

AN
ENEMY
TO
SOCIETY

BY
GEORGE
BRONSON-
HOWARD.

J. W. Schofield,

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AN ENEMY TO SOCIETY



"His presence seemed to dwarf them into men of mean stature"

AN ENEMY TO SOCIETY

A ROMANCE OF NEW YORK
OF YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

BY
GEORGE BRONSON HOWARD



ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR S. COVEY

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To
CHARLES AGNEW MACLEAN

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AN ENEMY TO SOCIETY

An Enemy to Society

CHAPTER I

A SON IS BORN TO THE HOUSE OF JANISSARY

I

WHAT THE PUBLIC THOUGHT OF IT

SNOW and sleet in Washington Square when Betsy, bundle girl for Madame Francesca, climbed on the blue omnibus that emerged from the foggy mist, the horses that drew it veritable fire-breathing dragons with their snorts and their smoke. A vista of soggy black earth with a few snow patches, gutters running aimless zigzag streams, water dropping drearily from the black skeletons of trees, and fantastically decorated chimney-pots where a flake or two had persuaded other flakes to stop and keep them company — that was Washington Square at four o'clock in the afternoon of February 7, 1888.

There was no room for Betsy inside the 'bus, so she must climb to the top, unmindful of sleet and snow, and try as best she could to cover the precious paper box she carried with her shaggy shawl; for pasteboard gives readily to moisture, and moisture is not a good thing for basques of

French sateen that a lady in Madison Square has sent for several times and is very angry because she has not received sooner.

But a bundle girl is accustomed to such trifles as numb hands and continual colds in the head, so Betsy does not really mind; except that she wishes these rich folk would not leave their curtains undone, for it always makes bundle girls remember they are cold when they see grate fires, like rubies in colour but far more precious, winking and sputtering at them across damp spaces, with their little white sisters, the candles, reaching out their long witch faces across polished mahogany.

Great houses these; houses with front steps so high that the basement is not really a basement at all but a first floor; very nice for those in service, there, reflects Betsy, because basements are damp no matter how big a fire you build, and these rich people don't understand that the kitchen fire won't heat the whole of it; houses with iron balconies, where in summer, Betsy remembers, young ladies in muslins sat and laughed with young men in very wide white trousers and very narrow black jackets; houses with a beautiful little green tree on either side of the door-way, the kind that didn't care about the cold and grew just as bravely in winter as in summer, and that had such a nice, Christmassy smell.

Now the straining horses cease to slip on the sleety street, but trot erectly and take their steps with confidence; the lumbering 'bus rolls as though upon a magic carpet; the 'busman shifts his reins to a hand he takes from a warm pocket, peering over the side.

"Tan bark," he says, between expectorations. "Huh! Some big bug sick, I reckon."

Betsy has no fear of the many-caped coachman; he has been her charioteer before.

"What's tan bark, Mr. McCune?"

"Thar 'tis, younker; oceans on oceans on't. Leather 'tis. Sich as th' use in the shoes th' sell us folk — durn 'em. Leather shavin's. See?"

And, indeed, the entire block seems a light brown, for the tan bark hasn't been down long enough for it to get wet and black. Many shiny rigs — doctors' seemingly — stand before a great square house, behind the iron railing of which Betsy knows are lilac and jasmine and other sweet smelling flowers in more clement weather — though it is doubtful if she has one of their botanical appellations correctly.

A massive house — the house of a family, the beginning of a dynasty; castle-like, built, one imagines, with the fear of assault upon its projector; pillared and porticoed; its windows and doors double and deeply set in brown stone.

Mr. McCune stops his 'bus at the corner; a passenger stands waiting. Now he is on the roof and the 'bus jogs on again.

"Big Steve's got a son," the passenger tells the conductor. The passenger is in livery and wears a cockade in his hat.

"Big Steve, eh? Well! Well! Time! And how's th' missus bearin' up, eh?"

"Tollable. It's a great thing for her. She knows!"

"Knows what?" asks Mr. McCune, ponderously resenting the lackey's tone; for he is a man who stops his horses when he sees ladies are afraid to cross in front of them.

"Knows the story of Napolyun and Joseyfeen," replies the man with the cockade impudently. "Big Steve's all set up 'bout it now; nothin's too good fer her. A son — see? He'll be Stephen Janissary 3d, he will. Great doin's ter-night. Know where I'm goin'?"

"An' a fat lot I care," mutters Mr. McCune, but the conductor hangs upon the cockaded man's words and so does Betsy.

"Delmonico's, that's where. Del's! Big Steve's a-givin' a birthday party for his son — first birthday, see? Har, har!"

He nudges the conductor's ribs and that official laughs politely, and Betsy does the best she can with her shrill treble. Mr. McCune only grunts.

"I've got my orders," continued the cockaded man, swelling in importance. "Private room overlookin' the square. Table for — for — thirty! All the big bugs in town, you bet. Nothin' scrimping 'bout Big Steve. He says to me ——"

"He says to you, he says," remarks Mr. McCune, "here you! Take this letter to th' head waiter at Delmonniker's and git a move on. That's what he said to you. An' you about heard h'm tell somebody he was givin' a dinner."

Defeated, the man with the cockade can only sneer:

"Oh! you know a lot, you do; now don't you?"

"I know a fool when I see one," replies Mr. McCune. "Gid-dap there, you Grover Cleveland, gid-dap!"

"Four doctors that kid had, mind you," continues Mr. Cockade in a tone that plainly excludes Mr. McCune from the conversation. "Four of 'em. An' th' one in charge's Doc Griffony — th' one that charges five thousand plunks

jest to be there. An' a trained nurse fer th' missus, and 'nuther fer th' kid, an' then 'nuther jest t' help th' other two. An all of us git our orders to watch sharp fer th' bell case we're needed."

Flattered by Betsy's wide-open eyes he bestows upon her a little lofty attention.

"You can well lissen. Guess that's kinda different from the way you was brought inta th' world, hey?"

"I dunno," Betsy replies shyly. The shining hat and the cockade demand great respect and she gives it.

"I guess," she adds, plucking up courage as she sees he looks on her tolerantly. "I guess it was like when the other kids come. Pop says, 'Nuther brat'; and ma, she kinda looks tired, and she says, 'Nuther mouth to feed.' Guess it was the same with me. I'm th' fourth."

Seeing that she has made no pronounced impression as a narrator, she subsides, blushing: "Excuse me."

"That's all right. Come round th' back way sometime and I'll show you th' cups an' spoons th' people sent him. I shine th' silver, I do. Well, so long. So long, stick-in-the-mud. Needn't stop your old plugs fer me."

Mr. McCune, for whom this flattering address is intended, does not hear him, nor does he know that Cockade has gone until he sees his shadow reflected on the slippery pavement in the lights from Delmonico's restaurant.

"Pomp and pride," mutters Mr. McCune. "Tan bark and teetotal tarnation. No good'll come of 't. Too many starvin' fer th' price of that tan bark. Pomp and pride."

"Oh, sir," Betsy begs, "you don't think any harm'll go to th' baby 'cause they spent that money on him, do you?"

"Pomp and pride," mutters Mr. McCune, somewhat at a loss. "Pomp and pride — they have their fall. Don't th' Good Book say so, younker?"

"Yes, sir," returns Betsy, frightened that she has displayed heretical leanings. "Yes, sir, they do. And please Mr. McCune, you've taken me past my block."

II

WHAT STEPHEN JANISSARY THOUGHT

Well might he be called "Big Steve." As he stands now, his coat tails flapping energetically and fanning the fire, his head overtops the tallest candle in the tallest candlestick on the mantel of carved mahogany behind him — a good two inches above six feet in his common-sense, flat-heeled, broad-toed boots, but of a breadth corresponding, consequently lacking the appearance of great height. One feels sure he has a valet — no man in his position would dare be without one — but is equally certain that the man's position is almost an honorary one, for while Janissary is carefully dressed it is in commonplace fashion; his clothes of that hard-faced cloth advertised as suitable for business wear; his collar what those of the last two decades called a "choker," his black neck-tie ambitious to ride over it.

He is not what our English cousins are pleased to term a "gentleman"; no niceties of grooming, no clean-cutness of limb or feature — the limbs large but ungainly, the features strong but roughhewn. And yet, no common

man, no newly rich person; there is about him too unholy a pride, a manner so peremptory that it cannot be mistaken for other than that of a man accustomed to command.

A curious mixture, this Stephen Janissary, the second generation of an American family, lacking education because of the mistaken idea once prevalent among rich men that "Their sons should begin as they did and earn their way as they went along." Hence for amusement, he read Mr. Sylvanus Cobb's "Gunmaker of Moscow" and other novels of the *Ledger* variety and found Thackeray tiresome; and though his home was a treasure house of precious china, silver, and furniture, not one picture on his walls would have fetched more than a twenty-dollar note under the auctioneer's hammer. There was not even a grand piano; in its place stood an ordinary cottage organ on which he picked out by ear, hymn tunes peculiar to the religious sect to which he gave his patronage, and sometimes the airs that boys whistled in the streets. When a street piano passed beneath his window, he would slyly toss coins into the monkey's cap that the monkey's master might exhaust his repertoire for him.

At fifteen he had been sent as supercargo on one of the Janissary coffee clippers — the fast sailing boats that ran between Rio and Baltimore — and had learned how to circumvent dishonest shippers who prepared false manifests, drunken captains who accepted bribes, and picaroonish crews who pilfered to supply small ship chandlers with their stock. He had put his nose to the grindstone then, and had never taken it away. Coffee, tea, sugar, and spices — all that there was to know of them he knew; but to that

knowledge he had sacrificed all his youth and all the pleasure that should be the heritage of one born wealthy. He had married the daughter of his father's partner, and with the death of both the old gentlemen, the firm ceased to be "Janissary and Mellish," and became "Stephen Janissary and Son."

And there lay the pathos of it. How ardently had he desired a son, firmly believing that Heaven must obey him as men did; that it could not long refuse to send him one; but the years had passed unfruitful; he had long become estranged from his wife; had even abandoned his religion, and, freed from that wholesome check, had taken such coarse pleasures as an uneducated man of his type was likely to find.

It is not incredible for those who know the man to believe that Stephen Janissary would have been capable of cold-blooded murder had he believed he was never to have a son by his wife. Divorce she had firmly refused, and the faded Lavender Lady was beyond reproach.

And now — it had come!

His secretary sat before him. A rare bottle of old port, part of the stock that the first Stephen Janissary had laid down during the Mexican war, stood on the massive mahogany table, resting upon a silver tray and surrounded by the most fragile of glasses. The man servant had brought it, poured two glasses, and had gone out; that was half an hour before and still the secretary had not dared touch his glass.

There had been absolute silence in the room, save for the crackle of the burning logs in the fireplace and the drip

of the melted sleet from the cornices and window ledges without. Stephen had been dreaming of a world conquest that his son would carry on; dreaming in teas, coffees, sugars, and spices, because that was all he knew, but vaguely aware that that fragile bit of manhood up stairs would dream in other values, and carry on what he had carried far.

Now he crossed to the table and lifted his glass. The secretary would have given a toast. Stephen Janissary stopped him.

“No, not now!”

He knew the secretary would dare toast no other thing at that time in that house.

“The figures man, the figures?”

The secretary halted, puzzled, and repeated the words interrogatively; they were thundered at him again.

“You’re paid, and paid well — to understand — me! My fortune! You know the figures! Exactly!”

“It’s a thing to ask, Mr. Janissary. A thing I ask myself every day. How could I know? You buy real estate; you buy and the values keep increasing; railroads and street car lines change values. It is too much to ask, sir. To-morrow, if you wish, I will calculate. But exactly — not even then. I always do my best, sir.”

It was a statement at which no one could take umbrage; there was too much flattery in it.

“But five millions — it is easily five millions, eh, Eliason? Easily that?”

“As you say, sir, quite easily that. If you had said ——”

“You should have known I was no fool. But — Duress? He is worth that you think?”

“Not that, Mr. Janissary. Half that, perhaps. Not more.”

“We must amalgamate. No help for that, eh, Eliason?”

“As you say, sir; he controls all the grocery trade that we do not. They are the things we do not sell. If you contemplate invading the retail trade ——”

“As I must. The money is there. We want no middlemen. Sell the public direct. Get all the money, Eliason. All the money. For the boy! Stephen Janissary 3d. Stephen Janissary and Son, Eliason.”

“As you say, sir.”

“Duress has been begging. Ben Duress — begging me! The aristocrat, Eliason. He wouldn’t have me in his house — no, not even now. The Duresses — great people, the Duresses, eh? But he’l invite me to his house if I’m his partner, eh, Eliason? And the boy — Stephen Janissary 3d. There’ll be a Duress girl, eh? A marriage? I married old Mellish’s daughter — why not? I married her, the — but she’s his mother now. The boy’s mother. So you write to Duress to-night, Eliason.”

And again the formula:

“As you say, sir!”

Stephen Janissary raised his glass to his lips.

“To Janissary and Duress, Eliason.”

He laughed cunningly.

“Don’t look surprised, man; it’ll all be Stephen Janissary 3d soon enough.”

He filled the glasses quickly:

“The boy.”

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF "THE WOLF"

HIS name was not Wulf Axtell at all; Axtell, maybe — none knew; but "Wolf" was a sobriquet bestowed upon him by his companions, and, with his customary regard for little details, in adopting the "monaker," he made the necessary alterations in vowels so that it might sound like a real name.

Somewhere (no doubt in many places) it has been remarked that the countenance of every human being has a resemblance to that of some particular animal, a certain trait of a certain beast being so predominant in each that the analogy cannot be missed. Certainly this was true in the case of Mr. Axtell.

But he was a lame wolf; an affliction possessed him. When he walked abroad it was with the assistance of a knotted timber of teak, weighted heavily with lead on one end and with a golden knob for a handle. As each foot was advanced, it trembled violently before it was set down. The Wolf was paying for his early excesses; he could never be cured.

The hand of fate had fallen thus heavily upon him when he was in his criminal prime — a well set up man of thirty-five, distinguished slightly by hair grayed at the temples and eyes cold and indifferent — a man who would have

laughed after a murder if the corpse at his feet twitched into some grotesque position.

In September, 1890, if you had followed Waverly Place into Sixth Avenue, where the little smoky, toy engines dragged long lines of cars above you — pygmies on a giant's job — and had continued your course a few blocks down town, you would have come to Chapel Street and found a stone's throw from the avenue, ruined remnants of what had once been a stone temple of worship for members of the Dutch Reformed faith. The chapel had long ceased to serve the purpose for which it was intended so it had been let out to Schramm, who painted scenery for theatres and found it an excellent place to stretch his wide canvases.

Next door, and built of the same gray stone, stood the dominie's house; but they had rectors now, and so equally with the chapel, it had ceased to be of service, and it was rented for a purpose, the hearing of which would have provoked somersaults from the skeletons of Cortlandts and Ten Eycks, Roosevelts, and Van Rennselaers. For the House of the Dominie had become the House of "The Wolf."

In and out of it slouched fellows of listless bearing and drawn expressions about the eyes, some resplendent in raiment too fashionable to be in good form, others with caps and derbies tilted over eyes that never met the gaze of honester men.

Supported on the arm of Hilary Quackenbos, The Wolf came out on an afternoon of that September and walked as far as Van Tromp's grocery which stood at the corner of Chapel Street and Sixth Avenue. It was an idiosyncrasy

of Axtell's to chew spices, and Van Tromp kept always a certain fine brand.

"You'll hear the same infernal story," remarked Quackenbos, in a tired tone. "It wearies me, dear old chap. It is the Thousand and One Nights with the thousand stories left out. 'Piling it up, piling it up.'"

He abruptly mimicked the tones of a querulous man.

"'Robbers and thieves,'" he continued. "'Oppressors of the ——'"

"Why hear it twice?" asked Axtell.

"I can't understand," complained the Englishman, "why you hear it at all. Day after day for the past month, you have stood and listened attentively while he poured out the story of his bally wrongs. It gives me the hump; 'pon my soul it does."

"Too bad; too bad"; condoled Axtell, in tones that signalled danger. He drew the tall, thin Englishman in the shabby clothes nearer the shop front where old-fashioned wares were displayed in an old-fashioned way.

Behind the counter, Balthazar van Tromp sat reading the *Evening Post*. He did not understand the *Evening Post* in the slightest, but he took it because it had been taken by his predecessor of many years before, and he was a man who disliked change. He had begun his life as errand boy for the grocer who had reigned before him; all his life had been spent on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Chapel Street, and to his knowledge, and with his consent, nothing had been changed in forty years.

He was an undersized man, far older in appearance than his age of fifty-five warranted, and untidy in appearance.

From a mole on his cheek, there grew four hairs that had resolved themselves into a ringlet, so industriously had he curled them about his finger for many years.

At the appearance of Axtell and his companion, he gave them, "good day" in a tone that was, for him, cordial, and went immediately to the japanned-tin compartment where he kept the spices that were Wulf Axtell's favourites.

"Quarter pound as usual, I reckon: HAY?"

He had a fashion of mumbling his words and trying to make up the average volume of each sentence by shouting the last word.

Axtell nodded pleasantly. One of the many wonders about him, to Quackenbos, was his treatment of old Van Tromp, his unvarying courtesy and marvellous patience.

"Here, I saved this fer you to look at, Mester Axtell," he said, hopping forward, a gait inevitable to shopkeepers hurrying in small spaces. "'Nuther good stand gobbled up by them *pirates*. Piling it up, always piling it up. And nuthing ain't done to them though they takes it 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,' as Holy Writ says ain't to be done under no *circumstances*. 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings' — I remember them words *well*. And looka *herel*!"

The paragraph he had annotated was in the accounts of real-estate transfers, and notified the public of a change in the leasehold of Darius Benrimo and Son, retail grocers, at Broadway and a street in the Twenties, the new proprietors being Janissary and Duress.

"And you know how they done it, gentlemen; jest like they're doing to me *now*. Underselling, underselling and

losing until they hev run t'other fellow outa business and made him sell his stand for most nothing, and then putting prices back where they was and piling it up, piling it up, 'til it don't seem that the Heavens kin be no *higher*. Look how the foks round here run all the ways upta Greenwich Street 'cause that store of ther'n sells fresh, home-made butter fer twenty cents a *pound*. Gen'lmen, there ain't no profit kin be got by selling at no twenty cents a pound — it costs more'n *that*. And sugar — fine gran'lated — same thing — four'n half *cents*. Can't be done, gen'lmen. And he's piling it ——"

"Whom do you mean by 'he'?" asked Axtell, although he had a plethora of knowledge on the subject, and Quackenbos groaned, for he knew the monologue that would follow. "I thought you said the firm was Janissary and Duress?"

"That's what it's *called*," said Van Tromp in fine contempt. "But it's Janissary — Big Steve Janissary. Oh, I seen him down here looking over this stand a year ago and then I felt sick; but I says, 'No, Balthazar, the Lord takes care of them that holds Him in fear and trembling and passes the plate in His house every other *Sunday*.' But, *no!*"

He pulled at the ringlet until he seemed to be dragging the mole from his face; his eyes lit up with the fury of a fanatic.

"But, no! No, I says. *No!* It is the devil's day and Satan is his boosom *friend*. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he took it, though expressly told he ain't to do no sich thing by that which is higher'n *him*. And they goes all the way to Greenwich Street and buys and I'm a

ruined *man*. And now he offers me a measly five thousand fer my *good-will*. *Good-will*? He kin starve and he kin break me, but my *good-will* I'll sell to no robber of the ——”

“It's shameful; it's terrible,” cried Axtell, turning to Quackenbos, as though the revelation had been made to him for the first time. “Is there no way to punish such a man? Shall he go on his criminal way unpunished? If the law will not touch the robber, the individual should! If I wasn't a cripple, I'd find a way to punish him.”

The grocer's eyes gleamed as he reached across the counter and took The Wolf by the sleeve.

“I ain't no cripple, but I ain't educated like you, Mr. Axtell, and I don't know no *ways*. You tell me and, short of murder, I'll do it. Thieving I take no count on, for the biggest robber of all is *him*. How kin he be punished; how kin he?”

“Through those he loves,” said Axtell sombrely.

“Love? Him *love*? Mr. Axtell, you dunno that *man*. He don't love nothing but piling it up all the time, piling——”

“It up, yes; and who for?” asked Axtell. “His son Stephen Janissary, 3d! Christened by the cardinal; a thousand invitations; a breakfast for two hundred and fifty. His father becomes a Catholic so that the christening will be famous, and Catholics will remember and deal with his stores. He *is* piling it up; yes, for his son. Suppose somebody stole that son? His wife's dead now; he's getting older. It's past two years old — not like an infant; easy to handle; don't yell and cry. Suppose somebody stole it? That *would* be revenge, eh, Quackenbos? Pretty

that — ha! ha! — pretty! But it'll never happen! No, no, it'll never happen."

"Why — why shouldn't it happen, Mr. Axtell?" asked Van Tromp, who had held his breath while The Wolf talked.

Axtell looked at him long and steadily and then sneered:

"Why? Because there wouldn't be any Big Steve at all if you people had any nerve. You let these fellows rob and sweat you and then you go out and vote for the men who'll help them to do it. You might be free men, you like to be slaves — *like* it, I tell you. You sit and mope and cry like children instead of going about things a man's way. Anybody with a little nerve could steal that child and get away with it. But nobody will. Bah! I've got no patience with you. Sheep! That's what you are — sheep! Cowards, too. Come, Quackenbos!"

The grocer had resented neither his words nor his tone. They left him, both elbows on the counter, fingers pulling aimlessly at the mole on his cheek. Axtell threw a glance back as he passed the shop front and saw that the man had not moved.

"In building a fire, my dear Quackenbos," said Axtell instructively as they continued up Sixth Avenue, "it is first necessary that you be endowed with great patience. Fan the flame, my boy, fan it; but fan it gently, and then — when the crucial moment comes — drop on the big chunk of wood and the flames will eagerly devour it."

"Yes, of course, dear old chap, I quite understand that," returned Quackenbos. "But what puzzles me, you see, is why the deuce you should want this bally infant

captured by the smelly grocer. Kidnapping's dangerous business, you know, and we've been warned dozens of times not to mix up with any influential people. Now this fellow, this Janissary, seems by way of being influential, don't you think? Jupiter Olympus! I'm not terribly keen on taking a fall out of him."

They had reached Washington Square and both sat upon a bench: a different Washington Square from the one you know now — one supremely indicative of wealth, fashion, and breeding. Long lines of carriages seemed to make the four sides of the square — east and west, north and south, one saw them like an Egyptian dado encircling the lower portion of a great, roofless temple. Lights had begun to shoot little fitful rays from fanlights, and the curtains of drawing-room windows were being drawn. Liveried coachmen and footmen strolled up and down before their vehicles, some smoking pipes on the lee side, secure in the fact that the body of the vehicle hid them from the sight of mistresses within. Every little while, a door was thrown open by a servitor and a whiff of perfume, subtle and delicate, was followed by some woman of fashion in ringlets and ribbons with a long trailing boa thrown over her shoulder and a little pomponned hat that we would consider quite ridiculous if we saw it nowadays. And, sometimes, a man came out — mostly youngsters these, in frock coats cut very high and standing collars cut very low — the mode of the moment — with long narrow, patent-leather shoes that street gamins called "toothpicks."

"Damn you, I hate you all!" exclaimed Wulf Axtel suddenly. "I hate you all, all! If I'd been born with a

grubby ability to figure and figure, and cheat and lie over pennies, and work for three dollars a week and save half of it, I might be living there too."

"The grub and the butterfly, dear old chap," Quackenbos reminded him. "Butterflies are golden and gauzy, but they come from the grub, don't forget that. We can't be born butterflies. Either we must be grubs ourselves or have a grub for an ancestor."

"I hate them all — every one," continued Axtell moodily, paying no heed to what Quackenbos had said. "Oh, if I had been left alone, let be like other men. If this damned persecution hadn't been put on me, I'd show them! I'd show them!"

Suddenly, he took Quackenbos's arm.

"That's why I want this kid — this kid of Janissary's. I'll bring him up an enemy to society — to all of them. I'll teach him to hate them as I do. The son of one of the biggest of them. I'll train him to fight *against* them as his father would have taught him to fight *for* them. And then, when the father dies, we'll have the fortune — the eldest son, you know."

"Then you think, you really think, dear old chap, that the smelly grocer is going to steal him?"

"Think?"

Axtell's face was lit up with evil cunning.

"That kind of people are animals, with an animal's fixity of purpose. One thought at a time. He's been thinking of nothing else but Janissary. He'd never have thought to steal the kid. I put the idea in his head. Now he thinks of nothing else. Hilary!"

He gripped the Englishman's arm.

"An idea! A good one!"

With considerable trouble, he extracted a key from his pocket.

"Go open the third drawer in the highboy in my room. You'll find a lot of police shields, customs and gas inspectors' badges. Take one of the last. Go down to Harry Karlinsky and get him to put it among the pawned goods on which the time has run out. I'll hobble along back to Van Tromp's shop alone. You go the other way."

Among the circle in which Messrs. Axtell and Quackenbos moved, Mr. Karlinsky was designated a "fence," a term which even the uninitiated of to-day have learned to know is a "wise-crack" equivalent to "receiver of stolen goods." Needless to say, Mr. Karlinsky was at the orders of one who controlled the affairs of so many profitable customers as Wulf Axtell.

Alone Axtell waited for awhile, wetting his dry lips, and muttering imprecations on the heads of those whom he saw enter the carriages and drive away. Presently he arose, and, with infinite pains and a curse for all who obstructed his way, made the two blocks between the Square and Van Tromp's shop.

As he imagined, Van Tromp was waiting for him to return, and almost dragged him into the little shop.

"Suppose, jest suppose now, mind you, Mr. Axtell, suppose as you — as you ——"

He did not have the courage to come out with it.

"— try some of this here citron as jest come in — reg'lar spice-cured citron that, Mr. Axtell, and harder to git than

a gentleman like you is likely to know, not bein' put to much trouble fer gittin' anything he *wants*. No matter how rich you was you couldn't git no better citron than that, even if you was to be a millionaire like — like ——"

He considered he had exercised great diplomacy in bringing the conversation around to the subject nearest to his heart.

"He kin go on pilin' and pilin', but he can't git no better citron than that at no *price*. And if he was to sell it under what I'm goin' to sell it to you at, he'd lose more'n he loses on his butter and *sugar*. Funny, you talking about kidnapping that younker of his; can't be done, Mr. Axtell. Why in a house that big, with so many nigger and white servants a-standin' around, I wonder the fambly gets a chance to set down, a' tall. Minute one of them set eyes on you sneakin' through the house, why there'd be too much, Mr. Axtell, too much fer an old man to do — or a young one fer that matter. I naturally looks at it as a man of my age would, not meanin' anything by it as you *know*."

He watched Axtell slyly, but The Wolf was biting bits of the citron, tasting it approvingly.

"Yes, very good this, Van Tromp. I'll take a pound — yes, a pound. Oh, as far as kidnapping; well, I recall a similar case. But of course this fellow hated his enemy so much that he was willing to take the time and trouble to scheme the thing out. A very similar case to this one, by the way."

He chewed a bit more at the citron. Van Tromp watched him, dumbly fascinated, making no move to carry out the order Axtell had just given.

"This fellow," said Axtell slowly, "was ruined in business by a very rich man who had a son. He made up his mind to kidnap that son. So he went to a pawn shop and he bought a badge — the kind that gas inspectors wear when they go to inspect gas metres. Then he fastens this badge to his cap and goes to the rich man's house. The servant shows him the metre; he says the gas leaks, and he turns the metre so only half the flow of gas comes out and says he must go through the house lighting the jets to see where the leak is. That gives him an excuse to get into the kid's room. See?"

Only the old simile of the bird and the serpent could express the expressions in the eyes of the two men. The grocer stood spellbound, hardly daring to breathe for fear he would miss one of the precious words.

"This man," continued Axtell, his eyes beady now in their intensity as they held Van Tromp's, "was a wise man. He chose an hour when the child's nurse was eating her supper. Children like that are always put to bed at six and their nurses have their supper as soon as the children go to sleep — about half past six."

He paused, and, although Van Tromp did not speak, Axtell could see his lips forming the words that stood for the two hours.

"The servant who was with this man" he went on, more impressively, "said he couldn't go into the nursery because Master — Master Charles ——"

"Charles?"

The interruption was instinctive.

"This child was named Charles — yes — Charles, jr.

As I was saying — because Master Charles was asleep. So this man just clapped a chloroform sponge to that servant's nose and then went into the nursery and put a little — just a tiny little — bit more chloroform to the child's nose. He was carrying a big carpet-bag from which he had taken a couple of tools so the servants in the kitchen could see them. So now he slips those few tools in his pocket ——”

“But a baby — a two-year old baby — would it go into a carpet-bag — would *it* ?”

“This one was a *big* carpet-bag — but even at that the baby had to be squeezed a little. Didn't hurt it much. Just for a few minutes. You see this man lived only a few blocks from where the millionaire did. But, as I was saying, he picks up the servant and carries her into the nursery and puts her in the baby's bed and puts the baby in the carpet-bag and walks right down stairs again. Even stops in the kitchen and chats for a minute with the cook. They don't think anything of the girl not coming down stairs when he tells 'em he found the leak and she's cleaning up the litter he made repairing it.”

“But didn't they — didn't they recognize the man who stole the child and have him advertised in the papers and ——”

“He wasn't fool enough to go as he was,” said Axtell, reprovingly. “He had better sense than that. At the pawnbroker's where he bought the badge he also got a false beard and moustache. Pawnbrokers always have such things. Why, you know Harry Karlinsky's down the street a little way ——?”

"Karlinsky's — yes — I — I know: can you buy such things there? Badges and *sich*?"

"I saw a badge — a gas inspector's badge in there only this morning. So you see how easy it is——"

Suddenly he broke off with a laugh:

'But how foolish to waste your time and mine telling you a thing like that. You — a respectable grocer! Why even if you had an enemy you wouldn't dare do it.'

"No, no; of course *not*," returned Van Tromp slyly, looking away from Axtell.

"Although," continued The Wolf thoughtfully, "that was the way with that other fellow. He was so respectable that nobody suspected him and the father never got the boy back. He died from grief."

"The *father*?" asked Van Tromp viciously.

Axtell nodded.

"You see he'd been grinding down the poor and piling up the money just for this boy. Oh, it was a great revenge. Well, good night, Van Tromp. Haven't you done up my citron yet?"

"Yes, sir; in a minute, Mr. Axtell!"

No further words passed between them; not even good night. The package was done up, handed, and paid for silently; and, as Wulf Axtell turned the corner and passed out of the grocer's sight, a spasm of evil laughter overtook him so violently that it turned to coughing and racked his anæmic body.

"He'll do it," he said to Quackenbos as that worthy who had been waiting for him by the stoop of the Dominie's House, now hurried forward in some alarm as he witnessed



“Quackenbos followed the palsied finger that shook as it pointed”

The Wolf's spasm. "He'll do it to-night. I've made my living judging men, and I tell you he'll do it — sure!"

"Well, what then?"

"Why," said Axtell, smiling in his ugly way, "why we'll let him keep the kid until everybody's forgotten all about him. Let him have the worry and the care. Let him take all the risks. He can't blame anything on me. I advised nothing. The old hypothetical case. Parallel circumstances! A good job, Hilary. Oh, I must give it to myself. I'm clever, devilish clever."

"Yes, devilish clever," agreed Quackenbos soberly.

"Oh, oh! You're a prude, Hilary; a man of no stamina. You don't know how to hate and plan like I do. I'll fix 'em — fix 'em all. If this boy has any of his father's brain I'll make a thief like the world never saw before — the master-thief, Hilary, old boy. Oh, believe me, Hilary, I'm rather proud of this little job. No risk; nothing. Let old Van Tromp have him for a couple of years; then I'll go and take him away and begin to train him. Even as a kid, I'll train him. Oh, Hilary, this is too much, too much, my boy."

And he went into another spasm of evil mirth that changed to a racking cough. Quackenbos drew his weakened frame up the brown stone steps.

"Come in. The air's chilly. You can't stand it, you know."

"Look!" said Axtell suddenly.

He pushed his partner back into the door-way. Together they crouched in the shadows and out of sight. Quackenbos followed the palsied finger that shook as it pointed,

and saw, slinking down the dimly lighted street, the figure of the grocer, his hat pulled over his eyes, his step uncertain. Occasionally he turned, and, like a frightened rodent, peered backward. At the sight of a uniformed policeman, on whose buttons the light from a gas lamp glinted, he shied violently and walked a little more rapidly.

His face was turned toward Karlinsky's pawn shop.

CHAPTER III

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

(From the Diary of Stephen Adams)

I

THE TRAINING OF THE YOUTH

IF UNCLE HILARY finds I have taken this book for my own uses, the devil will be to pay. It was among some old things in the attic, though, so I suppose he has forgotten all about it. It is quite a gorgeous book with the word "Album" in big gilt Roman letters on the back — which I have glued over the brown paper — and an illuminated title page with a picture of Venice and another picture of Rome and another of some city I don't know, and, in the centre, in beautifully blazoned letters, "Presented to" and "By." The blanks are filled in faded violet ink, "Master Hilary St. Geger Quackenbos," and, "His affectionate aunt, Helen St. Geger."

That's the one Uncle Hilary said used to chase him up stairs to learn his catechism every Sunday morning. She was the wife of Lord Nothend, although his real name was Peter St. Geger. I consider it a rather silly thing, that

business of having two different names — two different titles too, by the way, for, although he was *called* “Lord Nothend” by people, he was really “Baron Nothend.”

It is very confusing. Uncle Hilary says he was a fat old man who dropped all his “g’s” and couldn’t spell to save his life. Fancy such a man having a title and “Lording” it over people. I asked Hilary (I call him Hilary although he is my uncle) why, and Hilary laughed and said it was just another of life’s little ironies that I would have to get used to.

It looks as though I would have a hard time understanding things, and Hilary doesn’t help me any. I can’t figure it out whether grown-up people are terribly stupid or whether I am. It’s conceited even to have a doubt about it, I suppose, but I’ve got it and I suppose I will never get rid of it.

I’m getting old enough to have something else beside “kid” books, by the way. I shall ask Hilary for some, because I want to get a notion of why things are so badly arranged when, it seems to me, it is the simplest thing in the world to set them right.

Of course, “Robin Hood” is all very well. I like Robin and his merry men, and I think he did perfectly right to take from the rich to give to the poor. But Hilary says that if Robin tried those things “on” to-day (that’s his funny way of expressing himself), he’d be sentenced to serve years and years in prison.

This, again, is terribly confusing, as you can see; because he did a great deal of good and should have been rewarded for it. He *was* rewarded in my book, made earl of Sher-

wood, I think. (I will look it up.) I have a very fine edition of "Robin" now, with perfectly fascinating pictures by Pyle whom I consider a great artist. (He also wrote the book.) I have had a great many "Robin Hood" books — all different — but I like this one best.

Then there was François Villon. He was a great poet and writer and a scholar of the University of Paris, and in his time that was a great thing; for most of the people were so uneducated they didn't even know how to write their own names. And François was a very brave man, too, for when the Duke of Burgundy was besieging Paris, he organized a band of men and helped defend his beloved city. Yet he was hanged by the neck until he was dead just because he stole from the rich. Just imagine that! And he was so great a writer that people read his poems to this very day. Beautiful poems, too! One of them Hilary recited to me:

"Where are the snows of yesterday?
The winds have blown them all away —"

I forget the rest of it. But it was very pretty.

And then there was Claude Duval and "Gallop Dick" Turpin. They were fine fellows. It must have been great to get on your horse on a dark windy night, and ride over the moors and stick your pistols at the rich people's heads and say:

"Stand and deliver!"

I think I should like that. But I shouldn't like to be hanged in chains on Tyburn as Dick was. Almost all these fine fellows in my books got hanged or something. It is not very encouraging.

Hilary says that "the world" doesn't consider it right. He says that "the world" thinks that you ought to lie and cheat and deceive and get as much of other people's money as you can without actually threatening them with a weapon. Then, when you get very rich and anybody tries to take any of your wealth away from you, all you have got to do is to go "to law," and you will get it back and the one who takes it will be sent to prison.

It's too much for me: I can't understand it. I should think that the man who risked his life to take things away from other people would be more respected than the one who sneaks them away when you're not looking.

Mr. Axtell says he will explain it all to me some day — not now. Mr. Axtell is a funny fellow — I don't mean humourous, but queer. I don't know whether I like him or not, but he teaches me so many clever tricks that I'm always glad when he pays some attention to me. I suppose it's his lameness that makes him cross, but sometimes he makes me think of a butcher in a white apron with big stains on it: and I don't like butchers or blood or anything like that. It's a silly thing for an old lame man to make you think about.

But he is very clever, especially with cards. He has taught me how I can beat Hilary any time I want. You see, he has got a pack of cards that are made especially for him; and on the backs of them there is a rose, and you can tell by looking at the number of petals on the rose just what cards you are dealing to the one you're playing with and so you always know what he's got. And he has taught me how to take a pack of cards and shuffle them in such a

way that if I want to deal Hilary four jacks and myself four aces, I can do it without the slightest bit of trouble. I learned that when I was eight; and it's as easy as winking now.

Last night I was playing poker with Hilary and I won about two thousand dollars (in chips, of course), and Mr. Axtell said to Hilary:

“Did you see him do it?”

Hilary shook his head and both of them burst out laughing, and then Mr. Axtell patted me on the head. I'd a deal rather he wouldn't do that, because it makes the electricity come out when he does it, and I feel like making a noise like our cat does when you stroke her fur the wrong way.

I think I shall tell Hilary how I beat him so easily: it doesn't seem fair to make him look cheap all the time.

Sometimes I imagine Mr. Axtell wants me to be an actor, for he is forever showing me how I can change the appearance of my face altogether with a little bit of rouge-stick and black-lead stick, and a few little tufts of hair here and there. He says anybody can make up to deceive on the stage, but the true artist is one who can make up so that a person who knows you can look you right in the face and not be able to tell who you are.

Of course, the eyes have a great deal to do with it, though. There's some stuff called belladonna that makes your eyes look quite different from what they really are.

Then there's the voice: Every time I meet a new person, Mr. Axtell makes me give an imitation of the way he speaks and keep on practising until I can get the exact tone he

uses. Yes, I'm sure he *must* want me to be an actor, but if he does he's mightily mistaken. I don't just know what I *do* want to be, but I know I *don't* want to be an actor, and nobody shall make me either.

Mr. Axtell is a great bother to me. He has one very annoying habit: he is always losing his keys and calling for me to come and open a locked drawer or cupboard or something. At first I had no notion of how I was going to do it, but he has some little thin steel things with which, if you once get the hang of them, you can open anything. He locked himself out last night when we went to the theatre together and there was nobody to let us in, so he showed me (or rather he told me) how to open the front parlour window: he called it "springing" the window and that is a good name, because, you know, you *do* spring it.

And though he's so careless himself, he's dead against carelessness in others. For instance, he told Hilary one day to wear his watch chain through a button-hole instead of loose from pocket to pocket, because, he said, it would be so easy for any one to lift it out. Hilary laughed and "pooh-poohed" him, and it must have made Mr. Axtell mad, for, when Hilary went out, he said:

"I'm going to teach him a lesson."

And to teach him, Mr. Axtell taught me how to lift the whole thing away so Hilary wouldn't know it. That seemed the easiest thing in the world after the difficult things I've learned to do with my fingers, so, when Hilary came back, I took the chain (with a watch on one end and a knife on the other) out of his pocket and he knew nothing about it until I handed them back.

Here I am running along not like a diary at all: at least, not like any diaries I ever read; but then I don't seem to be able to do anything just like anybody else. One thing is certain, though; I ought to put down the date; it is May 7th or 8th — I haven't got a calendar handy — 1901, and I was thirteen last February.

I've written ten pages and my wrist is tired, so I shall close and write again sometime next week.

II

LITTLE THIEVES AND BIG ONES

July 17, 1901 — (I started right this time.) Well, I forgot all my good resolutions about writing in this diary every day. Besides, if I did, I shouldn't have much to put down. Nothing much ever happens to me: I suppose it is only in books that things really happen.

I'm trying to think (now I have started on the subject of happenings) whether anything ever happened to me, and I don't think so. Of course, losing your father and mother is a happening in a way, but that was before I can remember and what's the good of a happening you can't remember? Anyhow, father's death occurred far away — in India — and mother died when I was born.

The first person I *can* remember is old Van Tromp, and, for a funny thing, every time I see the old drunkard, I seem to smell a cellar. That's funny enough, isn't it? Uncle Hilary left me with Van Tromp when he was off in the Rocky Mountains prospecting, and I don't think Van

Tromp was very careful of me, because almost the very first thing I can remember is a row between Van Tromp and Hilary and Mr. Axtell. It's funny it should stick out in my mind the way it does, although I suppose that is because it was the day I first came to live here.

What the row was about I couldn't tell you. All I know was that old Van Tromp didn't want to let me go for some reason, and they kept telling him what they would do to him if he didn't until finally he got very scared and sat down and put his hands to his stomach and didn't say anything, and Hilary took me out.

I must have been about four at that time.

Since then, all I've done is to live in this house and study with Hilary and read by myself and take lessons from Mr. Axtell, and box with Eddie O'Brien.

A great many funny people come to our house, but "Rag" is the funniest. We call him that because he gets himself all worked up into a passion over some little argument, and then sits down to the piano and thumps out a lot of rag-time. He always plays on the middle keys, and whether he's doing "Ave Maria," or "My Gal's a High Born Lady," they both sound alike the way he plays them.

He is a very mild-looking fellow with light eyelashes and nice gray eyes, but Mr. Axtell says he is one of the "toughest little son-of-a-guns that ever was in the Tenderloin." It appears that he was a prize-fighter once, and also that he has been in prison. He wouldn't tell me what for; gets rather angry when I ask him, and the other day, when I said that I didn't see why men should be sent to

prison just because they took things from rich people, he got very red and flushed and he said:

“Now, kid; don’t let ’em slip you any of that kind of bunk. You’re a nice kid and I’d like to see you git along, but you ain’t a-goin’ to make any ten strike if you follow that dope. They’s sich a thing as laws and s’long as they is, th’ best thing to do is not to monkey with the buzz-saw. You’re young and you’ve got a good nut on you and nuthin’ agin you. Learn some good, square graft and stick to it. Th’ other money’s easier made, but by th’ time you get through slippin’ it to coppers and politicians, you ain’t got much left for your bit. No, you kin skin the suckers easiest by playin’ their own game and bein’ what they call honest and you kin turn a starvin’ family out into the street for six dollars room rent and nobuddy ’ll interduce you to th’ wrong side of a jail. And, lissen, kid: there ain’t nuthin’ in God’s green world that’s worth doing a ‘bit’ for — hours that seems like days and days that seems like months and all the while you know there is blue skies and green trees and pretty gals walking ’crost Herald Square. No, they is rules to this game and you gotta learn ’em.”

“Rag” takes me into some strange places, and a lot of the men he introduces to me have names like savages: For instance, “Red Leary,” and “Mike the Goat,” and “Eat-’em Alive McGinnis,” who fights with his teeth, and “The Pale Face Kid,” and so on. They all seem tame enough to me: I think they must call themselves by these queer names because they are a little deficient of brain. Most of them have very low foreheads and ears set down near

their chins and the manners of sulky children. "Rag" says it will do me a lot of good to know them.

"They'd kill you jest to see which way you fell, kid. And anybody could hire one of them to do murder for a ten-dollar note. I ain't got much use for 'em, myself, but one thing I will say: they'd never harm a pal, not for a million bucks, and so it's handy to stand in with 'em."

I was very much disgusted:

"But why do people permit such horrible creatures to live and wear good clothes and jewellery and have money to buy good things to drink and eat?" I asked him.

"Well, kid, it's this way;" he explained. "Somebuddy's got to do the dirty work, see? I'll explain it to you: Supposin' you're a rich guy that lives on Fifth Av'noo and you've got a lot of dough and you want a lot more, and th' only way you kin git it is to bribe somebuddy to give you something that will make 'em a lot more millions, like say, a subway franchise or a gas franchise or a telephone franchise — something that everybody has gotta use and pay for. Well, those franchises have got to be granted by the mayor and the board of aldermen, see?"

"Well, some one has got to supply gas and telephones and subways, haven't they?" I asked. "It's only fair that the people who put up the money and take all the risk should get the profits."

"Profits? sure! Reasonable profits. But they ain't got any right to make fifty and seventy-five per cent. interest on their investments. They ain't got any right to git any franchise that soaks the citizens of New York City five cents for every telephone call and every street car ride they take

for a hundred years, have they? And as for the risk, these guys ain't takin' any risk with their money on city franchises. Six per cent. is a reasonable profit on a sure thing. They're entitled to that and no more — not to all they can squeeze out of the public. Now, mind, it ain't as though they were employing a lot of people and payin' 'em high wages. They've got a monopoly and they pay the people that work for 'em any price they choose, because if the people don't want to take it they kin git plenty more shipped from the pauper countries of Europe that will. Get me?"

"You mean to say," I asked, mentally calculating, "that they get from eight to ten times as much profit as they reasonably should and pay their employés as little as they choose?"

"That's jest what I mean to say. Get me now?"

"I don't believe it," I said indignantly, "I don't believe people will stand being robbed that way. Every man's got a vote, hasn't he? He can elect people to offices who will vote against such things like that and keep him from being robbed."

"Ah, now you're comin' to it, kid!" exclaimed "Rag" triumphantly, "and that's where the 'gangs' come in so far as New York City is concerned. A man's vote ain't worth a durn here if the rich men put up the money for the politicians to elect some guy they want in. Now see here: Suppose I'm planning to run an elevated road on Eighth Avenue and I want a franchise from the city to build it and operate it for the next ninety-nine years. I go to the bosses of both parties and I tell 'em what I want and I hand over the money they say I've gotta give. Then they

git together and select the men who'll give that franchise and when next election time comes the Republicans put up a weak man in th' districts where th' Democrats are to win, and th' Democrats do likewise in th' districts where it's agreed th' Republican's to win. See? That's easy.

"But, in some districts, th' bosses ain't got no pull and th' people put up a square guy who'll vote agin th' franchise as sure as I'm settin' in this chair and who can't be 'fixed'. Well, then, th' boss calls in the guys he kin trust in that district and says: 'Say, I'm goin' vote th' names of John Jones, Pete Smith, Dick Robinson, Bill Hicks and Sim Clark from your flat, so when th' election verifier comes around, you tell him them guys live in your house. Get me? Well, say he votes six men that ain't got any existence out of the houses of three hundred men he kin trust — that's eighteen hundred votes he's got solid before the pollin' begins and there ain't no sich people. Then all these 'gangs' they go around castin' their vote four and five times, votin' first in their own names and then in the phony names of these guys he's planted and then in the names of dead men and so forth and so on."

"But how can they do it? How are they allowed to do it?" I asked indignantly. "Aren't there people to watch the polls and see that dishonest voters are arrested or something?"

He looked at me pityingly.

"Watchers? Sure! The honest candidate, say, has a couple of watchers at every poll. Well, what happens? I go up to vote in the name of a dead man. I vote myself as John Jones, aged 43. The watcher challenges me:

'You ain't no 43,' he says. 'I challenge your vote.' Well, I'm wearing a little pin in my lapel to show I'm voting accordin' to the boss's orders and like as not th' policeman on duty (who owes his job to th' boss) says: 'G'wan. I know this guy. He's 43, all right'. And th' challenge is passed over. But if th' policeman is square and it looks like an arrest, th' gang cuts in with their black-jacks and knocks th' copper and th' challenger cold, and I make my get-a-way durin' th' scrap. But if by any chance I'm pinched, th' boss of th' district has got a gang down at the court room before I get there, and any one of them will swear me out and perjure his soul fer a two-dollar note. Oh, there ain't no way to beat it.

"I could go on fer hours tellin' you about it, but what's th' use. But you kin go gamble your boots that th' men who've been fixed for the franchise get in if there has to be all kinds of assault and murder done. And there generally is. So th' rich guy gits his franchise, th' bosses git their dough, th' aldermen gits their thousand bucks apiece, and th' gang gits their fifty dollars apiece and license to steal and murder whenever they like without no fear of doing time fer it.

"If they can't fix th' mayor with dough, and they need him in their business, they promise to make him governor or senator or ambassador or supreme court judge.

"It's th' same way with all the bigger jobs: the people that go to congress and so on. No President can git elected without th' rich guys and the political bosses back of them. 'Course every now and then th' people git cantankerous and start reforms and then th' bosses put some

guy on the ticket fer mayor or governor who's got a good rep and use him fer a stall to elect a lot of crooked guys who'll vote agin everything the straight guy wants done. Oh, there ain't no way to beat it, kid.

"I've learned my lesson" he added with a funny, choking, little cough. "If I'd a joined one of these here political clubs or secret organizations and always voted 'right' and bin a good 'party' man, I'd never done no three years up-river fer burglary. But as soon as they finds you've got no political pull, the judges and all git very moral; throw the book at you and tell you to add up the sentences in it. I've learned my lesson all right."

"Is everybody rotten then?" I asked, the tears in my eyes. "Is everybody willing to do everything that's wrong just for a few dirty dollars? Oh, Rag, it can't be as bad as that. Everybody isn't that way."

"Of course not, kid," he answered, "I know that. But in the big cities the 'square guys' don't count. Up in New England and in the Middle West and the South, where th' votes come from the people in the country, th' best man ginrally wins; but it's the big cities that rule the United States and in them there's only two things that count: a lot of dough and a lot of political pull."

"If you have those two things, in other words," I said, "you can do anything you like?"

He nodded. "Not stopping at murder," he qualified. "Of course there are plenty of good guys who play fair and square and make a few million dollars honestly and pay their people a square amount and try to do all the good they kin. I ain't downin' a man jest cause he's rich — I ain't

no anarchist. But most of th' men that's got more'n a few million is so greedy for more that they'll do *anything*, and so long as they've got crooked politicians to do their dirty work, they'll always git it done."

I had a long talk with Hilary about this business when I got home, and Mr. Axtell patted "Rag" on the back and said, "Good boy!" He gave him a twenty-dollar bill, too, but he didn't have much to say, only nodding at the remarks Hilary made.

It seems that "Rag" wasn't exaggerating. It has made me feel very miserable and I hardly slept at all last night, so I'm putting all this down so that I won't forget any of it.

It seems to me that something ought to be done to these criminals, rich and poor alike, and if everybody felt as I do, I'm sure something *would* be done.

What nonsense I'm talking! I suppose when I grow up I'll be just like all the other people and not pay any attention to such things, but just go on trying to make a fortune for myself. I don't think so, though, because I don't particularly care anything about money, and I do hate people who take advantage of other people who are weaker or have less brains than they have.

To my mind (and of course I know my opinions don't amount to anything: still in my own diary I can say what I like) a man ought to be so happy about having better brains and more strength than the average person that he would find the greatest pleasure in helping other people who haven't got them — like the old knights I read about in Froissart who went about helping people in distress.

Of course (mind you) I don't think that a labourer, for instance, needs the same luxuries that a man of finer brain and weaker body does; but I do think that every man who is willing to work eight hours a day is entitled to plenty of food, a clean place to live in, and warm clothes and fires in winter, and ice in summer; also enough money to bring up his children decently. No matter what kind of work he does, if it is *real work* he is entitled to those things. And he can't get them on \$1.50 or \$2 a day, can he?

I have no use for people that won't work, though; not the least in the world; that is unless they have some affliction like Mr. Axtell and *can't* work.

I *do* wish everything in this world wasn't so complicated.

However, it means that I've got to study and read hard and learn the ins and outs of everything. I don't want to make up my mind hastily before I'm fourteen.

III

THE FIRST THEFT

March 8, 1902 — After I read over the last entry in this book, it sounded so absolutely childish that I was going to tear it out. Not what "Rag" said, of course, for that was good common sense, but the rest of it about myself. I don't know why I should, but I suppose everybody who keeps a diary has a lurking suspicion that it will be read some day and tries to put down things that are worth reading. Anyhow, I swore I wouldn't write anything more in it until I had something of some importance to say, and

now that I *have* I don't know whether to put it down or not; because, although I did what I know was *right* still there is that bugaboo, *the law*, that sent "Rag" to prison, and I'm sure that I'd break down and plead and cry like a baby if they tried to send me there.

As I think it over, it seems incredible that I'm only fourteen years old — fourteen last February. But then I haven't lived the life of the usual child: I've never had a boy or girl companion, never gone to school, never played games or had toys — that is, unless you call picture books toys. And then I'm tremendously large for my age and not a bit gawky like the usual kids — I stand five feet seven high and weigh one hundred and thirty-seven pounds, stripped, in our gymnasium; and on my fourteenth birthday I put on long trousers. More than that, I knocked "Rag" out the other day and he stayed "out" for three minutes by the stop watch. I must have a lot of strength to do that, but then I've been punching the bag since I was eight and boxing with "Rag" for five years, and every day I walk at least ten miles.

I want Hilary to send me to college, but, for some reason, he won't do it. It can't be that he can't afford it, for we live very expensively here on Chapel Street, and Hilary paid \$50 for my long trouser suit and gives me \$5 a week spending money.

I don't know, of course, whether Mr. Axtell or Hilary owns the house; it may be Mr. Axtell. Anyhow, Hilary says, "Cawn't afford a 'Varsity career, my boy." And then he added: "I'm a mawster of arts, Oxon, and what bally good has it done me, eh, what?"

(I used to talk like that myself, once, but Mr. Axtell and "Rag" and George le Fay and all the other men who came to our house made so much fun of it that I've stopped it. [Hilary doesn't seem to mind their "chaff," as he calls it.]

Hilary is splendidly educated. He reads De Maupassant and Flaubert and Balzac in the original French, and Karl Marx and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in German. Besides that, he has a wonderful knowledge of the classics, which he has tried to impart to me, but Mr. Axtell told him one day that it was all nonsense stuffing my head with dead languages, so I stopped my Latin after I'd finished "Cæsar's Commentaries" and, as far as Greek is concerned, I was only half through Xenophon.

Hilary shakes his head over this; but I'm working twice as hard at my French and German. George le Fay helps me with the first (his real name is Georges Lefebvre and he is half French, half Irish) and Morgenstein is of great assistance in conversational German. Everybody who comes to our house is very patient with me and they all seem to take a great interest in my education — even old Van Tromp (whom I do not like), for he taught me all I know about machinery.

He has been dead-broke for a year now and drunk most of the time; so the other day I heard Mr. Axtell tell him that if he expected to get another cent out of him he'd have to take the pledge and look after our motor-car. (We have had so much trouble with chauffeurs.) He said he would pay Van Tromp to take care of the car, and run it when necessary, and he would also give him a room in the

attic; but if he got drunk one single time he would throw him out and never let him in the house again.

I think Mr. Axtell is too severe with the poor old fellow; he must be nearly seventy and he seems half-witted. I don't understand him at all: he's always coming up to me leering (he hasn't any teeth) and saying:

“Well, boy, he's pilin' it *UP*: pilin' it *UP*, ain't he?”

I always say “yes,” although I don't know what he's talking about, and then he acts as though I'd made the cleverest answer in the world:

“Bright boy; bright boy! And a lot of good it'll do *HIM*. Har, har!”

And off he shambles, still rubbing his hands: it sounds like the manicurist using sand-paper on your finger nails.

Here I am again just covering page after page and not putting down a word of the most important thing that has ever happened to me.

It was some time in October last that Hilary and I were standing in front of the Brevoort House and we saw a woman carrying a big bundle start across Fifth Avenue; just then a touring car swung out of Eighth Street, and, before we knew what had happened, she was lying in the middle of the road, groaning and crying. The motor never stopped; it went right on, but I saw the number and wrote it down.

The woman's leg was broken in three places. I went to the hospital to see her. Her name is Elizabeth Mimble and she lives in Washington Court, a narrow little alley off McDougall Street. She's had a pretty hard time, poor thing; carried bundles for Madame Francesca, the big

Fifth Avenue milliner, for a long time and then got to be an assistant seamstress or something. Finally, she left to go in business for herself because she had two little sisters to support.

Hilary told me not to meddle in the case, but I made so much fuss that he sent for his lawyer, and the lawyer found out from the number I wrote down that the machine belonged to Lycurgus Yancey, the big real-estate man. He compromised the case for five hundred dollars and her hospital expenses, and when Miss Mimble came out she was very grateful. I am sorry for her. She is so uncomplaining about everything, and she calls me "sir" all the time until it makes me feel very uncomfortable.

Well, now, it appears that she wasn't cured at all; gangrene set in and her leg had to be amputated. All the five hundred dollars went for doctors' and surgeons' bills, and when Hilary's lawyer saw Mr. Yancey again he refused to give any more money. So the lawyer took the case to court, but Mr. Yancey proved that he had compromised it, and brought the doctors from the hospital to swear that Miss Mimble was cured once and that the gangrene was due to her own carelessness; so she lost the case.

One of the little sisters — twelve years old — got a position wrapping bundles at three dollars a week in a big department store on Sixth Avenue, and that was all they had to live on (the other sister is only eight), so I took the twelve-year-old one aside and told her to tell Miss Mimble she was getting twice as much as she really was and I gave her that much more out of my spending money.

It left me rather strapped, naturally; I had hardly any-

thing for car fares; so the other day I had to ask Hilary for an extra dollar and he wouldn't give it to me; then I told him what I was doing.

Mr. Axtell immediately frowned at Hilary and said:

"That's the proper spirit, my boy. Hereafter, I'll give you the money for the woman. Keep your allowance. Now run along. I want to talk to Hilary."

And now I'm going to tell you about the oddest coincidence. The next day Hilary went walking with me, and we went into the Hudson River Bank. Hilary took the manager aside and asked him a great many questions about starting an account there. Then he got into conversation with him about England and they talked along for quite awhile. Hilary finally broke off the conversation by looking at his watch and telling the bank manager what a hurry he was in, for it was past time for an engagement he should have kept. We went out and Hilary whispered:

"You know that beast, Yancey; the fellow who wouldn't pay that poor girl anything — the one that lost her leg, y'know — Trimble or Thimble or some such ridiculous name?"

"Mimble," I said, "and I don't see anything ridiculous about it."

"No, no, of course not, dear boy; I was only pulling your leg a bit, y'know. Well, there he goes!"

He nodded toward a man who was crossing the street.

"Yancey?"

"He's just drawn a thousand dollars in tens and twenties," Hilary said, nodding. "I noticed it while I was talking to the manager. He put the lot in a leather wallet

and it's in his right-hand hip pocket. He'll probably blow it all on chorus girls and champagne to-night and that poor Miss — whatever her name is — could live comfortably for a couple of years on it."

"Yes, poor thing," I said, thinking how pitiful her case was and how patient and sweet-tempered she was about it.

"Poor thing!" echoed Hilary, and very shortly: "Yes, that's all you or any one else can say. That's the way abuses go unrectified. Why, if I were as young as you and as clever as you about taking other people's watches and things when they're not looking — as you did with me two or three times — I'd cut after that chap and take his wallet away from him and give the money to the woman you're always whining about."

We had crossed the street and Mr. Yancey was only about five yards in front of us walking down Fifth Avenue.

"But that would be stealing," I said, "and they put you in jail for stealing, don't they?"

"Is it stealing to make a poor woman happy with money taken from a rich soundrel who has crippled her for life?" he asked, very cross indeed.

"Why, n-no," I stammered, "I guess not, Hilary."

"And who'll only spend it in dissipation," he pursued, crosser if possible.

I shook my head.

"Well, then," he said, with an ugly little twitch of his mouth, "then you're a coward, that's all. You're afraid of going to jail. You prefer to beg me and Axtell for money to give to your protégées. Oh, it's very easy to be charitable with money you don't take any trouble or risk to get."

I felt very much ashamed.

"Do you think I could get that wallet?" I asked eagerly, thinking of poor Miss Mimble and how glad she would be to have a thousand dollars.

"You took my watch and chain without my knowing it, didn't you? And George le Fay's stick pin and Morgenstein's bank roll; eh, what?"

"But that was only fun!"

"Well, now here's a chance to be in earnest. Will you do it?"

"Yes," I said bravely; but I didn't feel at all brave, I assure you, when I left Hilary behind and started to walk closer to Mr. Yancey.

Of course, I didn't try to do anything while he was just walking; but when he came to Thirty-fourth Street he had to stop for a few minutes because there was quite a jam of street cars, carriages, motors, and trucks — and no end of people were crowded along the curb waiting for a chance to get across. I got close to Mr. Yancey and several times I put out my hand to lift his coat tails — he was wearing a cutaway — but each time I thought everybody was looking at me and I put the hand back in my pocket. Cold chills were running up and down my back; but I knew I wouldn't have another chance as good as this one unless he walked over to Broadway, so when the policeman held up his hand to keep the other vehicles back and beckoned to us to cross, I sort of stumbled against Mr. Yancey as though some one had shoved me from behind, held the pocket open with one hand and slipped the wallet out with the other, immediately running it up my sleeve, as I'd been

taught to do, and putting my hand in my pocket very unconcernedly, although it was trembling like anything.

It wasn't really very dangerous, after all; for in that crowd nobody could see what I was doing and, beside, the whole operation couldn't have consumed ten seconds; and, of course, the way you do it, the person can't feel the thing slipping out.

I was glad I'd done it, afterward, for Mr. Yancey kept on down Fifth Avenue, and I turned west and walked down past the big hotel just as though I owned it. I was very scared, though, and I still imagined people were looking at me.

Hilary caught up with me before I reached Broadway and beckoned to a hansom cab driver, who came up to the curb. Hilary waved me in, and when we were seated held out his hand for the wallet.

"I'll deposit the money and give you my check for the what-you-call-it girl," he said.

Which he did just as soon as we reached home, and he was very nice to me all evening; so was Mr. Axtell, too, who called me "our little hero" and patted me on the head. (Which I wish he wouldn't do, because, as I've told you before, it makes me feel like the cat when her fur is rubbed the wrong way — I know I ought to like Mr. Axtell, but somehow I just can't.) And George le Fay, who dropped in after dinner, listened to what I told him of how I did it, and then shook me by the hand just like he would a grown person, and said:

"As neat a piece of work as I ever heard of. Bully for you, Kid."

And when I carried the check around to Betsy — she says I must call her that, which I have promised to do if she will stop saying ‘sir’ to me — my goodness! I was certainly glad to get out of that place! She just wept and laughed and kissed my hand — that is, until I snatched it away from her — and made me feel awfully uncomfortable. Still, when I left her, I felt sort of warmed up and nice inside and like I do when I read Christmas stories.

I looked in the paper this morning to see if Mr. Yancey had made any complaint to the police about it; but he hadn’t said a single word. I guess a thousand dollars doesn’t make much difference to him, and maybe he thinks it just dropped out of his back pocket. But, for a funny thing, there was another fellow who cashed a check at that very same bank and who lost it while walking down Fifth Avenue. He did make a fearful complaint. I’ll just paste the clipping on here to show you how “coincidency” real life is — even more so than in stories:

“AL” GREEN ROBBED

**PROPRIETOR OF NOTORIOUS
POKER CLUB RELIEVED OF
NIGHT’S BANK-ROLL.**

\$2,500 IN CASH

Albert H. Green, who has figured in the police courts as the president of the notorious Sachem Poker Club where “mixed” gambling was allowed, yesterday appeared, for the first time, as a complainant — a new role for him. He told the lieutenant at

the Tenderloin police station that he had cashed a check for \$2,500 at the Hudson River Bank at half-past two o'clock yesterday afternoon and placed the money in his wallet, which, he discovered on his arrival at his residence, after a walk down Fifth Avenue, had been stolen from him.

He had no theory as to how the thief had managed to secure the wallet, and, as the money was in bills of small denomination, there is little chance of recovering it.

It was presumed, by those conversant in such matters, that the money was intended for use as the night's "bank roll" in another house of chance which Green is said to control.

Green received little sympathy at the hands of the police, who looked on the affair as a case of "the biter bit," in view of the numerous complaints that have been made against Green for "crooked" gambling; it having been alleged that in the Sachem Poker Club he maintained a game of faro bank operated with the notorious "high layout."

I remember George le Fay speaking of this "Al" Green the other night, and saying something about a fellow who was "so mean he wouldn't let you set your watch by his clock" and who was always "skinning his pals." I guess he deserved what he got.

But I don't like that word "thief"; it sounds so low and common — like somebody who sneaks around and does mean things. However, I don't suppose they'll change the English language to suit me; and I guess I'll have to acknowledge to being a — no, I can't write it down.

However, Betsy is provided for, anyhow, and I feel all right. So I don't care what they call me. However, I shouldn't like them to find out, and send me to prison like they did "Rag"—I dreamed about prison last night and it was terrible.

CHAPTER IV
IN MID-ATLANTIC

I

STEPHEN JANISSARY HAS MEMORIES

THE deck steward began to count the change of a louis d'or into the mechanically outstretched palm of the young man in the plaid golf cap.

"Fourteen francs five centimes," he remarked, "and the name, sir?"

Reluctantly, the young man forced himself to remember the existence of the uniformed functionary.

"Here, what's all this?" he asked, regarding the silver in his hand.

"Your change of a louis, sir; the steamer chairs are a dollar for the trip."

"Take it," said the young man. The steward, impressed by such unusual liberality so early in the trip, became eagerly deferential in expectation of future largesse.

"That's all right; quite all right. Now you notice that young lady in the red tam-o'-shanter, steward?"

"Yes, sir."

"Place my chair next to hers."

“Yes, sir.”

The steward started off.

“And, steward ——”

“Yes, sir.”

“Don’t let the young lady think that ——”

“Quite naturally not, sir. But, if you will excuse me — your name?”

“Mr. Adams.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The young man, whistling a lively air, thrust his hands in the pockets of his belted travelling coat and strolled aft, the opposite direction to that taken by the steward. Circling the drawing-room, he strolled forward on the port side, and, again crossing, stood in front of the smoke room, coming within the radius of wind-driven spray that stung his face until it was all a tingle.

For a moment he imagined himself alone; the passengers all seemed an in-doors lot, and those who were possessed of digestions enabling them to remain, had all sought the comfortable starboard side of the promenade deck. But here stood one in magnificent isolation; hands thrust deep into the pockets of a shaggy frieze ulster, an unlighted cigar held stiffly between clinched teeth, and a black hat of velvet velour pulled sharply over fierce eyes that unblinkingly surveyed the lowering sky and churning sea as though their turmoil existed not at all.

First, Stephen Adams’s glance was retained by the stranger’s height; there were not many who measured up to the young man’s shoulder, but this one overtopped him a full inch. Also he gave the impression of enormous bulk, an

impression heightened by the thickness of the frieze garment. Then, too, there was that about him that gave Stephen a mental picture of one who dominated; even a great transatlantic liner seems a toy in a tempest, its passengers impotent pygmies; but this man, somehow, seemed to be allowing the storm to continue only because its duration was a matter of indifference to him.

Withal it was no pleasant dominance. There was a saturnine twist to the fellow's mouth, an ugly brooding about his eyes, as of one who remembered only his enemies, and who, forgetting past victories, only guarded himself against possible defeats in the future: a ruler, in all certainty, but one who loved little and hated much; who seemed resentful that there should be a power greater than he.

Delicate sentiment, inspired a moment before by the girl in the red tam-o'-shanter, faded from the mind of the young man as his impressions of the stranger painted a new picture for him, the contemplation of which resulted in a retrospect of many disagreeable things, followed by a horoscope of others equally unpleasant but deemed inevitable by pessimists following his dangerous calling. Not that the stranger was likely to be connected in any official capacity with the law; policemen, secret-service men, even diplomatic agents — the young man knew them all; the Government could command the services of no man capable of coping with Stephen Adams. Those who had such notable ability fought battles for themselves against the State, not for it.

No — it was but the disagreeable sensation of having come into the presence of one whose sinister personality negated any assurance that he, Stephen Adams, was

cleverer than all the world. It was seldom he met such folk; a success had, so far, always been his. He was one man against all the world — a lone hand that fought and won whenever it had been raised in the cause of the oppressed. Here was a stranger who fought and won, too, but it was as an enslaver; an enemy of the people more powerful perhaps than Stephen was a friend.

So magnetized was the young man's mind to impressions, so necessarily had he developed the sense of the animal that hunts and is, in turn, hunted, that people of strong personalities affected him barometrically. The sense that men concede to women, somewhat superiorly, as "intuition," but which is really that alertness of mind given her to protect her young, was his in a more developed sense.

Thus he viewed the man as an enemy.

Stephen's gaze turned upon him; the telepathic current affected the silent one. The hat of velvet velour bobbed, the head swivelled, the deep sunken eyes met the defiant ones of the tall youth.

The crossing of glances had no such effect as Stephen Adams had contemplated. Braced almost for physical attack, he was surprised to see the other start as one afraid, the action almost equivalent to the throwing of a hand up to guard.

And yet there was no triumph in Stephen's mind; this unexpected eccentricity in no way changed his estimate of the man's malefic worth. It was as though some neutral party had suddenly interfered between armour-girded champions whose swords were about to cross — an accident that neither would be base enough to turn to his own advantage.

The older man spoke, his voice holding some peculiar quality that Stephen knew to be other than fear, but which might have been so classified by one of inferior intuition:

“Do I know you, young man?”

“No, sir.”

The appellation had slipped out. Stephen bit his lip in vexation at his involuntary respect.

“Well, then,” queried the other harshly, evidently recovering his poise, “why are you staring at me?”

“I don’t know,” answered Stephen truthfully.

The other made some untranslatable noise in his throat, his eyes still searching those of the young man.

“You remind me,” he said at length, “of some one. Some one,” he continued, losing himself in retrospection, “who was very close to me — and who — yes — whining, snivelling always — and looking — looking — Eyes! Eyes!”

He turned quickly.

“Eyes, that’s it, eyes!” he said, and stepped forward until there was barely enough room between them to raise a hand.

“Your eyes, young man, have given me an unpleasant memory!”

“I’m sorry,” averred Stephen, although his tone belied his words. “What was it?”

“I don’t know,” answered the other. “Some person had eyes like yours — eyes that I saw every day when I would rather not have seen them. That is the memory.”

And then, suddenly:

“You’re tall, boy!”

“Six feet two!”

"My height at your age — you're about my weight, too. Unusual! I'm tall. I'm not accustomed to being looked squarely in the eyes. You do it!"

He wrinkled his brow again, thinking hard.

"That memory! A damned unpleasant one! What did you say your name was?"

"Adams!"

"American, by your accent."

"I didn't think I had one."

"Ashamed of it, eh? English clothes! I know your brand, boy. Father made money in the United States for his son to spend in Europe and ape these bowing, scraping foreigners — damn 'em!"

"That bowing and scraping," said Stephen, turning cold, "is preferable to profanity and bad manners on short acquaintance."

"Profanity? Bad manners? You mean *me*?"

"Your comprehension is, at least, quick!"

"Why, damn it," said the older man suddenly surprised. "It's almost a pleasure to find some one big enough to insult me. But then," he added, sneering slightly, "you wouldn't be big enough if you heard my name. You'd be like the others then — complaining and yelping like a lot of whipped children and frightened curs when my back's turned; boot-licking when I condescend to notice them."

"Goliath only needed a pebble thrown by an expert hand," said Stephen casually. "And now, since you're been so frankly unpleasant with me, permit me to reciprocate. I find your manners deficient, your egotism amusing, and your companionship a bore. Good day to you, sir."

The other caught his arm as he would have passed him.

"Just a moment," he said, almost pleadingly. "That memory again — odd — odd! Young man," he went on, the appeal gone from his tone, "the end comes when a man begins to forget when he wants to remember. It is only the weak who want to forget. The strong fear forgetfulness. Your name was — Adams?"

"At least," said Stephen, "I find you a man big enough to overlook petty insults to accomplish your ends. This memory you speak of seems to worry you. Can I assist you?"

"I asked you a moment ago if you were American."

"You mean you said something to annoy me. Yes, I *am* American, by education and adoption. I had an English father — he died in India — and an uncle brought me up in New York. I've never met you before, so you can't have any memory that concerns me. Now, if you don't mind ——"

He released the other's grip on his arm so easily that the older man's face again took on a look of surprise.

"You have strength!"

"So I've been told before!"

He paused for a moment, then said with sudden curiosity:

"Your own name?"

"You've amused me, boy," said the other roughly. "Perhaps you'll amuse me again if you don't know my name. Its effect is always the same on men."

Without further words he left Stephen staring and in a state of mind which he found it difficult to explain to himself. He turned his gaze to the storm-swept sea, and, for

the first time, realized that while the colloquy between him and the stranger had gone on he had allowed himself to be thoroughly wetted by wind and spray. Somehow, he found an odd consolation in watching the deck-high breakers through which the ship was fighting its way. He felt that exhaustion consequent upon a physical encounter, yet which only braces the game fighter to enduring effort.

As the ship won its way through the storm inch by inch, an almost personal triumph seemed to come to Stephen. He could defeat this strange fellow, but he must do it as the ship was conquering the battling sea — little by little, backed by an unending store of energy.

Gradually his thoughts went back to the girl in the red tam-'o-shanter; and, taking up the tune he had begun almost where he had left it off, he went below to change to a dryer protection against the chill.

II

DECIMA DURESS

No one would be foolhardy enough to dispute the truism that conventions are — well — conventions; but then it is equally indisputable that boredom is — well — worse than violating the said conventions; and of all places in the world where the first yields to the insufferableness of the second a transatlantic steamer holds the record. Not that Miss Decima was any great stickler, but she liked to excuse herself for putting no obstacles in the way of the young man in the foreign-looking plaid cap who seemed desirous of

getting on good terms with her. Her Continental experience had taught her that foreigners were not as chivalrous as her own countrymen and that, if one wished to retain one's self-respect, one must be very careful about allowing strange young men to open conversations.

However, it was stuffy in-doors, and in the open the gigantic canvas lashed from deck to deck, while serving its purpose of keeping off wind and spray from the passengers huddled up on the starboard side, also kept out light and prevented one enjoying a volume of Mr. Ghent on Socialism; so when the young man dropped into a chair recently placed next to hers and looked agreeably at her, she found it impossible to stare icily.

"It's ——"

"Yes, I know," she replied, disappointed at this conventional beginning.

"Know what?"

"All about the disagreeable weather we're having; also I know what time the ship made yesterday, how many miles, or knots, we're losing by running into this storm, and the approximate amount we'll be late in New York."

"Sorry to contradict you," he laughed, "but I wasn't going to say anything about the weather. When a man lacks the proper credentials for an introduction, he has to do better than that. What I *was* going to say was that I liked being among my own people again."

"Oh, you *are* American, then?"

"Why, yes; couldn't you tell? A man I just met said I had an American accent."

She made a sound to indicate a negative, peculiar to

women, and scarcely expressed by the written, "Imph-un," then surveyed him with the eye of a critic.

"Your clothes are very Bond Street-y and you use stuff to keep your hair smooth; of course that's English. And your accent doesn't help any; it isn't anything in particular."

"So I always thought."

"I'm glad you're American, though," she continued. "because I think I should stop talking to you if you weren't. Foreigners don't understand American girls; they — they take liberties unless you're rigidly orthodox, don't they?"

Stephen Adams rubbed his gloved hands together tentatively.

"Has — er — any one on this boat —"

"Oh, no! — I haven't spoken to any one on this boat except you and the stewards. I've been below with my chaperon and had my meals in our sitting room: she's been quite ill since we left Cherbourg. But then she always goes to bed the minute we get on a ship and stays there till we dock. I'd *never* travel if I were that way."

"All imagination — this seasickness."

"No. I'm sorry to be prosaic, but it's nothing half so spiritual, it's stomach."

"So I think," he agreed laughing. "But I — er — thought maybe 'stomach' might be construed as a liberty."

"Nothing that is true and that comes naturally into the conversation," she said sedately, "is a liberty. I knew a man once who used always to say 'limbs' in front of me and sort of half smile. I always hated that man."

He viewed her admiringly. He had hardly dared hope

for intelligent conversation; she was too pretty, and, though she wore comfortable lounging things, too well groomed. Her wavy black hair was perfectly coifed, her Persian lamb travelling coat form-fitting, and her white stock collar tied as beautifully as even a master of fox-hounds could desire. He had not fallen into the customary error of deeming a pretty woman brainless; but he was aware that pretty women know that men will put up with any sort of conversational silliness or listlessness from them, whereas their plainer sisters must strive to fasten themselves upon the other sex by mental persuasion.

His glance took in the closed book in her lap, but he was prepared even for Ghent after her last remark and evinced no surprise.

"A sane thinker," he remarked. "That is, as sane as any true-blue Socialist can be."

"Now don't you attack Socialism" she said warmly. "I'm tired of people who don't know anything about it saying it's all nonsense. I," she added, with a certain amount of pride, "am a Socialist."

"And so am I, in practice," he said seriously, "but not in theory."

"You mean the other way about, don't you?" she asked puzzled.

"No, I mean just what I say. Most Socialists are only Socialists in theory — not in practice."

"I don't quite understand."

"Well, I'll explain. My income for the past four years has averaged about eighty-five thousand dollars a year. Of this I have given each year seventy-five thousand dollars

to those who needed it more than I did; for I have calculated that I am entitled to ten thousand to supply the various things that are necessities to me."

She regarded him wide-eyed.

"You don't mean it?"

He laughed. "That's the way with you Socialists: the minute a man puts your theories into practice, you look surprised. However, that is just what I *have* done. I've contributed money to people who run free soup kitchens and coffee stands in the winter and who provide ice in the summer and send sickly slum children into the country. I've supported a good many people who were down on their luck, and sent some bright kids to college, and given others enough money to keep them decently while they're learning some useful trade. I — well — what's the use of going into details? I've done that sort of thing with my money; that's all!"

"And yet you don't believe in Socialism?" she asked, too amazed to express her admiration.

"In a way, yes; in another way, no. You see equality is a terrible weapon to put into the hands of people who don't know how to use it."

"Education makes ——"

"You can't educate a born fool into intelligence; you simply graft education upon his foolishness, which makes him twice as bad. I suppose my beliefs resolve themselves into a benevolent autocracy; I think the strong should protect the weak, that's all. Because I'm stronger than you is no reason why I should knock you down and pick your pocket. But that's what our laws permit me to do,

only the strength nowadays is the strength of brain. But as for equality — why, that's the way the rascals get on top. The really great men won't stoop to flatter the prejudices and weaknesses of the brainless, so the unscrupulous get their confidence and use their own votes to rob them. Socialism would be fine if the people would have sense enough to elect the members of the Fabian Society to office, for the Fabians are men who work for the *good* of the people. But, the people laugh at the Fabians and vote for the demagogue who gives them whiskey at election time and kisses their babies. The majority of people are fools; that's true enough, but because a man's a fool is no reason why you shouldn't sympathize with him and help him to have decent food and clothes and a decent place to live in. That's my creed!"

She looked thoughtful.

"It's a very good creed, of course," she said hesitatingly. "But don't you see that puts everything in the hands of the individual? What we want are laws that protect the poor and the foolish."

"Yes," he replied promptly "and the poor and the foolish would, unfortunately, be the first to resent being protected. Oh, you can't tell me anything about Socialism. I'm a Fabian myself and I vote the Socialist ticket — at least I've voted it once — and I've talked with Shaw and Wells and Ghent and all the big brains in the society. They know as well as I do that their general scheme is founded on a fallacy. But they stick to it, just as I do, because it's the best we have."

"What is your solution, then?" she asked.

“Educate the rich to understand that their lives will be twice as happy if they spend them serving others with their brains and their money. And they’re coming around to it every day: there are almost as many rich Socialists as there are poor ones. Look at Carnegie and his coöperative schemes. That’s the sort of thing that helps. You see, we’ve got to make the rich understand that if they don’t play fair with the poor, they’ll have blood-red anarchy on their hands; and what’s the use of having a French revolution every few hundred years? That argument ought to appeal to those who sneer at the first one — my creed — which is helping the poor because it gives you pleasure. But there are some who won’t listen to either; who go on bribing legislatures and senators and aldermen to steal the people’s rights; who put up the price of necessities and legislate high tariff along with it; who debauch our law-makers and public servants with their dirty money and who care for nothing but piling up their damned millions — I beg your pardon ——”

“It isn’t necessary. Go on!”

“Well, those men have got to be taught a lesson; they’ve got to be treated as they treat others. No self-seeker is impregnable. Look at Napoleon! If he’d worked for the people instead of for his own ungovernable ambition, his dynasty would rule France to-day. So with these money thieves — men like J. K. Dwyer, Grant Filliston, F. Jeremiah Uhler, and Stephen Janissary ——”

“Stephen Janissary,” she exclaimed suddenly. “Yes; you’re right. I hate him! He was my father’s partner and he stole almost everything he had. Father died broken-

hearted, and, can you imagine it? — Mr. Janissary insisted on being my guardian and executor because father hadn't changed the will that made him so before he discovered his treachery. And so the half a million that he left is in Mr. Janissary's hands and I don't get anything but the interest until I'm twenty-one. I hate him! He's on board this ship now — the beast!"

"Stephen Janissary on board?" asked Adams somewhat surprised.

"Yes. But he's not with me; believe that. Mrs. Granville Llewellyn is my chaperon. His being aboard is just an accident."

"His name isn't on the passenger list," said Adams. "But then, of course, people like Janissary never register. And so you're — why, you're Miss Duress, then, aren't you? The girl who is building that model tenement on Jonquil Street?"

"I'm not building it," she said mournfully. "I need five thousand more before I can start building. Yes, I'm Decima Duress."

"Decima! That's an odd name; the tenth, eh? Were you the tenth child?"

She laughed. "No, the only one. I was named for my grandmother; she was the tenth. It is odd; the only trouble is they always call you 'Dessie'."

"That's a shame," he protested boyishly, "I shouldn't."

"How we are getting on," she smiled.

"Oh, I beg your pardon."

"First you swear in front of me," she said, shaking her

head. "And now you use my first name on half-hour's acquaintance. 'Liberties' both of them!"

"The — what-you-call-it slipped out," he said, almost blushing. "And I didn't presume to ——"

"Well," she considered "you *may*. That is, if you'll keep your promise. But the minute you say 'Dessie,' you must get very formal again. What's the use of standing on ceremony and being silly? We shall be great friends, I know, and there's no sense in getting used to calling me 'Miss Duress' only to change it after a month or so. But you haven't told me *your* name."

"Stephen Adams."

"Stephen Adams?"

She gasped and sat looking at him.

"Well; this *is* a day of surprises. You mean, 'junior,' of course, though?"

"No, I don't! My father is dead. I'm the only one there is that I know of, although I suppose it's a common enough name."

"But you're so young."

"Yes," he regretted, "I'm not twenty-two yet!"

"And you're the man I'd always pictured as a gray-headed old philanthropist who looked something like Long-fellow's pictures. Why I've read your pamphlet about ten times — that one — 'The Duty of the Superman' — and then — all the beautiful things you've done. Oh, Mr. Adams, I'm so glad to have met you!"

"Stephen," he amended, taking the little outstretched hand which grasped his warmly.

"Stephen," she corrected obediently.

"Why, do you know," she went on, leaning back and admiring him, "for a funny coincidence, I was going to write to you for that five thousand dollars I need to start building my model tenements?"

"The minute you spoke of needing five thousand, I made up my mind to give you my check as soon as we landed in America."

"Oh, no," she protested, "I couldn't permit it, now I know you."

"When you get to know me better you'll say you couldn't *prevent* it," he laughed. "Don't be silly, my dear girl; your tenement idea is just the sort of thing I'd like to have started myself, but I didn't have your social connections to help me raise subscriptions. If you'll allow me to contribute the five thousand I'll take it as a favour."

"It seems like begging," she demurred.

"Only a hypocrite is ashamed to beg in a good cause," he bantered. "And I know you aren't a hypocrite. Hello! here's the afternoon paper. Let's see if anything exciting has happened since we left Cherbourg."

A sailor, bearing an armful of *Wireless Tidings*, the paper printed daily aboard the big ships and containing much stock stuff, more advertisements, and a few thousand words of purser embellished Marconi despatches, was passing, and both Stephen and Miss Duress held out requesting hands. Each was furnished with a copy and turned to the middle of the pamphlet where the news was to be found.

Evidently La Belle France was at peace with itself, for

but one happening bore a French date line. The girl observed the young man laughing quietly as he read it.

“What’s funny?” she inquired.

“Second page of despatches, burglary case,” he answered, still smiling.

She turned a leaf of the pamphlet and read:

NOVEL SAFE-BREAKING

UNSUCCESSFUL PAINTER TURNS BURGLAR

One Hundred and Fifty Thousand Francs Stolen at
Chiermontalem, France

NOTORIOUS LOTTERY-SWINDLER THE VICTIM

On Saturday night last while Paul Ravel, who now occupies the chateau of the Comte de Beaufort at Chiermontalem, above Chantilly, was dining a party of boulevardiers and ladies from Maxim’s and L’Abbaye — the guest of honour being Lotta la Fleur, formerly a celebrated mannequin for Caillot Soeurs, his safe was burglarized and one hundred thousand franc notes taken therefrom along with jewellery valued at more than half that sum.

The ingenuity of the theft lay in the fact that the safe was in the room next to that one in which Ravel entertained his guests, and the burglary was no doubt accomplished while they sat at dinner. A painted drop, accurately representing that part of the room where the safe stood, was left behind, evidently to show Ravel just how the theft had been accomplished. There is no other clue to the perpetrator of the affair.

Ravel was the founder of the notorious Aztec Lottery organized in Flushing which collected some twenty million francs from the peasants throughout France and Belgium, and which, as yet, has failed to explain why those connected with the management drew

all the prizes. He narrowly escaped death at the hands of an angry mob at Longchamps the other day, the opportune arrival of the gendarmes alone saving him.

"I'm glad somebody paid him back" declared the girl, looking up from the paper.

"And *I'm* glad to hear you say *you're* glad," responded Stephen, "which sounds silly, but isn't."

"But I don't quite understand how the thing was done while they sat at dinner — and why this — er — Ravel didn't discover it."

Stephen opened his mouth eagerly, then closed it tightly again, and squinted at the pamphlet, as though holding it at a different angle would assist elucidation.

"Well," he said, finally, "the way I see it is this: suppose this chair I'm sitting in was a safe and you were sitting over there under the drawing-room windows with a lot of shaded lights around, and I put up a screen in front of this chair (which we suppose is a safe). Now this screen I put up is painted to represent the safe and everything that stands around it, and a person looking in from the next room and seeing the picture under the shaded lights would naturally presume it was the safe itself; while all the time a man equipped with burglar's tools would be kneeling behind the safe and drilling it open; those 'petes' — as cracksmen call them — in people's houses are generally very easy to open silently if you use a lot of oil and muffle your tools — at least so they tell me."

"But this screen — it must have been hard to get that in the house, mustn't it?"

“Naturally. That’s why I think that one of Ravel’s guests must have been a confederate. The crowd was out there for the night and had come with bags and things. Probably this painting was rolled up, and — you know those rulers that fold into four or five parts and then lengthen out?”

She nodded.

“Well, the framework was probably carried in that way by the guest who was a confederate, and he slipped down and put up the screen and then gave his ‘pal’ on the outside the ‘office’ to come in and ‘turn the trick’. I’m just using the sort of talk that burglars do. Now do you understand?”

“Of course,” she said, smiling. “How clever! What a pity men with brains enough to think up such a scheme will waste them in being thieves.”

Stephen did not appear to be inclined for argument on this point. He remained silent, presently asked her permission to smoke, and struck a match. As his head was bent over his cupped hands he heard a gruff: “How d’ye do, Dessie,” and looked up sharply from the flaming bit of wood to see the tall, bulky man in the heavy frieze ulster pass on toward the smoke room — the man with whom he had exchanged words and glances an hour before.

He let the match drop from his fingers and twirled the unlighted cigarette for a moment in silence. A vague sense of uneasiness possessed him. He looked at her once or twice before he was able to ask his question, somehow finding suspicions in even so small a matter.

He struck another match first and blew several rings of smoke.

"Who was your friend?" he asked, with a fine attempt at casualness.

"He's no friend of mine," she protested warmly. "I can't help it if I know him. That's Stephen Janissary."

III

MARKED CARDS

When Stephen Adams turned the knob of the door that opened into the sitting room of the suite that he occupied jointly with Hilary Quackenbos he found that the door had been bolted from the inside, and rapped sharply. Hilary Quackenbos, coatless and slippers, admitted him and closed the door in haste, readjusting a wet towel over the keyhole. Stephen sniffed and uttered a noise signifying displeasure.

"At it again, eh?" he said. "It takes all my appetite for my meals away, coming down to change my clothes with you smoking that stuff."

He followed Hilary through the sitting room of the suite and sat down on the bunk opposite. Hilary scrambled back and, placing the pillows so that he might lie on his side, dug out with a long thin piece of steel some chocolate-coloured stuff from an enamelled box and began toasting it over a small filigreed lamp that burned olive oil. At first it gave out a rather pleasant aroma, but when he had rolled it into pills of a conical shape on a clay bowl which was attached to a huge stem of bamboo, and placed one of these cones to an orifice in the bowl — holding it in place with the long steel needle — a smell reminiscent of Chinese

laundries offended the atmosphere. However, it was swiftly swept forth through the open port holes, and Stephen breathed freely again.

"I can't understand your infatuation for that stuff," he complained. "It smells like the devil and it's ruined your career. Why don't you cut it out?"

Quackenbos smiled ironically and put another "pill" in place.

"Stevey, dear old chap," he said, with the air of one ending an argument, "don't rag."

The "pill" having disappeared in smoke, he rested the butt of the bamboo pipe against the bunk.

"It quiets the mind," he said, gazing lovingly at the little box, enamelled in gold and lacquer. "It destroys ambition — that restless ambition that forever keeps a man miserable; it renders a man immune from the petty insults of the world; it soothes, it caresses, and it is good for one who meditates on the follies of others. In fact, dear old chap, don't rag, as I've said before. Have you seen to-day's Marconis?"

"Yes, I have," replied Stephen shortly.

"Dear old Ravel; he was such a howling bounder! It was worth it to endure his society and that of his female friends. 'Pon honour, dear old chap, I felt like saying, 'Let's all go to the trough,' when dinner was announced. If you had heard ——"

"I heard all I wanted to while I was working behind that screen," answered Stephen, making a gesture indicative of the deepest disgust. "Men who can tell such stories as that! And women who can listen to them! Ugh! Mind

you, Hilary, I'm no prude. I don't even set up for a moralist; but Lord! I've got a little æstheticism and I give you my word it was all I could do to keep from getting up from the floor and braining that bald-headed baron with my extension jimmy and boring a hole in Ravel with my electric drill. God! that such beasts should be permitted to live and walk the earth."

He arose and paced the narrow cabin, his hands clinched; presently he sat down and looked at Hilary.

"What's my bit amount to?"

"Counting exchange, we'll have about eighteen thousand five hundred. George's stake should be about a thousand; he's not entitled to it because he didn't do anything, but he's been hustling with us; expenses come to twenty-five hundred at least—well, say fifteen thousand to split clean between us. Of course we can't get rid of the junk for six months."

"I know," said Stephen, nodding impatiently. "Well, I've promised ten thousand to St. Ignatius's Foundling School, so that'll about make it up with the money I've got. But look here, Hilary; I've just gone and promised another five thousand to a Miss Duress for some model tenements!"

"I declare you *are* a mug, dear old chap," said the Englishman, lifting the bamboo stem and scraping at the bowl viciously with the yen-hok. "It's all very well for you to be a philanthropist and get your name in the bally press; but, 'pon honour, it's deucedly silly to tie yourself up with promises until you have the stuff."

"I don't see what you're quarrelling about," said Stephen

ungraciously. "I've made you rich, haven't I? You don't follow my 'silly ass' policy as you call it; you put yours in an old sock and carry it around your neck ——"

"Oh, I say, you know, I do no such bally thing," interrupted the indignant Quackenbos.

"American humour," explained Stephen wearily. "Pardon it. But, as I was saying, I've got to have this five thousand I spoke of."

"Then perhaps you'll find a way to get it."

"Have no bally fear — as you would say. I have."

He took from his pocket a packet of cards which he had purchased a few moments before from the smoking-room steward.

"I shall steam off this seal, prepare some 'strippers,' and, with the assistance of George, proceed to make another wealthy gentleman contribute to a worthy charity against his will."

Quackenbos paused in the act of putting the ivory mouth-piece to his lips and again rested the butt of the opium pipe against the side of the bunk.

"I declare now, dear old boy, this is too vexing; have I overlooked anything?"

"Most decidedly; we haven't got a pack of factory-made cards, not one of the three of us. And as for the passenger list, why, you ought to know people like Stephen Janissary don't register. What are you trembling about?"

"Don't rag, old top, that's a good boy — who?"

"Stephen Janissary!"

The Englishman steadied himself with an effort and held the clay bowl over the flame; but the opium was cold and

broke into little bits. He disguised his agitation under cover of preparing more.

“So he’s aboard, eh?”

“I was talking with him. Now there’s a beast, Hilary! You don’t have to go into any involved arguments to get me to skin him.”

Stephen had drawn some water from the folding wash-hand stand on his left and now placed a silver travelling kettle containing it on the electric heater, an invention installed by the company in the hope that women would cease to use candles to prepare curling irons and thus minimize fire-insurance fees. He turned on the electricity and left the water to boil.

“Awkward not having factory cards,” he said. “Every now and then you get a fellow who knows about the strippers. What’s the matter, Hilary? Stuff giving you a colic?”

“Let me get this correctly: you were *talking to Stephen Janissary?*”

“Hang it all, yes! Got any complaint to make? You’re getting more and more like an old woman every day. We were beastly discourteous to each other, if that does you any good to know. Why shouldn’t I talk to him?”

Hilary forced a laugh.

“Why not, eh? Certainly, why not? Did he ask you any questions?”

“He said I recalled a memory!”

The Englishman started suddenly.

“A memory?”

“Yes, my eyes; he said they reminded him of some one he used to see every day and dislike very much.”

Quackenbos nerved himself and thought rapidly.

“Your father and he were enemies. Did you tell him your father died in India?”

“Yes.”

“But not your name?”

“I said my name was Adams.”

“Stephen Adams?”

“No; just Adams.”

The other breathed a long sigh of relief and took the deferred “pill” in one long draw.

“Never tell him your name is Stephen, my boy, or he’d likely persecute you as he did your father. No, I won’t go into the story: it’s too long and painful. If he insists on a first name — er — use your middle one.”

“I didn’t know I had one.”

“Oh, dear me, yes,” said Quackenbos nervously. “The same as mine — St. Geger; remember, St. Geger?”

“Yes; I saw it in a book of yours once. But about Janissary and my father — tell me!”

“Some day, maybe; not now. Janissary — he wronged him; he — oh, I say, it’s too deucedly harrowing and all that sort of thing. I shan’t tell you, Stevey.”

“You tell me Hilary, or ——”

“Don’t be absurd, dear old boy. You can’t force me, you know.”

“Well, you just wait until you want me to do *you* a favour,” returned Stephen shortly, “and see how quickly I’ll do it.”

He had been holding the pack of cards over the spout of the kettle from which the steam gushed, spurted, and hissed — spout and steam reminding Stephen of a very vicious

little adder, rampant and darting forth a forked tongue. The cabin was now very quiet except for a suggestion of wind and waves outside, deadened by the peculiar construction of the port holes; the sputtering of the opium as Hilary held the bowl over the flames and drew in the smoke; and the kettle's subdued singing. The working of Hilary's wrist as he toasted more of the chocolate-colored stuff threw a shadow on the ceiling that was in all seeming a giant's hand holding a formidable spear on the end of which one imagined the head of an enemy.

The seal disposed of, Stephen came closer to the light of the filigreed lamp, and, taking his travelling bag from under his bunk, opened it, the light gleaming on silver fittings against a field of red morocco. From among them he selected a razor-case and tested one of its ivory-handled contents on his thumb; it proving satisfactory, he shuffled the pack of cards, threw out the aces and queens, and set to work upon them, using the razor blade to shave them delicately along the edges, stripping off the enamel until each card was perceptibly thinned at that point — the queens on the left side, the aces on the ends.

To the average eye there was no change, however; but, to make sure, Stephen dealt out the marked cards among some others and asked Hilary if he could identify them without touching. The overhead lights were switched on and Hilary stared hard, then shook his head.

"Shuffle, then," said Stephen, handing them to him, "and see if you can stack the strippers on top."

Hilary Quackenbos sat up on the bunk and took the pack of cards, shuffling and reshuffling without looking at them,

but feeling for the sharpened edges each time he divided the pack into segments. Finally he dealt from the top four aces and a queen to Stephen, three queens and two low cards to himself.

"They're quite all right, my boy," he said. "Now turn off that beastly overhead light and leave me in peace."

"I must dress for dinner," answered Stephen, replacing the cards in their box and moistening the seal, which he replaced, laying the pack near the steam pipes to dry. "As you have so often remarked, nothing inspires confidence so much as faultless evening dress. People read about it in novels, fall short of it themselves, and greatly admire those who can achieve it. Why don't you put that rotten layout away and dress yourself? For all you know I may need you."

"No jolly fear," returned Quackenbos quickly. "If you can't turn this trick without me it'll go unturned; George is the man to do it. Nobody knows we're acquainted with him. Between you and me it would look like collusion."

Stephen surveyed him with some disgust.

"Am I in the primer class? I don't want you to help. Except you might 'stall' around a little bit and ask me not to play, and deplore the fact that your harum-scarum nephew is making ducks and drakes of his fortune. You're such a distinguished-looking old scoundrel, Hilary, that people would lose money to your nephew just for the pleasure of knowing you."

The younger man had stripped to his underclothes and was now fastening pearl studs in a shirt front of delicate

muslin, down the centre of which ran two tiny ruffles with places between them for three studs. After adjusting the mother-of-pearl cuff links, Stephen laid down the garment and moistened his hair with a preparation that kept it close to his head, gave his finger nails a little attention, and then arrayed himself in evening clothes, unmistakably the work of an artist and worthy of the deftly tied bit of white piqué that went under his poke collar. The buttons of his white waistcoat matched his sleeve links and the clocks on his hose were also white.

He slipped into a loose coat and picked up his cap. Into the pocket of his coat he dropped the packet of marked cards, and went up to the smoke room, deserted at that moment, for most of the men were below preparing themselves for the first banging of the dinner gong. Stephen had a book from the ship's library and he read and smoked until the expected gong sounded; then his ears twitched just a little and he looked up.

Prompt to the minute, for this hour had been agreed upon as their trysting-time when they separated in Paris before taking the boat train down, Georges le Febvre appeared at the door of the smoking room. Stephen put his cigarette in the left corner of his mouth, and Le Fay, gazing wearily around, departed for the deck. Stephen read several pages more before he rose for his ante-dinner stroll. As he walked the starboard side, where the electric lights and the wet flapping canvas combined to remind one of candles and a shroud, his path crossed that of Le Fay, and he dropped the cards into the other man's pocket.

Again they strolled back and forth; other people were

strolling, too, so they passed the second time without either movement or comment; the third time, Le Fay inquired, although his mouth hardly seemed to move:

“Strippers?”

“Yes.”

“After dinner?”

“Yes.”

The length of time necessary for the exit of four bullets from an automatic pistol was about equal to the duration of this conversation. They strolled back and forth several times again, then both repaired to the dining saloon and to different tables.

IV

MR. JANISSARY BECOMES THE ALMONER OF THE POOR

George le Fay's French father would have referred to him as an *artiste*; his Irish mother as a “wicked spalpeen.” As a matter of fact he was neither; only a plain business man who took his profession seriously, supported a wife and three children, who thought he was a cotton-broker, in respectable, middle-class luxury on Riverside Drive, saved his money, and never drank. His creed was that no thief was a clever one if he was caught; consequently he refused all hazardous ventures and trusted no one who was not equally implicated with him. He was clever and he was reliable, but he believed in the superiority of prudence over valour.

As he sat now, in the corner of the smoking room, playing *solitaire* and speaking to no one, he simply radiated bourgeois virtues. His dinner coat was of good material but

cut unfashionably, and he was guilty of that sartorial error, peculiar to the middle classes, of wearing a gray evening tie to match his waistcoat; another solecism was the wearing of his watch chain looped up on the middle button of his waistcoat and dangling the carved head of an animal; and, disdaining pumps or oxfords, he wore stout shoes of vici kid, polished obnoxiously bright.

He did not seem anxious for companionship, and, when a jolly travelling salesman, with a similiar head to his watch chain, suggested a little poker, Le Fay insisted that the stakes be very low.

“Oh, sure; ten-cent limit; just to pass the time away. Come on, Clem!”

“Clem” was the mate for the travelling salesman in everything but height and weight. He looked up hesitatingly at the sign just above their heads:

“BEWARE OF PROFESSIONAL GAMBLERS”

Annoyed, Clem’s companion, in dumb show, indicated the trunkless animal that dangled from Mr. le Fay’s watch chain. The other brightened up, hand-grips were exchanged, and a spirit of confidence pervaded the corner.

The travelling salesman was right. As a member of that particular secret order, Mr. le Fay would have willingly thrust his hand into a blazing fire sooner than take advantage of any confidence it engendered. It was for this reason he wore it, for he knew that otherwise he might unwittingly trick a brother member and he wanted to make no mistakes.

Meanwhile Stephen sat, book in hand, alongside Hilary, who was similarly equipped. Despite the usual opinion that

one with a drug habit such as his is an anæmic person with lack-lustre eyes, Hilary's face was ruddy, his complexion contrasting sharply with his grizzled moustache and hair, both clipped short, and giving him less the look of a scholar than of a retired army officer. He no longer seemed tall, however, for his girth had increased with years. His blue eyes, slightly glassy and with pupils dilated, were the only evidences of his indulgence. His peculiarity in dress was to wear a double length of dress tie about a singularly high collar.

The game in the corner continued for more than an hour without Janissary putting in an appearance in the smoking room. Stephen fidgeted. He was aware of the fact that he was at his best in evening clothes and he yearned to peacock himself in the presence of Miss Duress; but his single-mindedness amounted almost to doggedness, and the most important way to serve her was to remain just where he was.

With Janissary's entrance, the queer qualms that had attacked him before when in the older man's presence again beset Stephen. Janissary stood for a moment, holding back the storm-pushed door by sheer strength, and a wave of cold air caused a majority of those in the smoking room to raise their eyes in deprecation. Somehow, Stephen could not rid himself of the idea that this man Janissary was, to a certain extent, weakened by an enormous vanity like unto that of an actor. Expecting what was technically known as an "entrance" on the stage where he was wont to figure, he involuntarily created one for himself on those stages where he was unknown. Any Achillean spot in Janissary's armour

of invulnerability was a welcome discovery to Stephen Adams. It is a terrible feeling that comes to one who believes, before the battle is on, that he is coping with his master.

Stephen had figured rightly as to the position he should occupy. Janissary came directly to the wood fire that blazed in the great Flemish fireplace, attracted without any volition of his own, as are all men who come from the outside — a streak of the primitive as ineradicable as the desire for food. Though the cold has not penetrated, the fire is there and one comes. So it was that he stood within a foot of Stephen and Hilary, rubbing his gloved hands, and staring down at that which holds the light of all the topazes and rubies in the world.

“Well, why shouldn’t I play cards?” Stephen asked immediately Janissary stood nearby, although apparently oblivious of his presence. “It’s my money to do as I like with, isn’t it?”

“Yes, dear boy,” replied Hilary, taking the cue naturally, his tone becoming as parental as Stephen’s was boyish, “but you’ve got a lifetime before you and no ability for making money. You’re not twenty-two yet and you’ve spent three times what your income should have been since you came into your money this year.”

“Oh, bother!” replied Stephen, “I’ve got to have my fling and I’m going to have it. Don’t be an old woman, uncle. Come on — get into the game! It’s only a little ten-cent limit. Such a fuss over nothing. Why, I couldn’t lose more than fifty dollars at that if I tried.”

Quackenbos shook his head gravely.

"You never stop at any limit, my boy. The minute you begin either to win or lose you want to double the stakes. No, please!" he protested, holding up his hand as Stephen would have argued. "We've gone over this thing a hundred times before. If you insist on playing I can't stop you, of course; but you do so against my wishes and I refuse to abet you."

"Well, I'm going to play," said Stephen angrily. "I'm tired of being treated like a child."

Hilary rose also. His face was regretful.

"Very well, my boy. Good night."

"You aren't going? Stop and watch the game. I promise not to play for more than an hour, then I'll walk up and down with you."

"No. I'll walk now and then turn in. Good night, my boy."

"Oh, go to the devil, then!"

He swung around, as Hilary left him, and his eyes met Janissary's squarely.

"As I thought," the older man sneered. "As I said this afternoon. Some man piled up money for a foolish cub like you to spend."

"That's better than being an old woman," Stephen taunted, "and hiding your money under the bed each night as *you* probably do. I'll bet you never took a chance in your life — got the first dollar you made probably. You're like my uncle — send your bank roll to the cleaner's every month. Why if you took it out I guess a nest of mice would jump out of it."

"You impudent whipper-snapper!" choked the older man.

Even to articulate the three words was an effort that brought out purple veins in his forehead.

"Tell me the equivalent of that for a man of your age and I'll reciprocate," said Stephen coolly. "I've as much right to insult you as you have to insult me. Just because you older men don't care to risk your money — or are afraid to do it ——"

"Afraid, you cub! Afraid of what?"

"Why, of losing it, of course? Well, that's no reason why you should grudge us young fellows our fun. I *like* to risk my money; like to take a chance. While you ——"

"Why," said Janissary slowly, "you amuse me, boy. So young, so uninformed. I have risked more money than you could count if you began now and spent the month counting. Afraid of losing? Me? Afraid?"

"Well; no offence taken ——"

"You deserve to have a lesson taught you," said the older man, "and, as I've nothing better to do, I've a mind to teach it to you."

"Well, then, teach it," said Stephen recklessly. "But remember I'm pretty well able to take care of myself. I'm going to play. Good night."

"Not so fast. I'll play with you. Have you some cards?"

"There's a game going on over there. We'll join them. I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to say anything insulting, but you started it, you know."

"Never mind," said the other, closing his lips tightly. "No man has ever dared to speak to me as you've done, boy! I don't forget things like that!"

"Well, forget it for the time if you're going to play,"

answered Stephen lightly as he led the way across to the corner where George le Fay sat with 'Clem' and his friend.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen ——"

George le Fay looked up inquiringly.

"We'd like to sit in the game if we may ——"

Le Fay arose and bowed.

"The more the merrier," he said with a heavy attempt at raillery. "Won't you sit down?"

One of the stewards busied himself pushing two wicker chairs forward. The travelling salesman and Clem eyed the newcomers suspiciously, evidently searching for more reassuring watch charms. As Janissary took off his frieze coat, however, surrendering it into the steward's hands, the sapphire that he wore in his black four-in-hand — for he had not found it necessary to don evening dress — reassured Clem, who was a buyer for the leading jewellery house in Muncie, Ind., and Stephen's pearls and waist-coat buttons crushed any lingering suspicion, for Clem was one of those simple-minded men who deem a dangerous woman one with a painted face, and picture a suspicious man as either masked or wearing a policeman's moustache, an assortment of glittering solitaire diamonds, and having an eye that forever seeks the ground.

"Ten-cent limit, you know," warned Le Fay, as Janissary after glancing at the hand dealt him, suggested opening "the pot" at something like fifty times that sum.

"Oh, absurd!" said Janissary rudely and threw down his hand. Clem, his suspicions returning, took out his watch and fingered it nervously.

"We'll have to be going, I guess, Ed," he suggested to the travelling salesman, his eye conveying a warning. Ed promptly threw down his cards and winked hard in Le Fay's direction, for he, too, had brotherly feelings toward one who wore a watch charm similiar to his own.

"Don't break up the game," urged Le Fay, as both the men got to their feet.

"Certainly not," said Janissary. "I didn't mean to break in on you. But such child's play as the figure you name, it's absurd. I wouldn't waste my time!"

The travelling gentlemen quailed under his eye, and, murmuring their excuses again, turned in their chips to Le Fay, who paid them off, finding himself something out of pocket by the transaction.

"Sorry you're going," he said politely, and, as they turned away, he smiled a little at Janissary.

"Well, I've got to get twenty-five dollars out of somebody, and it might as well be you gentlemen."

He handed the cards to Janissary, who, scowling at Stephen, cut and shuffled with painstaking accuracy, and dealt a hand around the table. Le Fay placed ten dollars' worth of chips at his elbow.

"Whites five, reds ten, blues twenty-five," he said, and pushed another pile across to Stephen.

"Dollars?" sneered Janissary at Stephen.

"As you like," the younger man gave him back defiantly.

"Hold on a minute, gentlemen," said Le Fay. "You two may be millionaires. I'm not. I can't play in any such game as that."

"If you want to play ten-cent limit ——"

"I'm willing to go higher than that," answered Le Fay, apparently a little ashamed. "But not as high as you suggest. Make the whites a dollar, the reds five, and the blues twenty-five if you like. That suit you?"

He turned to Stephen.

"Anything goes with me," said the young man.

"And you, sir?"

"It'll have to do if you won't play higher," growled Janissary. "Any one open? No? Your ante, sir. A dollar. All pass? Sweeten it, a dollar each."

He handed the cards to Le Fay, who cut and shuffled with deliberation. He dealt the aces to Janissary and kept the queens in the pack.

"Twenty-five dollars; cost you twenty-five to come in. What? No one playing?"

Stephen and George shook their heads and Janissary gathered in what was in the pot.

The game wore on, an affair almost as mechanical to Stephen and Le Fay as an engineer's job becomes to a seasoned veteran. As Le Fay was the owner of the cards, it was part of the system that he should lose heavily to Stephen. They kept Janissary neither winning nor losing, sometimes dealing him a hand which enabled him to speak of preposterous raising, and then dropping out and allowing him to take the antes and "sweetenings" as before.

Half an hour later, when the pack had circled the table twice without an opener, George le Fay winked ever so slightly at Stephen Adams.

It was a pleasure for a professional to watch George work. He was what is colloquially termed a "drop dealer," holding

the pack high in air and allowing the cards to flutter from the bottom as his wrist circled the table, and, when he desired to deal from the top, disguising his movement with a down flop which had wrung admiration from those who had dealt a living to themselves from the pack before George's eyes were opened to the world.

Stephen received the aces, Janissary the queens. George, with a disgusted look at his hand, tossed his paste boards into the discard.

"It will cost you, boy," said Janissary, glancing at Stephen malevolently, "just one hundred dollars to draw cards."

"I see that hundred and raise it a couple hundred more," said Stephen airily, pushing forward all the chips he had and requesting more from Le Fay, the banker. Janissary, silently, made the same request. Le Fay inquired the amounts desired.

"A thousand will do."

"And you, sir?"

"Same here," said Stephen.

"Oh, you intend to bluff it out, eh?" asked Janissary.

"Call it what you like. At all events you can't bluff *me*. What are you doing?"

"Seeing that two hundred of yours and going you five hundred better," replied Janissary, as he received the new pile from Le Fay. "Anything to say?"

"Going you five hundred better still, that's all."

Janissary looked at him a little uneasily.

"Five hundred to call," he said. "Dammit," he added vexedly as Stephen turned up his cards, "I might have known you wouldn't have the nerve to bluff."

"I'll see your openers, please," remarked Stephen pleasantly, as he raked in his winnings.

"Four queens," glowered Janissary, showing them, and then, gathering up the cards, for it was his turn to deal, he tossed them into a cuspidor that stood nearby.

"Steward," he called, "bring a new deck."

"Superstitious?" smiled Stephen, who was counting his chips and finding himself wealthier by nearly twelve hundred of Janissary's dollars. But the smile was a forced one, for, though the system of signals between George and himself was perfect enough to utterly defeat Janissary in the long run, it was not nearly so easy as working with the "strippers" which now lay at their feet.

Janissary broke the seal on the new deck, signed the steward's check with his room number, and threw the empty packet on the floor. He dealt carefully, wetting his lips, and occasionally biting them.

In the hands that followed, luck seemed to be with him, for he relieved Stephen of a few hundred of his winnings. It was impossible to "stack" with unidentified backs and neither of the two held particularly good hands. On the sixth hand, however, while Janissary gazed at his cards, Stephen blew two rings of smoke out of the right side of his mouth. To his surprise Le Fay did likewise, a signal that each held a pair of kings. George, who was the dealer, immediately declared himself out of the game, and, when dealing the cards to both Janissary and Stephen, managed to palm his own pair of kings into the pack and let Stephen have them. He laid down his hand, and, leaning back, lit a cigar.

“Out of it?” asked Janissary.

Le Fay nodded and reached across the table for a second match, glancing at Janissary’s hand as he did so, but so quickly that the millionaire had no notion that he had seen it. Le Fay leaned back a second time and stroked his moustache three times, the “office” that Janissary was happy in the possession of a trilogy of tens.

“Can you open?” asked Stephen.

“For five hundred,” answered Janissary viciously.

“See and double it,” responded Stephen.

“See you and treble it!”

“See that and raise you five hundred!”

“Boy, are you a fool?”

“What’s the matter? Lost your nerve?”

Janissary’s teeth came down on his lower lip. He did not ask Le Fay to give him checks now, for there were hardly enough checks in the box, at the value placed upon them, to cover the sums wagered.

“Are you keeping track?” he inquired.

Le Fay showed him pencil and paper.

“Very well, then,” said Janissary grimly. “Just put this down.”

He drew a pocket-book from his inside coat pocket and a fountain pen from his waistcoat. With some trouble he produced a check from a Paris banking firm for twenty thousand francs, stuck it under Stephen’s nose, and laid it on the table.

“That goes in addition,” he said. “Now, boy; can you match it?”

“If you give me time to write one!”

"How do I know if it's worth anything?"

"How do I know yours is? I'll see and call you and write my check now."

"Got that down?" Janissary asked Le Fay. "He calls me for an equal amount. Well, that's what you've got to beat!"

Stephen laughed as he saw the tens.

"It's easy enough to beat that," he replied. "I thought you had a full house or a fours at least. How do you like my little pets?"

Both men became aware of evil creases about Janissary's forehead and ugly lines about the mouth. He picked up the cards, and, shuffling them slowly, put on his gold-framed eye-glasses and held each card up to the light.

"See that sign above you?" mocked Stephen. "It's an easy way to get out of paying. A favourite trick with welchers. I expected as much from you when I sat down to play."

George le Fay suddenly struck the table with his fist.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Look at the way he's examining the cards? Can't you guess what he's thinking?"

"You mean ——"

"Looks like it!"

"Well," said George le Fay with dignity, "perhaps I can assist the gentleman. Sir," he addressed Janissary, "permit me; a jeweller's glass."

He gave him a rubber-mounted magnifying lens which he took from his trousers pocket.

"I use that when I buy gems. I'm just as anxious as

you are to know about these cards. I'm afraid I've won something and I'd rather you'd be perfectly sure before you pay me."

"I wasn't thinking of you," snapped Janissary,

"Then, for my sake," implored Stephen, "take his magnifying glass and make sure! That's the worst of playing with strangers," he added to Le Fay. "If you lose *you* have to pay; and if you win *they* think you're cheating. Fine sportsmanship!"

Janissary banged the pack on the table.

"Here," he said, "I've had enough. Cash in!"

"Of course, if you can't afford it ——" Stephen began in a milder tone.

"When you're as well able to afford it as I am, my boy," said Janissary, roused to a pitch of superlative exasperation, "you may gamble in millions, not thousands."

Stephen picked up the check, reading the name aloud:

"Oh, Janissary? Stephen Janissary, eh? Well, you *can* afford it. Endorse it to Ste — to S. St. Geger Adams, if you please. Thank you. *Saint Geger*, yes. And now, if you'll lend me your pen, I'll show you I have no intention of putting this money to my own uses. There!"

He wrote in the name of Decima Duress and held the bit of paper under the older man's gold-rimmed eye-glasses. The taunt in Stephen's tone brought a burning red to Janissary's cheeks.

"Your money's only good enough to gamble with, eh? But mine's tainted I suppose; going to charity; is that it?"

With his words, the last bit of self-control left Stephen.

He had acted before, mocked this man for a purpose; but now it seemed that the fellow was utterly without good; that even the generous impulse of a young spendthrift was worth only a careless sneer. Rage, that was half hate for Janissary's evil and half because his strength had chilled Stephen's courage, now possessed the younger man, and he leaned across the green-topped table, his clinched fist striking it time and time again.

“Exactly, Mr. Janissary, exactly. Your money *is* tainted — the blood-money of labourers who sweat twelve hours a day for you -- the stolen money of little shopkeepers whom you've sent to the morgue — the virtue-wrung money of their daughters whom you've driven to the streets and the brothels — the burial money of the weak, the fools, and the damned. Tainted money, *you thief* — yes! Money with the curse of death on every dollar! And it *is* going to charity, Mr. Janissary; yes, by God, it *is*!”

CHAPTER V

THE NEW FRANKENSTEIN

I

AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS

CANBY KERNAHAN did not covet the assignment that had the solving of the Vaughan jewel robbery for its desideratum. He had served his apprenticeship as police reporter in another town and, when relieved of the obnoxious task, had remarked that as a man must be either flint-hearted or consistently miserable to adequately "cover" this work and, as he envied neither state, he would never under any circumstances take such a position again. Since his arrival in New York — to which city he had been lured by an editor who admired his signed, provincial work — he had sat in his own private room, and twisted semi-facts into those pleasant fictions, agreeably illustrated, which are known as Sunday stories.

But, when a woman places her jewels on her dressing table, turns to open her safe, and then reaches for her jewel box, only to find it gone; when the thinnest kind of a rope is found attached to a cornice of a house next door and within that rope is concealed a piano wire that would bear the weight of a baby elephant yet could be rolled up and put into a man's pocket without spoiling the shape

of his coat; when the amount of the robbery aggregates close upon a quarter million of dollars, and the lady's husband has sworn to apprehend the thief if it takes all the profits of the Flour Trust, of which he is the head, for a year — yes, even if he must again decrease the size of the poor man's loaf of bread to make it up — then indeed the matter becomes worthy of a higher-salaried man than the ordinary police-reporter, and Canby Kernahan, weaving romances in his mind, was detailed to the work.

So, for the first time, he made his way through foul, ill-smelling Mott Street, past those rabbit warrens called tenements; and came to the building — ugly as crime itself — where kept vigil those whom the State had entrusted with the power to protect its citizens against malefactors who live to steal and to bear false witness, to forge, to blackmail, and to kill; and who, far from fulfilling their trust, kept that same vigil with but one eye open and that one upon "the main chance."

The building gave that impression, too; it had none of the unbribable majesty of power, the grim unalterableness of that which is the law; rather did it impress Kernahan as the abode of little men with ugly souls who threatened with weapons that bigger men had purchased and put in their hands; and who were forever wary, with the fear upon them that these bigger men might turn from their bigger businesses, see, become enraged, and, with the placid anger of the mighty, tear them from their prey as the eagle snatches the fox whose sharp teeth are already upon the rabbit.

Kernahan entered the building by the Mott Street door, which was the rear one, and passed into an atmosphere

where domination was visualized in brass; brass buttons everywhere except where there were brass railings. Kernahan's addressal of a tobacco masticator was inept, in that his shy politeness was construed as timidity into which is read in the mind of every constabulario fear of punishment resulting from guilt.

"Th' Chief's busy, now. What cher wanta see him about?"

"I am Mr. Kernahan. I'm in charge of the Vaughan robbery story for my paper."

The mention of the daily that he represented — one opposed to ordinary police methods and quick to uphold its staff in any disagreement — had its effect upon the man of the frequent expectorations and was productive of a haste which had its duplicate in the attitude of the official into whose presence Kernahan was speedily ushered.

"I hear you've got the man who robbed Mrs. Vaughan?" said the reporter, after refusing the usual thick cigar and exchanging the banal courtesies consequent upon a man's introduction of himself.

The Chief of Detectives — a thin, nervous fellow with an eye that strove to be inscrutable and which only succeeded in being theatrical — nodded in a self-satisfied manner.

"Sure," he replied. "We've got him. Now maybe your paper will stop hollering about the inability of the police to get crooks. This is the biggest deal pulled off this year and we nabbed the fellow two days after he turned the trick. Pretty good, I call it."

"I agree with you, Chief. May I ask: Have you also got the ——"

"The stuff? Naw, not *yet*. But we'll *get* it!"

"May I ask how do you know you've got the right man?"

"How do I know? Now listen, Mr. Kernahan, you're new to this game; don't go gettin' the idea that we're a lot of boneheads. It's easy enough to sit in a newspaper office and tell us how to do our work; but it's *our* work and we know more about it than you do. Your paper now ——"

"But — so many robberies this year, Chief. Big ones, too, and not a single conviction."

"Conviction?" snarled the policeman. "There'd a bin plenty of convictions if those silk-stockin' guys from up town 'ud kept their hands off. We made the pinches, all right."

"Yes, but the alibis; the witnesses ——"

"Aaw, hell! I can alibi you out of anything for ten dollars. Not worth a busted night-stick ——"

"Or a policeman's oath," smiled Kernahan, looking him squarely in the eye. "May I see the prisoner, Chief?"

He picked up his soft hat and stood awaiting permission. The policeman's tone took on a pleading note.

"Aaw hell! What for?"

"I'd like to hear his story."

"You don't think he'll tell you the truth?"

"It isn't that, but we can't be one-sided."

"I'd rather you didn't see him to-day, Mr. Kernahan."

"I'm sorry, Chief, but that won't go with my city editor. He gave me orders to see Mike. You understand my position?"

The inscrutableness which the Chief of Detectives affected — an imitation of which can be assumed by any one who will bring together his eyebrows and look up from under them — now disappeared entirely. He broke the silence of a moment of thought by striking a bell and directing the policeman who answered it to fetch Lieutenant Kneebreeks. Evidently the lieutenant was within easy hailing distance, for he answered the summons almost immediately, his heavy frame, broad shoulders, and Indian-like face seemingly cast-iron in its immobility — a menace to those in the shadows of life.

"This gentleman," said the Chief, indicating Kernahan, "is connected with ——" He mentioned Kernahan's paper. "He wants to see *your* prisoner."

"Which one?" asked Kneebreeks, who found it politic to be pleasant to newspaper men, and, if possible, to indulge in some pleasantry of which this was a sample. "Have to be specific, Mister, when you spring a thing like that on me."

"Sheeny Mike."

"Oh!"

There was an exchange of meaning glances between Chief and lieutenant which they were fatuous enough to believe escaped Kernahan entirely.

"Oh, sure," said Kneebreeks, slowly.

"Up here, of course," added the Chief.

"Oh, sure."

He turned to go. Kernahan arose.

"Where are you going?" asked the Chief, also rising.

"Why, down to the cell with Lieutenant Kneebreeks."

"I'm going to bring him up here, young fellow," explained Kneebreeks, controlling his temper with some difficulty. "Although I can't see *why* you want to see him. He's confessed; wrote it all down how he done it. The Chief's got it; all written out it is."

"So we heard," said Kernahan. "That's why I want to see him. No use bringing him up here."

"Please sit down, Mr. Kernahan, and let Lieutenant Kneebreeks go. Our time is limited!"

"Anybody 'ud think," he added, as Kernahan reseated himself reluctantly and the door slammed behind the lieutenant, "anybody 'ud think that you imagine Kneebreeks is going to threaten him or something. That's just the wrong idea you fellows get about us. Why Kneebreeks is as tender-hearted as a baby. You don't know Kneebreeks."

"No, I haven't that pleasure," Kernahan admitted.

"Here's 'Sheeny Mike's confession if you want to read it."

He handed Kernahan a sheet of fool's-cap covered with typewriting and protected from dirt by a blue backing fastened to it with a brass tack.

"Why," said Kernahan, gazing in surprise, "what's this?"

He pointed to the bottom of the sheet.

“‘Sheeny Mike — his mark,’” translated the captain. “Can’t write you know.”

“Can’t write! But, Chief, surely you don’t believe that a man who can’t write was capable of framing up such a gorgeous robbery? Why, first they had to ‘sound’ the house and find that every window and every door — except those opening on the air-shaft — was provided with a burglar-alarm. They had to know also that Mrs. Vaughan’s safe was provided with an electric buzzer that went off the moment any one not provided with the proper combination attempted to touch it.

“Why, you’ve already caught four ‘pete-men’ who attempted to drill the safe, caught ’em redhanded — the best ‘petes’ in the country. This thief must have studied the thing out like a problem in chess: had to know the construction not only of Mrs. Vaughan’s house but of the two houses on either side of it; he had to get on the roof of the Croysmith’s house, probably, and watch Mrs. Vaughan retiring for several nights, before he found what she did with her jewels, and then, best of all, had to invent this piano-wire rope to hold him—an ordinary rope would have to be about as thick as a cable to do the same job. And then you tell me that this thing was accomplished by a man who can’t even write his own name?”

“He did the ‘tooling,’” replied the Chief, turning sullen. “Of course the trick was turned by a mob—we know that as well as you do.”

Kernahan read the confession aloud:

“I, Michael Kornatowski, alias ‘Sheeny Mike,’ having been duly sworn, do declare of my own free will and without coercion of any kind, that I am guilty of the crime of feloniously entering the house of Henry K. Vaughan at 0376 Fifth Avenue, New York City, on the night of December 15, 19—, and removing therefrom gems and other personal adornments valued at \$237,500. So help me God.”

“As clear as mud,” commented Kernahan, handing it back. “It gives the public many interesting little details it would like to know, as, for instance, how he managed to ‘feloniously enter’ that house, how he ‘removed therefrom’ the amount he speaks of. Not very lucid, Chief.”

It was spared the Chief any tax upon his mentality to answer Kernahan’s objections, for, the door opening at that moment, a cowering figure was pushed in, the pusher following in the person of Lieutenant Kneebreeks.

Kernahan took a careful look at the prisoner — a poor weak creature with the mark of the tenements upon him — white, pinched face, skinny hands, hunted, harassed. Obsequiousness was in the very shape of his back, servility in the movement of his nail-less fingers, and sheer horror in his every gesture.

“Now, Mike, speak up!” said Kneebreeks, in a tone peculiarly low but holding a malefic quality. “This gentleman here is a newspaper guy. He wants to know who made that there touch up to Vaughan’s.”

If fright were to be reckoned a concomitant of peccancy then indeed was “Sheeny Mike” blood-guilty.

"Come on. You better tell the truth now. Who done it?"

Kneebreeks caught the bony shoulder nearest him in a predaceous grip.

"Who done it? Come on, now!"

"I—I done it," whimpered the man. "I ain't said I didn't, have I? I done it. Sure I done it!"

Kneebreeks snatched up his confession and thrust it into the prisoner's hand.

"That's yours, ain't it? Come on, now; tell the gentleman!"

Without even glancing at the paper, the man nodded vehemently.

"Come on; speak up. It's yours, ain't it?"

"Yes, sir; yes, Mr. Kneebreeks, it's mine!"

"*Lieutenant* Kneebreeks, you ——"

"Sheeny Mike's" eyes rolled in terror.

"'Scuse me, Lootenant; Lootenant was what I meant."

"Be more careful. You turned that trick and you signed this paper; that's what you want this gentleman to know, ain't it?"

"Yes; yes, sir!"

Kneebreeks viewed Kernahan triumphantly. The reporter's eyes wandered to those of the Chief, who had resumed his inscrutable gaze. Kernahan shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all you wanted to know, Mr. Kernahan? Well, then, Kneebreeks, I guess ——"

The policeman on duty outside the door opened it. The Chief frowned at him.

“I can’t help it, sir. It’s that Mr. Adams again.”

It now appeared as though the Chief had never had any inscrutableness. He took the deep breath of a helpless child. Kneebreeks’s face purpled.

“He can’t come in — not now,” said the Chief faintly.

“I’m sorry, sir. He’s just behind me. Oh — certainly; yes, sir.”

The latter portion of his speech was due to the fact that he was suddenly pushed aside and a young man of generous proportions — withal of a slenderness sufficient to present a good appearance in a smartly cut morning-coat — entered the room and saluted the Chief with a movement of his malacca stick.

“That’ll be all right,” he assured the guardian of the door, who, staring helplessly, looked to the Chief for his orders. He received an angry nod and the door closed.

Stephen Adams, while waiting for some one to speak, leaned over and breathed the perfume of the bud-rose which he wore in the lapel of his coat. As no one seemed desirous of breaking the silence, he took that upon himself also.

“I love flowers,” he said. “When I was little, I seemed to remember flowers growing all around me; although my uncle says that must be my imagination. But down in this quarter I find life simply unsupportable without them. Ever hear the story of the French noblewoman who carried a rose with her while they were driving her to the guillotine so she could keep off the smell of the sweating mob who were crying for her blood? I’m like that too.”

“Any time we’ve nothing better to do, we’ll be glad to hear you lecture on botany, Mr. Adams,” said the Chief, with heavy irony. “But, just now ——”

“Oh, but I didn’t come down here to lecture about flowers — oh, dear, no! I’ve got something of vastly more importance — (confound those English expressions: I pick them up so easily) of *much* more importance, I should have said. You know, you people are so infernally careless about arresting other people. I have to be on hand all the time to see you don’t make any mistakes. And our dear little friends, the criminals, they are so vastly obliging — good-natured little things — they want to help you out of your troubles so much that they’ll even go to jail to please you. I’ve come to see ‘Sheeny Mikc.’ Where is he?”

A silence almost visible in its concentration fell upon the room. The prisoner, crouched against a chair, did not even raise his eyes, knowing that if he did so he would but meet the baleful gaze of Kneebreeks. So oppressive was the feeling engendered by the basilisk thought centralization of the lieutenant and his superior that Kernahan found some difficulty in voicing the simple statement:

“There he is.”

“Why, thank you, sir,” said Stephen in genial surprise, and searched him with his eyes, discovering the inevitable folded sheets of copy paper thrust into a side pocket. “Oh, a newspaper man. . . . My name is Adams—Stephen Adams ——”

“Stephen Adams?”

Kernahan’s eyes lighted with genuine pleasure.

"Well, I'm sincerely glad to meet you — really sincerely. I've written a lot about you, Mr. Adams, but never had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"Oh," deprecated Stephen, blushing a little, "you fellows are too kind to me. I'm afraid I'm a little spectacular; there are lots of people doing more than I am."

"On this case? Vaughan robbery?"

"Yes. Are you interested?"

"In a way. I want to see justice done. This poor devil——"

He indicated the prisoner rather contemptuously — "*could* about steal a door mat with 'Welcome' on it, or a few milk cans, or maybe some plumbing out of an empty house. The Vaughan robbery loses all its dignity by being fastened on him."

"Fastened!" repeated Kneebreeks slowly.

Stephen nodded.

"Can't you see," he said, slapping the lieutenant on the shoulder. "The fellow's ambitious. He wants to get out of his class and work with a swell mob. And, of course, Lieutenant," he burlesqued, again slapping Kneebreeks's shoulder, "he wants to stand in with you — do you a good turn as it were. He knows these are cold days for a plain-clothes man to be out working and, anyhow, he probably calculates to be warmer in jail than he would be outside. He has a lot of reasons for confessing. Come here, my boy!"

He addressed the prisoner, who remained motionless, his eyes swivelling from Kneebreeks to the Chief. Kneebreeks crossed between him and Adams, his great bulk interposing

with seeming effectualness. Stephen disregarded his action.

“You — Mike!” he said. “Come here!”

The prisoner retained his pitiful motionlessness.

“Why,” rallied Stephen scornfully, “be a man, Mike! No? Well, then, if you will pardon me, Lieutenant.”

With a shoulder grip and a backward motion as graceful as it was difficult, Stephen removed Kneebreeks from his path, and shook the prisoner vigorously. Mike uttered a little scream, and went down on his knees.

“Poor *devil!*” said Stephen shaking his head; then he turned sharply to the Chief:

“Discharge him. He’s no more guilty than you are. I’ve got the keeper of the ‘rope house’ where he slept all that night; also three ‘ropers’ who remember him being there at twelve o’clock. Mrs. Vaughan didn’t get away from the opera until 11:25, according to her own statement; the supper at Canary’s afterward lasted until one; so she couldn’t have been home until a quarter after at least. Now these men I’ve got outside are prepared to swear that ‘Sheeny Mike’ was sound asleep long before that hour. Better let him go before I take the thing before a judge and make you look ridiculous again; you know how I hate doing that. Shall I have them come in?”

“How about this here signed confession that he done it?” asked Kneebreeks, whose colour remained apoplectic through the strain of keeping his temper. Stephen took the blue-backed paper and glanced at it; then laughed.

“That’s the answer,” he replied, pointing to the prisoner who was still on his knees. “I guess the least said about this confession the better, don’t you? I’d conveniently lose it if I were you. But come, I’ve wasted enough time, gentlemen. My valet has the witnesses outside. Shall they come in?”

“Kneebreeks,” said the Chief, drawing the other aside, “I think — I think that——”

“Think nothing,” Kneebreeks whispered back. “We’ve got it on him. I told you he’d about butt in. We’re framed for him this time. Don’t back down, Chief. Tell him.”

The Chief resumed his seat and stared fixedly at the floor for a sufficient length of time to twist his features into his usual steady frown. He seemed to be contemplating the aspects of affairs of great moment, giving them earnest and thoughtful consideration.

“Some one,” he said, finally, “is a perjurer. Now we happen to have two witnesses ourselves. Both of them declare that ‘Sheeny Mike’ made a statement to them that he had been ‘trailing’ Mrs. Vaughan for days and that he was all ‘prepped’ to turn this particular trick. Their sworn statements — taken in connection with this man’s confession, which is also sworn — make the evidence against him so strong that I’m afraid we’ll have to let you take your disreputable lodging-house keeper and your bums before the judge, who will decide whose case is the stronger — yours or that of those hopeless incompetents — the police!”

He had so far regained his spirits as to attempt irony —

a manner he affected with those who were bound to show visible signs of appreciation or who were too dependent upon his mercy to forget to laugh in the proper place. His sanguineness of manner increased when he noted that Stephen Adams appeared to be crestfallen.

"Have you—have you really got witnesses who will swear that?"

"We have, Mr. Adams," Kneebreeks answered for the Chief. He had lost his apoplectic hue and spoke in important tones, as one who doles out valuable words sparingly.

"Oh!" said Stephen blankly, and then, brightening up a bit, added: "Oh, stool-pigeons, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Adams," monotoned the Chief. "Much as I admire your courage, I regret your conventional methods of deduction. If you will glance at these sworn statements and note the names, you will observe that they are not those of 'stools.'"

Two folded blue-backs, similar to the confession in form, were struck open by the man at the desk, placed together and handed to Stephen, via Kneebreeks. He studied each one carefully; for a single moment he wrinkled his brow in thought; then, again smiling, and, this time ignoring the policemen, he addressed Canby Kernahan.

"Old man, you want a good story for your paper, of course?"

"Surest thing you know."

"Come along with me, then; I'll give you a pippin; one that will probably result in there being a new Chief of Detectives; and, incidentally, in the transfer of Lieutenant

Kneebreeks back to 'harness,' with a station somewhere in a lonely part of the Bronx. Good-day, gentlemen. Don't be afraid, Mike; don't imagine you're going to get the worst of it. When to-morrow's paper comes out you'll be a prisoner only a few hours longer. Again, gentlemen, good-day!"

Linking his arm in that of Canby Kernahan, Stephen Adams pushed open the door. The Chief cast a look of piteous appeal at Kneebreeks, who winked reassuringly; but his superior was not the lieutenant's equal in fortitude, and before the newspaper man and his cicerone had passed out he recalled them both in tones that were decidedly weak.

"What did you mean by that, Mr. Adams. That there would be a new head to the Detective Bureau? That——"

Kneebreeks, disgusted, turned his back. Stephen addressed Kernahan:

"Will you give me your word not to print a line of what I am going to say if they release this poor devil immediately? Come, man, you're a human being first, a reporter afterward. If the police throw down their hand," he added in a tone inaudible to the others, "there's no use in crowing over them in the papers. Will you just say that 'Sheeny Mike' was released for want of sufficient evidence?"

The last sentence was delivered in his normal tones. Kernahan made a gesture of annoyance, but Stephen did not give him time to object.

"I'll give you my personal help on the story — the real story if you do."

"Oh, very well," replied Kernahan resignedly.

"Although if my city editor knew what I've passed up, I'd get the blue envelope sure! Go ahead, though: I promise!"

"Thanks, old man. Well, then, gentlemen, the names of the two men signed to those statements are those of members of 'Chicken' McGuimp's 'gang.' And, since reading them, I have suddenly realized why you let 'Big Harry' and 'Nigger Jake' go on that charge of beating up Xavier McMillan's ex-coachman the other night. I know McMillan hired those two men to go as close to murdering that coachman as they could without actually stamping out the last breath of life; he's in Rose Hospital now with five ribs broken, a gouged eye, and six teeth gone, and without a single doubt those two fellows did it. I wondered why they were turned loose the next day; now I understand perfectly; and the readers of this man's paper will get my ideas to-morrow morning unless that prisoner walks out of this room with me right now without any more talk. D'you understand? Well?"

The Chief of Detectives avoided his steady glance. Turning, he beckoned to Kneebreeks, who came close enough to hear his whisper and, in reply, to mutter angrily. But the finality of his superior's attitude was unmistakable. Kneebreeks left him to put a hand on the prisoner's shoulder.

"Come along, you!" he said, unable to speak other than ungraciously. "Come along!"

"Accompany them, Mr. Kernahan, and see that this fellow is turned out in regular fashion — 'discharged for

lack of evidence.' I'll meet you at the little saloon over the way. You know, Mr. Kernahan, of course, Lieutenant? Here, Mike, put this in your pocket and come to see me to-morrow at my apartment — Canary's, opposite the All-Night Bank. Mr. Adams; any one will tell you; and don't stop to thank me."

Holding the crumpled twenty-dollar bill, the prisoner stared unbelievably at this man who seemed woven from the gorgeous fabric of dreams — a hero such as his groping mind had pictured from the stray bits of reading that had come his way — a Thaddeus of Warsaw, a John Sobieski — some splendid knight of Polish history who had figured in the tales of his withered grandam. He went reluctantly, loath to lose the sight of this demi-god. Stephen was left alone with the chief of detectives. For a moment he did not speak: he seemed to be carefully choosing the right words, the exact construction of his further speech.

"Chief," he said quietly, and into his eyes crept a sadness that was hardly a match for his years; "Chief, listen: In your position, you can make so many lives miserable. Doesn't it hurt you to think of that, Chief? When you lie down at night aren't you troubled by thoughts of poor devils hanging by their arms from cell doors, flattening themselves against cell walls to escape the brutal torrent of a fire hose; crying like children for sleep while merciless men keep them awake night after night until they have signed their names to some damnable lie that will condemn them to year after year of imprisonment for offences they have never committed — doesn't it trouble you, Chief?"

“I — I — don’t know what you mean,” stammered the other, his glance directed to the floor.

“Oh, yes, you do! Man’s inhumanity to man. Will it always be this way? Will men with power always be tyrants, always oppress the weak? Chief, you know as well as I do that that man never committed that crime, but he was a poor devil of a petty-larceny crook and you were afraid of what the people and the press would say if the police didn’t offer a sacrifice. So you bribed two members of McGuimp’s gang to sign those infernal lies and you third-degreed that confession out of Mike. In exchange you set ‘Nigger Jake’ and ‘Big Harry’ free when you knew that for a few dollars they had viciously beaten that coachman. But the coachman didn’t have any friends; nobody would make a protest, and you let the two gorillas go. But the Vaughan robbery is different; he’s a rich man; he can make or break chiefs of detectives; he had to be placated; and what did a wastrel like Mike matter? But, listen, Chief ——”

He crossed to the desk and deliberately leaned over.

“Those thefts that worry you people so much, those hundred thousand and quarter-million touches — the Vaughan, Youngston, Willette, Friedenheim, and Gerstein robberies — they aren’t committed by the sort of man you can lay your fingers on. You won’t do yourself any good by trying to fasten them on other people, because, I give you fair warning, I’m not going to let you. I’m a very rich man, Chief — a millionaire; and this sort of thing is my hobby. And before I’ve done with you, you’ll throw your third degree into the waste-basket. Believe me when I tell you! But, Chief, listen: I don’t want to threaten. I want

to be your friend. I'll work with you in the interests of justice every time. I only ask a little mercy — a little remembrance of the fact that some of these wretches you torture have hearts and brains and people who love them; that they are guilty enough without your making them more so; that some of them are cold and hungry and miserable — poor drifters who can't find a place to sleep of nights, sometimes, and very seldom enough to eat. Be a little merciful with them, Chief. They are so weak, so miserable."

Stephen saw that the man in the chair appeared not to be listening. He paused a moment, undecided, then, the sadness still upon him, left the room quietly.

The Chief did not look up until Kneebreeks entered some little while later. When their glances met, he saw infuriated hate in that of Kneebreeks, and rejoiced that it should be there.

"This man, Adams ——"

He held up his hand to check the flow of profanity that followed.

"Not so loud. We'll have to do something: not talk! He's got money and the money he's got he's willing to spend checkmating us. It's got to stop, Kneebreeks. The bureau will go to hell if it doesn't."

"Well, if I were ——"

"If you held my job, you'd be just like I am. We're helpless, you fool. But, if somebody else was his enemy, eh? Suppose 'Chicken McGuimp' were told about what he said? He's pretty well protected; got the sheriff back of him and the organization. Still, it wouldn't hurt him to have us for his good friends, eh?"

Kneebreeks's face was indeed immobile; it took almost a full moment for his anger to be replaced by a look of cunning which in its turn gave way to a brightening of the eye and a broad grin. Finally he burst into an immoderate bull laugh, and slapped his superior's shoulder with a huge hand.

"Say, Chief, you're all right. Well, I guess yes. You're — all — right!"

II

VISIONS IN THE FIRE

That Eddie O'Brien, whose patronymic had been for so long a time submerged into the *nom-de-piano* of "Rag," could be persuaded to sink his identity in a cutaway coat, a red and black striped waistcoat with metal buttons upon it, and a bow tie of white percale, the unmistakable badges of servitude, would have been an almost incredible prophecy to those who knew him "when the joints was good." With a career behind him which began at the age of seven, when he sold papers on the short-change system, taking in a period when he was known as the "sweet boy tenor" of various rathskellers, singing, by request, songs that induced remarks from weepy patrons on the order of "if you knew my real name and what my people were," emerging from this occupation to the honkatonk-post-graduate course of "singing waiter," through the various stages of piano-player, floor manager of dance halls, three-card-monte man, and deeper descents into that Avernus known as the underworld, which finally terminated in a few years' endurance of the state's hospitality,

Rag had finally become respectable. For he was man servant to Stephen Adams, Esq., who, as all folks knew, held forth at Canary's. Now, standing in a respectful attitude near one of the brass railings at headquarters, he bowed acknowledgment of his master's exit from the office of the chief of detectives.

"We won't need your men, Edward," said Stephen. "Give them something and let them go."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

"I dine with the Livingstones to-night and go on to the opera, Edward. I'll be in at six, or maybe a trifle later."

"Quite so; good afternoon, sir."

He turned to his shabby companions, and Stephen cut through the building, emerging on Mulberry Street, where, in an ill-smelling grog shop on the other side of the street, he found the newspaper man awaiting him.

"I wouldn't insult you by asking you to drink here," laughed Stephen. "And, anyhow, I'm a bit late for an engagement with the most charming young lady in New York, in my opinion. For your courtesy in the matter I will further bribe the press by introducing you to her. Hey, taxi!"

They entered the vehicle and Stephen gave an address in Washington Square.

"I presume you mean Miss Duress?"

"No presumption at all. If you drink tea occasionally, she has a brand and a method that will make you swear off drinking it anywhere else. Have you the time?"

"There are some circumstances that make time for themselves," said the newspaper man. "A man doesn't

often get the chance of meeting a young lady like Miss Duress. She's about the only one nowadays who can rank with you on the sociological racket, and her being a pretty woman makes it all the more extraordinary. Those model tenements of hers are scheduled to open pretty soon, aren't they?"

"Day after New Year's," replied Stephen, "and she's already had five hundred more requests than she has flats, though she has extended her plans since the first ones were drawn. They cover a triangle made up by Jonquil, Pearl, and Seventh Streets."

"Oh, yes, I know. And I also know that you were responsible for the extension of the plans, Mr. Adams. Why, altogether, you must have fifty thousand dollars in the venture, haven't you?"

Stephen's face clouded.

"All credit for the model tenements is entirely due to Miss Duress," he said a trifle stiffly. "That I contributed a few thousands means nothing. It was her idea and she raised all the money, besides the large sums she gave personally herself. Any time you have to write about them please see that she gets the credit she deserves — which is *all* of it."

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Adams, naturally. But about this Vaughan robbery now: I've got the story to cover; I don't *want* it, but I've *got* it, and you said you'd help me. Now it's my opinion (and I want you to tell me what you think of it) that this Vaughan business is just such another as the Gerstein affair and a good many others that have been perpetrated in the last year. It bears the same marks of thought in plan and execution: there is absolutely no clue

left, and, like all the others, the thief wasn't seen by the person from whom the stuff was stolen. No violence, no bungling, no play with weapons — nothing. I tell you I believe there is a master criminal at work in New York City."

"Nonsense, old man," laughed Stephen. "Just coincidence, that's all. But, of course, every one of those robberies you speak of showed some brains; that's why I object to having them fastened on incapables like this little Polish Jew I just set free."

"Yes, I know; you interfered in the Gerstein matter; that's why I mentioned it. In several others too. So I thought you might have some theory."

"None at all," answered Stephen airily, "except that the police are rather stupid."

He rapped on the window of the taxicab and the driver brought his machine to a stop before a white-columned house, in the garden of which stood a marble maiden holding aloft a jug that always ceased to pour water at the first signs of frost; a house with a certain nobility to it, its severely plain Doric outlines softened by the ivy and Virginia creeper that had interwoven in the course of the past half century.

Kernahan looked at his watch.

"Afraid I was a little too careless of the paper's time," he said. "I've got to write a lead to this Vaughan story and I've got hardly anything of any importance to say; besides, I must look after two other men and three cubs who're working on it with me. I'm too much of a Southerner yet to take a cup of tea from the hands of a young lady and apologize for going while I drink it. May I come to see you some time, Mr. Adams?"

“Any time at all. Sorry you won’t come in. You’ve got my address?”

And as Kernahan turned away, with his romance woven now around the heroic figure of Stephen Adams, to rehearse over and over the other man’s splendid defiance of the law, Stephen himself, merry as a boy from school, bounded up the white marble steps and gave the nose of a brass griffon several sharp tweaks. Its protests in the shape of knocks upon the heavy mahogany door under the fanlight resulted in its immediate opening by an ancient coloured man in almost equally ancient livery, who, day in and out, sat on a carved seat in the broad hall, in his hand a copy of a newspaper from which he spelt out headlines in the hope of being able some day to boast a speaking acquaintance with the stories under them. He had begun this tedious task when Horace Greeley was the arbiter of “heads” and had decreed that even a decisive victory for the Union should be announced in block type but a shade larger than the main body of the narrative itself. He had rejoiced in the radical policy of Mr. Dana, who believed the attention of the public was better held by blocks of twice the size favoured by the great aider of Western colonization; and he had welcomed the advent of Mr. Pulitzer, and later, of Mr. Hearst, as great educators of ancient coloured men; but, still, he gleaned all his knowledge of the world’s doings from the condensations above the date lines.

“Yessah; she’s a-waitin’ fo yo’, suh. Ve’y pow’ful draf’ down chimluh to-day, Missuh Adams; fires jes’ lak ro’in’ fuhnaces what consumed sinnahs but lef’ dem three fellahs what trusted in de Lawd puf’ly safe. Wha’ was dem names,

Missuh Adams? One of dem had 'uh name lak uh fish, othah one was a nigguh lak me ——”

“You mean Shadrach and Abednego,” laughed Stephen. “The other was Meshach.”

“Pow'ful hard fo' an old nigguh to sabe his soul ef he have to know dem ve'y dif'cult names, Missuh Adams. Missie Dessie, she's in her own lib'y, suh. Said yo' was to come right up.”

“Thanks, Uncle Fairfax. How's your rheumatiz?”

“Po'ly, thank you, suh, po'ly.”

It was an inevitable question and an equally inevitable answer. Uncle Fairfax resumed his seat by the hall door and the copy of the evening paper with the preposterous headlines, and Stephen, crossing the broad expanse of polished, parquettted hall, ascended the winding stairs, whose spindle balusters of carved mahogany had been copied by every architect in the city who built houses on the Queen Anne plan.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, but as the shortest day of the year was soon to be upon them, darkness was already beginning to fall and the light of the fire sought bits of brass and silver in Decima's library and picked them out in red. At Stephen's entrance the girl arose from the tea equipage which had been wheeled into the room and gave him her hand, which he took and held with a gesture that was almost a caress. She always seemed slightly disappointed, however, after every exchange of handshakes with Stephen, and now she reseated herself, and poured the boiling water from the little kettle upon the tea waiting its immersion.

He seated himself opposite her, the reflection of the fire-light on the silver between them lighting up their faces. She was in a loose tea gown of yellow and silver threads, her hair parted in the middle and brought down low over her brows in the Greek fashion, which served to accentuate her youth. Stephen watched her slender, ringless fingers as they deftly moved the bits of silverware about, wishing he might grace one of them with a ring at once costly and simple — a proclamation to the world of his ownership.

“Of course you got him off,” she remarked as she handed him his cup of tea, the saucer bearing some thin sweet biscuits. It was not a question, simply a statement of fact.

He nodded.

“Nothing but his helplessness ever persuaded the police he could be proved guilty.”

“That’s the point,” she said, sipping her tea. “Who would imagine that Stephen Adams — Stephen the Magnificent —”

“Oh, please, Dessie, forget that silly newspaper phrase.”

“I shall do nothing of the sort. ‘Etienne le magnifique’ — oh, beautiful, Stephen! It gives the people a picture.”

“A silly picture; those Frenchmen are always so infernally romantic. There’s nothing magnificent about me, that is certain.”

“Your modesty is magnificent if nothing else. Don’t be absurd, Stephen. I’m sure you’re always pretending. Why, I’ll be willing to wager you spend half an hour dressing every day.”

“I do nothing of the sort,” he replied indignantly. “You

can ask Rag if I do. He's around me all the time and he knows more about me than anybody else."

"Ask Rag?" she echoed scornfully. "Why he couldn't see any faults in you if you committed murder. He worships the very ground you walk on, Stephen. The very fact he's willing to be a valet proves that. Dear old Rag!"

"I'm awf'ly glad you like him, Dessie," said Stephen eagerly. "He's *such* a good fellow."

"I like him because he adores you," she said quietly.

Stephen squirmed in his chair. Decima had a habit of making remarks like that, remarks that could be adequately answered in but one way — a way in which he longed with all his heart and soul to answer, but which his very love for her prevented.

"Stephen the Magnificent," she soliloquized, setting down her teacup. "Why not? You're so big and good-looking and well dressed — that's enough to begin with; but when you add to that your unselfishness, your championship of those who can't help themselves, your liberality ——"

"Oh, Dessie! Please, please ——"

"I can't help it, Stephen. From the very first moment we met I've always been perfectly frank with you; always said just what was in my mind; and, just now, *you*, and nothing else, are in it. Now don't make some silly joke about how light and unburdened my thoughts must be I hate false modesty!"

She rang the bell.

"More tea?"

"I've had two cups and five crackers. I've got to think

of that fifty-seven varieties of courses they'll give us at the Livingstones' to-night."

"Yes, and I suppose you'll go in with Isabel, as usual — that silly little thing! You know she hasn't got one single thought that's worth listening to."

"She subscribed ten thousand to your tenements, Dessie."

"Yes, and *you* know well enough why. You can clear away, Clara," she broke off as the capped and aproned upper house-maid entered softly and stood by the door. When the equipage had been wheeled over the soft Teheran rug and its wheels sounded on the parquet floor of the hall, Decima arose and closed the door.

"Yes, you know well enough why," she repeated accusingly.

"Of course; because I've persuaded her that she can be happier helping others than leading the selfish life she's led up to now."

"Oh, *piffle*, Stephen; excuse me — but *piffle*! I went over the same arguments with her a hundred times before she met you and all she said was, 'But those people are so dirty,' as if that ended the argument. Why, you know well enough she's in love with you — head over heels — and I've a good mind not to go to their old dinner to-night — *now!*"

"Now, Dess, *don't*; please don't," said Stephen uncomfortably. "You're always imagining girls are in love with me. It's so ridiculous. Why, I'm preaching a new sort of gospel, that's all, and they're so bored with the lives they lead that they've taken it up."

“Yes, the gospel of a fine, manly figure and good-looking eyes — that’s all the gospel they see, and you know it. I don’t care, Stephen; I’m not going to stand it. I can’t bear to see them putting on that mysterious, far-away look and telling you that you are the first man who ever understood they had real brains and were not just dolls to be petted and dressed up — and — and — actually *putting their hands on you*. Why, not one of them will let go your hand when you go to say good-by; they go on talking just so they can keep hold of it, the little cats! Oh, I know you don’t encourage them; I don’t think you care a speck for one woman in the world; but, anyhow, I’m sincere. I had planned a lot of things for the poor before I met you; I don’t just do them because I’m in love with you ——”

She paused, biting her lip and looking at him. He had forgotten to be uncomfortable; his face lit up, his eyes sparkled, and he turned suddenly to her. She threw herself down on the hearth rug before the fire, and, sitting there, took his hand.

“Stephen, I didn’t mean to let it out. It came just naturally. Stephen ——”

“Oh, my dear!” he said, and gathered her into his arms.

There was a long silence. Presently she released herself and sat on the rug again.

“You *do* love me, Stephen?”

“Better than anything in the world, dear,” he replied soberly.

“And you — you don’t think me immodest — for telling you?”

"No, dear; it was my fault. I should have spoken myself. You must have known I loved you."

"I did — *think* so. But whether you did or not, I wanted you to tell me so. Stephen, I loved you ten minutes after you sat down beside me on that boat last year. I couldn't help it — it just — *came!* And I — I just couldn't stand those other women putting their hands on you. I wanted to shriek out that you were mine, *mine* — that you belonged to me — *me!*"

"I do, Decima; I always have. It was just the same with me as it was with you."

"But you — you never *told* me."

"That was because I *did* love you, Decima. Maybe I ought to tell you something else, but, somehow, I can't. In this old house, where everything is so quiet, every one so happy and contented, the world seems a sweet, clean sort of place — a dispensation of the Almighty for which we should be thankful. My own rebellion strikes me with horror. I — no, Decima, I can't tell you — not now. Maybe, soon, I'll nerve myself to do it. You ought to know all about me, and there's a lot I've never dared tell you."

"Something I shouldn't know?" she echoed. "About you? Oh, no, Stephen, I guess there isn't much about you I don't know — not likely, when you've been in my mind day and night for the past year. You're one of God's own noblemen: never a thought for yourself, always for others. There's nothing about you I don't know, for, don't you see, I know *you*. And even if there was," she added a little fiercely, "it wouldn't make any difference in my love. If you're in trouble, I want to comfort you. Tell me!"

"Do you ever look in the fire and dream, Dessie?"

"Yes, of you. And you, too, Stephen?"

"It is life to me, Dessie," he said, a strange note in his voice, for he spoke in the tones of one who dreams. "See, now it burns a steady red glow, all the little bits of coal equally alight. But every now and then one of the little pieces springs upward and bursts into a bright yellow flame, exulting in its predominance over the others, then sinks down and is utterly gone. Life is like that, Dessie: if we burn brighter than our fellows for our little hour, so is that little hour shortened. He who burns brightly burns rapidly, Dessie, and soon is gone; and the others burn on steadily, never knowing — or caring. Life, Dessie, life!"

"Stephen," she cried terrified, "I don't understand; what do you mean?"

"Sometimes, I look and I see—visions," he said. "Visions of a people happy in the happiness of others; of those who were once the oppressors become the friends; of the laughter of the little children of the poor; of no man seeking that which will harm another; and sometimes I hear my name spoken, spoken kindly, gratefully — as of one who did his little bit toward making a world like that. I see them remembering what the Man of Nazareth said — amazed that they should ever have forgotten it. The wolf faces and the faces of the foxes have gone from out the race of men; all are gentle — and kind!"

He broke off, his face darkening.

"And then I see another vision: a race of slaves, living in great stone prisons, lettered and numbered by their masters; men with the blind eyes of moles, working endlessly,

they know not why, working not that they may be happy, but only that they may be allowed to live; slaves who are no longer men. I see that, Dessie, and I am afraid — and so I will go on, on, fighting, fighting until the end, even with the shadow of the gallows across my path: even with that — I'll fight!"

"Stephen, what do you mean?"

He took her in his arms; his eyes were wet.

"I mean, Dessie, that if we married I must give up the fight. I could not ask you to share a life like mine. I love you too much for that."

"A life like yours?" she echoed.

"Like mine — you don't know — and I can't tell you now. Love me, Dessie, and let me love you; but tell no one. Some time it may come right; then — then there'll be always happy pictures in the fire, my own."

"Anything — anything you say, Stephen," she whispered. "Only remember you're mine — *mine!*"

III

THE VULTURES

Though Schramm had been gathered to his fathers, and the old chapel was replaced by a flimsy "taxpayer" building, let out to secret societies and Sunday schools for meetings and amateur entertainments, the House of the Dominie, which had long since passed under the ownership of Wulf Axtell, stood intact, its bleak gray walls a landmark in the neighbourhood. In the second-story front room Wulf Axtell had sat for the past ten years unable to move a foot,

and only barely able to lift a cigar to his mouth. They had contrived a grandfather's chair for him, which rolled about on wheels, and when it was light, he sat at the window, with an arrangement of mirrors set in the frame that he might see those who passed on both sides of the street, and even get a glimpse of Sixth Avenue where electrics had long since replaced the little smoky engines he knew in the old days of the "L." For some time he had been companionless, but now Van Tromp was infirm, too, and they got him the twin chair to Axtell's. So, day in and out, the old grocer would sit beside him at the window, or opposite him at the fireplace, as he was doing now, bearing with his abuse and even pretending that his own infirmity was as great as The Wolf's; although, if he awoke earlier than his companion, he would often hobble down stairs and walk up to Sixth Avenue, bearing heavily on his stick, to watch the customers passing in and out of the shop he had tended for forty years, and which now bore the sign of the grocery corporation, "Janissary and Duress, Limited." There he would stand, weeping maudlinly or else chuckling senilely, until a servant, alarmed at Axtell's awakening, would run out and fetch him back.

They had a fire in The Wolf's house that night, too, but it was not a fire of fancies to Stephen as he entered and saw the two old men like hideous gargoyles on either side of the hearth. Van Tromp had dropped to sleep, muttering and showing toothless gums, while Axtell scowled at him from under fierce white brows that bristled, his eyes the incarnation of evil.

Hilary in a frock coat, with a gardenia in his buttonhole,

sat swinging his legs from the centre table; Hilary had "indulged" but an hour or so before and he was feeling particularly optimistic. George le Fay, in a suit of hard-faced cloth, was smoking the cigar most patronized by the middle class; and Morgenstein, a lean, handsome Jew, was plaiting and unplaiting a purple handkerchief that matched his tie and socks, for he was a nervous man and must ever be doing something with those prehensile fingers. He was the member of the company who disposed of stolen goods and was remarkably keen at a bargain, knew exactly how much any one to whom he sold would pay, and never made a mistake about whom to trust.

"A little late, Stephen," he said.

"Sorry. We're all here, aren't we?"

He looked around the room, then turned on the light from the door; a red-shaded lamp on the table responded and half-lit the room. Morgenstein locked the doors. Old Van Tromp stirred in his sleep.

"Piling it up," he muttered drowsily, "piling it up."

"Shut up, you old idiot," roared Axtell. "Hand me a book or something to throw at him, somebody."

"Oh, let him alone, Mr. Axtell," said Stephen. "He's not doing any one any harm. Well, now, let's get to business. I must get away from here before six. I've called you all together for a very good reason and I don't want it misunderstood. So everybody get his cigar or cigarette lit and listen."

Morgenstein could not resist a placid sneer.

"How long has it been since you've been the head of this 'gang,' Stevey?"

“Now, Morgy, don’t be nasty,” replied the younger man. “We don’t want any bad feeling among ourselves, you know. I’m not going to give any orders. I’m simply going to make a statement.”

He reached into his pocket, took out a bundle of sketches captioned in “hog-latin,” and spread them open for the others to see.

“Everybody knows what they are, of course ——”

Hilary, Le Fay, and Morgenstein craned their necks and nodded. Wulf Axtell extended a hand.

“Ah, the Gresham Theatre ‘soundings,’ ” he said. “Well, Stevey, boy, aren’t they all right?”

“They *ought* to be all right,” challenged George le Fay heavily. “I put in two weeks getting the dope on that place. Those plans are as good as any architect could draw. The entrance is a cinch, and the getaway’s immense. It’s a pipe, Stevey, with nine to twenty thousand ready money in the safe every Saturday night that stays there until they take it to the bank on Monday. They’re awful suckers not to deposit in the All Night when they’ve got a successful play like ‘Ambition’ there.”

Hilary scanned them also. “And, dear old chap,” he said to Stephen, “I flatter myself that I made rather good sketches from George’s descriptions.”

“Not a single miss,” averred Le Fay. “What’s the matter with them, Stevey?”

“Only this,” replied Stephen Adams, and, taking the plans from Axtell’s hand, he tossed them on the burning coals and stood with his back to the fireplace. Axtell roared out a violent imprecation, which awoke Van Tromp

again. Seeing Stephen, he vented his senile laugh and rubbed his crackly old hands together:

“Is he going to rob Janissary this time? Eh, Stevey, good boy, go after him — go after him, Stevey. Robber and persecutor and piling it *up*.”

Axtell, gritting his teeth, tried to reach the poker with his helpless hand. Van Tromp, suddenly afraid, pretended to sleep again.

“Look here, Steve,” said George le Fay, angered at the destruction of work which he had already translated into money, “what do you think you’re doing?”

“Yes, boy,” grated Axtell. “You forget yourself — d’you understand; you forget yourself!”

“On the contrary, Mr. Axtell,” said Stephen coldly, “it is you and George and Hilary and Morgy who forget themselves. You gave me reason to believe that Henry K. Morris of the Gresham Theatre was some kind of a beast. I’ve just found that he treats his employés better, pays them bigger salaries, provides them with better accommodations, and is an all-around better fellow than any theatrical man in the business. Why, only to-day, as I sat in his office, talking to him, a friend of his wanted to borrow ten thousand over the ’phone. Morris simply told him to send up for the certified check and hung up the receiver. Now that’s a real man for you; and if you think I’d steal a dollar of his money you’re mighty well mistaken!”

“He’s a member of the syndicate — the theatrical syndicate,” said George le Fay weakly. He had originated the affair and he did not like the threat in Stephen’s eyes.

Stephen looked down at the fire. Seeing that the plans

were now but a crumbling mass of black cinders, he resumed his seat under the red glow of the electric lamp.

“The fact that he’s in a syndicate doesn’t make him a thief,” he said coldly. “He has not taken advantage of his position to oppress anybody. He’s a jolly, hearty business man with fine, square, honest principles. There’s hardly a theatrical charity to which he hasn’t contributed more heavily than any other manager, and his success is due to the use of his own brains in a decent, God-fearing way.”

“He’s worth a million or two, dear old boy,” objected Hilary.

“What if he is? A man can make that much squarely if he’s a clever man. Don’t tell me anything about Henry K. Morris. Every cent he’s got he *deserves* to have. He’s been poor and lived on twenty-five dollars a week for years at a time; he’s learned the theatrical business from A to Z through actual work in every theatrical capacity; and, finally, when he accumulated a little money, he risked it on his judgment of plays and actors. He actually risked it — money earned by the sweat of his brow; and he’s stood the chance of losing every penny. But the people have liked his productions and willingly paid to see them. They weren’t forced; they didn’t have to see them; they just came because he was a good purveyor of amusements. He’s got money, but he’s giving hundreds of people decent employment, and every one of them respects and admires him. No, the only excuse for robbing the Gresham Theatre lay in the fact that the money was there and that it was easy to get,

and if you ever steer me up against a proposition like that again, I'll punch your head, George le Fay."

Seeing that Axtell was on the point of an outbreak, Hilary had crossed to his side and whispered to him:

"Go slow, dear old chap; don't forget — philanthropy is the racket. Take his end of it; give George hell!"

Axtell quieted down under the common-sense arguments of Hilary; but it was a moment or so before he could compose himself sufficiently to speak in the lofty, detached manner he affected when seeking to convince Stephen.

"Stephen is quite right, George," he said sternly. "You should have made fuller investigation. It turns out that this man, Morris, is not the sort of man we wish to harm."

"But the syndicate and ——"

"Yes, I quite understand, George, how you came to make the error," agreed The Wolf, catching his eye and winking hard. "But you must be more careful in the future. But you, Stephen, must remember that we only take from these millionaires that the poor may benefit thereby. This Morris cannot use a million dollars as beneficially as we could."

"If I were quite sure, Mr. Axtell," said Stephen, fixing his eye first on Le Fay and then on Hilary, "that the other members of the company used their money as I use mine — in charity — I would be better pleased. Of course, you all *say* you do, but then every one of you refuses to contribute a cent to any scheme that I recommend and I never hear of any donations you make except from you yourselves."

"Every man has a right to contribute to the charity that pleases him most," explained Axtell, choking back his wrath.

“You have never been appointed general almoner for your friends, you know. Don’t be unreasonable, Stephen!”

“I’m not unreasonable. I’m sincerely trying to carry out the principles you’ve inculcated in me ever since I can remember. Why, I can recall sitting on that old hassock over there when I was a kid and having you show me that the only excuse Robin Hood and those fellows had for stealing was that they took money from selfish people and helped those who needed it.”

“And have I ever gone back on those principles, boy?”

“Not exactly, but there’s an atmosphere I’m beginning to dislike about our calculations. It seems somehow as though we were getting like the very people we’re fighting against — greedy for money, envious of every rich man we see. I’m not fighting against wealth. I know plenty of rich men who are fine, square fellows and who go about helping their fellow-men whenever they can — men like this Morris. It annoys me to think we ever planned to steal from him — makes me feel no better than those common ‘yeggs’ who crack a post-office safe or rob the till of some poor groceryman.”

“Dear old chap, listen,” urged Hilary suavely. “We’re not combating you; a mistake has been made, that’s all; and I’m sure George will apologize.”

“Oh, I apologize all right,” said Le Fay ungraciously. “I’ll know better next time.”

He exchanged meaning glances with Axtell.

“But, at the same time, Stephen,” Hilary went on, “you mustn’t get the idea that just because a man is honest in his business details and contributes to a few charities that

he is necessarily exempt from our attentions. Y'see, dear old chap, under existing circumstances, a man may treat his employés generously, and still steal from them while keeping to the strict letter of the law, and even going a little further even than that."

"I don't follow you, Hilary. If a man is honest and square and is clever enough to make millions ——"

"Ah, but dear old chap, you don't just get the angle. Are great business men cleverer than great artists, great composers, great generals, or great writers? Eh, what?"

"Certainly not. Business ability, to my mind, is inferior to any of the talents you have mentioned."

"Ah, quite right. Now follow me closely — closely, d'you mind!"

Stephen nodded, and, putting both palms under his chin, supported his head in a manner familiar to all present — for this was the attitude of his perplexed boyhood — and gazed intently at his supposed avuncular relative.

"Now, here we are, five men. For the sake of argument, let us assume that Van Tromp writes, George is a great pianist, I am a noted sculptor, Morgy a victorious general, Axtell a wonderful legislator, while you are a man with a head for figures. Got that, eh?"

Stephen nodded.

"Well, we form a club, d'you see? — a club. Now all the rest of us have our work to do for our art's sake and for the sake of humanity in general; so we can't stop to bother about our monetary affairs. So, dear old chap, we come to you and say: 'Now, old boy, we'll send you all our money and we want you to look after it for us and make invest-

ments and do things; d'you follow me? Thanks, I rather imagined you would. You see, you're our treasurer. Now all you have to do is to invest the money that we create — that is to say, practically we create it, because everybody wants us to do something for them and when we do it, they pay us. Now is there any reason why you — who only look after our money — should make ten times as much as we do? Eh?"

"No, I — I suppose not," answered Stephen. "It doesn't seem so, does it?"

"And yet you do. A great business man makes from ten to a thousand times as much as a great man in any other occupation, for the simple reason that great men generally want to attend to something else besides figures. In other words, we make the business men our treasurers and they cheat us, because they take what we have to sell and, figuring the market on that particular thing, get more for it than we could get — and pocket the difference themselves. In other words, they get *absolutely all they can get*, whereas we, after we have done these things for the pure love of doing them, find pecuniary compensation a secondary consideration and don't bother much about it. They, on the other hand, create nothing, and exist simply by selling what we create for more than we could get. Now *we* don't suffer by this, because we get all we *want*; but somebody must suffer. Who then? Why the people who buy, of course. In other words, the business man cheats the buyer out of the difference between what we receive and what the people pay for our creation. D'you see, dear old boy?"

"Why, yes, of course," answered Stephen thoughtfully.

"I do see. In other words, the business man should be reduced to the level of a hired employé. We should not permit him to sell higher than we wish and should pay him a salary for attending to our affairs, instead of which he takes advantage of our lack of knowledge of figures and makes us his servants as well as the public."

"Quite right," said Axtell venomously. "Therefore, no matter how honest he is in his dealings, he is existing merely because he has the faculty of preying on others."

"Oh, no, not quite," objected Stephen. "The great organizers, the wonderful executives — they are not necessarily preyers; they fulfil their functions, often, quite honestly — as honestly as existing conditions will allow. Mr. Carnegie, for instance, with his coöperative schemes ——"

"Ah, yes, dear old chap," agreed Hilary. "That is something like; give the man who works for you a working share in your business, so that when your profits increase, his increase with them, and, if they decrease, he will fight as hard as you will to keep the depression off. That is the solution."

"And that is my creed," said Stephen, his face lighting up. "That is what I would do, if I had money, just to prove how feasible it is. It is the key to the whole situation; we always get back to it — kindness and simplicity. Meanwhile," he sighed, "we have still enough real thieves in the world to cope with without bothering the so-called honest business man. Let's pick out one of the robber barons and teach him a severe lesson; let's show him that we are as able to steal as he is. Don't try to make it easy for me. Show me the man who deserves punishment: I don't care for the

risk. With our brains and my technical knowledge, I could enter the Bank of England with guards at every door. Don't try to spare me. I'm always ready to risk my neck. If I wasn't, there'd be no glory to my adventures; they would just be common thefts a little more skilfully executed. I like to feel as though I'd done something that was brave as well as good. Pick me out a hardened robber, gentlemen!"

So intent had the others been upon him — for when Stephen Adams spoke, there was a sparkle in his eye, a colour in his cheek, a mysterious magnetism of personality that demanded and held attention — that they had not noticed old Van Tromp trembling with suppressed excitement — so much so that he forgot his fear of Axtell, and, flattening his withered palms against the arm rests of his chair, levitated himself and slid to the floor, advancing from the shadows into the light cast by the electric lamp and placing both hands on the table, his snow-white hair tumbling into his eyes, his toothless jaws working in a frenzy of excitement.

"I'll pick ye one, Stevey, boy — old Trompy what taught you all about all the little wheels that went round and round — you know Trompy knows, Stevey, boy. You——"

"Idiot! Imbecile!" yelled Axtell. "Knock him down, Hilary. Kick the old pig. Oh! if I only had the use of my arms! If I——"

With an effort that caused him actual, griping pain, he managed to secure the poker, but immediately dropped it. It clattered back on the hearth. Stephen, so interested in the old man's speech that he had not heard Axtell, was annoyed by the sound of the poker's fall — and made an im-

patient movement that requested silence; and Hilary Quackenbos again found it necessary to cross and quiet The Wolf. As for Van Tromp himself, even had he been struck, his fanaticism on this point, his one burning hatred, was such that not even pain would have mattered.

“Go on, Trompy!”

The use, by Van Tromp, of the diminutive, for Stephen as a little boy had been responsible for all the shortenings of names — ‘Steveys,’ ‘Morgys,’ and the like — had softened Stephen’s attitude to the old grocer whom, even as a child, he had not particularly liked.

“Yes? Trompy knows — he knows, Stevey. He knew all about the little wheels that went round and round and he knew all about sugars and teas and *spices* — the sich as Mr. Axtell himself used to buy and as he knows I always had the *finest*.”

His poor old wandering wits became suddenly disturbed by a picture of the old store on the corner, with the japanned tin boxes that had held the spices of which he spoke; and a deep wrinkle in his seared face became the bed of a rivulet. Then another and yet another filled until his face was quite wet. He put a fleshless hand to his face — a hand ingrained with the dirt of years — and dabbed at his burning eyes.

“Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he took it, which the Good Book says ain’t to be done under no *circumstances* — and who is he to set himself up again the Good *Book* — which is read by me faithful, Stevey, every Sunday, every Sunday, even though Mr. Axtell won’t git me no glasses to read it with ——”

“Horrible ass,” snarled Axtell. Push him away, Steve!”

"The same old Janissary stuff," said Morgenstein wearily. "We ought to put him out of the room when we have a confab. He gits on my nerves. He must dream Janissary."

The old man threw the white hair from his eyes, which for the moment were lit by a fierce gleam.

"Janissary — 'Big Steve,' was what they called him when you were 'Little Steve.' But *you're* 'Big Steve' now — bigger'n *him*. Not Duress — don't believe Duress — he's *nobody*. You go after him that piles it up and piles it *up*, Stevey — or are you afeared of Satan 'cause Satan's his bosom *friend*? If you ain't afeared, go after Stephen Janissary, Stevey, and git an old man's blessing — a very old man, Stevey, that he couldn't let have his little store what he kept fer forty year. Not Duress — don't believe Duress; go after Stephen Janissary!"

His strength failed, and he would have fallen if Stephen had not risen and caught him and led him back to his chair by the fireplace, where Axtell scowled at him.

"Imbecile pig!" said Axtell, grinning viciously. "Wait until I lay my hands on you ——"

"You couldn't get into Janissary's house with a crowbar," commented George le Fay. "We'd get a tumble as sure as you're born — at least *you* would, Stephen."

"I'll take the chance. 'Sound' it!"

There was an emphatic chorus of protest from all others except Van Tromp, who, weak as he was, managed to rub together his crackling hands.

"Dear old chap, why take unnecessary risks? We don't even know that it's worth while."

"That's ridiculous," averred Stephen coolly. "All the

world knows that Janissary has one hobby, one weakness — his passion for carved stones. He must have half a million's worth somewhere in his house."

"Carved stones!" echoed Morgenstein in fine contempt. "Yes, you mean he's *paid* half a million for them; but how much could we get? He's got emeralds and rubies and sapphires and topazes and Gawd knows how many more — they'd be worth a fortune uncarved; but, carved, they're only valuable to a collector, for they're in every jewel catalogue in the world, with histories as long as a Hot Springs drug bill. You can't cut 'em up because bits of the carving spoil 'em, and, even if you did, their value is mostly in their size."

"Don't be absurd, Morgy," replied Stephen. "We'll send you on a trip to India. Those Maharajahs started the fashion in carving stones and they'll pay pretty nearly what they're worth. Besides, some of them have histories that make them valuable to Gækwars and tribal chiefs of that sort. With half a million's worth in your possession it's worth making a trip to India for."

Morgenstein considered, and presently nodded.

"I'm a mangy pup, if I don't believe the youngster's right, boys! Half those hock-rocks were stolen from Indian princes! They'd pay a pretty penny to git them back, and, best of all, they wouldn't ask no questions. It would take time to dispose of 'em, that's all."

"Half a million's worth taking time over, isn't it?" queried Stephen. "Why, the Vaughan jewels are valued at a quarter million and we'll be lucky if we clear a hundred thousand from them by the time you cut them up,

Morgy, and take your trips around to dispose of them. The beauty about those carved stones is that they don't *have* to be cut up."

He turned back the lapel of his coat, a lapel bearing a button that looked like the insignia of a decoration, the hidden side a small watch — the very latest thing in watches and Decima's present on his birthday — and observed that it was already past the hour he had set for arriving at his apartment. He began to draw on his gloves.

"Well, that's my next trick," he said placidly; "so get to work, George, and try to give me a working knowledge of the inside of the Janissary house as soon as you can. It shouldn't be difficult; it's an old house without any new tricks for disconcerting burglarious gentlemen."

"Yes," agreed George heavily, "and it is also a detached house, which makes it impossible for us to use the trick we did with half of the others."

"Oh, the game would lose its interest if it always worked out according to rules," laughed Stephen. "Send me a check for seven thousand five hundred to-morrow, Mr. Axtell. I've made some promises I'll have to fulfil this week. Well, good night, fellows. You know my 'phone number if you want me. So long!"

He took up his top hat and stick and went out. Axtell gave vent to his feelings in a manner that, had he heard, would effectually have cured Stephen of any belief in his better nature.

"Don't, dear old chap," urged Hilary. "You are quite too bad at times. Besides, we should remember — every one of us — that we were never one quarter as prosperous

as we have been since he first began to work. He takes chances that no other burglar in the country would dare take; and, besides, it's like a circus acrobat or a ballet dancer — unless they're taken in hand when they're children, they always bungle. Stephen has technical skill that is simply marvellous, almost magical. He is a positive genius, 'pon honour, he is — the bally Napoleon of cracksmen."

"Oh, can that sucker talk, Hil!" growled George le Fay, relapsing into the vernacular with the exit of Stephen. "Say a 'house man' or a 'sneak' or a 'second-story' man or a 'peteman' — anything but 'cracksmen.' You see that in novels and that's about the only place where you do see it."

"I'll jolly well use any expression I like, George," replied the Englishman stiffly. "And, 'pon honour, dear old chap, that's a shocking cravat you're wearing."

George's angry reply was averted by Morgenstein's reflective remark:

"Say, who was that guy who made another guy — some doctor — you know — Frank something ——"

"Near relative of yours, Morgy," replied Hilary. "You mean 'Frankenstein,' I suppose."

The Jew nodded.

"Well, you remember, after he made him, the guy was so big he couldn't handle him — got out of his control or something, and after that he was always afraid he'd croak him?"

"Everybody knows the story you're talking about," growled Axtell. "Whatever it's got to do with us, get

it off your chest. If you're just romancing along, shut up and talk about business or else get out. I'm tired of having so much noise here."

"Why can't you see the — the — whatever it is — between that Frankenstein and Stevey?"

"Oh, you mean 'analogy,'" supplied Hilary superiorly. "Why, not at all. Stephen is perfectly easy to manage. He's like the cat; you've got to find out which way his fur lies. He's a sweet, good-tempered boy and sometimes, on my soul, I wish I were like him. D'you know, I've actually given away quite a bit of money through listening to him?"

"Oh, you're full of hop," said George rudely. "You always get very philanthropic with a few pills in you."

"I keep thinking of that Frankenstein fellow," complained the Jew, slipping into his Astrakhan-collared, fur-lined coat. "Every now and then I wake up dreaming that Frankenstein is looking in at the window — Gee! that's a horrible thought — and somehow I can't seem to get it out of my head. If Stephen ever finds out we're nothing but a lot of grafters, always looking for the best of it and using all those noble sentiments for a stall to get him to put his fingers in the fire for us, he'll about tear up a lamp post and beat us all to death. Those good-natured fellows like Stephen are always like that when they get sore, and he's got no fear and would tackle an army with a bean-shooter if somebody told him it was his duty. Sometimes I feel kind a sorry I'm not like him myself. He's a grand little fellow, Stephen is."

"Typical sucker!" said George le Fay. "Typical!

Stephen gives me a pain. Did you hear that boob talk about Morris? Gee! I wanted to crown him with a cuspidor. It's pretty tough when a lot of wise ones have to take their orders from a simp like him."

The Jew paused at the door. Circumstances, rather than desire, had placed him outside the law. Persecution in Russia, police tyranny in America, sudden anger against one of "the force" and an exhibition of superior strength, had given him six months on the Island, a 'tough rep,' and placed his picture in the Rogues' Gallery, a creature at the mercy of every policeman who wanted to make a record. Since that time he had sinned daringly and with cunning, and he sincerely admired men of courage.

"Pretty soft for you, George, who never took a chance in your life, to be mixed up with a regular king of crooks like Stevey. If you weren't so damned common, you'd respect him and, sometimes, fear him, as I do — a man with some brains."

He went out. George snatched up his hat and followed him, to continue the argument.

"A Frankenstein?" said Hilary slowly. "I wonder — Axtell!"

"Oh! take that talk outside."

"A Frankenstein, eh, dear old chap? . . . We must be careful; yes, deucedly careful. Morgy's right!"

He also took his departure, thoughtfully. Left alone, Axtell eyed the drowsing Van Tromp, and, by moving his chair little by little, finally, in the course of the next quarter-hour, brought it close enough to stretch out his hand and pinch the other viciously. Van Tromp awoke with a little

scream to see the other glaring at him, hateful sin incarnate! So they sat and the long hours began to drag their way again.

IV

AT CANARY'S

Hot-house flowers, lilting music, and soft lights!

Ah, those lights! As unique as is its curious canape are Canary's candelabra — copper-wrought, burnished to a semblance of dull gold, the electric candles cunningly contrived to give the appearance of waxen tapers as slim as the fingers of beautiful women, and hung with transparent silk gauze, canary-coloured — four score or more of these candelabra, and mirrors set in white wall panels reflect their doubles, trebles, and quadruples.

All sorts come to Canary's. Gray-haired gentlemen, dining modestly on what still remains from the sale of their lands that their many times great-grandsires bought for beads and whiskey; next to them rather recent individuals, risen to the height of dining at Canary's through defrauding the descendants of the beads-and-whiskey-barterers, discussing terrapin and rare vintage wines: the specific antitheses are typical; at one time or other may be found at Canary's all who bear the stamp of caste cheek by jowl with the coveters of the iron that brands a crest. Pauperized patriicians allowing oily outsiders to pay for dinners to which they are accustomed but cannot afford; gormandizing Gentiles with generous Jews; Anglicized Americans sign-

ing checks for fawning foreigners. All sorts, yes, but seldom an individual.

Stephen Adams paused for a moment at the door of the restaurant; the people in it, somehow, impressed him as being very tired. He saw amid the crowd many whom he knew would welcome him at their tables, but he shuddered at the thought of their forced gayety. They were all pretending, all unreal; even their laughs rang hollow. How different that girl he had left in dignified old Washington Square a few hours before, the thought of whose kiss was to be banished from his mind in such an atmosphere. He wanted to be alone with the memory of it.

The gilded cage shot upward and left him at the seventh floor. About the whole place was an aggressive air of expensiveness: doors that proclaimed the solidity of their mahogany by too bright a varnish; brass letters and numbers too conspicuous; marble floors too slippery; decorations too ornate. Money had been spent with a lavish hand, and the proprietor was determined that those who paid should recognize value received.

Stephen selected a key from among the various golden trinkets on the end of a chain, but, as he was about to fit it in the lock of apartment 72, the door was opened from within and Rag, still clad immaculately in the garb of an upper servant, stood framed against a background of soft lights that emanated from bulbs cunningly hidden in drop lights of Japanese beaten glass and Bohemian coloured vases. His presence surprised Stephen; since becoming respectable Rag generally retired before midnight.

He closed the door behind Stephen and touched his shoulder.

“Say, Steve, I jest grabbed a bit of information for myself. Set down, I want tuh tell yuh.”

It was quite a different person from the deferential “Edward”; this was the old companion of Stephen’s boyhood, the ardent admirer and devoted friend who served him in a menial capacity only because so magnificent a gentleman as Stephen must have a servant and servants who could be trusted were hard to find.

“Play something for me, Rag,” said Stephen wearily as he sank into a quaint mahogany bed rocker, tapestried in old rose that matched the walls. “You know, you wicked, red-headed sinner, you’re responsible for my degenerate taste in music. Here I’ve been sitting through a magnificent thing like ‘Falstaff’ and not enjoying one little bit of it. Miss Duress understood it and got all sorts of pleasure while I was bored. You’re to blame for that with your confounded rag-time songs. I was brought up on them, that’s the trouble. As far back as I can remember, all my songs have been rag-time.”

“But, listen, Stevey, there’s a ‘rap’ out for you.”

“Now, Rag, don’t bother me. Haven’t I asked you to play for me? I want to hear some music I can enjoy. Isn’t it terrible to think that you have to be David to my Saul? Play some pretty rag-time. I have some rather nice things to think about. Go on, Rag, I say! What a pity they don’t build fireplaces in these high-priced places — those blooming gas logs make you so tired — they’re so near and yet so far from the real thing, so ordered and mechanical, no surprises — like life without any adventure. Play something, Rag.”

O'Brien passed his hands over red hair parted smoothly in the middle, and sat down to the piano. In a sort of weird handling of syncopated music he had a certain genius, for he very seldom followed any particular tune or time. Scraps of opera, opera comique, musical comedy, folk and street songs, were mingled together in a *mélange* that had almost a kinship to the works of Debussy in its lack of any half-notes — like a Chinese monotone in a hurry. Also Rag had a peculiarity, resulting from telepathic kinship with Stephen, of always playing the sort of things that suited Stephen's particular mood.

"Rag-time," continued Stephen, as Rag played, "do you know, I rather think I've discovered why I like it so well? It's this New York life — that's rag-time if you like — the quick changes, the sudden turns of the wheel of fortune. Take the people down stairs — chorus girls living on Fifth Avenue; Knickerbockers lucky if they can pay for a flat in the Bronx, the waiter owning real estate and the patron wondering, when he pays for the meal and tip, whether they'll throw out his account at the bank because it's gone too low; society men selling champagne; champagne proprietors trying to sell enough of it to buy their way into society; rich women going on the stage; actresses trying to be recognized by rich women; the wise men pretending to be fools in order to amuse; the fools putting on all the airs of wise men; the race-track gambler with his few hundreds of winnings opening wine to-night and breakfasting on wheat-cakes and a five cent cup of coffee to-morrow — that's the key-note of New York — a longing to be other than you are — and that's rag-time, eh?"

“You could preach a sermon over a burnt match or the butt of a cigarette, Stephen,” commented Rag, wheeling around in his chair. “And now you’ve got that off your chest, I wanta tell yuh somethin’. There’s a ‘stiff’ out for you from McGuimp’s gang. I met one of their up-town bunch in Dockerty’s and he told me. Don’t go out of the house ’til I’ve gone down and squared it with McGuimp. They’re an awful gang of murderers an’ if they git you there won’t be nothin’ done to them — they’re too well protected.”

“McGuimp, eh?” said Stephen, pausing in the act of removing his patent-leather pumps; he had already divested himself of coat and waistcoat and slipped into a velvet smoking jacket.

“Sure thing, ‘Chicken’ McGuimp. His men have got orders to git you and lay you up in the hospital fer a couple of months — you know how it’s done; I told you when you was a kid. One of them’ll push you, you’ll push him back, an argument’ll start and the first thing you know yuh’re laid out with a jack. What ’uhve you ever done to McGuimp, Steve?”

“McGuimp? why, nothing,” answered Stephen reflectively. “But you can bet your boots I *will* do something if he starts after me.”

“Oh, nix on that, Steve, you don’t know what you’re talking about. Those fellows’d drop you jest t’ see which way you fell. They ain’t got no hearts nur nuthin’; they’re jest desperate murderers an’ they got all the protection in New York. So you jest stick in here ’till I’ve seen some of the gang and squared it with McGuimp. Will you?”

Stephen did not answer. A look of apprehension came

into Rag's eyes; he crossed the room stealthily and unhooked Stephen's pass key from the end of the gold chain that now lay on the centre table, pocketing it quickly.

"Well, good-night, Steve. I've got to be out early to-morrow t' attend tuh that matter for you about Betsy's findin' a new place tuh live. You dunno how you got in bad with McGuimp, do you?"

Stephen nodded.

"I've got an idea. Tell you about it to-morrow. Don't bother about squaring things for me, Rag. That McGuimp gang doesn't worry me any."

Patiently O'Brien went back to his argument:

"Steve, don't be a sucker! Those felluhs don't fight on the square. You do. So what chance have you got of gettin' the best of it. Let me handle this thing. When they find out all you've done for the gang, they'll call in their 'stiff'. I'll square it all right."

Stephen laughed.

"Rag, you take these toughs seriously. That's where they always win. They scare people. Now they don't scare me in the least; all a man has got to do is to show them that. If nothing else worried me I'd be all right, Rag. Good night."

He walked to the window and pushed aside the heavy portières, standing with a bit of lace draping in each hand and staring out at lights that gleamed from the building beneath him — a monarch surveying his kingdom. Outside, the snow had taken hold of slippery Fifth Avenue, and a whimsical wind hurled it against Canary's brocade-

hung windows. Waiting cabs, landaus, and motor vehicles were flake festooned, and their drivers stamped up and down the curbing, slapping their bodies into warmth. Stephen essayed a smile at the clowning of one of them; but it was a smile of the lips only. His eyes were sad.

He fumbled in his trousers' pockets and brought out a bit of lace and cambric that exhaled iris — the scent of the delicately bred that carried with it the remembrance of that kiss in Washington Square.

“Oh, my dear!” he said, something that was almost a sob escaping him. “Oh, my dear!”

He entered his dressing-room and turned on the shaded lights that displayed silver brushes and toilet articles on the mahogany table beneath them; and, opening a little drawer, placed the handkerchief in safe keeping. Straightening his tie and resuming his waistcoat and coat, rejecting his top hat which he had worn to dinner and the opera in favour of a soft one, he slipped into his fur-lined great coat.

Hesitating a moment at the door, he came back to his dressing-table and took from it a steel-blue weapon. Now he turned the knob of the door and found it locked. He sought the aid of his key chain, then laughed.

“Dear old Rag,” he said aloud. “How silly.”

It was but the matter of a moment to straighten out the curve in a silver button hook by placing it in a crack and closing a heavy mahogany door against it. The end, now only slightly curved, he inserted in the key-hole and felt for the lock; several times he missed it but the third time the tumbler was caught and turned backward.

He adjusted the catch that he might be able to enter on his return, and, when he reached the street, turned up the collar of his great coat and hailed the taxicab rank.

“First out,” echoed the taxicab starter. “Where to, sir?”

“Great Jones Street, just off the Bowery,” replied Stephen, feeling the reassuring touch of the steel-blue weapon in his pocket.

V

THE ASSASSINS

There had been imported recently a dance styled “The Tokolo Twirl” which had spread like chicken-pox through the honkatonks of the West — where originate most of such dances and the executants thereof — and had finally reached Manhattan to be received with acclaim by those of the East Side, briefly described by up-town bad men as “dese, dose, and dem guys”; the quotation referring to the congenital incapacity of the East Siders to master the pronunciation of the diphthong th.

The dance was in progress now at McGuimp’s, a glide, almost a walk, supplemented by sudden stoppage of the feet and a sidewise movement of the shoulders. The noise of ill-shod feet scraping over the sanded floor rose above the notes of the automatic piano which, for the slight temptation of an inserted nickel, provided the necessary accompaniment. The gentlemen took no chances with their hats, only making their deference to etiquette by tilting them

back on their heads instead of forward on their noses as was their usual custom. Mostly they wore hard-boiled shirts, originally white, creased of bosom, unclean of cuffs; dark clothes of no particular pattern; derbies on which dust had been allowed to accumulate unheeded since leaving the hatters, and what they were pleased to term "paddend-ledder" shoes. Their female companions' tastes ran to plaids in shirt waists, hats of astounding size loaded down with blowsy chiffon, long German-silver chains on which hung suspended locketts of the same material holding a lock of hair and a photograph, very tight skirts, and high-laced shoes of papier-maché — although purchased with a touching trust in human nature under the impression that a philanthropic manufacturer turned out leather boots for \$1.98 the pair.

Certain bulges in the gentlemen's clothes were not due to physical defects. Sometimes, when "Humpty" Keegan, the bartender, had no more remunerative occupation, he was unfraternal to the extent of wishing that a cataclysmic disturbance might render the entire "gang" senseless for a period long enough for him to completely "frisk them" and provide his little home in Jersey with an entire new set of elegant plumbing.

But those carrying lead-pipes were only the rank and file — the truckmen, draymen, and expressmen, who worked honestly by day and found the aiding of dishonesty only an avocation. The trusted lieutenants of Chicken McGuimp, proprietor of "The Gem," were all "gun men"— Big Al, Nigger Jake, an excessively swarthy gentleman hailing from Sicily, Gas-House Fred, a deserter from a gang

farther up town who had changed his residence for reasons best not discussed in his presence; Rats, who was well-named, many declared, being suspected of "stooling for the coppers and swearing many a right guy into the boob" — and others with decorative and descriptive "monakers" distinguishing them from the common herd of proletarian Jacks, Bills, and Petes, had never sunk so low in their own estimation as to believe that the world was other than a place made expressly for the purpose of supplying them with a living without labour. Although held in deepest fear by their associates, their right to the title of "gun men" might have been questioned severely by Western gentlemen who witnessed their use of weapons, for, unless they were within a few feet of their foe, they were more likely to injure furniture and chandeliers than anything else. However, as most of their work was done in dark places — from behind — with the butts of their revolvers, their marksmanship had little to do with their murderous ability.

The dance concluded and as no one donated another nickel to the insatiate automatic, the "gang" resumed their seats at deal tables that were ringed with many wet glasses, and most of them observed that the door-way leading to the bar was blocked by the bulk of a very tall man who, with a black slouch hat pulled over his eyes, stood watching them with some interest. Seeing, however, that the entertainment was for the moment suspended and the dancers were refreshing themselves, he turned from the door to "Humpty" Keegan and asked for a bottle of sarsparilla — his only reason for so doing being his figuring that he would rather open his drink with his own hands.

"Give you beer, whiskey, gin, brandy, creme-dy-minty, and ginger ale," Humpty informed him briefly.

"Ginger ale," directed the stranger.

The room began to fill with men who wore uncomfortable hats if one might judge by the number of times they took them off, wiped the inside bands, and replaced them at new angles. The appearance of a man in a fur coat and of a stature so commanding as Stephen Adams was hardly likely to go unnoticed in a place so mean as Chicken McGuimp's, and when he reached into his pocket to pay for his refreshment, those back of him noticed from the bar mirror that he was in a dress seldom seen in that neighbourhood. Two men who had come into the bar-room now left it by the front door, outside of which they remained in case of emergencies. Unaccompanied gentlemen in fur-lined coats and evening dress had been bonanzas to "The Gem" before.

Stephen laid a half-dollar on the bar.

"Have a drink?" he suggested smilingly.

"I'll have a cigar," growled Humpty. The half-dollar disappeared into the till. Stephen believed sufficiently in the adage concerning the custom of the country not to ask any questions concerning price. He lifted his glass and silently toasted Humpty; then set it down on the plain deal bar.

"Is Mr. McGuimp about?"

"Naw!"

"Do you know when he will be?"

"Naw!"

"Thank you," said Stephen, still smiling.

"Whadda yuh doin'?' kiddin' *me*? inquired Mr. Keegan, his face darkening.

What might have been the outcome of the matter was never fully determined in Stephen's mind; for, at that moment, he was forced to give his attention to a young gentleman who stumbled against him in order to divert his attention from the efforts of another young gentleman to reach his watch. Stephen smilingly stepped back, shaking his head.

"Raw work, boys," he criticized. "Good for the 'shorts' and that's about all. Have to do better than that nowadays if you want to get on."

His smiling assurance, his big frame, and, now, his use of words confined to the underworld and only known by those familiar with its life, somewhat disconcerted the gentlemen with the uncomfortable hats. The man who had tried to possess himself of Stephen's property and who was in a fair way to promotion as a lieutenant left the room hurriedly to seek Big Al, whom he knew to be feasting with a friend at the chop suey restaurant over the way.

Stephen produced a gold cigarette case from which he took one of a brand unfamiliar to that section of the city. But even as he lit it he did not remove his gaze from those members of McGuimp's fraternity who were engaged in staring at him, holding the match up instead of bending down over the flame. The gentlemen found his close attention somewhat disconcerting. Soon they only stared in relays.

The appearance of a chunky man — his breadth accentuated by the short, double-breasted reefer coat and low-

crowned derby he wore; a man of porcine eyes, his head, contrary to the usual fashion, broadening downward from a low narrow forehead until his jaws had the semblance of the well-filled pouches of a squirrel — was hailed with genuine relief. Stephen received the many telepathic messages flashed about the narrow space of the bar-room, and viewed the new comer with the knowledge that he was a man of some importance in this little world, possibly the leader of these "gorillas." Their eyes sought each the level of the other's, and Stephen was unable to restrain a laugh. The man's head suggested to him only a harmless Bartlett pear.

Slowly the new comer made his way to Stephen, passed him, and entered the little room at the back, where he was followed by a number of the men, only enough remaining to overwhelm the stranger should he so conduct himself as to merit it. The squirrel-pouched man removed himself from Stephen's line of vision, and, taking from his pocket a .38 revolver of a pattern familiar to magazine readers who have been urged to "hammer the hammer," polished off the long nickled barrel with a gypsy handkerchief.

"Yuh 'make' him, Al?" queried one of his followers.

"You ginks git into that bar and see he stays there," returned Big Al briefly.

"Has he got any dough, Al?" asked a thin-lipped Jew.

"You do as I tell you. Git in there. Rats and Gas-House and me were goin' up to-morra night teh git him. The 'dicks' ain't givin' him no protection, see? If we croak him, it's a accident and nuthin' won't be done; that comes straight from 'the office,' see?"

They moved off.

“Wait a minute. Don’t start nuthin’ in here. ‘Chicken’ ’ull be here by one. Wait fer him. We gotta keep him here ’til he comes.”

They filtered back into the narrow bar, and others slid into the back room to be furnished with information. The females at the table, sentient to danger through the production of Big Al’s gun, sat quiet. A great silence brooded over the bar, also, the brute eyes of the gorilla occasionally searching Stephen’s, and amazed that they found no fear there.

Stephen was becoming impatient; the foul air was nauseating, and this ominous silence, while in no way intimidating, nevertheless irked him. He wondered if the man who had just entered could be McGuimp, but Big Al did not return to the bar that Stephen might ask; for he had left the back room by the hall-way known as the “Ladies’ Entrance” and was now standing just outside the bar door that led to the street.

“When d’you expect McGuimp?” asked Stephen, turning his head at a slight angle to address Humpty Keegan.

“One o’clock,” volunteered one of the gorillas who had been informed.

Stephen thanked him and moved toward the street door. The gorillas, patient as wolves and as unreasoning, moved after him in a body, elated at an action that could be attributed to fear.

“You stay in here, young fella,” called after him the young Jew who had inquired of Big Al concerning the stranger’s wealth. Stephen turned, noting their general movement forward.

"What?" he asked.

Something in his tone bade the man who had spoken keep his peace. He was at a loss to explain why, but the very placidity of the stranger's eye and the quietness of his tone made him desire to recall his words. He shivered instinctively lest he should be picked as the speaker.

"Oh, I thought somebody spoke," said Stephen, looking them over as a general might inspect a squad of newly recruited "rookies" who showed little promise. They felt the implied superiority of his sneer but, somehow, failed to resent it, and were glad when he removed his gaze and turned his back on them again. They made no further movement.

"Let Al look after him; he'll do ut," whispered some one. It seemed to be the consensus of opinion.

Stephen opened the door. Immediately confronting him was Big Al, his hand in his jacket pocket.

"Where you goin', young fellow?"

"Why," answered Stephen, humouring him, "it's rather close in the bar. I thought I'd step out on the pavement a minute. By the way, are you McGuimp?"

All bull-dozing speeches eluded Big Al's memory; he felt at a loss for words, so contented himself with growling out a negative in answer to the latter portion of Stephen's remark.

"He'll be along about one," Stephen said conversationally. "I'm very anxious to meet him but it's too close inside. Think I'll step out on the curb."

"Nope," declared Al courageously.

"What?"

"Stay inside until McGuimp comes. He wants to see you. You're Steve Adams, ain't yuh?"

"Yes," agreed Stephen.

Al, surprised at his temerity in declaring himself, stared at the daring one.

"Guess you didn't know Mac wanted tuh see you?"

"Yes, I heard so from a friend. That's why I came down. I'm very anxious to meet McGuimp, as I said before. I'll be waiting for him at the curb in case he doesn't recognize me."

He started forward; Al put up a flattened palm.

"Hullo," laughed Stephen. "What's all this!"

"You stay in that bar until McGuimp comes!"

"What?"

"You heard what I said, young fella!"

"Oh, behave," said Stephen. "Get out of the way or I'll drop you where you stand."

He slapped down the upraised palm, tossed Al aside carelessly and stepped out into the street. In an instant, the match of violence having been set to their suppressed brutality, there was a headlong rush for the open, each man feeling for his lead pipe, his black jack, or his gun.

They came out into the cold, clear air of midnight, under a moon that lighted up the snow-covered streets, and they halted suddenly, deploying in a straggling semicircle.

The street was silent and empty save for the figure of Stephen, one side of his fur-lined coat now thrown back, his back against a gnarled tree, through the stark branches of which a flood of moonlight filtered down to show the sheer white of his shirt and tie and the fact that the side of the

coat thrown back was raised just a trifle by something within the pocket that was held hard against the cloth by a very steady hand.

"Well, boys," laughed Stephen pleasantly, "want anything?"

His attitude alarmed them. If he had drawn a weapon that would have been nothing; but this throwing back of the coat and the heavy pressure of a gun muzzle against it was a trick that they associated with professional murderers — men who shot in crowds and then quietly closed their coats and pressed out the fire from within so that none knew from whom the shot had come.

"Oh, you've just come out to keep me from being lonely!"

They surveyed his huge frame uncomfortably. Many shivered but not from the cold. An uncontrollable desire to return to their haunt within was only checked by the fear of turning their backs. The inside of "The Gem" became suddenly an Elysium difficult of attainment. Big Al, more than any of the others, for he had felt the weight of the stranger's careless gesture and knew it to be more powerful than another's doughtiest blow, wished he had not interfered in the matter.

It was in marble-like attitudes that McGuimp found his followers upon his return from a secret session with the political master of the situation in that part of town who had been issuing to him certain instructions that had to do with certain enemies. He burst through the semicircle to stand face to face with the man he had been instructed to maim, recognizing him immediately from his description, and becoming equally cognizant with his fellow gorillas of

the sinister threat of that concealed hand and thrown back coat.

Stephen took stock of him — a hairy fellow with a long upper lip that protruded out of all proportion to the other features, a small nose with split nostrils upturned, heavy bowed shoulders, and long, lean arms held in such a position that the palms were turned backward — the central figure of a fantasy had his ugliness possessed any whimsical touch, but, lacking that, only a throw back to the tree man — an atavistic monstrosity painful to the more cultivated sight of those a hundred centuries removed from him by the natural laws of evolution.

The sight of such a man, thought Stephen, must have been the genesis of Charles Darwin's famous theory.

It had never occurred to him to be afraid; least of all now. He was studying a curiosity, knowing that such a man must have been his ancestor ages before, but rather resenting a family portrait gallery that stretched so far back.

Stephen's analytical gaze had its effect upon McGuimp. The sense of physical superiority overawed him, as the appearance of the lion in the distance sent his prototype in the early ages scurrying to the topmost branches of a tree. Indeed the very presence of the withered branches before him produced a disturbing effect in his groping primordial brain.

Stephen burst into laughter, laughter as fresh and as unfeigned as any that had ever been drawn from him by any comic happening. That men should fear this mental

dwarf, this mere beginning of a man, but a step removed from the easily trained dumb brutes, was something so irresistibly amusing that he could find no words that would adequately express his feelings.

The laughter seemed like the tapping of a steel hammer against the gang leader's brain. His eyes closed, his attitude became that of a dog, about to slink away in blind terror.

"Come here, McGuimp," said Stephen, still laughing.

As one magnetized, the gorilla advanced without effort, facing Stephen for a moment and closing his eyes again.

"Send that mob of yours back where they came from."

McGuimp half turned and lifted his hand. Glad enough of the excuse to go, they still hesitated. Stephen construed their feelings rightly.

"I'm not down here for trouble, boys. Do as you're told."

One by one, each endeavouring to persuade the others by his gesture that he went simply because he had been so requested, the gorillas regained their Elysium with suppressed sighs of relief, leaving the street to Stephen and their leader. Stephen waited until the last one had disappeared, then again gave vent to his tickled risibilities by another hearty laugh.

"So people are afraid of you, McGuimp? That's the funniest joke of the year. If you only knew how ridiculous you look, my boy. I've got a pup I'm going to name after you. Afraid of you are they, McGuimp?"

Somehow it seemed ludicrous even to the gang leader that he should ever have imagined himself a person to be



“Don’t ever let me hear another peep out of you about me”

feared, with this towering figure looking down at him, this man of the fine, ringing laugh who was yet as able to stamp him out as was McGuimp the meanest member of his gang. His eyes sought Stephen's almost appealingly as a dog's those of a master who is inflicting punishment.

"I guess that was a mistake, McGuimp? You weren't going to let a bullet-headed policeman 'bull' you into going after me, were you? You really didn't intend to 'get' me, did you, McGuimp?"

McGuimp gave vent to just one word — the first and the last he had ever the honour to address to Stephen Adams. It was a vigorous and emphatic negative. Stephen laughed again until his sides ached.

"I thought not! Just talking, weren't you? Well, don't talk that way again, McGuimp. And listen! Don't come up in my part of the town again and beat up any more men — understand? Do your maiming and your killing among your own kind of brutes; the more of them get killed the better; but don't ever let me hear another 'peep' out of you about me or I'll put a net around this honkatonk of yours with your mob in it and drop the whole business into the East River. That's all. Now get in out of the cold and tell your gang what I've told you. Go on! Get!"

Stephen watched the gang leader go as ordered, then, with another laugh, walked off up the street.

McGuimp entered the bar. Expectant faces questioned him. His realization that these people had dared to offend the man he had just left occurred to him suddenly as an insult, and as the beaten dog has no resentment toward his

master but a mighty rage against that master's enemies, he became immediately a fierce, menacing figure.

"Did any of youse guys say anything wrong to *him*, hey?"

If he had lost any standing by his conduct in the presence of Stephen, he regained it in that single instant. There was a chorus of negatives.

"Don't tell me no lies, now; did anybody say anything wrong? Come on now! Better tell me de trut'!"

The frightened Jew, fearing that his one remark might be remembered by the others, cried out in his fear:

"Al did — Big Al — he put up his mitt and tole him not tuh go out. He done it."

His eyes blazing, McGuimp tore across the room to where stood the man with the squirrel-pouched face, and, even as he ran, he swung his fist. Al toppled under the blow and fell awkwardly, striking his head against a cuspidor. McGuimp kicked him viciously with his heavy boots.

"Yuh let me hear of any of youse guys sayin' anyt'ing wrong tuh *him*. W'y, you big boobs," he yelled in a sudden frenzy of triumphant pride at declaring so great a man in any way connected with himself, "yuh bone heads, yuh mutts — *he's me pal*."

CHAPTER VI

THE SPIDER

I

INTRODUCING COMMON FOLK TO THEIR MASTER

DOWN on the lower part of the island of Manhattan, where belles and their beaux once strolled in well-bred leisure and watched queenly ships skim lightly over placid waters bringing them mail from that greater land beyond the seas; where Manhattan seems to narrow and two rivers meet placidly; where frigate and privateer, merchantman, pirate, and man-of-war lay side by side in the broad harbour for the time at peace in this Mecca of the New World where all earth's long-delayed promises to common men were to be fulfilled; down where a jubilant nation afterward erected a gigantic monolith in honour of the seeming fulfilment of those promises, yes, almost within the shadow of Liberty's cradle — stand the castles of those who are speedily making a race of free men bond again.

Here there are not men but human dynamos; here machinery has long since taken the place of hearts; even brains have become subordinated to tireless energy and concentrated money lust. There is lacking here even the beauty

that old-time tyrants gave to possessions wrenched from the people; one may forgive a structure stained with one's blood if that structure be more beautiful than one's dreams; but the castles of the new masters are only masses of wood, stone, and iron, divided into hutches where sit patient rabbits, blinking bleared eyes under green shades, and counting up their overlords' wealth. Sallow of skin, stunted of frame, and dwarfed of mind, are the wage slaves of the machine; in dress pitifully alike; in disposition as near a copy of the one immediately above them as their inferior mentality permits; each bullying some helpless subordinate who in turn will bully another over whom he has the right; for cunning masters contrive small whips that their slaves may scourge other slaves with them, and, through giving petty authority, wrench a dollar where but a half is paid.

The Masters' Castles — truly gigantic monstrosities befitting a dynasty whose ruler is from the loins of the goddess of gold; false even in their appearance of strength, for here the masters have faced disciples of their own lawless creed which is to give as little as one must for service rendered; buildings built upon sand because the rock was too expensive to reach if contractors are to wax rapidly rich; the aftermaths of dying men in unsafe caissons, for life is cheaper in New York town than the cost of saving it — card-board houses of an oligarchy, than which none has been more ridiculous since the geese flapped and crowed in ancient Rome.

Not castles reared by mighty men, head and shoulders above their kind; not the castles of great rulers, holding the reins of government by sheer force of mighty intellects;

neither the great crude strength of barbarism nor the keen, ordered dignity of those who have passed through civilization's crucible and emerged fit to rule nobly. For these are rulers only because of the crass stupidity of a generation too confused and perplexed to rule for themselves.

Men called the many-tentacled decapod, requiring for residence a granite building of thirty stories containing close upon a thousand rooms, "Amalgamated Securities." It seemed but a single boulder that helped in its way to make the walls of the Grand Cañon of lower Broadway; but, in reality, it was from there that red-hot wires ran to all the other boulders. No deal was too large to originate there; none too small for Stephen Janissary to unblushingly demand his share of the profits. Argus eyed and heavy pawed, Amalgamated Securities lay like an unwieldy shadow over the world of business and politics.

A man who had wished to hold the highest office in the land had come humbly to Room 203 (marked private), and had gone forth, after making certain promises, with the knowledge that he was already elected. No senator was deemed fit to represent the Empire State at the nation's capital unless Room 203 approved him as a "safe" man. Governors, mayors, and representatives were of too little consequence to bother about; sometimes Room 203 let the people elect some so-called reformer under the impression that they were reorganizing corrupt politics. This was very amusing to Room 203 and cost it little; for, if it found the elected one meddling in its affairs after taking the office, it was always easy to smother him with lieutenant-governorships,

vice-presidencies, or, as a token of respectful fear, with a seat in the Federal Judiciary.

It made very little difference to Room 203 how an indignant nation voted, so long as nature's inexorable law was that fools be in the majority and the greatest number of the intelligent be without scruples. These latter could be bought; those of the brainless not susceptible to bribes were easily persuaded by a subsidized press and expensive publicity promoters into the opinion that Socialism was akin to Anarchy and to priding themselves into believing they were "Conservative." Truly Satan never invented a more convenient word; there must have been merry laughter in hell when "Conservative" was coined.

At the top of this heap of ludicrous conceit sat Stephen Janissary in Room 203.

"Janissary and Duress" had long ago ceased to interest him. It had been but a step to the control of the flour industry, which was now capably managed for him by Henry K. Vaughan. A corner in wheat had followed inevitably, catching in its meshes some of those heavily interested in oil, and from them Janissary had demanded a heavy toll of their stock before he would release them. That certain oil fields should be properly developed, it was necessary that he should interest himself in those railroads on which the developments depended. Once in, it was to be expected that trusty lieutenants should point out to him how easy it was to bankrupt smaller railroads and buy in their stock for a song. Friction between himself and affiliated railroad owners caused him to build a trolley line between two cities. This knowledge of the value of

franchises made him greedy to share in the rich profits accruing from the ownership of stock in transportation companies in the metropolis.

He had scarcely ever taken a risk. He had always been in the possession of ready money when ready money was scarce, and he had bought nothing that was not safe as real estate. Eventually, it was necessary that he own a bank to swing his enterprises; now he had a chain of banks.

And then, that his interests might be protected, he saw that he must also own a fair share of the government; and he found that, with money to hand, this was the easiest task of all.

Men had long ceased to attempt to compile statistics concerning his wealth. It having gone outside their ken, they referred to him vaguely as a billionaire. If wealth be reckoned by income, he was.

Had he been a really great man he might have been vulnerable. But there was nothing in life for which he had a weakness. Women had ever been to him but creatures of the moment to be summoned when wanted, dismissed immediately they palled. His second wife, whom he married in the desperate hope of securing a second son and heir, had disappointed him and, finding his wrath too terrible, had fled from him to the security of a convent, denying him divorce as a result of her religion, and dying only a few years before. Of art, music, and literature, he was still as ignorant as he had ever been. His personal tastes were still those of the middle classes, with the exception of a recently developed hobby for carved jewels. Some one had persuaded him to build a great country house in Westchester

County, but he used it only when he wished to golf; his city home was still the old Janissary house on lower Fifth Avenue.

When Canby Kernahan first read the story of John Graham's fight in the Council, it had never occurred to him that, at the end of the long coil of corruption, he was going to find Amalgamated Securities. The story, in itself, was big enough without springing from so gigantic a root.

"Before the street railways were amalgamated under one head," his city editor had told him, "there was a surface car that ran along Broadway from Bowling Green out to Harlem. But the minute all of them got together, it was arranged to take this line off, and pretend that there were two rival companies, so that the Broadway cars ran out Seventh Avenue to Fifty-third Street, then into Sixth Avenue and so on and so on; so that if you wanted to ride out Broadway farther than Forty-seventh Street you had to pay two fares. Now John Graham, a mighty square alderman, has looked over the franchises of these companies, and found that a link in this Broadway car line isn't provided with a franchise; in other words, that these cars run over one block of city property without having any authority to do so from the city, and he has introduced a measure before the council to veto the car line's franchise. He says that any body of men so infernally greedy as to cut that Broadway ride in half and force a large proportion of people living above Forty-seventh Street either to walk or pay a second fare deserves no mercy even on a technicality."

Kernahan had nodded.

"I've been following the story, sir. The veto's bound to

go through, isn't it? The council wouldn't dare to vote against it in the face of the public opinion that we've stirred up!"

The city editor, calloused to graft, found the unsophistication of the younger man amusing.

"Just figure out to yourself how much that franchise is worth to the people now operating it and how much the city could make those people pay to get it back again if it were once cancelled; then figure out how much money they're willing to disgorge to save themselves any such disaster."

Kernahan had sat down, overwhelmed. Each development of civic corruption that came to his notice found him unprepared. He had spent his life among a different race of people; among those with whom honour, the fair fame of their family, honesty, and a conscience at peace with itself counted for more than the mere accumulation of money. Their lives had been less complex, and regulated by their abilities rather than their desires. It was the very fact that he looked at affairs in New York through the eyes of such people that made him of enormous value to his newspaper; for his indignation at public thefts was not feigned; his rhetoric had in it something more than a mere desire for effect; it carried conviction to the mind of the reader because it was sincere.

"Now I want you to follow this thing, day by day," the city editor had wound up. "Of course, everything will be done to choke off Graham and keep the measure from being introduced. But he's that *rara avis*, an honest man, and he's going through. It'll be interesting

to see what Amalgamated does about it. I'll bet they haven't had a scare like this thrown into them for years, and it'll cost the crowd a fortune before they get through with it. More than that; Stephen Janissary and that crew will have a few more lines and gray hairs before the thing's over."

"Janissary — is he mixed up in this, too?"

"My dear Kerny," said the city editor tolerantly, "you talk like a child. The history of the United States and that of Stephen Janissary have been identical for the past five years or so. The man is invincible; you can't beat him."

Kernahan flushed.

"Well, he'll be beaten on this thing — that's a cinch. The council would never dare to refuse to veto that franchise; why the men who voted for it would be tarred and feathered and run out of town."

"In your section of the country, you mean. Here they'll give a big picnic, distribute a hundred tons of coal among the poor, and be as popular as ever with the simple voters by the time next election comes. But while this story lasts, it's a pippin for us. Go to it, young reformer!"

"If I have anything to do with it, the measure won't go through. I'll interview every alderman and force him to make a statement about the measure, and if he goes back on it he'll be politically dead ——"

"With you, you mean. Well, God bless you, Kerny, and more speed to your elbow; but Janissary and his crowd will win. I'll bet you the finest hat you ever had on your head they do."

"A good sport never bets on a sure thing," said Canby

Kernahan sententiously. "Therefore I refuse to be equipped with headgear at your expense."

"Lucky you feel that way about it," laughed the city editor, "because they'll win as sure as God made little apples. So long."

Since that time Kernahan had discovered that the pessimistic outlook of his superior officer was only too lamentably justified; for, in spite of his and other burning articles, there was a deadlock in the council, and, after a period of holding out, Aloysius McKenna went over to the enemy, his vote deciding the battle in favour of the corporation. Immediately thereafter a new franchise to cover that city block was introduced.

But Canby had not been idle. Working shoulder to shoulder with John Graham, he had cornered McKenna, and, finding the man a fairly decent sort of citizen, had played upon his better feelings to such good purpose that, under the most solemn of pledges to keep his peace, Kernahan learned that there was a grand jury indictment against McKenna for manslaughter — the result of a saloon brawl in which he had struck in self-defence. But he had no witnesses to prove his innocence and the grand jury had indicted him. Being, however, a lawyer of some influence on the East Side, the machine had indefinitely postponed the trial, and voted him into office, knowing that the indictment would be a Damoclean sword to hold over his head.

But, sickened of such political slavery, he had been about to take his chances and vote in favour of John Graham's measure; after that he had intended to throw himself upon the mercy of the public should the indictment be

revived, explaining that his ill-luck was only due to the fact that he had antagonized the political and business interests that had hitherto protected him. It was while in this frame of mind, he told Kernahan, that he had been taken to see Mr. Janissary and shown the sworn statements of five witnesses who declared McKenna was the aggressor in the saloon brawl and who also stated that they had heard him state in their presence, two weeks before, that he intended to "get" the man whom he had killed. This changed the aspect of affairs from manslaughter to murder in the first degree — for premeditation made all the difference — and it was a certainty that, if he were brought to trial on the present indictment, the grand jury would return a second one that would result in no less than twenty years' imprisonment.

It was also shown to McKenna's perfect dismay that the district attorney was on the best of terms with the son of the president of the railway companies, and that the president — O'Shea — had the pleasure of the public prosecutor's company at dinner more than a few times each month. The district attorney's term of office being short, and the position of legal adviser to the street railways being guaranteed him after that term had expired, it was not to be supposed that the prosecution of Mr. McKenna would be conducted in a lackadaisical manner.

Then, after showing the alderman what they were able to do if he voted against their interests, a flat package of bills was put into his hands — the legend, \$25,000, being inscribed upon the brown paper that covered them.

It was through the acceptance of this sum that McKenna

was enabled to leave New York for London, whence he would travel to Tangier where extradition laws were not. John Graham had guaranteed to clear him of the manslaughter charge, and to look out for his interests during his solstice. Graham had waited until McKenna cabled from London that he was on his way to Tangier. Now, armed with his confession and flanked by Canby Kernahan, he awaited the effect of sending in his card to Stephen Janissary.

The first clerk in the general offices of Amalgamated to whom the card had been handed had treated it with the usual contempt shown in that office to any who desired to transact business there. He was a sloe-eyed young fellow with a vulgar collar that came close together and held the veriest wisp of knitted neck-tie fastened with a matrix pin so arranged that it wormed its way in and out of the tie in three places.

“See Mr. Janissary?” he said in tones that seemed awed by the unreasonableness of the request. “Oh, say, you’re kiddin’ me, ain’t you?”

Kernahan added his card to that of Graham’s. The clerk looked at it for the barest instant then tossed it back.

“He never sees any of you newspaper fellahs; you oughta know that. Kinda new to th’ business, ain’t you?” He hailed a fellow clerk. “Say, Gus, here’s nerve for you; a couple of newspaper guys sendin’ in their cards to Mr. Janissary! Rich, ain’t it?”

The other joined in the laugh that followed. The first clerk seemed to consider the interview at an end for he turned his back upon the visitors.

“What show you gunna go to to-night, Gus?”

"Oh, I dunno; so much of this high brow stuff in the theatres this month. Let's go tuh see th' 'Girl from Shanley's' agin, hey?"

"Aaw, cheese! We've seen it couple o' times."

"I know, but we can get front-row seats now and kid those dancing girls. . . . How are yuh on the currency? Strong? Might kop a couple out for ourselves and take them tuh supper ——"

Graham broke in impatiently:

"Are you going to send my card to Mr. Janissary, or are you not?"

The clerks turned, regarding him superciliously; but a second look at the grim face, the deep-set eyes, broad brow, and statesman's black string neck-tie set a cog of memory working in the mind of Gus. He frowned at his companion and stretched out his hand for Graham's card.

"Yuh ain't John K. Graham, th' alderman, are yuh?" he asked.

Graham nodded. Gus caught the arm of the clerk who had first spoken, and, drawing him away, whispered. The other took the card and disappeared.

"I'm sorry, gen'l'men," averred Gus, drawing close to the wicket window. "Didn't know who you was, you know. So many panhandlers an' grafters a-tryin' to see Mr. Janissary. Hope you ——"

"Like master, like man," murmured Graham.

"Beg your pardon, sir ——"

"Oh, nothing. Incident's closed. Say no more about it." The other clerk returned.

"Card's on its way up," he explained to the waiting men.

“Takes some time to get to Mr. Janissary — has to pass through about twenty people. Sit down, please.”

He had sent cards to the great man before, and had known United States senators and others whose names were household words, to remain waiting for half an hour or more. Stephen Janissary seldom received except by appointment. But there was no doubt in the mind of either the alderman or the newspaper man that Janissary would welcome a conversation with the father of the franchise veto measure.

Indeed a peculiar honour was in store for him. No less a person than Eliason, confidential secretary now, as he had always been, to Janissary, answered the call of the card — a shred of a man, bundled up in a great fur coat, his thin neck wrapped in a silk-knitted muffler, and affecting those whiskers which have all the semblance of virtue and which are popularly known as “weepers” — the perfect picture of a member of the vestry of a fashionable church.

“Mr. Graham, sir . . . an honour: and your friend — Kirby Hand, you say?— Ah, Kernahan? Excuse me, gentlemen — a trifling affliction of the left ear — if you wouldn't mind speaking to my right. Ah, thank you. As you say, gentlemen — Mr. Janissary? Quite so — very anxious to have the honour of your acquaintance, gentlemen, but terribly busy with a board meeting. It is a thing to ask, him giving that up — but terribly anxious to have the honour — a few moments. Come with me, gentlemen.”

He led the way into the marble-paved hall of the building and through the revolving doors to the street, where,

conspicuous even in the cheap expensiveness of lower Broadway, a handsomely appointed, dark blue landaulette, presided over by a chauffeur in livery that matched the car's colour, was drawn up to the curb.

"Mr. Janissary requests you to accompany me to his house — private house, gentlemen. Appreciates honour of your call, and wants to give you his undivided attention. Eh, what's that, gentlemen? On the right side if you please ——"

But Graham did not desire that Eliason should hear what he was saying to Kernahan:

"That's where all the big deals are pulled off — at the house. That's where they took McKenna. He's going to talk business."

"Yes, what *he* calls business; but what you'd call bribery."

"The right side, gentlemen, if you please."

"Oh, it's nothing, sir," explained Graham, as he sat down beside Eliason in the motor-car. "Just a remark I made to my friend. It wasn't of any importance."

Dusk was beginning to fall — the early dusk that precedes the long winter night — and the chimes of Trinity Church — a peaceful, old-world anachronism, that church, with its graveyard of mighty dead, a solemn warning to the victors of the moment that eternity at least could not be bought — were calling the hour of five. The rabbits, turned loose from their hutches, were scampering home to their warrens at the other end of the town where they might eat poorly and rest scantily, preparing for their tread-mill work of the morrow. They scattered at the approach of the magnificent car, yielding it the right of way without

question. Eliason pulled down the blinds, and, touching a button, flooded the interior with roseate light.

“Cigarettes, cigars, the evening papers, a light — even a wee nip if you indulge, gentlemen.”

It was but a question of touching buttons set in the brocaded panelled walls for little compartments containing the articles of which the secretary spoke to be revealed to their gaze — the furnishings in gold and cut glass. The guests shook their heads, and Eliason helped himself to a cigarette, pressing another button that caused an overhead ventilator to whirl about carrying off the smoke.

“Mr. Janissary neither smokes, drinks, nor chews — a beautiful example to the youth of the age. A glass of port on rare occasions, nothing more. If our great men would but all follow his example! Ah, gentlemen, the right side, if you please —”

“Very beautiful, indeed,” sneered Graham. But the old man heard only the words.

“As you say, Mr. Graham, very beautiful. Such an example — such a man!”

He clasped his hands in rapt devotion.

“I — I must confess,” he deprecated as he held the cigarette between thumb and forefinger taking an occasional whiff, “I must confess that I am not equal to the demand of the flesh. These cigarettes now; from the Khedive’s own stock; such tobacco, gentlemen! Why,” he added in an awed whisper, “twenty-one cents apiece, counting the duty. But it is vanity and he is above it. You won’t indulge, gentlemen?”

“Twenty-one cents apiece for cigarettes and the cheapest

eggs twenty-five cents a dozen," said Graham bitterly, turning to Kernahan.

"The right side, gentlemen, please."

They ignored him, conversing between themselves, the old man stroking his white "weepers" and contemplating the cigarette he held with affectionate admiration. The motor-car drew up to a curb again, and the chauffeur, leaving his steering wheel, opened the door for them.

The years had made little change in the massive, brown-stone house of Janissary; the spear-head railings had received countless more coats of paint but always the same black; a famous landscape gardener had done some wonderful things with beds of tulips and geraniums which were now covered with straw to protect them from the winter's frost; but the oak trees, planted when the house was built, were still young, individual laughs of time at the apparent age of the house which now seemed an antiquity.

The door was opened by the footman who had once travelled upon Mr. McCune's 'bus to order the supper in celebration of young Stephen's birth; but he was an upper footman now and only answered the door and waited at table when big functions were held, a man solemn beyond belief and in no way reminiscent of that one who had chaffed 'bus drivers.

The library into which Eliason conducted Graham and Kernahan was at the head of the broad staircase, and it was here that all privy businesses connected with Amalgamated Securities were transacted. Its appearance was a tribute to the second Mrs. Janissary who had been a lady of some artistic impulses, using the money at her

command to beautify the middle-class abode to which she found herself taken on the occasion of her marriage. It was furnished in gold and dark violet, the furniture of mahogany and in the First Empire style, with bronze figures of Ceres, Mercury, Minerva, and Juno attached to bookcases, chairs, and divans, and forming component parts of table legs. Several Greuzes, Watteaus, and others in styles more or less similar, were well hung and lighted; and the fireplace was a copy of the one that travellers admire in Marie Antoinette's boudoir at the *Petit Trianon*; above it, in a glass case, two Tanagra statuettes. The volumes in the bookcases were handsomely tooled in colours that carried out the general colour-scheme of the room, and the only hint of business was found in the flat-topped table in the centre of the room on which were arranged writing paraphernalia in heavy silver. Even the telephone and the safe were concealed, the former within a high drawer in the desk especially made for the purpose, the latter being encased within the lower portion of a magnificent piece of Chippendale — an upright desk with carved lions' heads.

When Eliason switched on the lights they seemed to emanate from real candles, so cunningly contrived were the three-branched candelabras set over mantel, bookcases, and in corresponding portions of the room.

Eliason sat down at the flat-topped desk and took out the concealed telephone.

“I'll see if he's left the office, gentlemen.”

He held the receiver to his ear.

“Am I on the right side, gentlemen? I seem to be.

I am? Strange; I *hear* nothing. Would you oblige me, Mr. Graham? Ask for Broad 654789."

"There's something the matter with the wire," said Graham curtly, after pushing down the hook of the instrument several times in the belief that "exchange" had succumbed to soporific influences. Eliason looked vexed.

"Most annoying — most annoying, gentlemen."

He touched a button.

"Dreadfully inefficient service — terrible annoyance."

"Amalgamated Securities owns a majority of the stock in the telephone monopoly," said John Graham grimly.

"Right side, Mr. Graham, please. What? Oh, Creedy," he added at the entrance of the footman he had summoned. "The telephone's out of order. Send around some one immediately. Catch them before they close. Hurry!"

"If you please, sir, a man just came; a workman; says there's been complaints from all around; wanted to know if ours was all right, sir."

"Well, you can tell him they're not. No, send him up here. I'll speak severely to him. Most annoying ——"

"He said he'd have to go into every room in the house, almost, to find out where the trouble was, Mr. Eliason; said something about a short-circuit or something. He's in the dining-room now. Shall I send him up?"

"I told you so, did I not? Yes, immediately. Impudent scamps, these workmen — servants can't manage them."

"Nor masters, either, nowadays," growled John Graham.

"The workman, sir," announced the footman, who, having leaned over the balusters and called to his companions below, had summoned the man in overalls with little delay.

As has been before remarked, George le Fay was an artist in all he attempted. Middle class he might be in his personal tastes, but in such matters as cheating at cards or providing himself with information concerning the "lay-out" of a house, the contents of which were to be removed without the owner's consent, he had few superiors. He had chosen this time of day to cut the telephone wires that connected with the Janissary house, for he knew it would be too late for them to summon a workman from the company, and he would, consequently, have all the time necessary to "sound the joint" — as he would have phrased it. The cutting of the wires had been accomplished without difficulty from the roof of the house next door, to which he had gained admittance on the pretext that their connection seemed to be poor, their light showing but dimly in the exchange. He had informed the householder that the trouble lay in the Janissary home and that he must attend to that before he could remedy theirs, this because he knew he must return to the first house to twist the wires together again. He had already very thoroughly investigated dining, breakfast and drawing rooms, also kitchen, servants' quarters, wine cellar, and coal bins, and he welcomed the summons to the second floor.

A few smudges of grease across his face, his hair disordered, and his blue-striped overalls grimy, a telephone employé's badge in his greasy cap, and carrying an assortment of tools, no one would have seen in George le Fay any resemblance to a pillar of a secret order that wore trunkless animals on their watch chains.

"Yes, sir, I agree with you, sir. Quite right, sir;" he

replied humbly after Eliason's diatribe. "I'll try and fix it at once, sir."

"Right side, please. What?"

"I'll get to work right away; must locate the trouble, though. Is there a telephone in this room?"

When it was shown him, he seemed to give it the attention of an expert, first, however, by adroit questions, discovering that no one in the room knew anything at all about the wiring of a house for a telephone connection. After shaking and patting the instrument, he got down on hands and knees and crawled about the floor, tapping walls and flooring, and, surreptitiously, bits of furniture. It was not long before he became aware of the location of the safe in the upright desk.

"Trouble's not in this room," he said authoritatively, rising to his feet and dusting off his hands. "I'll have to go over the whole house, sir," he added in Eliason's ear. "P'raps the trouble comes from next door. I'll look into that, too."

He started out but drew back at the entrance of Stephen Janissary. The size of the man cowed George le Fay for the moment; he was no friend of danger; shirked it whenever possible; and the cold eyes of the master of Amalgamated seemed to search those of the smaller thief as if stirred by remembrance. George had not bargained on meeting Janissary. He was immediately thrown into a cold perspiration lest the other recall the game of cards which had ended both disastrously and offensively for the "plucked" one. After young Stephen's tirade, there would be little mercy shown his partner.

“Telephone — out of order,” he stammered. “Trying to locate the defective wiring. ’Scuse me, gentlemen.”

George went out hurriedly. Janissary, for the moment oblivious of the two strangers, sat down heavily at the flat-topped desk, and placed his palms to his head.

“You know I told you, Eliason. Memories all the time. Who was that man?”

“A workman, sir; telephone company.”

“I know; but his name?”

“It is a thing to ask, Mr. Janissary. I cannot remember workmen’s names even if they tell me. But you are forgetting Mr. Graham — and his friend.”

Stephen Janissary raised his eyes and regarded the two men almost insolently, nodding.

“Oh, yes, Mr. Graham, I remember. So you thought you’d come and see me, eh? Well, let’s talk business and be quick about it. My time’s valuable.”

II

THE SILENT MESSENGER

Before speaking John Graham removed with some ostentation the folded sheets of fool’s-cap that made up a copy of McKenna’s confession. His gesture, to overbalance the insolent stare of Janissary, was almost grandiose. Indeed, his love of theatricalism was the weakest point in the alderman’s armour. There was more than a little of the old-school statesman, whose favourite place to rest his hand was between the first and second buttons of his coat, about John Graham; and especially when he found himself in the

presence of one he knew to be his mental superior as, subconsciously, he believed Janissary to be.

"I think you would prefer to hear what I have to say alone, Mr. Janissary," he said finally.

"I have no secrets from Mr. Eliason. Say what you have to say."

"Then he must be a very great hypocrite," retorted John Graham bitterly, "for he has just been holding you up as an example to the youth of the age — a fine example, truly. I thought you had him hoodwinked; gave him credit for sincerity."

"Ah, I see; your object in coming here was to criticise me and my staff personally," said Janissary in a dangerously cold voice. He had shown to poor advantage with the younger Stephen in their passages at arms on the Atlantic liner; now he had the contemptuous suavity of a master.

"Well," he continued, "I have read your opinion of me and my friends in the anarchistic rags that print such stuff, and I prefer them in print. So if you have nothing else to say to me I'm simply wasting time ——"

He arose.

"Sit down, Mr. Janissary," broke in Canby Kernahan. "We didn't come here for personal disagreements."

"We?"

"Mr. Kernahan of the *Orb*."

"Ah! My lawyers have been instructed to bring action against your sheet for several libels fathered over your signature, young man. I admire your cheek in coming here. Now get out!"

Janissary strode to the door and threw it open.

"If he goes, I go too," declared Graham.

"As you like, my dear man. It is a matter of indifference to me *what* you do, but I refuse to discuss any matter in the presence of a scribbler for the press. Suit yourself."

His manner was utterly indifferent. He sat down and began to turn over some personal letters that lay on his desk, finding among them a small article carefully wrapped in brown paper and addressed to him in the shaking, uneducated handwriting of a person evidently long past the prime of life. He held it in his hand while he turned to survey the two men.

"Make up your mind," he said coldly. "I am a very busy man. But again I repeat, the newspaper man must leave the room before I grant you an interview, Mr. Graham."

"I'll go, Graham," said Canby Kernahan. "I'll wait down stairs."

Janissary nodded to Eliason who departed by another door-way that led to his own private room next door. The two doors closed almost synchronously.

Janissary laid down the little parcel with which he had been toying. Graham drew up a chair at the other side of the flat-topped desk.

"You see this, Mr. Janissary?"

"A superfluous question."

"McKenna's confession, Mr. Janissary. Care to read it?"

"Not unless you wish me to."

"I do wish it."

"Hand it over then and don't talk so much about it or I may refuse."

"I think not," said Graham triumphantly as the paper passed into Janissary's hands. It was read with an utterly impassive pair of eyes, and handed back without emotion.

"I've read it, Graham. Well?"

"The franchise is up before the council now. You bought me out on the veto, but I'll beat you with the franchise. That won't be granted, Mr. Janissary."

"No?"

"No. For if it is, I'll carry this confession before the grand jury and secure an indictment against McKenna and other aldermen; I have his permission. But I shan't need to do so. Showing this confession to the bribe-takers will be enough to guarantee them voting for the franchise. I've come for those five sworn statements against McKenna."

"Yes?"

"Yes. I've promised him immunity. With those statements in my hands, you'll see that the grand jury never acts on that manslaughter indictment. And if you don't give them to me, I'll publish this confession in every paper in America that you haven't subsidized. If you give me those sworn statements I'll use it only to frighten my fellow aldermen. I'm willing to sacrifice unmasking you to protect McKenna. So long as I have that franchise thrown out, I'll forego the personal pleasure of doing you an injury. Come, I mean business, Mr. Janissary."

Janissary sat back in his chair, still toying carelessly with the little parcel.

"Graham," he said after a moment's consideration,

"I see I shall have to break you. You've been annoying me for some time, Graham, and I've had enough of it. Now let me tell you something: If you go through with this thing, you will never hold office again. More than that, I shall personally see that you will find little profit in being a wholesale dealer in coal, which I believe is your business. I'll break you, Graham, and you'll end your days in either the morgue or the poor-house — depends on your courage.

"On the other hand," he added, just as coldly careless, "a man as honest and as earnest as you has his value. I need an auditor for Amalgamated Securities—the present one thinks a little too much of his personal gain. You would be an ideal man. The work is perfectly straight; you would be asked to do nothing that would conflict with your principles and the salary is twenty thousand a year — better than morgues and poor-houses. Now believe me, Graham, when I tell you that I don't do this because I have any fear of you. You give me a little discomfort and you cause me to spend more money than is absolutely necessary. I could admire your integrity if it was exercised in my interests; used against me it is an annoyance to which I'm going to put a stop: do you comprehend — fully? If so, all you've got to do is drop this fight against the franchise. In exchange I'll give you the statements regarding the *murder* of Kingston by McKenna. He may come back and we won't molest him. That is my final answer to anything you may suggest. Come in to-morrow if you decide to accept. If not, don't bother. But, believe me, in either case, that franchise is going to go through, and all the

confessions you may publish won't do you an ounce of good. *That franchise is going through.* You understand?"

"We'll see if it does, Mr. Janissary, after this confession is published to-morrow," said Graham in a voice that trembled with the white heat of insulted honesty and pride.

"The confession of a criminal fleeing from justice — lot of effect that will have," said Janissary, smiling coldly.

"I'll get my indictment with it just the same and bring him back as state's evidence. I'll expose your plot against him so that you won't dare use those statements."

"What statements have we got? I know nothing of any statements."

Janissary sat back and smiled as he noted with satisfaction the effect this shot had upon the alderman.

"You see it is possible McKenna's constituents did not know that there was an indictment against him when he was elected," continued Janissary, "so that when they discovered it and it was brought to the attention of the party leaders and they refused to aid McKenna against the laws of his country, he sought to revenge himself against them by leaving behind a false confession. Do you apprehend the situation, Mr. Graham?"

Graham raised his eyes and regarded Janissary steadily, a look of burning hatred gradually replacing his steady stare as the cold sneer of Janissary spread into a smile and was succeeded by a mocking laugh.

"I see that you *do* apprehend, Graham. Clever fellow — perfect jewel of apprehension. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, you know, Graham. That confession you

hold is not a very strong chain, Graham; lacks five links. You call them statements; eh, Graham?"

"You deny there were ever any such statements?"

"To my knowledge, Graham, none. Mad dream of a guilty man endeavouring to blackguard those who stood for uprightness and law and order — virtues you admire, Graham. Eh?"

He knew the teeth of his enemy were drawn now, and he could afford to indulge his cruel humour. He arose and walked toward the door.

"Come in to-morrow, and the auditor's job is yours. Stop fighting windmills. Why, you fool," he added with sudden fierceness, "why waste hard work and lofty endeavour for those cattle you call the public? Don't you know they always bite the hand that feeds them and lick the one that beats them down? They could have this honest government you prate so much about if they chose, but they are dogs; each one is thinking how he can bite the other dog and escape scot-free with his bone. If *we* did not rule them, they'd be eternally bickering and squabbling with one another. Come out of the rain, Graham; get into the shelter that brains provided for clever men. Do what every one else is doing and get a larger bone than the other dogs."

"You have called them correctly, Janissary," cried the other, in the shrill, impotent wrath of the conquered. "Yes, dogs, dogs, dogs, and you are the chief dog of them all — the biggest thief, the greatest liar — yes, by God, even the worst murderer of the whole kennel of dogs. Dogs, dogs, dogs — you've got them right, Janissary, and

I've got *you* right, and I'll make you suffer yet — I'll make you suffer yet."

It was with the same assurance of victory, the same carelessness of fear that distinguished young Stephen, the absolute supremacy of power, that Stephen Janissary laid a heavy hand on the alderman's shoulder.

"You poor fool," he said curtly. "I overrated you. You don't even know when you are beaten. You are of no value to me after all, and I have listened to your ravings long enough. My patience is exhausted now. The door's in the same place it was when you came in — better find it! Or, in the case of a dullard like you, best to point it out, I guess."

He turned the knob and moved back of it for Graham to pass him. But, as he did so, he saw, outside in the hall, Canby Kernahan in conversation with a young lady in a small sable toque, the coat which matched it dragging a scant two inches from the floor. They were leaning over the balustrade and she was listening, apparently much interested, while the newspaper man talked. She turned now at the sound of the door opening and came directly toward him.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Janissary," she said with nothing in her tone to indicate however, that the sight of him would be conducive to pleasure. "But Mr. Kernahan told me you were busy. Are you free now?"

"Quite, Decima," he answered. "You got my 'phone call, I suppose? Come in."

She passed over the threshold but saw that John Graham still lingered. Her narrow, Japanese-like eyes widened

at the sight of him and she held out her hand, frankly pleased.

“Mr. Graham, isn’t it? Mr. Kernahan has just been telling me all about your perfectly bully fight. I do hope you win, yes, even if it *is* against Mr. Janissary.”

There was too much of the eternal feminine about her, however, not to placate instinctively the other man, even though she really disliked him as she so many times had declared to Stephen that she did.

“You know you’ve *so* much, Mr. Janissary; you could afford to lose this fight just to give Mr. Graham a reputation.”

She was one of the few persons who could say what she liked to Stephen Janissary; even her father, old Ben Duress, had insulted him with impunity, for, deep down in his heart, Janissary had that feeling of social inequality born of early respect for the name of Duress and never quite banished from his system.

“I’m sorry, but Mr. Graham will have to climb the ladder to fame in some other way than over my shoulders,” said Janissary. “Incidentally, I’ve concluded my business with him; I don’t know why he lingers. Possibly he is waiting for a coarser affront than any I have at my command; in my humble way I’ve done the best I could in insults.”

“Oh, go on, Mr. Janissary, give him those papers he wants so that poor McKenna can come back home and not be harmed; please, to oblige me,” she added coaxingly, putting a little gloved hand on his shoulder. Janissary laughed shortly.

“So they make women their confidants; well, well! So you are actually going at last, Mr. Graham?”

In truth Graham had been in too much of a daze to move. He had come with his cards all carefully displayed. He believed he was holding a sure winning hand, but had found that instead of holding five, as he imagined, he lacked the one necessary to play the hand at all. He had come in state as a conqueror and now departed in a captive's chains. The effort to bribe him had raised his own estimation of himself and given him a chance to display the somewhat theatrical honesty that he loved; now his enemy held him in so little value that he had withdrawn the bribe.

The tears were close to his eyes; he was like a child, burning under the lawless injustice of those so much older and stronger than himself that he was unable to resent it even in words lest his voice become choked with tears that would be an acknowledgement of utter defeat. So he moved silently out of the room and joined Kernahan, still speaking no word.

"Wait for me down stairs," called Decima after Kernahan. "I want to tell you something before you go."

Janissary shut the door. So pleased was he with his triumph over Graham that he ignored Decima's speech to the enemy. Besides, he had always striven, as far as his rude masterfulness would permit, to win this girl's respect and admiration, for she was the only link that bound him to the past. He remembered the day of her birth — a few months after that of young Stephen's — and he had actually gone down on his knees believing that she had come in answer to his prayer for a mate to his son and heir. In the two years that had followed, he remembered pleasant days in sunny Washington Square when the babies attended

by their respective nurses cooed side by side in their perambulators and he sat with old Ben Duress, her father, no longer dreaming in teas, sugars, coffees, and spices, but of the beginning of that world-conquest which their heirs would carry on. The irony of it! Had there been no little Stephen, he might ever have been content to rule the firm of Janissary and Son; but that was not enough for *his* son. He must give him something greater to begin with, for he was to marry Ben Duress's daughter and move in social circles that would ever be mystically closed to his father. Why it was not until the night of the boy's birth that he had even thought of amalgamation with the girl's father!

He roused himself from his reveries, remembering Decima was there by his request.

"To-morrow night," he said, almost mechanically for his thoughts were still in the past, "to-morrow night, you are twenty-one, Dessie; twenty-one and your own mistress — mistress of half a million. No, more than that, Dessie. It was half a million when Ben died. Perhaps it's a million now — I don't know; haven't had much time to pay attention, but it's been well invested — invested as only I could have invested it. That coat now," he said, rousing himself sufficiently to note the sables in which she was draped "that came from no half-million's income. How much would that be, Dessie?"

She perched herself daintily on the arm of a chair, and pursed her lips with an expression half of pleasure, half of vexation.

"I shouldn't have bought it, but it was so beautiful, and Isabel Livingstone, who is a cat if there ever was one," she

explained in frank parenthesis, "was bragging so much about hers that when I found I could get this for seven thousand — awfully cheap you know — full length and real Russian — I couldn't resist the temptation. Oh, my income; why I haven't noticed particularly — I suppose I've had more than forty thousand during the past year."

"And in government bonds you would realize just about eighteen thousand per annum," said Janissary rather grimly, as he remembered some of his ward's printed remarks concerning "trusts," "octopuses" — which of course was violently incorrect — "corrupt corporations," and the like. "I suppose you'll invest it that way when you get control of it, eh?"

"Indeed, then, I shall not," she returned, the sable toque tossing a little. "I'm going to invest enough to give me five thousand a year in some safe thing, and I'm going to use the remainder of my capital to build some more model tenements. Oh, I know I'll have to mortgage them to do it, but they actually pay two and one half per cent. That isn't much, but still it's something to think that you're giving all those poor people clean rooms, fresh air, sanitary plumbing, and bath-tubs ——"

"Which they'll probably use to store coal in," he interjected with a grim smile. "Well, you can thank me for having provided you with the opportunity to make a bigger fool of yourself by making more money for you. But the reason I 'phoned you was to say that I'm giving a dinner in your honour to-morrow night — least I can do as your guardian."

"Will you have a lot of very rich men there if I come?" she asked eagerly.

"I didn't know you were so mercenary," he said, startled into a laugh.

"Oh, now, don't be nasty, Mr. Janissary. You know *why* I want to see them — to get them interested in my model tenements. I'm sure some of them will subscribe even if *you* are so hateful about it. Who'll be there?"

"Must I actually drive a bargain with you? Well, then, choose your company; there isn't a man on the Street or who counts at all in New York who won't break any engagement to dine with me if I request it."

The statement was made in no egotistical manner; it was a mere fact of which she was as well aware as he.

"All right, I'll leave it to you. Have the richest ones, though — and their wives. Especially," she added with feminine cunning, "if they are very rich and aren't *in* — you know — haven't been *taken up*. Recent people, you understand; people who want to be *somebodies* ——"

"In society, you mean?" he asked, frowning.

"Why — if you want to put it that way — yes. A lot of the women will make their husbands subscribe if I let them think they'll have their names on the board of patronesses along with Mrs. Livingstone and Isabel and the Vielés and Corlears and Cortlandts and so on. Oh, I know it sounds like graft," she added defensively, "but, after all, they'll get something they'd have to pay for anyhow and besides they'll be doing a lot of good. How many people?"

"Oh, a small affair, Dessie; not more than fifteen couples, I should say."

"Very well — I'll come. And, now, as a personal favour

to me," she went on, changing the subject abruptly, "please give poor Mr. Graham those statements he wants so much. He looked so sad when he went out of here a few moments ago. You're such a *big* man, Mr. Janissary, I should think you could afford to be generous."

Janissary's tone in answering her was the complete antithesis of the lighter one he had used a moment before. The cold sneer that was almost habitual with him returned to his lips and eyes.

"You don't know what you are talking about, young woman. Don't mix in affairs you don't understand. This man Graham has been blackguarding me and my friends in the dirty yellow press for a month or more now. Do you think I am going to give him material for further slanders? Why, Dessie," he added, and she shrank a little at the cruelty that seemed to leap from his eyes as he crumpled in his hand the little paper parcel with which he had toyed ever since he first had observed it, "he called me a liar, a thief, and a murderer — not to mention a dog and several other choice epithets — right here in this very room. Why ——"

He laughed harshly.

"—it's a wonder I didn't take him by the throat and shake him until he found out which one of us was the dog. He comes to me with threats — threats! Threats from him! It's laughable, but I can't quite laugh at it. But then," he said, subsiding, "he's so small. . . . And I can't afford to be angry with small men. If I paid any attention to the yelps of all these envious curs, I'd have no time to rule them."

There was exultation in his tone, exaltation in his eye. It came to Decima Duress in that instant that she had seen such a look in the eye of a madman once — that identical gleam of maniacy. She shuddered and turned away.

“Rule them; rule them; rule them!” he muttered, and then, remembering her presence, crossed the room to face her again. “If the fools only knew! Why I’ve only got to lift that telephone and call him, and the President of these United States — this glorious land of liberty; the fools have a song about that, Dessie — will come to this room as fast as special trains and motor-cars can bring him. And a rat like this Graham dares to threaten me! . . . When I rule them . . . all. Why no man has bested me: no man ever kept *me* from what I wanted, and no man ever *shall*.”

He threw down the telephone and sat moodily in his chair. Decima, with all the timidity that comes to those who both fear and hate, approached him and put the instrument in its place.

“I’ll come to-morrow night,” she said in a very small voice and went out hurriedly. Had she loved this man, she would have exulted in his power. Caring nothing for him, his words stung her into a realization of inferiority and helplessness that was intolerable. So Delilah must have felt in the presence of Samson; no other motive could have brought her to shear away those strength-giving locks. She raged in her helplessness.

Exhausted by his outbreak of fury, Janissary sat for a long time quite silent, his mind almost a blank as is frequently the case when the brain sleeps in a body that is awake

resting after a strain. In such moods, the abstraction is aided by the concentration of the gaze upon a single object; in this case, it was that small, unopened parcel in the handwriting of an aged and uneducated man that had given his fingers employment since the first words had passed between him and Graham. Coming out of his state of mental flaccidity, he wondered what the parcel contained and why he had not opened it before; and, reaching out his hand, he picked at the brown paper wrapping until it fell away, revealing a small, card-board box.

He opened it and there tumbled out a tiny bit of knitted silk, tied with a bow of white ribbon, and soled with the softest felt — the white now tarnished to a hue that was almost brown, the ribbon so rotten that bits crumbled away at his touch.

How could such a thing have become mixed with his personal mail? He lifted the brown paper wrapping to read the address.

There was no mistake. His name was there right enough. Curiously, he wondered that the writer had not seen fit to prefix a "Mr." or add an "Esquire"—it was not very respectful to address him with neither, especially, as he now noted from the writing, when the parcel had come from a common man.

Old, too, very old; his own handwriting was getting crabbed like that.

He searched mechanically for some letter that would explain the peculiar present but there was none. Then he bent over the fragile thing peering at it, somehow, in dull foreboding.

As men in nightmares choke and try to scream for help, so suddenly did Stephen Janissary. A great pain came to his eyes for they were straining, straining, ever wider; nor could he bring down his tongue from the roof of his mouth where it lay, a hot burning thing. In his agony, words he had spoken but a moment before blazed before him.

“No man has kept me from what I wanted and no man ever shall!”

Yet here was the silent messenger to give him the lie; the messenger from an enemy who had struck to a heart that no one else had ever found; who had robbed him of all that was dear and had trampled his pride in the dust.

Eliason, in the next room, heard the frenzied scream of one on whom has fallen the tortures of the damned. Alarmed, he flung open the door. Stephen Janissary's head was down upon the flat-topped desk, his arms hiding his eyes from a sight too horrible!

Yet all there was to see was the shoe of a little child.

CHAPTER VII

DESTINY'S MAGIC WHEEL

I

"I WILL REPAY"

SO, OLD idiot," said Axtell viciously, "you are well enough to go out of the house and stay for an hour, are you? Come near the fire if you dare and I'll push you into it, you deceiving old imbecile."

The afternoon was a cold one; and, since the old house was provided with no other heat than that which emanated from the fireplaces, the only comfortable part of the first-floor front room was entirely hogged by The Wolf, who had ordered the servant to push his chair into such a position that his back faced the fire; which position he guarded with a long, thin, brass poker, prodding at Van Tromp with it whenever that worthy made any attempt to get within the zone of heat.

"Didn't, Mr. Axtell; didn't go out; servant tells lies as one with no religion would, bein' envious of me that reads th' Good Book reg'lar and is in all his ways accordin' to what it teaches. It's cold," he shivered, "c-o-o-o-l-d, Mr. Axtell. You wouldn't have one freeze what had al-

ways respected and served you, even when you wanted spices on which there was no profit nohow bein' kept only to oblige. Oh, it's so cold. Let old Trompey be, Mr. Axtell; he's so cold."

"Wasn't so cold you couldn't leave the house and stay away for a full hour yesterday. You deceiving, traitorous old hound," grinned Axtell, pushing out the poker threateningly. He could not have lifted it an inch, but was quite able to move it back and forth. "You like being cold so well that I'm going to get you used to it — because I shall turn you out into the streets to-morrow like the wicked old uncle in the play. Am I wicked, old idiot?"

"No-o-o-o, Mr. Axtell," replied the old man, his teeth chattering. "You're kind and generous to old Trompey for which he remembers you in his prayers every night of his life and for which the Good Lord will repay you even a thousandfold, bein' according to the Good Book ——"

"Well, will I be wicked when I turn you out into the streets, Grandfather Goose, eh? Because you love the streets so much, I'm going to let you get better acquainted with them. Get away; get away from the fire or I'll maim you."

He paused in the act of pushing out the poker to its full length, and looked up to scowl at George le Fay, who, his face red and shiny from the cold, his body encased in a huge overcoat of blue Melton, his hands in fur-lined gloves, which he stripped off, approached the fire to warm himself. Le Fay glanced up to note the shivering Van Tromp at the other side of the table.

"Here, Trompey, you old simp," he said with rude kindness. "What're you doing? Playing the castanets? Look

out; your false teeth 'll drop out if you don't stop. Come over by the fire, old bag of bones, where you belong."

Van Tromp advanced, looking entreatingly at Axtell, who, with his usual vicious grin, took careful aim at the grocer's stomach and launched out. George le Fay, noting the movement, stopped the poker's billiard cue progress and returned it to its place in the brass bowl on the hearth.

"Say, you're a fine old son of a gun, ain't you, Axtell?" he remarked scornfully. "I'm a mangy dog if you ain't a pippin! I believe you just naturally like to hurt people. Leave the poor old boob alone, why don't you? And say, d'you think you're entitled to all that fire? Git in your place!"

He pushed the high-backed chair containing the helpless Axtell into its usual position on the left side of the hearth, pulling Van Tromp's to the right side.

"Come and sit down, Trompey," he said. "Stop making faces at him, Axtell. What's he done?"

"I'm to be pushed about by a cheap, petty-larceny 'gun' like you, am I, George le Fay?" snarled Axtell, writhing in interrupted spite. "A fellow who, if it wasn't for me, would be 'stalling' on the 'shorts' for a lousy gun mob — a 'stool-pigeon' at heart, a rat bellows mender of a ——"

"Never mind what I was," said George le Fay flushing. "I'm helping to support a no-good, fault-finding crab of a cripple, ain't I? That's good enough. And say, I'm here on business to see Stephen, so let's drop all this small talk. Sit down, Trompey, before your fingers fall off from the cold. What have you been doing anyhow?"

Van Tromp came a little closer to the fire, but did not dare to seat himself until Axtell, tiring of useless malice for the moment, nodded surly permission.

"He went out yesterday and stayed an hour," he explained shortly, his mind now on the matter of which George had spoken. "Have you 'sounded' the Janissary 'joint'?"

At the sound of the hated name, Van Tromp forgot to warm his freezing hands, and leaned forward, his eyes burning with eagerness.

"Got it all over with 'bout this time yesterday evening," replied George le Fay. "Telephone 'stall'; they fell for it like winking. Not a bit of trouble. But, say! I ran into old Janissary himself and it threw a scare into me, I can tell you!"

"You always were a courageous sucker, George," sneered Axtell, glad of the opportunity of paying Le Fay back for his peremptory handling of the situation on his entrance.

"Never mind about my courage, Wulf," returned George with some asperity. "I don't throw any 'bull' around like some guys I know — some of these fearless mutts who are ashamed to fight less than three at a time but start to 'squeal' the minute a copper taps them on the shoulder. This Janissary is a big guy — big as a house — and besides if he ever took a dislike to a gink like me and had him up before the court the judge 'ud about throw the book at me and tell me to add up the sentences in it. Guess you forget the time Stevey and me 'beat' him for that bunch of 'dough' on the *Mauradriatic*; 'sposin he'd 'a remembered me and then seen me posing around as a telephone workman! I guess he'd a fell for it — *not!* But nix on all this

small talk; I got the goods for Steve and what's better 'n that, I've got the time for him to go and git the stuff!"

"Good enough, George," said a voice behind him. "Quick work! I was expecting you had when I found your 'phone call at Canary's."

Stephen threw off his fur-lined coat as he spoke, tossing it on the back of a chair and, placing his top hat on the table, drew up a chair between Van Tromp and Axtell, facing Le Fay who was standing with his back to the fire, warming his hands which were behind him.

"Well, it's to-night, if you want to know," returned George. "Yesterday, while I was working there, I heard some of the footmen talking about a dinner they were going to give to-night, so I got to thinking about it to-day and I got into that telephone 'harness' again and went around to the house to ask 'em if the 'phones were working all right now; and, of course, I saw from the way the kitchen looked that something was goin' to be pulled off; dozens of chickens, a round of beef as big as me, a million dollars' worth of stuff for soups, and enough *pâté de foie gras*, jellied meats, asparagus, truffles, mushrooms, plovers' eggs, mayonnaise dressing, aspic, and all that sort of fancy stuff, to keep a couple of regular families for a year. And the servants were tacking up greens in the front hall and putting wreaths around the chandeliers, and tying holly and mistletoe to pictures, and doing everything they could think of to git rid of money for nothing. He's giving a dinner, and say, if you was to put a lock on that house while it was going on and keep all those guys there, you could set everybody in the jails free; honest to Gawd! There's Vaughan — the same guy we

made that last touch from — that's the flour trust man; and Quesink, who's running cotton; O'Shea, the street railways gink; Philip Helmet, that's got meat by the neck; Gage, the steel corporation president; Lyttleton, Fillimore, Rollins K. Hilman, Arbuthnot, the district attorney, the mayor — and, say, everybody that we've got a grudge against — meaning you, particularly, Steve, and not forgetting our old friend Gerstein that we touched for eighty thousand bucks. As fine a lot of gentlemen as ever scuttled a ship, Steve!"

Stephen's lips flattened against his teeth, the boyish smile that had wreathed his rosy face departing entirely.

"What time is the dinner — eight?"

George nodded.

"The servants will all be occupied, of course," continued Stephen. "And there'll be nobody up stairs at all, I suppose?"

"How did you know the place was up stairs?" asked George wonderingly.

"Why," answered Stephen in some perplexity. "I'm sure I don't know; it just occurred to me that it was, that's all; in a library, isn't it?"

"Why, yes. Say, you never 'prowled' the joint, did you?"

"No, never," returned Stephen, his perplexity growing. "Strange I should feel so sure about it. But then," he laughed, "you know I'm studying theosophy nowadays and I have given up trying to trace mental impressions. Miss Duress has got me interested."

"Duress — never mind Duress — he don't count. It's Janissary — Janissary," mumbled Van Tromp.

Le Fay placed a restraining hand upon Axtell as Hilary was generally wont to do.

“Somehow,” continued Stephen, “that Janissary house seems awfully familiar to me. I would have sworn I’d played in that garden when I was a child, and maybe I did, but Hilary shuts up like a clam every time the name of Janissary is mentioned. He told me once on the *Mauradriatic* that Janissary wronged my father but that was all I’ve ever been able to screw out of him. However, go ahead, George; they’re giving a dinner to-night at eight, and that leaves up stairs free. How do I kick my way in?”

Le Fay, now sufficiently warmed, pushed a chair up to the table and switched on the light in the red-shaded electric lamp. Stephen, making a ball of his gray gloves, tossed them into his upturned silk hat and sat down beside him. Producing a series of rude drawings in lead pencil — captioned as always in “hog Latin” — the older man began his practical explanation.

“Of course, the front’s no good, but I’ve drawn it there so you can see it. There’s only one pair of steps leading into the house; there they are — the front ones — so let’s start with the back. You see these lines represent the iron fence that runs around the front, but, at the sides and at the back, there’s a brick wall about ten feet high. Couldn’t hop it unless it was a night as dark as a ‘dinge’ and then it ’ud be some trouble. But there’s a wooden door in the brick wall at the back that leads out into Washington Court ——”

“Where Betsy lives, you remember, Mr. Axtell,”

interjected Stephen parenthetically. "Well, what kind of a lock?"

"A regular yale lock; all you need for that is to stick your saw between the door and the jamb and ——"

"I'm not in the primer class. What then?"

"Well — then you're in the back garden; lot of oak trees and rose bushes and things that hide you. The regular entrance is five steps down into the basement — which is no good of course, for the cooks and dish washers 'ull be working down there. But there's a little wooden balcony with round knobs on it that comes out from the dining-room windows about twelve feet from the ground; too high to jump for it ——"

"But it'll be all right to noose with the wire, won't it? Knobs look easy to lasso?"

"A cinch; that's what I was going to suggest. Well, of course, they'll all be in the dining-room at the time and the curtains will be drawn. But right at the side, just a few inches around from the porch, is the window to the butler's pantry and running right along the edge of the house is a water pipe. Now I figure it out that, if you carried one of our wooden wedges and shoved it in behind the hook that holds the water pipe in place, you could keep one foot on the porch rail and one on the wedge and spring the pantry window that way. You can figure out by peeping into the dining-room just when all the ginks are busy serving and then swing yourself over onto the sill and get in. Well, the back stairway is right off the butler's pantry and all you gotta do then is to walk right up and the first room to your right when you land is the library. If you was to be

unlucky enough to meet anybody, you've got on clothes like the guests wear and they wouldn't think anything of it — big party like that!"

Stephen nodded.

"It's no easy proposition," continued George. "I wouldn't tackle it with a letter from the Pope — but you picked it out for yourself — or I guess old bag of bones did, egging you on."

"Old Grandfather Goose," sneered Axtell. "A foolish thing, Stephen, to let yourself be swayed by a doddering old idiot's arguments. Why not drop this thing," he added with real earnestness, for he had no wish that the lucrative business of the company should come to an abrupt termination through the discovery of Stephen's profession. "There are plenty of places easier to handle than this one."

"Oh, we settled all that long ago, Mr. Axtell," said Stephen lightly. "Go on about the place, George. What's the safe like?"

"It's one of those covered-up affairs; bottom of a writing desk effect. I should say from the size and shape of it that it was a Mall-Harwin 23."

"Need about a half-inch bit for that, eh, George?"

Le Fay nodded.

"It should be a pipe after you're once in the library; all you need is your drill, your electric connections, and some soap, and, of course, your extension jimmy for the compartments inside. The 'pete' 'ull be nothing to some you have opened. Of course you have to take the same chances coming back, though, if I were you, I'd just walk right down the front stairs and out — the library door faces the

front stairway you know. In a dress suit you ought to be able to get away with it."

"Not a chance, George. I'm not taking any unnecessary risks," laughed Stephen excitedly, for the prospect of danger to be faced always brought a flush to his cheek and a sparkle to his eyes, exhilarating him as do drugs and drink most men. "I'll use my wire for the getaway; it's an easy drop with it to the garden-plot at the side, isn't it?"

"Great material for dice," apologized George, tapping his head. "Guess my mind's wandering, Steve. Well, what about it? Think you'll turn the trick to-night?"

Stephen took the plans that George had made and folded them, placing them in his pocket. Van Tromp leaned forward eagerly, ceasing to wheeze for the moment lest he might miss the monosyllable that would decide the matter. When it turned out to be the desired and expected one, he leaned back in his chair with a great sigh of gratification, closing his eyes that Axtell might not observe from them any emotion that was passing through his mind.

"Send Hilary up to-morrow for the stuff," Stephen concluded lightly, as he rose to go. Seeing further remonstrance in the eyes of Wulf Axtell, he whipped his coat from the chair, tossed up his hat, caught it in one hand and his gloves in the other; and with a—

"Why so serious, friends of my youth?" and another boyish laugh, clapped the hat on the back of his head and left the room. Axtell glowered at the old grocer who still kept his eyes discreetly closed.

"Horrible ass," he grated. "Wait until George goes;

you'll see if you sit so comfortably there by *my* fire. He listened to you against me, did he?"

Quivering with excitement and gratification, old Van Tromp still remained to all appearances inert, as though overcome by sudden weakness. But had Axtell looked into his pocket, he might have found there a mate to the silent messenger that had gone to Janissary on the previous day; and had he seen what lay behind those closed eyelids, he might have realized that, beside the hatred of that old man against Stephen Janissary, his own vicious envy for the whole world was as the merest drop of water to a mighty ocean.

For in the brain of the old man there stood out in letters of fire a passage from the great black Book that was his constant companion:

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

He believed that he had been chosen the instrument of that vengeance — a vengeance the like of which it had never been allowed that the mouse should visit upon the lion.

II

DECIMA PILES OSSA UPON PELION

Stephen swung out of the House of the Dominie, passed swiftly along Chapel Street, crossed Sixth Avenue, and cut across Washington Square diagonally toward the Duress home. It was the sort of day on which a man necessarily walked swiftly unless he wished to become like the statues in the fountains, the original designs of which were completely disguised by masks of ice. In the dim blue of the

winter sky the early stars seemed like little frozen eyes, and, under foot, the snow lay in hard, compact mounds so that one did well to disregard the beauty of approaching night and mind where one's feet were placed before striding too confidently. In the garden of the Duress house, the marble maiden with her long, unfilled jug caused Stephen a little shiver, presenting to his mind as she did the infelicitous question of how he should be affected in such weather were he as free from raiment as she. And he found occasion to censure Uncle Fairfax for an attention to educative headlines that obscured in his mind the necessity for pouring warm water on steps sheeted with ice.

"Am a shif'less, tho'tless nigguh and no mistake, Missuh Adams," he agreed, as he laid down the apotheosis of "heads," enabling Stephen, ten feet away, to glean by a second's inspection, the principal happenings of a day set forth in type as large as any alphabetical blocks dared to be. "Reckun Ah'm gettin' toe old even toe ten' de doah, Missuh Adams. She's in thuh usual place, Missie Decima is; kinduh peeved yoh didn't come yestuhda, Ah reckon. Kep' a askin' all thuh time ef you was down heah wastin' yo' time with me."

"I was out of town — got a Philadelphia man interested in Miss Decima's tenements, Uncle Fairfax. How's your rheumatiz?"

"Po'ly, thank de Lawd, po'ly, suh."

Stephen was half-way up the broad staircase when he asked the question, and Decima heard his whole-souled laugh, and ran to the door of her library to greet him.

"I got your flowers," she said, pointing to a bit of

Wedgwood that held a cluster of Jacqueminot roses. "But that doesn't excuse your not coming or 'phoning yesterday."

"Why, honey," he said, taking her into his arms, "as I was just telling Uncle Fairfax, I've got good news for you. Dittmars is going to subscribe twenty-five thousand for the new tenements; but I had to go down to Philadelphia with him and meet his wife before he would absolutely give his word. He said she had charge of the charity for the family but if I talked to her the way I did to him, he was sure she'd consent — and she did. Now aren't you glad?"

"Did she keep looking at you all the time through dinner like Isabel Livingstone does?"

"Oh, hang Isabel!"

"Cheerfully, Stephen. She's a thorn in my flesh. And I can't get over the idea that you like her pretty well at that. Now don't you?"

"That's typical of your sex, Decima. Wise and foolish, they are exactly the same about their men kind. Isabel is your dearest friend; she goes everywhere with you; and you, yourself, took me to the Livingstones' house and had me invited to dinners and insisted on my taking you ——"

"Yes, but I wanted you to look at *me* and not at Isabel. I ——"

"You can't look at one person while you're talking to another. 'Tisn't done in court circles these days. Any cigarettes about, Dess?"

She rose and handed him a glass-topped silver box, lighted

a spill from the fire, and tendered it to him while she sat on the arm of his chair.

"Isn't it funny when you love a person you like to wait on them?" she said meditatively. "Strange about a woman, Stephen; she makes slaves out of all the men she doesn't love and thinks it discourteous unless they accept their slavery gratefully. I suppose that's because *she's* so willing to make a slave of herself when she loves."

"All that disquisition over the passing of a cigarette and a light, Dess?" asked Stephen, smiling.

"Oh, no, no!" she said hastily. "I *love* to wait on you; really, Stephen, it gives me more pleasure to be waiting on you than to do anything in the world. I want to do things for you I wouldn't do for anybody in the world, because I can do so little else to prove my love that it really makes me irritable if I miss a chance. Women *can* do so little," she added wistfully, "so *very* little, unless the man they love is sick or in disgrace, or ——"

"And suppose that I — I — were in disgrace?" he asked, looking up at her.

"Oh, you couldn't be; why talk of it?"

"But suppose I were?" he persisted.

"Well, I should be in two minds," she said, wrinkling up her little nose. "I shouldn't know whether to be sorry you were in trouble or glad it gave me a chance to prove how much I loved you. These women in novels now," she said scornfully, "and plays, too — they're so tiresome; as if any real woman who loved ever stopped loving because her husband or lover did something that the world disapproved of. It's perfectly silly, Stephen. One thing you must allow

us women; if we don't love often we do love with all our hearts, and, once we do, I suppose the man can commit murder and we'd still love him. But not petty, small things," she explained carefully, "not nasty *little* things. A woman demands her lover be tremendous even in *all* things — at least a woman like me, and, of course, I only speak for myself. And that's what you are; I just love that Frenchman who christened you 'Stephen the Magnificent.'"

"Well, I *don't* then," he said frowning. "Everybody's taken it up until it's become a perfect nuisance. Well, what's new, Dess, anything?"

"What, you're not going?" she asked, hurt, as he began to reach for his hat and coat. "You'll have some tea?"

"Can't, Dess; very important engagement to-night."

It was on the tip of her tongue to tell him that she, too, had an engagement of considerable moment in the dinner that Janissary was tendering her; but, recollecting that Janissary had promised to bring her in touch with many wealthy people from whom she expected to extort subscriptions, she decided to wait until the morrow when she could triumphantly recount her victories to Stephen. But the thought of the dinner revived the scene that the master of Amalgamated had had with John Graham and the promise she had made Canby Kernahan to help him in the matter through the one man in the world whom she considered a match for Janissary and who now sat before her.

"Oh, Stephen, I forgot to tell you. I want a favour — a big favour!"

Amused at her earnestness, he took her hands and looked

at her quizzically. She slipped into her favourite position on the hearth rug at her feet.

“Go ahead: anything I can do, Dessie!”

“Well you *can* do this, Stephen, and you are the only man I know of who can. Now I don't understand the thing very well, but Mr. Kernahan, your friend, told me that the street railways were charging two fares to a lot of poor people ——”

“You mean the Graham veto, of course,” he agreed. “Yes, I know all about that; McKenna's confession, too. That will kill the franchise and Graham will win after all.”

“Oh, but he *won't*, Stephen; that's just where all of you were mistaken. He told me afterward, and he was just like a person who'd lost all his family or something. You see Mr. Janissary denies there were ever any statements against McKenna and then asks what effect will the confession of an indicted criminal have, especially when his political party will swear that they were ignorant of his crimes when he was nominated and, besides that, will say that he came to them for help in quashing the indictment and that they refused ‘to defeat the ends of justice,’ I think Mr. Graham quoted ——”

Having given the matter concentrated attention since Decima first began to speak, Stephen's alert brain was able to figure out the existing condition of affairs in the matter from the few scraps that Decima had let drop.

“I see,” he said slowly; “they claim he's run away because they wouldn't protect him and left this confession behind for revenge; that it?”

“Yes; and ——”

“And the statements are necessary to prove that his story is true. Otherwise Graham would have to bring him from Tangier to go on the stand himself, whereas, the moment McKenna landed, they’d run him into prison and convict him before they could make use of him. Yes, that’s the way the machine of business-politics works, Decima. If they can’t bribe a man they get something to threaten him with. Poor McKenna!”

“But don’t you see,” Decima explained eagerly, “that if Mr. Graham had those statements his story would be proved and the mayor wouldn’t dare sign the new franchise.”

“The mayor? Surely it hasn’t passed the council yet?”

“Yes, this afternoon! Haven’t you read the papers? And the mayor will sign it to-morrow without a doubt unless somebody gets those statements that Mr. Janissary declares don’t exist. But they do, Stephen, Mr. Graham knows they do, and that is what makes it so sad. Please, Stephen, won’t you do something? It would be such a favour to me. Think of those poor people all tired out from their work having to get out of the cars and walk or else pay another fare that they can’t afford! It’s a downright shame,” she finished indignantly, “and it will be terrible if that franchise goes through and Mr. Janissary and all his friends just laugh at the people and tell them to pay or walk. It isn’t right — it shouldn’t be permitted — and I want you to stop it, Stephen!”

She was actually pacing the floor in her vexation, her little hands clasped behind her back, her manner a reminiscence of Stephen’s own when something had gone wrong

in spite of his efforts. It was like a child playing statesman, and Stephen repressed a smile with difficulty.

"Why, you dear little unselfish thing," he said, stopping her in her progress, and drawing her down to the arm of his chair. "You are as much worked up about it as though you were actually losing money yourself."

"I wouldn't *care* if *I* was losing money — that is, not much," she said, turning her flushed little face to his, "because I can afford to lose something. But these poor people can't and it isn't right that they should; and if you're their friend, Stephen, you'll protect them, because you know the mayor will certainly sign that franchise unless somebody prevents him."

"Yes," agreed Stephen soberly, "he is the easiest tool the machine has had in many moons. Such a pity, too — a man with a father like that and the chances he had — greed again, Dessie, sheer greed; everything is sacrificed to that!"

"Oh, but this mustn't be," she said seriously, holding his hand in a tight grasp. "This mustn't be; promise me it won't, Stephen; promise me!"

"I wish I could, Dess," he sighed. "God knows I do. But what can be done? I'm helpless. I have no influence with Mr. Janissary nor with the mayor. I can't *force* them to do anything."

"Oh, but you *can*, Stephen, you can. You can do *anything* if you set your mind to it, and I want this done *so* much, because I saw the nasty, insulting way Mr. Janissary treated poor Mr. Graham — like the dirt under his feet — as our washerwoman says. And Mr. Graham is so sad about it. Stephen, please!"

“What can I do, Dessie?” he asked, extending his palms in a helpless sort of way.

“Oh, don’t talk like that, Stephen. You can do anything if you try — you — ‘Stephen the Magnificent.’”

“Yes, magnificent ass! Look how unworthy I am when a thing like this comes up.”

“Oh, no, no! Not unworthy! Your brain is tired, that’s all. You don’t realize how important this is. Let me help you — let me think.”

She stared into the blazing grate, her eyes set, her hands clenched. He sat brooding. If he only *could* do something in the matter! But how? It troubled him that there should be so much injustice in the world and he must view it with troubled eyes and folded hands, knowing no remedy. In such crises he saw himself a Gulliver among Brobdinagians. It was the realization of his impotence in preventing civic corruptions of this sort that kept him humble.

Suddenly she turned to him with a little excited cry, and, dropping to her knees on the white bearskin before the fire, caught the lapels of his coat so violently that his rosebud fell to the floor.

“I’ve got it, Stephen; I’ve got it. McKenna names the men who swore to those statements in his confession; you can go to them and force them to tell the truth; just threaten to do all sorts of terrible things to them. They will be afraid of you and tell the truth. Why, you could get that person McGuimp to help you with his awful friends; they would be useful to scare those perjurers so that they’d be afraid not to tell that those statements in Mr. Janissary’s safe were all lies. Why, Stephen, what’s the matter?”

For he had leaped to his feet as though he had come into sudden contact with a live wire; no catapult ever shot a heavy weight straighter; no man ever consciously tumbled the girl he loved into such a sprawling heap as did Stephen tumble Decima at that moment.

She sat up, cross-legged, staring at him as he tore up and down the room, unable to find words to voice his amazement at the inscrutable ways of Providence, his wonder at the machinery of Destiny's magic wheel.

"The statements — where?" he gasped.

"Statements — where — what?" she stammered, all ideas of the franchise banished by his remarkable behaviour.

"The statements — the statements against McKenna; where did you say they were?"

He was actually shaking her.

"Stephen, have you gone mad?"

"If I have it's a wonderful madness — a glorious, beautiful, jubilant, happy, joyful, maddeningly wonderful madness," he almost shouted, pulling her to her feet and almost dancing with her about the room. "Where in the name of all that's fantastically incredible did you say those statements were?"

"You mean — the statements against McKenna?" she asked, gasping for breath in his grizzly-like embrace.

"No — the statements against the Kaiser and King Edward and the President of France, little silly," he answered, laughing happily. "Did you say those statements were in Mr. Janissary's safe?"

"Why, yes, the McKenna statements are, but I don't know anything about any other statements."

"Now it couldn't be by any absolutely unbelievable chance that you mean they are in the safe in Mr. Janissary's private residence? Of course, you mean in his office at Amalgamated, don't you?"

"Oh, no, no! They're not there, Stephen. They're right in his private house," she assured him earnestly.

Stephen, releasing her as a companion unworthy of his terpsichorean inspiration, executed a caracole about the library that would have won enthusiastic admiration from masters of the art for its absolute lack of technique.

"Stephen, you silly child!" she said reprovingly, through her wild laughter. "You're nothing but a great big baby; what on earth set you off like that? What difference does it make whether the statements are in Mr. Janissary's private house or in his office or where they are?"

"Eh, what?" he asked, pausing in the middle of a very difficult step that no one but an amateur would have dared attempt to execute.

"Sit down and stop that foolishness. I want to talk seriously to you. What difference does it make where the statements are?"

The difficult step was never accomplished; the world of dancing to-day has lost a most complicated figure; Stephen put his foot down and attempted to sober his bearing.

"Of course, what difference does it make?" he asked, his eyes, however, betraying concealed merriment.

"Come here, sir. Sit down!" she said imperiously.

"Sorry, Dess, but if you want me to keep that franchise from being signed you'd better let me go now," he said, slipping into his great-coat.

"You're *going* to keep it from being signed?" she asked, clapping her hands delightedly. "Are you *really*, Stephen?"

He nodded solemnly.

"But how? Like I suggested?"

"I shall file your suggestions and they shall have my most careful attention," he said with the same waggish solemnity.

"But ——"

"Now, listen, little girl," he said, catching her in his arms. "Don't bother me for details. If things are the way you say they are, that franchise hasn't got as much chance of being signed by the mayor as I have of becoming President on the Prohibition ticket. That ought to be good enough!"

A second time she was crushed in a bear hug, kissed fervidly, and left gasping for breath; and as he passed down the stairs she heard peal after peal of merry laughter.

CHAPTER VIII

BELSHAZZAR FEASTS

I

STEPHEN BUCKLES ON HIS ARMOUR

THERE was the smell of Christmas in Apartment 72 at Canary's when Stephen opened the door. Rag had cleared away a corner of the room near one of the windows, and was now busily engaged in decorating a hugh fir tree with tinsel, multi-coloured candles, and balls, spears, cornucopias, and other ornaments of iridescent hues, all of which are created for the sole purpose of hanging on Christmas-trees. This one was set in a miniature garden where sparkling quartz and mica were strewn in such profusion that only the most ignorant child could fail to mistake the combination for anything except snow, while through this garden wandered the black tracks of a competent little Baldwin locomotive, which, if properly attended to, would go tearing around within the radius of the green picket fence for a full quarter of an hour without pausing to take water. An army of gaudy lead soldiers, in the uniform of the French army and carrying firearms, the like of which was never seen on land or sea and certainly never approved by any war department, stood in spirited attitudes regard-

ing the locomotive with some hostility — possibly considering it a feed train laden with supplies for the enemy. With such fierce fellows about, one feared for the safety of the fleecy little lambs browsing discontentedly over the waste of white in company with dun-coloured cows and one very tame tiger whose yellow and black colour scheme immediately identified him as a solecism, unless he had been reduced, through living in a land of continual snow, to hiring himself out in the capacity of a sheep dog in order to gain his daily nutriment — possibly a vegetarian tiger.

Rag disregarded the appearance of Stephen until he had satisfactorily crowned the top of the tree with a very rubicund gentleman who wore a pack on his back and had snow on his whiskers, and who beamed benignantly over this tribute to the holiday of which he knew himself to be the most beloved of patron saints.

“Tree, ornaments, garden, and everything only cost fifty-two sixty-seven,” Rag announced with some pride, stepping back to view his first attempt at decoration. “Say, Steve, won’t those kids be tickled to death? I’ll bet there never was a guy lived in this joint ever thought of giving a Christmas party for the servants’ kids. André tells me he’ll send his, too, and that’s going some for André, because he considers himself high above all the other people here. These head waiters are pretty near millionaires themselves.”

He consulted a little note-book, wetting the lead in his pencil and totaling up statistics.

“There’ll be one hundred and two kids, Steve, and the presents I’ve ordered ’ull stand you back about two hundred and fifty; that oversteppin’ th’ limit?”

“Should say not; I want to give them the time of their lives. Don’t stint yourself on candy and cakes and sugar canes and chocolate rabbits and all that kind of thing. Go as far as you like, Rag. Let’s see; only three days before Christmas, isn’t it?”

Rag dusted off his hands and slipped back into the garment of servitude, viewing his quasi-master admiringly.

“Say, you’re a great guy, Steve. Wonderful th’ things you think of doin’ for other people; them waiters and chambermaids and chefs ’ud do anything fer you after this party. Don’t know how you git any time to attend to your own business, lookin’ after other people’s so much. Say,” he added, noticing that the hands of the little ormolu mantel clock were indicating the close approach of eight o’clock, “where you bin all this time? Ain’t you dining out? What’ll I git you — the ‘soup-and-fish’ or the ‘thirteen-and-the-odd?’”

Stephen disclaimed any desire for the dinner coat first mentioned, declaring his preference for the more formal tailed garment.

“Where you dinin’?” asked Rag, entering the dressing-room to procure it.

“I *have* dined — in a little out-of-the-way restaurant near Washington Square. I’ve had a lot to think about. I’m working to-night, Rag.”

“Workin’,” echoed the other, appearing at the curtains. “What at? the Janissary case? so soon?”

Stephen nodded.

“He’s got a big dinner party on. George gave me all the ‘soundings.’ My kit in good working order, Rag?”

"Oh, sure," returned the other somewhat downcast. "But I'm sorry you're pullin' this off 'fore Christmas. Seems a shame tuh take a chance right around th' holidays when yuh've got so many things tuh attend tuh. Can't you put it off?"

Stephen, thinking of Decima's request, shook his head and smiled. Grumbling, Rag unlocked a drawer in a desk and brought out a large chamois belt, lined with enormous pockets.

"It's a pity some of them bums can't take a chance theirselves oncet and awhile," he continued to protest, as he opened the first compartment on the belt and took out a piece of nickelled metal which, on being pulled, revealed itself as an extension jimmy, most useful of burglar's tools. "They got a great nerve sicking you onto a tough joint like that there Janissary house. I think you're a sucker to cut it up fifty-fifty with them when you take all the risks, Steve. It ain't fair."

Stephen shrugged his shoulders. He had discarded his outer garments and now stood, a stalwart, muscular figure, in a tightly fitting jersey of fine silk and a pair of short running pants of the same material. One hardly realized the height and breadth of Stephen until he stripped; his form-fitting English clothes gave him an appearance of exceeding slenderness. Now, with broad chest bulging and great cords of muscles showing under the pink and white of rounded arms, he looked fit to step in any ring and sustain the honour of his nation's fighting ability against all comers.

"What kind of a bit?" inquired Rag, fingering a half dozen of these nefariously useful articles.

"I'm not quite sure; half-inch I should say."

“What’s the ‘pete’?”

“George thinks it’s a Mall-Harwin 23. . . . But it’s one of those covered over affairs — hidden by the bottom of a writing-desk. Better put in the quarter-inch bit too. Have you oiled the drill lately?”

“I oiled it just after that Gerstein touch.”

“Better give it a try-out, then.”

Rag unscrewed a bulb from the overhead electrolier and attached the electric connection of the drill; its buzz was only faintly indicated.

“That’s all right,” Stephen assured him. “Now I’ll want some soap, a wedge, my ruled saw, and make the wire about thirty feet long this time.”

“For the love of Mike! Is the safe that far away from the electric connections?”

“No, but I’ll have to use the wire to climb the porch.”

“Oh, the noose business?”

Stephen nodded. Rag took out his pocket knife and began to unscrew the fuse from the twelve feet of insulated copper wire that had been used on the last safe-breaking affair. Removing the fuse, he added to the wire a good twenty feet, braiding it carefully, and connecting the two ends of the new piece with the fuse wire in the plug. This done, he wound it up and placed it in one of the compartments of the chamois belt.

“‘Soup’?”

“You know I never use it,” answered Stephen impatiently. “Only yeggs need nitro-glycerine. I’d be a fine one blowing out a combination with the people at dinner right under me.”

“If you muffled it ——”

“Well, come along and be my muffler then. Bone heads like you are cheaper than blankets, and you carry yourselves,” laughed Stephen. “Take that bottle and throw it in the nearest sewer, will you, Rag?”

“Oh, you new-fashioned ‘pete-men’ are wonders,” said Rag, with the nearest approach to a sneer of which his good-humoured countenance was capable, but at the same time laying aside the bottle with the dangerous explosive and lacing the chamois belt about Stephen’s waist. “I wasn’t above usin’ it I kin tell you when I was out on the ‘heel’; it was good enough for *me*.”

“Yes, and so was that little town up river with the sweet, familiar name,” returned Stephen smiling. “So you’ll forgive me if I don’t emulate you, Ragsey. Where’s the dicky now?”

“Right here waiting to go on,” answered Rag, handing him what appeared to be the unattached bosom of a dress shirt and fastening it behind by joining two elastics, Stephen meanwhile snapping the catch of the tab below into a socket in the chamois belt. A poke collar fitted snugly down over the dicky but was not attached to it, the dress tie being pinned to the collar, so that the false front could be pulled out and laid aside while working without disturbing collar and tie.

Save for this, and the detached cuffs that fastened into the sleeves of his coat, the remainder of the apparel that Rag brought forth was of the familiar variety that goes to make up the ensemble of a gentleman dressed for the evening.

“Say, Steve ——”

Rag was plainly ill at ease as he surveyed Stephen in this formal attire.

“I kinda hate your goin’ off like this — pullin’ off this kind of a trick so close to Christmas.”

“You said that before, Ragsey.”

“Yes, I know; but say, Steve, I’m thinkin’ of that swell little lady of yours and — oh, say, Steve — cut ut out to-night, or —” he added eagerly, “let me turn it, will you?”

Stephen laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Say, Ragsey, you hate me, don’t you?”

“Yes, like my own mother,” returned Rag grimly. “Honest to Gawd, Steve, I b’lieve I’d rather do time myself than have you do it. Why I feel like you was my own kid. Ain’t I trained you up from one that high?”

He measured off an infinitesimal space with his hand.

“And I wouldn’t ’a’ made no crook out of you neither, if I’d had the doin’ of it, you bet,” he added fiercely. “Say, Steve, you was jest the cunningest ever was, and you’d give your shirt to a perfect stranger even then! I was crazy about you the minit I set eyes on you — you was such a funny little kid, a-setting there by the fire when I played ‘rag’ for you and a thinkin’, and wonderin’, and askin’ me questions and figurin’ how you could do nice things fer everybody. Steve, I didn’t want you to ever go on the ‘heel.’ I ——”

“Rag, what’s the matter with your eyes?”

“Oh, I ain’t goin’ to ‘stall’ and say I ain’t got anythin’ in them — I ain’t ashamed. You’re all I got. I’m

forty-seven years old, Steve, forty-seven, and you're the only thing in the world that's ever cared a damn whether I ended up in the morgue or in the potter's field. Don't ever think I'd 'a' taught you to 'nick' anythin' — I wanted you to grow up square. I — aw, Steve, don't go to-night! Can all this business, marry your little lady, and settle down like the gen'l'm'n you was born to be. I'll go through with you; I'll do everythin' I kin to get you started fair, and all I ask is to have a little room near the attic to sleep and tear off a meal once a day. Go on, Steve; go on, won't you?"

For the first time Stephen noted the furrows in Rag's forehead, the many wrinkles about his eyes and mouth. The fact that this man — a free agent — had willingly served him for more than fifteen years, asking little or no reward, brought moisture to his eyes also.

"Don't, Rag — I've got to go through with this. Don't keep talking about it — please! I'd do almost anything else you asked me to, but I can't give this up. But say, Rag, don't think all this affection of yours is on one side; next to Miss Duress ——"

Stephen caught both hands of his servitor and held them in a pressure so firm that Rag almost winced with pain; then, ashamed of his emotion, he kicked off the shoes he wore, making considerable noise, and stepped into the felt-soled pumps that stood ready for him, making for the door before Rag could speak further.

Riding down in the gilded cage and passing through the pillared halls, Stephen kept his black velvet hat perched lightly above his brows; but when he had passed a block

or more down Fifth Avenue, he twisted the front down over his eyes and turned up the velvet collar of the dark-coloured cravenette that he wore, transforming himself into a much more usual looking person, and stepped lightly upon a passing motor 'bus bound south.

He whistled as the heavy motor throbbed beneath him and the cumbersome vehicle lumbered down the long lane between rows of bright blue jewels that seemed to meet away down there at Washington Square, around which, somehow, his whole life seemed to be centred. The remainder of New York had always left him cold, lacking for him either atmosphere or charm. He passed brilliant Forty-second Street, noting in the distance the cheap expensiveness of Broadway, the dwelling-place of strangers, the amusement palaces of the brainless and the unscrupulous — chaotic, confused, vast without strength, lacking all that made life worth while. Down the jewelled lane, past shop fronts that typified the apex of a nation's ambition, past that meaningless pile at Thirty-fourth Street, iron, mortar, and lights, the darling of the hearts of those from out of town who were supping grandly in the cold magnificence of a palm room that lacked either tropic charm or the blazing fires of the North; again past a glittering restaurant where many electrics seek to disguise crumbling walls, and artistic decorations attempt to retain an atmosphere that is nullified by coarse manners, unsuitable dress clothes, and pretentious jewellery — a come-down, this, from the dignified folk who supped there serenely when the restaurant had another name; and then into a darkened Broadway where the sheer walls of a fantastic

building of world-wide fame loom up like the sides of a mighty ocean liner.

Back to a Fifth Avenue of shabby shops (once the town houses of those who had supped at old Delmonico's) flanked by square stone buildings, hideous in themselves, and rendered unbearable to the sight by forests of signs bearing Semitic names indicating that thousands of eyes are strained over seams and buttonholes far into the night; down to the actual crude vulgarity of Fourteenth Street with its cheerful throngs seeking amusement for next to nothing — the pleasure centre of the poor; past gloomy and decayed ghosts of houses, and then, with the sight of the gray walls of an old church, through the windows of which filtered dim, dusky light upon ivy and creepers and hoar frost that lay thick upon its garden plot, into the district where remains, in all Manhattan town, something of the dignity and beauty of age in the midst of a people who know the beauty of all that is old only as a name.

II.

THE HEIR TO THE HOUSE RETURNS TO IT

As the omnibus sighted the church and its dim light, Stephen descended the spiral stairway, and slid to the street. The avenue at that point was almost deserted; few traverse it so late nowadays, and the night was cold, although Stephen, in the warmth induced by excitement, hardly realized that he had shivered beneath his furs earlier in the day. Passing the church, he saw that the Janissary house was ablaze with light along its lower floor, and noted

the line of waiting motor-cars on the adjacent street. A thick carpet had been spread from between the Doric columns at the head of the front steps, a carpet that stretched through the garden and down to the curb, and over it an awning, along the inside of which were strung multi-coloured electric arcs that picked out the runway from the surrounding darkness, so that no one within several blocks of the place could have failed to note that they were making merry within the house of Janissary. Crowded along the iron railings with the spear heads was the usual curious crowd of poor folk to whom even a position on the outside of a festivity was a pleasant break in the monotony of drab-coloured lives, although the full enjoyment of their feast by proxy was somewhat marred by two officious policemen in uniform detailed by Janissary's request to guard against the possibility of some shivering wretch resenting with cold steel the gathering together of so many of his enemies for merrymaking; the policemen, having nothing better to do, sometimes reminding the crowd of their authority by prodding at them with their night sticks and bidding them begone.

Stephen passed the front of the house, apparently betraying only a mild curiosity concerning the plethora of light, but noting with great satisfaction that the rear of the garden was as dark as could be desired, the moon yielding so little protection to the Janissary house that it failed even to outline the oak trees and rose bushes at the back. The same odd feeling of familiarity that always obsessed Stephen when passing this place came upon him a hundredfold now, and he found himself picturing the interior of the house as

plainly as though, at some previous time, he had been thoroughly familiar with it.

He passed down the side street. Here no motors lightened the dark house fronts where penurious landladies turned low the gas in the houses of former merchant princes and blooded bucks. When he came into the darkness of Washington Court, an alley lit only by a single street lamp, his progress was necessarily slow, sidling along as he did close to the fences so that he might feel the bricks of the Janissary wall when he came to it, and, coincidentally, attract no attention from passers-by on either of the streets. As he moved, holding one hand lightly against the boards, the other hand went beneath his coat, unfastened the tab of the dicky, removed the ruled saw from within its compartment in the chamois belt, fastened the tab again, and slipped the saw up the loose sleeve of his coat. His other hand now ceased to traverse the roughened surface of the bricks and came again in contact with wood, stopping at the jamb of the door. Then, flattening his palm, and keeping the side of his thumb hard against the jamb until the third finger came in contact with the round disc of brass that marked the location of the yale lock, he slipped the saw down his sleeve and inserted it between the door and the jamb parallel with the disc. Feeling out the lock bar, he brought the saw under it, dealing it several smart blows until he loosened its tension sufficiently to insert the saw between the lock socket and the sharp edge of the truncated bar, which flew back as he bent the flexible steel toward the lock disc.

It was then only necessary to turn the door knob to make an entrance as lacking in difficulty as though he were

possessed of the key. But, before entering, he inserted enough of his face to peer into the garden in case danger might be lurking there in the shape of a policeman told off to guard the rear. That there would be no canine disturbance he knew, otherwise George would have mentioned the presence of a dog.

The windows above the first floor were quite dark; from the dining-room, a few stray shafts of light percolated through heavy tapestry curtains; sufficient to indicate that there was light within, but not enough to outline anything in the darkness outside. The windows of the basement were set far below the level of the garden and in a bricked area way removed by five or six feet.

Stephen closed the garden gate behind him softly and stood flattened against it until his eyes should become accustomed to the darkness and give him the lay of the land. He listened intently meanwhile, hardly breathing lest there should be another waiting in that same darkness whose lack of caution in this matter of lung filling should betray his presence. Soon, he made out a pergola with some rustic chairs within it, one or two flower urns muffled in winter straw, a bricked pavement running between two sections of garden plot, and the outlines of the porch with its surmounting knobs of wood.

Keeping his saw in his pocket, for he would need it again presently for the window, he drew from the chamois belt the coil of copper wire, making a noose about one fuse plug and slipping the corresponding plug on the other end through this noose in lasso fashion. Folding this in his right hand, he advanced over the hardened earth, his body

bent double, lifting each foot high in air and placing it down with great care, approaching the house diagonally, in this slow fashion, his point of attack being the south pillar of the porch. When within a few feet of the pillar, but out of the line of vision of any one who might, by chance, have their noses flattened against the area windows below, he threw the noose, aiming it at the wooden knob at the angle formed above by the articulation of south and west railings, Finding no resistance as he sought to tighten the noose, he hastily jerked it back over his head lest the falling of the plug upon the bricks of the walk create a sound to attract attention.

Gathering the wire together again, he rearranged it into a loop slightly greater in circumference than the first one and taking, if possible, more deliberate aim, again hurled it at the knob. Hearing a slight rasp, he tightened it quickly in his hand before the plug should rattle against the knob which the noose had now caught. His next move was executed with remarkable rapidity, for he had those people in the basement to consider and was not quite sure what tricks shadows were likely to play on him; so, hardening his muscles, he took a short running jump, and, his feet against the pillar, drew himself up, hand over hand, by means of the wire which was held taut by his weight until he was enabled to place one foot on the edge of the porch, and levitate himself with a movement like the straightening of a bow string; Both gloved hands were now fastened upon the railing.

He paused there for the moment to remove the noose from the wooden knob, wind up the wire, and replace it

in its compartment in the belt; then, putting a hand on the knob, he mounted the rail and hugged the iron pipe at the southwest angle of the house.

The confused sound of many people in animated conversation buzzed in his ear as it was pressed against a pane in the dining-room window nearest him; but, try as he might, he found from this point no parting of the tapestry curtains that would disclose to him the sight of the party within, which interested him, however, only so far as the servants were concerned; for it was the butler's pantry just off the porch that he was to enter, and he considered it advisable to discover through the dining-room windows, if possible, the number of liveried gentlemen on duty there.

Descending to the porch again, and stepping flat-footedly as before, he searched in vain for some parting of the curtains wide enough to permit of the application of an eye; but the shafts of light filtered through interstices of less width than that of the thinnest tissue paper, and he returned to his point of attack on the railing, removing from his belt the wooden wedge suggested by George le Fay and feeling for the hook holding the pipe to the wall of which the official "sounder" had also spoken. He discovered it — a bit of iron shaped like a "V" about on the level of the small window that opened into the pantry, which was situated some three and a half feet away.

The wedge, a bit of walnut running to a thin edge, fitted itself nicely in place when tucked under the water pipe hook, and Stephen, holding to the pipe, raised himself until he could rest one foot upon the bit of wood and test its ability to hold his weight. Finding it equal to the

emergency, he swung around on the pipe, still hugging it tightly, and stretched out the other foot tentatively toward the window sill of the pantry, missing it by several inches. Swinging down to the porch rail again, he rested his arms for a moment, and now, having calculated the exact distance, landed his foot squarely upon the sill and stood in much the same attitude as a dancer doing what is inelegantly termed "the split," one foot on the wedge and one on the sill, flattened against the wall, one hand steadying him against the water pipe, the other holding to the window jamb. He observed, happily, that the window was hung with chintz inside, in addition to the drawn blinds of brown holland, precluding any chance of his being seen by those within. So, taking a firmer grip upon the window jamb, he steadied the foot on the sill and drew himself away from wedge and water pipe, bringing his other foot close and yet closer as one shuts up a pair of compasses until the points touch.

It was now that he discovered that, through the very fact that no one from within could observe him without, he was unable to observe whether or not there was any one within. So he laid an ear to the glass and listened.

From the absence of either conversation or the clattering of dishes, he judged it safe to begin operations, and, inserting the thin saw at the junction of the upper and lower sashes, he pushed up the catch silently and without the slightest difficulty. Returning the saw to its place beneath his garments, he touched the puttied surface of one of the pane mouldings, lowering the upper sash a trifle from the top, so that, were there the slightest noise within — even

the creaking of a dumb-waiter cord — it would reach his ears. He became possessed of no auricular novelty by the act, however; his olfactory nerves receiving the only new message, which was that the dumb-waiter shaft evidently had close proximity to the kitchen. The combined aroma of fragrant roasted meats, coffees, cinnamons, and other sweets came to his nostrils.

He closed the aperture above, and, dallying no longer, threw the lower sash high; waited, perhaps, a second, then hastily tying a black silk handkerchief over the lower portion of his face, and pulling his hat down to his eyes, slipped into the pantry — which was quite untenanted at that moment — pulled down the lower sash, readjusted the window catch, and, snatching off the black silk handkerchief and thrusting it and his soft hat into a pocket of his cravenette, he turned down the velvet collar of that useful garment and strolled out into the back hall as unconcernedly as would any invited guest, his passport his scrupulously correct attire.

The door to the dining-room opening on this hall was slightly ajar; but any conversation, any clatter of knives, forks, and spoons, any tinkle of delicate glasses or hum of conversation that might have drifted through this open door was drowned by the lively playing of a Tzigane orchestra in a forest of palms that led to the drawing room.

The hall in which Stephen found himself was frescoed, Murillo fashion, its floor laid with carpet of such softness that his felt-so led shoes were unnecessary precautions. The stairway before him was of the narrow, straight-baluster fashion found in old houses. He ascended it two steps at a

time, emerging from its narrow confines upon a landing that gave upon another hall — this one square, hung with *genre* pictures, some glassed and boxed in velvet-bordered frames, others painted on panels, but all more or less of the same size. Many doors opened on this hall, which struck Stephen as oddly familiar, although he seemed to remember none of these small paintings nor indeed the dull, autumnal shades of the soft carpet. A vivid recollection of a floor covering in Turkey red for the moment effaced the present hall from his memory. The second Mrs. Janissary had been possessed of some artistic purpose.

He hardly needed to remember the directions of George le Fay; but instinctively turned to the library door and entered; then closed himself into total darkness and shot the bolt. Having some dim recollection of another door he took from his waistcoat pocket what appeared to be an ordinary hunting-case watch, but which, when touched in the right spot, threw a bright electric glow over the hand that held it and a few objects in the immediate proximity of that hand.

He moved across the room, avoiding tables and chairs, to the opposite door. This he pulled slightly ajar to note that it gave upon a small balcony, from either side of which stairs ascended and descended. He caught a glimpse, below, of the Tziganes among the palms, their orange coats frogged with silver, busily scraping. Then he bolted this door also.

The library ran half the width of the house, with windows looking to the south; and, although the blinds were drawn down and the heavy, violet-shaded portières pulled together,

he remembered the luminous shafts that had crept through the dining-room windows and had no temptation to turn on the lights here for possible guardians outside to note. Instead he began to explore the room inch by inch until the light from his watch disclosed the piece of Chippendale. Kneeling before it, he pushed a mahogany panel backward and shoved it up through its groove, fastening it with a catch above.

The safe now stood revealed, and, as George had surmised from long acquaintance with the infinite variety of such "burglar proof" articles, it was indeed a hall-marwin, 23, this information being painted in bold letters upon its iron front.

Holding the watch close to the combination, Stephen again had recourse to that indispensable saw which he now used as a ruler, the light from the watch revealing the fact that it was divided off into little spaces of one twelfth of an inch each. Carefully Stephen measured off an inch directly above the combination and marked it with a bit of red chalk. Laying aside the chalk, he measured it again to verify the exact inch and made a riffling correction — perhaps one half of one thirtieth of an inch. Again he measured, this time from the first point two inches diagonally each way, dotting each point of attack with the chalk as before and verifying the dots' correctness.

The saw replaced, he removed the copper wire a second time, crossed to the nearest electric candelabrum, unscrewed one of the arcs, and substituted for it the fuse plug of the wire. To its companion plug, at the wire's other extremity, he attached the electric brace — a sectional affair which he

first fitted together — and, finding the connection satisfactory, screwed into the brace the half-inch bit.

He snapped on the power, holding the drill away from him and listening to the faint buzzing of it as the bit revolved rapidly through the empty air. Carrying it over to the safe he turned off the power by the brace snap. Carefully, he applied moist soap to the first red dot, doing as much for the entire length of the bit. Clamping the steel end of the brace against his knee, into which it fitted as it was designed to do, he held the electric watch close to the soaped dot, and turned on the power by the brace snap. Pulling out the dicky, he threw it on the floor.

The bit began to eat into the steel of the safe with a slight, rasping sound; Stephen withdrew the point, soaped it more carefully, and again applied it. This time there resulted only a sort of worried birring like that which might come from a very large fly imprisoned in a very small bottle.

Stephen pressed his knee gently, and, alternately pushing and removing the bit to soap it, the minutes began to wear away. At intervals, he would press the watch and the light from it would disclose the remarkable picture of a man in correct evening dress, but wearing instead of the usual snowy front an undervest of pink silk, kneeling and peering anxiously at a very small bit of steel entering a hole which seemed yet again smaller.

III

“GRANDFATHER GOOSE” CRIES QUILTS WITH THE WOLF

In the rambling old room at the top of the Dominic's House — attic, studio, lumber room, depending upon the

uses to which it was put and, in this case, all three, for Hilary Quackenbos was accustomed to use it when he wished to indulge his fancy for mediocre oils and water-colours — Van Tromp was arraying himself with trembling old hands in vestments last used in the early eighties, when on a certain auspicious occasion he had “given away” his sister in St. Mark’s church to a very deserving young plumber who had taken her West to share his fortunes. The little windows under the eaves, outside which swallows built nests and warred with energetic English sparrows for their possession, were covered with the dust of a decade, for Hilary seldom used the place nowadays and even the servants knew they need not bother about “old Trompey.” The long, slanting sheet of glass which had provided Hilary with his “north light” was covered with the soot from surrounding chimneys, and the room itself, intended by the architect to have considerable natural illumination, was ever in a semi-twilight. Van Tromp hardly knew, save when informed, what the hour was, although a great mahogany hall clock graced one end of the room. But the rope holding its pendulum had rotted while it stood there, the bit of brass falling several years before while the old man lay sleeping and causing him to shriek aloud in terror, imagining The Wolf had temporarily recovered the use of his limbs and had come up stairs to murder him while he slept. About a four-poster bed in another corner, musty hangings exuded a smell as of the grave. The brass on an ancient “high-boy” near by was now as funereal as a sexton’s spade; and a battered harpsichord stood forlornly upon two legs supporting itself against its more stable companion.

Upon a little iron truckle bed, more reminiscent of a hospital than of a home, lay Van Tromp's tribute to the dignity of one "giving away" a fair young lady; trousers of the variety once known as "sponge-bag," a chess-board of complex lines in black over a dun-coloured ground; a black garment with very short tails — irreverently alluded to as "spikes" by the gamins of 1885; a "made-up" ascot tie, termed by Van Tromp's kind a "puff," secured in the centre of its folds by a bit of wax which even one with a combination of astigmatism and myopia in their most virulent forms could not have mistaken for a seed pearl; a blanket-red waistcoat with small gun-metal balls for buttons; a pair of patent-leather shoes, long and sharp enough to inflict a mortal wound upon one with tender flesh, and a top hat so narrow of brim and so high of crown that no better description than the colloquial "stove pipe" could be desired.

He knew that his dinner had been served him at a quarter past six; he had been sure that the consumption of it had lasted no longer than it took the clock hands to reach around to the Roman letters that stood for the beginning of the succeeding hour. After that he had hobbled painfully from the room, for he had bethought that, if he was to go to triumph over his enemy, he must array himself in purple and fine linen.

The excitement, the thought that his vengeance was soon to be, and, now, the infinite satisfaction that came to him when he gazed between the two candles before the dusty pier glass at his aged form on which the bygone finery hung in loose folds, were all as draughts of the alchemist's elixir to the old grocer. With great precision, he drew on his

moth-eaten white cotton gloves, and tapped the floor with a knotted ash stick which an Irish customer had once presented him. The knock upon his door disturbed him not at all.

“Mr. Axtell’s just a-tole a-me you’d a-better come a-down a-right away,” said the black-banged, plaid-bloused Italian maid-servant, inserting a portion of her face in the room. And then, startled by his appearance, she went off into peal after peal of Neapolitan mirth.

“You look-a just a-lik-a th’ padrone, he look-a whan-a he come-a collect-a th’ mon’ from-a th’ boot-black-a stand,” she informed him candidly between gasps of mirth. “Also you look-a like-a th’ monk my brud he-a take-a on th’ organ for-a beg-a.”

He hardly heard her, so intent was he upon the vision of himself in the mirror.

“You come-a right away I tell-a Mr. Axtell?” she asked.

Mechanically he turned from the mirror to follow her. Old habits are not broken even when the hour of one’s vengeance is at hand. For the moment he forgot all he was that night to do; remembered only that the master had called and that he must come at once lest the servant be bidden to give him no food and he go to his cold room without even a candle to keep away the ghosts of memory that crowded around him in the darkness.

His old lameness seemed to descend upon him at the same time, and, though he had come up the steps with the elastic muscles of youth, he crawled down with the pain and precaution of age.

He entered the second-floor front trembling in anticipation

of threats and punishment for something he had done of which he had prescience only vaguely. Banished from his mind were the thoughts of his once radiant attire and of the great purpose which had been the cause of his donning them. He saw only the evil, hateful face of The Wolf, eyes burning wickedly under heavy white brows.

For the first few seconds of Van Tromp's presence in the room, Axtell was too amazed to burst into the violent tirade he had been bottling up until his butt should enter. Now he took stock of the old fellow — the hat upon his head, the gaudy waistcoat, the ridiculous coat and shoes, and burst into laughter as unlike the servant's merry unloosening of merriment as two things bearing the same name could possibly be; for Axtell's was induced by the thought that the other old man had finally lost what little remained of his wandering wits, which had wandered afar once too often and now were gone forever.

"Ha, Grandfather Goose," he croaked. "Grandfather Goose posing for his picture. Never was there a picture like you'll make, Grandfather Goose. Come here, old imbecile."

The thin brass poker was in his hands, but he stealthily slid it backward in the hope the old man would not notice and approach the fire without apprehension. His hopes were realized, not because of his sleight of hand work, but for the reason that two forces battled within old Van Tromp's brain — one the remembrance that he had started to perform some great deed that he could not remember; the other his ever present fear of this evil old satyr who sat before him.

He came forward unsteadily and, when he was near enough, the poker slid back again through Axtell's hands catching Van Tromp heavily just below the third waistcoat button and sprawling him on the floor where he lay beyond the reach of his tormentor, whining and crying like a child in pain and wondering stupidly what had happened to him. For a long time he remained in this position until the actual pain was succeeded by a dull lethargy from which there appeared no good reason to rouse himself.

But, presently, he became aware of something that made a monotonous sound; not a sound of any import, only a steady, regular attack upon something in his brain that, though dormant, was yet sentient to a certain long-desired happening, the unfulfilment of which tortured him. There was something in this regular tick-tick of the mantel clock that acted as shepherd to his wandering wits. He lay very quiet and thinking hard. Then he raised himself on his elbow and stared at the clock's face.

A quarter to nine!

It was as a whip-lash laid across his eyes; he stared, almost blinded. A certain frenzy took possession of him. A quarter to nine! Stephen was to have gone to the house at eight. No, no! The dinner was to have begun at eight; that was it. Stephen would not be there until later. He still had time.

Forgetting Axtell, he scrambled up and made for the door, his hat and stick forgotten. But the remembrance of the distance to the Janissary house — a good five blocks — halted him.

He turned to view his evil old companion.

Axtell had money — small change for the servants that he kept in the pocket of the dressing gown he wore. Van Tromp knew he would need that money if he was to reach the Janissary house; a weakness was already beginning to assail his legs. He came, then, directly across the room and thrust his hand into The Wolf's pocket. The fingers fastened on some crumpled bills and he drew them out eagerly, not heeding the wild ravings of the paralytic who sat helpless to interfere.

Van Tromp shoved the money into his trousers' pockets, and, Axtell, finally gaining his attention, looked upon a face as distorted as his own.

“Screaming — screaming won't do it,” gloated Van Tromp, thrusting his neck forward and looking down at Axtell, his eyes gleaming with fanatical fury. “Screaming won't do it; they know as how you always scream at old Trompey for nothing and they won't come when it's something. Ones that read the Good Book every Sunday regular with or without glasses is protected by Something Higher'n you. ‘Blessed are the meek for they shall 'herit the earth' has been said and old Trompey has always been meek and a waitin.’ And to-night's Trompey's 'heritance. You as always despised him, and others what is higher in their pride and pomp than ever you was or will be — them too is to have a fall to-night from old Trompey, for into his hand has been give a weapon which is as keen as a two-edged sword; for bein' meek, as was expressly commanded he should be, is the weapon given. Look,” he cried shrilly, in a tone that matched Axtell's own, “look upon the weapon which will humble the proud and cause them to

gnash their teeth and wail — yea even in their high places — look!”

His withered hand held under Axtell's nose the mate to the silent messenger that had gone to Janissary. Axtell's eyes grew glassy as he stared and understood; his venomous tongue was frozen within his mouth. Old Van Tromp reached for his fallen hat and placed it on his head, taking up the knotted ash stick at the same moment, and viewing his enemy with gleaming eyes. Then he turned, and in the silence that followed, left the room and slammed the door behind him.

He hurried down the stairs and out of the front door hobbling away from Chapel Street lest Axtell find speech and send the servants after him. With the aid of his stick, he soon found himself in the glare of Sixth Avenue, looking about in vain for a vehicle of some sort which would convey him speedily to his destination. None being in sight, he dragged himself across the street and signalled an approaching surface car bound up town, pulling himself upon the platform with the assistance of the uniformed conductor, and, after paying his fare, remaining in the open, unmindful of the cold, and peering eagerly at the lamp posts bearing the numbers of the intersecting streets.

“Where d'you wanta git off, grandad?” asked the conductor with rough kindness. But Van Tromp did not hear him; he was counting on nerveless fingers. Ah! that grating and bouncing meant they were crossing Eighth Street where there was another car line.

“Eighth — Ninth — Tenth ——”

He went on, counting mechanically.

“Here — here,” he shouted suddenly.

The conductor, with that respect for age found among the very poor, helped him off the car. Van Tromp hurried to the street and across it to Fifth Avenue — a long block for one so old. The corner finally reached, he paused, looking about him for the Janissary house. With its blaze of lights it was impossible to miss. He made haste toward it, reached the carpet runner, and stood under the awning with the light of the multi-coloured arcs upon him as he laid a hand on the latch of the iron gate.

The two men in uniform hurried up and took him by the arms.

“Here, git away from this joint,” growled one.

“You got a nerve, you old panhandler,” augmented the other.

With the dignity born of his great mission, he threw them off.

“I’m to see Mr. Janissary,” he said.

“Oh, you’re to see Mr. Janissary, are you?”

“Yes,” replied the old man simply. “Take me to him — take me to him, I tell you,” he added fiercely, “or you’ll suffer — suffer — suffer.”

There was a something to his demeanour that gave the policemen uneasiness. They viewed each other. Van Tromp lifted the latch of the iron gate and passed in.

“Better let him go,” said the first policeman doubtfully. “Kneebreaks is inside. He’ll look out fer him ——”

“Yes, and he’ll give us hell if we let any of these anarchist guys past us. We better go in with him. Come on.”

They followed the hobbling old man along the lane of

light, up the garden walk through the entrance formed by the Doric columns, and stood by him as the servant opened the door and would have barred it against the old man's entrance. But Van Tromp pushed him aside, loudly calling the name of Janissary — undismayed even by the blaze of lights, the tropical wealth of palms, and the magnificent musicians in their orange and silver uniforms.

A figure, heavy, yet sure footed, detached itself from the shadows back of the palms and came forward. It was Kneebreeks of detective headquarters, specially detailed to look after the welfare of Mr. Janissary and his guests. He viewed the old man with the ugly bulldozing look that was habitually his when on duty, and the policemen, scenting danger for themselves, made haste to explain.

"He wants to see Mr. Janissary. He said we were to take him to Mr. Janissary or we'd suffer," submitted the first officer weakly.

"Say, Lieutenant, come here," added the younger and wiser man and, taking the arm of his superior, whispered:

"He's liable to be Janissary's brother — uncle — or something — look at the way he's got up; eccentric old millionaire probably. That's why I let him by; you know these big guys have all got funny looking relations. See?"

Kneebreeks did see, and knew there was wisdom in his subordinate's remarks, but was loath to admit that he accepted them against his own judgment. He therefore formulated in speech, a theory of his own in which he had no belief.

"Probably from Mr. Janissary's office," he said aloud. "Is it important, sir?"

His bearing had undergone a change since the second officer had spoken; he was now almost respectful.

Van Tromp nodded. He was too exhausted from his arduous walk and the excitement of his squabble with the policemen to have breath for words.

"Just wait a minute, then," said the lieutenant, "and I'll have Mr. Janissary come out. What name?"

"No name."

"No name?"

Van Tromp shook his head.

"You're sure it's important now? Mr. Janissary is having a big dinner party. I don't want to disturb him."

"Policeman — policeman," the old man cried fiercely, finding his breath as he saw the precious moments slipping away, "tell Mr. Janissary to come — at once — at once!"

His tone convinced Kneebreeks that the affair was no ordinary one; but, even so, his eternal suspicion did not desert him. Linking his arm in that of the second policeman he drew him toward the palms.

"Keep your hand on your stick; if the old guy draws a gun or a knife or tries to do anything screwy, brain him!"

He passed the palms and entered the dining-room by the rear hall door. In the buzz of conversation around him, Janissary did not, at first, hear Kneebreeks's low tones at his back. Kneebreeks repeated his words.

"What's that? What's that?" asked Janissary irritably.

"Lieutenant Kneebreeks from headquarters, sir ——"

"Yes; I know you. What do you want?"

"A man outside — won't give any name — says it's

most important and that I should fetch you at once. A very old man, sir. Thought it best to tell you."

Stephen Janissary looked about him. Kneebreeks could not have chosen a more favourable moment, for each of the guests was busily engaged in conversation with another. There were too many important deals swung by Amalgamated for Janissary to be surprised at messages sent in by men who would give no names. Mayors, governors, senators, and the like, for instance, were not likely to put such information in the hands of policemen.

He murmured conventional apologies which nobody heard and followed Kneebreeks to the hall. The sight of the infirm old grocer irritated him.

"This man sent the message?"

"Yes, sir," returned Kneebreeks, crestfallen as he observed the lack of recognition in the glance that Janissary gave Van Tromp, and looking daggers at the plausible policeman.

"Absurd! Absurd! I won't listen to it."

He turned away, but Van Tromp caught a corner of his dress coat. Cunning was given to the old man in this the culmination of his revenge. The humbleness of a hundred servile menials was as nothing to Van Tromp's tones as he addressed the master of Amalgamated.

"Mr. Janissary, sir — came to do you a good turn as a man like me would hope to have the chance of doing for one like you when he is lucky enough — danger, Mr. Janissary, danger — up there ——"

He pointed to the head of the staircase; he had good reason to remember the construction of the house and what

he had forgotten had been supplied by George le Fay's "soundings" to which he had listened with bated breath.

"A burglar!"

"Nonsense! Absurd! A burglar — pouff!"

"Listen, listen, Mr. Janissary. I saw him climbing over your wall at the back. I was passing Washington Court the same as I does every night to git to my home and none can say as I hasn't the right; and to-night I sees this man, not ten minutes ago, Mr. Janissary, a climbing of your garden wall and then a climbing of your porch. I seen him, Mr. Janissary; I seen him. Send these policemen up to git him and then see if I ain't right. After he clumb your porch he got into them second-floor winders and he's up there somewheres now. Send your policemen to see if he ain't!"

"If we was all to be sent away," put in the plausible policeman, essaying his luck again, "that would leave you alone with this man, Mr. Janissary, and while we was looking for this here burglar he might up and try to kill you."

"Oh, you — shut — up," growled Kneebreeks. "As for you," he added, turning to Van Tromp, "are you sure you seen this burglar climbin' that wall?"

Van Tromp nodded energetically.

"He ain't got no reason to lie that I kin see, Mr. Janissary," said Kneebreeks. "If he ain't telling the truth, we'll soon find out what he's up to. Is there a back stairs here, sir?"

"Just off the dining-room. It won't do any harm to look. The man may be actuated by friendliness — and hope of reward. If it's for anything else, I can handle him

easily enough," Janissary finished grimly. "He won't try his tricks but once. As it is, my collection of carved stones are in the room that opens directly off the head of these stairs — that's where the burglar is if he's anywhere. Go up there, Lieutenant, and stand outside the door. I'll take these other men up the back way. You are all armed?"

Each of the three members of the constabulary nodded, patting those portions of their garments that concealed a weapon of blued steel.

"Then, up with you, Lieutenant. Keep your eye on this fellow, Timothy," he added to the footman who stood by the door, indicating Van Tromp by a jerk of his thumb. "Now you two follow me."

He led the way past the palms and to the rear hall, ascending the narrow stairs and switching on all the lights on the square landing above. Stephen Janissary had little or no fear, and his only concern was for the carved gems in the library; so, disregarding the peril of entering a room containing a possibly dangerous law-breaker, he laid his hand on the knob of the library door and turned it.

The door did not yield to the pressure of his knee. He stepped back to where the prudent police were standing. "Some one in there," he said, nodding. "Break down the door."

The second policeman again gave proof of his imagination and intelligence, laying a finger to his lips for silence.

"No use breaking in, sir," he said. "The man's got to get out. And the minute he does, me and my friend'll have him covered. He won't know we're here; that little turn of the knob wouldn't be heard."

Janissary nodded coldly.

"See that he doesn't get away, then," he said. "If he does, you two will lose your jobs. Don't forget that!"

He passed down stairs again, leaving them behind, their weapons in their hands, in a full blaze of light that would make a burglar an easy mark the moment he appeared at the door.

Janissary crossed back to the front entrance and beckoned to Kneebreeks who stood guard on the little balcony at the head of the stairs. The lieutenant came down half-way to meet him.

"There's some one there; no doubt of that," said Janissary. "I've got your two men at the back door; you stay where you were. He can't get out any other way unless he jumps from the window, which is unlikely. I hold you responsible for his capture and I'll see all of you get the right sort of a present, and, incidentally, a word of praise in the night quarter. Now I must return to my guests. They need know nothing of this. Simply bring me whatever he has on his person that is mine and I'll come down to the police station later and make a charge against him. This is a very annoying thing to happen when I'm giving a dinner."

"Yes, sir; quite so, sir," agreed Kneebreeks staring. "You're sure he's in there?"

"The door's bolted; some one is in there, that's certain," said Janissary calmly. "No doubt he has the door on this side bolted also. It isn't necessary to try it. As that red-faced friend of yours suggests, the burglar must come out at some time and it will be through either one door or the other."

“That red-faced friend of mine, sir?”

“One of the other policemen. Now get back to your post.”

Stephen Janissary descended the stairs, drew a twenty-dollar gold certificate from among others of larger and smaller denominations in the pocket of his dress waistcoat, and handed it to old Van Tromp, who, during the proceedings consequent upon his information, had remained as one rooted to the spot where first he had stood; nor did his immutability of limbs and features relax as he looked upon the donat on.

“Here — this is for you,” said Stephen Janissary, with as much graciousness as it was possible for him to exhibit toward one so lowly.

“Not for me, sir; no, not for me,” answered the old man. “Put it in your pocket, Mr. Janissary, as it was afore, and keep it there, for no such gauds and baubles is for one as brought you information with no hope of reward, only wishful for to see the wicked punished and them that serve Him exalted.”

To Janissary his mumblings were but the meanderings of a religious fanatic whose mind was unsound

“Oh, you want to stay and see the burglar captured; is that it?” he asked, slightly amused. “Well, you can do that and have the money too. Here, take it; I can’t waste any more time with you. Timothy, this fellow can stay until the burglar is caught. Possibly his evidence may be valuable to convict him. Take the money, man!”

Van Tromp’s fingers closed about the bill only for the length of time necessary for Stephen Janissary to turn his back and start on his way to the dining-room. Then it

fluttered to the floor and lay at the old grocer's feet. The footman at the door stared curiously at this peculiar person who scorned money; but he had little time to cogitate on the matter, for Kneebreeks made another flying trip down the stairs and took Timothy by the arm.

"That room up there — it's got winders, ain't it?"

"Yes, four of 'em; looking that way."

Timothy waved his wand southward.

"Well, you git outside and watch 'em. Here," he thrust a police whistle into his hand, "if he tries to make his git-away through them windows, you blow that — see? And, say; before you go to watching, go tell them guys on the other side about what them whistles means — see? Go on, now! Git a move on!"

The footman, waiving the insolence of the commands because he feared his master's anger should he refuse to obey them, left his post. Kneebreeks returned to the head of the stairs, back against the plush-covered hand rail of the balcony, face turned toward the door of the library. His folded hands concealed the drooping barrel of blued steel that they held.

The leader of the Tziganes put a handkerchief on the shoulder of his orange coat and lifted his violin to it, raising a silver-bordered cuff and laying his bow across the instrument's strings. His companions followed him into the melody most beloved for the moment in Montmartre.

Over the whole scene brooded the figure of the ancient grocer in antiquated garments — the first grave digger in the garb of Punchinello — the grinning death mask at the feast, waiting — for his time was close at hand.

IV

THE SECOND MESSENGER SPEAKS

Stephen felt his knee slip forward and hastily snapped off the power from the brace as he had done when the first and second tumblers had been reached, the boring of the three holes having covered a period of more than half an hour. From the church near by, he heard the four strokes he knew to indicate that the hour of nine was half spent. He sighed relief; there was little left to do, now that the third "dog" had dropped.

He withdrew the bit from the last hole and turned the knob of the safe; it sagged heavily outward. Satisfied, he removed the bit, unscrewed the brace into its sections, took out the fuse plugs, and replacing the various articles in the different compartments of his belt, took out his jimmy and lengthened it for possible use. Then he pulled open the safe door all the way and flashed the light of the watch upon its contents.

The strong box was, of course, locked; naturally, that would be where the jewels were kept. But in the pigeon-holes were many small ledgers, account books, and papers. He began to sort over the latter — an easy process for each was captioned on the back, legal fashion, with a brief of its contents. He turned over deeds, mortgages, bills of sale, and other private documents connected with Stephen Janissary's own personal business affairs, searching for the statements that Decima so anxiously desired, until his eye was arrested by a bit of parchment, sere and yellowed, and

indexed in faded ink — “The Last Will and Testament of Stephen Janissary.”

Somehow, from an impulse he could not resist, he wasted precious time to open it; animated, he pleaded in extenuation, by a natural curiosity to know what disposition was to be made of wealth so enormous. The parchment crackled as he spread it out.

It was simple enough — only a few lines and dated years before. It was as old as young Stephen was days; its execution a night in the winter of 1888 when tan bark was spread before the great house.

“I bequeath my property, appurtenances, chattels, good will, and all that I possess to my only son, Stephen Janissary, junior.”

It was written in Janissary’s own hand and witnessed by Eliason and a doctor in attendance; afterward the red seal of legal approval had been placed upon it together with some conventional words that notaries use.

Wondering what this younger Janissary — of whom he had never heard — might be like, but envying him not in the least, Stephen replaced the document, rather ashamed of having wasted time over it, and resumed his search. He had evidently begun at the wrong pigeon-hole; the papers seemed to be filed chronologically. He skipped several sections and took a fresh start on an iron compartment where the edges of the documents appeared freer from dust.

Leases, notes of hand, writs, warrants — all the forensic machinery applied to legal papyrus! Every now and then the brief on the back of some paper would set Stephen’s imagination wandering through fields of corruption in high

places. Bills of sale, notes of eviction, mandamus proceedings, bail bonds for financiers at odds with the edicts of the attorney-general, supreme court findings — would he never come to the papers he sought? — diplomas from universities certifying to good reasons why Stephen Janissary should be an A.B., a B.S., or an M.A., certificates of membership in clubs, notifications of elections to directorships of companies — everything but statements! Could Decima have been wrong?

There was but a single pigeon-hole left — a small one containing an account book bound in red morocco and a few bundles of papers — recent ones, Stephen surmised, for they were held together by small rubbers, not by red tape, and rubber bands have but a short life.

He picked up the first bundle and stretched the band across the space between thumb and index finger. There stared at him from a field of fool's-cap words certifying to the ability of Thomas Starkweather to qualify as a witness in the case of the murder of Gregory Kingston by Aloysius McKenna, said Starkweather having been present in Fogarty's saloon at the corner of Eighteenth Streets and ——

Stephen's fingers trembled as he turned to the second paper, of a different colour and size (cunning dogs, these!) and read the ungrammatical affidavit of Pedar Andrevy to the identical effect; going on to the knowledge of Fenton McGuire in the same instance; and neglecting neither the testimony of Lemuel Causey nor that of Buxton G. Smith.

He smiled happily and slid the packet of papers into the inside pocket of his dress-coat. He had been enabled —

thanks to a wonderful turn of the wheel of Fate — to justify Decima's confidence in his powers; only a little later he would see her, give her these papers, and allow her the pleasure of telephoning Graham that his triumph was complete. Tomorrow a timid mayor would turn a piteous face to his Warwick and confess inability to sign a franchise which had been proven a rapacious and unscrupulous attempt to wrench millions from the city exchequer. For once Amalgamated would be forced to pay in full; perhaps the supreme court would take action and shatter Amalgamated's hold on one or two enterprises in which the government was closely connected.

As he picked up his jimmy to pry open the strong box, another sort of a smile came to his face — rather the amusement of a naughty child — that he, Stephen Adams, burglar, in the practice of his nefarious profession, should be planning a fight against the lawless! It seemed a fit subject for a Gilbert or a Carroll to immortalize in nonsense rhymes.

Inserting the jimmy's thin edge of chilled steel between the iron door and its jamb, he levered open the strong box. Before him lay money of all descriptions in neat, methodical little piles — eagles, double eagles, silver dollars, twenty, fifty, and hundred-dollar gold certificates. He took cursory count of the actual value of the lot — perhaps six thousand in all, the household money of a large establishment, and, since it was there, it might as well be taken; that is, the least cumbersome. He picked up little packages of hundreds and fifties, dropping them carelessly in the loose pockets of his cravenette which lay on the chair beside

him; then, reaching farther in, he brought out a huge sandalwood box and jimmied off its top.

There, on a tray of white satin, lay those treasures he had come to seek — the jewelled fruits of Aladdin's cave; rubies of the pigeon-blue variety, star sapphires, emeralds nearly flawless, cinnamon diamonds. He removed the first tray and placed it on the floor; the jewels in the second were, if one might conceive it, even more beautiful than the first although not intrinsically of the same value — topazes, amethysts, turquoises, peridots, Oriental cat's-eyes, tourmalines in all colours, jaspers, chalcedony, jade, sardonyx, malachite — all the semi-precious stones carved with the infinitely patient cunning of Eastern artificers who found their surfaces more susceptible to art than those of more valuable minerals. Stephen, a true artist, stared more admiringly at these than he had at those on the first tray. The third one was a tray of pearls — pearls the like of which even he had never seen gathered together; pink pearls, blue pearls, yellow pearls, rose pearls, strawberry pearls — the Oriental, the Madras, and the Bombay varieties; fresh-water, and sweet-water pearls, button pearls, twinned pearls, pear and egg pearls, drop and ball pearls — pearls of all shapes and kinds, from all oceans and all seas, of all colours, descriptions, and imaginations, even down to the queer mother-of-pearl red-ears of the Abalones and green-ears of their twin sisters the Haliotis — they were all here, a representative from every tribe of them.

He tore himself from their contemplation reluctantly and slid a hand into a hip pocket for the chamois bag he had

brought as a receptacle for the loot; but as his fingers descended over the first tray to gather up a handful of stones he paused, ceasing for the moment to breathe.

The knob of the rear door had been turned — or was it imagination?

The seconds dragged abominably; then — click! He had not been mistaken. The knob had been released.

With an alertness incredible to those unacquainted with such work, he returned the three trays to the sandal-wood box; replaced it in its usual position, and closed the doors of strong box and safe. His fingers touched the papers; no, they should not be replaced no matter what happened. In that moment his one thought was to be worthy of Decima's confidence. No other purpose had being in his brain.

Now he crouched down beside the rear door, his ear to the key-hole. The sibilance of whispers came to him from outside. In some way, then, his presence within was known. He had no thought or suspicion of the police. What more natural than that some one should have been sent up stairs for some article from the library and, finding the door bolted from within, was naturally conscious of the fact that he whom that bolted door shielded was within for no purpose that would serve to augment the fortunes of the house of Janissary?

The whispering continued; followed a step on the stairs; then again the whispering. Two or more persons were left to guard the entrance. As the rat entered so would he emerge; logical enough. Some one else had gone for assistance. He must get out before it came — before the police were called in and a cordon drawn about the house.

First, he must make the getaway secure, then snatch up the jewel box, empty it, and make a run for it. The door leading down the front stairs was naturally impossible. The window ——

He pulled out the ever-useful wire — hastily shoved his dicky into place, fastened the tab, and drew on his overcoat. The wire he noosed to throw over a shutter fastener, and, holding it ready in his hand, threw up one of the lower window sashes noiselessly and leaned forward to fasten the wire.

Synchronously, sudden and clear, came the screech of a whistle, once, twice, three times; and, gazing down, he saw a man scampering over the grass.

After the lapse of perhaps a single second a heavy body was hurled against the rear door which, giving under the weight, dashed inward, and, spinning around with a momentum he was unable to control, the second policeman struck a heavy table and a jardinière smashed on the floor. As he staggered around to raise a weapon, Stephen, sighting him in the streamer of light that came from the hall, swung his fist from his heel with the force of close upon two hundred pounds of hard muscle behind it, and the man's feet slid from under him as though his legs had been of wetted card-board. Close at his heels came the first policeman and, as swiftly — though not with so much force, for the blow was a glancing one — Stephen's fist drove straight for his chin and knocked him clear of the shattered door and back into the square hall outside. The next moment, Stephen pushed the door back in its place and shoved against it the heavy flat desk.

He had but a single chance. He turned down the velvet collar to his coat, and adjusted his hat high on his forehead as he ran toward the front door. Perhaps he could bluff it out on his appearance, delay the game for the single moment necessary for him to wing his way to the street; servants would not know; might see in him but one of the guests. Better yet, he would go without either hat or coat. He tore them off, running back to the safe and tossing in the packets of bills that had been in his pockets. Then with the assurance of a demi-god, he shot back the bolt of the front door and, unconcernedly, stepped out upon the landing.

He noted the upraised weapon of Kneebreeks and laughed pleasantly.

“We’ve got him,” he said. “He’s back in there. Go in and bring him out.”

He wondered if the man could hear the trip-hammer beats of his heart as he voiced these airy words with the manner that had won for him from an enthusiastic Gaul the title of “The Magnificent.” And, just as he had not in the excitement of the moment recognized Kneebreeks, so was that officer lacking in remembrance of him. His assurance, his garb, his manner, all played for him. Kneebreeks lowered the weapon and was about to speak, when the policeman whom Stephen had knocked clear of the rear door threw open the one just closed, and, in a blaze of light, revealed the battle scene — the overturned table, the broken jardinière, the scattered silver, and the senseless body of the red-faced policeman who had gone down, clutching a curtain of violet and gold.

He stopped, staring.

"Where is he? Where's he gone?"

"Did he get by you, you — —— fool?" shouted Kneebreeks.

"No. He shoved the table to the door but I pushed it over. He never got by *me*."

"The window?" suggested Stephen, helpfully.

"Naw, no winder!" growled the other. "He couldn't a slid down in the time and besides there's a man outside there who'd give the alarm again. He must a come through this door. Ain't nobuddy come through this door?" he demanded of Kneebreeks.

"O-only-th-this-g-gentleman," gasped Kneebreeks.

In the silence that followed the two policemen eyed each other and Kneebreeks raised his long barrel of blued steel, the other policeman capping his action by drawing its mate from under his blouse.

Down below in the hall, the dinner guests, alarmed by the crashes from the library, had poured through the forest of palms, some crying, "fire," others asking wild questions and being provided with explanations equally chaotic. Janissary's voice was raised above the tumult calling for order and silence.

"Git down stairs," ordered Kneebreeks, peering at Stephen over his revolver barrel, and reaching a hand to the other for a pair of cuffs. "Here, put out your hands." he added, as the jingling chains touched his fingers.

"You're making a great mistake," said Stephen.

"Never mind the mistake, bo! — I got you now, *Mister* Steve Adams — I got you now. Now I know why you was *so* intrusted in them crooks; now I know why you knew

they never done them things. Guess I've grabbed myself a bunch of promotion to-night, *Mister* Steve Adams. Hold out your hands."

"Put those things away, Kneebreeks," said Stephen quietly, but into his eyes leapt a malefic flame that caused the other to give back a step and tighten his hold on the butt of his weapon; "put 'em away and let me alone. If you want me to go down to headquarters and explain, *I'll* explain all right — but put those things away as I tell you, and don't try to bullyrag me or I'll drop you where you stand, gun or no gun — understand? Now I'm going down stairs. Try and stop me!"

Raising his fingers to straighten any possible dereliction in the matter of his neck-tie, and passing both hands backward over his smooth head, he descended the spiral stairway as might an emperor to greet loving subjects who waited, laurel wreaths in hand. He saw the faces of his enemies below — Vaughan, O'Shea, Quesink, Philip Helmet, Arbuthnot, Fillimore, and Rollins K. Hilman — Gerstein, too — Gerstein the insignificant with the transparent ears and hang-dog manner who lurked on the outskirts of the crowd, and, towering over them all, Stephen Janissary — all enemies against whom he was sworn.

And then, Decima!

Decima!

Decima, with a pitiful little face and eyes that were strained from their sockets; Decima, who, heedless of her good name, pushed through the crowd and caught his hands. From her eyes, he realized that she understood at least one of the reasons that had brought him there.

He had some little skill at legerdemain. His handkerchief was within his sleeve, the black one which also served for a mask when necessary. He drew it forth and slipped his hand to the inside pocket of his coat so swiftly that, unless one's eyes were abnormally keen, it would seem he had drawn the bit of silk from that place originally. When it came out of his dress-coat, the statements of the perjured witnesses were hidden by it, crumpled into a hard ball. As her raised eyes met his, he lifted the handkerchief to his mouth and spoke in low tones, from the corner of his mouth, his lips apparently still.

"Don't bother about me now. Get out of the house and 'phone John Graham; get him to come immediately. Go and go quickly. You can do no good here!"

"I'm sorry," he added aloud. "Sorry, Miss Duress, that you should find me in so embarrassing a position. Thank you for your trust in me."

He had palmed the statements, and, as he slipped the handkerchief back into his cuff with one hand, the other that was outstretched conveyed the crumpled ball of paper to Decima, who grasped it.

"I'm sorry too," she said, her ability as an actress rising to the test as does every woman's when she feels she must be worthy of the confidence placed in her by her lover. "But I'm sure Mr. Janissary will understand. Oh, Mr. Janissary!"

But Kneebreeks, who had been watching the entire colloquy, revolver still unsheathed, elbowed himself to her side before Janissary had finished explanations to a very stout and tightly laced wife of one of his captains of industry

who had been threatening an hysterical outbreak. The lieutenant's eyes were trained to take in just such sleight of hand work as Stephen's and, though he had nothing but his suspicions to go on, he now caught Decima's clinched hand, the fingers of which were closed over Stephen's booty.

In that same second, Stephen knocked him down. Immediately the confusion began afresh. The stout lady actually fulfilled her threat; her screams were augmented by similar sounds from some of her friends, several of whom gathered up their skirts and ran affrightedly toward the rear hall. One of the orange-and-silver Tziganes, a nervous little fellow, lost his nose glasses, tramped on them, staggered blindly into the palms, grasping at a frond of one and clutching it so tightly that the brass bowl holding it crashed down from its tabouret to the floor and induced the belief in the mind of Mr. Gerstein that the house was being attacked on another side by ferocious robbers. He added his yell of terror to the pandemonium into which the affair had now resolved itself.

Stephen himself made no attempt to escape. He knew the other policeman, three steps up on the stairway, had him covered; besides Kneebreeks had recognized him and flight would only make matters worse. His right foot, however, was on the lieutenant's weapon, which had been jerked out of his hand by the fall. The movement attracted no attention from Kneebreeks, who was so stunned by the blow that he had not regained his feet.

Here was Decima's chance. Stephen frowned heavily at her and slightly jerked his head toward the rear of the house. Obedient, but tearful, she cast back a frightened

glance at him as she went. His sigh of relief was a profound one.

Now he turned with smiling eyes to the policeman on the stairs.

“Put that gun away,” he ordered peremptorily. “Can’t you see you’re frightening the ladies. I’m not going to try to get out. Here, Kneebreeks,” he went on, shaking the lieutenant who had drawn himself to a sitting posture and was staring about still dazed; “Kneebreeks, I say — get up and take me to headquarters if you’re going to.”

He helped the man to his feet.

“Come on, man; I’m ready!”

“Ready? Ready for what? Here, take your foot off my gun, you ——”

The noise having again quieted, Janissary stopped the policeman’s speech by also catching his shoulder. The master of the house was searching the room with angry eyes for some sign of a captured house breaker after a tumult so appalling. The monotony of Stephen’s attire, so like that of all the others about him, was enough to prevent Janissary from taking the trouble to look carefully at his face; he imagined him, instinctively, one of his guests. Therefore, he turned upon the lieutenant a face that was a veritable mask of fury.

“So you’ve let the burglar escape, have you, you mutton-headed incompetent? And with my jewels, too? Come, what’s happened, man? Are you frightened out of your wits? Come, where’s the burglar?”

The policeman who had been standing on the stairs now hurriedly ascended them and disappeared within the library

to discover just what the prisoner had accomplished while at work.

The intimacy of Stephen with one of the guests, the blow, and now the great man's anger all served to befuddle Kneebreeks; but when his glance took in Stephen's smile, he forgot everything except Janissary's injustice.

"Where's the burglar, Mr. Janissary?" he echoed bitterly. "Ain't you got eyes that you can't see that fella standin' there?"

He waved a hand toward Stephen. Janissary looked puzzled. He saw only a conventionally dressed young man, and began to fumble for the thin gold chain to which his eye-glasses were attached, endeavouring to jerk them out for a closer inspection of the person indicated. His lack of enthusiasm at Kneebreeks's catch further enraged the lieutenant, especially as more men were now crowding around and all seemed to consider the matter more or less of a joke of which he, Kneebreeks, was the point.

"Yes, Mr. Janissary," he shouted, his anger getting the better of his fear, "that's the burglar standin' there for all his fine airs and dress clothes and even if he does get away with the high and mighty stuff. As fer your jewels, I guess he'll come through with them when we git him down to the office. Say, you," he called to the other policeman who was now descending the stairs, "has this fella bin after the safe?"

"Typical 'pete-man's' job," returned the other not without admiration. "Three holes bored through the combination — as neat a job as I ever see. He must be an old hand, this guy — a reg'lar pippin!"

Kneebreeks viewed Stephen in malevolent triumph; but

Stephen's smile was apparently indelible. He reached down to the floor and picked up the lieutenant's weapon. Kneebreeks jumped back affrightedly and, before the other policeman could reach for his revolver Stephen had him covered.

He burst into a laugh as merry and whole-souled as any that he had given Uncle Fairfax in answer to the inevitable query as to his ailments.

"What a lot of courageous gentlemen!" he said in mirthful scorn. "Oh, Kneebreeks, poor old Kneebreeks! So I'm a burglar, am I? Well, if I *were* a burglar, I wouldn't have much trouble in getting away from a lot of policemen if they're all like you. Poor old Kneebreeks!"

He "broke" the revolver, knocked the cartridges into the palm of his hand, and extended the weapon to its owner.

"It's dangerous when it's loaded," he said severely as one would speak to a careless child. "Here's a present for you, Mr. Janissary; memento of the occasion — with the burglar's compliments on having such efficient guardians — souvenir of said efficiency; have them, Mr. Janissary?"

Aghast at impudence so colossal, Janissary had dallied with his eye-glasses. Now he put them on and viewed Stephen.

He gave back a step!

The Mauradriatic! The boy who had defeated and then insulted him, and who now smilingly denied his preëminence by airy impertinence even when he stood convicted as a house-breaker and old at the game. A low criminal, yet he dared flout Stephen Janissary. In his anger Janissary

struck down the hand and the cartridges scattered on the parqueted floor.

A wave of sentiency swept over him.

"Vaughan," he said, turning to his friend; "Hilman, Arbuthnot, Helmet — come here! — You remember I told you about that affair on the *Mauradriatic*? Well, this is the fellow who didn't like tainted money, this one here!"

He wagged a bony finger at Stephen. Resentment at this defeat, this insult at the hands of an unknown had long rankled within him. Now the man was in his hands — most men *did* fall into his hands who insulted him; he made it his business that they should. His lucky star had played for him here.

"Didn't like tainted money, Helmet!"

That Janissary should laugh was sufficient reason for all to turn and listen. The hall was very quiet now.

"A good example of what these Socialists generally are; these wonderful self-sacrificing gentlemen; these friends of the *poor*. Let us congratulate the poor on this shining example of their friends — *card cheat and burglar!* Eh, Hilman?"

He deliberately turned his back on Stephen.

"Take him away, officer. I'll follow you in a few moments and prefer the charge!"

The smile had faded from Stephen's face. It was not easy to simulate merriment with such contempt to face. His cheeks flamed scarlet, and his eyes were dangerous when Kneebreeks tapped him on the shoulder.

"Come along, *Mister* Stephen Adams!" he said.

Exhausted by his effort in reaching the place, to which

was added the strain of a long wait upon weak and weary old legs hardly able to bear his weight, Van Tromp had sunk down on the cushioned window seat generally occupied by the footman and had succumbed to physical weakness which bound his limbs and leashed his tongue during the tremendous excitement of the few past moments. Several times he had attempted to rise but each time he had sunk back. He had tried to cry out, but he could not summon the breath to do so nor moisten the crackling lips and dried throat of age. But now he must speak or it would be too late; they were taking Stephen away; the crowd was moving.

His effort was entirely spiritual. There was neither strength nor mentality behind it. It seemed to him that he was walking on air, that his voice came from a great distance; but the monosyllable that he shrieked out in a high falsetto centred all eyes upon him as he tottered out of the shadows by the door, a grotesque old figure.

Yet no one laughed; there was something at once strange and terrifying about the old man's gleaming eyes.

"No, no, no, I say — *no!*"

A woman who was near him drew away in fright.

"Stephen Adams, no, no, no! It's Trompey's time now and you've all got to listen to *him*. You've trodden him down — all of you — as the Good Book says ain't to be done under no circumstances, and now he's got you where he wants you, for he's got your chief, your leader, your general, and he'll humble him like man was never humbled before. You, I mean, you, Mr. Stephen Janissary!"

The ash stick trembled as he held it pointing at his enemy.

"You robbed me of my little shop as I tended forty year,



*“Made me a PAUPER, didn’t you? Well, I’ve made
your son A THIEF”*

Mr. Janissary; robbed me for to swell pomp and pride and because you hated them what was beneath you. For you was 'Big Steve' and such as me was dogs to you. You robbed me and you robbed others notwithstanding what the Good Book said, but you never thought as one of them what you despised could rob you too. But one of them did, and that one was old Trompey, and if you'll look at what I've got in my hand you'll know what was stole from you. I sent you the other two days ago so you'd begin to remember and now you can have this too."

The ash stick rattled as it fell and the other hand was extended under Janissary's eyes. It held just such another bit of silk and tarnished baby ribbon as the mail had brought to him two days before. Mechanically — only subconsciously understanding — Janissary's eyes travelled from it to the features of the younger Stephen who stood proudly by, gazing upon Van Tromp half-scornfully, half-pityingly.

The old man followed Janissary's gaze with a look unholy in its maddened hatred.

"Yes; look, all of you, at the thief standin' there what is the living image of his father! It's been a long time since you seen him, ain't it, Mr. Stephen Janissary?"

As the old man's wrinkled face was thrust forward — the face of an aged vulture — Janissary shrank away, and a moan came from him; a moan such as those who heard had never known could come from the breast of man.

Helpless, an arm held before his eyes, he stood while the vulture face was pushed nearer and lips were pressed against

his ear. The silence seemed to hold in it some of the quality of death; a whisper might have been heard by all, let alone that mad scream of triumph:

“Made me a *pauper*, didn't you? Well, I've made your son a *thief*.”

CHAPTER IX

THE FEAR

SNOW had begun to fall, first sifting like fine powder on black roofs and chimneys; later filling up the yawning excavations of Manhattan's continual rebuilding, packing itself in compact masses on the slanting panes of studios, and causing slender flag poles on hotels and public buildings to grow clumsy beards. Where unattractive fire-escapes had been, there soon were velvet-carpeted ladders to the skies.

People had begun to grow merry in the streets. Boys blew tin horns as reminders that Christmas was near. The holiday turkeys became cold and firm to the touch. The holly berries in the market places glistened, red hearts of white stars set against fields of green. One could hardly find the mistletoe at all amid so much whiteness.

Winter weather, Christmas weather, Dickens weather; the weather to rejoice the true Norse and Angle, creating as it does the atmosphere making for that country of illusion where the Yule-log ever burns brightly and the Christmas-tree never dies. It did not appeal to Morgenstein, for he was an Oriental by nature and shivered under his fur coat even though the astrakhan collar was turned up about his ears; but to George le Fay it brought subconscious

memories of old Normandy, or perhaps, of the streets of Paris, where, in another age he had crawled along the snowy moat, a prudent counsellor to a foolhardy Villon or René de Montpensier — the Guy Tabary, maybe, of the Parisian underworld when Burgundians camped before the city gates and wolves prowled the streets.

He did not know why he had been summoned to the House of the Dominie. Words had passed over the wire from Axtell, a code agreed upon, which he was bound to obey, although his evening game of chess with his neighbour, the proprietor of a haberdashery and most respectable, had been rudely interrupted, much to his vexation. In like manner, Morgenstein, who sat each evening poring over ancient tomes detailing the experiments of Raymond Tully, Albertus Magnus, and Friar Bacon, for he had always contended that the old alchemists knew more of precious metals and stones than any one else, had been incommoded and was also making his way, unwillingly, through the snowy streets. It so happened that, coming in opposite directions, they met at the front steps of their rendezvous.

“Rich, this!” growled George le Fay. “Got any idea what it’s all about, Morgy?”

“You’re like the old dame in the play that kept wondering what was in the telegram she hadn’t opened,” returned Morgenstein ungraciously as he fitted a pass key into the front door lock. George followed, his thoughts still among the manœuvres of red and black chessmen, the adventures of knights, pawns, and queens.

The bright patch of orange-red, where the fire leaped and gleamed briskly in the second floor front, drove all

other thoughts from the minds of the new arrivals, who, their coats still upon their backs, stripped off their gloves and warmed their hands over the blaze. Turning their faces from it presently, they observed that not only was Hilary present, but Rag also. Axtell's ferocity disturbed them not at all; he had wasted his superlatives on small matters so that none remained to impress his companions fitly with a matter really disastrous.

It was, rather, the silence of Quackenbos and O'Brien that alarmed them; for Hilary was gazing sombrely before him, seeing nothing, in spite of the fact that the pupils of his eyes which had shrunk to pin points showed that he had been indulging freely in the Oriental pleasure that usually banished pessimism. For pallor and fixity, O'Brien's face equalled that of the Carrara statue of "Comedy and Tragedy," flanking the ormolu clock behind them.

"We're done, dear old chaps," said Hilary, rousing himself and speaking in a frightened whisper.

"Yes, and you, all of you, taking the old imbecile's part against me," raged Axtell, the glow of the fire upon his face giving it the only touch of Satanic diablerie that it did not itself supply. "I knew his black old heart; I knew he was a Judas, a dog that bit the hand that fed it; a crazy, traitorous old fool! And we let him sit there while we discussed our plans, thinking he didn't understand. I knew he was shamming. I didn't want him here. But you all said 'poor Trompey.'"

His voice rose to a sneering shriek:

"'Poor old Trompey' indeed. You thought, because I was chained to my chair and had lost the use of my limbs,

that I'd lost my brains too, didn't you? Me, who planned this whole organization; me, the brains of the lot of you, and you wouldn't listen; me, who trained that boy from the first day I got him, trained him to be the greatest thief in the world and trained him so he stole like other men pray. And yet I didn't *know* anything, eh? 'Poor old Trompey!' Oh, you insane fools! Well, now you'll pay for it; you'll all go up the river and break stones and pick oakum for your 'poor old Trompey.' They can't do anything to *me*. I'm paralyzed. They wouldn't dare imprison me; but you, you chumps, you thick heads, you snivelling, drivelling fools, you'll wear striped suits and wield pickaxes and answer to a number, *you* will. Bah!"

George le Fay felt his stomach; a sickening pain was there; a nauseous something was in his mouth. He sat down heavily. When he had come in, he was wondering whether he should have checkmated and — with a groan, he dismissed the game of chess from his mind. He would never finish it.

Dully, Morgenstein remembered that he had been sitting with stockinged feet against the gilded radiator in his apartment hotel. The copy of Friar Bacon's "Excelsis" he had left open on the little table near by. The steam heat would loosen its binding if it were there too long, and he had paid thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents for the book at auction. He wondered if the central office men would allow him a few moments to go back, put it in its oilskin cover and replace it in his trunk.

"Van Tromp went to Janissary's taking one of Stevey's baby shoes with him," further explained Hilary in a dull

voice. "We can only imagine that he wants to turn Stephen up as a burglar and humiliate Janissary. He's evidently planned the whole thing out since he persuaded Stephen to burglarize the place. As Axtell says, we didn't give him credit for enough sense, dear old chaps. So, I rather fancy we're done."

"Yes, good and brown," echoed Morgenstein. "Good and brown."

George le Fay started to his feet.

"Van Tromp 'll have to turn himself up if he turns Stephen; he stole the boy and he's the most to blame. He's got nothin' on *me*; I never stole a dollar in my life — not a dollar. They can't take *me* away from my home and wife and children. I'm a respectable citizen. I pay my taxes regular and I lived in one place for fifteen years. My lodge 'ull see I don't go to jail for what somebody else has done. I never made a single 'touch', not one, not one!"

"Be still, you rat!" said Morgenstein coldly, pushing Le Fay back in his chair and bending over him. His Oriental eyes burned wickedly on either side of his hawk's nose, and his lean hand reached out to take George by the throat and shake him.

"You're the kind that turns state's evidence, ain't you? Now listen to me! If you ever 'peep' about one of us I'll cut your heart out — un'stand? They can't send me away for more than seven years, and when I come out the world won't be no bigger'n Times Square so far as your hidin' away from me; see?"

With Morgenstein's contemptuous shove, Le Fay's head struck the back of his chair heavily.

“Jest think of what I’m tellin’ you now when th’ district attorney starts promisin’ you immunity if you ‘stool.’ Jest remember it’s better f’r you to *serve* seven years than to croak *after* seven years! Better not forgit!”

A dry sob escaped from Rag O’Brien; he clasped his head with his hands.

“What! You too?” sneered Morgenstein.

“That’s right, Morgy,” shouted Axtell in evil glee. “Choke ’em, beat ’em, kick ’em, strangle ’em. You’re the only *man* of the lot if you *are* a Jew!”

Rag leaped up, threatening the paralytic.

“Shet up; shet up, or I’ll stick you in the fire and burn yuh to death like yuh oughta bin burned years ago.”

He turned, passionately protesting to the others.

“You’re all thinkin’ of yer own skins; I’m thinkin’ of Stevey. I kin stand goin’ to ‘stir’; I’m a tough old crab. But it ’ull break his heart to go there jest as it’s breakin’ mine to think of him goin’. Why I’ll serve ten years for every one he’ll have to do if I can. You keep yer tongue for them as needs it, you kike!” he finished, turning suddenly to Morgenstein. “And ——”

He observed that the Jew’s eyes swivelled away from him and that his ears twitched. Some one in the street had touched the bell button and the echoes of the tinkling buzz came up to them through the dark and silent hall ways.

“The coppers,” moaned Georgele Fay and covered his eyes.

“We’ve got a light in the room — damn the luck!” said Morgenstein. “We might ’uve known they’d come here direct! We *are* a pack of fools, Axtell, and we deserve to pay for our folly.”

The bell again reminded them of the presence of would-be visitors outside.

"No use tryin' to make a getaway," said Rag. "Not with a blindin' snow storm outside and the ground thick with it. They've probably sent a 'rap' to all the ferries and tunnel stations anyhow."

"If we're done," sighed Hilary, straightening up and feeling for his cigarette case, "why, then, dear old chaps, we may as well 'swank.' Rag, you're in very proper livery, old chap. Let's go through it with a bit of 'side.' Will you answer the bally bell?"

"No, no," screamed George le Fay. "No, no; give me a chance to get away first — give me a chance! I've got a wife and kids — I know a place where we can hide. We'll fight th' coppers, but don't let them take us to jail, no, no, no!"

He drew a long .38 from the side pocket of his heavy overcoat. Morgenstein stepped behind him, locked his arm, and plucked the weapon from nerveless fingers.

"We've got jest one chance," said the Jew, unloading the revolver, "and we ain't goin' to have you 'crab' it. The bunch of us oughta be able to swear Trompey into Matteawan if we stand 'pat'; but if we start tryin' to unload hardware and seein' coppers through th' smoke, we're gone."

He opened a drawer in the table and threw the weapon into it; then pushing Le Fay back into his chair for the second time, regarded him with dangerous eyes.

"You try to make any gitaways and I'll drop you where you stand," he said. Le Fay shrank back, huddling himself

into Trompey's chair, as seemingly infirm as the old man had been.

The bell had continued to ring by fits and starts. Morgenstein nodded to Rag, who, drawing a deep breath, fastened the single button of his black morning coat, opened the door, and left the room.

The echo of every step that Rag took down the uncarpeted stairs seemed to consume moments to the breathless men above. His journey was interminable; even after they heard the door open, and seemed, so wrapt were they in his movements, to feel the rush of drifting snow and cold air on their own faces, a long time appeared to pass before they distinguished a woman's voice. They had not recovered from their bewilderment before the hall ways were ablaze with light, for Rag had snapped on the switch below. Then they heard him talking eagerly. The fears of months were crowded into the period of waiting, for their liberty was at stake; but, in actual duration, less than five minutes had elapsed since Rag's journey down stairs before he bounded jubilantly up the stairs, taking two steps at a time, and burst into the room, slamming the door behind him.

"It's Miss Duress," he shouted, running his words together, so much had he to say and so eager was he to say it in the shortest possible time. "I've put her in the front parlour and lighted the fire there. She's waiting for Steve. She went to his apartment but he wasn't there; so she came here because th' clerk at Canary's give this as th' address of his uncle — you, Hilary!"

They wanted to ask him so many questions that they could

not decide which to ask first; consequently he continued uninterrupted.

“Steve’s free; they ain’t goin’ to do anythin’ to him. Ain’t that *great!* Ain’t it? Ain’t it?”

“He’s *free,*” echoed Morgenstein. “Then Van Tromp didn’t ——”

“What about us? We ain’t goin’ to be th’ ‘fall guys’ fer Steve,” shouted Le Fay. “If we’ve got to do time, so has he!”

“Oh, shet up! Nobuddy ain’t goin’ to do no time, sucker! This Miss Duress she wanted some papers outa Janissary’s safe and she musta told Steve so this afternoon though she didn’t see how she had a dog’s chance a-gittin’ them. Some kind of a franchise steal was on and th’ reformers needed them papers to keep th’ mayor from signing some bill. Well, Van Tromp done as we expected. He turned Stevey up while Steve was workin’ on th’ ‘pete,’ and th’ ‘dicks’ rushed in and glomed him; but Steve dropped one of them and pushed th’ others aside and walked down th’ steps, cool’s you please. Well this Miss Duress was a guest at that there blow-out as Janissary was givin’ and when she hears them yellin’ burglar and sees Steve a-comin’ down th’ stairs, she thinks he kicked in th’ front fer her sake. So when he slipped her these docymints he copped and tells her to make a gitaway with them, she runs to th’ alderman what’s fightin’ this here franchise bill and comes back to Janissary’s joint with him afore th’ ‘dicks’ can take Steve down t’ th’ ‘office.’ Janissary, meanwhile, gits told by old Trompey that Stevey’s his son and he jest sits in a daze and don’t seem to see nor hear nothin’; and th’ butler leads

him off to his room. But when Miss Duress come tearin' back in her motor with th' alderman, she jest runs right up to O'Shea, th' president of th' street railways and th' mayor himself — both of which was present at this here dinner — and she takes them aside and she and th' alderman talk to them. She says as how Steve wasn't tuh blame fer makin' th' touch 'cause she'd 'conned him into it — not knowin' of course that he'd take sich a desprit chance. But, now that he *had* done it and they had th' statements he'd nailed (which proved th' franchise was a steal or somethin'), they'd publish th' whole story in th' papers less'n they let Steve take a walk and let that be th' blow-off! Well, it must'a' thrown a scare into them all right; fer O'Shea calls th' 'dick' over (they was only one 'dick' th' others was harness bulls) and 'mitts' him five century notes and says: 'Knee-breeks, ferget all about this or you to "the goats!"' And he also slips th' two harness bulls a century apiece and tells them th' same. Then Mr. Janissary's old sekkertary goes up and looks in th' safe and finds th' carved jewels ain't bin stole at all. So they're nothin' to it but tuh turn Steve loose. So Stevey takes a 'quiet sneak' while this here Miss Duress is a-talkin' to th' mayor about not signing th' franchise, and he ain't at Canary's, and she's come down here tuh find him, for she's scared he might do somethin' desprit 'count of the disgrace of bein' caught with the goods! See?"

"What! He didn't get the 'stuff'?" asked George le Fay in angry tones. "After me takin' all that trouble to get 'soundings,' he jest uses them to cop some lousy papers for a dame? Well, I'll be ——"

"Oh, shet up, or I'll crown you with a cuspidor," retorted Rag indignantly. "You ain't got no more gratitude than a ground-hog."

"What about that old imbecile, Van Tromp?" asked Axtell viciously. "Did Janissary knock him down and tread on him? He's a big man! You'd think he'd kill the old fool. Did he?"

Rag sighed and looked at the gathering resignedly.

"Well, you're a fine lot of gentlemen!" he said. "No thanks for th' little lady savin' th' bunch of you from th' 'hoose-gow'; not a peep of gladness for Stevey gittin' off clean; nothin' but selfishness! I wasn't botherin' about Trompey nor nobody but Steve. If you wanta know anythin' else, I'll ask th' young lady tuh come up. But, mind! — nix on th' rough stuff. You keep your face closed, George, and you too, Morgy. Let Axtell and Hilary do th' talkin': I 'ain't gunna have her think Stevey's tied up with a bunch of lobby-gows. . . . With me it's dif'runt. I'm jest a servant to her, fer she's a reg'lar lady, as classy as they make 'em, and she ain't got no idea that Steve ever stole a dollar. That's what makes this safe breakin' so strong with her; she thinks he took all them chances jest fer her sake."

"Well so he did," growled George le Fay. "And what's more he made *me* take chances, too. It ain't fair; I've got no interest in th' dame!"

"You call her a 'dame' again, and I'll hang one on you right from my heel, un'stand?" returned Rag threateningly, and turned to the others:

"If you wanta ask her any questions, you'd better promise

to behave, 'cause otherwise I ain't goin' to bring her — not an inch!"

"I ain't gunna talk," promised Morgenstein, "and if George does, *I'll* hang one on him before *you* do after she goes. Bring her up, Rag!"

"Janissary and Duress," sneered Axtell from the fireplace as Rag went out. "I've heard Big Steve intended the young ones to be spliced up when they came of age. Well," he added with a horrible semblance of mirth, "it looks like he's got his wish. His own son steals from him and his partner's daughter helps him. How do you do, my dear Miss Duress," he said, his tone again changing to one that those about him had not heard for years — a courtly, deferential one that he had been taught somewhere back in the distant past was proper to use to women who commanded respect. "I trust that you will pardon my not rising — unfortunately, I am a cripple, Miss Duress; I haven't left my chair for fifteen years."

"Oh, I *am* sorry," said Decima impulsively, coming across the room and taking his palsied hand. "Mr. Adams never told me his uncle was — was ——"

"If you will allow me," said Hilary, smiling, as he touched the sleeves of her coat, indicating that he would help her remove it, "I am Stephen's uncle — Mr. Quackenbos. This," he said, presenting the man by the fire, "is my friend and partner, Mr. Axtell. Sit here, if you please, Miss Duress. No doubt Stephen will be here presently. He always comes to his old uncle when he's in trouble."

He had placed for her Van Tromp's chair, from which he had previously ejected the injured George, who now

stood glowering from the shadows at the back of the room on the girl who he considered had cheated him out of his rightful due. She still wore the gown of yellow satin pailletted with silver, cut in the fashion of mediæval times, which her dark beauty carried royally. Hilary, distinguished in appearance, with hair slightly grayed, and wearing a dinner jacket from Bond Street, seemed a fitting concomitant. He placed her coat and muff of sables on a divan near the door, and drew up a chair between her and Axtell.

"I have one or two questions I should like to ask you, Miss Duress," said Axtell, before Hilary sat down.

"Yes, and I have one or two I should like to ask you and Stephen's uncle, too," she replied. "I'll ask mine first if you don't mind! That horrible old man said that Stephen was Mr. Janissary's son. And Mr. Janissary did have a son stolen from him a long time ago. But Stephen isn't that son, is he? Because, if he is, how can you be his uncle?"

"I'm not really his uncle, dear lady," returned Hilary, a pathetic note creeping into his voice. "I was a lonely man and I adopted Stephen. He attracted me when I used to go to the corner grocery. The old grocer said Stephen was his son, but he allowed me to have him for a certain consideration. After that the grocer failed and since then he had been living here with us — a poor half-witted fellow named Van Tromp."

"That was the man, that was the one that Mr. Eliason took away to question after Mr. Janissary was helped up to his bedroom. So then there *is* a chance that Stephen *may* be Mr. Janissary's son?"

“I know nothing except that this Van Tromp said Stephen was his son. I naturally didn't want Stephen to know his father as a drunken, infirm, crack-brained fellow, so I told him his father was an English officer who died in India. If Van Tromp stole him from Mr. Janissary — why he should know! Where is Stephen?”

“Oh, I don't know,” she answered, her tone agitated. “Here I've been sitting, forgetting that he may be doing something desperate because I led him into that — that — burglary. Oh, believe me, sir,” she said, turning to Hilary, “if I'd had the slightest idea that he would do anything so rash as that I would never have mentioned those statements in Mr. Janissary's safe. Of course, it was glorious for him to do it and now the franchise won't be signed — the mayor has promised that! But it is too terrible to think that a person like Stephen whom everybody respects and loves and whom people call ‘Stephen the Magnificent’ should lay himself open to trial as a thief. Not that I mean he was; no, no; don't think that! I'm only giving you the world's opinion. But, after all, we care what the *meanest* people think of us, don't we? It's because they *are* so mean that we resent their bad opinions; to think we should give *them* a chance to despise us! Can you ever forgive me for putting Stephen in such a terrible position, Mr. Quackenbos?”

Hilary was about to answer, but a tap on the shoulder from Rag, the action coupled with a warning finger laid against the lip, kept him in silence during which he heard a slow step on the stair — the step of one who drags himself onward with no particular purpose in view save movement.

The step well fitted the look of the man who entered. Stephen's eyes lacked lustre, his shoulders seemed incapable — broad as they were — of bearing even the light coat that had sat so lightly upon them but a few hours ago. His hat was pulled far down over his face as though he feared to meet the gaze of his fellow men. As he sank into the nearest chair, they noted that his hands were red and blue with cold, for he had forgotten to put on his gloves.

He did not see that Decima was among them, for the high back of the grandfather's chair hid her from sight. Rag approached him solicitously, but said nothing, only taking Stephen's cold hands between his warmer ones, rubbing them tenderly.

Somehow no one seemed inclined to speak. It silences even the most cynical to see one utterly crushed in spirit. Stephen had been light-hearted enough when there was danger to face; but now, believing that the end had come between him and Decima, all the joy seemed gone out of life forever. Young as he was, he had few illusions concerning women. His companions had dinned into him from early childhood their lack of brains, of honour, of heart; their near kinship to the animal that is withheld from its desires by none of the man-made virtues. He knew, therefore, that he had won for his own, one beyond price — a woman in a million; one to whom was given all the things that most of her sex lacked; and who would go to her death with a smile on her lips for his sake.

So he had tramped the streets while the snow froze beneath him, hardly knowing he fought his way through a storm; lacking knowledge even of the paths he took,

until, by the instinct that brings a dog to its kennel or a bird to its nest, he had found himself mechanically fitting a key into the lock of the home of his childhood, and ascending the stairs to the fire before which as a boy he had sat to puzzle and dream over the injustice of a world toward those who sought to save it.

The glow that came with the pressure of O'Brien's hands against his brought him out of his black broodings. His eyes were wistful as those of a child, as he looked down at the man who knelt at his feet. The pressure of the hands was his this time, and tears started from the corners of his eyes, the tears that come from others' kindness when one is sad.

"You were right, Ragsey," he said. "I shouldn't have gone to-night. No, no; I didn't mean that! I'm glad I went, Ragsey; but one can't always be unselfish even if one does try. And I do try, don't I, Rag?"

"Try?" returned the other in a thick voice which he strove to make fierce to disguise his emotion. "Try? Naw, you don't *try*, Steve! You never thought of yerself in yer life. If yuh had, yuh might'a' bin somethin' instead a jest Dutchin' yer book fer a lot of no good, ungrateful rats that don't care whether yuh live or die s'long's they get *their'n*. But yuh ain't a goin' tuh do it no more, Steve. No, *sir!* . . . Miss Duress, talk tuh him, won't yuh?"

Looking up for the first time, Stephen realized that all the members of the company were present, and that Decima was advancing toward him from the fire. He leaped to his feet, dazed, and catching her hands, bent his head over them.

"Oh, Stephen, not there, not there," she said, her head bent too. "Stephen, 'Stephen the Magnificent,' oh, Stephen, I love you, I love you. My Stephen — *mine*."

Her arms stole about his neck. Hilary turned his back; Rag, Morgenstein, even George le Fay, sensible of the delicacy of the situation, realizing what it meant for this gently bred girl to forget the presence of others, affected to be interested elsewhere. Only old Axtell sat, smiling in sinister fashion, cruelly cynical; for there are some men without hearts to be touched, and who, if there be a hereafter, die with the death of their bodies; and Axtell was such a one!

"Stephen, Stephen! You are wonderful, wonderful! I couldn't have believed there was such a man on earth, much less think he would ever be *mine*. Stephen, to-night when I thought you might do something to yourself, I nearly died. And now I've got you, I want to watch over you all the time. Stephen, I want you! I want you! Must we wait any longer, my dearest!"

He disengaged her hands and sat down again, his fingers strained as they locked about his forehead.

"Decima, don't; don't, dear! Your man is a dream man — not *me*! You must know; you should know!"

He looked up, steadying his gaze with an effort.

"Decima, I'm a thief! I didn't go to Janissary's house just to get those statements, as *you* think. I had planned to steal his jewels before you told me about the statements. I've been stealing for eight years. The Willette, Vaughan, Gerstein, Youngston robberies — every one was mine! I'm just a common thief!"

"It's a damn lie, Steve!"

Rag strode between Stephen and Decima.

"A common thief don't send boys to college and 'prentice them to trades! He don't pay poor people's hospital bills and give money to foundlin' schools and set'l'm'nt houses. Did you ever hear of one of them givin' a thousand people a Thanksgivin' dinner, or havin' a Chris'mus party fer th' servants' kids in his hotel? Don't let him hand you no talk like that, Miss Duress. I suppose you gotta know he's broke into houses and took money and sparklers — wouldn't be square for him notta tell you — but every time he took a dime, we had tuh hold up our right arms and swear th' guy he was gunna nick had stole from th' poor. Common thief, hey? Common thief? Well, if you're a common thief, Steve, then I pray tuh God there wouldn't be nuthin' but thieves in th' world!"

Decima covered her eyes. The troubled tones of Hilary supplemented O'Brien's fiery peroration.

"O'Brien is crude, my dear young lady, very crude; but, in a way, he's right; yes, he's right. You see, we — well we, to an extent, have taken the law into our own hands. Purely philanthropic, however, my dear young lady; purely philanthropic, I assure you."

Axtell scowled him into silence, his eyes gleaming with evil, but when he spoke, it was in the honeyed tones of the fashionable evangelist — the "devil quoting Scripture," of a verity.

"We were given brains not to cheat our fellow men, Miss Duress, but to teach them *not* to cheat. We were given strength to protect the weak, not to oppress them. To-day

the strong in mind and body own just one law — the law of the conqueror. We fight them by their own rules. They steal with protection, and we steal without it. That is the only difference.”

Decima lifted a tear-stained face.

“So you — you didn’t — do it — for me — after all,” she said, between sobs.

“Only partly,” Stephen answered, his voice dull.

“You — you — *break* into houses?— like a *burglar* ?”

“I *am* a burglar, Decima; but it hurts to hear you say so.”

“Oh, I understand,” she cried impulsively, catching his hand again. “I understand, and I honour you for it, Stephen. But you mustn’t do it any more; no, not any more, will you? I have some money. You can have it — *all* — nearly a million dollars. You can do anything you like with it. Only don’t — don’t — *you know!* Promise me you won’t, dear!”

Axtell held himself hard against the back of his chair. His hope of future wealth was slipping away from him as a new something dawned in Stephen’s eyes. He spoke coldly:

“Stephen has given almost half of what you have already. If he quits the fight now, it means he goes back on all the principles he says he believes in. It means he is a *coward!* But he won’t be! I know Stephen better than that! Don’t I, my boy?”

He had played on this chord ever since the boy had been old enough to reason. Fearing it might be as effective as ever, Rag, in a frenzy of rage shot across the room, and shook his clinched hand in Axtell’s face.

“Shet up! Shet up,” he yelled. “You’ve had enough from Steve. Steve, old pal,” he entreated, a hand on the younger man’s shoulder, “for God’s sake, wake up! Don’t let him bull you any more! Don’t! Take a tumble to yourself!”

Rag hated what he would have called a “stool”—an informer; but his desire was strong that Stephen should no longer be misled. Without giving any of the details of the gigantic deceit that had been practised on him from boyhood, Rag, by a spurt of telepathic force, managed to stir a cog in Stephen’s mental wheel. Nor did Stephen need much arousalment. He was awakening. He knew that Axtell was endeavouring to destroy his happiness, to keep him from the girl who was willing to overlook his offences against the law; who, careless of what the public might say, was willing to give herself and all that was hers into the keeping of one confessed as a thief. And he began to see clearly the selfishness and the mean dishonesty of his preceptors.

“What are you trying to do, Axtell?” he asked, turning with sudden grim fierceness. “Didn’t you hear Miss Duress say she understood and forgave? Don’t you know I love her? Do you want me to ruin my life and hers? Up to a minute ago I thought I would lose her after she found out what I was, and I couldn’t see any use going on living. And now, when she understands and overlooks, you’d have me go on stealing? It was all right when I had just myself to think about and when I thought you believed yourselves in the principles you taught me; but it isn’t all right now! I want the woman I love; and I know you for a gang of

real thieves! I've helped the people: I've saved the city to-night at the risk of everything I wanted myself. It's time to think of myself a little now — and of her! I don't just know when it's to be: I'll have to leave this city, go somewhere else, begin a career alone for a while. I couldn't use your money, Decima; that wouldn't be fair! I've got to stand before you self-supporting at least, and all I know how to do now is steal. But have no fear. In a world as stupid as this, it isn't difficult to make your way. It won't be long, dear."

He took her into his arms. Axtell, his face working in silent fury, was restrained from speech by the hand of Hilary, and Stephen and the girl passed from the room together.

"In another minute, dear old chap," said Hilary warningly, "Stephen would have realized just about what our motives are. You can't argue with a man when he's in love. But wait until we get him alone again. The old arguments have never failed. He'll come around to terms. And remember, as he said, *he can't do anything but steal*. That's the main point, dear old boy."

"As it is, we're all pretty lucky we're not in jail," said Morgenstein. "That's good enough. But I'm not sure about Stephen coming to terms. Finkelstein's beginning to think."

"He means Frankenstein," said Hilary soberly. "That's not a pleasing thought, Morgy."

Axtell, finally coherent, became impossible of speech.

CHAPTER X

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE DEPARTS FROM IT

SINCE Van Tromp had spoken, Stephen Janissary had said no word. The man who had ruled millions had suffered himself to be led away as a child is led by its nurse. Solicitations, entreaties, requests for information as to his desires and wishes, had all fallen on deaf ears. The old man (for now it had become apparent that Stephen Janissary was very old) sat staring with eyes that saw but one thing — the shoe of a little child; with ears that heard only the words that his enemy had spoken; sat and stared and was silent.

Many times they came to him, Eliason, the butler, Timothy; Vaughan, and O'Shea had tried to tell him something — something about statements or papers or whether or not the mayor would sign some franchise the following morning. It had been words to Stephen Janissary — nothing more.

At last they left him in peace and the great house was still. He was glad of that. These people with their buzzing about papers and money and policemen and mayors were very tiresome. They did not understand that Stephen Janissary had other things of which to think — the shoes of little children, for instance, and old grocers in antiquated garments, and sons who were thieves.

Outside the wind hurled frozen flakes against the window. Within the fire died slowly for want of fuel; the old room was lit up, spasmodically, by its flames and flickers. And, after a long time, it died down and the room grew cold. But the old man did not know.

There were things to remember: for instance, the night the street before the house had been strewn with tan bark, and he had stood in the stately dining-room below, no longer dreaming in teas, sugars, and spices, but in a world conquest for his son — *his* son, Stephen Janissary, junior — who would marry the daughter of that old aristocrat, Ben Duress, and rule the world of business in the days to come.

He had begun to build not for himself, but for that tiny bit of humanity that lay in its swan's-down coverings just across the hall from the room in which he now stood. The business his father left him had been good enough for Stephen Janissary, but the boy must have more, more; for he would be a gentleman and the husband of a Duress.

Those two years that had passed then — the only happy ones of his life — after he amalgamated with Duress and added shop after shop to his chain; coming home each night in fresh triumph to rush up stairs to where the child lay and take him tenderly in his hairy hands, something too delicate and fragile for one like him to hold at all.

He had begun for the boy's sake, and what he had begun he could not stop; no, not even when his heart had been wrung with agony, and he had sought to spend all his millions to recover that most precious of his possessions.

Struck down in the dark and by such a one as that ghost that had come to his feast to-night; struck down, struck down!

He wondered, dully, if men would have called upon his name with hatred if the boy had not been taken from him? At all events, he would have had one that would have loved him better than life itself; one for whom he would have gladly died.

Those days in Washington Square, when he had sat with old Ben Duress, the children side by side; those nights when he sent the nurse away and sat beside the child's cradle, rocking it with his foot, and humming to it scraps of street songs and old Methodist hymns that he remembered from boyhood.

The years between that time and the present seemed a blur to him. He remembered, dimly, as men do unimportant things, that a man who was afterward President of the land had come humbly to him, soliciting his good offices, and that he had carelessly wrung from him promises which were fulfilled abjectly. Dully, he recalled pictures and caricatures of himself, in every one of which he wore a crown and held a sceptre.

Then, suddenly, he recalled that all men hated him!

Was there one who ever basked in the warmth of his smile for anything except gain? Was there a single one who sought his companionship for any reason save business association and advancement? His lieutenants, his secretaries, his employés — they all froze when he came near them, and he had once jubilated in the fact that, though they hated him, they were yet only his bond-servants and slaves, over whose lives he held absolute suzerainty; who grew glad when he approved, who chilled to the bone when he frowned.

The people, too, might hate, but how they feared him! The crowds that made way for his car, the politicians who came humbly soliciting his aid, his associates in business who listened meekly while he laid down the law, his clerks, his servants — never had one of them revolted, for they were afraid and fawned upon him, sycophants all!

To-morrow morning, they would read in those hateful prints that his son was a thief!

Stephen Janissary's son a thief; handled by policemen; taken to the common jail; insulted by all! Stephen Janissary's flesh and blood — the one creature in all the world that he had loved and that was absolutely his own.

They would profess sorrow — those fools! — but in their hearts they would be glad. Though he would not see it they would smile and nudge one another when he passed. Those that he despised and ruled would be laughing at him — the whole world would be laughing at him, and, maybe, what was worse, pitying him.

It came upon him in that instant that he had failed — failed absolutely. All his life he had known nothing save figures, figures, figures. He had had no childhood, no happiness! One wife had feared, the other hated, him! He saw no beauty in the things in which even the humblest found their pleasure.

When Stephen was born, he might have retired — a man of comfortable income with no need to work again all his life. What did he want with more money? His tastes had ever been simple; his requirements few. What he had spent in ostentation had been only on the advice of others. No! He had made this fortune for the boy — piled up

millions until they were uncountable and spent little or nothing. It had been for the boy: and now that boy was a thief!

“No man has ever bested me; no man ever kept me from what I wanted; and no man ever shall.”

Was it only yesterday that he had said that? or was it years ago? How had he dared defy something so far beyond, so vast, so terrible? Something that had chosen for the instrument of its vengeance the meanest of Stephen Janissary's victims.

Beaten by an old fool, a small tradesman whom he had trodden down on his way to rulership, one so small that he had not even a recollection of his face or his name! Beaten by an old fool, who, while Janissary had thought himself ruler of the people, had crouched in some foul hole, leering and grinning, and only waiting for the time to come when his enemy would reach the zenith of his career to humble him utterly before all those bond-servants and slaves whom he despised.

Beaten by an old fool!

Pictures came to him — horrible pictures! Pictures of a little child subjected to shameful tortures because he was his, Stephen Janissary's son. Pictures of that child being told of his own father as a devil in human form, one to be loathed and hated, his smallest actions interpreted into fiendish deeds. He remembered the night on the *Mauradriatic* when young Stephen's bitter words had burned into his brain:

“The stolen money of poor shop-keepers who're in the morgue because you've ruined them . . . the blood

money of labourers who sweat twelve hours a day for you . . . the virtue-wrung money of their daughters whom you've driven to the streets and the brothel . . . tainted money, you thief, yes; money with the curse of death on every dollar. You thief!"

So his son thought him a thief; his own son, who had cheated him — a common card sharp — called him a *thief*, and gave his money to charity — the money that he had piled up for that very son!

Oh, how they would laugh and jibe and sneer to-morrow! Stephen Janissary the father of a thief; Stephen Janissary beaten by an old fool; Stephen Janissary disowned by his own flesh and blood, who, even if he was both card cheat and burglar, thought himself better than his father.

Laugh, laugh, laugh!

He struggled to his feet. The last coal had burned itself out it seemed. They would laugh, eh? Laugh at Stephen Janissary! Well, he would cheat them of that anyhow!

He had ruled them once. Let them always remember him as Stephen Janissary, the ruler, the Warwick, the king-maker, who had made the public his bond-servants and his slaves.

Laugh at him, would they? They'd not laugh! He'd see to that! They should respect him even in memory, for he was their ruler, and game to the end. If he might not rule, then it was time that he should go.

But laugh! they should never do that!

He groped across the room to his night table. In the drawer of it had always been a protection against possible slaves, who, losing their reason, might come to him in their

maniacal fury. How cool and relieving the cold metal of it was against his hot, crackling skin!

No, they would never laugh! With faults and sins that were greater than other men, he was still a *man* for all that, and one who despised them even when his departure was at hand.

He had been wrong about the fire. A great streamer shot up all unawares and showed that the white of the snow against the window panes was as nothing to the white of Stephen Janissary's face, along which was slowly creeping some dark, snake-like thing that seemed to grow as it came.

CHAPTER XI

"TO THOSE FROM WHENCE IT CAME."

I

CANBY KERNAHAN INTERVIEWS ELIASON

SINCE it had become his misfortune to be attached to the afternoon edition of his paper, his splendid work on the Graham-McKenna case having terminated his connection with the Sunday sheet, Canby Kernahan knew he must heed the none too dulcet tones of an alarm-clock when that useful article announced that the hour of seven was at hand. Bath, breakfast, and subway journey all must be accomplished before the hour of eight, for that was the time he was expected to report to that (officially) stern tyrant, his city editor.

On this particular morning, Canby found him in a state of great mental perturbation, pacing up and down the room, and shouting terrifying orders to "cub" reporters, who always arrived at least a quarter-hour before their time. Canby was the first dependable member of the staff to appear and the city editor might have fallen on his neck for sheer joy, had he been a Gaul or lived in another age. As it was, he only sneered furiously:

"You're actually here at last, are you? Oh, this is a great staff I've got but not for newspaper work. Journalists, ain't you? Or did a magazine accept a story from you? Maybe Frohasco has given you an advance on a play? What?"

Canby, being accustomed to such manifestations of ill-humour whenever any big news features eventuated, merely took out his watch and put the dial under the nose of his superior officer.

"Oh, you're one of those fellows that work by the clock, are you? Wash your hands at quarter to three so you'll be ready to tear out when it strikes; you ——"

"Oh, pish-tush, Bates!" returned Canby good-naturedly. "What's the row?"

"Row — row? Hell's broke loose, no less. The mayor has sent out word he won't sign the franchise — that's good for a three-column head on the front page ——"

"Good for a full-page spread, you mean," returned Canby, jubilantly. "War type, too. Didn't we do it all ourselves? Isn't it our work? Three-column head be teetotally damned! Six column *spread* is what *you* mean?"

"Oh, do I? Do I? Then what I am going to do with the story of Stephen Janissary's suicide? Since you're so wise, maybe you'll tell me that?"

"Whose — suicide?"

The reporter dropped both the cigarette and lighted match he had been holding.

"Here, stamp out that flame before it sets fire to that copy paper. Got anything against this sheet? Stephen

Janissary's suicide, I said, 'Big Steve' Janissary's; that's whose, and —— ”

“Are you sure it was suicide?”

“No; I'm not sure I'm living! But he did it with his own revolver, in his own room, with his door locked from the inside, and he had the gun clutched in his hand when they found him.”

“Who reported it?”

“City News! So I'll have to put Douglas Thomas on the franchise case and send you up to Janissary's ——”

“But the franchise case is mine,” complained Canby.

“Oh, fat-head! Don't you see I'm giving you the star assignment? The franchise story is all right, but this death of Janissary's — and suicide at that — is worth two or three pages to the paper. Here, Young!”

He hailed another member of the staff who had just entered, and who, conscious that he should have been there a few moments before to be strictly impeccable, came forward on the run.

“Go with Kernahan, Young. And you'll want a couple of cubs, too, to run errands, I guess. Hey, you kids over there! — Demarest, Huntley — the others of you sit still — come here! Go with Mr. Kernahan! Now get out, Canby! Here's the 'flimsy' from the City News. Take a taxicab; take a couple of taxicabs; only get there in time to give us a page, at least, for our second edition; we'll fill the first up with rewrites from the 'morgue.' Go on the lamm, boys!”

The taxicab requisitioned just off Park Row, it was only a matter of moments before they passed through the snow-

wreathed arch that is the gateway to Washington Square, and, a block from the Janissary house, found further progress impeded by a mounted policeman, who raised a white-gloved hand.

"Go 'round to Sixth Av'noo and come back," he directed. "Yuh can't come this way."

Canby craned his neck from the window and noted that Fifth Avenue for two blocks seemed more like Brooklyn Bridge terminal after the close of business. Even the mounted policemen — of whom there were many — seemed to find some difficulty in forcing their horses through the press. On the nearest side street motor vehicles, broughams, and landaus were parked on both sides as if for a racing meet or a Vanderbilt Cup race.

"Here, chauffeur," Canby directed, "we'll drop you here. Take your fare. Come along, boys."

They left the machine and began their efforts to reach the Janissary house. Another policeman, this one on foot and wielding his night stick with fine carelessness for the heads of the crowd, attempted to push them back; but Canby showed his police card, and, to avoid any more attempted detainments of the sort, placed that useful bit of blue and orange printing in the band of his derby hat. Half of those through whom he fought his way were ignorant of the cause that had brought so many people together, and eagerly inquired of Canby, or any others who seemed to be steering a definite course, what was the occasion. Was the President in town? Was it a holiday they had overlooked and might they expect a parade? The other half knew of Janissary's death by his own hand and they were split into

rival factions, three quarters of them expressing the conventional sorrow that comes so cheaply and readily to commonplace people when the demise of any one is announced; the other quarter seemingly of the opinion that the suicide story was a myth and that some one had killed the master of Amalgamated.

"Hope they don't catch him!"

"The cops have got 'im now — in that there house. They're a-waitin' till we go away so's they kin take 'im to th' Tombs!"

"Let's rescue 'im then, shall we?"

"Sure; let's get nearer — come on!"

Canby lost his hat before he was half-way to the house, nor did he try to retrieve anything but the police card; for the hat was trampled hopelessly out of shape the moment it struck the ground, and his fingers came near sharing its fate when he reached for the bit of pasteboard. The mad mob spirit now took upon his gentle soul, and he pushed, kicked, nudged, elbowed, struck, and otherwise disgracefully comported himself in his efforts to attain his goal, which he did finally at the expense of his feet, which were cruelly trodden upon, and his neck-tie, which he lost utterly. He was therefore in no mood to receive graciously the announcement of one of the many policemen who kept the crowds back from the gate to Janissary's garden that he could not enter, but, showing his police card with one hand, and tearing back coat, vest, and overcoat with the other, he disclosed his fire badge fastened to his braces; and, then, without further ado, entered the garden alone, for his followers had evidently not shared his luck.

The coroner had been and gone, a lieutenant of police inside assured him; no, there wasn't any doubt about the suicide; Mr. Janissary had killed himself, but why no one could say. The embalmers had taken charge of the body — or it was to be cremated, he believed (wasn't sure) — and nobody could see it. No good to see it, anyhow, after the coroner's verdict had been passed, was there? Had had a party the night before and had killed himself after all the guests were gone. About three o'clock, Mr. Eli-son — or some such person — Mr. Janissary's secretary he was, had heard a shot and tried to get into the room. It was locked, so, being an old man, he had to get the butler and the other servants out of bed and after all of them had yelled for Mr. Janissary at the top of their lungs and hadn't got any answer, they had broken down the door, and found their master lying with his feet toward the door and his head on the hearth. Had his own revolver in his hand; one of those long, nickelled barrelled Jiver-Olson's .38 with a mother-of-pearl inlaid handle; yes, he (the lieutenant) had seen it, and it had Mr. Janissary's monogram on it; this Mr. Eli-son remembered having bought it at Griffony's several years before. Wasn't any doubt about the suicide, although, to make sure, he and some other central office men had examined the windows and the ground beneath them to see if there were any finger marks or rope marks on the sills or any footprints below — any of which would be very easy to find with so much snow about especially as the weather bureau reports said the snow had stopped falling at two o'clock, so they couldn't be hidden — didn't he see? And that was all he knew about it, and he'd told it so many

times his throat was getting dry, and if he (Canby) or any of the other newspaper boys wanted a drink all they had to do was to come down to the dining-room. . . . This Mr. Eli-son? He couldn't just say, but he thought he was in that room at the head of the stairs.

Canby, exchanging curt greeting with other press men who thronged about the men from the central office jotting down notes on folded copy paper, made his way up the back stairway and, without knocking, opened the door to the library where sat O'Shea, Vaughan, Rollins K. Hilman, Philip Helmet, Arbuthnot, and more of last night's dinner guests, along with others closely associated with the affairs of Amalgamated and the various businesses of which the dead man had been the controlling factor. They did not note Canby's addition to their number, so absorbed were they in some matter which was receiving their closest — if somewhat excited and apprehensive — attention.

“We've *got* to smother it up, I tell you. The market 'ull all go to hell as it is.”

“After what the fellow did last night, what chance will any of us have when he's the head of Amalgamated? As O'Shea says, Eliason, we've got to smother it up. Buy the young man off; tell him he can't prove his claim, and that we'll fight him through the courts every step of the way.”

“You haven't got any proof, anyhow, except the word of a crazy old fool.”

“What's the matter with buying the old fool off?”

Canby sank down into a chair at the back of the room. There were at least twenty men present, sitting and standing,

but their eyes had not wandered his way as yet, so intently were they focussed on Eliason, who, with one hand held, trumpet-fashion to his good ear, listened to the various heated speeches above recorded; and answered with due deliberation.

“It is a thing to ask, gentlemen. Mr. Janissary’s own son! I can’t do it. Besides, this man Van Tromp swears to go to the newspapers with the whole story. He seems to care for the boy, somehow; watched him grow up, you know: hated the father but loved the boy; wants to make reparation. You understand my position, gentlemen!”

“You actually mean, then, that you’re going to send for this son and tell him that everything that was Janissary’s belongs to him?”

Philip Helmet spoke, for the first time in his life, despairingly, one hand held to his aching head. He was a sleek, prosperous gentleman about whom press and public had had considerable to say when soldiers fighting for their country in a distant land had written home concerning foul and diseased meats given them for rations. He had taken that affair lightly but the prospect he now faced gave to his eyes a look as sickly as that of any starving soldier who had opened a can of his meat.

“A little louder, Mr. Helmet; the right side, you know! Thank you! Yes; what else can I do?”

Rollins K. Hilman, a little, hawk-nosed man, the bald spot on his crown giving him the appearance of a renegade monk, broke in fiercely with:

“Do? Do *anything* but hand over a fortune like that to a mad Socialist! Socialist, no! Anarchist, I mean; Socialists

never do anything. This fellow will wreck the Street in two weeks. I won't stand it; I tell you I won't, Eliason!”

“He's right; it won't do!” said Arbuthnot heavily.

“This Van Tromp won't dare confess to kidnapping; why he can get twenty years' imprisonment for that!” said O'Shea, his trained legal mind seizing upon the only possible chance. “And you can tell him from us, Eliason, that we'll see he gets life if he dares tell that story. More; if he goes away and shuts his mouth, we'll give him a cool hundred thousand. Put your damned ear closer, Eliason; did you hear what I said?”

“I heard, Mr. O'Shea, but it's no use. Van Tromp *expects* to go to the penitentiary — rather welcomes it — martyr's crown, so to speak. Gentlemen, there's not a possible chance of averting this thing. We've got a fanatic, and a bold dangerous young man, to fight. The public loves this young Stephen; calls him ‘Stephen the Magnificent.’”

“Spectacular ass,” growled Fillimore, feeling nervously the knot he had carelessly tied in his hurry and wondering if he preserved his usual well-groomed appearance.

“But this Van Tromp can't *prove* his story, I tell you,” almost moaned Helmet, both hands now circling his forehead, for the pain of his headache had become intense.

“The *right* side, Mr. Helmet.”

“Oh, damn your ear, Eliason,” shouted O'Shea. “Helmet says this old daddy longlegs can't *prove* his claim — can't *prove* it! And I think he's *right*.”

“Well, he isn't, sir — if you'll pardon me! First of all, the boy's the living picture of Mr. Janissary; second, this man Van Tromp has got all the baby clothes that the child

wore when it was stolen; and third, he's willing to go to the penitentiary to right the wrong he's done the boy. Now if he tells this story to the newspapers all the happenings of last night will come out; people will learn how this Stephen Adams got the statements that defeated the franchise and they'll help him fight his case until he wins it. It will be a painful family story and a disgraceful business altogether. There may be an investigation ordered by the attorney-general. You've all seen this Stephen Adams! Does he strike you as the sort of man who'll lay down on his claims where the greatest fortune in the world is concerned?"

"Good God! a mad Anarchist with a billion dollars!" groaned Rollins K. Hilman. "We can't *allow* it!"

"The right side, Mr. Hilman ——"

"*Can't allow it,*' he says," stormed O'Shea.

"We *must* allow it. If we fight young Stephen he'll get it all the same, and, after he gets it, he may fight *us!* I've kept this Van Tromp in the house ever since he told that story last night, but now that he knows Mr. Janissary is dead, I can't hold him much longer. He says he'll go straight to the newspapers if Stephen Adams isn't here by eleven o'clock. That's his last word!"

Canby Kernahan, his face flushed, got to his feet excitedly.

"I'll go for Stephen, Mr. Eliason! I'll go for him," he chirped happily.

At the sound of the strange voice, there were no longer any in the room who sat. All advanced a step with clinched hands, staring at the intruder.

"You didn't lock the door, you doddering idiot!"

O'Shea addressed Eliason, who held up a defensive palm.

"The back door is smashed; I couldn't lock it! What do you want in here, Mr. Kernahan?" he asked abjectly, turning to the reporter. "How much have you heard?"

"I've heard enough," said Canby, nodding wisely, "to advise you to send for Stephen Adams immediately; and I'll be the messenger. Oh, I shan't tell him anything; I'll leave that to you, sir. But I'll *be* here to *see* that he's told."

He turned abruptly and left the room.

"A newspaper reporter," explained Eliason. His hand was to his head also, now. "The man who came with John Graham to demand those statements from Mr. Janissary, Wednesday afternoon. Kernahan's his name!"

"Kernahan!" almost screamed O'Shea. "Kernahan? — the man who dug up McKenna?"

Eliason nodded and O'Shea sat down, the spirit utterly gone from him — crushed out by this unexpected climax to rebellious indecision. There was silence for a considerable length of time if that supposedly fast fleeting measurement can be adjusted to the emotions that may rapidly succeed one another in the minds of men who taste for the first time the bitterness of defeat.

"You — traitor," said Fillimore suddenly. "I believe you arranged to have that reporter come in."

"The right side, Mr. Fillimore, if you please."

The Beau Brummell of Amalgamated turned from him with clinched fists, upraised eyes, and a long-drawn breath of murderous impatience. O'Shea got to his feet again and spoke slowly:

"Eliason's right. We'll have to acknowledge the boy and talk some sense into his head. We'll tell the public

that his father has known who he was for some years, but that, by reason of the boy differing in his opinions from him, they could never agree and that it was the sorrow of his father over the boy's attitude in this matter that finally drove him to suicide! We can count on everybody keeping quiet who was here last night. We'll have to give those detectives some more money, and send the servants who heard the rumpus back to England. I think, if we accept this young man without a murmur and try, day by day, to impress him with our principles, that we'll get him to be reasonable and leave the business end of his father's affairs to us."

"Yes; tell him to do anything he wants with the income and the cash money; we won't object to that," cried Helmet eagerly.

"We can show him, too, how much more money we can make for him to spend in charity if he leaves it to us," chimed in Arbuthnot, his face lighting up. "Oh, yes, I think he'll listen to that; don't you, Fillimore?"

"Oh, I'm damned if I know; let me alone," returned the one addressed, rudely. "But, by the way," he added, his expression also becoming more cheerful, "what was the name of that supposed uncle of his that this Van Tromp fellow told you about — the one that took him away from Van Tromp and brought him up when he got too poor? I sort of recognized the name."

He addressed Eliason, taking care to enunciate carefully into his good ear. The secretary consulted the note-book from which he had read the various facts concerning Stephen's abduction and early life when the business associates of Janissary had first assembled in the library, and

which had no errors — only the omission of any mention that the training of young Stephen had been a peculiar one; for Van Tromp, now that his vengeance was satiated, had remembered many kindly actions on the part of George, Morgy, and Hilary, and, because of them, forgave his other enemy, Axtell; so that he had given Eliason to understand that the others in the Chapel Street house had been ignorant of the facts of Stephen's birth and the home of his babyhood.

“Rather peculiar name, Mr. Fillimore; possibly I have it wrong. ‘Hilary Quanbos’ is what I have written here. ‘Quanbos’ — an odd name, isn't it?”

Fillimore was beaming, positively beaming. His tone was actually kindly as he corrected the secretary.

“It's spelt ‘Quackenbos,’ but you've got the pronunciation correctly. He's an Englishman, Helmet,” he said, with a smile, “and as sophisticated a beggar as I ever knew! Belongs to that actors' club up town that I run into occasionally. If he brought up the youngster, he'll have some influence with him, and, believe *me*, I can't see old Quackenbos chucking away any millions because they're what the muck-rakers call tainted. (We took some girls from a show out to supper once, but, never mind that!) I know the fellow and he's as sharp as they make 'em. Always had my doubts of him at cards, by the way, and from what Janissary said about his son on the *Mauradriatic* looks like Quackenbos might have taught the youngster some of his tricks.”

“Why, all this ‘reform’ business of young Stephen's may be only a ‘front’ anyway,” agreed O'Shea, catching some of the other's optimism. “A lot of those fellows only raise a howl and persecute *us* because we don't let *them* on the

inside of the game. Guess we did all our worrying for nothing if this Quackenbos fellow is what you say, Fillimore. Now, before young Stephen comes here, suppose you go around and give this 'uncle' of his a quiet tip. Eh?"

"Looks like good stuff to me," answered the younger man, stroking his short black moustache. "Meanwhile, I'll leave you all to soft-soap the heir. But, by the way, how about that newspaper fellow who just went after him?"

"If he's a friend of the boy he won't talk, will he?" replied O'Shea. "But, anyhow, we'll see that he doesn't. Meanwhile, run along, Fillimore, and attend to your part of the job. I promise you we'll look after ours."

Fillimore caught up his mink-lined coat, his hat, and his stick, and went out by the front way. Eliason rang for the butler, who pushed forward the wheeled cellaret and unlocked its compartments, sending a footman for cracked ice and charged waters. Some of those costly Havanas that Eliason loved, along with the Khedive's own private stock of cigarettes were set alight, and the dove of peace seemed for the moment to have settled over the members of Amalgamated.

II

"TO SET THE PEOPLE FREE"

It had been early morning when Morgenstein came to Chapel Street; he remembered noting how brightly the sun had shone across the snow-covered roofs and chimney pots to where the East River ran, the sailing craft on it like

flowers wreathed about a shining sword when he looked upon it from his window far up near the roof of the thin and lofty hotel that was his home. And seeing the morning sun was an experience unusual for Morgy, who usually quitted his favourite Tenderloin *cabaret* only in time to draw the curtains of his bedroom windows before a red streamer from the east should seek to penetrate his privacy, and who, as every bell boy, chambermaid, telephone girl, and desk-clerk in the place knew, was under no circumstances to be reminded that there were such things as breakfast until more conventional folk had reached black coffee after leisurely disposing of elaborate “course” luncheons. But the particular exception had been made in favour of the insistent person from the “Spring” Exchange, and the lobby loungers had been treated to the unusual sight of the generally clean shaven and scrupulously groomed gentleman in the astrakhan-collared coat hurrying by with a day’s growth of Assyrian beard and wearing his favourite Ascot tie on the lining side.

This had gone unnoticed by the wearer until it grew too dark to figure any longer and he had strolled over to the window, for perhaps the hundredth time, to where Axtell sat, his legs wrapped in a slumber rug, peering anxiously into the ingenious arrangement of mirrors that gave the paralytic sight of all those who traversed both sides of Chapel Street and even occasional glimpses of comet-like elevated trains whisking their green-lighted tails up Sixth Avenue.

“Ain’t he even in sight, yet?” asked the Jew.

Axtell shook his head, and Morgenstein, peering into the glasses, noted his sartorial indiscretion, and recrossed the

room again to the mirror over the mantel, where, holding his gorgeous emerald and diamond pin in his mouth, he carefully folded over the blanket-like neck-tie in the approved form.

At the centre table, Hilary Quackenbos and George le Fay still figured away on pages torn from a copy-book which the servant had purchased down the street a half hour before, the supply of house writing-paper having been exhausted by the computations of the three of them, since Fillimore had left just before noon. At that time, there had been some six sheets of fool's-cap, covered in Morgy's Spenserian hand, with a list of the various interests that made up the Janissary estate, opposite which, in ruled columns, was written the value of said interests, together with the various rates of interests, annual dividends and the like, accruing annually to them. Now the second-floor front seemed too small to contain the amount of sheets that were variously disposed about it. There were sheets of paper, half stacked like cards, on every table and chair; the floor was as completely covered with them as was the studio roof opposite with snow; they leaned against the Carrara marbles and the ormolu clock on the mantel; Axtell had a bundle of them in his lap; and the gray film that covered the burning sea coal in the grate testified to the fact that numbers of them had been tossed upon the flames.

And still Hilary and George continued to contribute to this plethora!

Morgenstein lighted a cigarette. In the little flicker of extra light, it seemed that the two compilers of statistics took an extra spurt forward before it should expire.

Morgenstein, smiling indulgently, snapped on the current into the red-shaded electric lamp. The decided change in conditions caused the two to pause and look up.

“Confound you, old chap,” said Hilary irritably, “you’ve spoiled a jolly good bit of compound interest I was doing on K., J., & W. Preferred. Why can’t you leave a fellow in peace?”

“The ‘Oiltown City Securities’ ’ull bring us jest \$170,000 a year by themselves,” stated George with great satisfaction, wetting the point of his pencil to make a bit of fancy scroll work under his latest subtrahend. “Guess that’s going some for one little block of stock? Guess it’s bad?”

“That’s nothing to ‘Petersfield Oil,’” returned Morgenstein with the superiority of one who has not wasted his talents for mathematics on a bagatelle; “*it’s* good for jest three times that — a million a year from one piece of property. Boys, I tell you, I can’t git it through my nut! It all sounds like th’ bunk to me! I can’t believe there’s that much money in the world — a million a year jest out of Petersfield! When we come to add up th’ total of these here incomes, we’ll all about drop dead. Can’t seem possible that one man’s goin’ to have so much money — *one man!*”

“One man’s *not* to have it,” called out Axtell peremptorily from the window. “Don’t start that sort of talk, Morgy, or you’ll be using it when the boy comes in. It’s no more *his* than it’s *ours!* Isn’t this a *company?* Don’t we share and share *alike?* Don’t let me hear you talking like that again, you black-muzzled, cliff-dwelling kike! And don’t be acting as if you weren’t used to big money, or else the

boy will put it all over you. We've got enough of persuading to do as it is."

"Oh, 'can' all that, Axtell," broke in Le Fay. "Steve's not goin' to try to git away from the regular agreement between th' gang. He knows we'll all share on this jest as we shared on everything else! I'd like to see him try to pull any stuff about it bein' all his. I'd ——"

"You'd what?" invited Morgenstein. "I suppose you'd tear right up to him and hang one *on* him, hey? Yes, you *would!* In a pig's *eye!* Nobody ain't fergot the rat way you acted last night, George. But when it comes to talkin', anybuddy 'ud think Jeffries was still a 'comer'! But, say! Ain't it great? Ain't it wonderful? I can't git over it! Why, say, with our brains and all that money, we'll about rule the earth. Think of me with a police record as long as a Missouri search warrant bossin' that Wall Street gang, lendin' money to th' United States treasury when it's broke, and givin' kings and emperors the haughty eye when they want to make a touch. I guess since th' beginnin' of time there never was such a deep heel as this one, boys!"

Hilary, whose contemplation of his own reward of virtue had been so pleasing that he sat smiling silently, now looked up reprovingly.

"Incidentally, I should suggest, dear old chap, that, since your social position is going to undergo such a radical change, you endeavour to cure yourself of some of your eccentric forms of speech. 'Deep heel,' indeed! You positively embarrassed me while Mr. Fillimore was here! If you don't watch out, they're liable to suspect that Janissary's was no chance robbery."

"Very square of old Trompey not to pull anything about us, wasn't it? Oh, all right, Hil; I'll watch out for the 'wise-cracking' stuff. I don't pull much of it anyhow except when I'm excited. But, say; the first thing we'll have to do — all of us — is to call a board meeting of Amalgamated and all the other things we're *interested* in, and *elect* ourselves into the principal offices, 'cause if we're going to 'slough' our 'make,' we've gotta keep our eyes open for them guys; they're the wise little poodles when it comes to their own game and we're going to be typical suckers at it when we start in, and, if we don't look out, they'll trim us for the bank roll, hey?"

George le Fay looked up from his scroll work with a glance of infinite cunning.

"That's th' first wise crack I've heard out of you in years, Morgy! You bet they'll trim us, and I, for one, ain't goin' to give them a chance. I'm goin' to sell out, I am. No playin' any new game for me. I've got a wife and kids to consider and I'm takin' no chances with *my* money!"

Axtell, who had been remarkably tractable during the entire day, for even he had been stunned into good nature by the thought of having a share in so vast a fortune, interrupted with one of his old familiar roars.

"*Your* money, you petty-larceny, cross-town 'gun,'" he bellowed in fierce contempt. "*Your* money! Don't get so free with *your* money until you get it. And, before you get it, you'll sign the papers to stick to us or Stephen will hear how you acted last night and then what you'll get won't make a polo cap for a humming-bird; understand?"

“How you ever got *in* with a ‘gun-mob’ gets me, George,” augmented Morgenstein, echoing their leader’s scorn.

“Selling socks over a counter would be hazardous to a man of your disposition, Le Fay,” sneered Hilary. “Here, when we have the chance to rank with the rulers of the earth, you talk about your blessed brats and ‘missus’! Haven’t you any pride, dear old chap? any ambition? Doesn’t your blood tingle even the slightest bit when you stop to think that we four men who have been spending our lives in eternal fear of the law now are raised absolutely above that law! Why we can do anything! We’re more powerful than the Senate and the President put together! Think of what Stephen Janissary was, and then think of what we’ll be! Everything that he was and all that we can do ourselves added to that! Why it’s stupendous, colossal! Never in the history of the world did a thing like this happen before. And *you* talk about your wife and your brats! Why we should be able to rule this whole blooming country if we go about it rightly, and I don’t mind telling you that I shall have a shot at it! And I shan’t let you interfere, my lad. Mark that!”

What reply Le Fay might have made — and which really would not have mattered anyway — they were never given an opportunity of learning; for, afterward, it was unnecessary, and, at the time, it was prevented by the entrance of Decima Duress — a different Decima this from the girl Stephen had first seen on the *Mauradriatic*, for about her there seemed to have lingered no trace of the child-woman. Not knowing, one might have guessed her age far beyond the years that were hers, for her eyes shone with

a light that reflected a soul at peace with all the world; the happiness of wisdom, not the sudden enthusiastic joy of the very young.

Hilary remembered that he had thought of her as “little.” Now she gave no such impression. The attitude of “protection” that men like to assume toward women was not one to indulge in now. Rather, one would have turned to her for protection.

“Stephen is paying the cabman,” she said, including all of them in her bow and grave smile, and then added, directing her words to Hilary, “We are married. I came ahead to thank you, Mr. Quackenbos, and you, too, Mr. Axtell, for all that you have taught Stephen. The method may have been unusual but the result is wonderful. I only hope I am worthy to be Stephen’s helpmate in the great work that has been given us to do.”

The Englishman and the paralytic exchanged uneasy glances at her words, presaging as they did additional difficulties in the task of persuading Stephen to the view points of Mr. Fillimore and his associates. Quackenbos arose and would have assisted her in the removal of her coat but she shook her head.

“No, we only came to tell you of our marriage. There is too much work for us to do, and besides we must leave the city in less than an hour — get away from people and things until the funeral; it’s in three days and, of course, we must be there. In those three days, we’ll try to plan out the details of what we are going to do so that we can tell the public; so we’re going to a little shooting *chalet* I own, away from everybody. Here’s Stephen now!”

The chaffing greetings to which it had been the intention of those present to add humorous congratulations, were born in thoughts but not in words. Three of the four men sat silent regarding this stranger, who, with mild but earnest eyes, stood regarding them, smiling affectionately. His presence seemed to dwarf them into men of mean stature, into regarding themselves mentally as creatures of another, and very limited, sphere from the one in which he moved. Always huge of frame, he now seemed gigantic.

Only Axtell, who, if men may lack souls, was soulless, spoke:

“Lucky boy, Stephen! You’ve got the wife you wanted, and the money you need to carry on your work. Double congratulations. If any man deserved luck, you did!”

Stephen shook his head, his gesture humble.

“No, no, Mr. Axtell, I’m afraid you are all prejudiced in my favour. Decima’s done her best to convince me, aided by Rag, that I am something above the common run of men, too. But I’m afraid not. To-day has sobered me; made me realize my unworthiness. From now on, I must try, night and day, to remember that I have been given what only a few other men on earth have—the absolute control of many millions of men and women. If they starve, bodily or mentally, I am to blame. In one breath I must thank some Higher Power for a wonderful chance and pray to Him for help and guidance, for alone I am not equal to it, and my enthusiasms may bring harm instead of good.”

“It will be sure enough good, have no fear!” cried a gleeful voice from the door that the company knew for Rag O’Brien’s before they looked up to see.

“No, Rag,” Stephen corrected him gently. “Only good as I see it. Don’t try to exalt me, keep me humble; tell me of my deficiencies and my lack of knowledge; correct me when I go wrong, which will be many times. Remember that Stephen, your companion, may be good of heart but very deficient in wisdom. I need counsel, not praise.”

“Exactly, my boy,” broke in Axtell, to whom no subconscious revelation had come as to the others. His influence was so strong upon George le Fay that cupidity overbalanced that gentleman’s wiser self and he echoed acquiescence. Stephen turned inquiring glances upon them both, but Le Fay’s eyes refused to meet his.

“Wheel me to the fire,” Axtell added, and Stephen was before the others to do him the service. “Now, listen, Stephen; I’m glad to see your head isn’t turned by getting all this money. It’s a great compliment to your own nature, and the way we brought you up. You’re a bright man, of course, and a brave one; but to manage an estate like Stephen Janissary’s requires years of business training. So Hilary has drawn up some papers which we’ll all sign before you go away on that trip of yours. These papers turn the Janissary estate into a sort of joint-stock company. You’re the president, of course. I’m vice-president and treasurer, Hilary is the secretary, and Morgy and George are on the board of directors with us. We’ve decided — and I’m glad to see you show signs of agreeing with us — that, for the present, it’s best to leave your father’s affairs just exactly as they are, except that, of course, you’ll have to call a meeting of Amalgamated and the other affairs you’re interested in, and elect yourself, by virtue of the stock you

hold, to your father's various offices. Then, after that — of course *I* won't be able to take any active share — you can appoint Hilary, George, and Morgy to such positions as will guard our interests. But, as far as the investments are concerned, you could hardly hope to place your money to better advantage; of course you agree to that?"

Stephen had been regarding him with wonderment that grew, as Axtell's speech continued, to inexpressible amazement. Had the paralytic been less engrossed with the web of his own weaving, he would have spared himself the trouble of continuing:

"Of course, the income, which will be equally divided into five parts — as usual in the company's affairs — will be devoted to our living expenses, and, after that, to the charities each one of us fancies the most. We shall be really able to do some good now, Stephen," he added, pandering to the trait in the young man's nature that had always brought great results before. "It will be a great happiness to us all to know that we can."

Rag laughed outright; nor was it a merely casual laugh, but one that began with a roar and seemed to grow into a gale. Decima's grave smile deepened. Hilary, possessed of no risibilities worth chronicling, stared; but Morgenstein shook his head and chuckled, albeit rather grimly. Axtell's anger found companionship only in Le Fay's.

"You —" he began, but what anathemas he would have coupled with O'Brien's name were still-born on his lips when he encountered Stephen's gaze in which sorrow and astoundment were equally present. He paused, as might

a man in an armoury with an eccentric enemy beating on the door outside, to select a suitable weapon.

“You’re joking, aren’t you, Mr. Axtell?” asked Stephen quietly.

“Joking? Joking about what?” demanded the paralytic, endeavouring to make up in fury for what he lacked in force.

“Why, about everything! Aren’t you?”

“For instance; what? Explain!”

“Why, I won’t explain, because I don’t believe you are in earnest, Mr. Axtell! About the investments, for instance; as if, for a single instant, you, or any of us, would allow Amalgamated to exist a moment after you took control. As if you wouldn’t break it up into all the little companies of which it was originally composed — after the way all of us have railed at the trusts and, particularly, *that* trust. The moment I take control, I’ll dispose of Amalgamated right enough! This time next week, there won’t *be* any such thing!”

“Break up Amalgamated?” echoed Axtell in a white heat of strenuously polite scorn. “Ha! Very good that! Pray go on! And, why, pray?”

“Because, to begin with, it’s against the law for such a monstrosity to exist, as you and every one else here has told me innumerable times! If I have the power to break it up, and I permit it to go on existing, I simply encourage other men to form more trusts. Besides, as it stands to-day, I would be unable to administer its affairs legally and justly. I must resolve it into its hundred corporations. At the head of each of those corporations,” he went on eagerly, his eyes taking on the flame of one who is inspired, “I shall place a man who has proven his administrative ability and his

honest unselfishness even if I have to send to England and import the entire Fabian Society. My stock will then be divided among the workers in my fields and factories in proportion to the value of the work that they do, so that each man will be a stockholder, earning in proportion to the gains of the corporation itself — although I shall retain all the voting privileges that go with that stock myself, because, you see,” he explained in extenuation of what he feared might appear somewhat autocratic, “I have no confidence in their ability to select the right men to administer their affairs, and I am taking no chances of my excellent system falling to pieces through the stupidity of those it is intended to benefit. And, if I gave them the voting privileges, they would undoubtedly elect to office those who would flatter them most — and such men are never honest!”

“But you aren’t going to let the stupid ones handle all their own money, Stephen, you know,” Decima put in anxiously, misinterpreting the hostile attitude of Axtell. Stephen smiled, thanking her with his eyes.

“No, naturally not, dearest. I’m glad you reminded me. You see, Axtell, in a coöperative scheme such as I plan for my workmen and associates, everybody will have to do their share. Of course, I realize the danger in building up a benevolent autocracy. I understand we must take the chance of the next generation of rulers *not* being benevolent; but I can only act according to my lights. First of all, everybody who works for me must be properly housed, fed, and have suitable educational privileges for themselves and their children. For that reason, I shall have to realize on some of my properties and get a vast amount in ready cash in

order to start operations; so I shall sell all my railroad holdings. I select those to sell because I could never be supreme in railroads, anyhow, and, moreover, that is more government business than mine. With the money I realize, I shall build block after block of model tenements (flats in every sense of the word, of course), cottages in the industrial small towns, corporation hospitals, and corporation churches — and in the latter I'll have really religious men. The workmen in my employ must live in these model tenements or model cottages, and help support the corporation hospitals, churches, and schools. I'll have schools for both grown-up folks and children where *truth* will be taught — absolute truth, the truth as you, my friends, all of you, have taught it to me; so that when I and my generation of assistants and associates die, the people I have trained will be too sophisticated to listen to their flatterers. Religion and education will be used to help and enlighten, not to retard and deceive. And the central point of my educative system will be a great college to which those children who show marked signs of intelligence will be sent and educated in return for service rendered while there; for out of these we will have to choose our future executives. There will be no poverty among those who work for me, for no one who is willing to work eight hours a day will be paid less than will enable him to have what he actually needs to be clean, warm, well fed, and intelligently instructed. My whole system is founded on coöperation and the minimum wage. You remember how we talked about that when I was a little boy, Rag? I wrote it down in a diary once! It's never gone out of my head, that minimum wage thing!

Just *what* the minimum wage shall be will depend on locality, conditions, and so forth; it is one of the many matters that will take a lot of study, adjustment, and readjustment. As we build up our system, the question of intelligent amusements — theatres, concerts, and the like — will also shape itself into endowments. But, first of all, we must consider the home and the schools. To me, as head of the system will naturally accrue enormous revenues. I will endeavour to use these to perfect the system. Oh, I know," he said with a deprecating smile, "the work before me is gigantic, enormous, unending; but it is beautiful work and the years will pass very swiftly. I will make mistakes, and regret them bitterly, but no one will be able to say I have not done my best. And that's all a man can do, isn't it?"

In the excess of his fury, as he tried to wrench from himself words that his evil anger choked in his gullet, Axtell actually lifted himself bodily in his chair, and, had Stephen not been close at hand to catch him, must have fallen forward into the fire. This fate averted, he lay back in his chair gasping still for breath that would enable him to excoriate his pupil of his beliefs, yet finding, in his mind, only expressions of horrible hatred for one whom he saw now as the exemplar of all that he most despised.

"The people," he breathed finally; "the people! Oh, my good God! how they'll strip you of every cent, you fool, you prince of fools. The people! The people! Oh, give me some water or I'll choke!"

"Mr. Axtell," said Stephen gently, "you know that you don't mean what you say. Why everything I am, you have made me. All the good that is in me is yours. If I had

grown up as my father's son, I might have been like him — thinking only of himself, careless, scornful, of the people. But now I'm fit to serve them.”

“You're mad; insane. I'll have you put in Matteawan. Any committee of medical men would send you there if you gave them any such scheme to consider seriously. I tell you you're crazy, Stephen. This fortune has unsettled your brain. Go away and stay away until you forget these mad Socialistic ideas ——”

“Mad Socialistic ideas; oh, no, Mr. Axtell! You can't say that! Why from the time I was old enough to think, you've drilled these 'mad Socialistic' ideas into my head. When I was a youngster, I used to go to sleep listening to you talk about the inhumanity of man to man; you kept me awake, night after night, to tell me about them. The fortune has unsettled *your* brain, not *mine*. You are the one to go away to the mountains and stay there, and forget all these mad *capitalistic* ideas!”

In the glance that passed between Axtell and Hilary Quackenbos, it was plain that the older man looked upon Hilary as one who had his duty yet to do. The Englishman, therefore, cleared his throat.

“You see, dear old chap,” he tried to explain, endeavouring to give an air of easy reasonableness to what he was saying, “like you, when both Axtell and I were younger, we believed ourselves qualified to instruct kings and parliaments, presidents and congresses, about government. Since then we've grown wiser; we've realized that things have always gone on this way; that it is useless to try to change them. What the world is, the people in it make it. We

can't change the people; therefore, we can't change the world."

"Oh, but you *can* change the people," demurred Stephen immediately. "Look how you changed me! Think of what I would have been without your instruction; and then think what a *million children* will be when they are instructed as I was. No, no, Hilary! You began as a brave man; you don't want to end as a coward! Don't give up the fight! Stick to me. What we've got to teach the people is that the only true happiness comes from making others happy: that those who live for themselves are like the dumb beasts who know only comfort — not happiness. The world is made by those in it, you say. Quite right! I'm in it and I've got a chance to make it different! And I shall! And so this argument ends — right here! The Janissary estate is mine — positively mine! I shall administer it for the people — to whom it rightfully belongs. Are you with me or against me? That's all I came here to know!"

Morgenstein crossed the room and held out his hand.

"Duke me, Steve!" he said huskily. "You're a regular fella! If a young Jewish boy's appearance ain't against him in this here Christian movement, I beg leave to git on the band wagon. I told you fellas," he added, turning with a smile to the scowling three, "I told you before about that there guy that made another guy — Finkelstein was it? — who afterward got too big for him to handle and he was afraid all the time he'd croak him! Well, I ain't takin' no chances with this here Finkelstein of ours. I'm fur him very strong while I've got th' chance tuh be. Better come in, boys, th' water's fine — at present!"

"Of course you know where I stand," remarked Rag, taking Stephen's other hand. "And right here is where I beg leave to remark that all you guys oughta be blamed glad that instid of makin' a crook out of Steve, you've made th' grandest little fella on earth. Now, come on, be sports! He's only followin' your dope, you know!"

"What I wanta know," said George le Fay, after a long interval of silence, "is where I git off?"

"Why, that's very simple, George," returned Stephen, with a laugh. "You'd be chief inspector of the factories, There isn't a cheating dodge that you don't know, and if somebody invented one you'd be the first to find it out. Your job would be to see that nobody tried to get more than what was really coming to him and your salary would be a hanged sight more than you ever earned. Are you on?"

"Well," returned George, after some study of the matter, "I guess anyway I'd'a' balled up my affairs if I had got that chunk of dough I was expectin'. Somebody 'ud about sold me the Flatiron Buildin' or a rubber plantation in Honduras, I guess. Why," he exclaimed with sudden enthusiasm, "I'd like to see one of those ginks get my goat with any 'phony work in them factories!"

He, too, extended the palm of comradeship. One might have found in the production of Stephen's cigarette case, the modernized offering of the pipe of peace, for even George, who detested the paper tubes from inherited middle-class prejudices, accepted one.

Axtell found that the renegades were eying him rather curiously, for they knew that, as he went, so did Hilary, a curious attachment — which was not friendship but

custom — existing between these two, the original members of the gang. Rapidly, and with the bitterness of one who has planned too well and found his own weapons used against him, Axtell ran over the history of the assembled company from its inception to this, the end! Where was the great revenge that he was to have wreaked upon all human nature? As Stephen Janissary had failed through his lack of love for his fellow men, so, almost as disastrously, had Axtell. As the lily springs from the green slime of the cesspool, as the rose creeps forth from the dung heap, striving to make up for their surroundings with their super-sweetness, so had the foul garden of his hatred nourished a plant that had blossomed into flowers that would heal the hurts of the world.

The fortune was Stephen's; he was The Law. There was no appeal. But one last bit of venom was in his throat and he spat it forth.

"My lord," he said, bringing down his head in a mock obeisance; "perhaps you will be so good as to tell Hilary and me what you will allow us to be?"

Hilary nodded and spoke seriously:

"Yes, dear old chap; don't forget that! Something must become of us, you know! What?"

Stephen tossed away his cigarette and held out both his hands to Decima. For the moment both lost their gravity; their smiles were gay.

"Sweetheart, will you tell them what we were thinking of doing with them?"

Decima nestled into his arms and looked at Axtell and Hilary over her shoulder.

"Well," she said, her eyes whimsical, "you remember that college, Mr. Quackenbos — and you, Mr. Axtell — that college where the children are going to be sent for their higher education? Do you? Well, Stephen thought — and I did too — that ——"

The joke was too tremendous for her to carry; but there was bitterness in Stephen, bitterness recalled by Axtell's attempt of the night before to force him to continue a thief for no reason save the financial betterment of himself and his friends. It was the last savage thwack of the boomerang, for Stephen knew it would show Axtell that, at last, he understood just how complete was his defeat, and how completely he had brought it upon himself; the sort of acid humour that would burn in his memory.

"Well, it's like this," he said quietly, staring at Axtell directly. "As this college is founded to teach your own principles — the ones you taught me — I really can't see how I can do better than make you two its professors of political economy!"

CHAPTER XII

AT THE HUNTING CHALET

STEPHEN pushed away his plate, smiling at the flushed girl in the gingham apron, whose eyes were anxious. "You haven't finished yet; oh, you mustn't have," she pleaded. "I have some of the loveliest dessert!"

"We'll eat it later, dear, for supper. You haven't any right to be so good a housewife, Dessie——"

"You promised, when we first met, that you'd never call me that," she said reproachfully. "When Decima is *such* a pretty name! And so unusual! But you can't tell the difference between 'Dessie' and 'Bessie'— and that's a theatrical sort of name, I think — Bessie. Not a bit proper for the wife of the great philanthropist, Mr. Stephen Janissary——"

She paused, looking at him alarmed.

"Why, what's the matter, Stephen?"

"The name," he returned with a twisted smile. "It's the bitter part of the inheritance. Decima, dear, it's really awfully hard to realize that a man named 'Janissary' may be good. Sometimes, I'm afraid the name will change me."

She came over and stood behind him, lightly kissing the top of his head.

"Silly boy! Superstitious! Better have some dessert!"

He turned, regarding her with whimsical tenderness.

“What a curious idea — sending all the servants away from the place! You’re quite a wonderful person; I don’t think I’ve any right to nickname you.”

She became suddenly serious.

“It was to be with you; to have you entirely to myself — to do everything *for* you; to be everything *to* you — even if it was only for a few days; to think we started that way! When we’re in the city, I feel as though you were far away from me all the time! Oh, yes, I know — the good of the people! But I’m your wife, Stephen, and I’ve one favour to ask. And you must say yes. We’ll come away like this every month for two or three days; just like we are now! Forget everybody and everything and be all in all to one another — just sweethearts! I promise you I’ll be very serious in the city and never complain when you can’t notice me. That’s it,” she added triumphantly, “I’ll be ‘Decima’ — Mrs. Stephen Janissary — but down here I won’t have any dignity: I won’t even be a ‘Mrs.’— I’ll let you call me ‘Dessie’ and say foolish things and — Stephen! aren’t you perfectly happy just to be with me?”

“I think I’d be happy anywhere with so accomplished a cook,” he smiled back.

“Oh, Stephen, please don’t be so unromantic. Just think of you and me absolutely alone, fourteen miles from everybody on one side, and the ocean on the other — nothing nearer than France and Spain — with the wild birds nesting in our eaves, and the sea’s roar, and a long stretch of white beach, and pines — oh, I wish we could just stay here all the rest of our lives!”

She pulled down the green-shaded lamp by its arrangement of chains, turned the wick low, and blew out the light; then she drew him to a window seat that was enclosed on three sides by latticed panes.

It was snowing. They could see the drifting flakes like fantastic elfs at play, whirling each after the other in mad merriment, and scampering gaily out to sea to join their cousins of the spume and the spindrift, occasionally, when the wind took hold of them, shooting straight off, high over the crested waves, like strings of white hornets.

"You see pictures in the fire," she murmured, "I see them in the snow — Santa Clauses and Snow Queens."

"Look at the fire behind us," he murmured back. "Somehow there's no life for me without that fire. Look at it now ——"

It was rampant as though a great, unruly horse, imprisoned beneath, was tossing a wild red mane.

"The gleam of that behind our shutters is like a hundred rubies. And the smoke is pouring out of our chimney like a stringy ghost, sweeping up to the skies on a broomstick! Do you know," he said suddenly, "I believe it is because you and I are real poets, Decima, that we can find the beauty of things as they are — that we are not evil. Perhaps evil people are only blind — groping in their poor, mole-like way for pleasure, when pleasure stands at their very door and they do not know enough to let it in. What greater happiness could any one find than this. Two lovers — a snowy night outside — a great, warm fire within!"

She rested in his arms as lightly as any snow-flake might find a resting place.

"We must teach them, that, Stephen — how to find beauty. No worshipper of beauty can ever be evil; not the beauty that distorted minds see; there can be no beauty in vice, for vice is unnatural; but the beauty of the great real things! One must love *them before* one can understand love. Love is only the greatest appreciation of beauty, isn't it, dear?"

"You mean that one must have seen all the beauty and understood it before one knows there is such a thing as a soul to love? As we love, Decima! I couldn't have dragged you down, dear. I could not have tarnished you. I have seen too much of tarnished things. You women!" He looked down at her, lovingly yet sadly.

"If they were like you; if they inspired us to the things that are real! There are not many like you, dear; worse luck! I'm lucky. Lord, how lucky."

The shrilling note of the wind and the tearing crackle of the fire seemed to take on revolutionary sounds in the silence. The two were beyond words. Words do not apply to the perfect love; can never catch the subtlety of it, for, after all, words are material things and, in the love that brings real happiness, there is nothing that is material.

Presently he aroused himself sufficiently to tell her that a storm had begun, but for no reason than that he must speak of something. She nodded and sank back into his arms like a sleepy child; indeed was soon asleep. He held her ever so lightly, afraid that even a twitch of his muscles might disturb her.

Outside the wind had begun to howl. The breakers

pounded the beach, roaring with rage because they could go no farther but must slip back to gain extra force. The sea birds shrieked as they flew high over the little red and black hunting *chalet*; the cedars and pines bent and bowed like haughty ladies with high-piled coiffures at some stately dance. Out at sea, skippers blinked ominously at barometers.

And Stephen, looking into the fire, found a queer analogy in the storm. That was life without — turbulent life into which he must go heavily armoured in faith, enough for both himself and for the fragile girl who had given herself to him; life that he must conquer. But, as they now rested secure within the little *chalet*, with no necessity for battle, so should he find respite often; for here, with his debts to the world paid, was the perfect happiness.

It was neither the beginning nor the ending of things, this love of theirs — only protection against all the ugliness of the world — the masterpiece of the Great Painter upon whose palette there had been but one colour — the colour of the rose.

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