even in these enlightened days, the genuine, old-fashioned pirate yet flourishes. The idea, I mean, began there; perhaps was unconsciously suggested by a certain old river-pirate whose life I once happened to save. But that's another story; if you ever meet Señor Caglioni, again, which I doubt, he could tell you about it. This bucaneer of the yellow stream," he went on in ironical, scoffing accents, "was a terrible fellow. In times of famine, when thousands were dying and the Chinese

merchants hoisted the price of rice to a prohibitive figure, this wicked corsair helped himself at the sword's point to all the cereal, and distributed it for nothing to the famished hordes. Primitive socialism! There was something delightfully naïve about it to me. I cherished a positive liking for the old marauder. Of course they got his head in the end; but when his spirit, like that of the man's in the poem, swung past the milky way to the realms of Pluto, I'll warrant there was no 'what some one else said,' 'what some one else did or thought,' as he met the dark master's queries. A law unto himself!" musingly. "A personality!" He broke off with a laugh. "That seems about all," he remarked. "The rest becomes merely episodic and degenerates into mere vulgar details."

"You have always given away, then—" Was she speaking or was it a dream? He answered. From somewhere not far away, the orchestra tuning their instruments, could be heard.

"And Mr. Page—those bonds?"—She hardly knew what she was saying.

"Some time ago, he foisted on a certain charity, as advisory member of the board, about fifty thou-

CHAPTER XXVI

A LITTLE GARDEN AND A BIG PORT

A LITTLE shop in a street of colonnades at the foot of a great hill overlooking a big port, gateway to, or from, a magic domain, a Land of Nod whose somnolent millions are just beginning to raise their sleepy heads. On the waters of the big port the smaller native boats bob around like bumblebees busy in a garden. The brown junks lie still in droves, and only the occasional typhoon can stir them to general activity and excitement. Occupying the more open spaces, the ships from the western countries swing with an air of grave solidity at their anchorage. Dark specks clamber up the sides of several of them from the coal lighters around. Big vessels continue to arrive; others go. Always animation, life in the shadow of the great hills that stand like guardian sentinels of the strange land beyond.

The man in the little shop referred to can not,

at the present moment, see all this from his front door which faces the other way; but he knows it is there, and, sometimes, perhaps, he likes to think of, or go where he can look out upon the varied details of the picture. Now, however, he is absorbed in a paper from "home"—America; he has read the latest news of graft, politics and scandal, and is about to turn to the page devoted to sermons, when his gaze is arrested by a head-line: "The Goldberg pearls. . . . Mysteriously returned after more than four years." The fine straight eyes lift from the sheet. The man's expression is one of ironical disapproval of modern enterprising newspaper methods; then, suppressing a yawn, he sits with a contemplative look on his slightly whimsical, clean-cut features. It is only in moments like these, of perfect repose and easy poise, that the man on the little stool in the doorway appears any older than he who enacted the rôle of the beggar-prince in the old classic play of the Shoguns.

Has he ever thought of that occasion since? His eyes, somewhat graver, though filled with a lively interest in all things that have life, follow the multi-

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tude; brown, yellow, white! The bare feet of the 'ricksha boys patter — patter. There's a rhythm in the sound; it soothes, lulls. A Chinaman, with a visage suggestive of the inherited calm of generations of tranquil ancestors, moves silently about, amid the rarest of silks and priests' robes, vases and other superb ancient art-pieces. A shop? Rather, a tiny museum, a room full of delight and treasures.

The Chinaman dusts and rubs. He never drops anything; his days are an exemplification of existence without emotions or accidents. The man in the doorway now turns lazily to regard him. Patter! — patter! — the feet without go on incessantly. Click! — click! — life surges through the narrow street. The man hears the sound of the stream, though he no longer sees it; his gaze, half-contemplative, half-inquiring, continues fastened on the Oriental.

“Let me see, Ting's Elder Brother, how long is it since we have been partners?”

“Nearly ten years.”

“And in that time we have amassed a few pretty pennies?”

The Chinaman imperturbably mentioned an amount.

“Quite a princely fortune!” commented the man on the stool. “The people of your country are ideal business partners,” he laughed. “One puts a little money with them and it grows like a snowball you haven’t even helped roll along.”

“The collection of vases and other articles the master left before he went to the New World were very fine,” said the other in the smoothest dialect of Canton.

“They must have been,” was the lazy reply, “since you got nearly one hundred thousand dollars for purchases made by me for a few hundred dollars on one of my exploring expeditions into the interior. Truly art thou a Prince of Merchants, oh, Ting’s Elder Brother, and a wizard day was it for me when I established you here. An excellent contract of mine, that of equal profits for setting you up! And the joke of it is,” laughed the man on the stool, “I really thought I was doing you a favor, that never a dollar that went into the venture would ever come out again. I really forgot all about you and the little shop until one

day in New York —” his face graver — “a letter came, saying something about good business in China.”

“It is I and my brothers who owe much to the master,” said the Oriental musically. “Did he not save —”

“Your honorable and illustrious father, the benevolent pirate?” rising. “True. Heigho!” he yawned. “The sleeping partner, having become opulent, is also once more getting restless. The little stool in a front door, though a charming post of vantage, offers not sufficient scope for his fevered brain.”

“The master has only been back from one of his journeys about a week.”

“A week? It has seemed a year.”

“Well,” sententiously, “if the master must go so soon again, in the town of Tei-to, near the borders of Thibet, there is, I have heard, an honorable family who have had for many generations, three ancient vases —”

“Which, if you got, you could set your own price on for some barbarian American? Good! My countrymen must have works of art, Ting’s

Elder Brother. And to get these there may be offered an adventure. Besides—” He stopped, thinking of a delicate, secret service then engrossing him, work he had taken upon himself, through motives of patriotism, for his government at Washington. An unique, silent figure, Chatfield Bruce went here, there, everywhere, ostensibly to procure valuable curios, but more especially on confidential business pertaining to the awakening and the future of this vast empire.

The powers at home were interested, curious; they wanted to know much and to do a great deal. Disdaining compensation for his services, Bruce had mixed somewhat in the game between nations, never outwardly, but secretly, with true oriental subtlety. He understood these people, liked and trusted them, and they knew him.

The wanderlust for the wastes and the deserts and the walled cities that loom up like magic to startle the vision, was on him again; the big port, half-Europeanized, had begun to pall on his fancy. Now he walked once or twice back and forth, in the wonderful little shop; touched here and there with caressing finger some object; paused at the

sight of the newspaper that had dropped from his hand to the soft rug. News from home!—He continued to regard the sheet. Paltry news, that told him only of what he already knew. Sundry, to the public unexplainable, repayments to Goldberg, Morrow, Page and others. *Vis comica?* Instead of Morrow, for example, returning to the widows and orphans what that eminently respectable gentleman and pillar of society had stolen through his big asphalt swindle, it had been he, Bruce, after all, who had made restitution from his own pocket-book. An ironical turn of fortune! How Morrow, *et al*, would have a right to rub their hands complacently if they only knew the details! Travesty — burlesque — farce! His poor socialistic theories! As excellent as any; perhaps, a little better!

Had he ever really believed in, or cared for them? The end justifying the means? Or had the sardonic jest of it all, the risks, the mad excitement appealed to an odd, wild, seemingly untamable substratum in his nature? Who might say? The Then was as much a puzzle as the Now. The incongruous Now! To have yielded to old-fash-

ioned conventionalism, to have gone back, retrograded, become a mere cog, the usual ordinary, unthinking cog! Alack and alas! But it was to be; had been ordained; it could not have been otherwise. Something had happened; as if some potter had molded anew the clay. Totally anew! Oh, the near-tragedy of being just a mere part of an orderly machine! Bruce touched the paper with his foot. Paltry news, indeed!

A slight indentation appeared on his brow; he tapped a beautiful crystal ball carelessly. If one could but really look into it and span oceans with the gaze; conjure the picture one most wished to see, to the shining depths of the sphere's pellucid center!

"Well, I'll go now and pack the little bag," murmured Bruce, at length, absently. Life, after all, was mostly made up of packing and unpacking a grip.

"Can Ting's Elder Brother do anything more?" asked the Chinaman.

The young man paused in the doorway, his figure outlined against the sunlight on the pavement of the colonnade. "Not unless you are really a

necromancer as well as a magic merchant," he answered facetiously.

"And if so — what want?" said the other, relapsing into Pidgin-English.

"Nothing much, or very unreasonable," laughed Bruce. "You might bring me to the sleeping princess; the way the genii did in the Arabian fairy tale. What was her name — Badoura? She lived in some remote part of China."

"Plenty other princesses right here," suggested the active partner insinuatingly.

"Why, so there are!" in a lively tone. And Chatfield Bruce walked out.

As he made his way along the cool colonnade, a few of those other princesses Ting's Elder Brother had in mind looked, more or less shyly, out of the corners of their eyes at the graceful, tall figure, clad in the light, immaculate garments; but Chatfield Bruce, with head well up, seemed now only to gaze over the heads of the passers-by, princesses and all! At a corner he turned and walked down a block or two, to gaze out at the shipping.

What boats had come in, he asked one of the agents in front of an office on the harbor front.

The man told him the names of two or three liners that had just dropped anchor.

“That’s the *Cynthia*, over there, from Bombay,” added the informant, indicating with a finger. Bruce glanced; there was nothing very especial about the *Cynthia* to attract attention. She had brought a fair cargo and a goodly list of passengers; the latter had already been conveyed ashore by the noisy hotel launches, and were, no doubt, distributed by this time, in the various hostelries, among the shops or at the top of the hill, for the world-famed view.

Bruce stepped quickly on; he was in a mood for action. He did not take the inclined railroad to his house and garden, several hundred feet up on the hillside, but climbed briskly thither while restless, mercurial thoughts ran through his brain. Was it only that the wandering spirit had again bitten him? He passed his hand lightly across his brow and threw back his shoulders.

Vaporous vagaries; he would have no more to do with them; he would think only of the practical concerns of the hour.

Unlocking a gate, set in a vine-covered wall, he

found himself in a garden of rare flowers and plants. The house, English in design, looked out from its nesting place upon the wonderful harbor and commanded a lofty view of the way between hills to the sea. Bruce's small grip was soon packed; one could compress many garments of light silk in that inconsiderable space; and, leaving a few last directions with his English butler, the young man set forth for the inland journey.

That would lead him where? He neither knew nor cared.

He had scarcely left his house out of sight, when at one of the abrupt turns in his way leading down some one unexpectedly advanced to speak to him, a young lady who had been pausing indecisively near a flowering space whence several paths diverged.

"I beg your pardon, but would you kindly direct—" She broke off. "Mr. Bruce!"

Very pale, he bowed. There was momentary silence.

"When did you arrive?" he, at length, asked. He did not call her "Miss Wood"; she was probably now —

"This morning," she said, "on the *Cynthia*."

Again, that silence. It was broken, at last, by him. "You were about to ask the way to—"

"Yes." Her eyes were strangely bright; she mentioned the desired destination mechanically.

He indicated a path. "Three to the right; two to the left." He managed to speak now in matter-of-fact tones. He saw her figure straighten; she was annoyed by the encounter; annoyed! The word sang in his brain; the leaves, leaping to the wind, seemed to rustle it; the overgrown cricket of the hills mockingly to reiterate it. Annoyed—of course, naturally. What else should he expect? But he had to say something.

"Odd to meet again like this!" he went on. "But, after all, the world is small." He uttered the platitude as lightly as he could; it gapped an interval.

"Yes," she said. No more. He told himself he was detaining her, yet clumsily stayed a moment longer. He, Chatfield Bruce, clumsy! The immovable Buddha himself might have laughed.

"You had a good voyage?"

"Oh, yes."

Was there anything further to add or to do? He lifted his hat; the "China boy" had come up with the grip. She seemed about to speak and an instant he waited. Her hand suddenly tightened. He saw it, surmised an impatience and spoke more quickly:

"You should have no difficulty in finding it. Your way, I mean," and started to go. Whereupon she would have spoken — told him she had heard all — of the mysterious restorations to Morrow — the others — would have uttered she knew not what words — his name, certainly; she did speak that. But the car of the incline near by rushed down at that moment, swallowing up the words with its harsh metallic rattle and rumble and she stood alone looking down the path he had gone.

At the wharf Bruce learned that the scheduled hour for the boat's leaving had, at the last moment, been changed; it would not go until the next morning. He hardly listened to the explanations for this sudden alteration in the time for departure; it was of little interest to him, whether it had been caused by news of an outbreak of

cholera somewhere, the need for fumigating the boat anew, or an abrupt warning of typhoon signals. The circumstance, alone, was of moment to him; he found himself doomed to remain yet a while in the big port, twelve hours, or more. Ordinarily, he accepted these untoward incidents of a traveler's lot with unvarying calmness and philosophy; but now a burning impatience consumed him.

What should he do with himself until morning? How pass the remainder of that afternoon; the evening? Mingling with the passengers at the club? Listening to globe-trotters' yarns over whisky and tansan? Or should he go aboard the stuffy little river boat and remain there, to hear big tales from the captain about former days and the yellow pirates of old who made life interesting for the little pioneer steamboats?

In an unexplainable state of mind he sauntered on; he, Chatfield Bruce, generally quick and alert, now discovered in himself a vacillating and dilatory Triplepatte. He experienced a definite sense of demoralization and weakening of an erstwhile incisiveness of character, when without special motive, he got into one of the cars of the inclined

railroad, for no better reason than that it just went somewhere, and that such a destination seemed all-sufficient and satisfying at the present moment. He got out mechanically at the last stop; climbed where he had to climb, and walked where the path led him. At a considerable elevation, perforce he stopped; he could go no higher.

The world lay at his feet, superb, wonderful — beautiful green and sparkling blue — sward and sea, neither lovelier than the other and overhead the dreamy azure, unbroken by even a feather of a cloud. Bruce had often stood here and looked off. He had surveyed the picture in many varying aspects. Never the same twice, it had wooed and won him in different alluring guises; but now he felt strangely unresponsive. The hills were only hills and the ocean but the ocean. He sat down and plucked at the grass; then lay with his head in it and looked up.

Azure; nothing except azure above! Its monotony weighed upon him; the tiniest puff-ball of white he would have welcomed. That blank dome seemed, perhaps, like his life; an indefinite space of nothingness. How much time passed? An hour,

or two hours? It may be, longer; certainly, quite a while. He closed his eyes; the sunlight, playing on his lids, caused him to see red, intermingled with prismatic spots or blurs, shapeless, meaningless. For a considerable interval he remained thus; the sun began to dip in gorgeous triumph toward the horizon.

Suddenly he sat up and listened.

"I don't think I'll climb any higher, my dear. In fact, I believe I'll go back to the Cliff House, near by. It's been a strenuous day, and a rest on the balcony before dinner rather appeals to me."

The voice — a man's — came from below. An out-jutting granite rock at Bruce's feet concealed the speaker — a woman, who answered:

"Very well; I'll return with you."

"No, no; my dear; quite unnecessary!" Mr. Wood's tones were again heard in gentle remonstrance. "Go on up to the top, if you wish; it's perfectly safe, I'm told."

"You don't really mind, then?"

"Not a bit! Only, while you're about it, I'll be making my way leisurely toward one of those veranda chairs at the hotel," he laughed. "A little

touch of the rheumatism, you understand, my dear. I'm not the climber I used to be."

The retreating footsteps died away; a hush, death-like, seemed to embrace the world. Suddenly a pebble dropped; another! Bruce turned his eyes, and, for the second time that day, saw her, now as a part of a roseate miracle, with the swift, mantling flush tinting her cheek. The blue of her eyes was like the azure touched with the deepening shades of twilight; beneath the darkness of her hair, they looked out upon him, startled, surprised, and — glad, yes, glad!

What did it mean? Her white hand was trembling on the black rock. She had met him, after what seemed so many years, again a few moments before, that day, only to see him go away once more, this time for ever, she was certain. For ever! The word had been leaping in her heart; every beat had been attuned to it, and now —

The flames of light played between, around them and struck her fairly. And his gaze which he had forced to be conventional when he had encountered her before, now lingered absorbingly on her, a part of the picture, the sky, merging into it, making the

world super-radiant. Lovers' madness? Perhaps. But ah, the years had been kind to her, caressing her with soft curving lines, lending depth — wondrous depth to the blue eyes.

Who spoke first? Did he go to her, or she to him? The black months seemed to fall from his shoulders, all restlessness to take wings. The flames now played on them as one.

“And Sir Archibald?”

“Returned to India long ago.”

“You did not see him there?”

“No.”

“And yet he is not one lightly to resign. A man would fight hard for you”—he smiled — “not give you up easily.”

“Did you, sir, not give me up easily, as you call it, that night of the Japanese play?”

“I — easily!”

“And went away, a jest on your lips!”

“A jest?” He looked up at her. She sat on a great rock, he, at her feet. “I did not feel in a jesting mood.”

“And to-day, on the path”—her lips were

slightly tremulous —“ confess, you were somewhat cavalier —”

“ Ah, I did not know then,” with a glad laugh, “ what your eyes have since told me.”

“ *My eyes told you —*”

“ A moment ago — here —”

“ You mean I told you *first* that I —”

“ Shall we say, we told each other simultaneously? ”

The purple lights began to glow on the summit.

“ You were going away again to-day, when I met you? ”

“ But didn't! ” he answered. “ The boat's schedule was changed; she leaves to-morrow early.”

“ And you go then, of course? ”

He got up and looked down at her. Behind, the sun dipped; the radiance grew. “ Shall I? ”

She did not speak.

“ Shall I? ” he repeated, mindful only of the glory of her eyes, the wonder of her face.

She answered, but not in words.

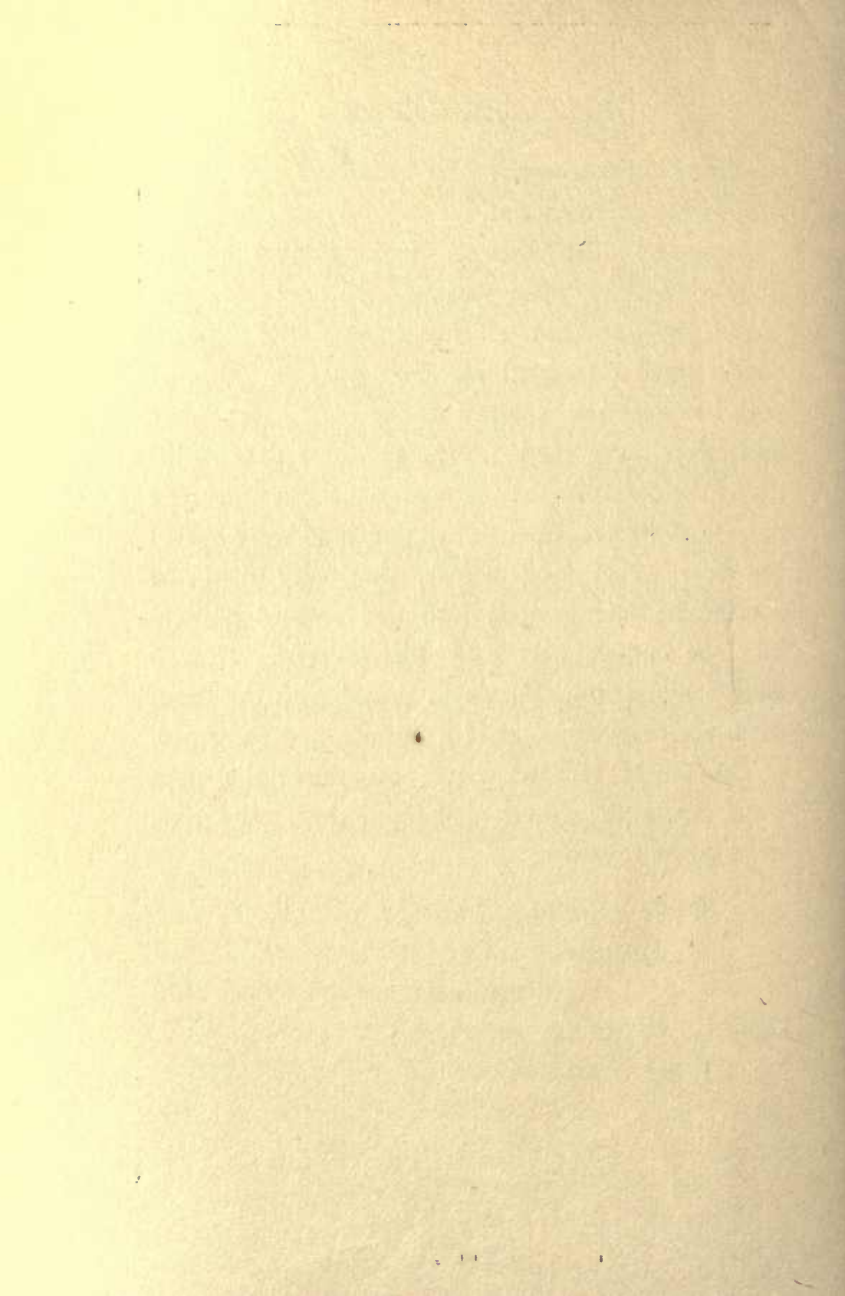
“ Marjorie! ” He took her in his arms, held her from all the world. A thousand swords flared

up from the horizon, as he bent over and kissed lips, sweet as Aurora's!

Aurora's! The Dawn, magic symbol!—suggestive of the “open sesame” of life! He had found it—at last. Triumphantly the knowledge surged through him. She was his “dawn,” with her eyes the wonderful blue of the sky. His lips swept over them, too; he forgot the world; it lay below like the figment of a dream. The past — all its problems — had gone and were buried for ever. Not long before, that very day, the routine he had stepped into had seemed anomalous; he had vaguely scoffed at himself. Now it had been suddenly illumined, tinged with the beautiful, the marvelous, as if a miracle had happened.

The world receded more and more; the stars came out, and in their glad light, they, very glad, went down together.

THE END



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