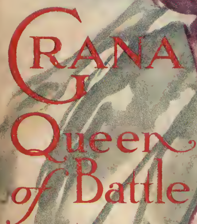
SATURDAY THE OCTOBER 11

# CAVALIER

ISSUED WEEKLY




COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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# THE CAVALIER

OCTOBER 11, 1913

Vol. XXXIV No. 1


# GRANA, QUEEN OF BATTLE

A NOVELETTE

BY JOHN BARNETT

## CHAPTER I.

### How She Schooled Traitors.

THE sun was setting. Its red light gleamed across the gray waves and wrapped in ruddy flame the gray castle that stood upon their verge. It streamed through a narrow window into a lofty chamber, and lit up the bold, harsh face of the man who lay there dying.

That man was Dubhdara, chief of the O'Malleys. He was little more than forty years of age; but he was dying, none the less. Life was cheap throughout the world in the days when Elizabeth's jeweled, masterful fingers gripped the scepter of England, and cheapest of all, perhaps, in stormy Ireland.

And the trade that Dubhdara had practised has never been conducive to long years. Sea-pirate and land-raider, rebel and outlaw from his boyhood, he had met his death-wound at last in a wild foray, and had been carried home to die in his castle of Kildownet upon Achill Sound. He had no son, and he must leave his only daughter to stand or fall alone.

Two people — a man and a young woman—watched beside his bed. The man's dress of rudest motley proclaimed his calling.

In those days the court of every petty Irish chieftain boasted its fool. But this man was something else besides a half-crazy humorist. His long, lean face could be absurd enough beneath the belled cap; but there was vast strength in his gaunt, lengthy frame, and in the long arms whose hands reached almost to his knees.

When the yelling boarders rose above the bulwarks as the ships locked close together, hurling the spray between their grinding quarters, then a hot fighting devil drove out the folly from the heart of Bryan Teige.

His long arms and sword were swift and deadly as the forked flicker of the lightning, and it was he who had cleared a ring about Dubhdara and brought him still living from his

last great fight. His lean, craggy face was grave and haggard now, and his eyes rarely wandered from his master's face.

Dubhdara roused himself as from stupor and stretched out his hand to Bryan Teige. The fool dropped upon his knees and carried it to his lips with wet eyes. Then his master motioned that he should leave the chamber, and when alone father and daughter looked each other in the eyes.

"For me it ends in a little while, Grana," Dubhdara said feebly. "But what of you?"

"I shall do well, father," Grana answered. "Your people love me."

"They are a restive team," Dubhdara muttered. "And Red Donell may clutch at the reins—now!"

Grana's lips tightened and there came a curious light into her eyes.

"It may be that I shall master him," she said.

"I would that you were wed, daughter of mine," Dubhdara murmured. "But remember always, if your strait is sore, aid may be bought from Murrough of the Axes with yon necklace."

And he motioned feebly with his hand toward an oaken chest in a corner of the room.

"I will remember, father," Grana answered, and a chill came to her heart as she marked the change in her father's face.

And then in a little while Dubhdara ceased to know her, and muttered wildly of sword work and the reeling, slippery decks.

"Bryan — brave lad!" he whispered. "But you come too late—too late!" Then for a space he lay silent until he passed into the great silence.

I would have you look closely at the girl of twenty who kneels beside the bed, into whose hands have passed a doubtful and stormy heritage of power. She is worth your notice. She is forgotten to-day except in peasant hearts, but here, perhaps, is one of the extraordinary women of the world.

A woman whom Fate restricted to a petty stage, but who might have ruled a kingdom. A woman who mastered men, whom men followed because she was stronger, bolder, and more daring than themselves.

A woman, as I fancy, of wit and charm, who bound men to her as no man could ever do, by the mysterious force of her womanhood. A woman —but, as she knelt that evening, her path was all before her, her fame was yet unwon, and I shall strive to show you how she clutched at power.

She was tall and lithe and graceful, so that you had not guessed her sinewy strength. Her long hair was a vivid, lustrous black, that in certain lights had the blue-black gleam of violets. Her face was delicately tanned by the sea winds, and was perhaps too strong for perfect beauty.

And yet in its splendid, unconquered arrogance it had the beauty of a free forest creature — a lioness untamed. Her mouth was red against the soft gold of her face, and could be—many things. Her eyes were darkest gray, and as yet she scarcely knew their power. At that moment they were strangely gentle. And there you have a poor picture of Grana O'Malley of Achill, whose fame lives yet upon faithful peasant lips.

The light had not yet faded from the west when Grana was roused from her mourning by the entrance of Bryan Teige. He glided almost noiselessly into the chamber, and there was that in his face which brought his mistress swiftly to her feet.

"My news is bad, lady," he said. "Red Donell has gathered the men in the great hall. I have been listening to their talk from the narrow passage. Donell does not yet know that my lord is dead. He waits only that to proclaim himself master of the castle."

Grana's eyes were gleaming from her white face. She had the power to put away grief and all lesser things at the call of her ambition. For that was the master instinct of her nature.

"Red Donell will find that he has to reckon with me!" she said proudly. "I will go down straightway to the hall—"

But the fool put up his gnarled hand.

"You will do well to harken before you act, lady," he said soberly. "Donell waits only for you to bear the tidings of your father's death to the hall. The men will obey him—he has been working long for this. He has made a plan whereby he can win over all who love you. It is in his mind to take you—for wife!"

Grana glared at the fool for a long moment, and then her face flushed royally.

"Oh, but the knave is insolent!" she whispered, and her knuckles gleamed white as she clenched her hands. "I—I to wed such as he! I will go down—"

"You must not go!" Bryan Teige said firmly. "He has persuaded the men that it were shame to obey a woman. If you go down you will but be a prisoner until you obey his will. Nay, if you must be wilful, I pray you at least to harken to their talk ere you trust yourself among them."

Grana hesitated for a moment, and then the strong cunning prudence that seldom failed her showed her the wisdom of the advice. She drew a long cloak about her and followed the gaunt man in motley from the chamber.

Down a narrow, winding staircase, and along a dark passage they glided, until Bryan Teige raised his hand and they halted. They were at a small, little-used doorway that led into the great feasting hall of the castle. From within there came a roar of voices and a clash of tankards, and under cover of the din the fool slid open the door a bare inch or so.

Grana was at his side, and, as she waited, suddenly the uproar lessened, and there were cries of "Donell! Donell! Silence for Red Donell!" Out of the hush that followed there bellowed a single voice, hoarse with wine and with the triumph of a long cunning hope that seemed about to be fulfilled.

And the face of Grana O'Malley slowly whitened, but not with fear, as she listened. She heard her own name and certain matters in full detail; but what she heard shall not be set down here. The times were frank and brutal and outspoken. But Grana laughed softly, with white lips.

She touched Bryan Teige's shoulder at last, and they crept up to the chamber as noiselessly as they had come. Then she spoke, coolly, without panic.

"You were right," she said. "Now what may be done?"

Bryan Teige had been thinking, and his fool's wits could at times be keen enough.

"You heard him?" he said. "He will be coming up here anon to speak with you. My plan is that we wait for him—you and I. As he speaks with you, I will deal with him from behind without noise. The keys of the castle are at his belt. We shall win forth to a boat, and afterward—it may be that Murrough O'Flaherty will give you shelter."

Grana thought for a while, and then she nodded.

"Not shelter, but aid," she said. "I will buy aid from him with which I may school these sorry traitors. Now we will wait. But mark you—you are not to kill Red Donell when he comes! I would have him live until I come again!"

And Bryan Teige understood that it was scarcely mercy that had prompted the command.

Then, in a tense silence, they waited for perhaps half an hour, until they heard a lurching, heavy step upon the stone stairway. Red Donell was coming to press his suit. Bryan Teige slipped quietly behind the door, and Grana kept her stand in the middle of the room before her father's couch.

She did not tremble as she waited; it was not her way when danger

pressed. But her long hands were clenched and her teeth pressed hard upon her lower lip. So Red Donell found her standing when he pushed open the door.

It should be remembered that this man loved her in his own fashion. The fact lends a certain piquancy to his later life. He was a huge, brawny man with a great shock of red, tangled hair. His coarse face flushed more deeply, and his small, blue eyes began to glitter as for a minute he gazed upon the gracious figure of his head master's daughter. Then he flung a glance at the still form upon the bed—at the man whose iron hand had loosed its grip upon his men at last.

"So—he is dead!" he muttered. "Good sleep to him for a stout fighter! It is an ill moment for wooing, maybe, but time presses! My lady, will you harken—"

"What is it you want?" Grana asked. Her eyes were set steadily upon his face. They gave no sign to him of what they saw beyond.

Bryan Teige had slid from his hiding place and was creeping inch by inch upon the red-haired giant. In his right hand he gripped a small, evil club. Red Donell was flushed with wine and had lost the courtesy that is habitual to his race. But for that he had scarcely forgotten the dead man.

"It is you whom I want, Grana!" he said thickly. "With you for wife, I will do great things. When will you wed me, my dark beauty?"

Grana's eyes flickered. Bryan Teige had raised his arm.

"Wed you?" she said, with fierce disgust and loathing. "Never—never!"

And then the little club crashed down. Red Donell threw up his arms with a thick gasp, and Bryan Teige caught him as he collapsed.

The fool was swift. Within two minutes the senseless man was securely gagged and bound. Grana stood above him, and her white face was cruel.

"I will speak with you at length when I come again!" she muttered, and she smiled.

"Our time is short, lady!" Bryan Teige murmured uneasily, and Grana turned from the unconscious man. She knew that the fool's terrors were on her behalf alone. For himself, he had asked no better than to hold the narrow stairway for a little while against the forty men below. They called him the death seeker, and it was a marvel that his search had so long been vain.

Grana went swiftly to the oaken chest and drew from it something that shimmered strangely in the dull red light. It was a diamond necklace of great price, a part of the spoil from a luckless, storm-driven Spanish galleon.

Grana hid it in her breast and threw the long, dark cloak about her. Then she knelt for a moment beside her father. As she rose she caught sight of his jeweled dagger by the bed and thrust it beneath her cloak.

She was not minded to fall living into Red Donell's hands. Then she signed to Bryan Teige to lead the way. The fool threw one glance at his master and they left the chamber.

When they were level with the hall where the men still reveled, waiting for their leader, Grana halted for a moment. She had it in her mind to go into their midst and strive to win them to her. It hurt her pride sorely to slink in this fashion from the castle that was hers by right. But she was untested in those days. She had yet to learn the strange power that she could wield upon men's hearts. And so she moved forward again behind the impatient fool.

He led her along a narrow passage to a small postern gate. This he unlocked with a key from the bunch that Red Donell had carried at his belt.

"There should be a plank here, lady," he muttered. "If not, we may have to swim the moat. At any moment they may seek that red-haired swine."

The dusk was thickening around them, and for a while he sought in vain. Then, just as he laid his hands upon the plank with a low grunt of satisfaction, they heard an exclamation. A warder was standing in the doorway behind them with amazement in his eyes. For a moment he gazed, and then, as Bryan Teige sprang toward him, he vanished swiftly.

"Quick, lady!" the fool muttered, throwing the plank across the moat. "The whole pack will be upon us now!"

He spoke truth. As in turn they crossed the bending plank they heard a sudden uproar and the patter of feet. Men were thundering up the stairway to find Red Donell and learn the meaning of these strange doings.

There was little time, indeed. Bryan Teige caught Grana's hand in his, and together they ran toward the beach.

Two upturned coracles were lying side by side. Bryan Teige slashed with his long knife at the skin covering of one, and then threw his wiry arms about the other and half dragged, half carried it toward the water.

The darkness was falling; and if they might but win a short start it would go hard with them if they could not evade pursuit. Grana aided him as best she could, but as they got the coracle afloat the drawbridge rattled down and a band of howling men broke from the castle.

There was a yell of triumph as they saw the fugitives. In the forefront of the pursuit reeled Red Donell with blood upon his face. But Bryan Teige's oars were out and the coracle was leaping from the land.

Some of the pursuers ran down the other coracle, and there were fresh howls of rage as she filled and sank within a few yards of the shore. Red Donell, stamping with rage, bade other boats be dragged down, and called upon such of his men as bore arquebuses to cripple the fool. The coracle was fifty yards away by now, and Bryan Teige was straining at the oars.

Grana was seated at the stem. She glanced back as the arquebuses roared and their red flames pierced the gloom. Then she rose to her feet in the swaying boat, entirely careless of a ball that ripped her cloak, and she waved her hands toward the dim figures on the shore.

"I will come back!" she promised. "Oh, I will surely come again!" I would show you how she kept that pledge.

Murrough O'Flaherty sat above his wine in the hall of his castle. All about him was a certain plentiful comfort and rude state. He was a large-boned man of five and thirty, with a long face that was made sinister by a white scar that ran from eye to jaw. Men called him "Murrough of the Axes," in memory of a certain famous fight in which, at the head of a small body of men armed only with battle-axes, he had made red slaughter.

He was a man of some genial humor and ability, and he was received in later years at the court of the great English queen. But at this time the Lord Deputy of Connaught would have paid large sums for the sight of his dead body.

Word was brought to him that two strangers sought admission, and he bade his servants bring them to his presence. And Murrough O'Flaherty opened wide his eyes in wonder as he saw come down the hall toward him a tall, graceful woman wrapped in a dark cloak, and behind her a gaunt man clad in ragged motley, with a huge, trailing sword strapped to his thigh.

"A woman and a fool!" he cried, and he lay back upon his bench prepared for entertainment. "By St. Patrick, you will seldom find the first without the second in attendance!"

But when the woman drew aside her cloak and showed her proud, lovely face, Murrough of the Axes sprang swiftly to his feet. He had ever a courteous welcome for beauty. It was his weakness.

"I pray you to take seat upon our high bench, lady," he said. "It is not fitting that you stand before us."

But Grana O'Malley shook her head.

"I will stand before you, sir," she answered; "for I come to seek a boon. I am the daughter of Dubhdara O'Malley."

Murrough sank back upon his bench in wonder.

"Then what do you here?" he asked, and his face darkened. "I have a score against the chief of the O'Malleys. There was a little matter touching a certain necklace—the cream of the plunder of a Spanish galleon. Dubhdara treated me ill."

"Dubhdara is dead," answered Dubhdara's daughter.

Murrough's face changed.

"Death closes all scores," he said, and then he frowned and added: "But I am yet sore about the brave necklace."

"It shall be yours," said Grana, "if you will grant me my boon."

"What is it that you seek?" Murrough asked curiously.

"I need a trading ship and thirty or forty fighting men," Grana answered. "My father's castle is in the hands of traitors, and I would school them back to honesty."

She clenched her long hands, and her eyes shone strangely.

"Oh, but I am hungry to begin that schooling!" she muttered.

Murrough was looking upon her beauty with dangerous pleasure. The joint in his harness has been indicated.

"I am minded to serve you, lady," he said softly. "You shall sail upon Murrough's own war-ship, and you shall watch him school your unruly hounds."

But Grana shook her head for the second time. The chief of the Flahertys was ambitious, and it would doubtless be hard to move him if once he won a footing within Kildownet Castle. And the proposal presented other dangers. But in her answer she did not touch upon these fears.

"I thank you, Murrough of the Axes," she said frankly. "But I may not accept your generous offer. I need only a trading ship, as old and crazy as you will, and for the rest—the schooling must be done by myself and none other if I am to wipe out my shame."

Murrough was vexed and puzzled.

"You need only a crazy trader?" he asked, and then he laughed aloud. "So I am to entrust a ship and men to the leadership of a girl and a fool?" he asked mockingly. "It is little to be thought of, lady!"

Grana flushed dangerously.

"I and this man beside me will find a way to discipline your men," she answered very quietly. "He wears fool's clothes, but some few have heard of Bryan Teige of the long sword. Yet—it may be that his fame has not reached to these—these wilds. Then choose a champion of your best, Murrough of the Axes, and this fool of mine shall prove his swordsmanship."

But Murrough smiled and looked with interest at Bryan.

"Nay, there is no need, lady," he said courteously. "I, even in these barbarous wilds, have heard of Bryan Teige the death-seeker. By the Red Steel, he is too good a man to wear the motley!" And then in his Irish vanity he added: "I have no champion to waste upon him, and for myself, it were not fitting that I should slay a guest!"

Grana did not smile at the boast, and the face of Bryan Teige was like scarred granite.

"Then, will you grant my boon, Murrough?" Grana asked. "The necklace shall be yours, and, if the saints are kind, your men and ship shall return to you unscathed in a little while."

"Where is the necklace? Do you bear it with you, lady?" Murrough asked carelessly.

Now, Grana in after years was called the Fox, because she had ever two roads to safety. She had buried the

necklace upon the shore before ever she trusted herself in Murrough's power.

"Nay, Murrough," she answered as carelessly as he had spoken. "It is in a certain place of safety. When I am aboard your ship that hiding-place shall surely be told to you."

Murrough of the Axes laughed. It is possible that he would not have robbed his guest even had it been in his power to do so. All things are possible.

"You shall have your ship and men, lady," he promised. "Within a day they shall be at your orders, and in the meanwhile Margaret, my wife, will be honored to extend her hospitality to such a guest."

For a week there had been wild revelry within Kildownet Castle. Red Donell had celebrated his accession to power by a drinking bout of amazing length. He had also been fain to drown his sorrow for the loss of his fair bride.

But even in those wild, deep-drinking days there were limits to men's capacity for liquor. Wherefore the watcher from the hills, all agog with news, was well received by the dissipated leader and his garrison.

"A trading ship under easy sail in sight!" Red Donell roared. "Here is the best of news, for we are in need of work. Up, lads, and dip your heads in water, and then, hey for plunder and gay fighting!"

Then was there noise and bustle as men, with red eyes and shaking hands, prepared themselves for sea. A dozen were left, sorely against their will, to garrison the castle, and the remaining thirty pulled out in crowded coracles to where the Red Horse lay at anchor. Her speed and seaworthiness had made her famous and the terror of those seas, and she had been the very apple of Dubhdara's eyes.

Every foot of Achill Sound was known to these sea raiders. The fierce tides that make it a menace to other seamen had no perils for them. And from it they could swoop forth either into Blacksod Bay on the north or Clew Bay to the south. No pirates in the world had ever a snugger lurking-place.

A light wind was blowing, and behind them the gaunt black head of Slievemore was clear of mist as they slid out into Clew Bay. Red Donell, standing beside the helmsman, peered through his huge hairy hands at the hapless trader.

"She is a rich merchant ship from the south swept hither by a gale, like enough," he muttered. "It will be but a poor fight, lads, I fear. Now that she has seen us, there are but a dozen hands on deck. The rest will be rotten with scurvy. Ah, they would run from us, but she will be lucky if she has the heels of the Red Horse!"

And indeed the long, evil craft swept down upon the fleeing clumsy trader like an eagle upon a heron. Three feet she sailed to the other's one, and in a little while Red Donell made out, to his amazement, that his boarders need expect no resistance.

A peaceful surrender was a folly little practised in those wild days even by the most helpless trader. Her crew would defend their decks like wildcats, for well they knew what scanty measure of mercy would be theirs. But upon this ship the few hands were running to and fro as in wild panic, and one was waving a white cloth in a pitiful attempt to win quarter by surrender.

Red Donell's men growled like wolves disappointed of a bone, and as the Red Horse drove alongside the trader they prepared in leisurely fashion to avenge their disappointment.

They case their grapnels fore and aft securely, and then in straggling order boarded their easy prize. The crew could be cut down or held as serfs. But—all the saints in heaven and some few devils!—what was this? From beneath a sail upon the deck and from the open hatches had burst a yelling wave of men, a torrent of mad fighters!

Here were no panic-stricken sailors. Saving their leaders, they were armed

to a man with heavy axes, even the dozen terrified hands who had been visible had caught up like weapons and had joined the rush. They were led by a lean giant of a man whose sword-sweep seemed scarcely human, and by a woman—dear saints and devils, a woman!—who handled sword and shield like any fighter.

The surprise was murderous and complete. Red Donell, brave as any bull, roared to his men to rally, but half of them were down before that first charge. The others were swirled backward to the Red Horse, but never a chance had they to slash loose the grapnels. The raging axmen were still with them, and they sullenly made ready to die with fierceness. But then the woman, high upon the bulwarks, intervened.

"Throw down your arms!" she cried in a clear, compelling voice that they remembered. "It may be that you have learned your lesson. I give you life—all save your leader! And he shall not die—yet!"

For a moment Red Donell leaned, sweating, upon his sword in despair. So this was Grana—the girl he had deposed so easily, the bride he had hoped to win! And his men were beaten.

All around him they were dropping their weapons and clutching at this chance for life. But that mercy was not for him! He was to die later—by torture, like enough, as an example!

Red Donell swung up his heavy sword and ran with a mad roar at the man in ragged motley. As he came Bryan Teige stepped deftly upon one side, and the flat of his long sword descended with crushing force upon Red Donell's head. When he regained his senses he was propped against the mast, bound hand and foot, and side by side the two vessels were entering Achill Sound.

Grana, as usual, had laid her plans with cunning. Only a dozen men were in the castle, but if the alarm were raised they could hold it with ease against four times their number.

Both ships were now being handled by the cowed and disarmed prisoners, and there was nothing to show the change of masters that had taken place. Grana herself was invisible, the wounded were in the holds, and Red Donell was dragged below before the ships rasped alongside the little jetty of rough stone.

The garrison were gathered upon the battlements, peering through the thick twilight at the prize.

"All's well!" was shouted from the Red Horse in answer to their eager hails, and then the drawbridge fell amid a howl of joy. Almost before it crashed into place a score of armed men set foot upon it, and the gateway, and then the castle, were in their hands without a struggle.

The garrison learned with horror and stupefaction that their lady had returned. An hour later Grana spoke to her people. The gloomy twilight of the castle yard was lit by flickering, smoking torches, and she stood in the middle with Bryan Teige beside her.

At her back were the axmen she had borrowed from Murrough O'Flaherty and before her were ranged the garrison and the survivors of those who had manned the Red Horse. They were sulky and afraid, not knowing what would be their fate.

Alone by himself stood Red Donell, with bound arms, upon his face wild, stubborn anger and no sign of fear.

Grana was richly clad in a robe of dark crimson silk and about her neck there gleamed a torque of ruddy gold. Her face with its flush of triumphs and dark, splendid eyes was good to see in the glinting torchlight. It was never her habit to neglect her advantages.

"I have kept my promise—I have come back to you, my friends!" she said, and her voice was low and her eyes were mocking.

"Weak woman as I am, I have kept my word. Aye, and these brave men behind me, who have served me well, will tell you that Grana can discipline her following!"

Whereat there was half unwilling laughter among the axmen. It would seem that at first Murrough's men had had grave scruples concerning obedience to a woman.

"This man," Grana continued, pointing with her hand toward Red Donell—"this man is but a bungler! He has permitted me to outwit him with scarce an effort. He was your leader, and it is not good to follow one who bungles. We will put him away—we will put him away!"

She paused and glanced at her fallen rival, as though she would have had him plead for pity. But in the torchlight his face was like a stone.

"I will give you another leader in his place. Indeed, you are but as blundering, foolish children! How may you endure, between the ever encroaching English and the strong coast tribes, without one with wit to spy out a path for you? Will you follow me, will you obey me, if I am merciful and forget your treachery?"

They are easily turned and easily led, the Irish, by clever words and a brave heart and a fair face. They answered this woman now with a roar of joy—they who had been ready a while before to hunt her to her death — and they surged in upon her to clasp and kiss her hands.

She drew her gown scornfully from their touch, although her eyes were bright with triumph, and Bryan Teige beat away the throng from before her with the flat of his sword. The fool at least had not forgotten their flight from the castle.

"It is well," Grana said as they slunk back. "Obey me, and I will give you gold and plunder and work that shall keep cool your blood. Aye, and you shall give me the power for which I crave! But wo to you if you fail me, if I meet treachery or cowardice! I will punish you with whips of steel—aye, I will give you a lesson now how a woman may make herself obeyed!"

She tossed out her hand toward Red Donell.

"That man dared to rise against me in my trouble when he dreamed that the one strong hand that shielded me was gone. My father had ever used him generously, and yet he dared to plot against my father's daughter! He shall be a warning—a grim warning—to you all. For two days the eagles yonder shall have no flesh, and then, still bound, he shall be thrust into their cage!"

Behind the bars of an enclosure there brooded four great mountain eagles. None might tame them; they sat ever gazing with fierce yellow eyes toward the wild hills that had once been their home. A shudder ran through even that careless throng as they listened to their leader's fate.

But Red Donell laughed out loud and long.

"I thank you, Grana O'Malley!" he cried. "I seek no mercy at your white hands. I would have tamed you royally if I had got you in my clutch, and now it is fitting that you should wreak your will upon me. But, oh, I would that I had not failed!"

And Grana turned and looked upon him curiously. All her life through she loved courage—fierce, wild courage that could laugh in the very grip of death. She had hated this man savagely, passionately; but now as he defied her, even in his despair, her mood changed. She was a woman, and not cruel by nature.

"Cut loose his arms!" she ordered suddenly, and it was done.

Then, as the man gazed at her in stupid wonder, she spoke again. "I have a liking for valor, Red Donell," she said coldly, "and it is not fit that it should be wasted. Now shall you live, and, more, I give you a choice. You have dared in your mad insolence to claim me for your wife.

"Now, if you will, you may dwell on here as my servant, knowing that I am never for you, racking your heart with vain, hopeless longing, or you may go forth free with your sword beside you. It is for you to choose."

Red Donell stared at her in silence, taking in the royally careless generosity of her words.

Then suddenly he staggered forward, and he knelt before her and he touched her robe with his hot lips.

"Lady, I will serve you to the death!" he muttered hoarsely. And that was how Grana of Achill came to her own.

## CHAPTER II.

### Strange Gifts of Cattle.

MURROUGH O'FLAHERTY of the Axes was angered. It must be admitted regretfully that he had cause. It may be remembered that Grana had borrowed from him a ship and a handful of axmen, paying for the loan with a certain necklace of price.

But when their work was done, when Grana's rebellious people had been persuaded back to their allegiance, the axmen had shown no longing to return to Murrough's service. Grana had caught their hearts — as was Grana's habit when men dealt with her; Grana seemed to them a most desirable mistress and leader, who would be likely to provide good plunder and gay fighting.

Murrough was well enough, but this reckless lady with the bright eyes and splendid hair had witched them once for all. Wherefore they sent word to Murrough with all courtesy that he would see them no more.

But Murrough of the Axes had other views. He was angered with his faithless men, but with Grana herself he was more furious. It is not suggested that she was blameless in the matter.

Grana, in fact, should have been born a queen. All through her long life her notions concerning property were so superbly lax. If she desired a thing she made it her business to obtain it. She desired these axmen, her ambitions being large and her following scanty, and so she did not send them back to their liege lord.

And in due course she received a curt message from Murrough of the Axes, intimating that he proposed to pay a visit, not of courtesy, to Kildownet Castle. He added that it had long appeared to him to be a desirable place of residence.

Grana fully understood the message. It spelled fighting. To warfare itself she had no sort of objection, but at the moment she was scarcely prepared for it. Murrough of the Axes could put three hundred men into the field; she herself had barely seventy.

And as it chanced there were other complications. She thought for a while when she had dismissed the ragged, wild-eyed kern who had acted as Murrough's herald, and then she summoned to her chamber Bryan Teige and Red Donell.

It was evening, and they came to her from the castle hall. Stranger servants, it may be, no mistress ever had. Red Donell loved her in his own fierce fashion, as has been told, and had striven to win her by force.

She had humbled him to the very ground, had dangled a cruel death before his eyes, and then carelessly had flung him life. Now he served her like a faithful dog, watching her ever with sullen, wistful eyes.

It was as though two men were habited in the skin of Bryan Teige. In times of stress and peril he was curt, silent, and ready, a great fighter, with a keen, cunning brain. With the passing of danger came reaction and an evil change. Straightway he lapsed into a boaster, a drinker, and a half-crazy buffoon. He came now to Grana in her chamber, heated with wine, clad as ever in his torn motley, fresh from entertaining the men with feats of strength and mad jesting.

Grana alone could master him.

"I have ill news and need your counsel, Bryan," she said, and straightway it was as though Bryan Teige sloughed his skin of folly.

"Aye, lady!" he said soberly. "You speak of the kern that Murrough sent? What answer have you returned?"

Grana from her high-carved chair motioned to the two men to seat themselves upon low stools. She mastered her wild followers by maintaining the dignity almost of a queen.

Her chamber was not wanting in comfort, even in luxury. Its silken hangings and rich furniture bore witness to Spanish taste. Dubhdara, her father, had been something of a connoisseur in such matters, even as were Raleigh and Francis Drake. But, like them, he had not been accustomed to pay with gold for his luxuries. These fittings had once adorned the cabin of a blue-blooded don, who had needed them no longer.

"What answer?" Grana said with a little laugh. "Why, one of vaguest courtesy, be sure! But it will not end here."

"Murrough's hands should be full enough," Bryan said thoughtfully. "He is out once more against the English."

"What news is there of the lord deputy?" Grana asked, turning to Red Donell.

"A spy came in but an hour ago, lady. He is moving slowly westward. He is sweeping all the country and is not likely to pass us by."

Grana frowned. The Irish have never been apt at the payment of taxes, regarding such a duty as a shameful weakness. In those days the luckless lord deputy of Connaught was compelled to gather the English tribute with an armed column. Dubhdara had never resented the humiliating exaction, and there was now a long score in arrears against his daughter.

And Grana herself was Irish to the core.

"What force has Sir Richard Bingham with him?" she asked sharply.

"Two hundred men, lady," Red Donell answered. "But he is hampered with many cattle."

The undisciplined Irish were no match in regular fighting for the trained English troops, as Grana knew well. She thought for a while with knitted brows.

"I have no mind to be robbed by the English," she said musingly. "But unless we act we are likely to be crushed between the hammer and the anvil."

"We can hold Kildownet against five hundred men, lady," Bryan Teige put in with confidence. There was a grim happiness in the fool's eyes. He scented a fight against long odds.

"Aye, but I am not minded to be mewed up here!" Grana said angrily. "It would be well that Murrough of the Axes should learn a lesson in good manners. I do not love to be threatened. How long have we, Donell, ere Sir Richard comes this way?"

Red Donell calculated upon his thick, gnarled fingers.

"He will not trouble us for a full week, lady," he answered at last.

"Aye?" said Grana quietly. "And horses? There should be plenty to hand upon the islands."

It should be remembered that Ireland, torn as it was with ceaseless feuds, was wealthier in those days than now. Huge herds of horses and cattle found grazing on the mainland and upon the swarm of islands that were held by Grana's people.

"We can get in as many as you will, lady," Red Donell answered.

"I need thirty at least in as hard condition as may be," Grana went on. "I have a plan. We will not stay to be penned up here If the saints are kind I will give a check both to this insolent Murrough and to Sir Richard."

Red Donell's eyes were glad and eager. But Bryan Teige spoke soberly.

"With thirty men, and in the open, lady?" he asked. It was for Grana alone that the fool found prudence.

"Aye!" Grana answered carelessly. "The rest shall hold the castle. But

I ask none to go that far. Think you that I shall find thirty bold enough to ride out with Grana of Achill?"

And Bryan Teige wasted no more cautious words.

Murrough of the Axes was in a complacent mood. His ready Irish vanity had been tickled. A second message had reached him from this insolent Grana O'Malley — a fittingly humble message, as it seemed to him.

She prayed him to advance no farther against her poor castle, and within two days she herself would come in person to his camp. She would bring with her his borrowed axmen, and make due gifts of cattle and apologies for her fault. Murrough of the Axes laughed when he heard her message (curiously enough, Grana also had laughed as she sent it), and invited flattery from his attendants.

It had taken but a little while and a mere threat after all to bring this girl to order! Who was there in the west who might stand before him? When Grana had duly humbled herself upon her knees he would go forth again and chase these insolent English back to the east once more.

So Murrough of the Axes boasted, and stayed on in his camp in the long valley of Ballydoig beneath the gray, misty hills, where Grana's messenger had found him.

There you have Murrough settled sufficiently at his ease, and I would ask you to take note of a little body of men riding steadily to the eastward of the valley of Ballydoig. They were mounted upon rough, hardy horses, and in their midst rode Grana between her two lieutenants.

She alone knew what plan was in her shapely head; but there was not a man in the band who would not have fawned before her for a smile. The Irish worship beauty — and fighting. Grana, it was certain, had the first, and had promised to supply the second. Wherefore there was huge contentment among her men.

They rode by night, and they were heading straight for the camp of Sir Richard Bingham, lord deputy of Connaught. They were fairly between the hammer and the anvil that Grana had mentioned, but Grana was superbly confident that her wits could keep the two from closing upon her.

There was risk, of course; but Grana loved risk for its own sake. Also, it is to be feared that Grana loved a good lie, apart from its mere strategic value. Her message to Murrough had been after her own heart.

Certainly she proposed to come to Murrough in his valley, but, as certainly, she was not coming in the fashion that Murrough expected. And there were those gifts of cattle that she had mentioned! Ten years later, when Grana's fame as a cunning leader had spread through all Ireland and had reached even to the English court, Murrough would not have received that humble message with such childlike faith.

There was little difficulty in finding Sir Richard Bingham's camp. It was not the quietest place in the world. A thousand head of cattle, many of them protesting strenuously against banishment from home grazing grounds, are not silent captives.

Very little gold had the lord deputy collected by his claims for taxes in arrears. His procedure was distressingly similar in almost every case. When the Irish chief in question considered himself strong enough he attacked the applicant for taxes and his column. When he was too weak for such a cheery course he protested aching poverty. In either case he would produce no money, and the end was the same.

So many head of his cattle were added to the great lowing herd, and a handful of his ragged kerns were impressed to act as herdsmen.

That night Sir Richard Bingham sat late in his tent inditing one of his many letters to the great queen at home. You may read those letters to-

day, if you choose, quaintly spelled and worded, pleading ever for the men and money that Elizabeth could or would not spare.

A tall, thin man, in soiled dress that had once been fashionable, with a worn, handsome face. It was no light or easy task, holding all stormy Connaught in check with a mere handful of troops. And the queen he served was a great mistress, but exacting.

Little she gave, or could give, in aid, but much did she expect. Sir Richard dismissed his secretary at last, and laid himself wearily upon his camp bed. He fell asleep at length with the lowing of the cattle in his ears.

He woke in the early dawn, and at first could not understand what it was he missed. Then he knew—the cattle were silent. And then there entered to him nervously apologetic men with grave news.

An hour or two after midnight, it appeared, when sundries are most weary, a band of mounted men had stolen upon the cattle. There could be no question that they had found willing helpers in the rascal herdsmen who had been pressed into service.

Sir Richard swore a great oath.

"String up those kerns at once for an example!" he roared.

"It should have been done ere this, Sir Richard, God knew! But — but the kerns were missing—every man!"

Sir Richard swore again, lustily, even as the queen herself would have sworn.

"And the cattle?" he asked.

"They—they were missing, too!"

"What had the sentries been about?" the lord deputy demanded furiously.

It appeared that the sentries had not failed in their duty. At the least, if they had slept, they were beyond further punishment. Their bodies had been found. Sir Richard dragged a cloak about him and stamped out impatiently into the chill morning mist to organize a pursuit.

It is certain that the camp, including probably the luckless sentries, must have slept with soundness. Much usquebaugh was drunk, as a duty, by the English exiled in Ireland to ward off the agues and fevers arising from the Irish bogs. Which duty, performed conscientiously, led sometimes to disaster.

It appeared that no attempt had been made by the raiders to drive off the cattle in one great herd. They had been nursed skilfully from the neighborhood of the sleeping camp, and then apparently had been dispersed in all directions. There was no great track to follow. Two blasphemous hours were wasted before a ragged peasant was brought in, but then little time was spent in his examination. He was confronted with torture, and he spoke without delay.

He had seen a herd of some three hundred head go by in the dawn, driven toward the west by a little band of mounted men. Within another hour Sir Richard and his men had struck camp and were in hot pursuit.

Grana had sent in that peasant to the camp when she deemed that she had won sufficient start. Grana had calculated her time with daring and cunning skill. She knew that the English were not mounted, and that, mindful of many ambushes, they would march with some caution. But they would follow—they would surely follow. They would hunger for the cattle, and they would deem it vital that such daring raiders should receive a lesson.

Sir Richard Bingham was well known to be choleric and high-hearted. So all that day the cattle were driven without undue speed toward the west.

You may picture Grana riding among her men, bright-eyed, untiring, and watchful, spurring to their work the native herdsmen whom she had released from the hated English service. She had left horsemen at intervals behind her, to watch for the dust of the pursuing column, and by their reports she regulated her speed.

When dusk began to fall, when she was still two miles or more from the valley of Ballydoig, she was able to halt for an hour to rest the steaming cattle. And then it was that she told her men of the work that lay before them, and they swore that for wit and daring their lady had no equal.

Daring she was, beyond all doubt. She waited until the sweating English troops trudged into sight, until they broke into a run as they saw the prize before them, and then she bade her men goad on the herd once more.

She lured the English forward with consummate skill. The long march was telling upon the cattle, a trail of exhausted bodies was beginning to dot the track, and not until the valley of Ballydoig opened before her and she saw the twinkle of Murrough's campfires did she increase the pace.

Then at last she raised her hand, and down through the gathering twilight, with the straining English at their very heels, thundered the cattle and the mounted men.

Murrough and his men were at their evening meal, and the sentries were—Irish. The first warning of danger came with a low, distant murmur of sound. Drowsy sentries came running with news of a great column of dust half seen through the thick twilight. But an hour before yet another messenger from Grana had come in, saying that she and her gift of cattle would shortly reach the camp. Murrough came from his tent and peered through the dusk with a vague suspicion of danger.

"This should be a princely gift!" he muttered. And then in a moment he had turned with swift and blasphemous orders upon his lips. He doubted no longer, but his time of grace was short.

The distant murmur had hardened swiftly into a roar. His men, confused by the gathering darkness, snatched up arms and strove to form themselves for battle one little moment before the mysterious whirlwind broke.

It raved in upon them with a thunder of hoofs that shook the ground, with a torrent of animal roarings and wild human yells. The yellow dust was a screen to make the mystery more devilish and affrighting.

And through that dust there broke the horned, shaggy heads of terrified, stampeding cattle. A great cry for aid went up to many saints, and then—the camp in the long, narrow valley was swept as by a giant broom! Men were trampled flat beneath the spurning hoofs, tossed high into air, flung far aside, gored and dying.

And then—the herd had crashed upon its way, leaving a horrid trail behind; and Murrough of the Axes, who had escaped as by a miracle, strove like a gallant man to rally the remnant of his three hundred men. He was half mad with anger, eager for a human foe upon whom he might vent his rage.

And Grana, in her generosity, had planned that that wish should be gratified. She had provided a human foe for Murrough of the Axes. Not her own little force; for Grana was seldom wasteful. She preferred, when possible, that other folk should do her work.

Her men had unwillingly obeyed her orders, and when the cattle were fairly within the valley, had driven their horses up the steep slope to the left. Then upon the ridge they halted, and peered down upon a grim and murderous fight.

For now the English were come. Even as Murrough rallied his broken force he was aware of the thud of feet and the rumble of English oaths. The English were up at last, eager to avenge the night raid and the long, dusty march. And between English and Irish in those days was a long debt of hate. There in the growing darkness, between almost equal forces, a portion of that debt was satisfied.

Grana and her men looked down through the gloom upon the stern hurly-burly. Their eyes might see little save the occasional flash of an arquebus, but to their ears came sounds

that told their own tale. Irish ax met English sword, and in courage there was little to choose between the fighters.

In the thick dusk discipline was of no avail, and man fought with man, groping his way to his foeman's throat. Mad yells and cries, the howls of the wounded, the thick, sobbing groans of the dying, blended into a hateful discord. It was but one of the thousand nameless fights that have watered the green Irish soil with blood.

And Grana triumphed; Grana's heart was high within her. She did not love bloodshed; she was seldom cruel; but she loved the sense of power that thrilled her as she sat her horse in the darkness above the fatal valley.

This was her doing; these poor, struggling pawns had been moved by her. She had not been crushed between the hammer and the anvil; she had slipped from between them, and they were crushing each other.

After that night Murrough of the Axes would be in little case for vengeance; and Sir Richard Bingham would have other matters to engage him beyond the collection of taxes in arrear. You do not understand Grana if you do not understand her triumph.

But—but she was a woman, and, one fancies, she was glad of the darkness. It saved her eyes from many things, and it made the fight less deadly. Soon enough the din grew fainter; soon enough the struggle became scattered as it went reeling down the valley. No man knew where were his friends, and panic raised its head and spread like fever. The darkness held vague horrors that were worse than death. The last embers of the fight flickered and died away, and the long, narrow valley was left to the wounded and the dead.

But in the gray dawn Grana and her men, walking their weary horses whither they hardly knew, came upon a lonely man beside the body of his dead horse. He was wounded and weary, and his once rich garments blew in tattered rags.

Upon his haggard face and in his deep-set eyes were dumb, bewildered grief and anger. It may be that they would not have known him, but the man rose unsteadily to his feet.

"I am Murrough of the Axes," he said, as a child might speak. "See, my sword is broken, and my men—where are my men?"

Grana spoke no word to him. She whispered an order and one of her band dismounted. They set Murrough in his saddle, and the little cavalcade moved on.

Some one handed Murrough food. He ate mechanically as he rode, and his mind cleared. His little army was scattered, and he was a prisoner in the hands of Grana of Achill. They were dragging him to her castle to die or to rot within a dungeon. Then the merciful numbness swept back upon his brain, and he rode on with bowed head and dull, unseeing eyes beneath the gray, misty Irish sky.

It was the evening, and Murrough's eyes were dazzled. Here was no gloomy dungeon. Here were bright lights and gleaming silken hangings and flashing silver. And yet he was within Kildownet Castle.

He remembered dully the echo of the drawbridge beneath his horse's hoofs, while men who held flickering torches had cheered madly and roared that their dark lady was a witch.

He had not heeded these things. He had asked only to be alone in his cell. But that boon had not been granted him. Instead, he had been conducted to a chamber where a deft-handed serving man had waited upon him in unbroken silence.

Water had steamed in a great bath, and there he had bathed his weary limbs. He had made no protest — it was as though he was moving in a dream. And still as in a dream he had suffered the attendant to bandage the wound in his sword-arm, to replace his torn rags with garments of rich satin, to belt upon him a jewel-hilted sword.

And then he had been led to this wonderful chamber.

The well-born Irish of those wild days were no savages. The most luxurious exquisite of to-day might have found little wanting in Grana's dining-room. Not for nothing had her father and her father's father laid tribute on the sea. Silver lamps filled with perfumed oil shed brilliant light, the table was rich with gold and silver plate.

And the lady who swept it, heralded by her seneschal, to curtsy low before her guest, was worthy of her splendid setting. Jewels gleamed in her dark hair, upon her milk-white neck, in the folds of her lustrous gown.

A haunting fragrance was in Murrough's nostrils as, half dizzily, he bowed before the gracious vision. He would have protested at such mockery, but she raised her hand and the words died on his lips.

He was moving amid enchantments, he stood within a fairy castle, and no word that he might utter should break the spell.

The table was laid for they two alone. Murrough ate of rich dishes and pledged his hostess in rare wine, scarce knowing what he did. His brain was bewildered by such treatment of a prisoner.

As they ate Grana talked easily of many things. She spoke of the gossip of the English court that came straying across the sea to Ireland, of the handsome and gallant Earl of Essex whom the queen was sending over as her representative, of the long war with Spain. But no word did she speak of Murrough of the Axes, or of his dispute with a certain Grana of Achill.

Until the meal was ended and they repaired to another chamber, as richly hung and furnished. Then Grana reclined at ease upon a couch, dipping her long fingers into a jeweled snuff-box at her side.

The habit was newly coming into favor in England, and she had learned it from her father's Spanish prisoners. Murrough of the Axes stood before her, striving to lay hands upon cool sense. Grana watched him with lazy, half approving eyes—a tall, lean, goodly figure of a man in his rich suit.

"I am bewildered, lady," he began, and indeed his tongue stumbled as he watched her. "Why should you treat me in such princely fashion? I am your prisoner—"

"Nay, sir," amended Grana courteously. "Rather at present you are my guest."

"I am your prisoner," he repeated. "What need to gloze the facts? I had it in my mind to break down your pride. But—it is I who am broken!"

Grana's careless eyes grew softer. She loved courage, and she knew that this man was brave. Also, she loved power and victory above all else in the world, but she hated to see a strong man ashamed.

"Nay, Murrough, all shall yet be well with you," she said gently. "You were greatly angered with me, and I say not that you had no cause. Although, indeed, I hate to own myself at fault!"

And she laughed a little, very softly and low.

"But you were too strong for me to meet in open fight, and I was threatened by another peril. For the lord deputy was hastening hither to demand his hateful taxes. And so I turned to my woman's guile for aid."

And she told him in few words of the strategy that she had used. Murrough bit his lips as he listened, but he spoke courteously.

"A general is lost in you, lady," he said. "For my men I grieve, but for myself I take no shame for my defeat. You are strong and clever and without fear. But now—I would ask what ransom you will demand of my poverty?"

For a while Grana did not answer. She gazed at him with eyes half veiled by their long, dark, silken lashes. She was a woman, and she had but lately learned her power.

She motioned him nearer with her hand. Murrough obeyed the gesture,

and to his nostrils there came the fragrance of her dark, splendid hair.

"May not a woman be generous?" she murmured. "May she not seek to win a friend in one who was a foe?"

And then—and then Murrough of the Axes forgot both his honor and his shame. He forgot that he was a prisoner, and he had no thought for the comely wife who watched for him in his distant castle.

He had no eyes and brain save for this woman whose smiling eyes were on his face. He fell upon his knees and he caught her hand to his lips and he poured forth a wild flood of mad, foolish words.

And for a moment—one short moment—Grana of Achill harkened to him with a little glad, proud smile. It has been said that she was a woman. Here was another sweet tribute to her power. Then she flushed, and she sat upright upon her couch, and she pushed him from her with her hand.

"Nay, Murrough," she said, with a curious, cold severity, with a scorn that maybe was edged against herself—"this folly is not seemly. You would ill requite my courtesy. And you forget your honor."

But Murrough did not heed her. His eyes and his brain were drunken.

"Grana, Grana, my sweet, my queen!" he whispered hoarsely. "All things are possible to us—we will found a kingdom, you and I together."

But Grana shook her head with decision. She might yield to vanity for a moment, but at heart she was cool and practical.

"I would be your friend, Murrough," she said. "But love is not for me. Or when it comes, I think it will be in the hand of one who is my master. And now—your folly is forgotten! There shall be no talk of ransom between us. To-morrow a horse shall be found for you and you shall ride to your home. You will remember—that Grana can be generous."

She slid from the couch, and as Murrough groped for her with shaking hands he heard the arras rustle. He sprang unsteadily to his feet to find himself alone.



## CHAPTER III.

### A Death Chase Among the Islands.

OVER the gray, ruffled waves, perilously near to the dark, cruel coast a storm-battered galleon came reeling. For three days a savage gale had howled from the south, and its first onset had left the galleon helpless and dismasted.

Then she had whirled before it, strained and buffeted, until Spanish seamanship was at a loss, and even Spanish courage was almost spent.

When the wind subsided, her crew, turning from the pattering of prayers, judged that they were off the ill-omened coast of Ireland, and made shift to rear a jury mast. And then out from a narrow gulf slid two long, evil-looking craft!

To Grana and her men it appeared certain that the saints were pleased. They were doubtful as to the exact fashion in which they had contrived to gratify the saints; but, there it was! Here was a rich prize crippled by the gale and flung into their very hands. It only went to prove that the blessed saints did nothing by halves!

Upon the poop of the Red Horse you behold Grana in her glory. Land adventuring was well enough, but—there was the blood of many generations of sea-pirates in her veins. She stood by the helmsman, wrapped in a long cloak of rough crimson frieze, and her dark eyes were vivid with delight.

The Red Horse drove through the long, sullen waves, not deigning to leap them, and the spray that her sharp bows flung in glinting clouds was as wine upon Grana's lips. Things were going well with her of late. The fame of her exploit in the valley of Ballydoig had spread far and wide, and her following had grown.

And here before her was a venture after her own heart. It had even a smack of legality to lend it an unusual piquancy. For was not Spain at war with England? Grana — the Grana who had defied and outwitted the representative of the English queen— found a certain humor in the thought of her present loyalty.

And then, without a waste of breath on either side, begins a fierce day-long battle. You see the galleon, a lumbering, stately castle of a ship with her one makeshift spar, hold on her slow way before the wind. And round and round her in swift mazy circles sweep the Red Horse and the Eagle. They are as cock-boats beneath the huge, round-bowed bulk of the Spaniard, with her high, carved castle at stern and bow, but in their very tininess there is safety.

They can be handled with bewildering speed, and as ever the Spanish guns are trained too high. That fact outbalances the almost ludicrous superiority of the galleon's weight of metal. As it is, the Red Horse and the Eagle find safety from their very daring, and at almost pointblank range even their light cannon hull the Spaniard time and again.

All through the gray, sunless day that running fight went on. The startled sea-birds rose screaming from the rocks, and the line of misty hills reechoed the thunder of the guns. There was a strange contrast between the fighters. The decks of the galleon swarmed with men.

Upon her poop her captain and the commandant of her soldiers, clad in glittering armor, paced in stately fashion. The dark-robed priests and the spruce gentlemen volunteers looked down in wonder and contempt upon their puny foes.

Upon the deck of one they saw a woman and a gaunt giant in motley directing a handful of ragged, shouting men; upon the other a red-haired bull of a man spurred on the pitiless attack. As the day died the Spaniards ceased to sneer, and began to ask themselves how the strange fight would end.

Upon the Red Horse and the Eagle they had no doubts. Their rigging had been cut by a few chance shots, but the damage had been smartly repaired. The Spaniards they knew were in very different case. The galleon had been lacked through and through, and she was perceptibly lower in the water. Soon she must yield or run for the jagged shore.

But to yield to such foes was not in accordance with Spanish honor. The galleon held on her proud unconquerable way, wallowing like a wounded whale. The red sun was dipping fast, and it was borne in upon Grana that her prize was slipping through her fingers. Another gray dawn would not find the galleon afloat.

Grana muttered a word to the helmsman, and the Red Horse shot across the Spaniard's bows. Grana was poised upon the bulwarks, hailing her to yield in broken Spanish. But the Spanish captain laughed with icy contempt. He had only one answer for such filibusters.

And Bryan Teige dragged Grana down from the high bulwarks as the arquebuses flashed. A bullet had grazed her arm, but she stamped with rage, unheeding the stinging pain.

"We shall lose her yet, by all the saints!" she cried fiercely.

"Run us alongside, Bryan, and we will board the rogues!"

Bryan Teige shrugged his shoulders.

"It is what they would pray for, lady," he answered dryly. "She carries soldiers — five hundred men and more! And, besides—"

He pointed through the gloom toward the galleon. She had given one sudden, sickening reel. And now— yes, by all the saints, her bows were rising! Then from her decks there broke one shrill and awful cry. It was a despairing wail to Heaven from five hundred throats.

Bryan Teige and Red Donell roared to their helmsmen, and the Red Horse and the Eagle wheeled and fled like startled birds. But for one moment through the grim twilight Grana looked upon an unforgetable sight. She saw the common folk of the galleon break all discipline in their mad terror; she saw a great, howling mob of soldiers and sailors hurl themselves for the lofty poop where still their officers waited, stately and unmoved, for what the saints might bring. She heard their screams and prayers and imprecations as death stretched out cold hands. And then there came a sudden, dreadful silence.

And Grana was moved to pity. You wrong her if you think her cruel because there was red fighting-blood in her veins. She shouted an order to the helmsman. The fellow hesitated, looking toward Bryan Teige, and Grana — well, her nature was never patient!

She caught the man a blow with the flat of her long hand that rang like a pistol shot, such a blow as Elizabeth gave to those who angered her, and as he shrank away she gripped the tiller. The Red Horse turned shivering upon her heel, and Grana drove her back upon her course.

But now no huge black hulk loomed out of the twilight. The galleon had vanished for ever and a day, and of the hundreds who had manned her they found but two, senseless and lashed to spars.

They were dragged aboard, and then the Red Horse and her consort set out sulkily enough for Achill Sound. The day had been long and hard, and for spoil they were bringing home two half-drowned Spaniards! But it is of those two that this story tells.

From their dress it was obvious that they were gentlemen. Grana bade her men carry them to the cabin and tend them with all care. If it pleases you, you may put down her humanity to a desire for ransom. At the least, that, or any other theory, will hurt Grana but little now. Both Spaniards were slight built, swarthy men of middle height. They forced spirits between their lips, and in a little while one of them opened his dark eyes.

"Where am I? What has chanced?" he muttered in Spanish. One of Grana's men had picked up a few words of that tongue from Spanish prisoners.

"The galleon was sunk, *señor,*" he answered. "You and one other have been saved."

There came a curious light to the Spaniard's eyes.

"Only one other!" he whispered eagerly. "Then — oh, thanks to the blessed saints!—that devil will surely have been drowned!"

He raised himself painfully upon one arm to look—then sank back with a little thick gasp of disappointment. By now the other Spaniard had been restored to life, and their eyes had met. The one who had spoken—his name was Juan Valdez—laughed softly and very bitterly.

"I might have known that he would not die," he murmured. "That is my half-brother, and a devil—oh, a devil!"

He raised himself once more.

"Greeting, dear Pedro!" he called softly, and his eyes flickered with hate. And a mocking, silvery voice made answer:

"Greeting, dearest brother!"

They say that Grana was kind, perhaps too kind, to both her prisoners. If it were so it is not strange. There were certain sides of Grana's nature that ambition and adventure could not satisfy.

There were no more polished gentlemen in Europe than the hidalgos of Spain. And these two contrasted vividly with Red Donell and Bryan Teige. And Grana—the fact has been stated ere this—was a true woman.

There was no thought of ransom. Pedro and Juan Valdez stayed on at Kildownet Castle, and soon enough under their teaching Grana's halting

Spanish became more fluent. No man knew the secret of the hate between the brothers, but all could see that they had carried their rivalry one long step onward.

For Grana stood between them now. Grana was the prize for which either would have sold his soul, and the hate that had burned between them was fanned to a wilder flame.

One wonders what were Grana's thoughts. It seems likely that her heart was scarcely touched. But she had ever a womanly fancy for setting puppets to their dancing. It would gratify that harmless fancy to ride after the red deer with these strange suitors on either hand, to sit with them in her chamber, and to watch the flicker in their eyes as she flung her careless crumbs of favor.

No man, the two least of all, might know which of the twain she liked the better. She was playing the game that has been beloved of women since the world began. She was playing with glowing fire, and she loved the thrill of power and danger that the pastime gave. But she was to pay a certain price for her amusement.

And so for two months and more love and hate and folly played their parts within Kildownet Castle. And Bryan Teige and Red Donell watched with smoldering fury these two dainty sprigs, who handled sword so deftly, who sat their horses with such grace and skill, and who had dared in their utter insolence to lay their love at the feet of Grana of Achill.

In the twilight of an autumn evening Juan Valdez sat with Grana in her chamber. A lute was upon his knees, and he was singing softly a plaintive Spanish song. As he played his eyes were upon Grana's proud, dark face. It is to be presumed that she was aware of the fact, although the little smile upon her lips was cool enough. And then the music ceased—but still its sweet, pleading echoes seemed to haunt the room.

Juan Valdez was upon his feet, his eyes dark with passion. He had forgotten that this woman was a barbarian, and of necessity inferior to a hidalgo of birth and breeding. He had forgotten everything in the world, except the face that gleamed palely from the shadows.

"Grana," he said hoarsely and low, "how long will you play with me, how long will you give but mocking answers to my prayers? I love you!"

And Grana ceased to smile. It may be that, for a moment at least, she was touched by the man's great passion. It may be that for the moment she was lonely and in need of friendship. It may be that she only pleased her vanity. Who shall say?

But at the least she motioned Juan Valdez to come nearer with a little gesture of her hand. And he came, with his blood at riot in his veins. He came, dreaming that he had won his heart's desire. It is a dream that many men have hugged. He knelt beside her, holding fast her jeweled hands, touching them with his lips, whispering a flood of passionate Spanish words of love.

And then in a dark corner of the chamber the arras stirred.

No wandering draft of air had moved it. From behind it there slid a dark, shadowy figure. It was Pedro Valdez. All the dying, flickering daylight in the room seemed to concentrate and burn in the eyes that gleamed from his swarthy face. They shone like a cat's eyes in the dark. Otherwise he might have been a ghostly wraith. But once the half light smoldered sullenly upon something that he gripped fast in his right hand.

Grana and her lover did not hear him. Like a panther he slunk across the chamber. But for Grana, Juan Valdez had died without a struggle. But Grana lifted her eyes, instinctively aware of another presence in the room, just as the great knife gleamed.

She gasped and clutched at the kneeling man, and it was but his left

shoulder that was torn. Only that sudden movement had saved him, for a Spaniard's skill with the knife is devilish. Juan Valdez, shrinking from the steel, glared upward into his brother's maddened eyes.

"Dog and murderer!" he hissed, and then he was upon his feet, careless of his wound, and their swords were out.

There was no formality about that death duel in the darkened chamber. The brothers did not wait for lights or seconds. They had red hate to guide their points, and the true swordsman can fence blindfolded, feeling for his opponent's blade.

Grana never thought of calling for aid to stop the fight. You see her crouching with clenched hands upon the couch, straining her eyes through the dim light. It was for her that they fought. So in the jungle the lioness watches two royal rivals grappling to the death, deciding which of the twain shall live to claim her favors.

One wonders if there was something akin to pride as well as horror in Grana's heart. The world was younger and less artificial then, and to this day women are strangely primitive.

It was that felon knife-stroke which gave victory to Pedro Valdez. Both the brothers were famous swordsmen and well matched. For a time Grana, madly eager that the stabber should be punished, could not detect that either had the vantage.

They pressed each other with the rage of devils, up and down the long stone-flagged chamber, amid the crashing furniture, with the bright sparks glinting in the twilight from their gritting blades.

But the end came suddenly at last. The blood was streaming from Juan Valdez's shoulder, and his strength was failing. In a little while it was only the fervor of his hate that kept him upon his feet. And then he reeled and his sword-point for a moment drooped. Pedro had no thought of mercy.

He lunged with one great cry of triumph. Juan Valdez was down with a mortal wound. A whisper came to Grana's ears—only one word—her own name murmured faintly; and then the room was strangely still. She hid her face in her hands, unnerved and trembling for the moment. She was alone in the twilight with the murderer.

And then her strong spirit mastered her weakness. She sprang to her feet. She would rouse the castle, and this villain should die as he deserved. The thick walls and flooring had deadened the sounds of the fight, but a silver bell was almost within her reach. As she groped for it, Pedro Valdez's voice came to her through the dusk.

"I grieve to be discourteous, *señorita,*" he said coldly and evenly; "but if you touch the bell or cry out, you die that moment."

There was something in his smooth voice that made Grana shiver, but when she answered her voice was firm.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I am going to leave the castle," he answered. "You must come with me. I, too, love you, as you know. I may not live without you."

And then Grana's wrath and scorn flamed out.

"You love me?" she cried. "*You*—a spy, a murderer, a stabber from behind? I am to go with you—you may not live without me? I tell you that it is a shame to me to speak with you; that it is hateful to me to breathe your air!"

His voice was utterly unchanged.

"It is for you to choose," he answered. "For myself, I care little. Summon your ruffians, *señorita,* if you will. Ere they come their mistress will be dead, and I—it will be no bitter end to die fighting. Choose, *señorita,* but choose swiftly!"

His voice carried conviction and restored Grana's cool sense.

"What is my other choice?" she asked sullenly, after a brief pause.

"You will walk beside me down the

stairway to the open air. You will be within touch of me as we go. If we meet any of your men upon the way, you will say and do nothing to arouse their suspicion. Near the water we shall find a boat. Afterward — who can tell what shall befall us afterward?"

Grana stood in silence, thinking swiftly. Grana might give way to rage, but it was only for the moment. As has been told, they called her the Fox in after years.

She knew that this man was entirely desperate, that he meant all that he had said. She knew — he had proved it fully—that murder was but a little thing in his eyes. She knew that, because he loved her, he would sooner see her dead than lost to him. For the Spaniard loves as a tiger loves. It was terrible to trust herself to this man, alone in the darkness upon the sea; it was hateful to her pride; but swift and certain death was the alternative.

Grana trusted always in her luck and her star, and the thought of death was ever strangely painful to her. She came without hesitation to her decision.

"I will go with you," she said in a low voice, and then she caught her breath sharply. Not all her strength of will could keep her from that sign of weakness.

"It is well," Pedro Valdez answered coolly. "Wrap a cloak about you and come forth without delay."

Without more words she did what he bade her. It added to her courage to know that within her breast was the little poniard that she always carried. She was so careless of his anger that she stooped and laid her hand upon the chilly forehead of the man whom he had killed.

Pedro Valdez watched her with Spanish frigidity as she did so; but it seemed to her that she heard the click of his dry lips. Then that strange pair went forth, side by side. They met but one man upon their way. It was one Patrick Oge, serving his turn as warden of the gate. He stared for a moment to see his lady go forth at such an hour, but — it was never Grana's habit to encourage questions from her servants.

Also, Pedro Valdez was beside her, and all in the castle knew that one or other of the Spaniards had been as a shadow to their lady for the last few weeks. The fact had not added to the popularity of the Spaniards. However, Patrick Oge conceived that the pair were going forth to watch the rising of the moon together, or upon some similar folly, and with an obsequious gesture he unlocked and threw open the great gate.

It is possible that he plumed himself upon his cleverness in reading the intentions of his lady. At the least, he had reason later to regret that cleverness.

The drawbridge was not yet raised. Grana and her escort passed across it, and a few yards brought them to an upturned coracle beside the water's edge. Pedro Valdez ran it down, and assisted Grana to a seat in the stern. As the boat slid through the gathering darkness down the Sound, Grana spoke.

"What will you do with me?" she asked, and it may be that her voice shook a very little. "We have neither food nor water, and these seas are dangerous for so frail a craft."

Pedro Valdez laughed softly—his own mocking, silvery laugh.

"I care not what chances in the future," he said. "I do not look ahead—not I. But you are with me; we are alone in the dark world together—you and I—and it is enough, my lady, it is enough!"

His pale, eager face gleamed through the heavy dusk. Grana glanced at him and then swiftly dropped her eyes. She was brave; there can be no question that she was brave beyond the wont of women, but I do not wonder that she shivered.

To Red Donell and Bryan Teige, in the great hall, there came a man and

a woman in panic haste. They were Grana's serving-woman and her seneschal. That hall, where Bryan Teige, drunkard and braggart in peaceful hours, held stormy revel, was commonly no place for them; but now they brought news that might not tarry.

"Where is the Lady Grana?" gasped the seneschal. "In her own chamber one of the Spanish lords has been slain!"

The serving-woman was past speech. In the dark of Grana's chamber she had stumbled upon something dumb and cold and awful that had chilled her heart. But her white face told its own story.

It was a sight to see how Bryan Teige flung aside his half-drunken folly. The man cared for but one living creature in the world. He sprang to his feet, and men obeyed the long, lean figure in the torn, stained motley as though he had been the mistress whom he loved. They had seen the death-seeker fight.

With a few curt words he drew from the seneschal all the story that the trampled, disordered, bloody chamber had to tell, and then he gave the one brief order that would throw light upon the mystery.

"Bring hither to me the warden of the gate," he growled.

Patrick Oge was voluble. Patrick Oge was fully assured that he had acted correctly and with discretion. Yes, the dark lady had gone forth—

"How long ago?" Bryan Teige broke in savagely.

"Less than the half of an hour, and within a minute or so I heard the creak of oars to the northward. Doubtless the Spaniard had rowed out with her to look upon the moon—"

"So the other Spaniard was with our lady?" Bryan Teige asked almost calmly.

"Aye, assuredly, the Lord Pedro. One or other of the twain is ever at her side—"

Bryan Teige slackened the bridle of his rage.

"And you let them pass without a thought of mischief, blockhead and witless fool? Upon you there rests the weight of our lady's peril. If a hair of her head be harmed your death shall not be easy! What—you dare to speak—"

Bryan Teige's clenched fist crashed out with the full weight of his long arm. Patrick Oge dropped senseless, and Bryan turned to matters of importance.

"Let every coracle be manned!" he cried. "Like enough the Spaniard led forth our lady under threat of death. But his start is short, and we shall find him snared among the islands. Come, Donell; come without delay! He must not live till dawn!"

And he broke from the hall.

Men speak yet of that night chase three hundred years ago among the tiny islands that swarm beyond Achill Sound. You yourself, if it pleases you, may thread the winding channels between Inisboffin, Inisclerie, Inisdevellan and the rest.

You may see the shifting glint of the moonlight upon the dark, restless water, the grim lowering line of hills upon the mainland, and you may picture that single coracle with its strange crew—the slim dark Spaniard tugging with delicate hands at the heavy oars, seldom shifting the gaze of his bright eyes from the white dauntless face of the woman in the stern.

You may even picture that moment when the Spaniard heard from far away the creak of many oars, and knew that the death chase, inspired by hate and love, was out behind him. I fancy for my part that he laughed when he heard it; laughed with a gleam of white teeth like the snarl of a hunted wolf, before he bent once more to his unaccustomed toil.

He can have had little hope of life. Already his overstrained muscles were tiring, and he had no knowledge of the maze of winding channels in which he was enmeshed. These men behind

him would be strong rowers; would have many boats, and they must hunt him down at last. I think that he had no clear plan at the back of his whirling brain.

If he could but outwit these dogs behind him for a little while; if he could but win to the open sea, there beneath the quiet stars he would find a way to convince this scornful woman of his hungry love.

Then, at least, she must harken to him; then, at least, she should understand the passion that burnt his heart and brain. Afterward—what would it matter though death came swift and pitiless behind his wooing?

And Grana? One fancies that in time a certain exhilaration thrilled her blood, bred of the night and the shifting moonlight and the very keenness of her peril. There was in her a wild strain of utter daring that nerved her spirit to meet almost with gay pleasure the chances of life and death.

Behind her, she knew now, were the men who loved her, straining nerve and sinew to achieve her safety; near to her, within hand's touch of her, was this wild man, who had killed his brother for her sake; who had sworn that she should die if it seemed that she must escape his love. Grana, wrapped close in her dark cloak, clutching ever the handle of her little dagger, found strength to wait with calm.

They were close upon them now. Pedro Valdez's arms were numb, and in his ears was the splash of oars. Three channels opened before him, and the tide was strong beneath his boat. What mattered it which way he went, since the end was surely to come? He dragged in the useless oars, and loosened his blade in its sheath.

The tide swept the coracle swiftly into the right-hand channel, and she grounded lightly beyond the point of a little island. Here would be a fitting place for his last fight. But—ah, thanks to St. Philip and all saints—the light of the moon was failing!

Dark clouds were sweeping across its face. There was still one slender chance. Grana saw the gleam of Pedro Valdez's drawn sword, and she heard him hiss, "If you cry out, you die!" And then in thick darkness they waited.

They heard the voices of the pursuers carried clearly over the water. Only two boats were near, it seemed. They held Red Donell and Bryan Teige. They had found means to urge their rowers ahead of all the rest. Bryan Teige was speaking. Pedro Valdez knew well the voice of the lean, dissolute giant in whose somber eyes he had so often read fierce hate.

"A curse upon this darkness! Here be three channels. Take you the middle one, Donell, and I will try the right. That devil should not be far ahead—if only our luck is in!"

Grana heard the Spaniard laugh very softly to himself. All her senses were strained and unnaturally keen. She even heard him tighten his grip upon his hilt.

She was conscious of the salt-haunting smell of seaweed. Yes—the end was come. What would death be like? For death was close upon her. Life seemed strangely beautiful and precious. What could she do with her tiny dagger against the Spaniard's sword? And then—from far away up the left-hand channel they heard the harsh scream of startled gulls and a great sound of splashing.

"By St. Patrick, they are yonder!" they heard Bryan Teige cry softly. "Their boat has disturbed the gulls! Up the left-hand channel, lads, and row like devils!"

When the sound of their oars was faint in the distance the Spaniard spoke.

"I think that death has never been nearer to either of us, *señorita,*" he said softly, and Grana drew a long breath.

For a while they stayed beside the little island, and then the breeze dropped, and a sea-fog crept up, blotting out all sights and sounds as with a soft gray blanket. Pedro Valdez took

to his oars once more, and slowly he felt his way among the maze of islands toward the open sea.

Time and again he heard the muffled cheep of his pursuer's oars; time and again blurred land opened out before his bows, but chance or fate was with him, and he was able to blunder on once more without mishap.

The dawn found them in open water —a haggard, weary man and a white-faced woman adrift in a crazy boat. The fog had lifted—a fresh breeze had sprung up from the land and was sweeping them out to sea.

It was evening once more and they were still afloat. But they were weak with hunger and their lips were cracking with thirst. Grana watched wearily the red sun dip into the sea and wondered without dread when death would come.

Pedro Valdez had sat in baffled silence from the moment when she had drawn her dagger and had sworn that she would kill herself if he laid hand upon her. But she had not dared to sleep.

She had passed through long hours of torture that few men and women could have borne. And now she knew that at last her nerve was breaking.

Sorely against her will, with fierce contempt even then for her own weakness, Grana of Achill began to cry softly like any outworn woman.

The Spaniard was speaking hoarsely through blackened lips. Was she dreaming, or did she hear his words aright? What miracle had turned this man to pity? He was begging her forgiveness, he was cursing himself for his mad cruelty to the bravest and the fairest lady in the world. He told her that the wind had changed and that they might yet win back to land.

He prayed her to try to sleep, for now he had no thought save for her safety. And Grana believed him, Grana allowed him to wrap his mantle about her, Grana even let him touch her hand with his parched lips.

She sank wearily to sleep like a tired child, and the last sight she saw before she slept was Pedro Valdez straining at the oars with slack arms that would scarcely obey his will.

And behind them the west wind was softly blowing that should waft one of them to friends and safety, and the other to—what?

Three times through that night she started fearfully from sleep, and still he was forcing himself to his hopeless task. Long afterward she remembered how his dark, hollow eyes had looked upon her in the moonlight; long afterward she recalled how he had soothed her terror with words of hope and comfort that came harshly from his blistered lips and cracking throat.

She woke once more in the red dawn, and could scarcely believe her eyes. For land was in sight, a long line of the dark, misty land she loved, and leaping toward her over the green waves was a ship whose lines she knew. It was the Red Horse, manned by men who had not slept and had scarcely eaten since their long search began.

They had been spurred by love and hate. But the man whom they sought had fallen forward above the oars that his raw hands still gripped, and had passed beyond their vengeance.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A Strange and Precious Hostage.

FERRALL O'DOWDE sent courteous greeting to Grana O'Malley —dwelling for the time in his castle of Ferrisowle. He gave notice that her servant, Bryan Teige, upon whose life, it was said, she sat some value, was wounded and a prisoner in his castle of Ballina. He added that unless Ferrisowle were duly delivered back to him within the week the aforesaid Bryan Teige would assuredly hang high.

In short, Grana had made a bitter and powerful enemy. The fact was not surprising. It was an inevitable

consequence to the pursuance of her darling hope and ambition. It was in her mind to get possession, by force or strategy, of every place of strength along thirty miles of coast.

It may be said at once that in time Grana actually did achieve this ambition, and was for a while well nigh unassailable even by the might of England, with God knows what further wild hopes and dreams in her fertile mind. But that end was not yet reached.

She had, however, made a fair beginning, as you may gather from the message given above. It is probable that Ferrall O'Dowde, in his greatness, knew little of Grana, until the entire garrison of his southernmost castle of Ferrisowle brought him vivid news of her. As a fact, they had been charged with a misspelled letter to him from their conqueror. Grana sent word to Ferrall that she had long been grieved by the slack carelessness of his garrison of Ferrisowle. Such men, she held, were unworthy of their brisk lord. And so she had replaced them—with her own men.

She had not hurt his people—they had slept too soundly for any need of that. She was happy to send them back to him unscathed—seeing that they were of no sort of use to herself. For the rest—she was Ferrall's humble servant, and the hospitality of her castle of Ferrisowle would ever be extended to her good lord.

They say that " her good lord " was moved almost to frenzy by that insolent message, when the ill-written scrawl had been spelled out to him by a learned priest.

The Irish are all born courtiers, and this Ferrall O'Dowde, who maintained the state of a little prince, was used only to servile obedience and flattery.

Half a dozen castles upon the coast were in his hands, and he was little minded that their number should be lessened. He was a young man and handsome, filled hugely, even for an Irish chieftain, with a sense of his own magnificence and power. He could hardly believe that this woman, or any other, would dare to brave the O'Dowde!

It occurred to him, when the first mad tumult of his wrath had slackened, that a certain indulgence would become him. Wherefore, when he had soothed himself by the infliction of divers pains upon the disgraced garrison, he sent back this answer to Grana.

He was annoyed by her impudent act, but it would not become the O'Dowde to war with women. Also, he could but think that she had acted in jest. At the least he was willing to treat her insolence as a joke, seeing that, as he was told, she was young and not ill-favored. So let her come with due humility to Ballina to pray pardon for her offense, and in his clemency he would make no more of the matter.

Grana, ceasing suddenly to jest, sent brief word to the effect that she was otherwise engaged.

Whereupon Ferrall acted. He gathered his men and he marched upon Ferrisowle. Kildownet, as he knew, was practically impregnable against assault. Besides, Grana herself was at Ferrisowle. But he was to find that he had as well attacked Kildownet. Grana, as usual, had not wasted her time; Grana had strengthened the defenses of her new castle; Grana had brought thither her best men and had stored provisions for many months.

Also—the season was late for siege work (for which the Irish had ever lacked the patience), and Grana, in the most cowardly fashion, refused flatly to leave the shelter of her walls and fight against long odds. To Ferrall this refusal appeared unsportsmanlike, almost immoral.

In his rage he flung his men against the walls in a mad assault, leading the attack in person, for he was brave like all his race. It was a venture worthy of a rash and angry child. The Irish stormer is second to no fighter in the world in splendid dash, but there are limits to his powers.

From that attack Ferrall drew off his baffled, weary men at last. He was himself wounded, and certain of his bravest men he left perforce behind him. He withdrew to his stronghold of Ballina, fifteen miles up the coast, nursing his shame and rage. In his bruised vanity he was for a while as a child who displays his hurts and clamors aloud for sympathy and revenge. That is to say, he was an Irishman, with the qualities and defects of his blood.

And then, since force had failed, he turned to cunning. Once again he sent a message to Grana at Ferrisowle. It was too late in the year for regular fighting, he said, but he saw his way to a pretty deed of arms, if Grana were agreeable. She herself was debarred from fighting, of course, but men told great stories of the prowess of Bryan Teige, her servant. If those tales were true, let him bring ten picked men to a certain valley, midway between Ferrisowle and Ballina, and he himself would come thither with a like number.

Then would they fight with swords, and the victory should decide once for all the peaceful ownership of Ferrisowle. By the result of that contest he would abide, if Grana would do likewise, but, of course, it might be that Bryan Teige had less heart for the fighting than the brave tales made out!

Grana harkened to that message (Ferrall was no hand at penmanship), and laughed with thin, tightened lips. She suspected treachery, and in any case she had naught to gain by such knight-errantry.

Ferrisowle was in her grip, and she was little inclined to risk the stronghold upon such a boyish chance of battle.

Despite her Irish blood, Grana's rash daring was generally controlled by her cool head. But she knew Bryan Teige and his vanity and his hot lust for fight. She flung the lean giant a glance where he stood beside her chair with twitching hands and his somber eyes aglow.

"You shall not go, Bryan," she said coolly.

"Not go, lady?" he growled. "And this mongrel O'Dowde will be saying that I fear him and his lads!"

"You have proved time and again that you fear no man," she answered coldly. "I say that you shall not go. Look to it, Bryan—for you shall answer with your head for disobedience!"

Bryan Teige snarled like a balked wolf, then stalked in silence from the room. And Grana gave the ragged, long-haired herald her answer. It was curt, for Bryan Teige had stirred her anger. She did not love even a hint of defiance of her orders. She sent word to Ferrall O'Dowde that she had other uses for her men than the child's play that he proposed. And she thought that the matter was at an end. But Bryan Teige spoke privately with the herald ere he left the castle.

For the next two days he was more moody and silent than his wont, and during that time he did not practise abstinence. Men left him to his sullen drinking, not daring even to speak to him. Even Grana left him to himself, judging that he was sulking because of the forbidden fight.

It was characteristic of Grana that she never seriously entertained the possibility of her order being disobeyed. But upon the third day, that day which Ferrall O'Dowde had suggested for the meeting in the valley, Bryan Teige was missing.

And next morning definite news of him came in from no less a person than Ferrall O'Dowde. That news was the message with which this tale begins.

Ferrall's plan had succeeded more completely than he had dared to hope. Certainly, in his knowledge of his countrymen's weaknesses, he had relied upon Bryan Teige accepting his challenge. He had known that his cunning taunts would sting the man's half-childish vanity, and he had had good hopes that his picked men would be able to secure so valuable a prisoner. But he had not counted upon Bryan

Teige coming alone to the trysting place!

If only one might roll back the drab years for one short half hour and see for oneself that meeting of which men yet speak in the long winter nights! To see that lonely valley beneath the sweep of the gray, mist-clad Irish hills, and that group of armed men waiting for the fight like quivering, crouching dogs! More than all, to see the single gaunt, ragged figure ride recklessly upon its fate!

They did not take Bryan Teige with ease. The death - seeker justified his grim name, the long, deadly sword and the long, lean arms swept clear for a while a circle that none might pass. The gritting clash of steel rang up to the brooding hills as the giant fought berserk, with mad, wild, laughing glee.

Ferrall O'Dowde had given stern orders that the man must not be slain—as well had you tried to take a tiger with bare hands! Not till those orders were clean forgotten in the red whirl of battle did it seem that the eleven might prevail against the one. Then at last, when his arms were numb and weary with the fearful strain, Bryan Teige went crashing down, with half a dozen deep wounds upon him, with the hilt of his snapped sword yet fast gripped in his hand.

They bound up his wounds and looked to their own, and carried him in triumph to Ballina. But the gray mist from the hills swept down into the silent valley, and wrapped as in a shroud the stiffening bodies of three men. Their lives were the price that had been paid for the capture of Bryan Teige.

They say that Grana received that taunting message in a fashion strangely quiet. She neither raved nor stormed, but her face whitened a little and her lips set tight. She saw her plans ruined and her pride humiliated by the disobedience of her servant. Her jest with Ferrall had grown strangely bitter upon her lips.

But Grana—and the quality is rare in women—could face an ill turn of fortune with the calm of the good gambler. She dismissed Ferrall's herald for the time, and she looked around her at the faces of Red Donell and the rest.

"What would you have me do?" she asked, and her voice was almost gentle.

Red Donell gnawed his thick fingers. Red Donell scratched his tangled, fiery head. Wisdom would not always come at a moment's notice to Red Donell. But his muscles were never slack.

"It would seem, lady, that Ferrisowle—that Ferrisowle must be given up!" he said doubtfully. And the others murmured their agreement.

But Grana answered with curtness:

"I will not yield up Ferrisowle—I had sooner die!" she snapped, and her long fingers gripped together as though they held the castle in their clutch.

Red Donell and the others recognized that tone.

"Then bid us storm Ballina Castle, lady," he said in a voice of relief. The crude simplicity of the plan was pleasing to his mind. There was little subtlety about Red Donell.

"You are a fool!" Grana told him with swift discourtesy. "There is no hope of a surprise, and as well might you try to pull down the castle with your hands. You should know by now that it is not my habit to waste men."

Red Donell shrugged his thick shoulders. He recognized vaguely that his mistress, when in trouble, was ill to deal with.

"Then—then it seems that Bryan must die!" he said sullenly.

Grana's eyes began to gleam.

"Because it is by his folly that we have come to this pass?" she asked with a curious smoothness.

"Aye, lady," Red Donell answered, fancying in his folly that he had pleased his mistress. Life was wondrously cheap in Ireland, and he himself owed little loyalty to Bryan Teige. The others growled their assent. The Irish are too fickle and light of head for

stubborn friendship. Then Grana rose swiftly to her feet, and they slunk back before her eyes.

"So you would sacrifice Bryan Teige?" she asked. "You would leave him to die in Ballina? I tell you that I would cheerfully give you, one and all, to death, ere he should come to harm!"

Then her anger choked her, and for a moment she glared at them in silence.

"Who are you that you should dare to judge his folly?" she snarled at last. "Are you not the men who, when my father lay dead, forgot your faith and loyalty with such swiftness — who turned upon me in my trouble? You have forgotten that, I do not doubt; but I—I do not forget! Even as I do not forget the one man who stood beside me, who was true to me when all others failed, who risked his life for me blithely. And that man was Bryan Teige. Oh, you do well to advise that I should leave him to his death!"

It is not suggested that Grana in that moment was just or reasonable. She was a woman and sorely tried. Red Donell bowed his head sullenly and spoke no word of the other proposals that he had made. He recognized that the moment was unseasonable for argument.

"I tell you that he shall not die!" Grana cried. "If I must go forth to aid him without a man behind me he shall not die!"

It will be observed that Grana, like many another woman in trouble, clutched at rhetoric rather than reason.

"What would you have us do, lady?" Red Donell asked almost timidly.

"You?" Grana cried. "I would have you be silent, for the dolts and helpless fools you are! Go forth and maze your brains with the liquor that you love, seeing that they are useless for aught else!"

And they went forth from her audience chamber, slinking like whipped dogs. Grana did not rule her people entirely by her charm. She sat alone when they were gone, racking her brains for a plan that would not come. Only two things were plain to her. She would not yield Ferrisowle, and she would not leave Bryan Teige to die.

For the rest—well, she had a week. Ah, and she would use it—she would not sit there idle! An idea had come to her that would at least give action to her limbs and brain. Oh! anything in the world, any risk or peril, was better than sitting there in impotence, brooding over his sore mischance.

Grana summoned her serving-woman and gave her certain orders that filled her with amazement. Then the two worked feverishly for the half of an hour, and when their task was done Grana bade her woman bring Red Donell to the chamber.

He came in some trepidation, prepared for almost any mood or caprice from his wilful lady. But for what he found he was not prepared. For Grana had vanished, and in her chair there sat a peasant woman, middle-aged and hideous, who spoke with Grana's own imperious voice!

Grana had been brave beyond the wont of women. She had cast aside for a while her beauty and her youth. She had stained the clear gold of her face a harsh and hideous brown; she had drawn wrinkles upon its smoothness; she had marred one cheek with the dark snarl of a scar. Her black, glossy hair she had tangled into elf-locks, and its splendid plenty she had hidden beneath a ragged shawl. Her hands were stained and roughened, and her slender feet were bare. Her clothes were humble and sadly worn.

Only her dark, keen eyes were unalterable. They were bright with laughter as they looked upon Red Donell's heavy, bewildered face.

"Donell," she said smoothly, "let Ferrall's herald be fed and courteously treated and dismissed. I have no answer for his master."

"Aye, lady, it shall be done," Red Donell stammered.

"You know not what to make of me, Donell? Well, I may not sit idly here.

I am going to Ballina to spy out the land. I will not trust the thick wits of any of our spies. Let a coracle and three rowers be ready within the hour."

Red Donell's massive jaw dropped as he stared and listened.

"You are going to Ballina, lady?" he gasped. "Nay, it is madness! If your disguise be pierced, what will be your plight—and ours? Lady, I pray you to give up this plan—to let me go in your stead!"

Grana frowned a trifle.

"You will hold this castle while I am gone," she said coolly. "You are better at the fighting than the scheming, Donell. And that red bull's head and neck of yours would need a thick disguise! For the rest—see that the boat be ready. I would land within a mile of Ballina when the dusk is falling."

And in the dusk she landed. She left her men with the coracle in a little creek, and alone she set out toward the castle. Do you see her trudging through the twilight upon her soft white feet along an infamous rutted track? I believe that in her heart she reveled in this venture, although as yet she had formed no definite plan of action, although she was well aware of the utter peril toward which she moved.

For things far worse than death might threaten a woman in the wild Ireland of those days. But it was to her daring fancy, it tickled her splendid self-reliance, this lonely hazard into the enemy's very clutch, with naught to lean on save her own courage and resource. Grana was at her best and happiest in such an hour, when for a while she had discarded her cunning policies and prudent scheming.

She came without adventure to the castle, and through the gray evening mists she peered up at its gaunt, towering walls. Somewhere within them lay Bryan Teige, wounded and a prisoner —Bryan Teige who had been faithful to her in her sorest need. Grana was no saint, but at least she could be a friend who would not fail. She had no thought in that moment for the man's reckless folly and costly disobedience.

She was there to aid him and to pluck him from this trap. Nor did she think of the odds against her, of how pitiful seemed her weak woman's strength beneath those lofty walls. Grana was never apt at self pity, nor was she to be cowed with ease.

She turned away at last. Perhaps upon the morrow she would seek humble service in the castle, or—half a dozen vague schemes were forming in her ready brain. But to-night she would find shelter in a cottage. From the talk of its inmates she might win information of value.

She had marked a likely hovel as she passed upon her way to the castle. Just such a low, white hut as you may see by scores in the Ireland of to-day. Grana found her way thither, and was at once made welcome with the true royal hospitality of the Irish. That also does not change with the gray, fleeting years.

She had her tale, of course, and a little bundle in her hand. She was upon her way on foot to visit a sick sister in a certain village to the north. She was brought into the one living and sleeping room, where, through the blue, fragrant reek of the peat fire, children and animals were dimly visible. Indeed and indeed, the Irish are the one unchanging race of the world.

The best of the benches was the guest's by right, and the best of the simple food was set before her. Grana knew her people well, and was at once at ease with the shrewdly simple man and woman of the little house.

Two small, ragged children stared timidly at her for a while, and then, with a sudden rush, forgot their fears. Grana played with them and peered about her as she ate. She was puzzled by but one thing in the dim chamber.

There was nothing strange about that cradle of dark bog-oak in which a sturdy baby was sleeping, but what was the meaning of that other cradle,

richly carved and bound with silver, which stood nearer to the smoldering peat, and held a child some twelve months old whose garments seemed to be of silk?

Grana wondered, the while she played her part like the born actress that she was.

There came a sudden knock at the door, and a tall, red-headed serving-man put his shock head within. "The O'Dowde!" he announced pompously, and stood aside to let the great man enter. And Grana gave a little gasp, despite her self-control, as Ferrall himself came in.

He was a tall man, so that he must bend his head beneath the stone lintel of the door. He was very richly clad in a fashion that would be garish to modern eyes, and his sword-hilt was of silver gilt. He was handsome, as has been said, and his manner to these humble folk was the happy blend of dignity and familiarity that the Irish ever love from those above them.

Grana stood up with the rest, and Ferrall shot one keen glance at her face. It sent a thrill through her, for she knew well what recognition would mean. She dropped her eyes humbly, and Ferrall listened to a whispered explanation of her presence from her host. It satisfied him apparently, for he gave her a courteous word as he passed toward the richer of the two cradles.

Grana watched him with eager curiosity scarcely veiled, and saw him swing up the sleeping baby in his arms. It woke and laughed as though it knew who held it. Grana's brain was working swiftly. Why should Ferrall come to this humble cottage and show his affection for the child in this fashion? He was laughing proudly as he kissed it. It must surely be his little son! Ah, she had been dull to be puzzled. She should have guessed that this baby belonged to the lord of Ballina, and had been put out with foster parents, after the Irish fashion.

And in a flash she saw the plan for which she had been groping, for which she had ventured more than her life. Here was a most precious hostage that should be set against the life of Bryan Teige!

For the actual methods she must trust to the wits that God had given her, but the end was plain at last. And her pride would be saved—ah! that touched Grana of Achill most nearly! In her sudden joy and triumph she was very near to laughing aloud.

But not too soon she set guard upon her lips. She stood humbly in her corner whilst the foster-mother spoke to Ferrall of her charge, and she forced herself to curtsy with bowed head when the great man went forth at last. And all the while her brain was seeking and rejecting schemes.

It was the woman of the cottage who gave her her cue in the end. Her curiosity and ready superstition had been aroused by something in Grana's appearance. From the first she had regarded her with an odd mixture of nervous fascination and fear. She had whispered to her husband that there was surely something fearsome about a woman with such bright young eyes set in an old face. And when they gathered about the red peat after Ferrall's departure she began to speak in a tentative fashion of the little people. It was as though she would draw out her guest to talk.

And Grana rose to the bait, swift to see how she might work upon the superstition that is still almost as strong in the heart of the Irish peasant as it was three hundred years ago.

Beyond all question Grana herself was not free from a shrinking belief in the fairies and spirits that haunted the mist-clad hills, but she was strong enough of heart to dare to use these awesome beings for her own ends. And so, when the woman spoke indirectly of the fairies, she answered readily in a low, earnest voice:

"Aye, it is upon such a night as this that they love to be abroad. Who should know it better than I?"

The woman and her husband crossed themselves.

" Will you have seen them lately, acushla?" the former asked fearfully.

" I see them often," Grana answered impressively. And she went on to tell a story, a really awe-inspiring story, of how, as she lay in bed one night in her cottage, the door had opened noiselessly, despite the bolts, and something had come in.

It had seated itself by the fireside, and in the glow of the peat she had seen its huge, shapeless bulk. Her blood had run icy cold with terror, but somehow she had kept her senses until the thing rose and moved toward her. She had caught a glimpse of its dim face, part animal, part devil. Then the room had whirled round, and for two long days she had lain as one dead.

It was a good story, told with a rare wealth of vaguely gruesome and suggestive detail, and I only regret that I have not space for it in full. It must suffice to say that the mere telling of it shook Grana's own nerves very sorely. As for the man and woman, it reduced them to a state of quivering terror that yet had in it a certain element of dreadful joy.

" That would be a demon," the woman quavered at last. The dear saints defend us from such! But the good people—have you had dealings with them, O stranger woman?"

Yes, it appeared that Grana had. They had stopped her one wonderful night upon the hills, tiny men and women marvelously clad, and they had told her that they loved her and were her friends. More than this (and Grana's voice became more richly earnest), they had given her a certain unfailing charm by which she could bring good luck and lasting health to all children. Here Grana broke off most artistically and gazed dreamily at the red gleam of the fire.

There was a hush of awe, and then the mother found courage to speak, after a loving glance at the humble cradle of bog-oak.

" What is the charm—may you tell it to us, acushla?" she whispered coaxingly.

" I tell it to few," Grana answered doubtfully. " It is not well to squander the little people's gifts. But it is one of their nights to-night, and I may feel them in the air. Upon such a night as this, when the moon is quivering behind the dancing, hurrying clouds, she who knows the charm must go forth alone into the air with the thrice lucky baby in her arms.

" When the moon shines brightly for the moment she must whisper certain words, which I dare not tell you. Then, when the clouds sweep once again before the moon, and the world is dark, the little people will come forth and stroke the baby's face with their small fingers. That is all, but while it lives that baby will be blessed."

There was another pause, and then the woman, having whispered to her husband, spoke again.

" Will you, stranger woman, of your great goodness, bring this fortune upon our baby?" she asked very humbly.

Grana appeared to hesitate, and then—

" Yes, I will do it," she promised with impulsive generosity. " You have been good to me. Each of these babies in turn shall hear the whispered charm."

The man muttered something, as though in doubt, but the woman brushed aside his shadowy fears.

" Shall we not bring a blessing upon the child of our lord?" she asked indignantly. " Should not the O'Dowde bless us for ever if we do this thing? But he is our lord, and his child should be more to us than our own. So let the baby go out first to meet the little people, and then, if all is well with him, the little lord shall have their blessing."

The father agreed to this with some timidity, and, trembling herself a little, the mother put her own baby into Grana's arms. We in our wisdom may sneer at the credulous folly of the act, but there was courage in it also.

And Grana, smiling to herself, and yet strangely nervous, carried the child into the misty night. They say that it was the first baby she had ever held. For five minutes, it may be, she stood beneath the cloudy sky, and then she brought her charge back to the anxious pair who waited.

As it chanced, the baby was laughing as they returned, and the sight removed all fear from its parents. Surely the little people had been pleased with their wonderful baby and would be kind! With muttered prayers of gratitude they gave their foster-child to Grana, and prayed that she would win for it a like portion of good luck and happiness.

And Grana went forth.

I cannot but be sorry for those two good, simple people who had meant so well. For five minutes they waited and thought no harm. Five more went by and still they suspected nothing. When at last they mastered their fears of the little people and went forth to seek the stranger woman and the precious child —well, as you may fancy, it was then too late. I do not care to think of their wild, heart-broken search through the long, dark, fairy-haunted night.

And Grana? The moon was hidden, and somehow she lost her way. She was to pay for her theft with some long moments of real heart-chilling fear. For, when she had wandered blindly for a while, she heard voices, and had but just time to crouch beneath a bush before two shadowy figures loomed in sight.

Grana drew her shawl more closely about the child in her arms, and crouched like a hunted hare. And the moon chose that moment of all others to break dimly forth behind the clouds! For the second time that night Grana was within a yard or so of Ferrall O'Dowde.

In that moment at least she knew the sickness of fear. For the child was awake, and oh! what if it should cry? But it did not do so, and Ferrall went slowly past toward the castle. And Grana rose, shivering still as though with ague, and saw her path clear before her in the moonlight.

Afterward—you see her speeding barefooted through the night, heedless of stones and weariness, but strangely careful that her small, warm burden should escape all hurt. You see her holding the baby awkwardly at first, and then with a greater skill. For in such matters a woman has instinct for guide.

You see her gain the boat at last, and rouse her slumbering rowers, and then glide swiftly with her tiny hostage through the fragrant night to Ferrisowle.

And the rest needs but little telling. For the message that Grana sent to Ferrall O'Dowde brought that great man to his knees with speed, and he hurried to Ferrisowle bearing with him his late prisoner, Bryan Teige, weak with his wounds and strangely humble. Ferrisowle and even his own vanity weighed little in Ferrall's eyes against the safety of his son.

But one thing is curious and must be told. They say that Grana was loath to give up the baby, that she delayed the surrender of her small hostage in the strangest fashion. They say that the child was her treasured plaything until the anxious father came. You had scarcely guessed that of Grana, remembering other things in which she took delight. But women are beyond all rules.

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## CHAPTER V.

### Grana Meets One Prouder Than Herself.

LEST it should be thought that Grana in her triumphs was something more than mortal, this story tells of her crushing humiliation and defeat. Incidentally it serves also to show, as I fancy, that she could be greater in failure than success. Which quality is somewhat rare in this limp world.

But there was little thought of failure in Grana's heart that bright spring

morning, as the Red Horse leaped the glinting wave ridges in eager chase. As a fact, Grana at this time was a trifle drunken with success. It had dulled her prudence, and in her Irish vanity she had forgotten that it is apt to breed many foes.

But Grana was out for diversion and amusement, Grana rated this pirate sport of hers high above even the plunder that it brought, Grana had no thought save for the fleeing hapless merchant ship behind whose creaming wake the Red Horse plunged and tore. It was a true Irish morning, sunny between dark rain showers, and its keen sparkle and the scent and zest of the sea fired her blood.

So you see Grana the pirate, Grana the sea rover, intent upon her darling trade.

But that merchant ship was strangely swift, and for once the Red Horse had almost met her match. The home lair of Achill Sound was left far to the south, dark Slievemore was dim in the misty distance, and still the Red Horse gained only foot by foot upon her prey.

But the southeast wind freshened to half a gale, the Red Horse lay almost gunwale under and hissed like a sea snake through the gray rollers, and by noon she was within short gunshot of the reeling, staggering trader. Grana, light-footed and agile upon the slippery decks, made her way forward to where the men were clustered about a culverin in the bows.

"Give her a shot, Bryan, and let us end this child's play," she ordered, and her dark eyes were gleaming beneath her spray-wet hair.

"It is ill weather for marksmanship, lady," Bryan Teige grumbled, and then: "By the Red Steel, whither is she heading?"

The trader had put down her helm and was plunging, close-hauled, straight for the land.

"Will they run her ashore to escape us?" Bryan Teige asked in angry wonder. "No, by all the saints, they are heading for yon opening!"

The dark-jagged hills came down to the sea's verge, but Bryan Teige was pointing to a narrow streak of smooth water that ran inland beyond the tumbling foam. It had been hidden from view by a black snarling foreland. The fool glanced doubtfully at his mistress.

"It may be ill to follow, lady," he said. "It were to run our heads into a noose perchance. We are far from our own country."

For a moment Grana hesitated and then her red lips closed firm.

"We will follow, Bryan!" she cried, and she laughed aloud in reckless glee. "Though all our foes be waiting, we will follow! Shall Grana of Achill lose a prize that is within her very hand?" And there was that in her laughter and her eyes that fired her men.

When Grana of Achill led there were few who cared to lag behind. They sent a mad cheer ringing across the water, and only Bryan Teige scowled and muttered forebodingly as the Red Horse made for the frowning land. But he dared make no further remonstrance. Since he had put himself in the clutches of Ferrall O'Dowde, as has been told, he had been somewhat out of favor with his imperious lady. Grana treated him now almost as she treated Red Donell and the rest. And no man knew of the fierce pain that Bryan Teige hid in his sullen heart because of his disgrace.

It was apparent that the trader's crew were no strangers to those menacing waters. With never a check their craft held on, and the Red Horse must follow since Grana of Achill willed it. The narrow passage between dark, close, huddling cliffs was made with safety, and up the smooth water of the long inlet the two vessels skimmed with no more than a hundred yards between them. The tide had lately turned, and against it the Red Horse drew steadily upon the fugitive. Her prize was almost in her grip.

Grana was in the bows among her shouting men, when Bryan Teige plucked at her arm. She turned im-

patiently at his touch, and then for a long moment she stood as though turned to stone, taking in that which the fool alone had seen. Three war-ships had rounded the point and were making up the inlet behind them. The Red Horse was cut off from the sea. It was Bryan Teige who spoke.

"It is in my mind that we are in a trap, lady," he said. "Likely enough those three lay hid behind the northern point of this accursed creek. And there is the decoy that has lured us blindly into the snare! Harken to them now!"

It was true enough. The crew of the merchant ship had seen their allies, and their exultant mocking cries told their own tale. And now men swarmed from below upon her decks and her bows swung round. The four ships closed upon the Red Horse, and the gulls rose screaming at the first roar of their guns. Upon all their decks men were howling and dancing for fierce joy. Was not Grana of Achill beguiled and trapped at last?

But they scarcely knew Grana of Achill. For one little moment longer she had stood in thought and her brain was clear and keen. This inlet and this country were strange to her and hostile. If she brushed past the single ship she would but run into greater peril with little hope of final escape. Well then—there was but one alternative! And its bare-naked daring thrilled to flame the wild blood that ran in Grana's veins.

"Get to the guns, lads!" she called, and her eyes were like torches upon a wintry night. "And you, Bryan, aft, to the helm with me! We will break a way through these rogues who think to trap us, and out in open water who may hope to follow my Red Horse?"

She had the knack of heartening men with her own wondrous spirit, so that a forlorn hope was painted with the colors of certain victory. Her crew answered with an exultant roar as the Red Horse surged round upon her heel. The tide was strong beneath her, and as her sails bellied out a thick white frill of foam creamed high before her bows. The sun broke from dark leaden clouds as she tore down into that unequal fight.

It shone upon the men crouching by their guns, upon Bryan Teige clutching the long tiller, upon Grana of Achill swaying beside him, fearless and lovely as a goddess of war. And her men, beneath the spell of her high courage and her magic beauty, yelled and yelled again, and Bryan Teige, freeing one hand from the tiller, drew his long sword and tossed it flashing high into air, and caught it as it fell.

So they sped down upon their fate.

The crews of those three war-ships may well have thought them mad. But they prepared to give them royal greeting. The Red Horse had the vantage of wind and tide, but they might hope to block the narrow channel. When her sharp bow was fifty yards away the three war-ships shivered up into the wind and their broadsides crashed.

The Red Horse reeled like a living thing that feels a mortal blow, and for a moment she swerved from her course. A huge splinter had struck Bryan Teige and stretched him upon the deck. But Grana caught the tiller in the nick of time and strove to peer through the blinding smoke.

Her ears were deafened by the smash of spars, the screams of the wounded, and the roar of her own guns. She held the Red Horse desperately upon her course, and she cried aloud half consciously as a gap opened in the dim line before her. The helmsman of the middle ship was down— There was a jarring, grinding crash as the Red Horse tore her way for freedom.

They fired into her as she broke past; they flung grapnels, men even leapt aboard her—but she fought free. The grapnel ropes were slashed away and borne upon tide and wind, battered and quivering and sorely hurt, the Red Horse staggered past the headlands out to the open sea.

But she had paid a bitter price for freedom. Grana looked along her splin-

tered, furrowed decks and her first warm triumph died away. One half of her men at least were killed or hurt, and even as she looked the mainmast, sore wounded, came crashing down. The Red Horse wallowed in the trough almost a wreck, and already she was deeper in the water.

The saints alone knew how many shots she had received in her stout hull. What state were they in for flight or further battle? And yet soon enough they must fight once more or yield.

Yield? There was something in the very word that roused Grana of Achill from her moment's despair with the courage of a wounded lion. She called a man to the helm, then ran forward, and by voice and example spurred heart into such of her crew as could stand upon their feet.

Under her direction they cut away the wreck of the mainmast and gave steerage way to the Red Horse. And then one gleam of good cheer came to Grana in her bitter strait. For Bryan Teige had regained his senses and staggered doggedly to his feet once more.

"What is your counsel, Bryan?" Grana asked.

The fool looked about him, keen, resourceful, and indomitable as ever when things were at their worst.

"We seemed to have filled their hands with work for the moment, lady," he said. "But they will be upon us shortly. We cannot run, and the Red Horse will sink beneath our feet if we try to fight her. It will be well to make for shore—or stay! Let us run for yon small island beyond the point! See you the gray ruin upon its crag? There shall we make it good against them for a time at least!"

It was clearly their one hope. Grana nodded without speech and the sluggish Red Horse was steered for the little island.

Ere they reached it the sails of three of their pursuers came into view. The fourth had sunk within the inlet and the others had tarried to save her crew. Now they gained rapidly upon the Red Horse, but her start enabled her to make the island first.

She was run ashore in a tiny bay, and then with all speed the wounded were landed, together with such water and provisions as might be carried. Grana urged on the work, while Bryan Teige made his swift way to the gray shell of ancient stone upon the rocks above.

He returned with the welcome news that one tower was sound and might be held even by their small force. And then began the slow-burdened clamber up the narrow winding path. But they must fight once more, despite their wounds and aching weariness, ere their sorry refuge might be gained.

For now their pursuers were hard upon them. They had run their ships into the cove beside the Red Horse, and were splashing through the water with fierce yells. Bryan Teige gathered six of his hardiest men and spoke swiftly to Grana.

"I pray you, lady, to hasten these other to shelter and to be ready to cover our retreat," he said. "Here at the turn of the path we will hold back these mongrel dogs for a little while."

And Grana obeyed. She was little practised in obedience, and she was not apt at leaving others to face peril, but here she had no choice. She touched the fool's shoulder not ungently with her hand. "You have wiped out the old score with handsomeness, Bryan!" she murmured briefly, and then she turned away to spur the laggards. Bryan Teige looked after her for a moment with deep-set glowing eyes, and then he spat upon his hands and spoke with cheerful blasphemy to the men behind him.

I confess to some little enthusiasm for Bryan Teige. To my fancy he looms very clear and vivid, standing there with grim laughter, stubborn and gaunt as the gray rocks above him, gripping his long sword in his scarred hands. Men did not love him overmuch in peaceful hours—they were moved to prudently secret scorn by his drunken buffoonery and crazy bragging, but in

such an hour as this the men he led came near to worship him.

His gleeful baresack courage and his long, lean arms were worth a dozen swords. But—he roused little enthusiasm of affection in those who fought against him!

They came upon him now, clambering up the winding path expectant of easy victory, and the welcome he made them was bitter upon their lips. The way was narrow, his sword sweep was worthy of Thor himself, and the men he led were roused to emulation.

Till their arms grew stiff and numb they held that path and then they gave way slowly, like snarling, reluctant wolves whipped back from food. At the crest, when their work was done, Bryan Teige dismissed them one and all to shelter, and for one or, it may be, two minutes he stood alone, beating down all who came.

Then with a shrill yell he ran like a gaunt hound for the tower, and as he came Grana and all her men, wounded and hale, cheered him wildly with all their hearts. They covered his retreat with their arquebuses, and, sorely spent, he reached the great door, and they wedged it home behind him. And upon the stairway Grana met him and caught his wet hands in her own.

But they had little enough time for speech or praise. The tower that they must hold was square and of two stories, with huge walls slitted for arrow fire. One straight, narrow stairway led from the outer door to the level platform at the top.

There the wounded men crouched behind the parapet and fired down upon the attacking force who already were thundering at the door—upon the stairway Grana and Bryan Teige, with perhaps fifteen uncrippled men, prepared to stem the rush that would surely come.

It came when the stout outer door splintered before the crashing ax blows. As it fell a reckless wave of men plunged jostling in with whoops of triumph. But only two might mount abreast, and above them on the stairway men were lying above each other with their fingers on the trigger.

As the attackers entered the arquebuses flamed and bellowed, and at that range even those clumsy weapons were effective. The head of the column shredded clean away, and for a moment the survivors faltered. Then another volley thundered, for loaded pieces had been handed down to the defenders. The shades and qualities of courage stand revealed at such a moment.

From the attacking force three nameless desperates broke clear and reeled through the choking smoke up the steep stair, to be flung back with crashing blows; the remainder turned pell-mell for the blessed open air, swearing that it was death to attempt the storm. And a short breathing space was granted to the little force within.

They did not fail to use it. An idea had come to Grana, and she set her men with axes and bars to uproot the stone stairway beneath the first story of the tower. Soon a chasm yawned below them, and then, leaving men upon guard, Grana and her lieutenant climbed to the summit of the tower.

"Who have we against us, Bryan?" she asked. "If my eyes did not fail me, I noted a certain standard through the smoke as the ships closed."

"Aye, lady," Bryan Teige answered gravely, "it is Domhnall O'Flaherty who has set this trap for us. Now it is in my mind that his terms will not be light."

Grana nodded with tightened lips and a little flush upon her cheek.

"You are right," she said; "this will be a glad day for Domhnall."

The man of whom they spoke was cousin to Murrough of the Axes. Also, he was a noted rebel, as the luckless lord deputy could have told, and, perhaps, the most powerful chieftain in all Connaught. He was one of the many who aspired to Grana's hand—at news of her beauty and her growing power.

But Grana, as has been noted, had been somewhat uplifted by her recent triumphs. It will never be pretended

by this chronicler that she was free from vanity. She had declined in her pride even to see this suitor, who had wooed her in so confident a fashion, and—that blow to such a man as Domhnall was not one lightly to be forgiven.

The pride of an Irish chieftain was a quality that may be done justice to by no mere clumsy words. Now it appeared that Domhnall was in a position to repay his grudge in full.

"What may we do, Bryan?" Grana asked after a pause. "We have checked them for a while."

"Aye, lady," Bryan Teige answered. "It is in my mind that we have sickened them of attack. There remains for them another way."

Grana nodded. "They will seek to starve us out," she said. "What food and water have we?"

"Enough for a bare week, maybe," Bryan Teige answered soberly.

"Much may chance in a week," Grana said thoughtfully. "I would that Red Donell knew of our plight."

"Aye, much may chance," Bryan Teige agreed, and then he added slowly: "But if nought chances, lady — what then?"

Grana looked him in the eyes.

"I will hold this place until I die," she said very quietly. "Do you think that Grana of Achill will surrender living to the man who has planned this trap?"

Bryan Teige's grim face brightened.

"Nay, I did not think it, lady," he answered almost gently. "And there is one at least who will stand beside you to the end — drunkard and vain babbler as he is. I ask no better ending. Indeed and indeed, I have seldom found this cheerless world so hugely to my taste."

Grana held out her hand with a little smile, and the fool caught it clumsily to his lips.

"So you were but trying me, Bryan," she said. "Well, it may be that you will find Grana as stubborn as yourself. And now—I would think a while."

She left Bryan Teige on watch and passed to a tiny cell-like chamber upon the first story of the tower. And there, with the door fast closed upon her, she hid her face in her hands and cried as she had seldom cried before. Because this was her first taste of bitter failure; because of the lives that had been wasted to her blind vanity; because of her weariness and shame; and, most of all, because of the triumph that she had given to the man whom she had scorned.

Then she dried her eyes and went forth among her men with heartening words and brave laughter on her lips. And not one of them might guess that their lady had known a moment's weakness.

A priest with a flag of truce was seeking audience with the leader of the little garrison. Eight days had passed and every scrap of food and almost every drop of water was exhausted. They had been weary days. When they found that the stairway was destroyed the attacking force had ceased their attempts to storm the tower.

They had erected rude huts and tents of sail-cloth and had prepared to starve Grana and her men into surrender. And then for the besieged had begun a time of waiting peculiarly hard for men of the hot and sanguine Irish blood.

They must subsist on scanty food and anticipate the day when the last crumb should be eaten. They must abstain from the fighting that was almost the one keen pleasure and excitement that their rude lives held. They must brood in idleness upon what their fate would be when hunger brought their proud lady to her knees. It might be well enough for her upon that day, but for them— Little mercy or quarter was dealt out to humble fighting men in those harsh days.

And so, being Irishmen, they had grumbled sorely as was not unnatural. They had whispered angrily to each other of the blind folly that had led them into such a trap. And then— Grana of Achill would come on her

rounds! Pale she might be and thin with sore privation, but the light in her dark eyes was yet undimmed, and her magic smile was dauntless as in her days of brightest triumph.

And ever she had words of praise and comfort, ever she would hold out the hope of some vaguest chance that should bring rescue; ever she had some jest that turned their scowls perforce to grins. They never guessed her own heart sickness—they never knew how dead was all real hope within her.

But to the wounded she brought new life, and, sick or well, they strove like dogs to touch the skirts of her gown as she passed by, and felt themselves the stronger for the contact. Oh, Grana of Achill was great in those dark days!

And now Domhnall O'Flaherty had made his first sign. It was as though he had calculated to a nicety their stock of food. Grana consented to see the priestly herald, and he was drawn up by a rope to the first story of the tower.

He was a short, dark man of some corpulence. He glanced without fear at the gaunt, fierce faces around him, and then he bowed courteously enough to Grana.

"Lady, my message is for your ears alone," he said.

Bryan Teige muttered an angry warning. Bryan had sadly little love for priests or trust in their good faith. He hinted that this one might bear a hidden dagger.

But Grana smiled disdainfully and the priest spoke out clearly.

"My sacred office should allay your fears," he said; "but, in any case, I am in your power. There would be no escape for me if I intended treachery."

"That is so," Grana agreed smoothly, and she motioned to her men to draw out of earshot. "I am at your service, good father."

They must have made a curious contrast, those two, the plump priest and the woman with her dark, haggard beauty, alone upon the summit of the gray tower beneath the gray Irish sky. They say that Grana was like to Bryan Teige in her regrettable want of love for priests.

"I fear that things are ill with you, my daughter," the holy man began. "From your pale face and the leanness of your men, I judge—"

Grana held up her slim, brown hand.

"Your pardon," she said with rather perilous calm. "I had not guessed that your mission was to spy upon our straits. If I had thought that—"

"It is not so," the priest assured her hurriedly.

"It is well," Grana answered civilly. "There is a certain servant of mine, long-limbed and gaunt—you may well have marked him. I pray that your reverence will not give him cause to suspect your honesty. He has an evil prejudice against your cloth. But—I await your errand."

The priest was a brave man, or he had scarce stood where he did, but it was a fact that he had marked Bryan Teige and the unholy light in his eyes. It may be that he paled a trifle.

"I come from Domhnall O'Flaherty, as you may guess," he said sullenly. "He would have speech with you, lady."

Grana laughed.

"Then let him come to me," she answered. "I promise him safe passage."

"He would have you go to him," the priest said. "Nay, lady, I pray you for your own sake and for sake of your men, not to refuse with scorn. Domhnall would speak with you, but he swears by his honor and all the saints that you shall return as freely as you came. Think, lady, I charge you, ere you refuse."

And Grana thought with lowering brows. The suggestion was hateful to her pride, but—but—

"How may I leave my men and go to him?" she asked curtly at last.

"He would have you come as secretly as may seem good to you," the priest answered. "This very night, if the moon is clouded, I will be beneath these walls. At midnight you may be low-

ered down by one you trust, and I will lead you to Domhnall. Lady, I assure you solemnly that, whatever chances, you may trust to my master's honor."

Again Grana reflected with hands strained together. There might be little to gain from this interview, but there was naught to lose, save only the hurt to her pride. And it might be that—oh! who knew what might chance from this strange night-errand? Perhaps, even to herself, she scarcely admitted how eagerly she clasped at one tiny gleam of hope. But at least in a moment she looked swiftly up.

"Tell your master that I will come to him, relying upon his honor," she said sourly, and she motioned to the watchful Bryan Teige that the audience was at an end.

It was Bryan Teige alone whom she took into her confidence that night. He was sorely against the plan—sorely distrustful of priests and Domhnall and all the world, but Grana would not harken to his pleading. She had said that she would go, and there the matter ended.

But she would hide her going from the rest of her men, lest her absence should dispirit them or awake their ready Irish suspicion of treachery. The night was dark as it chanced, and she had arranged that Bryan Teige should take the watch at midnight upon the summit of the tower. And so there was none to see when the fool fastened the rope beneath her arms and lowered her noiselessly to the ground. As she loosed it a hand touched her own and the priest's voice spoke through the darkness.

"It is well, lady; I pray you to follow me without noise," he said.

None spoke with them upon their way, although they met shadowy figures and passed tents and huts from whose chinks came gleams of light. They came at last to a larger pavilion of canvas, and here the priest halted.

"My master awaits you within, lady," he said quietly; then drew aside the flap and turned and slid away into the night. Grana, left alone, clenched her hands and crossed the threshold of the lighted tent.

It held only one occupant. He had been seated at a little table of wood, but he rose courteously at her entrance. Grana looked at him steadfastly and recognized that here was no common man. He might have been thirty years of age, and he was no giant, although his spare, well-knit frame held promise of activity and strength.

But it was his face that caught the eye. Its broad forehead, high-jutting nose, and firm, square jaw told surely of both pride and will. Also, it might be, of a cool self-control rare among the men of Grana's stormy race. For one little moment, for the first time in her life, Grana wondered if at last she had met her master. Then she hastened to fling aside the thought with anger.

"Greeting, Domhnall," she said steadily. "As you see, I have accepted your invitation."

Domhnall inclined his head.

"I thank you, lady," he said gravely. "Ere we speak together, I pray that you will accept my poor hospitality."

He motioned to a chair beside the table. Grana saw food and wine and the gleam of silver, and was conscious of wolfish pangs of hunger. For two days she had scarcely eaten, and she was growing weak. Then, with a great effort of her will, she turned her eyes away. She would not eat while her men were starving.

"I thank you, Domhnall," she said, "but I did not come hither to eat. I would hear what you would say to me. Nay, I will stand while we speak together."

Domhnall bowed and made no effort to persuade her. He had marked her hollow cheeks, her trembling hands, and the strange brilliance of her eyes. It may be that he respected the strong pride that could scorn the bitter gripe of hunger. But his voice was cold when he spoke.

"Why, think you, lady, that I have sent for you?" he asked.

"I cannot tell," Grana answered

frigidly, hating him for the form of his question. He stood for a moment in silence before he spoke again.

"Six months agone it was my ill-fortune to anger you," he said. "I sought your hand in marriage in all courtesy. There lay my offense, for it seemed that my wooing was an insult to your pride. Your answer, as I recollect, was of the curtest. Now, lady, do you understand why we are speaking in this fashion?"

Grana flushed royally.

"Aye, well I understand," she answered. "You think that you have attained your end by force. You think that I am beaten to my knees. You think that I prize life so highly that it were easier to become your wife than starve! Oh, little you know of Grana of Achill if you dream that you may win her thus!"

He waited with patience until she ended agasp with passion. Then he spoke, and his quiet, even voice was in curious contrast to her anger.

"You are wrong," he said. "I do not now seek to win by force what was refused to my courtesy. But—they tell me that Grana of Achill is proud. She should have remembered that I also possess some little pride. It is to ease that pride that we are meeting now."

He paused and looked at her steadily. The flush had died from Grana's cheeks leaving her strangely pale.

"You dealt to me some little humiliation," he said. "It is my unchristian habit to repay in kind. Grana of Achill was proud of her skill in war, her prudence, and her success. Now she has been trapped and lies at the mercy of one she scorned."

And then Grana laughed.

"Nay, there you are wrong," she cried. "You forget that there is another path that Grana will blithely tread ere she makes submission to you or any man."

"I do not forget it," he said quietly. "That is why we are speaking now. I will own that it was in my mind to press home my vantage, to woo you in another fashion than of courtesy when hunger had brought you to your knees. But—I have learned that your pride may not be broken in a fashion so simple. And I have thought of a better plan. There is a shame that is more bitter than defeat. It is in my mind to lay that shame upon you, lady."

Grana threw out her hands with a strange, helpless gesture.

"What is it that you mean?" she asked hoarsely. "What is it that you will do to me?"

"You will know to-morrow," Domhnall answered. "And now—the good father waits to lead you to the tower."

For one moment Grana looked at him with wild eyes, almost as though she would plead his pity. Then she turned and followed the priest into the darkness.

And on the morrow she understood, for Domhnall had raised the siege and had vanished with his ships. She understood that the shame of which he had spoken was the contemptuous mercy of a victorious foe. He had put that shame upon her, and even her strong pride was bruised and humbled.

But very often in the time that followed she caught herself musing as to the full meaning of this man's strange words. For somehow she knew of a surety that he would cross her path again.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### Grana Speaks With Her Master in the Dawn.

THE hand of the great English queen might be slow, but it was heavy and sure. (Do you fancy the stiff, brocaded, unlovely figure of her, posing as a beauty in her palace, a wanton at heart and avid for flattery as any wanton, and yet the true mistress of a great kingdom and the inspirer of men whose fame should live forever?)

Grana was to learn that fact—Grana, who had defied and outwitted

the Lord Deputy of Connaught with an ease that had bred contempt. For years she had been regarded as the nurse of all mischief and rebellion in Mayo—you may read Sir Richard Bingham's frank opinion of her in his curiously worded letters to Elizabeth. (But natural prejudice made him do her less than justice.)

There was, in fact, but one other rebel in western Ireland who gave sorer toil and anxiety to the English. And that other was Domhnall O'Flaherty, the single man who had humbled Grana and bruised her darling pride. As has been told.

It was the violence of her servants, rather than any act of her own, that brought matters to a head at last between Grana and the lord deputy. Her following had grown with her fame, and it is to be feared that it was notable for reckless courage, rather than honesty and the domestic virtues.

Under her own eye, Grana's men were mild enough, if she so willed it; out of her sight—well, it does not appear that their manners were especially lamblike. At the least, a dozen of them, out on foray, met two luckless body-servants of Sir Richard Bingham's, and, since they foolishly declined to submit to be stripped, slew them out of hand for sake of their clothes and weapons.

Upon news of which ungentle deed Sir Richard sent a curt message to Grana, demanding that the murderers should be delivered to himself for their due hanging.

But that was the one point concerning which Grana of Achill could never be brought to see reason. Treaties of the most solemn order she might make and break in bewildering fashion (it is unhappily beyond dispute that Grana looked upon the breaking of a treaty of alliance almost as a duty, certainly as a jest!), but it was not in her to be false to her own men.

She would treat them herself with harshness (as a fact, she sought out these very offenders and stood by while they were soundly flogged in the courtyard of Kildownet Castle), but she would allow none other to lay hand upon her property. It did not accord with her vivid pride. And she sent word to this effect to the lord deputy. Whereupon Sir Richard Bingham, outworn in body and temper by long, harassing dealings with the Irish, swore solemnly that, since the men were to escape their due, the mistress who shielded them should assuredly hang high. It should be added that such an act of justice was not without precedent in those rough days.

Grana laughed softly when she heard of that vow, and went upon her ways without a qualm.

But it was recalled to her mind upon a summer afternoon as she rode from Kildownet to her Castle of Ferrisowle, squired by Red Donell and a handful of ragged men at arms. An old woman, toothless, bearded, and quaintly hideous, rose up from beside the miry track and barred the way.

Grana flung her a piece of gold in her own royally careless fashion, and the old dame caught her hand with a torrent of mumbled invocations.

"It is Mad Barb, the witch, lady," Red Donell muttered, and whitened a little beneath the tan—Red Donell, who had scarcely turned aside from his path for any four mortal men!

It was Grana's way to pose as being above such weaknesses.

"I have heard of her," she said coolly. "What have you to tell me of my fortune, mother?"

Mad Barb was staring at the slim, capable hand with a strange look in her bleared, red eyes.

"Get you back to Kildownet, Grana of Achill—get you back!" she mumbled. "Black danger presses upon you!"

"It is no new thing," Grana retorted cheerily. "What is its nature, mother?"

"Strong are you and daring," wheezed the old woman; "but that which threatens you is stronger than

your strength. Get you back, lest shame and bonds become your portion."

There was one at least of her hearers who was impressed by her prophecies of gloom. Red Donell had already wheeled his horse, and was calling to the men in turn. He could not conceive that even Grana of Achill would go forward in face of such a warning from those inspired lips! Grana turned upon him, ruffled and moved against her will by the witch's words, glad of an object for her anger.

"What are you doing, Donell?" she asked, with dangerous smoothness. "It is not in my memory that I gave orders for retreat. And none other shall give orders where I ride."

"I thought you would surely heed Mad Barb's words, lady," Red Donell muttered. "She knows strange things."

"I had not thought you were a coward, Donell!" Grana cried. "About your wits I have never doubted! To be turned back by an old, mumbling dame! But Grana goes forward—even if she must ride alone!"

Red Donell bowed his head and turned his horse for Ferrisowle.

Mad Barb retained her hold of Grana's hand. Now a curious smile came to her unwashen, wrinkled face.

"I knew that you would not heed, lady," she said. "Oh, Mad Barb knew well! Ah, she can see—she can see many things with her sore, red eyes. Now I tell you that you shall be shamed and helpless—and none shall be able to aid you save one whom you have cause to hate and fear. But go forward, lady; for it may be that happiness lies beyond your shame."

Grana stared at the witch for a moment, then she wrenched her hand angrily away and touched her horse sharply with her spur. Mad Barb's words had recalled to her mind the one man or woman in the world whom she deemed that she had cause to hate or fear—Domhnall O'Flaherty, the man who had tricked and humbled her.

She did not love to think of him—and yet he was often in her mind. Only that morning a rumor had reached her ears that he and his men had been ambushed and broken by the English. She had not been sure whether the tidings had pleased or hurt her. Yet, why should she not be pleased? She recalled the lord deputy's vow—and promptly dismissed the trifle.

It was not in her mind as she rode on in silence with bowed head and frowning eyes. She was thinking once more of Domhnall. It was in a narrow valley piercing the wild, dark hills that she was roused harshly from her thoughts.

There was a sudden warning yell from her foreriders; the stony ground appeared to vomit men from every side, and Grana awoke to the fact that she was trapped.

Followed a brief, wild whirl of steel, a hurly-burly of shouts, and trampling hoofs. Red Donell might have his childish superstitions, but they were not apparent in face of human foes. He fought with the strength and courage of a she bear at bay before her cubs.

In obedience to his roar the men ringed round their lady with a grim hedge of steel. I fancy Grana sitting her horse in their midst, careless enough, I dare swear, of the peril, with cheery, cool words upon her lips. But the fight was cruelly brief, for no valor might stand against such crushing odds.

It was apparent that the assailants had their orders. No quarter was to be wasted upon her men, but Grana herself was to be taken alive. The ring was broken by sheer weight of steel, and then men fell swiftly.

For a little space Red Donell fought alone before his lady—one man, strong, fierce, and indomitable, amid a jostle of hungry steel. Then he went reeling down, and Grana fronted her foes with never a man of her body-guard upon his feet.

An officer spurred toward her

through the press, superbly mounted, but with his once shining, fashionable armor defaced and reddened by the damps of the Irish bogs. A hard-faced man of thirty, with something of the brute peering from his mouth and eyes. He looked Grana grimly in the face, and he did not bow.

"Who are you, sir?" she cried fiercely enough. "And by what right have you attacked me and slain my men?"

"I am Captain John Bingham, brother of the lord deputy," the man answered harshly. "It is by his orders that you have been captured for a notorious rebel and traitor. I am compelled to take certain precautions for your safe conduct."

He turned to a red-faced sergeant by his side.

"Bind this woman's arms behind her," he ordered, "and set a leading rein upon her palfrey."

Grana's face went dead white at the words, and she flung out her hands in incredulous protest.

"You dare not shame me in this fashion!" she cried, agasp with passion. "Oh, you shall answer for this—"

But the officer turned away without a word, and Grana, choking with rage, had sense to see that resistance would but be a further indignity. She submitted to be bound, but there was something in her blanched face that checked the rough jokes and laughter of the English soldiers who thronged with curious eyes about their famous prisoner. It was as though they set ropes upon a lioness, superb in her fierce rage, to be feared even in her impotence.

Ten minutes later the column was upon its way, in its midst a white-faced woman who forgot the gall and the shame of the rope about her wrists as she looked back at the tangled, faithful bodies that still lay in their broken ring.

Within the hour, it may be, a rider came jogging into that fatal valley. It was Mad Barb, a weird figure crouched upon the rump of a huge, raw-boned ass. She drew rein at sight of the bodies upon the trampled, bloody ground, and she gave a little nod and a queer, half-triumphant cluck of the breath.

For all her madness, her words were coming true. She bundled down and began to examine the still figures.

When she came to that of the big, red-haired man who had pleased her by his faith in her power, she gave a high chuckle that was almost a crow. Red Donell was horribly mangled, but there was life in his tough carcass yet. Mad Barb bound up his wounds with rags from her own person, then forced the neck of a bottle between his lips. In a minute Red Donell stirred, grinned feebly, and strove to take the flagon into his own care.

"Good liquor, mother!" he grunted, and then: "The blessed saints protect me, it is Mad Barb!"

"Yes, it is I," the old woman said. "And I was right!"

Red Donell's torn face contracted painfully.

"She is in their hands—the Lady Grana, God rot them!" he groaned. "And I must lie here! Whither have they taken her?"

Mad Barb pointed along the eastern track.

"It should be easy following," she said.

Red Donell sat up, and the agony of the movement brought a groan rasping harshly from his throat, despite his stubborn will.

"I must follow to see what is their will with her," he muttered. "The horses are gone, of course. Mother, lend me your donkey, and I will give you—a rosary of Spanish gold! Nay, I am a fool—what should you do with rosaries?"

The old woman chuckled impishly.

"All gold is good," she answered. "But you would roll from the ass's back in the first hundred yards. I myself will follow these English dogs and bring back word to you of what they

do to Grana of Achill—if you will pay me the rosary for fee!"

Red Donell swore with very vivid blasphemy that he would surely do so.

"And I am thinking that you will keep your word to Mad Barb!" the witch muttered with another chuckle. Then she laid the bottle of spirits and a wallet of food beside Red Donell, skipped nimbly upon her skinny steed, and rode down the valley along the broad English trail.

Seven or eight miles she covered at her uneasy pace, and then she found herself amid a stream of country-folk who seemed to be converging from all quarters upon one point. Mad Barb was known and feared by all, and her question, "Whither are you journeying, children?" was swiftly answered amid a growl of rage.

"The accursed English have taken Grana of Achill to their camp at Borydane, and she is to be tried at sunset, good mother!"

Mad Barb nodded and caught by the sleeve a tall, ragged man well known to her.

"What will they be doing to Grana, Rory?" she asked.

"They will be hanging her, like enough, mother, the saints look down upon her," the man answered, and then he lowered his voice.

"They have sought her long enough, but little they know how near to them is one whom they would be yet more blithe to take. Domhnall O'Flaherty himself is lying with one follower in the hut on Corryduin, three bare miles from the English camp."

Mad Barb nodded once more, and jogged on deep in thought among the muttering, wrathful peasants.

Six score of the English troops were camped at Borydane under John Bingham. He had full authority from the lord deputy for the stern act of justice that he proposed to execute.

It was vital that the outnumbered English should awe the unruly Irish from time to time by a grim sample of their power. Grana of Achill, whose lawless fame was on every adoring peasant lip, was to die as an example and warning to her brethren. The lord deputy's solemn vow cried aloud for fulfilment.

The glow of the sunset was red upon her proud, white face as they led her from her prison to the center of the camp. The Irish, who loved her, to whom she was a patriot queen, raised a despairing wail of anger as she passed among the soldiers.

They say that she smiled a little, even at that moment, as she heard them. It was ever pleasant to her to know that she could hold men's hearts.

Mad Barb watched all that passed from her place among the staring, murmuring peasant folk. She looked with peevish hate upon the grim-faced Englishmen before whom her countrywoman was arraigned.

She listened to the long recital of Grana's crimes, and she heard Grana scornfully disavow any wish to speak on her own behalf. Last of all she heard the sentence at the close of the brief trial. Grana of Achill, proved traitress, pirate, and rebel, was to hang at sunrise on the morrow.

The prisoner, who had listened to her doom without the quiver of a muscle of her haughty face, had been led back to the tent that was her prison, to sit motionless with her shattered dreams before her eyes and with thoughts that none may guess in her stormy heart.

The furious, raving peasants had been dispersed by blows from heavy whips, and Mad Barb was perched again upon her sorry steed. But she was not guiding him toward that valley where Red Donell lay—she was goading him along a hilly track to where gaunt Corryduin shouldered toward the sky. The path was steep and vile, and night had fully fallen ere she reached the little lonely hut that was her goal.

Within it sat the man who, two short days before, had been the most potent rebel in all broad Connaught. He had

been surprised by Sir Richard Bingham in full force, and had escaped barely with his life.

Now Domhnall O'Flaherty was a hunted fugitive, with but one faithful man beside him. But his dark, strong face and brooding eyes were as unmoved as upon that night when he had dealt with Grana of Achill in her defeat and shame.

"What would you with me, mother?" he asked when the old woman had been admitted with due caution.

"Greeting, Domhnall," Mad Barb answered. "A while ago you laughed when I met you in all your pride and told you that an evil day was pressing close upon you. Also I told you of Grana of Achill, how it had been whispered to me that her path and yours must meet. It would seem that a part at least of Mad Barb's words were true. Now I am come to tell you that Grana lies in the English camp at Borydane and will hang at tomorrow's sunrise."

Domhnall sprang to his feet with an exclamation.

"Grana of Achill to hang!" he cried. And then: "Why do you tell me this?"

The old woman's eyes grew dull and stupid.

"How should Mad Barb know?" she whined. "She has come far today, old as she is, but she must go farther yet. There is one lying wounded in a valley far away for whom she has ill news. That one, at least, would not bide quiet and safe but for his wounds."

She hobbled from the little hut, climbed stiffly upon her weary steed, and clattered down the steep flank of Corryduin.

Domhnall O'Flaherty sat in thought with his dark, grim head bent upon his hands. One fancies that through the gloom he saw clearly, clearly the pale royal face of the woman who had scorned his wooing, whose scorn he had set himself to avenge with bitter skill.

Since that night when she had come to him in his tent, weak with hunger, but with high pride undaunted, she had been strangely often in his thoughts. He had known curious contempt of himself for his revenge, but he had rejoiced often enough that at least he had not pressed his vantage home.

And now she was to die, to die shamefully before grinning, jeering soldiery. And he, he who was now himself a haunted fugitive, was powerless to avert this thing. It had been his dream, from the day when she had repulsed his wooing, that some day in some fashion he would subdue her pride and win her for his own. Oh, if he had but his men behind him now that he might storm through the English camp and snatch her in triumph from her doom! His defeat and helplessness were doubly bitter now.

But was there nothing he could do? Suddenly, swiftly, a thought came to him, a thought that appealed to the chivalry and Irish romance that lay beneath his grim, strong calm — a thought that brought him to his feet with shining eyes. For a while he paced the muddy floor of the rude hut, and ever the resolve grew and strengthened in his heart. Then he called to him the servant who had shared his flight.

"Michael, it is my will that you go forthwith to the English camp at Borydane," he said.

Michael nodded. He would have set forth without demur for Satan's court if that had been Domhnall's whim.

"They will not harm you or make you prisoner. You will ask to speak with the English captain. You will say to him that your master, Domhnall O'Flaherty, has sent you to him, relying upon his honor. Do you understand, Michael?"

"Yes, lord. And what will I say, then?"

"You will say that Domhnall will come to his camp at sunrise, to die as he shall please, if he will but pledge his honor that Grana of Achill shall go free in Domhnall's stead. That is my message, Michael."

Michael looked at his master with sullenly piteous, protesting eyes for one long minute. Then he turned with a groan and went out into the darkness.

The first red hint of dawn was staining the eastern sky when they came to Grana. It is said that they found her sleeping like any child. The priest with whom she had spoken for a while before she slept laid his hand pitifully enough upon her shoulder, and she awoke.

She stared about her in wonder for a moment, and then she remembered and understood. She rose to her feet fully dressed and confronted the harsh English captain who had been her judge. She knew that they had come to lead her forth to die.

It was not in her nature to plead for clemency. She knew nothing of the amazing offer that had come to Captain Bingham in the night; she did not know that the Englishman still waited incredulously for the surrender of the man who had sent the message.

She only knew that it ended here, once and for all, the dazzling, fascinating path of ambition that she had trodden since her father died. It ended in sorry fashion enough, and the knowledge of her failure was very bitter to her—but it was not fitting that these Englishmen should read her thoughts or have cause for jibing.

And so she drew her mantle about her with steady fingers and followed them into the gray dawn.

The lofty gallows loomed black and cruel and gaunt against that smear of crimson in the east. She set her eyes upon them without flinching. The misty air was damp and chilly, but she repressed a shiver of cold lest these people should fancy that she was afraid of death.

She was walking between a double line of soldiers, and they were strangely still. She found herself marveling at their silence, wondering that they refrained from coarse jests and mockery. She did not know that her woman's courage and the look in her dark eyes gripped strangely at the throats of the hard, common men who watched her pass.

She was beneath the gallows now, the long cord was swaying mistily in the light breeze. The priest was speaking to her very gently, and she thanked him with a little absent smile. They did not seem real at all at the moment, these dreamy things that appeared to be happening to her.

Presently she would awake and laugh—and then—and then she stiffened into sudden, vivid life, for a man was walking toward her.

Surely she might not mistake that face with the keen, hawk eyes and harsh, masterful nose and chin. Surely this man was Domhnall O'Flaherty and none other!

Captain Bingham was speaking to her with a curious smile.

"You are free to go whither you will, madam," he said.

Grana stared at him foolishly.

"Free?" she asked. "What is it that you mean?"

"My words should be plain," the Englishman answered precisely. "This gentleman, unhappily for himself, is a rebel of greater note even than you are. For his own reasons he has offered to ransom you with his person. My duty compelled me to accept his offer, seeing that he is the greater prize."

Slowly Grana took in the meaning of the words. Domhnall was near her now; they two, with John Bingham, were the central figures amid a great, silent, staring ring. Almost every man in the English camp was gathered about the gallows, marveling at these strange doings.

But Grana did not heed them. For a space she stood silently before this man; they two alone in an empty world, and that world was made all golden and her heart was softened to its depths by the triumph and wonder of his deed. Then suddenly she moved

a swift pace nearer to Domhnall with outstretched hands that quivered now.

"Why are you doing this?" she cried hoarsely. "Oh, why should you give your life for me?"

Domhnall smiled a little, and it was as though a swift flicker of light relieved the gloom of his dark face.

"It appeared, lady, that I owed you some small amends for starvation and discourtesy," he answered quietly. "It is my fashion, as you know, to pay my debts."

Grana looked curiously at his face.

"Oh, I know, I know!" she said softly, and then she drew herself erect with her old pride. "But I will not have it!" she cried. "No man shall die for me!"

She turned scornfully upon Captain Bingham.

"You, sir, most courteous of jailers, understand that I will not suffer this gentleman to ransom me."

Captain Bingham shrugged his shoulders.

"I fear that the matter does not rest with you, madam," he said dryly. "I have already accepted—"

And then the saints intervened! That, at least, is the Irish version. For myself I give some little credit to more practical agencies.

From two sides of the camp there rang a yell—that shrill Irish, charging yell that has reechoed on a thousand bloody fields since Fontenoy was lost and won.

Simultaneously there was the crack of arquebuses as the careless sentries awoke to their peril, and then—down upon the startled ring of huddled troops there surged two tossing waves of steel. The English camp was stormed.

There are no such chargers in the world as the Irish when their work is plain before them, and their leaders know how to lead. Their swift-footed dash, their gleeful, hungry joy, their splendid carelessness of odds and science are as resistless as a Rupert's hurtling rushes of horse.

Again it was to Grana as though she dreamed most vividly and swiftly. She heard Bryan Teige's voice high above the clamor. "Steel, rogues, steel!" and then—she saw the loose ranks of the English suck in and break. Axes were gleaming among them. Captain Bingham had sprung forward with drawn sword — but the surprise was crushing and complete.

Bryan had won to the center of the English ring; he had set a guard of a dozen men about his mistress, and then he abandoned himself to the one joy that could move his somber soul.

What need to dwell upon the rest? Quarter was seldom asked or given between the English and the Irish. The former held down the unruly country folk by force of discipline and skill, and by dint of red reprisals for rebellion. But once in a way, as now, an English camp was surprised and the revenge that followed is not pretty even in one's thoughts.

The English died grimly. All Europe knows that that has ever been the English habit. But the surprise of a *camisado* in the dawn, that ferocious charge from front and rear, led up to the breaking point that every soldier knows. The red sun leaped forth and gleamed upon the murderous rout that went raving far away among the hills.

"What brought you so aptly, Bryan? How was it that you heard of my plight in time?" Grana asked as Bryan Teige stood panting before her, leaning upon his long, stained sword, having torn himself reluctantly from the pursuit.

"Red Donell sent Mad Barb to find us—he knew that I was out on foray with fifty men. Four hours agone she met us returning to Kildownet. We rode our weary horses to the death, and as we came the country people flocked to us in scores, knowing that you were to hang. I split the lads into two, waited for dawn, and then we came upon the camp from either side."

"You have saved me again, Bryan,"

Grana said gently, and she stretched out her hand.

The fool raised it to his lips, but he looked askance with jealous eyes at Domhnall O'Flaherty.

A while later Domhnall came up to Grana, who had found no word for him since safety came.

"I will say farewell, lady," he said. "It may be that we part as friends."

"Aye, surely," Grana answered, and her words were strangely halting. "But—but whither do you go that we must part?"

Domhnall smiled.

"I go to find such of my lads as the English may have spared," he answered. "Certain small misfortunes have befallen me of late."

"Kildownet is at your service," Grana said very low.

Domhnall's smile grew whimsical.

"I thank you, lady," he answered. "But the pride of a foolish man is at its keenest when he himself is broken."

Grana flushed a little.

"You are not generous," she said. "He who gives greatly should take in a like measure, if he be not churlish. You have offered your life for mine, and you will take nothing at my hands. Oh! but I would that I knew why you dared this great thing for me!"

Domhnall looked at her, his own cheeks showing a fleck of color.

"Perchance, if five hundred men still called me lord; if my castle of Ballinahinch were still my own I might find words in which to tell you," he said quietly. "But now—it may be that I will speak with you again, lady, when I have tried another fall with fortune."

And then Grana laughed very softly, as she had not laughed in all her life before.

"Oh, you are very proud!" she said. "And once — ah! once I also was proud and foolish. But now—it is different. I think the whole world is changed to my eyes by the great thing that you have done.

"Harken, Domhnall, and learn how Grana of Achill's pride is humbled. She has learned that her own wisdom and strength are not unfailing, as she once thought them, and so she is seeking a — a master for her castles of Kildownet and Ferrisowle, and for—herself. But if she does not win the master whom she has in mind, none other shall hold the place!"

And she looked away from him.

"Lady, I do not understand," Domhnall muttered stupidly. "I am an outcast—a fugitive—"

Then Grana turned to him once more, and her dark gray eyes were very bright, and her face was most royally flushed.

"What do I care for these things?" she cried impatiently. "Oh, must I speak more plainly? Must I kneel before you?" And she held out her hands to him.

And that is how Grana of Achill won to happiness. And for the rest—how may one blame her if at that moment she spared no thought for that other man—who watched her covertly with haggard eyes ere he turned wearily away? There was blood upon Bryan Teige's sword arm, and a deep gash upon his lean body, but one fancies that in that moment he received a wound that bit more keenly.

(The end.)

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# LOVE THAT KILLS

**A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART I**

## BY CORALIE STANTON AND HEATH HOSKEN

### CHAPTER I.

**The Madness of Lady Queste.**

LORD QUESTE made his way slowly up the broad marble staircase of Queste House. It was after three o'clock in the morning. On either side were banks of dead roses and dying lilies. The balustrade of gilded bronze was entwined with roses, and red and rose and cream petals lay thick on the marble stairs.

As he ascended he observed fourteen hairpins, several strips of chiffon, quite a goodly portion of a flounce of delicate lace and a rose of gold tissue, lying at intervals on the pink pile of the stair carpet. Together with the exhausted atmosphere they sang the requiem of a brilliant reception—one of his wife's famous parties.

Lord Queste's face was quite untouched with that supreme satisfaction with life that one might have expected it to express. He was the *beau ideal* of a great English nobleman. He was in the prime of life—only just turned forty-five; he had a distinguished appearance and perfect health; he was the most powerful member of the government—the most popular prime minister the country had ever followed.

He had a beautiful young wife, splendid dwelling-places, and vast lands, the confidence and friendship of his sovereign, the affection of the people whose destiny he helped to rule. What more could mortal man desire?

His gravity was Queste's most distinctive characteristic. People who knew him well said they had never seen him smile. This was an exaggeration, but, like all exaggerations, based on fact. His opponents — and he had only political ones—called him a charlatan, and said that his splendid melancholy was only one of the tricks by which he made credulous people believe him a great man.

In the early hours of this May morning he looked more than grave. He moved like a man who bore a heavy burden which had become well-nigh intolerable, but which he could not cast off.

When he reached the first landing he turned to the left, passed down a pink-carpeted corridor, ascended another somewhat narrower flight of shallow stairs, and, turning the handle of the first door in the upper corridor, entered his wife's boudoir.

Lady Queste was standing with her back to him at the other end of the spacious apartment. She turned with a start, and dropped a withered red rose.

Queste walked as far as the mantelpiece. They were a striking couple, the finest flower of English manhood and womanhood. She was fifteen years younger than he. She had celebrated her thirtieth birthday the day before, and still looked a child.

She came of a family renowned for its pride of birth, and in the insolence of her gray eyes was crystalized the attitude of generations of her ancestors toward everybody who was not a

Malinmore. She was very lovely, tall, and beautifully proportioned, with a small, proud head and bright golden-brown hair, waving away from a central parting over her ears, the crown of diamonds set well into it, so that the stones glittered through the thick, lustrous meshes.

She had not yet discarded the gown that every woman at the reception had envied. It was made of some stiff turquoise blue tissue, shot through with threads of gold, and clothed her figure like a sheath, wonderful in its daring severity, revealing every line of the willowy form, and tapering away into an enormous pointed train, absolutely bare of trimming but for a hem of heavily embroidered golden roses and a fold of cloth of gold across the bust.

"I am glad to find that you have not retired, Millicent," said Lord Queste after a noticeable silence.

"Why? Have you something to say to me, Godfrey?" she asked. He did not answer immediately, and her eyes rested coldly on his tall, spare form and traveled up to his distinguished face, with its luminous pallor, its noble brow and clear, unsmiling eyes, its dark hair touched with gray at the high temples, and its melancholy, sensitive mouth, almost hidden by the mustache and trim pointed beard.

He wore his clothes with a distinction that modern men rarely attain. He was thin and upright as a lance, and held himself like a young man. He was, indeed, very good to look at. But Lady Queste's eyes did not soften as she regarded him.

"I am tired," she went on. "Worn out. Perhaps to-morrow will do?" She yawned as she spoke. Her voice was magnetic, but unmusical.

"If you can spare me a few moments I shall be grateful," he answered gravely. Then he hesitated again.

"But why don't you say what you want to say?" she asked with visible impatience.

"Because what I have to say is peculiarly unpleasant and painful," he replied. He spoke with a grave and gentle courtesy. "I must beg you to forgive me. Briefly, it is this: I want to ask you to practise a little more care in future in your attitude toward M. Floris."

Lady Queste flushed hotly. A flame leaped into her lovely, insolent eyes.

"What do you mean, Godfrey?"

"I would ask you, out of the respect you owe to your position, Millicent, not to show the favor with which you regard M. Floris quite so plainly."

"But it is monstrous!" she cried. Her voice had grown shrill. "Are you trying to insult me? Floris is a great artist, a genius. Do you expect me to treat him like a servant?"

"I expect you to treat him as he expects to be treated," was the quiet reply.

"What made you say this to me?" she asked suddenly.

"What I saw," he answered. "I saw you treating Floris as if he were your principal guest. I saw you force him to sit beside you during the concert; I saw you sitting with him afterward."

"There is something else," she said sharply. "I know it. You may as well say so."

"I overheard something," he admitted. "I heard two of your friends talking about you as if you were—a woman who could be talked about."

"Tell me what they said."

"No. It was a lie—an ugly, uncharitable lie."

"What do you suggest that I do?" she flashed.

"You let your desire to do honor to a great artist carry you too far," her husband replied. "Floris is, I have no doubt, a very charming man. He has been gifted with a marvelous voice. Naturally, he exploits it. You pay him to sing at your parties."

"I did not pay him to-night." The flush had faded from her cheeks; she was very white. "He came as my

guest, as your guest, Godfrey. When he sang to the people it was as a favor."

"That was a mistake," said Lord Queste quickly. "It shall be rectified to-morrow."

"You shall not insult a friend of mine!" Lady Queste cried.

"I beg of you not to talk like that, Millicent," gravely retorted Queste. "It is not worthy of you. Give me credit at least for an adequate motive in speaking to you on such a painful subject. I heard this evening—"

"Oh, how can you listen to some spiteful gossip you have overheard? It is hateful, uncharitable! Besides, what right, pray, have you to find fault with me?"

"You seem to forget," he answered, "that you are my wife."

"Your wife!" She shrugged her thin, beautiful shoulders. "What do you give me of your companionship, of your sympathy?"

"You share my life," he said, and his voice took on an added melancholy, a little shade more of reproach.

"Pshaw! Does a woman want to share her husband's public life? I want more—much more! Do you ever allow me so much as a glimpse into your real life, your real self, your inner life? No. You make me less than a stranger. Women are different to men. They demand more of life. A woman must have a friend. And is it any wonder that, when I choose my friends, I choose one who has a marvelous gift that makes me forget for a little while the wretched emptiness of my life? What if Floris is my friend?"

Lord Queste raised a hand in mute protest; but she went on excitedly, resentfully: "What right have you to object? What have you ever given me? When do I ever see you, except for a little while in the dining-room, with servants at our elbows, or on a night like this, when we fill the house with a mass of dull people that make it emptier even than when I am in it alone? Do you ever find time to sit with me for an hour or two, like an ordinary husband? Do you give me any love, any sympathy?"

She paused for a moment, panting. Queste had turned away. She could not see his face, but his voice was gentle and full of pain.

"I am sorry I have failed you, Millicent. I—I thought you were happy. I am too busy, too old."

"You are not really old!" she cried. "You could be as young as any man. When you married me, seven years ago, I could have loved you. Any girl, whatever her nature, will love a man who is kind to her, who will fill her life. At first you were kind, Godfrey, but how long did it last? Was it my fault, Godfrey, or yours? What sort of a life do I lead? Why have you chosen to imagine that I am a woman who can live without love and sympathy? I am married, but I have no husband! I am your wife, but I might as well be paid so much a year to run your household and entertain your friends."

"I can't express my feelings, Millicent," Queste said in a very low voice. "I am afraid I wronged you when I married you. I wish I could show you the regret that is in my heart because things must be as they are. But what I appeal to in you does not concern that part of your life — it concerns your position. Floris may be everything that is charming. I feel sure that he is, else you would not single him out for your favor. But he is—Floris."

Lady Queste appeared to be on the verge of some violent outburst. But she controlled herself and spoke only with intense bitterness.

"You despise him," she said. "You look upon him as a creature you hire to amuse your guests. You are so cold, you look down upon the rest of the world from your unreachable altitude. I sometimes wonder whether you are human. And always I wonder—have you ever been in love?"

"You don't mean that you are in love with Floris?" In every note of the man's voice was incredulous and boundless scorn. She heard it, and smiled icily; but she did not see the look of violent anguish that suddenly overspread his face.

"No; but I will tell you what he means to me," she answered, striving hard to control herself. "I will tell you what his voice means to me. My soul is starved; it feeds my soul. My heart is starved; it feeds my heart. My life is empty; it fills my life. Have you never wondered why so many of us women during the season sit in our boxes every night at Covent Garden? People say: 'Lady So-and-So must really love music!' Others say we go to show off our jewels and flirt during the intervals. Neither is true. We go because certain music and certain voices are like anodynes—they lull our craving hearts to sleep with false hopes; they make us forget. I suppose you don't understand?"

"Frankly," said her husband, not without a tinge of irony, "I do not; but I am sure," he added kindly, "that I have said enough. I am convinced that you will do as I ask."

"You may be certain," she said, with concentrated calm, "that I shall do as you ask."

"Then I won't waste any more of your repose. Good night, Millicent."

He went out of the room. She seemed not to heed him. When he had gone she stood for a moment looking at the closed door with a stony face; then she flung out her arms and went hastily to the bureau onto which she had dropped the withered red rose, and snatching it up pressed her lips to it with a strangled sob.

## CHAPTER II.

### A May Morning.

As Lord Queste left his wife's boudoir, and, descending the staircase, reached the first wide landing, a footman came forward to meet him. Late though it was, there were still signs of activity about the house. The servants had tasks to perform before they sought their rest.

"Had you forgotten, my lord," said the man with the mingling affection and awe that all his dependents felt for the prime minister, "that Mr. Endellion is waiting for you in the smoking-room?"

"Oh, oh," said Queste, though it was plain that he had needed the reminder; "I will go down at once."

Marcus Endellion was a well-known financier. He had been one of the guests, and he had intimated to his host, when most of them had taken their departure, that he had something of the utmost importance to say to him. Queste, with his mind full of his wife's indiscretion, had told him that if he would wait in the smoking-room he would come to him when he had taken leave of the final guest. Then he had forgotten.

When he entered the smoking-room a man even taller and thinner than he was himself rose to meet him. Marcus Endellion, one of the cleverest and most determined men in Europe, was the moving spirit of nearly all the great financial schemes of the day.

"It's quite unpardonable of me to have waited for you, Lord Queste," he said, as his host came toward him with an absent-minded curtsy; "but as a matter of fact it's of the highest importance to me. It's about the Central African Railway. I'm practically pledged to meet my colleagues in Paris to-morrow with the promise of your support. I suppose there's no doubt about your attitude, is there?"

Queste did not answer at once. He wore a strangely abstracted air. He walked over to the big bay window of the smoking-room, his nostrils evidently unpleasantly assailed by the mingling of hot-house scents and tobacco fumes. With a jerk of the cords he parted the heavy curtains, then

pulled up the blind and threw up the sash of one of the windows.

"I am too tired to talk business to-night, Endellion," he said. He spoke almost piteously. "Really, I am. Let's go for a walk. I want to get out. I must get out. Can't we meet the first thing in the morning — about ten?"

"Of course, if you wish it," said the financier. "I will postpone my departure until the afternoon."

Queste heaved a sigh of relief.

"Come, then."

They left the house, and, turning into a narrow lane, entered St. James's Street and walked toward Piccadilly, Queste having said that he would walk home with the financier, who lived in Hill Street. After a few moments Endellion spoke.

"I asked Lady Alice to marry me to-night," he said, "and she refused me." It was characteristic of the man that he had mentioned his business before his love-making.

"Oh," said Queste absently; "I am sorry."

Endellion caught him up.

"You mean that you wouldn't mind?"

Queste, who had only heard the words vaguely, pulled himself together.

"I want Alice to marry the man she wants to marry," he said in a friendly manner, but without enthusiasm. "She is very dear to me, as you know. She is my brother's child, the only near relation I have in the world. I look upon her as my own daughter. I only want her to be happy."

"I shall not despair," said the financier with decision. "I blame this odious woman's movement she's so wrapped up in."

After that they walked almost in silence until they reached Endellion's house.

"Won't you come in?" the financier asked, as Lord Queste stopped on the pavement.

"No, thanks; good night. I'll walk back. I feel inclined for a stroll." The fine voice had a far-away sound, and the financier remembered it for many a long day.

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## CHAPTER III.

### Echo of the Past.

WHEN Endellion had closed the door of his house upon him, Queste, who had turned away, quickened his footsteps. He walked no more as a man whose mind is abstracted, but as a man who has a goal.

The man's grave melancholy had dropped from him. He walked with elastic step; the cloud of perennial gravity had lifted from his face. He was a boy.

He reached the little turning that leads into Queen Anne's Gate, turned up it, and then bore to the left. He passed eight or nine of those Old-World houses that overlook St. James's Park, and then paused before one of the smaller ones, mounted the steps, took a key from his pocket, and let himself in.

In the hall a woman met him. She had hastily switched on the light at the sound of his key in the lock.

"Godfrey!" she said in a low, happy voice.

"Dearest, I am late," he replied.

"Ever so late. I've waited more than two hours after you said you'd be here in your note. But I knew you would come; I knew it wasn't your fault. So what does it matter?"

She linked her arm in his. He drew her to him and kissed her. Where was the grave, the reserved, the melancholy Lord Queste? In his place was a young man, strong, virile, full of life and animation, almost gay.

The woman drew him into a room that led out of the square hall. It was a charming, restful room, not very large, but perfectly proportioned, with an Old-World air imparted by flowery chintses, old Italian furniture, and a mass of books and flowers. There

were sandwiches and a spirit-stand on a table, and a large silver box of cigars and cigarettes.

The woman took Queste's coat from him when he had sat down.

"Fiamma," he said, as she held a light for his cigar, "how sweet of you to wait up for me! I expected just to creep in and hear the beautiful, peaceful silence of the house and go away again. My dear, what should I do without you? It is my greatest sorrow in life that we can only meet like this."

"Don't talk about that now. You know I should have waited, however late you'd been!" The woman had a lovely rich voice. She was much nearer to him in age than Lady Queste. She looked about thirty-five, and was, in fact, forty-two.

She was very beautiful, too, though in a different way to the proud and delicate Englishwoman, with her empty, passionate heart. She was cast in a larger mold, and yet she was slight. She had an oval face of creamy pallor, and, together with her great lustrous, dark eyes, her skin denoted foreign blood.

Her hair was of a rich auburn, heaped in picturesquely untidy masses on her head; her mouth was full and red, and its passionate lines knew no restraint. It was a mouth that laughed and sang and sobbed, but never grew cold or bitter or hard. She wore a loose white gown of velvet, cut with simplicity; but not with the studied effect of Lady Queste's wonderful turquoise garment.

She wore no jewels at all. This woman, one felt, was more a child of nature; and perhaps that was why to come into her presence made Lord Queste young again.

"Tell me about the party, Godfrey," she said. She sat down at his feet with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. "Was it very fine?"

"Dearest," he answered, "it was like all other parties." A shadow crossed his face. "And I don't want to talk about it. It makes me so angry and sad, just as the parties themselves do, because I know that you ought to be standing beside me, you ought to be receiving my guests, you ought to be making the house beautiful and sunny with your presence. And, instead of that, I have to steal away to see you like this, as if I and you were criminals, as if we were not man and wife!" There was an intensity of rebellion in his voice. The woman he called Fiamma and wife laid her lips gently, with infinite tenderness, on his hand.

"Dear Godfrey, you mustn't talk like that," she said in her soft, low voice. "That was all settled five years ago. You mustn't really. It's unfair, unkind to—Lady Queste."

"I don't often talk about it, do I?" he asked, taking one of her white hands in his and holding it as if it were a comforting balm for an infinitude of evils.

"But to-night, somehow, I must. I know that you are everything to me; that it is only your sympathy and sweet companionship that enables me to live; that you are the wife of my soul as well as my legal wife in the sight of men. And it maddens me that you should have to live in obscurity; that people should look at you askance, as you tell me some of them do; that—"

"Oh, hush, Godfrey!" she implored. "Have we not settled it all long ago?"

But to-night, as they sat in silence, the thoughts of both were busy with the past, with the long years of separation, with the reunion that only served to establish cold duty more firmly on the throne of love.

Their marriage, twenty-five years ago, had been a passionate romance of extreme youth. He was then Lord Godfrey Coleraine, a hot-headed youth of twenty, with very little prospect of being Marquis of Queste, since his elder brother, five years his senior,

who had succeeded their father two years previously, had married during the first year of his succession, and had just become the father of a little son.

Godfrey Coleraine, just escaped from academic studies, a passionate impulsive, headstrong young man, met Fiamma de Medici in Rome, where she lived with her mother, an Englishwoman, who had married an Italian, long since dead. The young people fell in love at first sight, and Godfrey urged the girl's mother to allow them to marry immediately, though Fiamma was but seventeen. Signora de Medici, with her eye on even a courtesy title, consented, not without a show of maternal reluctance. Godfrey's brother, himself of a romantic nature, wired his approval; the young man's trustees in England shook their heads, but knew that to remonstrate would be worse than useless.

The young people were duly married, and started on a prolonged tour in Italy, the land they both loved ardently. A year later a son was born to them. Two more years were passed in absolute bliss; then came a misunderstanding, slight in itself, but magnified to tragic proportions by the inexperience of youth.

Both thought life was over. Fiamma, whose mother was dead, determined to go to relatives in England for a little while and take the child with her.

Godfrey did not oppose her. In fact, he saw her on board the steamer by which she had elected to travel. The dumb misery of that parting was turned to agony for the young husband when, a few days later, came the news that the ship had foundered in the Gulf of Lyons, only a handful of passengers and one or two of the crew being saved. Days of despairing suspense revealed the fact that Lady Godfrey Coleraine and her infant son were not among those saved.

For fifteen years Godfrey remained inconsolable, and meanwhile discovered his vocation and served the long apprenticeship that had made him the great statesman that he was. Then he came into the title on his brother's sudden death, for the son born to the late marquis had died in infancy, and his only other child was a daughter, at whose birth her mother had died.

A year later Godfrey felt it his duty to marry again, and the lovely Lady Millicent Malinmore became his bride.

Two years later, quite by accident, he met his former wife, then a governess in a family whom he visited in the country. He realized with horror that he had unwittingly done a terrible wrong to an innocent woman. Fiamma's story was simplicity itself. The child had been swept from her arms in the wreck and drowned. She herself had been saved. When she was safely put ashore the horror of all she had gone through had well-nigh turned her brain.

When he had found her again, seventeen years after her supposed death in the wreck, she had had the greatest difficulty in persuading him that, for the sake of the innocent girl he had married, he must help her to keep the fact of her existence a secret.

He had been finally persuaded; but in one thing he had had his way. He had taken her from the subordinate position in which he had found her and installed her in comfort; and her consolation and her reward for the fact that she was not known to the world as the Marchioness of Queste was that for the last five years the charming house in Westminster had been his home.

"To-night I realize things," said Queste, suddenly breaking the long silence. The strong, powerful man was shaken with emotion. "To-night I realize my own loneliness as I have never realized it before. I am a man doomed to solitude. I have only my public life. I have no home life, Fiamma, no wife. For Lady Queste I have no love—I look upon her only as the

victim of a terrible mistake—and you will allow me to be no more than a friend to you—for her sake. And between you I am all alone!"

There were tears in the woman's eyes, tears raining down her cheeks. She adored him, and he loved her passionately and profoundly. It was agony to her to see him in this dark mood.

After that outburst of self-revelation, however, Queste recovered himself. He smiled with indescribable tenderness into her face and covered her hands with kisses.

"I am ungrateful — a boor, darling!" he said. "You have made me a little heaven here, and I reproach you because you have been incredibly chivalrous toward poor Millicent, whom I have so deeply wronged."

The vein of reminiscence was on him to-night; his clear eyes were dark with memory.

"But you know," he said, "if the boy had lived, if the poor little chap hadn't been drowned, it would all have been different. Wouldn't it, Fiamma?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, "if we had both been saved, I should never have had the heart to stay away from you. I shouldn't have dared to rob my son of his father." She cried gently, quietly; she, too, had sunk into a vein of reminiscence.

"Oh, Godfrey, how different it would have been if little Godfrey had lived!" she cried. "How strange it would have been! He'd have been twenty-four years old now. Think of me with a son of twenty-four! He would have been quite a man! Oh, how strange it seems!"

Suddenly she gave a laugh—a low, soft laugh of happy motherhood.

"Oh, Godfrey, do you remember the boy? He was a wee thing—just think, only two! But he had such sweet ways. Do you remember him? Do you remember that photograph of him—the only one—taken in Florence when he was quite a mite? I have it up-stairs. Shall I get it? Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, darling, get it," he said quietly, gazing fondly into her transfigured face.

She rose and went smiling and sighing from the room up-stairs to her bedroom, a vast, bay-windowed apartment, charming, well-ordered, restful, like all the rooms in the house. She opened an old Italian bureau, and took the photograph from one of the drawers.

It was faded and yellow, the photograph of a baby, with a smile on its chubby face. She pored over it; she fed her eyes on the little face; she kissed it. It was seldom that she allowed herself the luxury of this emotion. It was too deep; it was better hidden away.

Then she shut up the cabinet and switched off the lights, and went down-stairs. Despite all things, she was happy; her lips were curved in a smile. The man down-stairs, the great man, the powerful man, was hers.

She opened the door of the morning-room.

"Here is little Godfrey!" she said softly. "We don't often look at his little face, do we, dear? We can allow ourselves to be sentimental to-night."

But there was no response, and, looking toward Queste's chair, she saw that he sat stiffly upright, as if he were staring into vacancy.

Something in the pose struck a sudden chill to her heart.

"Godfrey!" she said, and her voice hardly rose above a whisper.

He did not move. She ran round the table until she was in line with his eyes. They stared at her glassily.

Like a woman in a trance, she moved forward and sank on her knees before him. She took his hand and dropped it suddenly.

"Godfrey! Godfrey!"

Still he did not move. An awful fear seized her, a paralyzing agony. There was something terrifying in that motionless figure, something rigid, something unknown.

She took his hand again and raised his arm. It fell back limply.

Then she realized that he was dead.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### The Crisis.

AT first Fiamma would not believe that Lord Queste was dead, The inexplicable suddenness and horror of the thing was so overwhelming that a touch of unreality was imparted to her terrible position.

She remained on her knees before the still figure that stared at her with sightless eyes. The head had fallen back and rested against the glazed, flowered chints of the armchair with grim and awful effect. The hand that she had touched was not yet cold, but even a person with no experience of death would have known that it was not the flesh of a living man, or of a man who had fallen into temporary unconsciousness.

She spoke to him; she whispered soft, caressing words; she pleaded with him; she entreated him to speak to her, to make some sign, not to terrify her, not to agonize her like that!

But the dead do not come back to life. Death had come with the dawn.

She rose to her feet; she walked a few steps backward, still with her eyes fixed on his face. She put her hands to her forehead and tried to think.

What had happened? How could it have happened?

How had he died? There was no sign of suffering on his face; it was composed and still.

With the power of coherent thought came the realization that action was necessary. This was no time for mere personal grief. What must she do?

Her first thought was to inform the police. She was half-way across the room when she stopped.

The prime minister of England—a man known to all the world for the splendor of his career and the nobility of his life, lay dead here—in her room. It was no ordinary thing, this terribly sudden death. The man was no ordinary man. He was one of those men who are not allowed to be men. He was an institution. This tragedy was of national importance.

What would such a position mean, if she called in the police now? A scandal, in which the great and honored name would be stained and blackened.

What was to be done? A few moments more of concentrated thought, and she realized that she was baffled. The whole thing was beyond her. She could not cope with it. Her loneliness and the sense of the importance of what she must do stunned her.

Obviously the right thing to do was to call her maid and send for the police.

What would happen then? The law would take its course. A dead man or a dead prime minister; it was all the same. Her evidence at the coroner's inquest, the newspaper sensation—it was all surging through her brain.

The truth would have to come out. There could be no preventing that. Queste, who in life had been blameless and unsullied, would be dragged from his high place and branded with the name of dishonor. It was unthinkable.

No, she would not, could not, send for the police. Not just then, at any rate; not until she had had more time to think, to try to find some way out of this awful situation, some as yet unimagined course that would shield the dead and spare the living, and leave to the nation the unsullied memory of one of her greatest sons.

At that moment, as she still stood facing the door with her back to the dead man, her acutely sensitive ears became aware of some movement in the house.

Now, it happened that the only person in the house at the moment besides herself was Giunta, her Italian maid, for, only the day before, Fiamma had returned from Italy, where she had been spending the last few weeks. She had given her servants a holiday, and, as she came back a couple of days be-

fore she was due, the house had been opened up by a charwoman, and the servants would not return until the following day.

Fiamma was not afraid. She was lifted above ordinary emotions. She moved to the door, opened it, and closed it behind her, taking the additional precaution of turning the key in the lock. As she went out into the hall she heard a faint sound on the upper landing.

"Who is that?" she called out sharply.

"*Sono io, signora,*" came the answer in a faltering voice. It was Giunta, half-dressed, carrying a candle.

"What is the matter?" asked her mistress in Italian.

"I thought I heard something, *signora.* Something disturbed me; I know not what. I was frightened. I felt as if some one was in the house."

Fiamma's mind was made up long before the servant had finished speaking. It was blind instinct that dictated her next words.

"You need not be alarmed, Giunta," she said in as firm and practical a tone as she could command. "You did hear something, most probably. It was the knock of a telegraph boy. I have had bad news. A very great friend of mine is very ill, on the point of death. She wants to see her sister, but she has quarreled with her and does not know her address. I am glad you are awake. I want you to take a letter to my friend's sister. I know where she is living. You will bring her back here, do you understand? Then we can go to my poor friend together. Indeed, Giunta, it is providential that you were awakened by the telegraph boy. Go and dress quickly. You can take a cab. It is a long way. I will go and write my letter."

The maid, who had a great deal of sturdy common sense beneath her emotional exterior, was quite satisfied with the explanation, and went back to her room to dress.

Meanwhile, Fiamma went back to the morning-room, unlocked the door, and went in. She only gave one look at the still figure in the chair. She went over to her writing-table and wrote a note haphazard. Then she wondered what address she should put on the envelope.

Hampstead seemed to her as far as anywhere. She had an acquaintance who lived there, and she wrote a fancy name of a house and also a fancy number in the street of which she knew the name. The name of the woman to whom the note was addressed was also a pure invention.

When she had finished she went out into the hall, again taking the precaution of locking the door of the room behind her. Giunta came down-stairs in a very few minutes.

"Here is money," Fiamma said, "and here is the letter. If you walk out into Victoria Street you will be sure to find a cab. Show the address to the driver, if you can't read it to him. And mind you bring Mrs. Mornington back with you. Now, Giunta, do you quite understand? I am sorry to have to send you, but, you see, there is no man in the house."

"Yes, *signora*, quite. You must not disturb yourself," the woman answered; "and, oh, *signora,* do rest yourself a little; you will be worn out."

"Yes, I shall rest, Giunta," said Fiamma. "But please make all the haste you can."

Making all the haste she could, Fiamma reckoned that her maid would be away at least an hour and a half—probably more.

Suddenly it came to her in a flash that she could not act alone. She was not strong enough; she didn't know what to do. She must have advice; she must consult some one—some one who understood things, who knew the law, who was brave and bold, and could face the situation.

She hardly needed to consider. There was only one man in the world whom she could absolutely trust in such an emergency—Marcus Endellion.

She went to the telephone, which was attached to the wall in a small room at the back of the hall.

She turned the handle vigorously.

"Number, please," came in a slow, sleepy voice.

"Mayfair, double-six-seven-double-one," Fiamma said composedly.

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## CHAPTER V.

### Endellion's Dream.

NO. 66711 Mayfair was not usually rung up at half past four in the morning.

Endellion heard the telephone bell as he was ascending the staircase to his bedroom. There was a telephone on his study-table; there were also extensions in his housekeeper's room and in his own bedroom.

"What on earth does that mean?" he exclaimed aloud, as the telephone bell rang. "At this hour of the night!"

He took his half-smoked cigar from his mouth and impatiently descended the staircase to his study and took up the receiver.

"Hello!" he jerked out.

"Double-six-seven-double-one Mayfair?" came a voice.

"Yes," he snapped.

"Is that you, Mr. Endellion," came Fiamma's voice; but for the moment the man did not recognize it. He only knew that a woman spoke to him.

"Yes, I'm Mr. Endellion," he answered. "What is it? Who are you?"

A half-smothered sigh of relief sounded in his ears, and then a very quiet and subdued voice said:

"Don't you know me—I'm Mrs. Monkswood—Fiamma Monkswood?"

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed the man. "What on earth is it? You're up very early. How do you do?"

He flung his cigar into the dead ashes in the grate and sat down with the receiver to his ear, a faint smile of amused curiosity stealing into his lean, saturnine face.

"What an idea! I was just going to bed. Tell me, though, is anything the matter?"

"Yes," was the faint answer. "I want to see you at once. Can you come round at once?"

"Yes. I'll be with you as soon as the first taxi I meet will take me."

"Thank you. Good-by."

"Good-by."

He replaced the receiver, rang off, and drew a deep breath.

"What on earth can it mean?" he exclaimed to the empty room.

Two minutes afterward he was driving to Queen Anne's Gate.

He observed the time as they were driving down St. James's Street. It was a quarter to five and the day was full-born.

Five minutes later he stood in the hall of Fiamma's house, holding her icy-cold hand in his.

"I haven't been long, have I?" he said, with some attempt at cheerfulness.

The woman shut her eyes and clutched his hand convulsively. For a moment he thought she was going to faint. But she controlled herself.

"Thank you so much—I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"Not at all," he answered. "First of all, tell me—shall I dismiss my cab?"

"No—no, keep it. You may want it. There are so few cabs about at this hour."

"All right. Now, tell me, Fiamma, what it all means? I'm completely mystified and—and I can't tell you how glad I am to see you again." He pressed her cold hand and released it.

"You are very good," she said in a faint voice. "I had to find some one. I couldn't think—I couldn't do anything alone. I was powerless, terrified, and —and, oh, my God, Marcus, even now I don't know what we can do! And I ought not to have dragged you into it. I—I am sorry; but somehow or other I could only think of you. I felt I could trust you, and I knew somehow that—that you'd come if I asked you."

"You make me very happy, Fiamma, when you say that," he said.

"Long ago—you remember—you once told me that—that if ever I was in trouble, or lonely, or worried, or in any way in want of a friend, that all I had to do was to—to send for you. And I believed you, you see. I took you at your word."

"That was a long time ago," murmured the man. "It seems a lifetime ago. Do you remember—it was in Paris, in the Louvre—we were standing in front of Beltraffio's Casio Madonna—the one I always said was a Luini until—"

"Yes, yes," she interrupted, "I remember, but not now—not now. An awful thing has happened—an awful thing."

"I don't care what's happened now!" he exclaimed, with a ring of triumph in his voice. "I'm the happiest man in the wide world, because Fiamma *mia* has made me her slave again."

"Oh, don't, Marcus—for God's sake, don't!" she murmured inarticulately.

"Forgive me," he answered quickly. "I am selfish. Come, tell me, what is the trouble?"

For a few long seconds neither spoke. Fiamma appeared to be struggling with her emotion. She was ghastly pale, and her lovely eyes shone with unnatural brilliance.

"I know I can trust you," said Fiamma at last. "But I must ask you now, before I say anything, to swear to me that you will not ask me to tell you more than I must."

"I am in your hands," he said gently. "What is it—dear?"

She pointed to a door leading from the small square hall. The gesture was expressive of surrender to fate and to the man's honor.

"In there," she breathed.

He moved forward to the door, but she caught his sleeve. "Don't go in till I tell you. Then, if you'd rather not, there is still time for you to go. It is only fair. He is dead—"

Endellion started. "Dead? Who is is dead?" The man's manner had changed in an instant.

"He is in there—just as I found him," she moaned. "He—he hadn't been here more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. I—I left him sitting in the chair and went to—to get something, and when I came back—I—I—found him. Now will you go in?" She unlocked the door.

Endellion looked at her for an instant, hesitated—no man, however callous, can rush into the presence of death—and then said, "Yes, I will go in—but don't you come."

"I must come, too. I must tell you everything. I know just what is in your mind—you are asking how it is that a man came to see me at such an hour."

"To be quite candid," retorted Endellion, "that was precisely what I was wondering."

The woman caught her breath. His look and the altered tone in his voice came just in time to prevent her telling him something which all her life she would have regretted. She must still keep her secret—even more closely now that he was dead.

"Please go in," she said, and her voice was strangled by a sob. She covered her face with her hands and commenced to sob hysterically.

Endellion opened the door and walked into the morning-room, with its flowered chintses and Italian furniture.

Endellion was superkeenly alive to minute impressions at that precise moment. He observed details rather than general effects. The first clear impression was the scent of lilies mingling with that of stale cigar smoke. It reminded him curiously of Queste House an hour or two ago.

He noticed a spirit-stand, a silver box of cigarettes, and a silver dish of dainty sandwiches on the table.

The room was bathed in sunlight, though the chints curtains of the large bay-window which occupied the entire end of the room were only partly drawn. He received a momentary impression of the fresh dancing green of

the trees in St. James's Park and the vibrant note of a distant bugle sounding reveille at the barracks not very far away.

His eyes traveled swiftly round the pleasant Old-World room.

He walked slowly toward the great bay-window, looking closely for the grim thing that Fiamma had told him he would find.

There was the armchair. It stood by the table. A man's white dress-tie lay across one of the arms; but the chair was empty. The room was empty.

He turned round just in time to catch Fiamma in his arms.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### A Mystery of the Dawn.

ENDELLION laid the insensible form of Fiamma on a large chints-covered Chesterfield and stared at her helplessly. Then he found himself kneeling by her side, begging her to come to life, to speak to him, not to be foolish, to be brave.

He pulled himself together at last and ran swiftly across the room to the electric bell. There must be servants in the house. He pressed the enameled bell-push and heard the distant sound of an electric bell. Then he strode swiftly toward the open door. He admitted himself powerless. He must seek help. He would go and arouse the servants. Good Heavens! If it came to that he would go out and call in a policeman—any passer-by, for the matter of that.

At the door he turned and looked back. Fiamma was struggling to her feet.

"Thank God!" he said devoutly.

"I—I am so sorry," she murmured faintly. "It was foolish of me. I—I—oh, please forgive me! I'm quite all right. I can't understand why I was so foolish. I—but what can it mean?"

He was by her side in an instant.

"What can what mean?" he asked. He spoke roughly in his overwhelming relief. "Are you sure you are all right?" he added. He was absolutely terrified lest she should faint again. "Do drink some brandy. Here's some in this glass."

She obviously needed the stimulant. Her knees were shaking—her face was like paper. He held the glass to her lips and she gulped some of the spirit down. In a minute or two she looked more like herself.

"Now, tell me what this means," said Endellion. "What a mercy the bell didn't awake your servants. But I was at my wits' end. I thought you would never come to."

"There aren't any servants to wake," she said.

"You don't mean that you are absolutely alone in the house?"

"Yes, I am."

"But why?"

"My maid was with me," she answered in a low, mechanical voice. "The others won't be back until to-morrow. I only came back yesterday from Florence—earlier than I meant to. But I sent my maid away just now—before I rang you up."

"Sent her away?" he echoed.

"Yes, I made an excuse and sent her to Hampstead. I was frightened to have any one in the house. You see—he was here." She looked round the room in a dazed fashion.

"But where is he?" she said in a weak, piteous voice. "He was here—I left him here. He was dead. He was here when I wrote a note to give Giunta. Then I came out and locked the door behind me. And now he is gone. Oh, what does it mean?"

Endellion took her hand in a firm grip.

"Fiamma," he said severely, "have you been dreaming?"

"No, no! It's true. You don't understand. It's too horrible. I feel as if I were going mad."

"Then tell me all about it."

"No, no, I can't!" She withdrew her hand from his grasp. Her faculties were returning to her. She looked at

him with a sort of terror. "Don't ask me, Marcus. I can't tell you anything."

"But you have told me there was a dead man in here."

"There was!" she wailed. "There was!"

"But now there is no one—nothing. How has he been taken away?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know! It is too awful. But I haven't been dreaming, Marcus."

"Why did you send for me?" he asked suddenly.

"Because I wanted your help. I didn't know what to do."

"You wanted me to deal with the situation?"

"Yes—yes."

"But you didn't know what you wanted me to do?"

"No, no!"

"And you won't tell me any more?"

"I can't, Marcus—I can't!"

"Only that there was a man here in your room at four o'clock in the morning. Alive or dead," he added roughly; "what difference does that make? What do you want me to think?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know! It doesn't matter about me." She had sunk into a chair and hidden her face in her hands.

Endellion began to make a systematic survey of the room. The first object that attracted his attention was the evening dress-tie of white lawn that lay across one of the arms of the chair in which Fiamma had stated that she had left a man dead. It was not tumbled or crumpled in any way, but just lay there as if it had been quietly and deftly removed from a man's collar and placed with deliberation in the position that it occupied.

Endellion took it up and examined it, then replaced it. As he did so he saw that on a small round table beside the armchair was a tumbler overturned. He took it up and held it to his nostrils.

"Whisky," he said to himself. "Fiamma"—he went on aloud—"did this—individual drink anything while he was with you?"

"No," came the answer in a smothered voice. "We were talking, and then I went up-stairs to get—something."

"And you say you were away only a few minutes?"

"Five at the most."

"And when you came back he was dead. My dear, forgive me, but it sounds the most impossible story I've ever heard."

She raised her face from her hands. The look of blind agony on it smote him with a pang of purest pity.

"Some one has been drinking whisky since you were in the room, then," he went on. "And that some one was in a hurry, too, for the glass was knocked over. And it was neat whisky, into the bargain."

He left the table and wandered round the room. The woman followed him with dull eyes.

When he came to the window he parted the chints curtains that were drawn right across the wide bay. There was a semicircular space behind them, and a low whistle sounded in Fiamma's ears as soon as he had disappeared behind the folds. The next moment he parted the curtains again and faced her with a look of deepening surprise on his face.

"Was the window open?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. I shut them all myself. Oh, hours ago!"

"The French window at the side is wide open," he said. "The blind is up and the gate at the bottom of the garden is open, too."

"Oh, Marcus," she cried wildly, "what does it mean?"

"That some one has opened the window and the gate and gained entrance to the house that way and disappeared the same way, too."

"Then some one came in and—and took him away!" said the woman in a hoarse whisper. "Oh, Marcus, is that what you think?"

"I am so utterly in the dark," he an-

swered, "that I can't form an opinion. But, if you are certain that the window was shut, it is clear that some one must have opened it."

He disappeared through the curtains again, and this time walked through the window into the fresh spring morning air. There was a short flight of iron steps leading down to the strip of laurel-belted garden that overlooked Birdcage Walk and St. James's Park.

He descended into the piece of ground, and, walking along the gravel path to the gate, looked carefully for signs of footsteps. But there were none. There had been no rain lately—the gravel revealed no traces, and the grass, fresh and untrodden, was sprinkled with glittering dew.

He closed the gate, which fastened with a spring catch, and must have been left unlocked for any one to have been able to open it, and went back to Fiamma, who still sat huddled up, gazing with a desperate, fixed look at the spot where she had last seen the form of the man she loved.

"I can't find any footprints," he told her. "Don't you keep that gate locked?"

"Not—always." Her voice faltered, and he looked at her sharply. But he did not ask any further questions.

He went on with his examination of the room, but could find no further traces that could contribute a clue to the mystery of which he did not even know the real nature. When he had satisfied himself he came and stood in front of her.

"Now, what shall I do, Fiamma? Shall I go and fetch a policeman?"

Her voice rose to a shrill note of terror.

"Oh, no, no! For God's sake, Marcus, promise me that you won't dream of doing such a thing!"

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"Nothing," she answered. "There is nothing to do now. You have been very good, Marcus."

"You want me to go away now?"

"Please."

"And convince myself, while I am eating my breakfast, that I have had a very curious dream?"

"Yes—yes. Oh, you are good! I knew I could trust you."

"But you will send for me again if anything happens?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Aren't you afraid of being left alone in the house?" he asked, as he took his hat from the table.

"No," she answered. "Giunta will be back soon. She won't be able to find the address I sent her to. She will come back to tell me; she thinks it very urgent. And why should I be afraid?" she added drearily.

"You are a wonderful woman," Endellion said. "You can trust me, Fiamma—in any emergency."

He took her hand and pressed it warmly. Then he went out by the window, through the garden, and into Birdcage Walk.

He walked home and managed to sleep for three hours. Then he bathed, dressed, and breakfasted, and at a quarter to ten set out for Queste House, where Lord Queste had given him an appointment at ten o'clock. All thoughts save of the scheme he wanted the prime minister's promise of support for were now rigorously banished from his mind.

There was two taxis outside the great entrance of the house in St. James's Place. Endellion rang the bell. The butler opened the door.

"I have an appointment with his lordship," the financier began, and then he looked at the butler's face, which was chalky white and working with strange convulsive movements. "What on earth is the matter?" he added sharply.

"Oh, sir," the man faltered in a quavering voice, "a most awful thing has happened! His lordship—his lordship is dead." He gave a sob like a woman. "They found him an hour ago in his bed. There's police and de-

tectives in the house. And they say" —he sobbed again—" they say his lordship has been murdered!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### The String of a Violin.

NO words could give any idea of Endellion's feelings as he heard from the blanched lips of the grief-stricken butler that Lord Queste was dead—that he had been murdered. It was one of those events the hearing of which rob men not only of their power of thought, but of their faculty for receiving impressions.

Lord Queste dead—murdered! It was inconceivable, impossible! Men of his position were not murdered—not in a peaceful and well-governed state. In Russia and other chaotic countries, where the government was the enemy of the people, those whose difficult task it was to rule were never for a moment free from the fear of assassination. But in England! And a man so universally revered and beloved! No; it was beyond belief. There was some mistake.

Endellion stood speechless on the threshold of the great house. The butler did not ask him to come in. He was just about to turn and go away, realizing in a dull way that the appointment he had made would never be kept, when a practical thought flashed into his brain.

"You say there is a detective here?" he said to the butler. "I may be of use. He may want to see me. I suppose I was one of the last people who saw Lord Queste alive."

"So one of the footmen was saying, sir," the man answered. "The detective has been asking us all questions."

"Will you go and find out whether he wants to see me? It would save time, as I am here."

"Yes, sir, if you will come in."

The butler showed him into a room of moderate dimensions at the back of the hall. It was next to the smoking-room where Endellion had waited for his host in the early hours of that fatal morning, and was known, from its shape, as the "oval room."

Endellion had only just time to wonder whether so many monstrous and impossible events had ever been crowded into a few short hours when a sturdily built man of medium height, dressed in neat, dark clothes, came into the room.

"Mr. Endellion, I believe," he said in a quiet, businesslike voice, in which was a strong trace of accent that Endellion could not place, but that bore no relation to the cockney intonation. "My name is Tarpel, sir — Chief Detective - Inspector Tarpel, of Scotland Yard. I have charge of this terrible case. I am obliged to you, sir, for letting me know that I could see you here. It will save time. I was on the point of sending to ask you to be good enough to grant me an interview. You were, I believe, the last person that saw Lord Queste alive. Therefore, what you have to say is of the greatest importance."

"The last person?" queried Endellion incredulously.

"As far as I can make out at present," the detective answered. "Though, of course, it may turn out that that is not the case."

"The butler said that Lord Queste had been murdered," said Endellion, showing his natural excitement. "It is incredible! Is it true?"

"I fear there can be no doubt," the detective answered.

"How?"

For a moment Mr. Tarpel hesitated. No doubt he was wondering whether, at this early stage, it was desirable to give information of any sort.

"Sir James Risborough," he said at last, "who was called in at once by the household, at first thought that his lordship had died a natural death. He was lying on his back in his bed. But, on examination, he found a punctured wound in the nape of the neck, almost

hidden by the hair. It was a very small wound. I don't understand these things myself, but Sir James says that a small, sharp instrument would puncture the spinal cord and cause death."

"Good Heavens, how ghastly it sounds!" cried Endellion, with a strong shudder. "It sounds like the work of a fiend. And have you no clue?"

Mr. Tarpel did not answer the question directly.

"At present," he said, "the case is shrouded in what the man in the street calls mystery."

"And what do you call it?" asked Endellion curiously.

"A variety of names. Sometimes accident, sometimes coincidence, sometimes a careful arrangement of plans."

"It couldn't be suicide?" Endellion interrupted suddenly.

The detective looked at him; a sudden light of acute, almost preternatural intelligence flashed into his blue eyes.

"Have you any reason to suppose, sir," he asked, "that Lord Queste would, under any circumstances, have been capable of committing suicide?"

"Of course not. But I think you are a little mistaken. I did not know him very well. I meant from your point of view."

"From my point of view," said the detective in measured tones, "the very last explanation of Lord Queste's death is that he took his own life. The doctor said it was impossible, too. And now, will you please tell me exactly what you know of his lordship's movements, Mr. Endellion?"

Endellion did so in as few words as possible, describing how, having a very important matter to discuss with Lord Queste, whose time was so enormously taken up that an interview with him was very difficult to obtain, he had stayed on after all the other guests had left, and his host had joined him in the smoking-room. Then how Lord Queste had seemed disinclined to discuss business at that hour, and had made an appointment with him at ten o'clock, and had then suggested that they should go out into the fresh air.

Up to that point the detective only interrupted him once.

"What reason did his lordship give," he asked, "for not discussing business with you, Mr. Endellion?"

"He said he was too tired. It was natural enough, after such a function."

"Yes, of course. Forgive my interruption. Please go on."

Then Endellion described how they had walked together to his house in Hill Street, speaking very little and on the most indifferent subjects, and how Lord Queste had parted from him on his own door-step, declining his invitation to go in, and saying that he would walk back, as he felt inclined for a stroll.

"Did you notice anything peculiar in his lordship's manner?" the detective asked.

"No, nothing whatever. He did appear to be very tired, but that was only natural."

"And when his lordship had left you, Mr. Endellion," Mr. Tarpel went on, "do you mind telling me what you did?"

"I went into my study and wrote a couple of letters," was the immediate answer, "and prepared some telegrams to be sent off as soon as the servants were up, postponing my journey to Paris."

"I see. And then you went to bed."

"Then I—" Endellion began. For the fraction of a second he hesitated; his mind flew back to those disturbing events of the early morning hours, to Mrs. Monkswood's telephonic summons, to his hasty drive to her house, to the extraordinary, impossible story she had told him and its startling and inexplicable result.

It was only the fraction of a second, and then he controlled his thoughts.

"Then I went to bed. I slept rather late this morinng, as you may imagine. Immediately after I had breakfasted I came here to keep the appointment Lord Queste had made with me."

"I see. Thank you, sir," said the detective. "Then that is all you have to tell me?"

"Absolutely all. But look here, just now you said I was the last person who had seen him alive. But surely that can't be the case! What about the servants?"

"It appears," Mr. Tarpel replied, "that Lord Queste was a very bad sleeper, and often in the habit of going out very late at night or very early in the morning. The servants had instructions not to wait up for him."

"But nobody was up in the house when he came in?"

"No; it appears not. And there is nothing unusual about that."

"Then obviously he came in as usual," said Endellion, "and the murderer, whoever he was, entered the house afterward. Obviously he must have got into the house."

"Or," said the detective pointedly, "he may have been in the house."

"Good Heavens!" cried Endellion in a scandalized voice, "you are not suggesting that you suspect some one in the household?"

"I am suggesting nothing," replied Mr. Tarpel calmly. "You must remember, sir, that it is our business to suspect every one."

"But you think it probable that the murderer was concealed in the house, and that when Lord Queste had come in and gone to bed he entered his room and murdered him in his bed?"

"No, most emphatically not," said the detective. "His lordship was dead before he was laid in his bed."

"How do you know that?" cried Endellion, startled.

"Because, if his lordship had been attacked while in bed," was the quiet answer, "there would have been some signs of a struggle. But there were none. The bedclothes were arranged as if they covered a person peacefully asleep. His lordship, when found, was lying on his back, with his arms at his side."

"Then how do you suggest that he was killed?" asked Endellion in horrified accents.

"I have no suggestion to make," replied Mr. Tarpel. "And now that you have been kind enough to give me all the information in your power, sir, I am afraid I must go back to my duties."

"You know where to find me, if you want me, Mr. Tarpel?"

"Yes, sir; thank you."

Endellion took up his hat and stick and walked out of the room. The detective followed him. Endellion found the butler in the hall. He asked that his most sincere and heartfelt condolences should be conveyed to Lady Queste as soon as she was sufficiently recovered from the shock to receive them.

Mr. Tarpel went up-stairs, with the measured step of a man who was puzzling out some problem, and entered the chamber of death.

A subordinate of his was on guard beside the mortal remains of the great minister. Sir James Risborough, the family physician, was at the moment in attendance on Lady Queste.

The first thing Mr. Tarpel did was to take out a small pocketbook and make a few notes in it with a pencil of which the end showed signs of having been constantly bitten. Then he approached the wide, low Empire bed of mahogany and ormolu on which the body of Lord Queste lay.

The face of the dead statesman was quite peaceful. Mr. Tarpel lifted the sheet that covered it and stared down into it, certainly without any morbid curiosity, but rather with a feverish desire to wrest from the cold clay the secret of how and in what guise and at what moment death had come.

He was about to let the sheet fall back again when his eye was arrested by something that protruded from under the silken sleeping-suit, at the dead man's throat. He had previously made no personal examination of the body beyond a glance at the small wound in the nape of the neck that the doctor had pointed out to him.

Now he quietly and reverently, and yet in a cool, businesslike way, slipped his hand under the dead man's jacket. He gave a sharp exclamation, and signed to his subordinate to help him raise the body from its recumbent position. This done, he undid a couple of buttons and stripped the right shoulder and upper arm as far as the elbow.

A curious sight met his eyes. Around the upper arm, about four inches below the shoulder, was something that Tarpel at first took to be a bootlace or a piece of tape. But a closer examination showed that it was made neither of hide nor silk nor cotton, but of some tough, resilient substance. The end had become detached, and it was that which Tarpel had seen protruding beneath the collar. With a few dexterous touches he uncoiled the strange bracelet, fastened the jacket, replaced the body, and covered it with the sheet. Then he examined closely that object that he held in his hand.

"What on earth is it?" asked the other detective in tones of intense curiosity.

"By all that's wonderful," said Tarpel, as if to himself, "it's one of the strings of a violin!"

He held it fully stretched out between his two hands. He and his subordinate stared at each other in blank perplexity.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### The Methods of Mr. Tarpel.

IN blank and speechless silence Mr. Tarpel and his subordinate, a rising young detective named Parsons, stared at the violin string that the former had just discovered coiled round the arm of the dead statesman. In itself such a simple object, and yet, in its incongruous position, bearing a mysteriously sinister suggestion, even to their hardened official minds.

After a few moments of that dead silence of stupefaction, Mr. Tarpel slowly, and with deliberation, coiled up the string, and put it away in his pocketbook.

"The doctor must have overlooked that," he muttered to himself. "That's queer."

"What do you make of it?" asked the other breathlessly.

But Mr. Tarpel only shook his head. He was not given to discussing his theories with his subordinates.

He then set himself to work on a task that, on the face of it, appeared to be a needless repetition, since it had already been carried out, under his instructions, by his younger colleague. He began to make a minute and systematic examination of the room—floor, walls, hangings, paint, pictures, furniture, and even of the various personal belongings of the dead man that were lying about.

It was a curious sight to watch him at work. His movements were apparently casual and without method, and yet not an inch of space, not a solitary object evaded his eyes.

Then he shook his head in a discouraged way.

"Not a trace of anything," he muttered. "Not a finger-mark! The windows all closed and untampered with. No sign of any living creature having been in the room."

"I thought I made a pretty thorough search," said the younger detective a trifle resentfully.

"Sometimes one overlooks things," replied Tarpel coolly.

He walked over to the wide couch at the foot of the bed, another beautiful piece of furniture dating from the First Empire. On it, in neat piles, were arranged the clothes Lord Queste had been wearing the night before. They had been found thus neatly folded, as his lordship's valet had informed the detective his master was in the habit of laying his garments, being of a most orderly disposition even in the smallest things.

The articles that had been found in the pockets had been placed on a small table by the side of the couch—Lord

Queste's watch, which was still going; a pocketbook, containing various personal papers, some visiting-cards, and an automobile license; a gold pencil-case, and a very old, battered silver cigarette-case with "Godfrey" engraved on it in letters that imitated handwriting; a bunch of keys, attached to a steel chain; some loose money, and two separate, very small, thin gilt keys of the type that fit specially made locks.

These keys, for some reason, now attracted Mr. Tarpel's attention. He took them up and examined them one after the other, and then very closely side by side. They were almost identical, and to the ordinary eye would have appeared absolutely so; but Mr. Tarpel's trained perception realized at once that the two keys would not have fitted the same lock. He laid them down, but for a moment his eyes still lingered on them.

He next turned his attention to Lord Queste's clothing. It had already been searched minutely by his subordinate, cursorily by himself; but he did not appear to be satisfied.

Trousers and waistcoat pockets revealed nothing further, but, taking up the coat, his hand came into contact with some object that was deep down in the pocket of one of the tails. It was a thin, circular object. He gave a sharp exclamation as he drew it out.

It was a bangle of frosted gold, just wide enough to allow of letters in diamonds of about an eighth of an inch, that were spread out round the circle. Mr. Tarpel spelled them out to himself; his voice was not loud enough for his colleague to hear what he said.

"F — I — A — M—M—A. Now, what's that? Fi—no; F—eeamma. A name—a foreign name—a woman's name."

His face changed. It grew strangely acute, and most considerably graver than before. He hesitated, making a movement first as if he would place the bangle on the table with the other things; but eventually he placed it in his pocketbook with the violin-string.

At that moment, just as the younger detective, who had been watching him curiously, was about to blurt out a question, the well-known physician, Sir James Risborough, came into the room.

"I have been with Lady Queste," he told the detective. "The poor lady is utterly prostrated, but she insists on coming here. She has not seen him yet. I trust," he added, "that you have finished what—what you have to do here."

"For the moment we have, sir," Mr. Tarpel answered. "Of course, nothing will be touched in the room. It may be necessary for us to renew our investigations later on."

"I hope it won't be necessary for you to interview Lady Queste," Sir James went on. "You can imagine the poor lady's state of mind."

"I am afraid I shall have to ask her ladyship to grant me a few minutes later on," the detective replied, his usual, stolidly businesslike tones deepened by a note of respectful sympathy. "But, of course, I will not disturb her ladyship until she is able to see me."

He signed to his companion, and, following in the wake of Sir James Risborough, they left the chamber of death, from which it was their duty to wrest its ghastly secret.

Sir James, after a few murmured directions to a white-faced servant on the landing, asked Mr. Tarpel to come down-stairs with him. The detective left his colleague in the hall to await further instructions, and followed the dignified and impressive form of the great doctor into the brilliant, airy, oval room where he had a little while before interviewed Endellion.

"As a friend of the family of many years' standing," Sir James began, "I am sure you will allow me to ask you, Mr.—ah, yes—Tarpel, whether you have as yet arrived at any conclusion, or formed any theory, about this fearful crime?"

"I have only just begun to work, sir," the detective answered frankly.

"Ah, yes, I knew that it is much too

early to expect you to make any definite pronouncement," the doctor went on. "But I thought there might be indications that would lead you along a certain train of reasoning and deduction."

"There are none," said the detective briefly.

"There is absolutely no clue?"

"None whatever that gives any indication of how Lord Queste was murdered and who murdered him."

"But you have found some sort of clue?" asked the doctor shrewdly.

"One or two things that may or may not turn out to be clues."

"What are they?"

"I don't think they would have any meaning to you, sir."

"Ah, of course, I know you gentlemen don't like to talk about your discoveries and theories," said Sir James, not attempting to hide his disappointment. "And I suppose you're right. But as I am such an old friend of the family, and poor Lady Queste has asked me to take charge of everything until the arrival of the new marquis—who has been telegraphed for—I thought you might waive your professional prejudices and tell me frankly on what lines you are pursuing your investigations."

"You may be quite right, sir," Tarpel answered respectfully, "that if I had anything to tell I should not keep it from you. But I have nothing. I have only just begun. I have not even thoroughly examined the house yet."

"I have every confidence in you, Mr. —er—Tarpel," said Sir James warmly.

"It is very good of you to say so, sir. I deeply regret that I have been able to tell you so little. By the way, sir, there is one question I want to ask you. Would the wound in the back of the neck, which you say punctured the spinal cord—would that cause instantaneous death?"

"I think there is no doubt that it would," replied Sir James, without hesitation. "Oh, yes, death would be instantaneous."

"Thank you, sir," said Tarpel.

He went back to his colleague and gave him a few instructions, and then proceeded to examine the whole house in exactly the same exhaustive manner as he had examined the chamber of death. Every now and then, when he was quite free from observation, he stopped and rubbed his hands together, and an expression of extreme satisfaction lightened his heavy face.

There was something outrageous in these demonstrations, but they meant no disrespect to the dead. They merely meant that he saw himself confronted by one of the biggest cases that ever a detective had had to handle. So perhaps it was no wonder that he rubbed his hands and said to himself:

"There's something quite out of the ordinary—something, something quite out of the ordinary!"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### The Woman With a Secret in Her Eyes.

ENDELLION went from Queste House to his offices, situated in an incongruously peaceful, Old-World court not far from the Mansion House.

As he drove there in his neat single brougham, which, like all the appurtenances of his daily life, was the acme of good taste, his horror at the prime minister's sudden death and his shuddering amazement at the horrid mystery of it were merged in the purely personal inconvenience it caused him, and the probable upsetting of his plans. Never was there a man with a more perfect capacity for dividing his brain into compartments and keeping each one absolutely separate and distinct from the others.

First of all, he went through his correspondence, and disposed of it. Then a series of telephone-calls gathered in his handsomely furnished room, within about twenty minutes, the other members of the English group—English, that is to say, by reason of being domiciled in England—that was interested in the gigantic scheme of railroad con-

struction for which they had desired the prime minister's more or less official support.

Half an hour's consultation decided them to go on with the scheme independently of the government's support. There was no knowing what would happen now. Queste's death had cast a cloud over the political horizon the magnitude of which only the future could show. He had been the strong man in the cabinet. There was not another man in the whole government who inspired the confidence that he did abroad.

"His influence is of more value to us," said Endellion at the end of the discussion, "than the pledged word of any other minister. Lord Queste dead is a greater power, as far as we are concerned, than any other man who occupies his position alive. He had practically promised his support. We shall find that all-sufficient."

It was decided that Endellion should postpone his departure for Paris until the next day, as there were now certain matters that needed consideration, and a lengthy explanatory telegram was despatched to the head of the French group with which they were combining. Lunch was then served.

After luncheon he interviewed the manager of the banking department, and spent a few minutes in the room devoted to the organization of his charities in conversation with Mr. Benjamin, his almoner, a cripple with a beautiful, poetic face that lit up with a light akin to worship when his employer, after discussing certain matters, kindly asked after his health and sent his regards to his beautiful young wife.

Then, with a bundle of papers in his hand and a cigar between his lips, he entered the neat little brougham again and was driven westward at a smart pace. This was his usual daily routine.

Endellion began his westward drive on this particular afternoon in his usual way by settling down to peruse the papers he had brought away with him; but it was plain that he found it difficult to concentrate his attention. Presently they dropped on to his knees, and he sat absorbed in his own reflections, mechanically drawing at his cigar and flicking the ash into the silver receptacle at his side.

When the brougham had reached the Embankment and was passing Cleopatra's Needle, he suddenly straightened his spare shoulders, gathered up his papers into a bundle, and, leaning out of the window, told his man to drive to No. 18a Queen Anne's Gate.

A footman opened the door to him; so Fiamma's servants had evidently returned during the morning.

He said that Mrs. Monkswood was not receiving. Endellion wrote a few words on his card and asked the man to take the message to his mistress.

In a few moments he was conducted to the empty drawing-room. It was on the first floor, with the same charming outlook as the morning-room where the extraordinary scene had been enacted.

It was quite five minutes before Mrs. Monkswood came into the room. As she advanced toward him, Endellion stared at her. He could not find his voice. Her face and her white gown were of the same hue; even her lips looked white. Her eyes were glassy. She looked more like a dead woman than a living one.

Endellion took her hand. It was like grasping a lump of ice.

"Fiamma, you are ill!" he said with the utmost concern. "Forgive me if I have intruded. But I want to know whether I can be of any further use."

"No, thank you," she said. Her voice was dull, but perfectly composed, the voice of a woman who has been waging a mortal combat for hours. "I am glad you have come," she went on. "I want to thank you."

"Are you still determined to tell me nothing?" he asked.

"You promised to forget all about it."

"I know. But I thought something might have happened."

"Nothing has happened," she said. His watchful eyes saw her gathering all her forces together in an effort to be natural. "Nothing did happen, Marcus."

"Then you imagined it all, Fiamma?"

"Yes," she said firmly.

"It was a dream? There was nothing corporeal about it?"

"Nothing."

"I am glad," he said with the utmost sincerity. But he knew all the same that there was something very corporeal about the white dress-tie that had lain on the arm of the chair, and about the overturned tumbler and the open window. "But I am sorry to see you looking so ill," he added.

"It is nothing," she said steadily. "Besides, when one's imagination plays such tricks, one must suffer."

"You live too much alone," Endellion said. "Why do you do it? When I think of the times I have called and you have denied yourself to me!"

"I am unsociable," she answered.

"You used not to be. When I first knew you in Venice, in Paris, in Rome—you had such a charming circle."

"I was younger," she said. "And that was in Paris—in Italy. I don't get on with English people."

"You won't allow them to know you. You live the life of a hermit—a beautiful woman like you. It is a sin, a crime. By the way, you have read of this tragedy of the prime minister's death?"

Her face was turned away; her hand was playing with the base of a bronze statuette. It fell to the ground.

"What a state your nerves are in!" said the man, picking it up. "But perhaps you haven't seen the evening papers?"

"Yes, I have. It is dreadful!" Her voice sounded like that of a child repeating a lesson. He thought she was not interested; he tried to interest her.

"It's the most mysterious thing. I was at Queste House this morning. I had an appointment with him. They had only found him an hour before. It seems they have no clue to the murderer at all. Do you know, it happens that I was the last person who saw him alive?"

She made a tigerish movement, as if she would spring out of her chair.

"What do you mean?" she cried hoarsely.

"My dear Fiamma, you will kill yourself if you get so excited about things that don't concern you," said Endellion gently. "I mustn't talk to you about such things; your nerves are all to pieces."

"Yes, tell me—tell me!" she breathed. "You said you were the last person who saw the prime minister, Lord Queste, alive. I have just been reading about his—his dreadful death. What do you mean?"

"Oh, I was at Queste House last night," the man explained, "and I stayed behind to talk to him, but he was too tired, and he wanted fresh air, so he walked home with me. He only left me on my doorstep. He must have gone straight back to his house. Isn't it dreadful?"

"Dreadful—dreadful," she murmured. A moment later she gave a dry sob. "And it was after being with him that you came on here, Marcus?" she asked.

Her fever-bright eyes alarmed him.

"Yes," he said soothingly. "But we're not going to talk about that, Fiamma *mia*. That's all forgotten. Your nerves played you a trick, and you got frightened and sent for me—that's all. And, look here, you must let me prescribe for you. You want rousing, taking out of yourself; you live far too much alone. You must let me take you about a bit.

"You must see people, have them here. What's the good of this dear old house? You must fill it with nice, interesting people. There are a few in the world. And to make a beginning,

come to the opera with me to-night. It will do you good. Floris is singing in 'Aida.' That will take you out of yourself, if anything can."

"Marcus!" She almost shrieked his name. She had sprung to her feet; she looked like some outraged goddess.

"My dear, what is the matter?" he asked in blank surprise. He attempted to treat her extraordinary outburst lightly. "I assure you, it's a great honor. No woman has ever been invited to sit in my box before."

"How can you? Oh, how can you be so heartless?"

She seemed to be beside herself; her face was that of a woman whose soul was on the rack. Endellion regarded her searchingly.

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## CHAPTER X.

### The Sensation of the Hour.

THE inquest on the body of Sir Godfrey Maude Villiers Patrick Edward Coleraine, Marquis of Queste, Viscount Coleraine, Lord Merryon of Constable, a baronet of the United Kingdom, Knight of the Garter, privy councilor, and possessor of a dozen other awe-inspiring titles and designations which came before the one by which the world principally knew him—his majesty's principal secretary of state for foreign affairs—was, from the point of view of the sensation-monger, eminently satisfactory, though it left in the minds of all sober-minded people a sense of incompleteness, of unexplained mystery, of grim, intangible horror.

The verdict was a foregone conclusion. The coroner's jury found that Lord Queste had been murdered, and gave their verdict accordingly: "Murdered by a person or persons unknown." They added a rider which was by way of being a censure on the particular police department whose duty it was to insure the safety of the great officers of the crown.

The country paid willingly and liberally for its police, and it was entitled to be exceedingly annoyed if the police allowed a great and important personage like the prime minister to be murdered in this singularly cold-blooded and altogether mysterious fashion.

The tragic death of Lord Queste, as was only natural, caused the biggest newspaper sensation of recent years. And it was not to be wondered at that the wildest of rumors found temporary credence. There was much talk of anarchists and political vengeance.

Meantime, the law took its course, and it says a great deal for the tact and good feeling of certain police officials who had nothing whatever to gain, but rather a good deal to lose in the nature of *kudos,* that a great deal more vulgar sensation was not brought into the case.

Briefly, the facts of the case, as disclosed by the coroner's inquest, are as follows:

Identity of the deceased having been proved, John Morton, valet of Lord Queste, stated that, on entering his master's bedroom at half past eight, as he had been instructed to do, he discovered Lord Queste dead in his bed. He at once aroused the household and sent for Sir James Risborough, his lordship's doctor, and for the police. Meanwhile, he himself had seen that no one entered Lord Queste's room.

Lady Queste had been informed and had fainted. Her maid was with her. She had not seen her husband until two hours after John Morton's discovery.

That was practically all the valet could say.

A police constable named Robert Lee Smooth was the next witness. All he could say was that he was standing at the corner of Park Place and St. James's Street, when Thomas Coram, a man servant in the employ of Lord Queste, informed him of the tragedy, saying he was on his way to Vine Street police station, and that Sir James Risborough had been telephoned for.

Police Constable Smooth had at once gone to Queste House, seen the body, and remained with Morton until the arrival of an inspector from Vine Street, accompanied by Chief Detective Tarpel, of Scotland Yard, who had opportunely been with the inspector at the time in connection with another case.

Sir James Risborough's evidence was perhaps one of the most dramatic episodes of the inquiry. He stated that he found Lord Queste, whom he well knew and whom he had professionally attended for many years, lying on his back in his bed. He was in pajamas and covered by the bedclothes. The bed and bedclothes did not appear to have been disturbed. He should give it as his opinion, especially in the light of what he now knew, that Lord Queste had never got into his bed that night, but had been placed there after his death.

Sir James went on to give his purely medical evidence. He carefully examined Lord Queste, who, he should say, had been dead about four hours—perhaps more, perhaps less. There was no sign of violence; the face appeared composed and wore a happy, faintly amused smile.

It was just as Sir James was about to leave baffled, as far as external evidence was concerned, that he noticed a very small puncture in the nape of the neck, at the base of the skull. His attention was called to this small puncture by observing a minute clot of blood on the hair which covered the actual wound. The blood was quite congealed and dry. On closer examination he found a clean and deep wound, made presumably by a long-pointed weapon. From the subsequent post-mortem examination he was prepared to say that death arose from this mysterious wound. The weapon had gone deep into the spinal cord.

Asked whether such a wound could be self-inflicted, he emphatically said that it could not. And questioned as to the nature of the instrument causing the puncture, he would not venture an opinion. It might be anything—a fine dagger, a nail, a surgical instrument, a bradawl, a hatpin—indeed, almost anything of that nature. Death would in any case be instantaneous.

There were no signs of organic trouble, and, as the deceased's medical man, he should say Lord Queste was in splendid health.

Could such a wound be the result of an accident? Possibly, though most improbably. Sir James Risborough was deeply moved while giving his evidence. The dead man and he had been lifelong friends.

Accident, suicide, or murder? That was the issue when Chief Detective Tarpel gave his evidence—the final and conclusive evidence of the police. And it was this evidence of the apple-cheeked, bucolic investigator of mystery and crime that, from the public point of view, was so unsatisfactory.

Tarpel was sphinxlike, reserved, almost resentful. The coroner felt that he was being slighted; the jury stood on their dignity. Tarpel's manner suggested a tolerant contempt for the coroner and complete ignorance of the very existence of the jury.

He was investigating the case, he said, but, so far, had no theory to advance, no evidence to adduce. In his opinion it was a case of wilful and clever murder. In time he was confident of bringing the guilty parties to justice.

Had he any clues? Yes, he had lots of clues. What were they? He did not think it politic to advertise them to the world and incidentally to the men or women he would ultimately convict.

One thing he felt certain of, and that was that the crime was the work of more than one man. Why? He preferred to say nothing. He had nothing to say that was evidence.

The coroner protested; the jury became indignant. Tarpel smiled his cherubic, countrified smile and shook his head.

Then one who was higher than Tarpel held a whispered conversation with him. The result was that Tarpel made a statement on oath to the following effect:

There was no doubt but that Lord Queste had been dead when he had been placed in his bed. There was nothing particular to point to foul-play, apart from the medical evidence. All the clothing worn by the deceased on the fatal night had been found in his room with the exception of a white dress-tie. And, around the right arm, about four inches below the shoulder, Tarpel had found a string of a violin.

Tarpel refused to say anything more, and the coroner contented himself with saying mildly sarcastic things about the police and defending his own position before he instructed his sympathetic jury to return the verdict already mentioned.

It was, under the circumstances, the only possible verdict. It was not the function of a coroner to do more than determine the cause of death. The coroner and his jury found that Lord Queste had been murdered.

Sir James Risborough's evidence disposed of the alternative—suicide. And as for the idea of an accident, that was manifestly out of the question, since it had been proved beyond all reasonable doubt that Lord Queste had been dead before he had been placed in his bed.

Fiamma Monkswood read the report of the verdict in an evening paper. She had sent her maid out for it when the raucous cries of the newsboys calling: "Result of the Queste Inquest" came to her from the Old-World quietude of Queen Anne's Gate.

The intense mental and physical strain of the last week—for the final verdict was not given until after an adjournment—had been terrible. Fiamma was desolate and horribly alone; and the unnameable nightmare-terror of the tragedy which had at once robbed her of husband, friend, life itself, had left her groping like a lost soul in the darkness of despair.

It was while Fiamma was reading the report of the coroner's inquest in the *Evening News* that an empty taxi drove up to the house in Queen Anne's Gate. The chauffeur—a sallow-cheeked, pale-eyed youth with a furtive look and an air of nervous bravado—alighted from his perch, patted his lean chestnut mare, and rang the bell of Fiamma's door.

The butler answered the summons and regarded the man with a look of stony inquiry.

"Well, my man?" he asked.

"Please, can I see the gentleman or lady who lives here?" asked the man in the voice of a professional mendicant.

"What's your business?" asked Blockstone, the butler.

"It's private," answered the chauffeur, trying to smile—but Blockstone's supercilious stare killed the germ of a smile instantly.

"I'm afraid my mistress is not at home," said the butler. "Perhaps you'll leave a message?"

"Is there a master here?" asked the cabman.

"This is Mrs. Monkswood's," retorted Blockstone pompously. "Have you made a mistake?"

"Mrs. Monkswood's, is it? Well, I want to see Mrs. Monkswood, please." The man was regaining his self-possession. Mr. Blockstone annoyed him. "My name's Jarratt, and that's my number"—he displayed his badge—"and that there's my cab. What I want now is a word with Mrs. Monkswell—"

"Monkswood," corrected the butler.

"Right-o, old man! Keep your hair on. Mrs. Monkswood, then."

"Mrs. Monkswood is not at home."

"When will she be?"

"Not for some time. You must tell me your business or—"

"All right, then," retorted the cabman; "all I wants to know is this—would Mrs. Monkswood kindly be so good as to oblige me with the name and address of the gentleman as I drove here at four in the morning last Friday

week. There—that's a simple question, ain't it? "

Blockstone's face was a study. He slowly repeated the question. The man nodded.

" That's it, old sport! Now you know."

" Wait a moment," said Blockstone; " I'll go and inquire. I—dare say I can find out without troubling Mrs. Monkswood."

" Thanks," laconically remarked the pale-eyed man, and commenced to whistle softly to himself the refrain of a popular song of the music-halls.

Mr. Blockstone went straight to his mistress.

" Please, ma'am," he said, " there's a cabman who have just called to inquire the name of the gentleman as he states what he drove here, ma'am, at four o'clock on Friday morning last week. Four o'clock, ma'am, he said. Shall I send him away or—"

Fiamma had sprung to her feet.

" Where is he? " she asked faintly.

" At the door, ma'am."

" I'll see him, then," she said quickly.

Fiamma was trembling from hand to foot. She saw that the butler was gazing at her with an uncontrollable astonishment showing through the stolidity of his demeanor.

" Bring the man in here," she added.

When the anemic, cunning-faced youth strode awkwardly into the room she immediately recovered her composure. She fastened coldly inquiring eyes on him. He felt her dignity, and sheepishly twirled his hat.

" I did not understand your question —that is why I sent for you. What do you want? " She spoke slowly and very distinctly.

" It was the name of the gentleman I drove to this 'ere 'ouse at four o'clock in the morning on a Friday—it would be yesterday week—as I wants to know, ma'am," the cabman answered. " If you'll be so good as to give it me, ma'am," he added with perfunctory politeness.

" There is some mistake."

" No, there ain't, ma'am." The crafty little eyes grew suspicious. " I knows the 'ouse, ma'am, 'cos I waited for the gent more than 'arf an hour."

" You have made a mistake," she said. " I thought you came in connection with my maid, whom I had to send a long distance in a cab. I thought she might have underpaid you."

There was nothing for the cabman to do but go. Fiamma turned her back on him. The butler was at the door, disgust on every feature. He went, muttering beneath his breath.

" Now, I wonder whether there's anything in this job or whether there ain't? " he asked himself.

With an evil chuckle he drove off at a smart pace to Scotland Yard.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### The Mourner in the House.

LADY QUESTE sat in her boudoir at Queste House. It was a little more than a week after the great public funeral of her husband, a solemn pageant at which a king had mourned and princes had acted as pallbearers, and the nation had shown a more profound demonstration of grief than had ever been accorded to one of its leaders before.

Lady Queste was still in possession of Queste House. The new marquis—a distant cousin of the dead man—was a clerk in holy orders, and acting as chaplain to a missionary bishop in India at the time of his cousin's death.

She was not alone in her boudoir on this glorious May afternoon. Another woman sat with her in the beautiful, spacious room, with its harmonious medley of styles, its air of refined luxury, and its glowing masses of crimson roses.

This other woman was quite a girl, and she sat near one of the windows, darkened by sun-blinds just sufficient to let into the room only the delicious suggestion of the cool greenery outside.

This girl in deep mourning was Lady

Alice Coleraine, the daughter of the late Lord Queste's elder brother, whom he had succeeded in the title. Her mother had died at her birth, and since her father's death she had made her home with her uncle, to whom she had been devotedly attached.

She was tall and slight and graceful, but easily passed over because of her complete lack of self-assertiveness. Her face wore that look of mingled wistfulness and pride that is so often associated with generations of good breeding. She had a high forehead, dreamy blue-gray eyes, set very widely apart, features of the utmost delicacy, and more than a touch of sadness in her lips.

She was not looking her best to-day. The death of her uncle had shaken her to the very core of her being. Her eyelids were swollen with much weeping, and her grief and a fortnight's imprisonment in the house had drained the soft color from her cheeks. This was only the second time she had seen Lady Queste since the tragedy, and the days of loneliness and brooding had robbed her of her accustomed self-control.

"Dear Alice, if you would only stop crying!" said Lady Queste, who was sitting at the other side of the room in a low chair beside which was a table heaped up with a pile of letters and telegrams. Her own eyes were quite dry.

"I can't help crying, Millicent," Lady Alice answered. Her low voice was broken. "I'm not—not so brave as you."

"Of course it sounds horrible of me to say such a thing," Lady Queste retorted. "But what is the good of crying—now? When you sit there, Alice, with tears dropping down your cheeks one by one, it nearly drives me crazy. I suppose it's because I can't cry myself. I never could. Besides, my nerves are horribly jumpy."

The girl half rose to her feet.

"I'll go to my room, Millicent," she began, but Lady Queste waved her back again.

"No, Alice, I want to talk to you. That's why I sent for you. We've got to make our plans. As soon as this parson man arrives, you see, we shall have to turn out. Of course he isn't married, but, still, I don't suppose he would want us here.

"Besides," she added, with a strange undercurrent of vehemence in her voice, "I don't want to stay. I shall take a box of a house in town, and I shall buy a property somewhere in Italy, and I've got the yacht—Godfrey gave me that for my own. Now, the question is—do you want to go on living with me or not? I know you're quite independent of me financially, although, of course, compared with the past, we shall both be paupers; but I expect Godfrey would have liked you to stay with me. We're not what would be called sympathetic to one another, but we don't get on so badly."

"You have always been very good and sweet to me, Millicent," said the girl. She was trying hard to control her tears, although her eyes were still swimming. "I've been thinking about things, too, and it's awfully good of you to offer to keep me. Only I'm afraid I worry you a lot, don't I? I'm rather a thorn in your side. You see—"

"That's just it," put in Lady Queste. "I want to make it quite clear to you that I can't countenance your ridiculous notions—all this woman's movement and suffragette business and your perfectly terrible friends. It's positively repulsive to think of a girl like you going in for that sort of thing. Poor Godfrey was frightfully weak about you."

"I don't take any active part, Millicent," Lady Alice said.

"If you mean you don't make a frantic spectacle of yourself outside the house, and get marched off to the police-station, with your hat on one side and a face like a turkey-cock, of course I know that," retorted Lady Queste impatiently.

"Uncle Godfrey didn't disapprove of what I have done," the girl said in a low voice.

" Your uncle, as I said just now, was as weak as water where you were concerned," replied Lady Queste. " If you stay with me you must give the whole thing up entirely and behave like an ordinary girl."

Lady Alice rose to her feet.

" That I couldn't do," she said. " I should be false to my convictions, to my ideals. I'd rather live quite alone." Her lips trembled slightly. It was as if she detected beneath Lady Queste's intolerance a personal hostility.

" Well, think it over, dear," retorted the other woman, with one of her sudden dazzling smiles that had that childlike quality that is an element of all superlative beauty. " I'm sure you will consider first of all what you know would have been Godfrey's wishes. And—Alice, I shall dine in my own room to-night. I'm not fit for company, really, even yours, dear. Come and tell me to-morrow, child, what your decision is."

Alice Coleraine felt herself dismissed. She went back to her own lonely rooms in the great silent house. In these first days of her grief she was very miserable.

Lady Queste, when she was alone, began to pace up and down the room with restless footsteps. Then she went over to the table where the letters and telegrams of condolence were heaped up and searched through them with hurried, feverish fingers, searched for the words that her heart hungered for —searched for the message that was not there.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### Voice of Gold.

OVER and over again Lady Queste had done this same thing—had searched feverishly through that great pile of messages for the one that was not there. There were messages of all kinds—gracious royal sympathy from every civilized country, tender words from friends, conventional phrases from acquaintances, from political organizations, from learned societies, from unknown adherents and admirers of the great dead man. There were hundreds of letters and telegrams from every class, from every nationality, from every faith.

Most women would have found occasion for sorrowful pride in this universal appreciation. But Millicent Queste only looked for the message that was not there.

" He might have sent a line—a word," she murmured, as her white fingers, for the hundredth time, pursued their vain search.

There was only one man in the world for Millicent Queste at this moment, when her husband had only just been laid in his grave, and that was Floris, the great Italian singer, the man with the voice of gold.

Of course, the famous tenor had no idea of what the great lady felt for him. Her pride had forbidden her to show it, had made it impossible for her to show it. All that he knew was that she had singled him out for flattering favor and that she raved about his voice.

That was because he did not know the Marchioness of Queste, whose pride was a tradition, who never before had even recognized the existence of such a man as he.

And now her heart, her brain, her whole being were on fire; and she was nearly mad with restlessness and longing, because she could not see him or hear his voice. She had not felt like this on the night when she had defended her conduct against her husband's grave displeasure, on the night of the reception, on the night of Queste's terrible death. She had been in love with Floris then; she had been in love with him for six months.

Six months ago she had, like every one else, raved about Floris's voice. She had, during the previous London season, had him to sing at one or two of her parties. She had welcomed him graciously, smiled on him in her dazzling, indifferent way, shaken hands

with him when he left, congratulated him politely, and felt that he was well worth the enormous check that was sent to him the next day.

Then she had gone over to New York on a flying visit to a friend, one of the few English aristocrats who had married an American and settled down in her husband's country.

It happened that Floris was on the same boat that bore Lady Queste and her retinue of servants back to England. The great lady was a perfect sailor, and it was very rough. Floris was also a perfect sailor.

Hardly any of the other passengers ever appeared on deck. Lady Queste graciously renewed the acquaintance. The singer responded with charming bonhomie and a hint of graceful reverence that her ladyship thought most becoming.

One night, when they were alone on the hurricane deck, he sang snatches of his part of the great love duet in "Madama Butterfly." He sang with his whole soul right into the storm. Something stirred in Lady Queste's heart that night, and since then that something had never been still.

It was passion, the all-powerful, all-conquering emotion that she had never known before. It was no longer only the voice she loved—it was the man. He had remained sublimely ignorant of her feelings, and she had never known content.

What could she do? What could she do? She paced up and down like a caged animal, her hands pressed to her throbbing temples. Then suddenly she crossed the whole length of the boudoir with haste, and passed through an open white door into her dressing-room, a spacious place, lined with white cupboards, with silver fittings, and with no furniture beyond her huge, gold-littered dressing-table, a wide divan, and a couple of armchairs.

She went over to a small, solid table at the farther end, on which stood one of those instruments that so wonderfully reproduce the human voice, a square box of satinwood. Just a box with a handle to it, but none the less a magic thing, that would give her Floris's voice to feast her ears on, to weep over, to madly long for.

She opened a satinwood cabinet that stood beside the table. It was full of drawers, and the drawers were full of round black disks in paper envelopes. She took one out, placed it on the round turn-table on the box, and, after some manipulation, accomplished by her with deft, accustomed, mechanical fingers, she went back hastily into the boudoir.

She sat down in an armchair, and the next moment, after a long-drawn orchestral note, there was poured forth the magic voice that was the delight of two continents.

She had picked out the record haphazard; she did not care as long as she heard his voice. It happened to be that beautiful song in "La Bohème," in which *Ridolfo*, after *Mimi*, having entered the studio and revived, after fainting away, chafes her ice-cold little hands, and tells her who he is and what he does, and reveals his splendid, careless poet's nature.

The soft Italian words rang out with such tenderness that they made the heart ache—"*Che gelida manina.*"

Lady Queste trembled from head to foot. She had forgotten everything, that her husband had only been buried a few days ago, that people would hear the instrument pouring forth its song —Alice Coleraine, the servants—that it was a shocking, a scandalous thing to let the marvelous voice ring out in the house of death.

The upper servants, assembled in the housekeeper's room, looked at each other.

"His lordship not dead a fortnight," said the butler with significance, "and her ladyship playing her gramophone!" The house was very large, but the wonderful instrument had penetrated down below. "That's a funny state of things," he added, shaking his head.

"You do not comprehend!" cried Lady Queste's French maid, who was drinking a cup of tea. "It is terrible for milady—this solitude! Nothing to do all the day — only to think! No wonder she likes to listen to M. Floris!"

A loud bang interrupted her.

"That sounds like the front door," said the butler. "I wonder who's gone out?"

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### Floris.

FLORIS came out of the stage-door of Covent Garden Opera-House with a light, buoyant step. The rehearsal was over, and he had run down the stairs like a boy let out from school. He was singing softly to himself some bars from the beautiful aria "Recondita Armonia," in "La Tosca," which they had just been rehearsing for a new soprano from St. Petersburg.

When he reached the street he remembered, and checked himself with a gay little laugh. The checking of himself was just as much a habit as the singing to himself.

Floris sang because he couldn't help it. All the rigorous training of the last few years had not been able to destroy the spontaneous and perfectly natural method in which he used his glorious voice.

In those first days, now nearly six years ago, after Siegermann, the world-famous impresario, had discovered Floris singing in a troupe, the "Barca Reale," that floated about in a barge on the Grand Canal in Venice, and made music outside the various hotels, that astute and prudent gentleman had had the greatest difficulty in impressing upon his wonderful discovery the fact that he must not go about singing all day, and certainly must never open his mouth to sing, as he was wont to do, in the streets, where people could hear him.

Floris was tall, very tall for an Italian, and especially for a southerner, for his native place was the rocky aerie of Castrogiovanni, in Sicily. He held himself like a lance, and there was no sign as yet in his slim, graceful figure of the almost inevitable obesity to which singers are doomed. He was young — only thirty-two — and there was still something boyish about him; also a very rare thing in an Italian—people of a race that matures so early.

He was dressed like an Englishman in a blue lounge suit, with a black tie, and wore a straw hat rather on the back of his head. He carried a stick and a pair of light gloves in his hand, and he wore no jewelry, with the exception of a thin gold watch-chain.

As he entered the hotel one of the clerks at the reception counter came out to meet him.

"A lady asked for you just now, *monsieur,*" he said, speaking in French, and in a rather hesitating way, although his difficulty was not with the language. Floris generally spoke French to any one who could speak it, although he knew English fairly well, having a natural aptitude for languages.

"A lady?" the singer replied carelessly. "Yes—who was it? Did she wait?"

"The lady gave no name," the clerk replied. "She said she particularly wanted to see you, and would wait for you. She was averse to waiting in the lounge, so I had her shown up to your salon. I hope I did not do wrong?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Floris. A faint shadow rested on his face. He thought of his wife, the narrow-minded, bad-tempered woman who had become a shrew while he was still a boy.

He wondered if she had come over to worry him. But no, it was not likely, he reflected, as he went up in the lift. Annunciata was pleased to go her own way as he was to go his. And she couldn't want money.

Perhaps it was some singer in need of help. He had many such applications and never refused them.

Or perhaps it was an adventure! He smiled. A good many had come his way; he had generally taken them as they came. But he was no coxcomb, and he was innately chivalrous and singularly unspoiled, considering all things.

He had a charming suite high up on the riverside of the hotel; the sitting-room had a balcony that he had had filled with flowering plants.

A woman stood at the open window leading onto the balcony. She was holding a bunch of roses to her face. She turned when Floris came in.

For a moment Floris was so startled that he did not recognize her. He saw at once that it was neither his wife nor a needy singer, but one of the ladies of the great world who smiled so sweetly upon him.

When it did flash upon him who she was he sprang forward and threw his hat on a table and then stopped dead.

"*Madame!*" he exclaimed in a voice full of wonder. "Miladi Queste!"

It was one of the greatest of all the great ladies. It was the lady who had trodden the rolling, shivering deck of the Atlantic liner with him during those days of storm last November—the wife of the great minister who had been killed on that night when he had sung at his house. But that was only a fortnight ago!

She must need some service from him, of course. She had always been so kind, so gracious, to him. But, of course, he was glad she had come to him. He would place his life at her feet. All the same, the most prominent sensation he experienced was sheer embarrassment.

"You are astonished to see me, M. Floris!" said Millicent Queste. Her voice sounded harsh and constrained. She continued to gaze at him with that dull fire smoldering in her eyes.

What could she say? There was nothing for her to say. She could not tell him that she had hungered for a sight of his face, that she had so longed for the sound of his voice that she could not exist a moment longer without satisfying these terrible cravings.

Her pride forbade her to say that. It had always been so during these last six months. When she had been with him she had been tongue-tied, smitten with an absurd, schoolgirl shyness; she had always talked the merest commonplaces.

But to-day she could think of nothing at all to say. As he stood there, with that deprecating, wondering air, her eyes devoured his face with a hopeless hunger that, had she seen it in any other woman's eyes, she would have lifted her eyebrows at or laughed at in careless scorn. But she was past analyzing her own sensations. Her soul was in the dust at this man's feet. All the average people had their revenge in this moment on all those generations of Malinmores who had held not even kings to be greater than they.

She swallowed something in her throat and began to speak in low, hurried tones.

"M. Floris, I know you will understand me. Of course you think it is very strange of me to come to see you so—so soon after my husband's death?"

"Ah, but how I grieved to hear of it!" he interrupted her. "That great minister; that splendid gentleman! It was cruel!"

"And you never sent me a message," she said. The words came out despite her will. "I thought it unkind of you. Every one—all my friends wrote to me. But you never sent a word."

"*Madame,*" Floris said, with a still more wondering look, "it is too great an honor for me to be counted among your friends."

"You know that is not true," she said softly. "Well, listen. I will explain why I am here." The half-truths came from her lips quite naturally. She was too finished a woman of the world ever to be at a loss for long. "I could not bear being shut up in my house any longer. It was so terribly lonely."

She looked appealingly at him. His intuitive brain followed her. She meant that she was *ennuyée,* tired of being alone, and yet unable to conventionally break the iron bands of her seclusion. So she came to him who was not of her world for companionship. That was it, no doubt.

Her next words came upon him as a still greater shock. She was looking at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"M. Floris," she said in a queer, strained voice, "it is just seven o'clock. You are not singing to-night, are you? Will you have pity on me—and understand? Will you take me to dinner at some quiet little place, where no one will see me or recognize me?"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A Dinner in Soho.

FLORIS was nothing if he was not gallant. Whatever he may have felt of amazement at Lady Queste's startling proposal, he did not show it. That he did feel amazement goes without saying. It was not that he thought of the terrible scandal it would cause if Lady Queste were seen about with him when she was supposed to be mourning her great husband in the somber and splendid seclusion of Queste House. That was not Floris's way.

It was rather that he thought it such an amazing thing that Miladi Queste should want to go and dine with him in a little restaurant, that she should find distraction in such a very ordinary proceeding.

"But I am charmed, *madame,*" he said, without a moment's hesitation and with a perfect naturalness that was an act of gallantry in itself. "It is too kind, too gracious of you to allow me to do this small thing for you. Where shall we go? Have you any preference? Do you like the little Italian places or the French?"

"I don't know," Millicent answered. She spoke more naturally now that she had got over the asking of that dreadful question. "Anywhere you like."

"I know a little place in Soho. The *padrone* is a good fellow. You shall have a real Italian feast and drink Chianti. Will that do?"

Lady Queste was like a woman in a dream as she drove through the streets beside Floris. It was a glorious evening.

"I am so glad you are not singing to-night," said Millicent in a low voice.

"It is my good fortune, *madame,*" he answered gaily. "Not that I would have sung a note if I had known that I could be of service to you."

She stifled that pricking ache that his gallant words always caused her. To how many women had he said that? No, she would not let herself be hurt. She would not think of these things. She would be happy to-night; she would laugh; she would hug these few hours that she had snatched boldly in the face of all the world.

She startled him by saying suddenly, with almost fierce emphasis:

"M. Floris, I won't be sad to-night. Help me to forget my life — everything — the circumstances of it. Will you? I want to be young and gay. I want to be like you are. I want to live like you live—so free, so contented, so happy. You are happy, aren't you?"

"But yes, *madame,*" he answered. He smiled, but he looked into her face with a puzzled air. "But you, *madame,* you have everything in the world! You must be happy, too. Forgive me, but you are so beautiful! And beautiful women must be happy."

"Do you think so?" she asked. "Perhaps," she added shortly, "although I have everything, I have not the things I want."

The cab pulled up outside a white house in one of the foreign streets of Soho. A moment later Floris ushered her into a long, narrow room, set with small tables.

The proprietor, a stout, cheery-

faced, prosperous-looking Italian, rushed at the singer. He knew him well, although he had not seen much of him lately. Five years ago, before the great world had swallowed him up, Floris had dined there every night when he was in London.

The best available table was hastily got ready; some people had only just left it, hurrying away to the theater. Special flowers were brought.

The meal that was subsequently served to them was perfect of its kind. But to Millicent it might have been anything on earth. She ate nothing. At first she was strangely silent.

Floris was as frugal as she. He was perfectly charming as a host. There was just a hint of unaccustomed gravity in his manner, assumed, of course, in deference to her mourning. She had his bunch of roses by her plate, and every now and then she held them to her face.

Presently she began to chatter with the utmost verve and inconsequence. It was as if she meant to impress upon him that this was not a time of mourning; that she desired, nay, commanded, him to forget her personal circumstances.

As soon as he understood that he dropped his cloak of gravity willingly enough. He found it heavy. He was a delightful companion, not intellectual, but intensely open to impressions; his brain was like a sensitive plate on which was photographed all that he saw and heard in a series of vivid pictures. As he saw and heard a great deal of immense interest, he could not fail to be interesting himself.

Millicent's response to his changed mood was immediate. In a few minutes all constraint was forgotten. They talked as they had never talked before.

Lady Queste was transfigured. If any of her friends, who called her in their secret hearts intolerably proud and cold, could have seen her, they would have gasped. She was leaning her elbows on the table, her white ringless hands clasped beneath her chin. Her lovely face was alight with happiness and interest; the lips had lost all their coldness; an enchanting smile hovered all the time in their delicious, alluring curve. Her eyes shone like stars into the handsome, equally animated face of the man opposite.

Then, toward the end of the meal, came an incident that marked the beginning of a change in their relations. They had been sitting there more than an hour and a half already. Dessert had been placed on the table long ago, but they had taken no notice of it, so engrossed were they in their bright, sparkling, inconsequent talk.

Then Floris, to illustrate a story that he was telling her about a particular song, sang a few bars of it just above his breath in the most natural way in the world.

Millicent saw the man immediately behind the singer start and turn round with a look of pure pleasure on his face, and then turn back and nudge his companion, and whisper something to him. She smiled at Floris.

"That man behind you recognized your voice," she said, with a queer sort of pride, as if the voice were hers. "He has heard you sing."

Floris happened to be looking at the menu card. Evidently the mention of singing and the date on the menu started a certain train of thought within him. It ended in a sharp exclamation.

"*Per Bacco!* I had forgotten!"

"Forgotten what?"

"*Madame,*" he said, with a gay smile, "that I am engaged to sing tonight at Brakewater House."

"At what time?" she asked quickly. "I suppose Lucy Brakewater has one of her deadly parties." She spoke in English, but he followed her.

"Some time after ten o'clock, *madame.*"

She felt a pang of terrible pain; her heart was as heavy as lead. He would have to go.

But he was speaking rapidly, and unintelligibly to her, to a waiter in Italian. The man brought him a packet of telegraph-forms.

He began to write.

"What are you writing?" she asked harshly.

"To say that I cannot sing at Brakewater House, *madame*."

"You mustn't do that," she said shrilly. "Why, it will mean a loss of hundreds of pounds to you!"

"What does that matter?" he said. "*Fa niente!*" It was quite genuine. He did not care about money—he had already so much.

"But that is what people always say of you," Millicent persisted. "That you never disappoint."

"*Madame,*" he said, "I have never before had occasion to disappoint."

Her heart sang. He wrote out his telegram, gave it to the waiter to despatch, and smiled at her.

"We will have our fruit and coffee undisturbed, *madame*. It is so much more charming than — singing at Brakewater House."

She did something quite independently of her own will. She put her hand across the table and laid it on his.

The touch of her feverish fingers told him what her eyes had never conveyed. He looked at her. There was a deathly silence, in which the clatter of the plates and the voices of the waiters rose to a tumult.

The silence was long; it seemed as if it would never end. Millicent wished with all her soul that it might never be broken.

The waiters shouted orders to the kitchen, the knives and forks clattered on the plates, the guests talked softly or loudly, tobacco smoke hung, cloud-like, in the still, hot air; but there was nothing in the world but those two pairs of eyes looking into each other. The Italian's held a flame; Lady Queste's were swimming mistily with joy.

Floris looked at her as if he saw her for the first time. It was only natural that his eyes should grow ardent. He was of the south—passionate, inflammable.

The woman broke the silence. She could bear it no longer. It seemed as if her soul, her life, were going from her, drawn by that mesmeric gaze. With speech came embarrassment. She found herself flushing like a schoolgirl.

"It was kind of you," she said jerkily, "to do that for me. Really kind. It would have been horrid to hurry away. But how they will miss you at Brakewater House!"

The spell was broken. Floris looked away. For the life of her Millicent could not have uttered another word. She felt as if her heart were in her throat, choking her. Why had he looked at her like that? Did he understand? She could only wait now. It was for him to speak.

As a matter of fact, he had nothing to say. He did not quite understand. That he had found more than ordinary favor in her eyes—yes. But more than that—no. And he had as yet no definite feeling toward her. But she had stirred his blood. Things were not as they had been before.

"*Madame,* I am only too delighted," he said, with his charming, gay smile. "I don't always want to sing. And all the others will be there." There was boyish mischief in his voice. It was not conceit; but he knew that none of "the others" could make up for him.

She flashed him a glance that told him so. Then she grew red again.

"Give me a cigarette," she said, and began to chatter again in the merry, inconsequent manner that had preceded his writing of the telegram.

He fell in with her mood; but, as he held a match for her cigarette, his hand touched hers, and he felt the white fingers tremble.

She went on chattering while she sipped her coffee. She had grown frivolous again; her voice had the

clear, metallic timbre habitual to it. She was once more the careless, great lady who had found a kindred spirit to while away a few hours with. But her heart was beating like the heart of a runner who had just won a race.

The proprietor of the restaurant himself brought them some special fruit, some really wonderful peaches. Although they had almost finished their coffee, Floris insisted on peeling one for her. They shared it, and laughed like children over their greediness.

"It is an evening of surprises," said the Italian. "Do you notice, *madame,* how on some days everything is right, and on other days the very same things would be all wrong? You have made everything right this evening. It is a festa—these hours I shall always remember."

She touched the pale-blue ribbon with which he had tied her red roses in the hotel.

"*Sempre?*" she asked softly. There was sadness in her smile—sadness that is inseparable from all tremendous emotion.

"*Sempre,*" he smiled back. "These are some of the hours given by the gods. And I might have been singing at Brakewater House if you had not been so kind to me, *madame!*"

Millicent had quite recovered her composure by now. She laughed merrily.

"How they would hate me if they knew! The concert will be quite spoiled."

"You are too kind, *madame,*" he answered. "Every one is too kind to me."

A look of wistfulness crept into her eyes.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### The New Marquis of Queste.

WHEN John Houghton Vernon Lennox Coleraine was a melancholy, anemic little boy, living with his mother in the early eighties, he was religiously dedicated to the Church of England. The reason for this early dedication was twofold.

In the first place, it was by way of being a protest on the part of Mrs. Coleraine against what she called the errors of Rome — she was a rather soured woman with strong evangelical leanings; she was obsessed by the sense of sin and the impending doom of humanity. Secondly, the dedication was largely influenced by a picturesque old peasant from the Abruzzi, who lived on the credulity and superstition of her countryfolk as a sort of fortune - teller. She held little John Coleraine's hand and looked into the future.

"He will never marry," she told Mrs. Coleraine. "He will be the last of his line; he will be a great apostate — an enemy of the holy church; he will die a violent death and burn eternally in hell."

The prophecy was more in the nature of a curse than anything else, and the old hag from the Abruzzi gave it without receiving a single soldino for her trouble.

In due course John Coleraine went to school—first in Paris, then in Ireland, and ultimately at Rugby. His career was blameless.

John Coleraine's career at Cambridge was, from an academic point of view, quite exceptionally brilliant. He proved himself to be a really great scholar. His record there has been equaled by very few men and excelled by none.

In fulfilment of his mother's lifelong desire, and his own spiritual and mental inclination, he took holy orders and a curacy in a populous parish in a large Lancashire manufacturing town, where he very soon became a power — indeed, so great a power did the Rev. John become that the noses of his vicar and his four fellow curates were speedily put out of joint.

When John Coleraine preached at the huge, red-brick barn of a church

dedicated to St. Luke the evangelist people were standing in the aisles and at the back of the church, and the slightly smaller chapel of ease, which was his particular care, was rapidly becoming a serious rival to its parent church.

At the age of seven-and-twenty he astonished every one who knew him and observed him, and sadly disappointed his proud mother by refusing an important living in Birmingham and accepting instead an obscure curacy in an East End parish.

A year afterward he became a missionary. He had received a divine call to go out and take Christianity to the heathen. The call came to him shortly after a lascar had stabbed him in Limehouse.

As far as his clerical career was concerned, this momentous decision was regarded as nothing short of suicidal; but John Coleraine never thought of a clerical career, and, as far as one could gather, a bishop's miter did not attract him.

He went to India, the land of gods and creeds and mighty religious forces. India was a revelation to John Coleraine. It was one thing to preach his great, simple human gospel to the weary, sin-spoiled workers of Boltham, one thing to thunder out divine vengeance for sin and divine forgiveness and sacrifice — the eternal mystery of the Christ — to the wretched denizens of the East End slums, but it was quite another thing to bring his creed of magic simplicity to the land of Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, and the Brahmin.

Before he had been in India a week he realized that he was face to face with a superior intelligence; that here fatalism, occultism — "superstition," as he had called it—subtle reasoning, and dominating tradition were forces which must be combated with other weapons and methods than those he had relied upon to do battle with sin in Boltham and Poplar.

The appeal to sentiment had no avail. The man who believed in Buddha could only regard John Coleraine's Christ with tolerant interest, much as a Harley Street consultant regarded a seventeenth-century prescription for measles.

Before Islam he was impotent. With the Brahmin he felt as a schoolboy in the presence of his head master.

John Coleraine did not save souls in India. On the contrary, he had to fight very hard for his own. India took from him the humanities; it gave him in return speculation, doubt, and knowledge.

He wrote an article on the "Islamic Penal Code of Afghanistan," which lives to this day. He wrote letters to the *Times* on "The Mullahs as Educators" and on "Hindu Sacred Books." In other words, he ceased to trouble about souls and began to deal with great abstract theories and religious beliefs.

It was at this psychological moment, at the one moment in the life of John Coleraine when his nature was most susceptible to new influences, that a telegram, handed in at St. James's Street, S. W., four hours previously, informed him of the death of his second cousin, Lord Queste.

It was fully half an hour afterward, and it required a tentative remark from the Bishop of Bhutan, in the capacity of chaplain to whom he was acting at the time, before the Rev. John Coleraine realized that he was a peer of the United Kingdom and an immensely rich man.

The bishop was a thoroughly good sort, a practical, workaday sort of bishop, who did his work, took his pay, and looked every man, from the most insignificant ryot to the governor-general himself, in the face.

"A terrible calamity, Coleraine," he said when he read the telegram, which was explicit; "a national calamity! Poor fellow! To be murdered like that just as he was at the very pinnacle of his destiny! Terrible! But, my dear fellow, I must con-

gratulate you. Let me be the first, Lord Queste, to call you by your new name."

Six weeks afterward John Coleraine and his newly acquired marquisate were on very good terms with each other. In six weeks most things can happen; in this particular six weeks the Rev. John Coleraine, evangelical missionary, some time curate of St. Luke's, Boltham; of St. Barnabas, Poplar, and chaplain to the Missionary Bishop of Bhutan, had become quite an adequate Lord Queste.

He landed at Marseilles on a blazing day in June. The voyage across the Indian Ocean and through the sweltering Red Sea at such a season had left very little visible sign upon him. He looked very brown and burned, and his tall, thin, spare frame suggested spent strength and yet more strength held in reserve.

The new Lord Queste was a striking figure of a man. He looked every inch of him an ecclesiastic. It did not require his conventional clerical collar and attire to suggest that.

Mrs. Coleraine met her son at Marseilles. She had been staying in her little villa on the Lake of Como. She was in deep mourning, but looked supremely happy. It was difficult to imagine such a round and rosy-cheeked little lady the mother of the gaunt, priestly son, who looked twenty years older than he really was.

Mother and son had many things to talk about on that swift journey across France.

"It is a great, a splendid thing for you, John!" she exclaimed for the fiftieth time. "Please God that you may be worthy of your great responsibilities! To think of it, John dear! You are really Lord Queste! Oh, if only your poor dear father could have lived to see this day!"

"I only wish that he had, mama," said Lord Queste, with a quaint little grimace. He always called her "mama."

"Weren't you surprised, John?"

"I was shocked," said his lordship gravely — "inexpressibly grieved. It was a terrible affair, an unspeakably terrible affair!"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking so much of that!" Mrs. Coleraine retorted. "Of course, that was very sad; but—well, we all have to die some time or other —don't we, dear? I hope Cousin Godfrey was prepared. What a lesson, John! What a lesson! Who shall say when it shall be our turn?"

Lord Queste sighed audibly, but refrained from checking the look of undisguised irritation which came to his face.

"But aren't you glad, John? Aren't you happy?"

"What do you mean, mama?"

"I mean, my dear, that God has seen fit to call you to this great place in the world, to entrust you with all this vast stewardship, this power of doing good and—"

"Tell me, mama, how is — is Cousin Millicent — Lady Queste? I have often thought of her. It must have been very terrible for her. You know, I've never met her that I remember, though, of course, I know her face well from photographs and that sort of thing."

Mrs. Coleraine's laughing, cherubic face became grave, her red lips formed themselves into something very nearly approaching a sneer.

"I'm afraid, my dear John," she replied, with a sniff of disdain, "that Millicent is one of those women who are incapable of any very great feeling. I don't think it has really made much impression on her."

"Where is she?"

"In London — at Queste House, waiting, so she told me in a letter I had from her a week ago, for you to come and turn her out."

"Absurd!" retorted Lord Queste. "What an idea!"

"Well, it's got to be done, you know," rejoined Mrs. Coleraine.

The new marquis permitted himself to smile faintly.

"I am very sorry for her," he said.

"Sorry? Pshaw! She's had a good inning," exclaimed Mrs. Coleraine. "And, besides, it will be no great hardship. She has an enormous jointure, besides her own income — the Malinmores are rolling in money, you know. She'll marry again, you'll see! Oh, I'm not particularly sorry for my lady!"

Lord Queste looked sharply at his mother. He had already begun to see a marked change in her; and he did not altogether like the change he saw.

"Has nothing further been discovered?" asked Lord Queste.

"Discovered about what?" asked Mrs. Coleraine vaguely.

"Why, about this terrible tragedy."

"Oh, my dear, no. Nothing beyond what you already know. Trust Scotland Yard to discover anything!"

"But surely the thing cannot be left as it is? What do they say about it? Is it a political crime, or was there any personal motive, or was—"

"My dear John," interrupted Mrs. Coleraine, "how can I say? How do I know? And, really, I cannot see what good it can do us to bother our heads about it. The poor dear man is dead, and nothing can bring him back, even if we wanted to. In good time, you may be quite sure that the guilty persons will meet with their just deserts. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.'"

Lord Queste looked very grave, and shook his head.

"I think it's the most terrible thing I have ever heard of," he said slowly; "and I've a feeling that I shall never know a really peaceful moment until the mystery is solved."

"That's very foolish of you, John, very foolish indeed."

The express was hurling itself through Avignon. There was only one other passenger in the compartment, a cheery-looking, bronzed youth with "Royal Navy" writ large all over him.

Queste met his frank gaze for a moment as he looked up. It seemed as if the youth wanted to say something. And at length he did speak.

"Forgive me, sir," he said; "but I couldn't help overhearing your conversation." He paused, then continued: "You are talking about the Queste case, aren't you?"

"Yes," answered John coldly.

"Then perhaps you haven't seen this?" The youth handed Lord Queste a copy of a Marseilles newspaper. "You read French?"

"Yes."

"Then you'll see there's something new about the case — looks rather startling."

Lord Queste looked at the paper and read a glaring head-line which sent the blood to his cheeks. He caught his breath and crushed the paper in his hand.

"Pretty startling, isn't it?" remarked the bronzed youth.

Mrs. Coleraine had observed the young man and had overheard the conversation. She metaphorically pricked up her ears and bent toward her son, holding out her hand for the copy.

"What is it, John?" she asked eagerly. "Have they found out anything fresh?"

"It would seem so, from this wretched paper," answered Lord Queste; "but, then, you can never rely upon these wild newspaper reports and rumors — especially in these French papers. Anything for a momentary sensation, don't you know. It's the lamentable tendency of modern journalism."

He addressed himself more to the youthful stranger than to his mother, who was watching him anxiously.

"It appears," he went on, still retaining the journal and speaking with a curious affectation of aloof indifference—his "analytical manner," it had been called at Cambridge—"that there has been some kind of friction for some time past between a certain obscure section of the English press and the authorities at Scotland Yard."

"Don't wonder at it," interrupted the stranger. "Precious set of idiots they must be to let a thing like this happen and never so much as venture an opinion as to how or why or anything else." The young man concluded his interpolation with something nearly approximating to a derisive grunt. He was a very English young man.

"You may be right, sir," said Lord Queste gravely, though there was the faintest shade of irony in his voice and the look he bestowed upon his *vis-à-vis*. "Personally, I am not very well acquainted with the methods of police organization in England, and am, therefore, not in a position to express myself very positively on the subject. You, on the contrary, appear to have the advantage over me. You have probably made the matter one of close study — a most interesting study, no doubt."

"Bless you, no, sir!" exclaimed the youth. "I've been away for nearly three years—Pacific station. Left the Invaluable—my ship—at Hong-Kong. I'm on my way home; but I read the papers."

"Indeed. And that was what I was about to say when you interpolated your most interesting remark. Although English police methods are a sealed book to me—mark you, I admire the British policeman. There's no one like him in the world—at the same time, I confess to being a close student of the English press, an observer — a pained observer, I must frankly own—of the lamentable trend of latter-day journalism. I do not like it, sir. I do not hesitate to say so on every available opportunity."

"My dear John," put in Mrs. Coleraine, "you aren't preaching a sermon now. Do, for goodness' sake, tell me what's in that paper."

The young man grinned cheerfully at Mrs. Coleraine. He had no taste for pedantic sermonizing. He was a modern young man.

"It's really nothing of any great importance, unless you're interested in the Queste murder case," he said, taking upon himself the onus of answering her question. "You see, I'm rather interested in the case because I knew poor Lord Queste very well. As a matter of fact, he really got me into the navy. My people knew him very well, and so, you see, a terrible thing like this rather affected me. I heard your husband talking about it and—"

"This lady is my mother, sir," said Lord Queste pompously. "And I think I ought to put matters right at once. My name is—er—Queste; that is to say, I am Lord Queste."

"By Jove!" murmured the youth, "what a thrice stupid ass I've made of myself. Do please forgive me." He ignored the *padre* and spoke to the woman. "I wouldn't have dreamed of referring to the matter if—"

"Why, of course," she hastened to assure him. "Not a word, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Saumoral," he supplied the name.

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Mrs. Coleraine, who knew intimately the family history of the Coleraines from the days of the Crimea. "Your grandmother was a Coleraine—Lady Norah Coleraine, daughter of my grandfather-in-law."

"All of which," remarked the Rev. Lord Queste, "does not directly affect the sensational news I have just perused in this French journal."

"Let me see it, John," eagerly exclaimed Mrs. Coleraine, seizing the paper from her son's hand.

It was on the front page, and the heading occupied two columns, and there was an indeterminate half-tone picture of the deceased peer.

### L'AFFAIRE QUESTE

**La Drame Terroriste des Suffragettes en Angleterre**
**Nouvelle Hypothese—Est-ce l'Explication?**

(De Notre Envoyé Special)

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Coleraine, "whatever next?" She un-

consciously translated the words of what followed into English, speaking breathlessly.

The article, letter, or report in the grandiloquent style of the French journalist briefly recapitulated the salient facts of the mysterious murder some weeks ago of the prime minister of England.

There was a mystery; there were people who could solve that mystery. Why, then, was not the mystery solved? The coroner's inquest had been a farce. Evidence in the possession of the police had been deliberately withheld. Was it from motives of political or national expediency or was it not?

The British public, according to the special correspondent of the Marseilles newspaper, were on the point of revolution. They refused to be hoodwinked and fooled any longer.

There was an arch-detective and a double-dyed villain called M. Tarpel, of the criminal investigation department of that scoundrelly Scotland Yard. He was mysterious; he was inaccessible. He was working, investigating, but he could say—what? Nothing!

What about the violin-string? asked the French special correspondent. Did a violin-string appear from space? Did prime ministers have E strings of violins round their arms when they died? No.

And was this saturnine M. Tarpel omnipotent? Was he an autocrat? Well, the special correspondent would see. *Nous verrons, mes amis!* M. Tarpel was not the only detective genius on the face of the globe. There was a certain M. Jules Renault.

The latest coup of Jules Renault was to solve the mystery of the foul murder of the Marquis of Queste, the great minister of England, friend of France, and keeper of the peace of nations.

And the latest coup of the special correspondent of the French newspaper was to obtain an interview with the redoubtable Jules.

The aforesaid interview occupied nearly two columns, but the gist of it could be easily contained in an inch of type. Indeed, Renault's actual words were few and cautious. They amounted to this:

"The English police are wrong. The crime is political. I could lay my hand on the actual assassin. It was the work of a new and dangerous section of lawless agitators—women, for the most part. It is the direct result of the suffragette movement in England, and its prime instigator is a certain Miss Mary Creed, daughter of the well-known ironmaster of Lancashire, Mr. Richard Creed. One of Miss Mary Creed's most ardent disciples is Lady Alice Coleraine, the niece of the murdered peer, who for some time past resided in his household.

"It is a well-known fact that the deceased minister was a strenuous and avowed opponent of the women's political movement in England. He did not believe that the time had come when votes should be given to women. He was, indeed, regarded as the principal opponent of the cause. Many letters of a threatening nature have been found among his papers, letters which form abundant evidence that the late prime minister's niece was concerned in, if not actually responsible, for the crime."

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.**

**You can join THE CAVALIER LEGION and receive the red button with the green star free of charge by sending your name and address to the editor of THE CAVALIER, 175 Fifth Ave., N.Y.**

# THE RETURN OF THE NIGHT WIND*

A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART II

BY VARICK VANARDY

Author of "Alias the Night Wind,"† "Missing—$81,500," etc., etc.

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### SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

BINGHAM HARVARD, formerly a protégé of Banker Chester, and employed in the bank, is wrongfully accused of the theft of a large sum of money. He escapes the police, cripples many individual officers, and flees to Europe. His wife, once a detective called Lady Kate, returns to America, pleads with Banker Chester to aid her husband in establishing his innocence and in catching the real culprit. Thomas Clancy, a friend of Harvard, works hand in hand with Mrs. Harvard. The Night Wind, as Bingham Harvard is known, suddenly appears in New York. He enters the home of the banker and asks for six months' freedom from apprehension in which to prove his innocence. The banker refuses. Lieutenant Rodney Rushton, of the metropolitan force, has convinced the banker that Harvard stole the money. Rushton's own character is unsavory. The Night Wind makes an unexpected call at the home of Lieutenant Rushton, surprises him, and binds him to a chair with ropes, while he searches through the police inspector's papers for evidence by which he may profit. While he is so occupied the telephone bell rings.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### Playing the Game.

RUSHTON gave an eager start when the telephone call rang out. Then, as the Night Wind lifted the receiver from the hook and put it against his ear, the lieutenant, with an assumption of carelessness that was plainly evident, remarked:

"I guess maybe you'd better let me answer that call, if you'll bring the phone over here. More'n likely they'll recognize your voice, Harvard."

But Harvard paid no attention to the suggestion.

And then Bingham Harvard smiled broadly, for he recognized the voice at the other end of the wire; and he was mentally glad that he had been sufficiently thoughtful in the "Hello" he had given to render his own voice as low and guttural as possible.

The following conversation followed, it being remembered that Rodney Rushton could hear only that part of it uttered by Harvard.

The voice at the other telephone was unmistakably the voice of the inspector.

"That you, Rushton?" he inquired; and without waiting for a reply to the question, continued: "I called you up to tell you that the Night Wind is back. He's in town now. As likely as not he's been here some time. That was all rot about his coming on the Golgotha, because she is outside of Sandy Hook yet. Do you get me?"

"Sure," said Harvard.

* This story began in The Cavalier for October 4.
† Appeared in Cavaliers of May 10, 17, 24, 31, 1913.

"What's the matter? Got a cold?"

"A little," and Harvard coughed. The inspector continued:

"I know he is here, because I saw him and spoke to him. He's looking for blood, too, so you had best keep an eye out. I wasn't going to say anything about it until morning, but about half an hour ago a messenger came to my house bringing a belt and stick and shield that belong to Compton; and a few minutes later Compton telephoned to me from somewhere out in the Bronx to say that the Night Wind took them away from him and then dropped him out there among the goats"

"Uh-huh," said Harvard, non-committally.

"It doesn't seem to interest you very much, Rushton. Or, are you scared stiff?"

"Both," Harvard replied. And he coughed again badly.

"You *have* got a cold, haven't you?" the inspector said sympathetically. "Well, forget it. You won't have any time to nurse colds now. You slip on your clothes and beat it up here to my house as soon as you can make it. I want to see you now."

"What for?" Harvard trusted himself to say.

There was a moment of hesitation at the other end of the wire. Then:

"I can't talk it over the wire—that is why I want you to come here to see me before we meet down at the office. But I'll say this much—we've got to separate that bunch of busybodies—Clancy, Lady Kate, and the Night Wind. We've got to get *her,* anyhow, and send her away—and Clancy, too, if possible."

"Frame something?" Harvard asked suggestively.

"We've got to get rid of them somehow."

Just then Rushton took a large chance. Driven to desperation by hearing only one end of a conversation that he knew was intended for himself, he yelled at the top of his voice:

"That ain't me talkin'—it's the Night Wind!"

Harvard knew that the inspector must have heard that shout and the words that were uttered; and he smiled broadly when he heard the inspector swear; then, before the choice selection of words was quite finished he said in his natural tones:

"Hello, inspector—how are you feeling about now?"

"Curse you, Harvard—I wish I could get at you," came the reply.

"Oh, I shall be gone from here long before you could get here or send others, inspector. I am nearly through for the night. That was very kind of you to give me that bit of information in regard to Mrs. Harvard and my friend Clancy."

"Say, what are you doing in Rushton's rooms?"

"Searching his papers and so forth."

"Where's Rushton?"

"He is here, sitting with his hands behind his back like a good little boy that has been naughty. He is harmless. Would you like to have me deliver that message of yours to him?"

"I would like to speak to him if you will let me do it."

"Certainly—on the condition that you will speak loud enough for both of us to hear what you say. If you do not, I shall hold the receiver so that he can't hear."

"All right," came the reply; and Harvard stepped across to the chair where Rushton was seated, stretching the telephone cord to its full length in doing so. Then he held the receiver down so that both of them could hear what might be said through it.

"Hello, inspector," Rushton called hoarsely. "This—"

Harvard lifted the transmitter and receiver out of his reach. "None of that, Rushton," he said. Then he put them down again for Rushton to talk.

"Tell me what has happened, Rushton," the inspector said. "He will let you do that."

"Aw, he rung my bell an' I went down like a jackass, with nothin' on me—that is, no gun 'r nothin'; an' he got me dead to rights down in the lower hall. And now he's got my own irons onto me, and he's goin' through my papers. It ain't nice to tell, but it's so."

"Tell Rushton about that idea of yours for a new frame-up, inspector," Harvard interposed; and the inspector replied:

"I'll tell him all right, Harvard, only I will go down there to do it. Just now I prefer to talk with you a little more. You see—"

That was all that Harvard heard, for he hung the receiver upon the hook instantly. The thought struck him suddenly that the inspector was talking to kill time, and that if he did that it was not without a purpose.

It was not unlikely that another person was in the room with the inspector when he called Rushton's number, and if that happened to be true, signs and signals would have sufficed to send that second person into the street to find another telephone. If that were the case, headquarters and then the nearest station-house would be speedily notified.

The fact of the matter was even more ominous, if Harvard had but known it; for, in addition to the regular telephone service, the inspector had a private, direct wire between his house and his own office at headquarters, and that private wire was working even while the inspector was talking with Harvard.

For one brief interval Bingham Harvard thought deeply when he replaced the receiver on the hook.

He had not completed his search of Rushton's papers, and there might never be another opportunity. He decided that he would allow himself ten minutes more.

He sprang to the desk again and pulled out the contents of the two remaining pigeonholes that he had not searched, and stuffed them into his pockets regardless of what they might be. Then he pulled out the drawers, one after another, and fumbled rapidly among the contents of them.

There was a package of small memorandum books, held together by a rubber band, and a glance into one of them told him that they might possibly be of value, so he dropped the entire package into his side pocket.

He looked into a closet and discovered a very small iron safe, but it was locked, and he did not care to search Rushton's pockets for the key.

Then he snapped off the lights, leaving Rushton in darkness, and passed into the hall, and thence into the rear room; but a quick search around it was unfruitful of results.

He knew that time was passing—that it would not be long, after headquarters was once notified of what was happening, before officers would come a running from the nearest precinct station-house, so he abandoned the idea of further search, and started down the stairs.

It had been an adventurous night, thus far, and he did not care to have it end disastrously. He was assured, too, that he had collected some valuable information from Rushton's desk—or, at least, the beginning of things that would prove to be of value.

As he opened the street door and stepped into the vestibule he could hear the sound of running feet approaching the house, and he had no doubts about what that meant.

But he paused an instant, nevertheless, for his trained ear told him that men were running toward him from either direction; and then, too, the rumble of a heavy wagon and the pounding of horses' hoofs on the pavement announced the rapid approach of the patrol wagon.

It did not occur to him that he would be unable to get through them and escape; the thought that was uppermost in his mind at that moment was one of dread lest he should be compelled to hurt somebody before he

would be able to do so—for he had determined, if it were possible, to carry out the task he had set himself to do in clearing his own name, without injuring anybody.

The noise of running feet came nearer from both directions, and with sudden resolution the Night Wind stepped outside of the door and closed it tightly after him.

Then, perceiving that he had no time to make a getaway, he turned about and began to shake the door, apparently with all his strength, and then half a dozen cops dashed up the steps behind him.

He did not wait for them to question him; he shouted orders at them; and he did it in a manner so peremptory that they very naturally mistook him for a plain-clothes man who had "beat them to it."

"Quick, now. All together," he ordered. "Smash in the door. One, two—there you are!"

There was a rending crash. The door gave way before the onslaught of the several men who threw themselves against it. There was a smashing splintering of wood, the clinking of broken glass, the harsh rending of iron—and the Night Wind passed into the darkness of the hall in the very forefront of those uniformed men.

It was then that he managed to step to one side while they passed him and stumbled and ran up the stairway.

Somebody shouted an order for somebody else to remain on guard at the door, and for still another somebody or two to perform the same service outside on the pavement. The people who lived on the parlor floor of the house, and on the second floor also, opened their doors in affright, yelled murder and fire and other things, and slammed them shut again.

The patrol-wagon deposited its quota of men at the curb, and they came tumbling into the house—and just as the major part of them passed him the Night Wind stepped outside and ran quickly down the steps.

One of the uniformed men who was on guard stepped toward him, and the Night Wind seized him by the arm and dragged him rapidly along the sidewalk, exclaiming as he did so:

"Come here a moment! I've got something to say to you! You other fellows stay where you are!"

It worked.

A few doors farther along the street the Night Wind seized his man and dexterously relieved him of his gun, which he threw into the middle of the street; and as he did so he said smilingly:

"I am the Night Wind, my friend. You can go back there now and tell them that you saw me. They will be pleased to hear it."

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## CHAPTER X.

### A "System" and a "Key."

THERE was a small and select gathering of police officials in the private office of the inspector the following day at noon. It is a notable fact, and one worthy of record, that the deputy commissioner was not among them.

The inspector had summoned them one by one, and when the few were present whom he desired, orders were given that he was not to be disturbed on any account for half an hour, and the door was locked to make sure.

Just how we know about that conference in order to report it at this time of the story should be explained as demonstrative of the thoroughness with which Tom Clancy was working in the interests of his friend Harvard, and as showing how wisely he had made his selection of the detective agency that was to perform much of the work—that agency which was directed by the master-mind to whom Tom referred as "Redhead."

There were present, besides the inspector, Lieutenants Rushton, Coniglio, and Masters; and Detective-sergeants Boynton, Potowski, and Con-

nor; and please don't forget Connor, for, as it happens, he had worked side by side with Redhead in a Western State long before he became a member of the New York police department, and was still working for him. Are we wise now? Redhead had long ago found it important that he should keep posted concerning the inside workings of police departments in various cities, and hence—

Rushton delivered a short speech. He said (condensed):

"You guys all know enough about the Night Wind an' what he has done to us, an' what he's likely to *do* to us unless we put the kibosh onto him, so it ain't necessary for me to go into particulars." Rushton looked from face to face in that gathering to make sure that they each appreciated the significance of what he had said; then he continued:

"The Night Wind has come back, and he's worse than ever — take it from me; and from the skipper, too. Both of us saw him last night, and both times *he* saw *us first.* Some of you know by experience what that means; some of you know only by hearsay, but you may as well put it down in your memoranda that when the Night Wind sees you first there ain't nothin' doin' for *you.*

"The skipper 'n me ain't personally ashamed of what happened to us last night, because this Bing Harvard ain't really human. He is something supernatural. He's chain-lightning in his motions, a panther in his tread on the streets, the tongue of a toad in his agility, and a veritable Samson in strength. He's the strongest and the quickest man I ever heard of. There ain't no man livin' that can stand up against him, so it ain't no dishonor to have him get the best of you. Them that's been up against him know that.

"He says he has stopped breaking bones an' maiming us cops, an' maybe he has. But it wouldn't be safe to bank too heavily on that proposition if one or two of you should undertake to tackle him. It's a cinch that if he had to do it in order to make a getaway he'd be right there on the job.

"When he moves he don't make no more noise than a shadow—and how he does it I don't know. He says he has come back here to clear his name, but I happen to be the guy that got the goods on him for that Centropolis bank affair, and so I know that unless he frames something on somebody else he's the guilty man. Anyhow, there's an indictment out against him, and we've got to get him. We've got to or go out of business.

"Now I'm comin' to the point of this here statement.

"The Night Wind didn't come back to New York alone. He brought Lady Kate—her that used to be down here with us — back with him. She *says* she's his wife now; and *he* says so, too; but I ain't seen no marriage certificate, and, so whether it's true 'r not, *we* ain't got no call to take official notice of it.

"And that ain't all. He has got a friend in this burg who is some friend — name of Tom Clancy — a downtown stock-broker, comfortably rich, and willin' to spend his last dollar for Bing Harvard. He is something of a sport, as slick as grease, ain't afraid of nothin', and as busy as a cat that has been smeared over with lard.

"Well, *we've got to get them two, an' get 'em good and plenty!*

"That is what you guys are here to be told. It don't make much difference how we get 'em, so long as we do it, for the skipper and me are agreed that we ain't likely to put the irons onto the Night Wind's wrists as long as them two are runnin' around loose.

"There are seven of us here in this bunch, and what passes between us seven don't go no farther—see? We've got to work together for the good of the community and for the force, and the one thing that we've got to do right off the reel is to find some means of sendin' them two—Lady Kate and Clancy—away.

"I ain't askin' you to frame nothin'. That ain't my way. But it's a cinch that if you look close enough into the history of any man 'r woman you'll find *something* that will do the trick. I guess that's all, inspector."

The inspector took his feet from the desk and brought them down solidly upon the floor.

"I guess you understand Lieutenant Rushton well enough, so that I need add nothing to what he has said," he told them. "Coniglio, you and Masters, with Boynton and Potowski on the side, are assigned to Clancy. The rest of us will take care of the girl. I want quick action if I can get it. That is all—only I want to be kept thoroughly posted all the time."

Behind closed doors in another private office farther down-town there was also a consultation. It took place at approximately the same hour, and was between two persons, of whom one was Redhead and the other Lady Kate.

It was the first meeting between these two; but Clancy had arranged for it, and Katherine was expected, when Black Julius drove her there in the imitation taxicab.

There was some preliminary talk between them which need not be recorded, and then:

"It might have been better, Mrs. Harvard, if you had returned directly to your old job at headquarters instead of going to Chester as you did. No doubt the inspector would have taken you back, and—well, there might have been possibilities—eh?"

"Perhaps. But they never would have trusted me again. They were morally certain that I went away with Mr. Harvard; indeed, some of them *knew* the fact. Bingham and I saw and recognized four members of the force at the pier the day we sailed, and we were reasonably certain that they saw and recognized us. No; I think I did right, chief."

"Are you aware that under the circumstances, as they now exist, you are in constant danger, Mrs. Harvard?" he asked her.

"Quite so," she smiled back at him.

"They will want to get you out of the way, and at once; and Clancy, too. But you, even more than he. You are an active menace to them and to everything that they stand for. Rushton and a few of his cronies will not hesitate to frame something on you, and the very fact that you have been one of them will render that an easy task. Really, Mrs. Harvard, you should keep out of sight. This is a man's job, not a woman's."

"I shall pass out of sight, chief, the moment I leave this office. I determined upon that much, and exactly how I would accomplish it, before I landed in New York. And that is the real reason for my presence here, to consult with you. I used to think, when I was connected with headquarters, that I would much rather have been here with you than there."

"I heartily wish you had been," he replied earnestly.

"And now I want your promise of secrecy concerning me. I mean that I do not wish my husband to know where I may be, or what I am doing. I wish him to be kept in entire ignorance. Is that agreed upon?"

"Certainly."

"I will report directly to you from time to time, and you will make such use as you see fit of what I may be able to tell you. Only, I wanted to be sure of your approval and cooperation."

"Of my cooperation, surely. Of my approval—I will first have to know something more about what you think of undertaking."

"Chief, I have thought and dreamed and planned for this opportunity constantly, ever since I left New York. I have worked out countless ideas, only to dismiss each one as being, for one reason or another, impracticable. I will tell you what I have decided upon presently, but, first, will you reply to a few questions that I wish to ask?"

"Gladly—if I can."

"Who took that money? I do not mean what person took it, but was it an inside job, or was it accomplished from the outside, in some inexplicable manner? What is your opinion as to that? Mr. Clancy has told me that you have had one of your men acting as an employee at the bank for some time."

"That is true, Mrs. Harvard. I cannot answer your question, however, more than to say that I am personally satisfied that neither of the two assistant tellers was the thief. My operative at the bank has accomplished absolutely nothing. I have kept every man who is employed there (who might have stolen the money), under rigid surveillance—with no result whatever. And if one of those men *had* taken it, there *would* have been a result."

"So you incline to the theory of an outside job?"

"If there *was* a job. But one confronts greater difficulties in the theory of an outside worker than in the other one."

"What do you mean when you say 'if there *was* a job'?"

"Sometimes I am on the point of believing that the money was never stolen at all."

"But that is absurd. Don't forget that it was Bingham who discovered the loss."

"Precisely. You have made use of the right word—loss. Was the money stolen or was it lost?"

"But it couldn't have been lost, chief, inside of that cage. Of course it was stolen. And I believe it was stolen from the outside. And—I believe that Rodney Rushton knows who stole it, and has appropriated a very large portion of it to his own uses since he found out that interesting fact. And, also, what Rodney Rushton was able to find out you can discover as well as he—unless—"

"Unless what, Mrs. Harvard?" The chief was suddenly interested in her suggestions.

"*Unless Rushton knew, before the money disappeared, that it would disappear,*" she replied with slow emphasis.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, and leaned back in his chair. "A double frame-up, eh? The idea is worth a lot of careful thought, Mrs. Harvard. But an outsider could not have taken the packages of money from the paying-teller's cage without help from the inside."

"Certainly not. And expert help, at that."

"Which fact brings us up against it just as hard as we were before. We are backed up into the same corner."

Katherine took a folded sheet of paper from her mesh-bag and spread it open on the desk between them, and the chief bent down over it.

"This," she said, "is a detailed plan of the inside of that cage, drawn to a scale, and by my husband. And here"—she produced a second paper—"is a floor-plan of the bank itself prepared in the same manner. The red cross on this one shows the spot from which the packages of bills actually disappeared. The black circles with numbers inside of them, on both plans, indicate the positions of the various workers in the bank at the time of the theft, or approximating it as nearly as possible. Below, and against each of the numbers, are the names and occupations of the workers. Chief, I have studied those plans until I can close my eyes and see each of them or both of them as plainly as you see them now."

"I have no doubt of it. They make an interesting study, too,"

Katherine leaned back in her chair again.

"Ever since the first day of my association with the New York police," she said, "I have heard the word 'system' dinned into my ears. Also, in studying over those plans so constantly, I was reminded that there never was a mathematical problem to be worked out for which a system was not necessary. And—a 'key.' And so I have

searched my intelligence to discover the system by which those packages of money were stolen and to find the key that would open that system and make it available. *I think, chief, that I have discovered both.*"

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Then the task is already accomplished, Mrs. Harvard."

"No. It must yet be proven. My theories—and there are nothing more than theories as yet—must be established; and there is the possibility that I may be utterly in error."

"But, tell me—"

"Please do not ask me to do that, chief; not yet. You see, I haven't the courage of my own convictions in this matter—and that is why I wish to work alone, unaided and unimpeded, until I have discovered something to uphold and sustain my opinions. I have seen one innocent man terribly wronged; and the man inside of that bank who is, I believe, the key to this mystery may be as innocent as my husband was and is. I utterly refuse to cast even the shadow of a doubt upon him until I have satisfied myself that I have a fairly good reason for doing so."

"But you may keep the plans, and you can study them as I have done. If you should arrive at the same solution that appeals to me—well, then, we will consult together in regard to it. In the mean time, I shall probably have established it or shattered it."

"And your method? That is what you came here to consult with me about, isn't it?"

"Yes." Katherine hesitated a moment, and then, with a whimsical smile, said: "I am perfectly well aware, chief, that the detective in disguise is largely a creature of romance; but nevertheless I have determined upon a disguise which I believe will be effective. It is absolutely necessary that I should find a place inside of that bank, and I have found a way to accomplish it, with your aid."

She leaned forward and laid a card upon the desk before him. It bore a name (not her own) and an address.

"Will you come to that address at ten o'clock to-night, and ask for that person?" Katherine continued.

He glanced at the card, then uttered a low whistle. "Will that person be you, Mrs. Harvard?" he asked; and when she nodded her head brightly in assent he added:

"You will be obliged to sacrifice something in order to play that part; and I am afraid that you will find it more difficult than you imagine. However, if you have decided, there is nothing more to be said, I suppose. I will be there, Mrs. Harvard, and I will give you an hour."

As Lady Kate descended to the street in one of the elevators, Detective-Sergeant Connor, fresh from that conference at headquarters, ascended in another. He was on his way to report to his real chief, Redhead; but he did not know that Rodney Rushton had followed him, and was, even then, waiting outside of the building.

Still less did Lady Kate, on her way to the street, anticipate the possible proximity of Lieutenant Rushton.

## CHAPTER XI.

### Lady Kate's Misfortune.

RUSHTON saw Lady Kate. Lady Kate did not see Rushton.

If Black Julius had been there with his car, waiting at the curb where his mistress left him, the things that happened so quickly after Katherine emerged from the entrance to the tall building might have been avoided; but the traffic regulations had forced Julius to take his car around the corner to wait.

Only a moment before Lady Kate come out of the building Rushton met and spoke to one of the regular plain-clothes men who were attached to that precinct, and they were still talking together when she appeared.

Rushton could think quickly on occasion. He did it then, and acted with the thought.

"Quick, Hardner!" he exclaimed under his breath with sudden inspiration. "If you'll do what I tell you to now, and do it right, I'll get you a promotion—and I know what I am talking about. D'ye see that woman there, at the curb? Looks as though she was lookin' f'r a cab 'r something. I want her pinched now, quick! Y'understand? Here; take this"—and he shoved something that he took from one of his own pockets into Hardner's hand—"an' plant it on her before she is searched. She's a dip—see? Run her around to your own station-house an' hold her there. Stay with her yourself, an' don't let anybody talk to her or her talk to anybody—an' no telephonin', either. And you stay right on the job with her till further orders. Hurry! She is moving off. You'll have the big chief stuck on you if you do this job right."

Rushton withdrew into a doorway behind a standing show-case and watched.

Hardner, a big brute of a man who had "bull" and plain-clothes man written all over him, and who had been "bouncer" in a dance-hall before he became a cop, did not hesitate.

He shoved himself forward through the throng of people who were moving in either direction, and he dropped a great paw roughly upon Katherine's shoulder and whirled her around so that she faced him, before she had taken half a dozen steps toward the corner around which Julius had taken his car.

"I want you, my little lady," Hardner said brutally, with a grin and a leer. "I saw you pinch one leather a minute 'r two ago, and I guess you've got more'n that on you. Gee! but you're a peach, ain't you? With a pair of lamps like yours, you ain't got no call to be a common dip. Not you. Come along."

He seized her roughly by the arm and forced her along the street beside him, in the direction opposite the corner around which Julius was waiting.

Lady Kate was so amazed by the attack and the suddenness of it, so utterly nonplused, that she had been led along the street twenty feet or more before she recovered her natural wit and poise; and then she sought to wrench her arm free from Hardner's grasp.

But the effort was unavailing. Also, a dozen people had witnessed the arrest, and a crowd was rapidly forming around them; and at that instant Hardner threw back one side of his coat and exhibited his shield of authority.

Katherine thoroughly understood how futile it would be to attempt resistance there; and she realized, also, that she had walked into a trap or had fallen into one. She could see Rushton's hand in what was taking place as plainly as if it had been held before her eyes.

And so she walked along quietly beside Hardner without resistance or announced objection. And presently they arrived at the station-house, which was not far distant, where she hoped and believed she would find somebody who knew her, who would identify her, and whom she could persuade to befriend her.

But Rushton anticipated any such event.

No sooner had Hardner started away with her before Rushton hurried to a telephone, and he had that particular station-house on the wire long before the plain-clothes man and his charge reached there.

The instructions that he gave were explicit and emphatic; and they were accompanied by threats that were not to be doubted in their general character. Thus, when Lady Kate did arrive at the station-house, a sergeant whom she did not know had taken the lieutenant's place at the desk, she was roughly questioned, a pretense was made of entering the record of the case

in the "blotter," and she was rushed into the captain's room, where Hardner stood guard over her until a patrol wagon came and took her away; for Rushton had done more telephoning than merely to call up the stationhouse.

If anybody supposes that a policeman in New York City cannot do pretty nearly as he pleases with a private citizen, in spite of magistrates and the law and so-called justice, provided that policeman is abetted in his act by one of the men "higher up," Mr. Anybody has got another guess coming; and Lady Kate speedily found herself in a position that was by no means enviable.

The "wagon" did not take her to headquarters, as she had confidently believed it was intended to do — for she surmised that she would have some kind of a frame-up to face, and she was prepared to resort, as a last extremity, to certain influences that she possessed to get her out of her difficulties; influences and associations which she had never revealed, even to her husband.

She had reserved that part of her history—the part that had always surrounded her with a cloak of mystery—until such time as Bingham Harvard would be enabled to face the world as an honest man.

That wagon was met by another, and, still later, the second one was met by a third; and in the course of time, after having been driven across Queensboro Bridge, Lady Kate realized that she was to be given no opportunity whatever to escape from the predicament she was in.

When she was at last locked up, guarded by a matron whose face was as hard and uncompromising in a feminine way as Hardner's, she knew only that she was somewhere out in Queens, but she had no idea as to the exact location.

Her cell was comfortable enough—more like a small room than a cell; but she understood perfectly well that she would not have been sent out to that remote place unless the persons who had her sent there knew what they were about.

There would be no hope for her now unless she could manage an actual escape, and that possibility appeared to be exceedingly vague and remote.

In the mean time, Black Julius, always patient where his loved mistress was concerned, became alarmed.

Katherine had implicit faith in her servitor, and usually told him more or less of her plans whenever he drove her about in the imitation taxicab, so that he could meet her half-way in carrying them into effect.

She had told him that day where she was going, and how long a time she expected to be detained; so, when almost an hour more than that time had elapsed, Julius left his car where it was, entered the tall building, and sought the office where he knew she had gone.

For reasons of his own he adopted, when he entered it, the dialect of a Southern negro; and fortune favored him so far that at the moment he entered the reception office of the suite Redhead came into it through another door at the opposite side.

"I's lookin' fo' de lady what I done druv down yere in ma cab, boss," Julius announced with a bow. "She said she was comin' out mos' an' houah ago, an' she ain't come yet. If she's yere, boss, will you jes' tell her that I's waitin'?"

Chief Redhead eyed the negro narrowly, then stepped closer to him.

"Do you know the lady's name?" he asked in a low tone.

"Yassir. I's heered her called Mis' Maxwell," Julius replied.

"She left here almost an hour ago. Haven't you seen her?"

"No, sah; an' if she done left de buildin' she'd have come straight as a string to me — unlessen somethin' stopped her." Julius was genuinely alarmed by that time.

"You go into my private office and

wait until I—" the chief began; but Julius interrupted.

"No, sah," he said. "I'll go down to my cab an' wait dere—jes' a li'l' while. You kin fin' me jes' aroun' de corner."

The chief had no difficulty when he reached the street, and by deft questioning, in discovering what had happened. There were several loiterers about who had seen a young woman arrested about an hour before for picking pockets.

The man at the cigar-stand just inside the entrance to the building had witnessed part of the incident; and there were others also.

The chief hurried around the corner to Julius. He had made a close surmise as to the real character of the negro.

"Are you Mrs. Harvard's servant?" he asked abruptly. "I am her friend and confidant. You need not be afraid to tell me."

"Yes, sir," Julius replied, dropping the assumed dialect.

"I thought so. She was arrested on a false charge when she came out of the building. An officer in plain clothes took her away. I want you to wait here a few moments until I return, and then drive me to the nearest station house."

He hurried away without waiting for an answer.

Inside of his own office he summoned one of his own men aside and rapidly recounted what had happened.

"Find Connor," he added, "and tell him all that I have told you. Tell him to get me all the particulars of what has happened, even if he has to queer himself over there to do it. I'm afraid he is queered, anyhow. Somebody must have followed him when he came here to report, and while waiting outside for him saw Lady Kate go out. More than likely it was Rushton himself. Tell Connor that if he gets a move on him he can find out what I want to know before Rushton has had time to tell of his suspicions. I am going around to the station house, but I don't expect to get much information there."

Nor did he.

He was permitted to examine the blotter himself. There was no entry concerning such a case as he inquired about. No pickpocket — male or female—had been brought in that day. (He did not make use of her name in making his inquiries.) Every cop at the station house was profoundly ignorant of any such circumstances as he described.

The face of Julius was very grave when the chief returned to him outside.

"I've got to find her, sir, right away, somehow," he said helplessly.

"We *will* find her right away—*somehow,* Julius," was the quick reply. "There is one chance that I may learn where she has been taken within an hour or two. It is almost certain that they would not take her to headquarters, or to a near-by station house."

"I want to help, sir. I've *got* to help."

"You shall help. Take me back to my office, then return for me in two hours. I will have determined upon some course by that time."

"I won't come back, sir; I'll wait; or maybe I'll just drive around the streets and keep my eyes open, and if I happen to see that man Rushton get in my way I'll run over him with the car."

"Why? What do you know about Rushton?" the chief asked quickly.

"I know that he has made Miss Kitty every bit of trouble she's ever had, and I know that I saw him go up the street past me while I was waiting around the corner for her; and if she has been arrested, as you say, it is his doings, and he knows where she is to be found. And if I happen to see him, *he's got to tell me, sir.*"

"No, Julius, not that. You would only betray the fact to him that you are her servant, and she doesn't wish

him to know that. Do as I have directed, and leave the rest to me. We will find her."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### The Little Door.

EXACTLY midnight.

The Night Wind paused in the doorway he had been seeking and looked up and down the street by which he had approached it. There was no person in sight. He turned, then, to look more closely at the building.

It presented every outward aspect of a warehouse. The windows were grimy, and—he assumed—cobwebbed, although it was much too dark just there for him to determine that. They were protected by heavy wire-screens that were almost as effective as bars might have been.

The door was a huge one, through the opening of which truck horses, three abreast, could have passed; but there was a very small door in the middle of it, faintly determinable, which, he assumed, was the one which would be opened for him from the inside at twelve-ten precisely, according to the directions that Tom Clancy had given him.

It was the night following his interview with the inspector and with Rushton; the night that followed upon the day of Katherine's disappearance. But he had, as yet, heard nothing of that.

He turned his back to the little door the better to be watchful for the approach of strangers along the street, and so did not hear it when it was opened—and then Tom Clancy's voice brought him sharply around again.

"Hello, Bing. Come in," was the greeting.

Harvard stepped through the narrow doorway into impenetrable blackness. He felt Tom's grasp upon his arm, and was led blindly forward through a thick wall of darkness until at last a faint glimmer of light could be seen.

It looked as if it were a mile away, but they came to it in another moment, after which they mounted some stairs, traversed another considerable distance (Tom carried the candle now that he had left waiting on the stairs), ascended to a third floor where they presently came to an iron ladder at the top of which was an opening through which the stars could be seen.

There was a structure on the roof, square and roomy, once a combination of cupola and watch-tower, but now transformed into a place of residence.

The door stood invitingly open, a student-lamp with a green shade was on the center-table of the one room, there were rugs on the floor, a three-quarter bed in one corner, a couch in another, several comfortable chairs, two well-filled bookcases, and a genial air of comfort and hominess.

"Behold your future residence, Mr. Night Wind," Clancy exclaimed as he closed the door. There had not been a word passed between them since the first greetings at the street.

"You are to live here, Bing, until we catch that thief. Wait a minute, now, till I finish. I've got to get this off of my chest."

"Go on, then."

"There are four ways out of the building down on the ground floor, one on each of the four sides. One opens upon the street, as you know; the others give upon narrow alleyways, which in turn will take you to one of the two streets. Up there in the corner is a coil of knotted rope, and out on the cornices, yonder, and yonder"—he pointed in two directions—"are iron hooks, in case you should happen to want to take to the street from the roof. Right there, on the table, is a telephone. It is a private wire into Redhead's office, which nobody but himself and ourselves and the telephone company know about."

"Oh! So this place is his, eh?" Bingham asked.

"Yes. He calls it his think-shop. Whenever the world and worldly things get on his nerves he chucks the world and comes here; and he has put the place at your disposal as long as you may need it. It is better than the fly-by-night existence that you would otherwise have to lead, isn't it?"

"Decidedly. I'm very grateful. But where is he? You said he was to be here, Tom."

"He couldn't make it, Bing. Something else demanded his attention. He sent me word of it at the last moment. But he will be here before daylight, if possible."

"Where is he? What has happened?" Harvard asked suspiciously. Something about Clancy's manner warned him that there was a reason which concerned himself.

"I have got some bad news for you, Bing. The chief told me not to tell you about it till he got here, because he believed there would be no reason for telling it afterward. But I don't think it's right to withhold it."

"Well? Well? What is it?"

"Katherine has been arrested."

Harvard started to his feet, stood still and rigid for a moment, then succeeded in controlling himself and sat down slowly again.

"Tell me about it," he said with forced calm. "Every word of it; all that you know about it."

And so Clancy told him—everything that *he* knew at the time, and Harvard listened in utter silence.

At the end of the recital he was still silent for so long a time that Clancy twice raised his eyes expectantly, but wisely kept still, waiting for his friend to speak.

Then Harvard left his chair, went to the door and passed outside on the roof which covered a considerable area and was dipped toward the rear of the building just enough to allow for drainage; otherwise it was flat.

"I am not going to wait here for the arrival of your friend Redhead," he said to Tom when the latter followed him outside. "I am going to find Katherine."

"But how? Where will you go? How will you find her, Bing?"

"I will find her by seeking the men who are responsible for her arrest and compelling them to tell me where she is. Great Heaven, Tom, don't you understand what this move of theirs means? Why, it is even a worse frame-up than Rushton put over on me. Unless I get her out of their clutches, and do it at once, Katherine will be railroaded to prison on a false charge, and there won't be a ghost of a show for her. Don't you see it?"

"Yes; of course I do see it. But the chief—"

"The chief will do everything in his power, of course. Let him keep on doing it. If he succeeds in finding her and rescuing her before I do, so much the better. But I will tell you one thing, Tom. It is this: if those fellows keep up this sort of thing they will force me back again into the condition of mind I was in before I went away, and if that happens I will take the law into my own hands in a manner that won't be good for the several men who are responsible for this business."

"Be careful, Bing."

"Oh, I am cool enough. I haven't lost my temper, and I'm not going to. Take me down to the street and let me out. Then give me the key that will admit me here again when I wish to return."

"Tell me what you are going to do, Bing."

"I don't know—all that I shall do. But I will go, first, to Chester's house to see him. What I may do after that will depend largely upon Chester."

"He won't admit you. Katherine gave up your key to him, you know."

"I have another one. I had a duplicate made of that one long ago. I am going straight from here to Chester's house, and to his bedside. It is high time that I had a personal interview with him, anyhow. I will make

him find out for me where they have taken Katherine."

"Do you think you can do that?"

"I will do it, Tom. You may tell the chief, as you call him, to telephone to me, here, at noon to-morrow. Give me his number, and in case I am not here, or able to get here in time I will telephone to him a little before twelve."

At the little door through the big one, which gave upon the street, Clancy put one hand on his friend's shoulder and said:

"I know there is no stopping you, Bing, so I won't try. But there is something more I wish to say to you before you go."

"Well?"

"In the interview that Katherine had with the chief she advanced some sort of a theory—he did not explain it to me so I cannot tell you what it was —which has got him going on an entirely new tack. He said, 'Clancy, that girl is a wonder. She has struck the key-note of the whole thing, I believe;' and that is all he would tell me. Think that over, Bing, while you are on your way to Chester's; that is, if you are going there."

"Oh, I am going there, Tom, right now!" Harvard replied as he stepped through the little doorway to the street.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### Putting One Over on Rushton.

STERLING CHESTER, the banker, awoke with a start. The glare of many electric lights in his room where he had been sleeping dazzled him; and then he half started to a sitting posture in the bed, but fell backward upon the pillows again with a cry of amazement and fright when the tall figure of a man stepped into view.

"Bingham! You?" he cried out, and yet his voice was raised but little.

"Yes. It is I, Mr. Chester," Harvard replied calmly. "Stay where you are. You need not leave your bed; and don't attempt to call for help or to give any sort of alarm. It would not avail."

"What—what are you going to do? Why are you here? Don't—please don't do anything that you will be sorry for, Bingham." The banker was beside himself with terror in the presence of this man who had been so grievously wronged.

"I did not come here to injure you in any way, Mr. Chester," Harvard replied slowly. "Do you know me so little that you fear I might do that?"

"How—how did you get in? She —that woman who came here one night and waited for me in the library —gave me the key that you had."

"I had two, sir. I gave her only one of them. And please to remember that '*that woman*' is my wife. She is Mrs. Bingham Harvard, if you have occasion to refer to her again. It is on her account that I am here now."

"On her — on Mrs. Harvard's account, you say?" The banker was endeavoring with all his power to speak composedly; but he was horribly afraid; he did not know what this man might yet do to him. He feared to do or say anything which might try that temper of which he had seen more than one exhibition.

"Yes. Your friends whom you have taken to your bosom, whom you permitted and assisted to perpetrate the foul wrong against me, have turned their attention and their activities against my wife. Failing to 'get' me, they believe that they can reach me through her. She was arrested yesterday, in the early afternoon, and has been spirited away to one of the distant precincts of the city, I imagine. I have come here to ask *you* to find out for me now where they have taken her."

"I? *I?* My dear Bingham, how in the world can I do that?"

"I will tell you presently how you *must* do it, Mr. Chester. Rushton,

your chosen coadjutor, instigated her arrest. She is charged with picking pockets. It is another one of his scoundrelly frame-ups. Whatever they found upon her was 'planted,' as they call it. She will not have a ghost of a chance to clear herself. Unless I interfere before she can be taken into some distant magistrate's court this morning a case will be made out against her; she will be arraigned, tried, convicted, sentenced — railroaded to prison before I can do a thing to prevent it."

Harvard hesitated in his speech for just a moment, and while he did so the banker gradually recovered his mental poise. He was still in fear of what Harvard might do if anything should occur to rouse that terrible temper; but—the banker had not seen Bingham Harvard in so long a time that the mere sight of him, whom he had loved so well as child and boy and man, gradually got the better of his fears.

Chester was conscious, in that moment, that he still loved Bingham Harvard; that still, to all intent and purpose, the man who stood beside his bed was the grown-up boy to whom he had given the affection and devotion of a father.

Yet he gave no sign of all this.

He felt less fear, more self-assurance as to the outcome of this mysterious midnight call. And as if in confirmation of that thought, Harvard spoke again, in a changed tone—in a voice that had in it something of the old thrill of respect, esteem, and love that he had always so freely bestowed upon his lifelong benefactor.

"Mr. Chester," he said, bending slightly forward, "cannot you understand why I am here? Don't you see that I *had* to come? Isn't there any of that old love for me left in your heart to bestow at this crucial moment? Don't answer me now. Listen to me, instead. She whom you know as Lady Kate is my wife. She is my world—my *all*. The machinations of Rushton, which began when he first succeeded in convincing you of my guilt, have grown and spread until they have reached out and seized upon her, my wife.

"I was desperate before, sir, when I saw my good name taken from me by the falseness of manufactured evidence—worse than all when I realized that the act had stolen away your love for me; for I will not believe that it was killed."

He straightened himself and took a step farther away from the bedside.

"I know that it was not destroyed, sir. I know now, better than you know it yourself, that in your inmost heart there still glows that father-love which you gave so freely to me through so many years of my life.

"Listen, Mr. Chester—listen, gov'nor, for that is what I used to call you, and what you liked to have me call you—it is to that father-love that you had for me that I appeal now. Won't you help me, sir? But even if you are reluctant to help *me*, won't you help *her* in this extremity?"

"But how, Bingham? I do not understand you at all. How can I be of help?" the banker demanded, with just a little show of petulance. The fear within him was nearly gone by that time, and yet there was a touch of it left, too. Harvard had touched the right cord of memory when he appealed to the father-love. "In what way can I be of assistance. I confess that I do not see how that can be."

"Mr. Chester — gov'nor—you place honesty of purpose and of conduct above all things else, I know. Justice, impartially meted out to all, is your creed. I know that, too. Then, sir—my more than friend in the past—no matter how you may regard me, I ask you in the name of your love of honesty to be just to Katherine."

"Well, well, well, Bingham, what is it that you wish me to do? But, before you tell me that, try to remember that you have no right to be here in my bedroom now. In the name of that justice you talk about I should, by

rights, go straight to the telephone, summon the police, and turn you over to—"

Harvard raised a hand in warning. The banker stopped with the sentence unfinished.

"Wait," Harvard said. "I had to come here—to the city first; to you now. If I had followed my own inclinations I would have taken Katherine away to the farthest corner of the world, to start life all over again. I would never have returned here, even to establish my innocence, if *she* had not insisted upon it, if she had not made me do it.

"I *had* to come. My birthright, mysterious and unknown though it is, in so far as my parentage is concerned—my birthright is honesty. That birthright I must not, will not, lose. Whoever gave it to me does not matter; it is none the less my own.

"And I have not come to you to-night to threaten you or to harm you in any way. God forbid. Whatever has happened, whatever may yet happen, I love you as a son should love his own father. If you will not help me to do justice to myself, then help me to do justice to another. Can you refuse such a plea as that, sir?"

"But how? What do you wish me to do? You have not told me that."

"I have told you that Katherine is even now in the power of that scoundrel, Rodney Rushton. I have told you that he has framed up a charge against her of picking pockets. I have told you that in order to make that charge good they have probably not hesitated to 'plant' articles upon her, to convict her. I have told you that they have spirited her away to some station-house or jail where I cannot hope to find her in time to save her from this terrible danger. I have told you that Rushton has done this, and that therefore Rushton knows where she is hidden. I want you to make—no, induce is the word—I want you to *induce* Lieutenant Rushton to tell you where she is."

"My dear Bingham" — the banker nearly forgot himself for the moment —"I do not know where Lieutenant Rushton may be now. I cannot dress and go to him at such an hour; and if I did so, he would refuse to give me the information you want."

"I know where Rushton may be found right now."

"But—"

"And there is the telephone. You have only to throw your bath-robe around you and to go down with me to the library."

"To telephone to him? To telephone to Lieutenant Rushton at this hour of the night?"

"Yes. He is barely more than arrived home. More than likely he will not yet have gone to bed. He will answer the telephone. And if you couch your request in the right words and manner he will tell you."

"But I do not know what to say to him," Chester protested, nevertheless rising from the bed and reaching for an elaborately quilted dressing-gown—and by that act Bingham Harvard knew that he had won, although he was not certain whether it was through love or fear that he had done so.

"You will say," said Harvard, speaking rapidly and finding the banker's slippers for him as he did so, "that you have only just now learned of the arrest of Lady Kate. You will say that your information came through Tom Clancy, and that will be the truth, for I got the news from him. Are you listening, sir?"

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"If he should ask you how Clancy came to know about it, say—truthfully —that he did not tell you that. Then, Mr. Chester—and here is the point!—you must congratulate Rushton upon the arrest; you must make him think that you approve of it. You must give him to understand that you consider it the best move he has made yet. You must rub him metaphorically down the back for all of it. Do you understand?"

"Yes. But I cannot—"

"Mr. Chester, you *must*. There are no two ways about it. You *must*. And there is more."

"Well? Well?"

"You must tell Rushton that you wish to see Lady Kate the first thing in the morning. You must make Rushton think that you believe you can induce her to betray my hiding-place. Remind him of the fact that she came here to your home one night and practically forced her way inside. Suggest to him that you will frighten her into telling you what you wish to know about me by holding over her the threat of another indictment for burglary. You can do it and you must do it, Mr. Chester. Come. You are ready. Let us go down."

They did not speak again until they were in the library and the telephone was before them. But the banker's thoughts had evidently been upon Harvard's last utterances.

"And then?" he asked. "What then—if he does tell me where she is now?"

"Then, sir, you must dress yourself and go with me to find her."

"But—at this hour of the night, and when I do not know where it may be—"

"Listen once again, sir. I have not ceased to love you. Even at this moment my filial impulses toward you are uppermost. And yet *you must do what I ask*. It hurts me more than I can say to seem to threaten—but you *must*. My life, Katherine's, our whole future and your contented future, too, sir—depend upon it, and I would be worse than a weakling if I did not force you to it. Would I not? You know that I would."

The banker took another step toward the telephone, and halted again.

"Go ahead, sir," Harvard said. "Take your seat at the telephone. I will hold the receiver so that we both may hear what is said. When necessary I will prompt you in what to say. Have no fear. All will be well. It will not be as difficult as you think. You will find that he will fall into the trap. Come, sir; you must do it; and you know that you *can* and *will* do it."

Seated at the telephone, before he raised the receiver from the hook, Chester, more disturbed than he had ever been in his life before, asked once again:

"Suppose—he—won't—tell me what I want to know, Bingham?"

"He must tell you. You must make him do it somehow. For I tell you plainly, Mr. Chester, if this scheme of theirs is carried out I shall hold you as responsible as the others; and I will, with these two hands of mine, kill every man who has been instrumental in bringing disgrace upon my wife. That is the last word, sir. Remember that you will not be talking half so much to save *her* as to save *yourself*."

There was an intensity in that last utterance of Bingham Harvard's that the banker could not mistake.

Harvard lifted the receiver from the hook and asked for the number; and after a short wait the answer came.

Harvard was holding the receiver so that both could hear it. His left cheek was in touch with Chester's left one as he faced away from the transmitter, while Chester's lips were close to it.

"Hello, there!" they heard the voice of Rushton exclaim angrily. "What's the matter with you fellows? Can't you ever let a fellow sleep?"

"This—this is Mr. Chester speaking—Chester, of the Centropolis Bank, lieutenant," the banker managed to announce tremblingly. "I—I felt that I had to call you up at once, on account of some news I have just heard—"

"Some splendid news," Harvard breathed softly.

"Some really splendid news, lieutenant," the banker added.

"Oh! It's you, is it, Chester?" Rushton growled from the other end. "What's the matter with you? Your voice sounds as if you were scared to death."

"You are eager," the Night Wind breathed as softly as before.

"I am only eager—extremely eager, lieutenant. I have just heard, through Clancy, of the—er—arrest of—er—that woman yesterday afternoon. That was a masterly stroke, lieutenant. I—er—"

"You must see her," Harvard prompted.

"—must see her at once, you know, so I want you to tell me where she is, and—"

"You must see her! What for?" Rushton demanded.

"Felonious entrance," Harvard prompted in a whisper.

"Why, don't you see?" Chester went on, remembering his instructions. "She came here to my house one night and forced her way inside. Couldn't that be construed into an attempted burglary? And couldn't I make an additional charge against her when she is arraigned in the morning?"

"Say, Chester," Rushton replied, "I didn't think you had it in you. You're wakin' up, you are. Now, that ain't a bad idea at all. But what do you want to see her about? You don't have to do no talkin' to her first in order to make that charge against her."

"Induce her to betray me," Harvard whispered quickly.

"Why — er — you see, lieutenant, I had an idea about that," the banker continued slowly, choosing his words with care, for he was in dread lest he should offened the man whose left cheek he could feel touching his own. "You see—er—that the charge I shall make against her is a felony. It is quite—er—a serious matter, is it not?"

"Betcher life it is, Chester."

"And—er—she will be correspondingly dismayed by it, I assume; especially coming as it will in addition to the other one."

"Say, Chester, I'm gittin' to be real proud of you!" Rushton exclaimed over the wire.

"Use it as a lever — against me," Harvard prompted in a whisper.

"And—ahem!—it has occurred to me, Rushton," the banker continued, "that it may be used as a sort of a cudgel over her head, don't you see, to induce her to tell us something about Harvard, and—er—er—"

"If you had the power to offer her immunity," Harvard whispered.

"Go on, Chester," Rushton demanded impatiently.

"And—well, if I had the power—from you, you know—to offer her immunity; to let her go free, provided she would tell me something about Harvard—why—er—don't you see, Rushton? She is only a woman, after all; and it seems to me that the idea *might* work."

"You would have to see her alone—go there where she is alone," Harvard prompted.

"I think it's a cinch of an idea, Chester," Rushton said. "I'll take you over there the first thing in the—"

"No, no, no, Rushton; that would not do at all. I must go to her alone. She must have no suspicion whatever that you have any knowledge of what I am doing. It would make her suspicious and might spoil everything."

"I guess that's right, too. You're wakin' up, Chester. But how'll she think you got onto the fact of her arrest at all—eh?"

"Why, I'll tell her the truth; that I heard it through Clancy."

"Bully! That'll be an additional lever, at that. What time will you go to see her if I tell you where to find her? You'll have to get there early, you know."

"At seven," Harvard prompted; and Chester repeated the two words over the wire.

"All right. I'll fix it for you," Rushton replied. "I'll telephone out there right now. And I'll be there myself along about a quarter past or half past seven, after you have gone inside to talk to her. You will find Lady Kate at the—" And here Rushton gave a clear description of the locality of the place where Katherine was con-

fined and how the banker was to get there by the most direct route; and he added many cautions and much advice regarding Chester's methods of procedure when he should see her.

"Say good-by and hang up as soon as he gets to a period," Harvard ordered; and the banker obeyed.

"And now, Mr. Chester, get into your clothes and be ready to start at once," Harvard directed then. "While you are doing that I will telephone to the garage and order your limousine car, for I will need it badly as soon as we get Katherine outside of her prison. Hurry, now, for there isn't any time to waste."

Thirty minutes later, at exactly two o'clock in the morning, they started.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### Into Jail—and Out.

THE new county jail in Queens had not been built when this happened. The old one, since replaced, needs no comment here. Nor were the local officials celebrated for perspicacity or astuteness.

When the banker, accompanied by the Night Wind, arrived at the jail the latter knew that he ran a considerable risk of being recognized, but he counted upon the very boldness of his act to offset that in a great degree; and for the rest, he determined to make constant use of his handkerchief and to keep his head turned away as much as possible while they were passing the guard.

Also, he figured that at that hour in the morning—between three and four o'clock—the turnkey's eyes would be heavy with sleep, and that doubtless his mental capacities would be proportionately stupefied.

Harvard had planned exactly what he would do once they were inside the prison and the door of Katherine's cell had been unlocked—or in case the turnkey should decline to unlock it, as he would be more than apt to do. In furtherance of those plans the Night Wind had provided himself with some stout cord and two of the banker's towels before they started.

There was some difficulty in arousing the guard, who was supposed to be wide awake; but he came to the door presently and glared at Chester a moment before he demanded gruffly:

"Well, what do *you* want?"

"I am Mr. Chester, of the Centropolis Bank," was the prompt and pompous reply, for the banker was quite himself by that time. "No doubt Lieutenant Rushton has already telephoned to you regarding me. I am to be admitted at once—at once, do you understand?—to see the woman who is detained here under the name of Kate Maxwell, alias Lady Kate." Harvard had prompted him exactly what to say at the start.

"Huh!" the turnkey replied. "You ain't due here till seven o'clock, and there wasn't anything said about two of you. You were to come alone."

"Those are mere details, Mr. Turnkey. If you have any doubts about the matter, you can call up Lieutenant Rushton — although I don't think he would thank you for doing it after he has given you explicit orders."

"More'n likely she's undressed and in bed," the turnkey replied, as he admitted them grumblingly.

"In that case she will have to dress again," Chester announced, as he brushed his way inside. It would seem, indeed, as if he was suddenly imbued with something of the spirit of the adventure. But—he did not *fear* the turnkey, while the man who clung so closely beside him and half a pace to the rear inspired him with constant terror lest he should do some act which would provoke Bingham Harvard's wrath.

Katherine's cell was the largest and best one in the woman's part of the prison. A screen had been pulled down over the barred doorway, but, nevertheless, Katherine had removed none of her clothing. Nor was she

asleep—which is not strange, under the circumstances.

"Two gents to see you, Kate," the turnkey announced with maddening familiarity. Harvard could have choked him then—as he meant to do presently.

"Unlock that door and let her step outside," he commanded, speaking for the first time, and careless now whether the turnkey should recognize him or not. But he did want Katherine to hear his voice, and so, to be prepared for what should follow.

He heard her gasp when he did speak. Then she came forward quickly and grasped the bars of the heavy door as she peered out at them. Her astonishment then was profound.

"Why, Mr. Chester—" she exclaimed, and stopped, fearful lest she should say too much.

The turnkey had paid no attention to Harvard's order. Instead, he was studying the Night Wind's face, as if it were faintly suggestive of something that he ought to remember; and Harvard repeated:

"Unlock the door, turnkey."

"Who told you to give orders in this place, mister?" the turnkey demanded with a leer. "I guess you can talk through them bars all right, and Lieutenant Rushton didn't say nothin' about unlockin' no doors. You'll have to do your—"

His speech ended in a gasp and a gurgle.

Harvard's left hand had seized him by the throat and effectually shut off further utterance. Harvard's right hand forced a towel between his jaws as they fell open because of the choking he was receiving; and one of Harvard's feet tripped him, and he was forced backward and down upon the flagged flooring, with one of Harvard's knees upon his chest and with that merciless hand still clutching at his throat.

He struggled mightily, of course, flaying with his arms, and kicking; and he made ineffectual guttural noises as he attempted to cry out for help.

But the struggles soon became spasmodic and almost ceased.

He was very nearly unconscious before Harvard was able to make use of both hands to knot the twisted towel behind the turnkey's head, thus making the gag effectual; and after that it required only a moment to use the cord, and to bind his ankles together and to tie his wrists behind his back.

The turnkey's keys had been in his grasp when he was attacked. Harvard picked them up where they had fallen to the floor and then turned his eyes for an instant upon the banker.

Chester was shaking as if with a palsy. His teeth were chattering and he was mumbling incoherently:

"Don't kill him, Bingham! For God's sake, don't kill him!"

"Shut up!" Harvard ordered peremptorily.

Then he sprang to the cell door, unlocked it, and threw it open, and in another instant Lady Kate was in his arms.

But not for long.

He held her so for a moment, then thrust her aside and turned his attention to the work in hand; and in regard to that, also, he had decided while on the way over exactly what he would do.

He lifted the burly form of the turnkey from the floor and bore him inside of the cell, dropping him upon the cot that was there; and then he turned and spoke sharply to the banker.

"Come here, Chester," he said; and the banker passed inside of the cell.

No sooner had he entered it than Harvard stepped quickly outside, closing the door after him and locking it; and while that was being done, Chester looked on dumbly and apparently without understanding the fact that it was Harvard's intention to leave him there.

But Katherine understood, and she put one hand upon her husband's arm in protest.

"Is it necessary, Bingham?" she asked softly.

"Yes," he replied shortly. "It will

be a lesson to him. He will find out something of what it means to an innocent man to be locked in a cell; and he will have time to do some real thinking under circumstances that may lead him to think straight."

Then he turned to Chester and spoke to him through the bars.

"I am going to leave you here, Mr. Chester," he said calmly. "I do it because I believe it will be good for you. You won't be locked up more than two or three hours, at the most. Somebody will be here by that time. And I don't think they will dare to do anything to you for assisting in the escape of a prisoner—because I believe that as yet there has been no official record made of that prisoner. And, anyhow, it will be best for you to be found here. You can lay it all to me—to the Night Wind," he added coldly.

"Oh, Bingham! Please—"

But Harvard had already grasped Katherine by the arm and was leading her away along the corridor; and because Katherine's cell had been located in an isolated part of the woman's section of the prison, as well as on account of the quiet with which the Night Wind had accomplished the coup, they passed outside of the jail without any sort of an alarm being given, unlocking and relocking the several doors they were obliged to pass with the guard's keys.

Harvard dropped them upon the steps outside the building and led his wife to the waiting limousine.

"Mr. Chester will remain here for several hours," he told the chauffeur, who was new in the employ of the banker, and therefore did not know Bingham Harvard. "You are to drive us directly to New York. When you have crossed the bridge I will direct you where to go."

Inside the security of the closed car Katherine threw herself into Bing Harvard's arms and wept—for the first time since the indignity of the arrest, with its false charge, was put upon her. But she recovered very soon and raised a pair of smiling eyes to her husband's face.

"How did you do it?" she asked earnestly.

"Oh, Chester and I just did it; that's all, dear," he replied. "The old gentleman was almost in a state of collapse from abject terror all the time he was with me. I think he was actually relieved to be left in that cell—only I don't think he will enjoy his company if he should venture to remove that turnkey's gag and bonds;" and Harvard chuckled. He was happier at that moment than he had been in a long time.

"Did you ride over here together?" she asked. "And did you try to reason with him, to convince him that you are innocent? He would listen to you and believe you, would he not, dear?"

"No, girlie. We came over together, of course, but the ride was taken in utter silence. Chester was too frightened to talk, and I wanted to think. And I knew how utterly useless it would be to reason with him."

It was very nearly daylight by the time they had crossed Queensboro Bridge, where they were confronted by the problem of where they should go for concealment during the day.

Harvard told Katherine of the retreat on top of the warehouse, to which he held the key, and suggested that they might go there, but she shook her head with emphasis.

"No, dear," she said; "and we must part here. We must not be together, and you must not know where to find me—for I knew that if you could do that you would not remain away; and we would both be in constant danger. Remember, you promised me that, Bingham."

"Yes. I know."

"And now we are both outlaws for the time being. And I have my plans, which I am determined to carry out to the end. Besides, I have a safe retreat to go to. And I will find Julius there, awaiting me, I know. Oh, Bingham, isn't it wonderful that you got me out

of that terrible place so quickly? Tell the man to drive us to Columbus Circle. I will get down there and take a car. And you—"

"I'll get down, too, and put you on the car. Then—"

"No; you must not."

"—and then I will go to that warehouse over on the East Side."

"Please, Bingham, let me get down alone. See; I have a veil to cover my face, and it is almost light now. I will be perfectly safe. And you have the man drive you to a place somewhere near that warehouse."

There was no resisting her when she pleaded with him like that. With all his great strength of muscle and will, Bingham Harvard was as putty in the hands of Lady Kate.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.**

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# THE CUTIE

**By Jane Burr**

LIKE mother's cross-barred apple-pie,
She lures you when you wander by;
That baby mouth! Those satin cheeks!
That silver cadence when she speaks!

Her tiny, rosebud, angel-face,
Framed in a fluff of tulle and lace;
Her hair, through which the wavelets run,
An aureole of light and sun.

How sweet! Oh, yes, we know the type.
Its brains would nearly fill a pipe;
It never has a thought to spare
From boots and dress or hats and hair.

Its conversation: "Simply grand,"
"Well, really now," "It beats the band,"
"So good of you," and "Must you go?"
With polka-dots of "Yes" and "No."

With all her fuss and folderol,
She's just a stupid little doll.
How many men with any brain
Would turn to look at her again?

How many, understanding life,
Would ask her to become their wife—
Would trust to her their whole career?
About a million every year!

# THE EMPTY HAND*

A SERIAL IN V PARTS—PART III

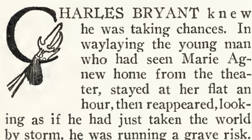
## BY PAUL BINKS

**SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS**

AFTER reaching the heights of prosperity as a Chicago merchant prince, with two sons to succeed him, James Hennikon discovers, by the visit of one Mollie Bryant, an old nurse, that his first born is not his son at all, but hers. His wife had bought him from the old nurse twenty-five years before the story opens, and Paul, the second son, is the only real son they have. But they love most dearly Benjamin, the first born, and the old man decides to keep Benjamin and give up Paul. Paul and Benjamin are both in love with Marie Agnew, an actress, whom Paul has backed financially under the name of Roberts. Mollie Bryant, the old nurse, tries to blackmail Mrs. Hennikon, and is drugged and left for dead, but Benjamin finds her and takes her to his rooms, where he hires a nurse and a Dr. Saunders to care for her. The woman has partially lost her memory, and Benjamin hopes forever. Mrs. Bryant's husband turns up, and follows Marie Agnew and Paul from the theater to her apartments. The nurse at Benjamin's rooms sees a startling resemblance between Benjamin and Frank Biscoe, a famous surgeon whom Ben hires to operate on Mrs. Bryant. Paul has succeeded in getting Marie to promise to marry him, and on his way home Bryant stops him and tells him that he and Ben had taken his wife away from him, and if they wanted her they must pay for her!

### CHAPTER XVII.

#### A Friendly Warning.



HARLES BRYANT knew he was taking chances. In waylaying the young man who had seen Marie Agnew home from the theater, stayed at her flat an hour, then reappeared, looking as if he had just taken the world by storm, he was running a grave risk.

The quick succession of events during the day, the sudden accession of wealth, and a liberal allowance of red wine had made him overconfident.

His life had consisted of a series of risks. Everything he did was a gamble, even his marriage with Mollie Bryant.

He studied Paul attentively as they stood in the empty street beneath the lamplight. When the detective had brought Bryant to Hennikon's office he had not noticed Paul, for the latter had been sitting at the far end of the room in the shadow and had never moved or spoken.

If he had not seen Marie Agnew's portrait in the sitting-room of the flat where his wife was hidden he would have had no reason for connecting the Mr. Roberts who stood facing him with the well-dressed, aristocratic youth whom he had seen going in and out.

However, he knew he was on the right tack, for all the color had left Paul's face.

When Bryant had seen him emerging from Miss Agnew's flat his cheeks had been flushed, his eyes resolute, his shoulders squared. Now he was white, with fear in his eyes, and he trembled.

"Well, what about it?" Bryant said briskly.

With an effort Paul found his voice.

* This story began in The Cavalier for September 27.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know you."

He hesitated a moment and looked more closely at the man. Again the feeling that he had seen him before—and the voice was vaguely familiar, too.

"I don't know anything about your wife," he continued. "Get out of the way and let me pass."

Bryant showed his teeth in an indulgent smile. "As you like, Mr. Roberts. I thought it was only fair to give you a friendly warning, though. If you can't give me a civil answer perhaps your brother will."

At the mention of his brother Paul started. His one thought, the only idea in his head, was that this man had been referring to Marie Agnew.

Now he recalled Marie's mysterious conversation through the telephone with Benjamin. Hope revived in his heart, courage returned.

"Hadn't you better tell me who your wife is, where she is?"

Bryant laughed.

"As if you didn't know. Perhaps you'll say you don't live at the Dearborn apartments; perhaps you'll say you're not on your way home there now."

Paul commenced to breathe freely again. He drew himself up and the color returned to his face.

"I don't live at the Dearborn apartments. Do you mean to imply that your wife is living there?"

"I do."

Paul shrugged and turned on his heel. A taxicab was coming down the street; he hailed it.

"Sorry I can't help you. I remember your face now; you were hanging about outside the Illinois Theater this evening; you must have followed me here. If I see you prowling about again I shall have you arrested."

Bryant said nothing. He was puzzled. He knew he had made a mistake. His brain—slightly fuddled by wine—refused to work clearly.

He watched Paul enter the taxicab; the latter, on his guard, gave a false address.

"Remember my warning," Paul said as he closed the door.

As soon as the cab reached Jackson Park he put his head out of the window and gave the chauffeur the right address. He let himself in with his latch-key when he reached home, and was going up-stairs when he noticed lights in the dining-room. Then Benjamin appeared.

Paul gave him a curt nod. He had not expected to find him at home.

"Well, old man, how goes it?" Benjamin said pleasantly.

All the old antipathy and jealousy surged in Paul's breast. The crisis just passed helped to increase rather than abate the resentment he had always felt for Benjamin.

"I'm all right, thanks. But what are you doing here? I should have thought you would have felt more at home in your rooms."

He saw that his remark had gone home. Ben flinched.

"Come and have a drink and a pipe before you turn in. I was waiting up for you. Where have you been?"

Paul followed his brother into the dining-room and poured himself out a drink. He felt the moment had come to make his elder brother realize his inferiority.

He himself, who a few hours ago had almost believed that he had no right to the name he bore, merely an adopted child, a thing of shame; now that his position was doubly secure, now that he was on the point of winning all that he had set out to accomplish, he took a cruel pleasure in seeing another writhe and suffer.

"I've just come from Marie Agnew's; spent the evening with her."

He swallowed the whisky and soda and sat on the edge of the table, smiling blandly.

"You shall be the first to hear the good news — the first to congratulate me, Ben. Doubtless you'll be surprised, because last night you told us

she had promised to marry you. It wasn't true—for she has promised to marry me, and the wedding will take place almost at once."

He was staring straight at his brother; gradually he dropped his eyes and, slipping off the table, walked to the sideboard and fumbled in a silver box for a cigarette.

There was a long silence; Paul commenced to whistle unconcernedly, then stopped and gave a sidelong glance at Ben.

"You yourself said the best man should win. I proved to-night that I was the better man of the two, and Marie accepted me."

He wished Ben would speak. But he had to wait a long time. And when he heard his brother's voice he was surprised. Even he detected a world of suppressed feeling in it.

"That's quite true," Ben said slowly; "you're the best man, Paul. You have done something with your life. I've only played the fool. Still, I, too, love her, old man—"

"Stop that!" Paul cried fiercely, turning toward him. "You? You're not fit to breathe her name. You made love to her, you mean, while you amused yourself with other women. You tried to trick her into an engagement because, I suppose, she was beautiful and successful, and you knew she was earning a big salary. Men who squander their own money always like to marry money. But she has found you out."

He recounted the incident of the telephone: "The second time you tried to shield yourself behind my pseudonym of Roberts, and then when we rang you up to-night the woman answered the telephone herself. Oh, I heard her voice distinctly, and not a bad voice, either! You weren't at home; she pretended that she was your servant. Well, have you nothing to say?"

Benjamin was standing with his back to his brother now, his elbows on the mantel-shelf.

"You judge quickly, Paul, and very harshly. No, I've nothing to say. If it's true that you love Marie and she loves you, of course I shall give up all thought of her, all claim to her."

Paul laughed.

"I won't interfere with you, but you mustn't interfere with me. Remember that. The woman to whom I have—lent my flat is nothing to me."

"That's a lie!"

Ben swung round from the mantel-shelf and faced Paul, his fists clenched, his eyes blazing.

"Take care! Don't tempt me to forget you are my brother. Paul, if you value your own happiness and the happiness of our home, leave me alone. Don't pry into my affairs or meddle with them. If you do, God help you!"

Paul did not flinch.

"Is that a threat?"

"Take it as you like. Think what you like, but hold your tongue. Live your own life in your own way; leave me to live mine."

Paul turned away. There was something in his brother's face and voice he had never noticed before. He hated him, but he felt a queer sense of awe, almost of respect.

"In future you will leave Miss Agnew alone. You won't see her or speak to her again."

Paul walked to the door, then turned.

"When I left her flat to-night a man followed me. He addressed me as Roberts and accused me of having stolen his wife, said I was keeping her in the Dearborn. If you don't want to shame and disgrace the whole family you had better get rid of the woman and silence this man. How he discovered I was your brother I don't know. It was caddish of you to use the name I'd taken for business purposes in dealing with Miss Agnew. Still, you're welcome to it in future."

He was leaving the room when Benjamin stopped him. He was obviously frightened now.

"A man followed you—accused

you of hiding his wife in my rooms? What was he like? What was his name? Tell me what he said."

Paul shrugged his shoulders and told his brother what had happened.

"You had better take steps to get rid of this woman at once. If you don't I shall interfere. I must do so for Miss Agnew's sake. Remember, if you attempt to see or speak to her again—well, I won't be responsible for what I may do." Without another word he left the room.

The next morning Benjamin did not wait for Saunders to ring him up; he was down-stairs before his brother or father and talking to the doctor over the telephone.

He left the house without waiting for breakfast, and an hour later Mrs. Bryant and Nurse Brown were safely ensconced in a suite of rooms in the private house Saunders had found for them.

The doctor looked very serious when he had seen Mrs. Bryant. The nurse reported that she had passed a restless night with periods of delirium.

Ben questioned her, and the nurse told him that the woman had talked the usual wild nonsense common with delirious people.

It was not nonsense to Benjamin. She had held imaginary conversations with some one—whom she called Paul.

At one moment she had imagined herself rich beyond the dreams of avarice; at the next she had cried out that she was starving and had appealed to her husband not to desert her, swearing she would give him all the money he required.

"We must wait for a few days," Saunders said, "and see how she progresses. The paralysis is the worst sign. I think we shall have to operate."

"You mean if you don't operate she will die?" Benjamin asked.

He wondered if Saunders knew how much depended on his answer.

The doctor shook his head.

"No, I think we can pull her through. This delirium is merely the outcome of drink — intense cerebral excitement. As a result of the blow she received a tiny portion of bone is pressing on the brain. Unless we operate she will probably be paralyzed on the left side for life."

"Then you must operate," Benjamin said after a moment's hesitation.

Saunders nodded.

"I'll speak to Dr. Bisco about it tonight. I would like him to see her. You don't object?"

Benjamin shook his head. It would be madness to object. Besides, he trusted Bill Saunders implicitly, and so he was anxious, if the operation were necessary, that Dr. Bisco should be the man to do it.

"Do you think her memory is affected, or is she feigning?" Ben asked Saunders.

"I should say she's too ill to attempt any play-acting of that sort. Of course I haven't tried to make her talk. Have you any reason to suspect that she's forgotten things—things you are anxious she should remember—or forget?"

Benjamin did not reply. Whichever way he turned, whatever course he pursued, fresh problems confronted him. It seemed as if fate were piling them up one on top of the other.

He, who had never taken anything seriously, unless perhaps it was his love for Marie Agnew, suddenly found himself holding between his hands the happiness and honor of some half-dozen people, and the life of at least one.

Watching him, Bill saw a queer smile part his lips and lighten the large blue eyes.

"I wish I could help you, old man," he blurted out. "I know you hate to be reminded of what you did in the past. You risked your life for mine; don't forget I'm ready to risk mine for you."

Ben shook his head and again an enigmatical smile hovered on his lips, shone in his eyes.

"I almost feel as if I were a schoolboy again. I think I'll go home, Bill, and rest for a bit, quietly. I have two problems that must be solved at once. And neither of them is as easy as the worst of poor old Euclid's."

"I can't help you?"

Just then Nurse Brown entered the sitting-room where they had been talking. Ben looked at her, then gave his hand to Bill.

"But for you and Nurse Brown I should probably have come to unutterable grief already. Anyway, having put my hand to the plow, I can't turn back. You'll look in again to-night?"

Bill Saunders nodded.

"Yes. But I'd like you to keep away for a day or two. I'll keep you posted as to how Mrs. Bryant gets along."

Benjamin refused to promise to absent himself for more than twelve hours.

"You see there are others to consider besides myself."

They walked down-stairs together, and in the hall Ben turned and confronted his friend.

"You've lived, you've worked, you've probably suffered. Here's a problem for you: Suppose your best pal was engaged to your sister, and you discovered he had no right to the name he bore, was perhaps a child of shame, though absolutely unconscious of the fact himself—what would you do? Would you tell him and ruin his life, would you warn your sister, or would you leave things to take their course?"

Saunders considered the question for some thirty seconds.

"Very interesting problem. If there was no chance of the man or my sister ever discovering the truth, if I were sure he was a straight, clean chap I think I'd hold my tongue. But I should first make absolutely certain that neither of them could ever know."

Benjamin walked back to his rooms, taking the most circuitous route. He stopped half-way and looked at the people riding in the park, the procession of carriages passing up and down.

The chestnut-trees were just shedding their blossoms, the flower-beds a blaze of color; their scent filled the air. The birds made music in the boughs of the trees.

Life looked a good thing seen in perspective; life was a good thing. Yet, he commented bitterly, what a mess men and women made of it. The birds, the trees, all animals except those imprisoned by man, were without flaw. Who could imagine a disconsolate sparrow or a peevish pigeon?

When he reached his flat he stood at the entrance a moment and gazed up and down the street. He hardly knew which problem to tackle first.

He wondered whether he would know the man who called himself Mrs. Bryant's husband if he saw him. Probably he would appear soon enough; then — then he might know the true story of Paul's parentage.

The first thing of which he was conscious when he entered his flat was Marie Agnew's portrait. He crossed the room hurriedly, and, flinging himself into an armchair, filled his pipe.

Her eyes followed him; he looked up; she was staring at him out of the silver frame. That had been a present to him on his last birthday. Perhaps she had only been playing with him.

He took the portrait from the piano, and, opening the bottom drawer of his bureau, locked it up. The one great romance of his life was finished and over.

He loved her; he knew that now without any doubts whatever. He knew it was not a passing fancy, but the real thing. He took a joy in the knowledge, for he could still live for her. And he would have to see her once again.

He had not the courage to go to her rooms; besides, he might meet Paul there. Then there would be a scene.

Bill Saunders's advice had been

sound. He made up his mind to act on it. There must be no chance of Paul ever discovering the truth. Yet while Mollie Bryant lay between life and death, holding the secret in her shriveled heart, there was grave danger.

He smoked a couple of pipes, then rang up Marie on the telephone. Her maid replied, and presently she same herself to the instrument.

"That really is Benjamin Hennikon, not another Mr. Roberts?"

"It's really Benjamin speaking," he replied. "I want you to do me a favor. It's the last I shall ever ask. Come down to my rooms in the Dearborn this afternoon as soon as you can. Yes, I know you're engaged to Paul. This is the last time we shall meet. I must see you for his sake and for yours."

"You want me to come to your flat?" There was surprise in her voice.

"Yes, I'm quite alone. I beg you not to refuse. Believe me, I'm not thinking of myself."

There was some delay before her reply came.

"I was just going out for a drive. I'll come in for a few minutes. I can't stop long."

Then she rang off.

Benjamin had no sooner replaced the receiver than he heard an imperative knock at his hall door. He hesitated, uncertain what to do.

The porter might have seen him come in, and said he was at home. As a rule he had very few visitors. This might be his mother come to assure herself that Mrs. Bryant had gone, for the previous evening he had led her to believe that he had really seen her off to New York. It was a lie, but it was told for her own salvation.

He walked into the hall and flung open the door. A stranger faced him; he knew instinctively he was the man Paul had seen the previous evening, who had called himself Mrs. Bryant's husband.

Ben's semi-Bohemian existence had made him a fairly good judge of character. He read this man quickly — a typical bully, physically strong, but mentally irresolute and weak. Rather a dangerous type, especially if he saw his opponent feared him.

"Well?"

"Mr. Roberts, I think?"

"That's not my name."

The man pushed his way into the hall. "Well, whoever you are you've got my wife here and I want to see her, for I'm Charles Bryant. Where is she?"

"She's not here."

"That's a lie—"

He stopped abruptly as he caught Benjamin's eye.

"Well, she is here," he added, half apologetically. "I know she's here, for I saw her here yesterday. She told me all about you, said your name was Roberts and that you brought her here."

The man spoke loudly, aggressively, as if he were anxious every one in the flat should hear him. Benjamin continued to hold the hall door wide open.

"I tell you she isn't here, so you'd better get out."

Bryant looked surprised. It was obvious Benjamin was not to be cowed.

"If she isn't here, you don't mind my searching, do you?" he said.

Benjamin let the door swing to. The meeting with this man had come sooner than he expected, but, having come, it would be as well to settle with him—if possible.

"You're an impudent scoundrel!" he said coolly. "But you can satisfy your curiosity. Then I shall kick you out."

"If you can you shall—supposing my wife's not here."

He strode up the passage and opened the door of the bedroom where Mrs. Bryant had passed the night, and when he saw it was empty an oath left his lips.

"You've got other rooms!"

Ben watched him while he entered each one. Then he strode into the sitting-room. Bryant followed him.

"Perhaps you'll apologize," the former said.

Bryant looked uneasy.

"Where is she gone? What have you done with her?"

"Hadn't you better make these inquiries of the police? If you are Mrs. Bryant's husband—which I have reason to doubt — you evidently haven't taken much care of her. I can't help you; the police may."

Bryant considered a few seconds.

"That's bluff!" He sat down. "Here I am and here I'll remain until you tell me what you've done with my wife."

Benjamin glanced at the clock on the mantel-shelf. It would not take Marie Agnew more than ten minutes to drive down from her apartments.

And it was quite nine minutes ago since he had rung her up on the telephone.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### "Where Is My Wife?"

BENJAMIN realized he had about two minutes in which to discover how much this man knew, and, having discovered, get rid of him. An almost impossible task.

And the thought flashed through his brain that it was the sort of job Paul might have tackled successfully—Paul, who bought and sold men and women in his shop just as he bought and sold boots or butter or bales of cotton.

Not exactly a bad judge of men, Benjamin Hennikon, but quite incapable of ruling them, of finding the weak spot in their characters and making use of it to his own advantage.

But Charles Bryant played into his hands. He was overanxious and self-conscious. He realized he had made a mistake in attacking Paul the previous evening; he had run his quarry to earth in the man facing him.

"Well, here I am and here I remain," he said defiantly.

"We shall see," Ben replied. "I'll give you one minute, then I'll ring for the hall-porter to throw you out. Your wife is very ill; she has been taken to a private nursing home, and is being well looked after by friends. Why do you want to see her?"

"What do *you* want with her?" Bryant responded quickly without thinking.

After a little more fencing Ben learned that Mrs. Bryant had not told this man her secret. He drew a deep breath of relief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. He was safe.

He could afford to ignore Charles Bryant. The only thing to be done was to keep him away from his wife; that at all costs. He took a bold step.

"Give me your address. I shall see your wife again, and if she has sufficiently recovered I'll tell her you've been here; and if she wants you I'll write to you."

Bryant shook his head. That was not what he wanted at all.

"You can give me her address, and be quick about it."

He knew she would not want to see him again if she could help it. Ill or well, she would be glad to get rid of him now she had fallen on her feet.

He had never believed her story about the rich folk in Chicago who might be useful to her and pay heavily for a secret she possessed. Now he cursed himself for not believing and not getting particulars from her.

Benjamin pulled out his watch.

"Your time is up. Are you going?"

Bryant shifted uncomfortably in his seat; then he looked Benjamin up and down, as if mentally summing up his strength, wondering who would get the better of it if it came to a "scrap."

He was slim, lightly built, yet he looked as if he might be useful with his fists. But Mr. Charles Bryant had learned several useful tricks from his adventurer friends abroad.

"No, I'm not going," he said threateningly.

He was still wondering what his wife could have had to do in the past with such a young man as Benjamin.

"It's no use trying to bluff it over me, Mr. Roberts," he continued—"if that is your name and you ain't hiding your identity behind your friend. Wouldn't the name of — Hennikon— suit you better perhaps?"

It was a chance shot. Before Bryant could see its effect Benjamin had turned on his heel and marched out of the room. Presently Bryant heard the faint sound of an electric bell. Then Benjamin reappeared.

"If you take my advice you'll go quickly and quietly. I've rung for the hall-porter to put you out. And he can do it without my help; he was heavy-weight champion before he left the army."

Bryant rose to his feet, his rather loose lips parted in an ugly sneer. "We'll see."

He stood close to Benjamin in a threatening attitude, but the latter never flinched.

"I've half a mind to give you a jolly good hiding and spoil your beauty, my young gentleman!" he hissed. "And I'd have the law on my side, remember, for I have proof you took my wife off and hid her here, and you haven't denied it. My wife, remember!—the law would protect me."

Benjamin's blood was up. The old fighting instinct dormant in every civilized man's breast awoke in his heart.

Physically he had not the least fear of Bryant. He would have given much to have taught the bully a lesson and have meted out to him the suggested thrashing.

But the result would probably end in police-court proceedings. Civilization again! He controlled himself, stood erect, his head flung back, his arms hanging loosely by his side.

Bryant's teeth gritted and the nostrils of his flat, pugnacious nose distended. He saw he had met a fighter. Yet one upper-cut with a knuckle-duster concealed in his pocket and "Mr. Roberts" would find little to interest him in life for a few hours.

So they faced one another for a few seconds. There came a double knock on the front door. Benjamin did not take his eyes off Bryant.

"Come in!" he cried. He had not locked the outer door.

"Are you going quietly?" he asked Bryant.

The latter did not speak. The sitting-room door was pushed wide open. Some one entered the room. "Show this man down-stairs—" Benjamin commenced.

Bryant interrupted him: "Not until you've told me where you've hidden my wife."

Benjamin turned quickly. An exclamation left his lips. It was not the hall porter who had entered the room. The sound of the rustle of a woman's petticoat warned him too late. It was Marie Agnew.

"I beg your pardon," she said unsteadily. "You told me to come in—I thought you were alone." She spoke to Benjamin, but she was looking at Bryant.

She recognized him. And directly he saw her he remembered her. The original of the photograph which had stood in the silver frame on the piano.

The woman he had followed the previous evening with the other "Mr. Roberts."

"No wonder you're in a hurry to get rid of me, Mr. Roberts," he laughed. "Since you won't speak, perhaps Miss Agnew will tell me where my wife is hidden. She seems to be very pally with you and your friend."

The color rushed to Benjamin's cheeks. He raised his arms, his fists clenched. The next moment they dropped limply to his side and he stepped back. For his mother's sake, for Marie's sake, as well as for Paul's, he dared not make a scene.

The hall porter was knocking at the door now. Benjamin crossed the room,

then hesitated. Bryant saw that for the moment he had the upper hand. He saw that the man he wanted to blackmail was frightened.

And when Ben looked at him he knew he dared not tell the porter to throw him out.

He just glanced into the hall.

"All right, Grimes," he said to the porter. "I don't want you now, but I may ring again in a moment."

"Very good, sir."

The man closed the door and went away.

Benjamin faced Marie, his cheeks scarlet.

"Did you bring me here to insult me, Mr. Hennikon?"

Bryant nodded his bulldog head, laughing triumphantly.

"So that's your real name—Hennikon, is it? My wife said it was Roberts. We'll find out what that means by and by."

He looked at Marie and grinned.

"Sorry if I've disturbed a tête-à-tête. I saw you last night with the real Mr. Roberts. I followed you, thinking it was he who had stolen my wife. I made a mistake. This is the gentleman I want."

Marie turned her back on Bryant.

"Who is this man?"

"I don't know."

"That's a lie," Bryant shouted. "He knows who I am, right enough. He had my wife here last night. He has stolen her from me. She's not here now. Perhaps his pal, Mr. Roberts, warned him and he's hidden her away somewhere else. But before I go I'll find out where she is."

Marie Agnew took no notice of Bryant. She still stood with her back to him, looking at Ben.

"Is this true?"

He moistened his lips. He knew he looked guilty. His attitude suggested shame as well as fear. Marie made no effort to hide her contempt.

"Paul knows nothing about it," he stammered. "What this man says is true—to a certain extent. I have given temporary shelter to the woman he calls his wife."

"Where is she? You're afraid to say. Tell me where she is."

With a little shrug of her shoulders Marie turned away and walked to the door. Benjamin flung himself in front of her, barring the way.

"You're not going like that. I have something to say to you first. Something that must be said."

"Let me pass."

"Let the lady pass," Bryant jeered from the other end of the room. "She's done with you."

Benjamin was trembling from head to foot. He was fighting for Marie's honor and happiness now, not for her love. And she did not know. She would never know.

Though they never met again, she would always hold him in loathing and contempt. He told himself that did not matter—if he could save her, and keep his family from ruin and disgrace.

Yet at the same time he was horribly conscious he was fighting for Paul, a man who hated him, and, after all, was not his brother, but merely a nameless outcast.

"If you refuse to let me pass, silence this man and send him away!" Marie cried. "You have proved yourself deceitful and treacherous; are you also a coward?"

The taunt was more than Benjamin could bear. Across the room he saw Bryant leering at him as if he realized his impotence. He flung open the sitting-room door.

"Wait in the other room. I must see you alone for your own sake."

At the same moment he took a couple of steps across the room and flung himself upon Bryant.

The attack was so swift that the latter was off his guard, and Benjamin's left went straight home onto the bully's mouth.

He reeled, but recovered himself. In a flash his right hand slipped into his coat-pocket. Something gleamed a moment as he raised it.

His clenched fist caught Benjamin between the eyes. There was a sickening thud, and the latter went down like a felled ox.

Quickly the knuckle-duster was replaced in his pocket, he seized his hat, and, brushing aside Marie Agnew, passed out of the flat, banging the door behind him.

It all occurred in an instant, but not until the door banged and silence came did Marie Agnew realize what had happened.

She looked at the prostrate figure of Ben on the floor. He was lying on his back, his arms outstretched. His forehead was bathed in blood.

With a terrified cry she rushed to his side and, kneeling down, caught him in her arms.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### After Many Years.

SLOWLY Benjamin opened his eyes. He found himself gazing into those of Marie Agnew.

He could not remember what had happened; he did not even know where he was. He gazed round the room. He was lying on the sofa in his own flat. Marie was kneeling beside him. His head was pillowed against one of her arms.

He told himself it did not much matter what had happened. He felt blissfully happy.

Presently Marie rose and held a glass to his lips; he shook his head, but she insisted on his swallowing some of the spirit.

"Anything wrong; am I ill?"

He raised his hand to his forehead and a cry of pain escaped his lips.

"You must not move, you must not speak," Marie whispered. "Lie still." She turned her head away. "Thank God you have recovered. I thought — for a moment — he had killed you."

"He — who?" And then Benjamin began to remember.

At first it seemed like a horrible nightmare. He hoped, almost prayed, it was. But too quickly every detail of what had occurred returned to him. He held out his hand:

"Give me another drink."

He emptied his glass and sat upright. Marie was no longer kneeling by his side; she was standing a little distance off. Her face was pale; there was fear in her eyes.

"I'm all right, now," Benjamin said easily, "quite all right. Stunned for the moment, that's all. The beggar must have used a knuckle-duster. In a fair scrap I could have whipped him."

The ghost of a smile flitted across Marie's lips. Ben's pride was hurt that he had been knocked down by another man. She could not help loving all the boyish traits in his character. The next moment her resentment against him increased.

He had deliberately asked her to come to his flat directly the other woman had gone, knowing the risks she would run of meeting the man who had just left. All along he had played the fool with her; his love-making had meant nothing; he had been merely a silly, irresponsible young man, like scores of others she met on the stage.

But she had believed he really cared for her, so she had not snubbed him and sent him away as she had done the others.

Now she realized he was worthless. Yet still a little pity mingled with the resentment in her heart for him.

"If you think you are quite all right I had better go," Marie said, hesitatingly.

"I am quite all right," Benjamin replied, not daring to look at her again. "Would you mind sitting down? There is something I want to say."

"Not now."

"It is—now or never."

She gave him a sidelong glance. He spoke as a man then, not as a boy.

And there was that in his face which made her obey.

There was silence for a few minutes. Benjamin stretched out his hand to the table by his side and deliberately filled and lit a pipe.

"You don't mind, do you? It helps a bit, and my head's beginning to ache. What I want to say is this: I have behaved like a fool in the past, but I loved you honestly—you alone. There has never been any other woman since we met. Oh, don't speak; of course, you can't believe me. That doesn't matter now. But I just had to tell you. I understand you're going to marry Paul?"

"Yes."

"You love him?"

Marie seemed to be reflecting.

"He has won me. He found me, as I told you, when I was knocking at the door: the door of life as well as the stage door of the theater. He opened it for me. And during all the time I worked and he helped me he never made love to me, never asked any return. I didn't know who he was; I didn't care. The chance came and I took it. He was the first man I met who gave me a chance—without asking for something in return."

"And now he has asked?"

There was the suspicion of a sneer in Ben's voice.

"He has asked me to become his wife," Marie replied proudly. "And he has won me because he's a man. He knows why I've accepted him; he knows the risks he is taking."

Benjamin rose and, crossing the room, poured himself out a little neat whisky. Marie watched him. Her instinct was to wait upon him, but she repressed it.

She was a little afraid of herself; she could not quite forget that Ben had loved her and that she—well, his love had roused pity in her heart. A curious emotion; a dangerous one to a woman.

"Paul said he was going to marry you at once," Benjamin continued, looking at her now. "I want you to promise me not to marry him for a month."

She tried to force a laugh.

"What has it got to do with you?"

"For his sake as well as for your own, wait a month. It's the only request, and the last, I shall make to you."

A little shiver ran through her body as she rose to her feet.

"I can promise you nothing. If you had been straight with me things might have been different, Ben, because I was fond of you. But you deceived me. It almost looks as if you had been trying to deceive your brother. There's some mystery I don't understand. Oh, you may as well know I'm not marrying for love! I don't suppose I shall ever love. But I'm tired of a lonely life; it's not easy for a woman. And the more successful she is the more difficult it becomes. Every man's hand is raised against her unless she has a man to protect her."

Benjamin's head dropped on to his chest.

"I was not fit to protect you."

"Paul has proved himself fit," she said. "He is a man of business. Already for a man of his age he has accomplished the impossible. And, as I told you just now, he has given me all I possess. There's nothing more to be said between us. If you think you're all right now I'll go."

He laughed as he watched her cross the room. He saw that she noticed her portrait had gone from the piano.

"The blow on the head was nothing," Benjamin said; "but I'm sorry you've been worried and insulted. It won't happen again. Only promise me to wait before you marry Paul."

She opened the door.

"Tell me why you want me to wait; what does all this mystery mean?"

He stepped toward her, then stopped.

"There *is* a mystery. It affects my brother as much as it does me. It may affect you. Marie, won't you believe

that I love you with all my heart and all my soul? I'll never see or speak to you again. I'm only pleading with you because I love you. For your own sake wait a little while; for my brother's sake!"

His own words mocked him. She wavered a moment.

"Explain. I can't listen to vague hints; I can't trust you. Who is the woman you've been hiding in your flat? And the man who was here just now? Have they anything to do with Paul? He was hanging about the stage-door of the theater last night and followed us. If you have nothing to be ashamed of, tell me the truth."

"I cannot tell you," he groaned. "I—I am responsible for the woman's presence here. The man won't worry you or Paul again."

"Is that all you have to say?"

He bowed his head. He heard her go out. The front door closed. The elevator bell rang.

He went back to the sofa, relit and finished his pipe. Then he examined the wound on his forehead. Marie had bathed and bandaged it; her handkerchief was lying on the floor.

He folded it up and put it in the breast-pocket of his coat. Then, putting on his hat, he called a cab and drove to where Dr. Saunders had engaged the rooms for Mrs. Bryant.

He did not enter the house until he was quite sure no one was watching. Nurse Brown was surprised to see him.

"I know Saunders told me not to come up for a day or two," he smiled. "I just remembered there was no one to relieve you. You must have a few hours off, either for a walk or for sleep. I'll look after Mrs. Bryant until dinner-time."

Nurse May assured him it was not necessary, but he was obdurate. So the nurse put on her bonnet and cloak and went out.

She walked briskly along through the park, stopped a few minutes on the bridge to watch the children feeding the ducks. And not only the children turned their heads to smile and look at the little nurse with the great, serious eyes, in which shone so clearly a love and understanding of all humanity.

Hers was the face of a woman who had been through the fires, who had suffered, but had not become soured by suffering. Truly, the face of a Madonna; virgin yet mother.

Later she entered a florist's shop and bought a bunch of pink roses, and from thence made her way to Dr. Frank Bisco's house.

The man servant who opened the door admitted her without any questions, merely telling her that the doctor was out.

She walked to his private study at the top of the house, and there put her roses into a large bowl which was placed on his table.

Taking off her cloak, she sat down in an armchair and waited until the famous surgeon came in.

He did not notice her until he closed the door; then he stood still, staring at her for a moment.

"The last person in the world I expected to see," he grunted.

He folded his arms and remained looking at her. Gradually the cold, steel-like eyes softened, the lines about the thin, firmly chiseled lips faded away. The whole man seemed to undergo a metamorphosis.

And Nurse Brown, lying back in her chair, looked at him out of her large, tender eyes, a world of love, bordering almost on adoration, shining in them.

"I didn't expect to get off duty today, not for several days. You're not angry that I came?"

"Angry!"

He tossed the word aside with boyish laughter. He ran his long fingers through his hair, then with a gesture seemed to sweep aside all thought of the work he did in the world outside.

He strode toward her chair, picked her up in his arms as he might have done a child, and kissed her.

"My woman," he whispered trium-

phantly, in a voice vibrating with love and the joy of life; a voice no one had ever heard in the sick-room, lecture-hall, or drawing-room. "Are you a woman, a witch, or what?"

"Let me go; you're crushing me! Frank, you don't realize how strong you are."

"I realize nothing but you! I was thinking of you as I was driving along just now. I've had a full day, and I've realized that I was about sick of the game. When we're married, May, I shall chuck it. Neither millionaire nor pauper will tempt me either with outrageous fees or pitiable tales of poverty. I'm sick of cutting up humanity and juggling with life. I want to give life! I want to be young again —now that I've learned how to live."

She lay in his arms, her head pillowed on his shoulder. She knew how to love, this gentle, Madonnalike creature who had spent her life healing the wounds of others which nature —and Dr. Frank Bisco—inflicted.

"Suppose I disappoint you?"

He disengaged her arms and dropped her into the chair a little roughly. He could be brutal and gentle at the same time. It was the strange mixture of tenderness and cruelty that so fascinated women; they did not understand it; Nurse Brown did.

"Disappoint me!" he echoed harshly. "I've learned too much to be disappointed. I know you as I know myself. No, no, my dear; it's you who may be disappointed; it's you who may be blind. When I was a young man I was a fool and a beast, as mad as they make 'em, without a conscience. When I settled down and started working and saw ambition beckoning to me, I made up my mind to cut my way to fame. Still without conscience, I merely followed the fashion; people wanted to be cut up, so I proved myself a brilliant butcher."

"Do you think it matters what you were or what you are?" Nurse Brown said under her breath. "I love you— that's all."

He turned to the desk with a shrug of his shoulders, then saw the bowl of roses. He picked them up in his hands and held them to his face, inhaling their perfume with all the joy of a child or a poet.

"That's good," he sighed. "No one ever brings me flowers but you. The fools think I hate 'em—perhaps because I turn them out of the sick-room. By gad, how these call one away—away from the dust and roar of the city! When my time comes this is the only anesthetic I want."

Still holding the roses in his hand, he swung round and knelt down at Nurse Brown's feet. Stooping forward, she placed her hands on his head.

"Look here; when will you be through with this case of yours?" he asked.

She smiled. "It depends on you. Hasn't Dr. Saunders told you?"

"Oh, yes; he said something. I intended refusing."

He smiled grimly.

"But if the knife will expedite matters, then I'm at his service. Because it's your last job; and, by gad, it shall be my last job, too! That's a happy thought. When it's done then we'll marry and run away and never work any more. Only live and love!"

Nurse Brown stooped lower, laying her face against his face, echoing his words: "Live and love. How wonderful it is that you, the great Dr. Frank Bisco, should have loved and found me, a little, insignificant nurse."

"Insignificant!"

He wound his arms about her, the lover now. His patients would not have recognized him, his mirror scarcely have known him. He looked, spoke, and acted like twenty-five rather than forty-five.

"No woman is insignificant. And when she loves, her healing powers are greater than all the knives and nostrums of surgeon or physician."

She laughed. "And that from Frank Bisco, who in his great world outside pretends to despise the sex!"

"Only in bulk," he laughed. "I would rather be confined in a cage of hyenas or wolves than a drawing-room full of women. But the one woman—"

He stretched out an arm and took up a diary from his desk: "Come along; we'll fix the day."

"It won't be easy," she smiled, looking over his shoulder as he glanced down the list of engagements.

He began to make notes with his pencil: "Won't it? Half a dozen appendixes to be removed—child's play! hand the lot over to Jones or Sowerby. Mrs. Ancaster — umph! Interesting case—that's what I wanted you for. Have to do that myself. Hundred to one against its being successful. I like long odds. Old Banks! I suppose I can't escape him."

He continued to turn the pages of his diary, making notes and comments as lightly as though his engagements were to dine or motor.

"In three weeks' time, I think — say a month; that will be safe. How about June the fourteenth?"

The joy and happiness in Nurse Brown's face increased until it became transfigured. No one now would have called her pretty, but beautiful.

"Are you serious?"

"Serious—"

The telephone bell interrupted him. His secretary was speaking from the consulting-room down-stairs.

"No, don't put me through, I'm engaged—can't speak to any one," he replied. "Yes, I'll take a message."

His voice and manner changed again; it was cold, resolute, businesslike.

The message was repeated to him, an urgent request. Dr. Bisco only spoke one word into the mouthpiece of the telephone.

"No! No! No!"

He pushed the telephone away, his face grew youthful, his eyes tender again as he took the woman he loved in his arms.

"What have you refused so vehemently?" she asked.

"To break the resolve I made a moment ago. To put off our wedding by a single day. A millionaire thinking to buy me with a few thousand dollars."

He glanced at the gold traveling clock on the mantelpiece.

"You had better be hurrying back to your patient. I'll drop a line to Saunders. If he wants me to operate it will have to be done before June."

He laughed as he kissed her lips.

"I'm going to be busy to-night. There's a lot to settle up in four weeks. And you will be busy, too; clothes to buy. We shall travel; you will have to lay in a stock. I tell you what, I'd like to buy them with you. You shall choose my lounge suit and I—I'll fix up a day to be dedicated to State Street."

He helped her into her cloak and fixed her bonnet at an impossible angle. Then suddenly swinging her round he held both her hands tightly in his own.

"I believe there's something I forgot to tell you and that you ought to know," he said seriously.

"About yourself?"

He nodded.

"I don't mean the stuff the gossips talk. You've heard all that. I dare say most of it's true. I was a rotter. I'm not now. I have learned. But I did one thing that might have mattered. I married."

She did not flinch or show surprise or resentment; she did not speak, she waited for him to continue.

"I cared in a way, I suppose," he continued. "I was about twenty. I was spending my vacation in the West with a lot of other young fools. There was a girl—we all made love to. I swore I would win her. I was a cad and accepted a wager about it. She laughed at us all. Even in those salad days I liked getting my own way, and I got it—by marrying her."

He waited a moment, but May did not speak.

"I ought to have told you before,

but—this is the worst of it—I'd forgotten. It seemed so long ago."

"And what happened?"

"I had to come back to Chicago for my final exams. I couldn't take her with me. She didn't want to come. I got keen on my work, sweated through my final. My health broke down; my father sent me on a voyage. When I came back I tried to find her. They told me in the village that she had gone away—then I heard she was dead."

The ghost of a sigh parted Nurse Brown's lips. A sigh of relief.

"Nothing matters but our future," she said.

"I knew that," he said, as he walked down-stairs with her and put her into a taxicab. "And that's why I'm cutting every thread that binds me with the past. On June the fourteenth no more juggling with death. You and I will conjure life."

He watched the cab out of sight, then returned to his room at the top of the house. His hands hovered over the bell to ring for his secretary, but he altered his mind.

There was a vast amount to be done in four weeks' time. A sarcastic smile parted his lips as he thought of the consternation the news his retirement would cause.

He unlocked one of the drawers of his bureau and looked at the small collection of letters, papers, and documents neatly tied together. It would not take long to settle up his private affairs; an hour with his waste-paper basket, a couple of hours with his lawyer, and the thing was done.

He made a note in his diary to ring up his lawyer in the morning, then clearing the table emptied the contents of the drawer on to it.

He untied the bundle of letters, hesitated just a moment with the first in his hand, looking at the writing. His eyes narrowed.

Memory returned, touched his heart-strings, pricked his conscience. Then one by one he destroyed them all — but the last refused to be torn apart. A large envelope: it contained a photograph. He took it out and laid it face downward until he had destroyed the letters; then he looked at it.

In almost illegible faded writing was scrawled across the foot of it: "Yours always—Mollie."

The woman of his wager. His wife. Pretty, piquant, just the sort of girl to fascinate a wild, hot-blooded youngster. Yes, vaguely he remembered her. Lord, what a fool he had been! But he was glad he had married her; he was grateful she had died. He looked at the roses on the table. If she had lived—

He deliberately tore the photograph in half again, and once again. Then he commenced to go through the bundle of documents. It was nearly midnight when he replaced the empty drawer in his desk, closing it with a noisy bang. There was no need to lock it now.

He emptied the waste-paper basket into the grate, and, setting fire to its contents, watched them burn to dust and ashes, which he turned thoughtfully with his feet.

"The end of every man's desire!" He laughed softly as the words of the poet flashed through his brain. He had severed the last thread connecting him with the past. He had burned his boats.

He poured himself out a glass of wine and ate a dry biscuit before going to bed. And he knew the deep sleep of a child; for he had no sense of impending tragedy.

When he entered his study in the morning the dust and ashes had been removed from the fireplace; the copper in the grate shone brightly, the roses on the bureau welcomed him. He looked gratefully at the empty drawer of the desk. It did not even contain a perfume, a letter, a photograph now.

His first visitor was Bill Saunders, who pushed his way into the consulting-room without ceremony.

"Look here," he cried, "I've got my car outside, and I want you to run down and see this patient of whom I spoke to you."

"You've come at the wrong moment," Bisco growled. "My little nurse was here last night, and we are to be married on June 14. I've got my hands full. I'm canceling all the engagements I can and handing them over to Jones and Sowerby."

"Umph!" Saunders stood with his back to the wall. "Come and have a look at her; the case will suit you. And—well, I told you I owe this young chap, Hennikon, my life. I don't know any one else who can do it but you."

"So serious?"

"In more senses than one."

Bisco rang for his secretary, and gave a few rapid instructions.

"Sit down for five minutes," he said to Saunders over his shoulder. At the end of that time he rose and put on his hat.

"It's lucky you've stolen Nurse Brown from me."

"You mean she's the attraction, not the case?"

"Never mind what I mean," Bisco laughed boyishly. "I'll give you ten minutes now."

They drove down to the house, and Bisco talked of everything but his work. His head was full of plans for traveling—Europe, Asia, Africa.

"The world is mine; think of it!" he cried. "I've only seen a quarter of it, and she has never been outside America. Won't it be splendid to really begin to live. Bill, my lad, take my advice—and love."

Nurse Brown did not expect to see the doctor, but everything was ready for Dr. Saunders.

"The patient had a bad night," she said. "I had to give her chloral twice. She is quiet enough now, but I'm afraid not in a good state for an examination."

The two men entered the room, followed by Nurse Brown.

"By the way," Saunders whispered, "the patient's name is Mollie Mercier —for the present—you understand?"

Bisco nodded. He stood at the foot of the bed, waiting, while Saunders glanced at the temperature chart and felt the patient's pulse. When he spoke to her she slowly opened her eyes, looked from one man to the other, then closed them again.

"Yes, certainly a case for operation," Bisco said, after he had examined the wound in the head and the left arm and side threatened by paralysis. The Rontgen rays will tell us more. There is obviously a portion of bone pressing on the brain. What's her age?"

Saunders shook his head.

"We don't know. Forty-five?"

"Who's responsible for her?"

"I told you. I'm attending her at the request of young Hennikon. But—"

Bisco interrupted him with a nod.

"Oh, yes; I know. Well, it will be impossible to operate under three weeks. She wouldn't stand it."

"Can you do it in three weeks' time?"

Bisco raised his head and his eyes met those of Nurse Brown.

"Will you?" she whispered.

"On June 12. The last—"

He was turning away when Mollie Bryant stirred, opened her eyes again, and raised herself in her bed. She stared at Bisco; then, as he crossed the room, stretched out an arm as if to stop him.

"Who is that?" she muttered thickly. "Who is it? Bring him back; I want to see him. I want to speak to him. Who is it?"

The door closed on the two men, and Nurse Brown was left alone with her patient. She rearranged her pillows and made her lie down, treating her as gently and firmly as if she were a child.

"You know Dr. Saunders—he's attending you."

"Yes; but the other man—the tall man with the hard face and the cruel eyes?"

May could not help laughing. The hard face and the cruel eyes!

"That's Dr. Frank Bisco, the famous surgeon!"

"Frank Bisco! Frank—Frank!"

And then the woman began to laugh. "What did he come to see me for?" she asked presently.

"Dr. Saunders wanted a consultation. You are very ill. But you mustn't ask questions and you mustn't talk."

The woman tried to raise herself again. She looked closely at Nurse Brown.

"That's what you all say to me—I mustn't talk. I'm only ill because I can't talk—I can't remember. It sort of all comes back to me in my dreams, and when I wake it's all gone again."

She suddenly stretched out a claw-like hand and seized the nurse with it.

"I'm not going to die?"

"Of course not. We're going to make you quite well and strong again."

"I don't believe you!" Mrs. Bryant cried fiercely. "At least I think I believe you, but I don't believe the others. I'm not wanted; I'm in the way."

She laughed again grimly.

"There are lots of women in the way in this world. There are too many of us; that's what's the matter. I'm one who would be better out of the way. But I'm not going—not until I've had my revenge."

Nurse Brown poured out a dose of medicine and made her swallow it; then she put the little table back by the bedside and placed a vase of flowers on it. Mrs. Bryant watched her curiously.

"There's only one revenge that's any good," the nurse said quietly, "and that's forgiving and forgetting."

"Religious talk."

"I am not what people call religious."

"Then you're in love!" sneered the voice from the bed.

"Perhaps."

"Who with? One of those men? Which one?"

Nurse Brown crossed the room; she had her back to Mrs. Bryant. "You mustn't talk any more. If you like I'll read to you presently."

"Which one?" the woman reiterated fiercely. "The tall one with the hard face and cruel eyes?"

May stood still facing the door. She could hear the doctor's voice.

"The one with the hard face and the cruel eyes," she repeated, as if to herself.

Mrs. Bryant turned on the pillows and laughed—and laughed!

Saunders opened the door and called Nurse Brown into the inner room, then he left her there with Dr. Bisco.

"Sorry you've taken this case," the latter said abruptly. "It will wear you out. It means night and day work, doesn't it?"

"For the present, perhaps; but I shall get two or three hours off every afternoon."

Bisco shrugged his shoulders. The mask was on his face now, completely hiding both the lover and the man.

"It's a pity I can't operate at once. But if I did, the odds are the patient would go under."

"Then you'll wait?"

"Until the twelfth. It will be the last time I shall use the knife. We shall both finish work together, then start life together."

He held out his hands.

"Sha'n't see much of you for the next three weeks. Take care of yourself."

He stared straight into her eyes, and his own grew bright and youthful for a moment.

"Don't forget my future holds only you. Without you there will be no life. Until the fourteenth!"

Turning away abruptly, he left her.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### The Watcher in the Street.

CHARLES BRYANT lay low for a few days before starting to try to discover where his wife was hidden.

He did not know what injuries he

had inflicted on Benjamin Hennikon, alias Mr. Roberts. He had only intended to stun him—but there was always the possibility of death.

So he kept to his rooms in the small hotel off Clark Street, reading the newspapers and making plans. He had plenty of money for the moment, but, instead of satisfying him, it only made him greedy.

He knew there was a lot more where that came from. The problem was how to get it—or rather who would pay?

There was a secret to be bought or sold, one his wife must have cherished ever since he had met her.

He felt no resentment against the young man whom his wife had called "Mr. Roberts," but who apparently was Benjamin Hennikon. He merely looked upon him as his lawful prey.

All his resentment was centered against Mollie Bryant. It was nothing to him that he had dragged her down, used her for any foul purposes which presented themselves, had made her what she was — a drab, a drunkard. He had grown to despise her. And all the time she had held the key to a little gold-mine.

He could do nothing until he found her and learned her secret. He knew he would not bungle as she had done.

So he waited a week, during which period he cultivated a good tailor and polished his finger-nails and his manners at the same time. Then he went to a firm of private detectives called the Continental Inquiry Agency.

And the next afternoon, when Benjamin left his flat *en route* to relieve Nurse Brown for a couple of hours from duty he was followed. For the first few days after Bryant's attack on him he had never gone out without assuring himself that his antagonist was not hanging about the streets or lurking in the byways or doorways near by.

He had taken circuitous routes to Dearborn Street, but, seeing nothing and hearing nothing of Bryant, he was beginning to believe the fellow had fled.

Nevertheless this afternoon, as usual, he waited until he had the terrace to himself before mounting the steps of the house.

Just as he was about to ring the bell a man turned the corner of the street, an ordinary-looking person dressed in a tweed suit. He just raised his head as he passed Benjamin. A couple of minutes later he was out of sight.

So Benjamin gave a double ring on the electric bell, as had become his habit, thus warning Nurse Brown of his arrival and telling the housekeeper that "Mr. Roberts" had come to take his place by the bedside of the patient.

A few seconds after the front door had closed upon Ben the young man in the tweed suit reappeared at the far end of the street, glanced down it, and, no longer seeing Benjamin standing on the steps, crossed to the opposite pavement, and there leaned against the iron railings while he slowly filled and lit a pipe.

He gave much time and care to the simple process, but the keen gray eyes, partly hidden beneath the soft green hat, continually sought the upper windows of the house wherein lay Mrs. Bryant.

Each window had a simple white curtain, not of the lodging-house or lace variety, and a plain dark-green blind.

Having got his pipe alight to his satisfaction, the young man took an afternoon newspaper from his pocket, and, strolling along the pavement, began to study the "past performances."

As he drew level with the house he evidently found something of unusual interest, for he again stopped and, leaning over the railings, his back to the house, read the result of a trial for the Brooklyn Handicap with avidity.

He held the newspaper in one hand while with the other he fumbled in the breast-pocket of his coat, presently withdrawing something that shone as it reflected the light. Very carefully

he placed this over the paragraph he was reading.

A piece of glass. But it was glass which, after a little manipulation, reflected the windows of the house opposite.

If any one stood between the curtains he could see them. If any one left the house he could see who it was without turning round or showing his own face.

Meanwhile Benjamin had been shown into the sitting-room adjoining Mrs. Bryant's bedroom, where he was quickly joined by Nurse Brown.

"I had a feeling you would not come to-day," she said, giving him one of her delightful smiles. "You really shouldn't bother, for I can manage quite well alone now. Our patient has made a most wonderful improvement during the last three days, and in consequence I have had proper nights' rest. It must be your influence that makes her so tractable."

Benjamin held the nurse's hand closely, and, looking into the Madonnalike face, he remembered Dr. Saunders's warning — not to fall in love with her.

He almost wished he could; but he knew there was only one woman for him—the woman Paul had won!

A terrible temptation had assailed him lately, one that required all his strength to conquer.

"All the same, you look rather tired," he replied. "I shall stop here until dinner-time; I advise you to lie down and have a good sleep."

She had already put on her cloak and bonnet. She looked delicious, whatever she wore; but the simple uniform gave a certain piquancy to her face. Her eyes sparkled brightly; she gave a merry laugh.

"I'm glad you've come, because there's a lot of shopping I want to do. Can I really take a couple of hours?"

Benjamin glanced at his watch.

"Four or five."

He watched her as she put on her gloves and buttoned them up. He was wondering who was the lucky man; he had a vague suspicion it was his old friend Bill or else Dr. Bisco.

"Do you know," he said, speaking his thoughts aloud, "you strike me as being the happiest person I ever met? You're always bright, cheerful, and contented. I wish you could give me the receipt."

She hid her face as she replied.

"I'm in love."

When she looked up she was blushing furiously.

"Now I've given my secret away, and I didn't mean to. I suppose I've been in love all my life—with a dream. The dream came true a good many months ago, which in simple language means—I met my man!"

"Your man! What a nice way of putting it!"

"He is a man, isn't he?" she cried impulsively.

"Bill?"

"No; Dr. Bisco."

A look of consternaton swept over her face.

"I ought not to have told you. But I'm glad; I had to tell some one. I forgot, you haven't met him yet."

"Not yet. He is performing the operation on the twelfth, isn't he? A pal of Bill's."

She nodded.

"Do you know you often remind me of him? Sometimes there's quite an extraordinary likeness; yet your features are not the same; your eyes and coloring are different. I wonder what it is?"

"It can't be character," Benjamin smiled. "For he's a strong man and I'm weak. But you mustn't waste your time talking to me; you'll never have time to do your shopping. I can understand now how important it is."

She opened the door and slipped quickly out.

"My trousseau!"

He listened to her footsteps as she descended the stairs. He heard the hall door slam. His under lip trembled as he returned to the inner room.

Her happiness hurt him; it reminded him of what he had lost.

Probably Marie Agnew was buying her trousseau, too. Making herself beautiful for Paul.

He stood just inside Mrs. Bryant's room and looked at the old, withered woman lying on the bed. She had turned on her side; her face was hidden. It looked as though she slept. Paul's mother!

A feeling of loathing swept over him. In his heart he cursed her and the child she had borne. They were nothing to him, less than nothing; yet he was risking his life and honor for one, and his life's happiness for the other.

Why, he asked himself bitterly, why? For his mother's sake, for the woman who had borne him. Yet the answer seemed to mock him. What had she to fear from this woman?

The woman in the bed stirred, turned round, and opened her eyes. A week had worked a great change in her. Rest, comfort, and good food were beginning to take effect.

Her gray hair, neatly brushed and braided, gave the tired face dignity; the lines about her eyes and mouth were softer now; remnants of the beauty she had once possessed were still to be seen—the low forehead, the aquiline nose, the curves of the lips, and the pretty oval of the face.

Pity stirred in Benjamin's heart as it had done the first time he saw her. And from pity another emotion had sprung to life of which he himself was quite unconscious.

He walked to the bedside, taking a chair with him; then he put a bunch of flowers he had brought on the pillow, common garden flowers, bright and sweetly perfumed.

The woman looked at them, touched them with one of her white hands, then glanced at Benjamin.

"So you've come again—with your flowers! It's queer the interest you take in me and the time you waste over me."

Benjamin sat down, he laid his hand on hers. She used to resent his touching her, now she seemed glad. After a moment or two the long, thin fingers interwove themselves with his fingers.

"You're better to-day?" Benjamin asked.

"Yes, better to-day. Every day a little better. But there's something wrong with my left side, that don't get better. And there's something I can't remember."

"Why do you want to remember?"

She looked at him a long time before replying; the clawlike fingers tightened on his hand.

"Why do you bring me flowers, Mr. Roberts? I thought you brought me here to get rid of me, to kill me. It seems as if I was wrong."

"Quite wrong. Don't you remember the bargain we made?"

She nodded. Her eyes, which had been calm and quiet, grew cunning.

"I was to give up my son and hold my tongue, and you were to keep me in luxury. Who pays, Mr. Roberts?"

"Does that matter so long as you get what you want?"

"Was she so terribly fond of Paul, Mrs. Hennikon? Not her own flesh and blood either. Or is it her husband she fears?"

"I can't tell you."

"Paul still believes they are his real parents?"

Benjamin considered before replying. "Yes. He must always believe that. If ever he learns the truth it will go badly with you, so remember. I'm not threatening, I'm only warning you."

Mrs. Bryant released his hand and, picking up the bunch of flowers, put them close to her face.

"I don't want to hurt him," she muttered to herself. "After all he is my child—I might have loved him—I don't love him now. I can remember how he looked when I told him who he was. He didn't quite believe, but he was scared. Ashamed, that's

what he was; ashamed of his own mother — because I was down in the world, drunken and dirty.

"Why didn't *he* bring me here — engage a nurse to take care of me, come and sit by my bed, bring me flowers, and read to me?"

She raised her head, and her voice grew suddenly shrill.

"I suppose they pay you well for doing this, the Hennikons?"

"They think you've gone to New York. Paul believes the same."

"Then what are you doing it for? Who are you?"

Benjamin rose to his feet. When the time came he intended to question, not to be questioned.

"I am an old friend; Paul and I—we were at school together, we've been together all our lives. I'm doing this for Mrs. Hennikon's sake as much as for his. If it were proved that you were his mother his career would be ruined, his life spoiled. In a short time he's going to be married—"

He stopped abruptly.

The woman fell back on the pillows and closed her eyes.

"I wonder if you've been speaking the truth?" she mumbled. "I remember a photograph in the room where you first took me—and a woman speaking over the telephone. Paul's name was mentioned. And the woman—I remember—her name. It was on the photograph, too. Marie—Marie Agnew."

She saw Benjamin's body stiffen; she saw the color leave his face.

"That's the woman, is it?" she cried triumphantly. "I remember now you told me—of course you did! Oh, I remember pretty nearly everything except what happened on the night I went to Mrs. Hennikon. Well, I wish her joy of him. He can rot for all I care. The coward, that's all he is. You needn't worry, I'll keep my bargain as long as I'm free, as long as I'm well paid. I don't care where the money comes from as long as I get it."

"You shall have all you want."

Benjamin walked to the window and stood looking across the railings opposite; over the strip of garden toward the river.

The sunlight had disappeared; the sky was overcast; a storm was coming up. It was growing very dark. Presently he switched on one of the electric lights and, picking up a book, sat by the woman's bedside again.

He had recovered his composure now; his face was calm, his voice quiet. He thought for a moment of the little nurse who had gone out full of the joy of life, who was busy choosing her wedding clothes. She had earned her happiness, deserved the love that had come to her. He would deserve Marie's love, though he could never possess it. She had told him to find something to do, to make a sacrifice. Well, he was doing both.

"Shall I read to you a little? Nurse Brown will be late to-night."

Mrs. Bryant drew a long breath.

"I would rather talk."

"You talk too much; you must rest yourself."

"When I'm not talking I'm thinking," she replied, "and that's no rest. Thoughts are terrible if one can't express them. And you won't let me drink. I used to drown them in drink; he taught me that."

"He—who?"

"The man I married. At least, we went through some sort of marriage out West. He dragged me down. A woman can't live alone. You haven't seen him, have you?"

Benjamin did not reply.

"He mustn't find me; you'll keep him away, won't you? Tell me about Nurse Brown. That's the sort of girl you ought to marry. If there were more women like her! She treats me like a human being—the way you treat me. I wonder what your game is?"

"You don't trust me?"

The woman laughed. "I wouldn't trust any one in the world unless it were the nurse. She says her prayers every night. And I heard her pray for me

once, and the man she's going to marry."

"Dr. Frank Bisco."

Benjamin began to turn the pages of his book. Suddenly it was snatched from his hands; it hurtled across the room.

Mrs. Bryant was sitting up in bed, glaring at him.

"What's that you said—she's going to marry that man, the man who came to see me a few days ago? Why don't you speak? You said it! You said it!" She seized the lapel of his coat in her clawlike hand, dragging him toward her. "She shall not marry him."

Benjamin put his arms about her and forced her to lie down. For a moment he thought she had taken leave of her senses.

She ceased struggling, her face was flushed, her breath came quickly.

"I hate him; he's a brute," she mumbled. "He's got cruel eyes and a face like iron. I hate him. Who brought him to see me? What does he want here?"

"Dr. Saunders called him in. He is one of the greatest of surgeons. Now, then, you're not going to ask any more questions; you must lie perfectly still and quiet."

To Benjamin's surprise she laughed. She turned round and lay with her back to him.

He saw the fingers of her right hand working convulsively beneath the bedclothes. He picked up the book she had thrown across the room, and, sitting down, began to read. He knew she was not listening, and he was unconscious of the words he was reading himself.

He had not turned a couple of pages when he was stopped by the sound of sobbing; he put the book down and listened. Mrs. Bryant was crying.

There is nothing more unnerving than a woman's tears, and nothing that makes a man so helpless.

"What's the matter?" He bent over her, touching her tenderly. To his surprise she flung him off with a smothered oath in a foreign tongue.

"Let me be," she whimpered. "You lied to me, and I know what your game is now—you want to kill me, but I won't die. I want to live. You sha'n't kill me. It's murder. You have brought me here to murder me, and you've chosen him to do it."

"You don't know what you're saying—you're talking nonsense," Benjamin replied sternly. "Unless the operation is performed you'll be an invalid for life, unable to move hand or foot. I'm trying to save your life."

"It's a lie!" she cried, her voice rising. "What am I to you? You're paid to get rid of me. And you've chosen him to do it. But he sha'n't do it. I'll fight. You can't keep me here against my will."

Benjamin took both her hands in his and made her lie still. He sat on the edge of the bed, and, bending down, forced her eyes to meet his.

There was nothing vicious or cunning in them now, only fear. The eyes of a hunted animal. The pity he had originally felt grew greater until it verged on love, just the kind of love the strong feel for the weak, the love a man in moments of his life feels for all humanity, especially the poor, the fallen, the sinful.

"You're talking nonsense," he said gently, "because you are tired out and your nerves are unstrung. I've never met Dr. Bisco in my life; I only know him by name. He has been chosen to do the operation because he's the cleverest man living. My only thought is to give you back your health, to save your life."

She tried to turn her eyes from his, but she could not. Slowly the fear died away and surprise took its place. She began to sob again softly, and a tear rolled down her cheek.

"All the same, he'll kill me. Yet when I look at you—you remind me—you make me feel. Oh, God! if I had never let my boy go I might have been different. But now it's too late.

Mr. Roberts, let me see Paul! I want to see him again before he's married —before that man kills me—what he can give you—money."

"You must never see him again."

"He is my son!"

"You don't want him. You only want quiet.

"Death," she wailed. "Very well, but before I die I will be revenged on the lot of them. Before Dr. Bisco takes up the knife to silence me I'll cut deep into his heart. And it won't be marriage bells that will be ringing for Paul or him, but funeral bells. Take my advice, Mr. Roberts, go away and never come here again."

She covered her face and refused to speak again. Benjamin sat at the window waiting until the nurse returned. He believed Mrs. Bryant's hysterical ravings were those of a disordered brain. Only reasonless fear could have prompted them.

He gave a sigh of relief as he saw a taxicab draw up and Nurse Brown alight, her arms full of parcels. He met her in the sitting-room. He told her as briefly as he could what had happened.

"I'm afraid I've undone all your good work. I ought to be ashamed of myself for letting her talk and talking to her."

"You mustn't worry," she said sympathetically. "Until Dr. Bisco has operated we must expect these outbursts. She will have forgotten all about it to-morrow and be herself again."

Benjamin did not like leaving her alone with Mrs. Bryant, but she convinced him it was better he should go. He made her promise to ring him up if any change occurred.

There was a taxicab waiting outside a little way down the road; he hailed it, then saw that the flag was down. He walked in the direction of his rooms.

The cab followed him a short distance, then stopped, and the young man in the light tweed suit and the soft green hat alighted, paid the chauffeur, and discharged the cab.

Then he followed Benjamin on foot to his rooms.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### Face to Face.

AFTER what Benjamin had told her Nurse Brown rather expected a bad night with her patient. She was agreeably surprised to find her complacent and obedient.

As soon as she had given her the last meal of the day she made her comfortable for the night, and then, as the hour was only nine o'clock, sat in her room and sewed.

And ever and again she sang softly under her breath. Her heart was so full of joy. She sang her patient to sleep, or so it seemed. At ten o'clock she regretfully put her work away, for it was really a labor of love she did now—labor for the love that was coming.

And she carried her parcels and her sewing into the little room adjoining Mrs. Bryant's, where she slept. Only a curtain divided the two rooms, and this was generally kept pulled back, so that she could hear and see her patient.

Just as she was beginning to undress she heard the faint tingling of the telephone-bell from the sitting-room. She went through the passage outside so as to avoid disturbing her patient.

Only Dr. Saunders or Mr. Roberts used the telephone, and it was unlikely either of them would ring up at that hour save on a matter of importance.

"Who's there?" she asked only just loud enough for her voice to travel over the wire. And when she heard the reply she laughed softly, and then pretended to be very angry.

"My patient's asleep. I was just going to bed. Really, Dr. Bisco, you of all men ought to know better."

She glanced over her shoulder and noticed that the door leading into the bedroom was ajar. She closed it before continuing the conversation.

She made no sound in shutting it, yet before she had time to pick up the receiver of the telephone again Mrs. Bryant slowly sat up in bed, supporting herself by her right hand and straining her ears to catch Nurse Brown's part in the conversation. She had heard enough before the closing of the door to interest her.

The nurse, the little woman with the Madonnalike face, who had brought her out of the valley of the shadow of death and already sown the seeds of hope—and something better than hope—in her heart, was talking to the great man with the hard face and the cruel eyes—the man she loved and was going to marry in a few days' time.

And she, the little Madonna, had nursed her, the withered Magdalene, back to life.

At intervals she could just hear her voice, but not a word that was said. She lay down again just before Nurse Brown returned, pulling the clothes tightly around her, pretending to be in a deep sleep.

Nurse Brown put the night-light on the mantelpiece, and before going to her room bent over the bed. Even she was deceived. She thought Mrs. Bryant slept.

Yet the latter had never been more wideawake. She was listening to every sound from the inner room. She knew when the nurse was undressed. She heard now and again the rustle of paper parcels, the opening and closing of a trunk. And she smiled beneath the bedclothes.

She had made no preparations for her marriage, and she had never possessed a trousseau—nothing—nothing but the son whom she had sold, partly through shame and fear, and a little tempted by the greed of gold.

So shame and fear had been born in his heart.

At last silence came from the adjoining room. Mrs. Bryant opened her eyes and peered through the darkness.

Nurse Brown had left the curtains half drawn; there was no light save the faint flicker from the night-light on the mantel-shelf.

She heard the church clock chime the hour—half past ten. And she lay quite still, the clothes pulled back from her head now so that she could hear. Time crawled slowly, but her thoughts worked quickly.

Eleven o'clock struck—eleven thirty. Surely the little Madonnalike nurse was asleep now. She would be very tired after her long day's shopping and the excitement. And her sleep would be full of wonderful dreams—dreams of the future.

A smile parted the lips of the woman who lay awake waiting. Her dreams were all of the past. She would have no future, unless—

Fear stabbed sharply, as it had done when Benjamin spoke of Dr. Bisco and the operation he was to perform.

Very slowly she pushed the bedclothes back and sat upright. She was weak still, and her left arm seemed quite useless. But her brain was clearer than it had been for years.

She realized she lived, and was glad to be alive. She sat pondering for several minutes on the changes that had occurred in herself. It was something in the nature of a miracle.

They could not have saved her only to destroy her.

"Nurse?"

Her voice was scarcely audible, for she knew that the Madonna slept like a watch-dog. To-night her sleep might be as heavy as it would surely be sweet. She called her once again, softly but clearly. Silence answered. Then the church clock struck the hour: midnight.

Slowly, painfully, she slipped from the bed and stood upright. She swayed and almost fell. She took a couple of unsteady steps forward, limping; there was something wrong with her left leg. She was not conscious of the foot touching the ground; the nerves were dead. It took her five minutes to cross the room holding on to the chairs and tables.

When she reached the sitting-room door she clung to it, listening; opened it as noiselessly as Nurse Brown had done an hour or two ago, and, slipping into the sitting-room, closed and locked it.

Her right hand, tremblingly supporting her against the wall, found the electric switch, and the room was suddenly flooded with light.

There was no hesitation now. She shuffled her way to the table where the telephone stood, and, opening the directory, searched among the A's for Marie Agnew's name.

She found it, with the number and address. She put the receiver to her ear and, when the exchange answered, gave the number in a quiet, steady voice.

There was delay, but eventually some one answered. Miss Agnew!

Mrs. Bryant began to speak, quickly but distinctly, carefully pronouncing each word. First of all she gave her name.

" You don't know who I am; you have probably never heard the name before. I want you to come and see me. I'm very ill. I'm staying at — Riverside Terrace, in what I think you call a nursing home. I have something to tell you that affects you deeply—something to do with the man you're going to marry — Paul Hennikon. Come to-morrow morning at half past ten. When the door is opened walk straight up to the first floor. I can't tell you more, but if you value your life and happiness, come. But don't tell your future husband until you've seen me, then you can tell him what you like."

She waited for a reply; she heard Marie Agnew's voice; the latter was speaking to some one else in the room. Then a man's voice throbbed over the wire.

" Who do you say you are? "

She did not recognize the voice at first; instinct prompted her reply:

" Is that Paul speaking? I am Mrs. Bryant." She heard a smothered oath, and she knew. She had no time to think; she spoke on the spur of the moment.

" Mrs. Bryant, your mother."

Then, suddenly frightened, she hung up the receiver and, rising, tottered toward the bedroom door. She remembered Benjamin's warning. She was frightened.

She switched out the electric light and groped her way into the bedroom. She reached the bed shivering with cold and crawled into it. As she began to fumble for the bedclothes she heard Nurse Brown stir, then speak. She did not answer.

A minute passed and she knew she had not been detected.

But she was very frightened; she trembled as with an ague. She longed to wake the nurse and tell her what she had done; confess everything to her. She would understand; she would pity and forgive her.

Then she remembered Frank Bisco, and she pulled the clothes right over her head; the room seemed suddenly ghost-haunted. Her life threatened all their lives. Unless she escaped they would surely take it.

Next morning, to Mrs. Bryant's surprise, the nurse said she might get up for a little while and sit in the armchair. Mrs. Bryant made no objection. She said she had passed a good night, was very quiet, and evinced no desire to talk. She watched the nurse as she tidied the room and put the armchair by the window.

She helped her rise and partly dress with as much care and tenderness as if she were her own mother. And then she brought her a pretty, comfortable dressing-gown.

" Now you must look at yourself in the mirror; it suits you, doesn't it? I bought it at the store yesterday. Do you recognize yourself? "

Mrs. Bryant shook her head. But she recognized herself—a self she had not seen for many years. As the nurse helped her into the armchair she stumbled, and, stretching out her arms as

if to save herself, she upset the table by her side where her medicine stood. The bottle crashed to the ground and broke.

"Do you think I can trust you to stay there quite quietly for five minutes while I run around to the druggist's? Will you give me your word not to move?"

"I don't think I could move without your help," her patient replied. "I've got a fancy for a little jelly — you know, it's made in bottles—and I'd like to see a newspaper. Would you mind trying to get me one?"

May nodded.

"But the medicine's most important. I can't let you go without that till this afternoon. And don't forget you've given me your word," she said as she put on her bonnet and left the room.

Mrs. Bryant nodded as she glanced at the clock.

"I promise not to move."

It was nearly half past ten. Would her son come? Probably he did not believe her. She would make him believe this time. She really wanted to see him now—it would be better perhaps than seeing the woman Marie Agnew. She would know what sort of son she had borne.

The half-hour struck. She moved her chair ever so slightly so that she could see into the street. Presently a taxicab appeared and stopped a few doors off. A man alighted, dismissed the cab, then walked quickly along until he came to No. —. The front door bell rang.

Mrs. Bryant heard the sound of voices in the hall. Footsteps running quickly up the stairs and the sitting-room door burst open. A woman's voice raised protestingly.

Then the bedroom door opened and she saw Paul facing her. Over his shoulder peered the scared face of the servant.

"It is all right," she said; "this gentleman is expected. It's all right, Nurse Brown will be back directly."

Paul shut the door in the servant's face and stood with his back to it, facing Mrs. Bryant.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### A Proposition by Mrs. Bryant.

THERE was a long silence. Paul was unable to speak, and now they were alone Mrs. Bryant was not anxious to say the first word. She was sitting close to the window with her back to the light, Paul was facing it.

She studied his face attentively. It was the first opportunity she had had of really seeing him closely, quietly.

Her first impression had been right. Not much to look at, nothing to be proud of—unless it were his brains. There was a certain amount of clever cunning in his face.

The woman smiled. He inherited that from her.

"Hadn't you better come right in and sit down?" she said at last, remembering time was precious and that there was a lot to be said, and perhaps done, before the nurse returned.

Paul moved slowly forward. His eyes roved round the room, taking in every detail. Spotlessly clean, well but sparsely furnished; suggesting health, comfort, and loving care.

Comfort and loving care—for the creature in the armchair facing him—drunkard and blackmailer!

"Sit down!"

It was she who spoke again. Paul was already conscious of the change that had taken place since he had seen her last. It was hard to realize he was looking at the same woman. But to him she was still horrible.

"Haven't much time to waste over you," he replied, finding his voice with an effort. "I understand you had left the country. What do you mean by telephoning to — to Miss Agnew last night?"

"I wanted to see the woman who is going to marry my son," she replied quietly.

Paul's face grew livid. He kept his

self-control with an effort. Fear and suspicion had never been entirely absent from him since that first dreadful meeting in his father's office. Both now were redoubled.

"Mrs. Bryant, this farce had better cease. You have left me no alternative now but to go to the police."

The woman still smiled. There was nothing vicious or cunning in her expression. Her eyes were a little sad, perhaps—a suggestion of cruelty lingered about the lines of her mouth.

Outwardly she was calm and self-contained, the exact antithesis to Paul.

"You must do what you think fit. But for your own sake you had better hear me. I haven't sent for you to ask anything of you—though I have the right, because you are my son."

"Stop repeating that infamous lie!"

"It's the truth, so help me God!"

Before she spoke again Paul sat down. He sat huddled up, his hands clasped across his knees, looking older and more ungainly than ever.

"I want nothing from you—at present," she continued; "for, as you see, I have all I want. Servants to wait on me, a nurse to look after me, a couple of doctors—flowers, books, the best medicine money can buy, and the best food."

She gave a little laugh.

"Who do you think is providing all this? You are not, the one man who should. It's Mrs. Hennikon—the name you bear and have no right to. Whether she knows I'm here or whether she thinks I'm in New York, I neither know nor care. She's paying to keep me out of the way—and your friend, Mr. Roberts, is doing the dirty work for her—and for you."

Paul questioned her then cautiously. He only discovered that she was the woman who had been concealed in Benjamin's rooms—she had no idea they were brothers.

"I sold you to Mrs. Hennikon," the woman continued, "for reasons which, if you haven't guessed, I'm not going to tell you—yet. You can verify everything I've told you and am going to tell you; you shall have every opportunity of doing so, and I'll give you every proof on certain conditions."

Paul rose to his feet. His legs almost refused to bear him, he could not keep still; he could not rest under the intolerable burden that threatened to crush him and all his dreams and aspirations.

The woman who told her story to him now was very different from the miserable drab he had first seen at Hennikon's Stores.

It had been comparatively easy with the help of his father and brother to believe she had only spat out a pack of lies and that when threatened with the police she had fled.

But now he realized he had been hoodwinked. He recalled his father's terror, his mother's indisposition, the mystery which followed, and Benjamin's share in it.

He walked up and down the room, stumbling and reeling; his short, thick hands pulling at his hair, knotting themselves together.

Mrs. Bryant watched him with clear and steady eyes as if trying to see right into his heart.

"If you are my mother," he choked, suddenly interrupting her, "what can it matter to either mother or father? Why don't they give you up to me? Why should they care—what am I to them?"

"Your father does not know; Mrs. Hennikon has evidently made him believe what you believe, that I was only a blackmailer. And she—well, she has her own reasons, which I'm not going to tell you yet. Perhaps she cares for you a little—for you! Or perhaps it's only her husband—she doesn't want to lose him. Women will fight for the thing they love, my son—lie, kill, cheat, steal! I never really loved—not even you. I'm wondering whether love may yet come. Your friend, Mr. Roberts, has set me thinking!"

"What do you want of me? Say what you want of me and let me go. I

don't believe you yet, though—I shall wait until I have proof."

She nodded. "You shall have all the proof you want, Paul. It's here. Fate has played into my hands at the last moment. Your father is here!"

"My father?" Paul tore at the collar round his throat. "Mr. Hennikon—here?"

"Oh, no—your real father. My husband."

Paul began to laugh.

Mrs. Bryant held up her hand warningly. "You had better lock the door. The nurse may return at any moment. We must not be disturbed until I've finished."

"Be quick, then, for I've had about enough."

"Listen! This is my proposal. You will acknowledge me as your mother. You'll take my name or rather my husband's name. I think the marriage is valid, all right. You will tell the woman you are going to marry the truth. As long as I live a decent quiet life you will see that I'm properly looked after. I won't interfere with you in any way; I won't interfere with the Hennikons. That's all."

She waited. Paul was seated again. He was staring at her out of bloodshot eyes, grinning horribly.

"You are mad!" he whispered at last. "If—if all you say is true, then who am I? What am I? Your son—a beggar! What will my father—what will Mr. Hennikon say—what will he do? I shall be kicked out, to starve in the streets. Acknowledge you—you as my mother!"

He staggered to his feet.

"No, rather than do that, if you are my mother, I'd kill you! Yes, curse you—life wouldn't be worth living!"

He strode the length of the room and back again, wringing his hands together, his shoulders bowed, his head poked forward, the muscles about his mouth and nose twitching and trembling.

"Yes, I mean what I say. If you ruin me I'll kill you. For I shall have nothing to live for. Don't you realize who I am and what I've done?"

He was talking to himself now as he reeled about the room as much as to the woman sitting quietly in the armchair with her back to the window.

"I'm making my mark in the world—I'm making my fortune. I have just won a great position. I have just won love. And you—you come out suddenly from the past and tell me you're my mother! And my father—what about him? Oh, don't answer me — sunk lower than you, I suppose; some drunken, nameless beast of the gutters!"

Suddenly he swung round on her and, seizing her shoulders, forced her down into her chair.

"Enough of this; where's your proof—show me your proof?"

The woman did not flinch or struggle. She waited until Paul's paroxysm of rage passed.

As he released her the sound of a taxicab stopping in the street beneath the window caught her ears, then the ringing of the hall-bell and a double knock on the door. With an effort she raised herself and peered out.

"If that's Mr. Roberts, he mustn't see you here," she said quickly. "I promised him you should never know."

"Mr. Roberts!" Paul echoed. "Don't you know that he is my—" He stopped abruptly; perhaps it was better she should not know.

But she was not listening to him. She was staring out of the window. Nurse Brown had just run up the steps of the house. Then she saw the man who had been knocking; it was Charles Bryant.

She turned her back on the window, supporting herself with her right hand.

"Give me your answer. Will you acknowledge me? Will you keep me as a son should? I swear not to shame or disgrace you. I'll live decently—I could, for I should have something to live for. Tell this woman, Miss Agnew, bring her to see me—you'll know then whether it's love she's giving you or only an imitation."

The hall door below opened. The sound of voices came up. Charles Bryant was trying to force an entrance, the nurse and the servants trying to stop him.

Quick, your answer. You must go."

Paul's nerve deserted him. In vain he had tried to make himself believe the woman lied. He was too terrified to know what he really believed. He clung to the door and fumbled with the key.

"Whoever you are, whether you're my mother or not, if you come between me and my ambition, between me and the woman I love, God help us both. Rather than own you as my mother, I'll kill you!"

"Is that your last word, my son?"

"Yes, my last word," he hissed as he opened the door. "Make what arrangements and plans you like with—with Mrs. Hennikon and my—with this Mr. Roberts. But if you interfere with me—God help you."

"Then go!" she cried. "I might have saved you, have given you a name, something to be proud of! But, though you are my son, go—go now and rot!"

Paul scarcely heard her. He stumbled down-stairs through the hall to the door, and there came face to face with Charles Bryant.

"Now, then, I know my wife is here; you can't keep me out," the latter cried.

Paul recognized him. And then in a flash he realized that this Charles Bryant was the same man whom the detective had brought to Hennikon's Stores.

And he was his father!

Nurse Brown scarcely noticed Paul. She stepped quickly out into the street, and before Bryant could divine her intention she had called to a policeman at the end of the road.

"Now, then, what's all this about?" the policeman said, sizing Bryant up at a glance. "If you're told there's nobody here with that name you had better clear out quickly."

Bryant tried to bluff.

"I know my wife's here. I have a right to see her. This man"—pointing to Paul—"knows it; he has been in to see her."

Paul pushed his way past.

"I never heard of the woman; I came here to visit a friend."

The policeman managed to maneuver Bryant outside the hall door, which promptly closed in his face.

"If you take my advice," the policeman said grimly, "you'll go on quietly. If you don't—"

Paul had already commenced to walk away. Bryant hesitated a moment, then, threatening the policeman with sundry penalties for not having done his duty, he followed him.

He did not overtake him until he had turned out of the street, then he ranged alongside him.

"Well, Mr. Hennikon, don't you think we had better have a little quiet conversation together?"

Paul stopped. This was his father! At that moment, blind with fear, he would have killed him had he been physically capable.

Death—murder. It seemed the only way out. He felt like a rat caught in a trap. He looked more animal than human.

"Yes, I suppose we had," he said thickly. "Yes, if it's true you are my father, the sooner we come to an understanding the better."

Bryant stood quite still. Only his heavy, bulldog face expressed surprise. Putting his fingers to his lips he whistled a cab. And then he laughed under his breath. He had learned Mrs. Bryant's secret at last. It was one worth possessing.

Almost unconsciously he treated Paul courteously. He felt like a man who had suddenly chanced upon a gold mine.

"Better get into this cab and we'll drive back to my hotel. We can talk quietly there."

Paul followed him into the cab. "I have nothing much to say."

They drove on without a word being spoken. Bryant led him to his rooms

at the top of a small hotel off Clark Street. He shut the door and motioned Paul to a chair; the latter remained standing.

"Naturally a bit of a shock to you," Bryant hazarded. "Have something to drink?"

Paul shook his head.

Bryant mixed himself a brandy and soda and lit a cigarette.

"Now, my boy, we had better come to business. What are you going to do about it?"

"What do you propose?"

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A Double-Crossing.

MR. CHARLES BRYANT did not find it at all easy to propose anything; of the two, he was more astonished than Paul. And the bully, not being without a sense of humor, could not help laughing at his easy victory.

That Paul was Mrs. Bryant's son he thoroughly believed. He had got to the bottom of the mystery Mollie had always cherished. But how she could have persuaded this wealthy young man to believe that he, Paul, was his son, Bryant could not imagine.

He intended to make hay while the sun shone. He realized the possibility of Paul having jumped to a false conclusion.

"I suppose you never suspected the truth about your parentage," he said tentatively, moistening his thick lips and smoking his cigar with gusto.

"Never. And remember, I don't know the truth yet. I haven't proof."

"Of course, of course. We'll furnish you with that at the proper time."

For the moment Bryant was anxious to humor Paul. He saw how deeply the boy was agitated. He was agitated, too, though in a different way. But he did not show it. He was like a gambler who sees a thousand-to-one chance coming home.

"Give me proof."

Paul spoke. Bryant contemplated the glowing end of his cigar. He had no doubt that Mollie Bryant was Paul's mother, and he was quite willing to be his father—for the moment.

The problem to be solved, if he was to make capital out of Paul Hennikon, was—how had Mrs. Bryant palmed him off on the Hennikons?

The most obvious—indeed, the only answer to the riddle, that James Hennikon was Paul's father. There were other possibilities, but there was not time to consider them.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Here was a bird to be plucked. But the operation had to be done quickly and delicately.

Bryant assumed a paternal air. He rose from his chair and made Paul sit down, standing over him with folded arms.

"Now, look here, my lad," he said bruskly. "Since you know the truth sooner than I intended, let's face the thing like men of the world. There's no false pride about me; I'm just an ordinary, common man. I've done my best to look after your mother and keep her straight, but it was a hopeless job from the first. Now you're a gentleman; you've got a great position; you're rich, with fine friends. You're going to be married to a well-known actress.

"I don't want to stand in your light, and I won't let my wife stand in your light. You would be glad to be rid of us, wouldn't you? You have never borne our name; you never want to. There's no reason you ever should; there's no reason that any one in the world should ever know we are your parents."

He waited. Paul said nothing; he did not even look up. He was sitting with his hands clasped together, shivering.

Bryant nodded his head approvingly as if to emphasize his words. The boy was scared to death; now was the time to strike.

"Why, we've got no claim on you," he said pleasantly. "We didn't even

bring you up; we've given you practically nothing. It was Mollie's idea to come to Chicago and find you. I can't blame her, mind you, for though she hasn't seen you since you were a tiny kid, yet a mother's love is a curious thing—a wonderful thing, my boy! With all her faults, I'm sure she loves you. And if she hadn't given you up her life might have been different. She would not have been the poor, drunken, broken-down creature you see her."

"Words, words! What's going to be done?" Paul stammered.

"What do you propose?"

Paul's teeth were chattering.

"I must see my father—Mr. Hennikon, I mean."

"That would be fatal—to you," Bryant added quickly. "Though, as far as I'm concerned, it would be the best thing that could happen. No amount of scandal could hurt me, though it might ruin you and your prospects. Mr. Hennikon doesn't know everything, you see; when he does it will be all up with you—unless, of course, you care to acknowledge us and come to New York and live quietly with us there. We've got no money; we've got nothing. That's why Mollie came here; we were practically starving."

Paul raised his hands helplessly. He was incapable of resistance. He said he wanted the truth; when he knew the whole miserable, shameful story, how would it help him? He was cornered. Whoever he was and whatever had been done in the past, he was the victim. His only thought was escape—at any price.

To be free again, to command Hennikon's stores. To be free again to make Marie Agnew his wife; free to hold up his head in the great shop and rule. Freedom at any price.

"What do you want?" he cried, his voice rising piercingly.

"I don't want to injure you," Bryant replied, turning his head away a moment. "That's why I quarreled with Mollie; that's why she tried to run away from me. She thinks she has got a claim on you; I suppose she has. But I can manage her. Tell me what you'd like us to do."

There was a long silence. Then:

"I wish you were both dead," Paul whispered.

Bryant turned away, and, walking to the window, stood looking down into the street. He was playing a desperate game cleverly and carefully.

"Perhaps your mother will die."

Paul sat bolt upright.

"What do you mean?"

"She is very ill, isn't she? She met with—an accident, shall we call it? There are two doctors visiting her daily, one the famous surgeon, Frank Bisco. I suppose it means an operation. She might go under."

A gleam of hope shone in Paul's eyes. "You would be glad to get rid of her?"

Bryant did not reply, but he turned round and looked at Paul. And they understood one another.

"If you were free you would go to New York; you would leave me alone to live my own life here?"

"I would start for New York to-morrow if I could—if I had the money. But it means starvation. I chucked my work to come over here. I have no money, no prospects."

Rising, Paul poured himself out a glass of neat brandy, which he swallowed. He opened the door of the room and glanced up and down the passage to make sure they were not heard. Then he began to bargain with Charles Bryant.

His business instincts and training served him well, but Bryant was clever, too. Promises, even in writing, were of no use to him. And he could give nothing in return, not the proof Paul still clamored for.

"My wife can give you that; you can get it out of her when I'm gone. Isn't her presence in the nursing home enough, the fact that young Hennikon has hidden her there?"

Paul was incapable of seeing things clearly any longer; his mind was a blur. A few minutes later he was driving to his bankers in a taxicab with Charles Bryant.

He always kept a most meager balance at his bank, but he had securities. And it was not difficult to arrange an advance.

He parted with Bryant outside the Union Station, and the latter had a roll of bills amounting to ten thousand dollars tucked away in his trouser-pocket.

Directly Paul was out of sight Mr. Bryant took a cab and drove to Hennikon's Stores, demanding to see the head of the firm, Mr. James Hennikon.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### Paul on the Rack.

NO sooner had Paul Hennikon got rid of Bryant and found himself striding blindly along in the direction of the park than he realized the probable futility of what he had done.

He had been terrorized into believing he could buy silence and freedom from Charles Bryant, his own father, for a few thousand dollars.

He still tried to believe he would never see the man's face again. He told himself again and again as he walked along that as far as Charles Bryant was concerned he was safe. There was only a woman, his mother, to be settled with.

And she would die.

He found himself in the Drive. An endless procession of motor-cars and carriages swept up and down. Paul's teeth gritted. A sudden hatred of this world swept over him. Yet he knew it was this world he was really aiming to win and conquer.

Even as a boy he had instinctively pitted his brains and business instincts against birth and beauty. He had thought one day to buy position—just as he was going to buy the woman he loved. She represented beauty.

He knew well enough now why there had always been an undercurrent of jealous hatred for the man he called his brother. Money had not been necessary to make a gentleman of him. He had fallen on his feet in the social world.

A gentleman! Bitter tears suddenly filled Paul's eyes.

He turned round, ashamed and frightened lest some one saw him, and he found himself facing a theater ticket-office; the first thing he saw was a portrait of Marie Agnew. On a play-bill her name in large scarlet letters.

He would have to explain to her. He did not know what he was going to say, but he knew that it could not be the truth.

He commenced to walk again, still bearing north, without any very clear knowledge of what he was going to do. His reasoning powers had deserted him; he had nothing but instincts left; strongest of all, the instinct of self-preservation. It brought him to the Dearborn.

The only one who could help him was the one person he hated and feared. Unless there was a deep-laid plot against him he was in Benjamin's debt.

He had not the courage to enter at first; he walked round and round the building trying to solve the numerous problems which were now fast presenting themselves.

It was in Benjamin's power to ruin him, to rob him of his position in Hennikon's, to take away his good name; above all, to prevent him marrying Marie Agnew, the woman Benjamin himself loved. As soon as he knew his secret, why had he not done so?

It was two o'clock when he rang the bell of Benjamin's flat. The latter opened the door himself. He was frankly surprised to see Paul, who strode past him into the sitting-room.

Ben followed him quickly and sat down with his back to the desk on which Paul noticed a litter of documents and papers.

"This is a surprise visit; anything wrong? What do you want?"

Paul forced a smile.

"I suppose you know I shouldn't come to see you if I didn't—want something."

His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; it was not easy to say. Benjamin's superiority was more than ever apparent. His easy, condescending manner hurt deeply.

And Paul had to humble himself. He might even have to plead.

Fear fed the flames of resentment in his breast.

"Look here, I know everything," he blurted out. "What about this woman you've been hiding? It's no use trying to fool me any longer. I saw her this morning. She told me all. My mother! I suppose it was the truth. If so, why has it been kept from me? And what have you got to do with it all?"

Benjamin's face went a shade paler. Paul only glanced at him surreptitiously. He noticed he was looking ill and tired like a man who had undergone prolonged strain. There was silence for quite a minute. It seemed like an hour.

"I'm sorry, old man, but it mustn't make any difference between us."

There was genuine emotion in Benjamin's voice, but Paul failed to notice it. He was only thinking of himself, only conscious of his own loneliness, his pitiable degradation.

He was in Benjamin's power, the man he had called a brother and a wastrel.

"What does it all mean?" Paul cried fiercely. "Why has the truth been kept from me; why have you suddenly played the saint, done the dirty work, and let me live in a fool's paradise? How long have you known? I want the truth; I shall want proof, too, of everything you say."

Benjamin half turned and laid his hand on the papers by his side.

"I have been searching for proofs. I'll tell you all I know, which is not very much. You must first give me your word of honor you won't breathe a word of this to father—James Hennikon, I mean."

"He knows; he must know. Both the man and the woman went to see him, tried to blackmail him."

"He doesn't know," Benjamin replied quietly. "I think we have quieted any fears or suspicions he may have had. He believes you are his son, and he must be left in that belief."

Paul raised his face from his hands. He was surprised, and he experienced a sense of relief. After all, if he still kept his name, still kept his position, nothing else much mattered. Birth was only an accident!

He looked up.

"Go on, tell me what you know."

Benjamin told him. When he had finished Paul laughed. There was a touch of hysteria in his voice.

"Do you mean to say you never forced mother—" He stumbled over the word, hesitated, then let it pass. "Do you mean to say you never questioned her, made her tell you the truth? How do I know it isn't all a put-up job? If I am this woman's, Mrs. Bryant's—son, what does it matter to her—to your mother, I mean? What has she got to fear?"

Benjamin tried to explain.

"It's obvious that father doesn't know; he has been in ignorance all his life. That is one reason. Then I don't know yet who this woman is; she might be a relative of my mother's—a sister."

"And you never asked?" Paul shouted. "You didn't care, as it didn't affect you. I suppose you were frightened of a scandal; that's why you've hidden Mrs. Bryant away and kept the knowledge from me. It was not for my sake—oh, no! Just to shield your own name. And you hadn't the pluck to make mother confess."

He struggled to his feet.

"She shall tell me before the day's an hour older. I'm not going to re-

main in the dark, to be blackmailed and persecuted, not knowing who I am or what I am."

Benjamin rose to his feet, too.

"Wait," he said sternly. "I have told you this will make no difference between us. I don't want to take your name away from you, nor your position at home or in the business. But you must not question mother; she must be spared; and father must remain in ignorance. If you won't consider them, consider yourself," he continued, his voice rising.

Paul sat down again. He was on the rack; he did not know what to do. He mistrusted every one; he mistrusted even himself.

"How do I know you are not all in league against me? What are those papers you've got on the bureau? Show them to me."

"They have only just arrived; I haven't looked at them all. It took some time to get them. I could not employ our own solicitor, and it was difficult to find a man that I could trust."

He made Paul tell him how he went to the nursing home. And then he learned what Mrs. Bryant had said to Paul and the bargain she had tried to drive. His face grew very serious when Paul told him about Charles Bryant.

"I can manage him all right," Paul stammered. "He can be bought. But Mrs. Bryant, she's the danger. Do you think she'll live?"

"If the operation is successful."

"It must take place at once," Paul cried. "I must see Dr. Bisco myself."

"It would be dangerous to operate yet."

The eyes of the two men met. Paul's lips moved, but he choked the words ere they were spoken. "I must see the doctor myself," he repeated. "Meanwhile"—he rose and moved toward the door.

He remembered Marie Agnew's photograph used to stand on the piano; he noticed that it had gone.

"Marie knows nothing?" he whispered, his back to Benjamin.

"No. Paul, you'll have to tell her."

"That's my affair."

The handle of the door rattled in his hand.

"You'll have to tell her before you marry her, Paul."

Paul half turned, opening the door. The bent, ungainly figure, in its ill-fitting, respectable suit of black, hunched up, quivering with ill-repressed fear and excitement, was not without pathos.

But his voice was venomous and the expression in his eyes vindictive.

"Look here. Do what you like, but don't you come between me and Marie Agnew again. She has promised to marry me. We understand one another. I know how you've always despised me in your heart, thought me common and all that. I don't care. I don't care what name I bear. I have no yearnings to be a gentleman. I've got the brains; you can have the rest. But you'll never have Marie. Don't you go near her or breathe a word of this."

He flung himself out of the room, banging the door behind him.

Benjamin called him back; he either did not hear or refused to listen. The hall door shut.

Without waiting to ring for the elevator Paul hurried down-stairs and out of the building. Without the least hesitation now he strode quickly in the direction of Hennikon's Stores.

With a sigh, Benjamin pulled his chair round and began to look through the papers and documents on his desk, now and then making a note on a sheet of paper beside him.

There were copies of the certificates of his father's and mother's marriage, which had taken place in St. Timothy's Church in Evanston.

A copy of the birth certificate of the infant son of James and Marguerite Hennikon, born in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois, on January 19, 1889; a copy of the baptismal certificate dated

five weeks later, taken from the register of St. Thomas's Church, Chicago, Illinois.

In Benjamin's hands apparently lay absolute proof that Paul was really and truly Mr. and Mrs. Hennikon's son!

It was a pity Paul had not come back when Benjamin called him.

Very thoughtfully the latter folded up the papers and locked them away. Then he went out and, calling a taxicab, drove to Delaware Street.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.**

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# TEXAS TOMMY TESSIE

**A SHORT STORY**

## BY HORATIO WINSLOW

WITH the dash and vigor that pointed all her moves Miss Mary McGlynn (Texas Tommy Tessie — see programs and press notices), bounced from the chair.

"I don't like the business for a cent," she said, exhibiting the conviction that pertains to a young person who is good-looking and clear-brained and self-supporting.

"None of us like it, dearie," interposed Mme. Worbell in her most soothing tones, "but we all gotta right to live, ain't we? And if you're broke you can't choose."

The girl did not nod agreement, but stared through the yellow roses of the faded wall-paper. The man on the trunk scowled and stirred uneasily.

"But can she do the job? Of course I know she can put over this Texas Tommy dope, but we don't want any rough stuff like that!"

"Can I?" The girl's pride had been touched to the raw. "Listen!" With eyes half-closed she began singing "The Suwanee River." Clear, liquid, powerful the voice ranged over the familiar melody, giving to the old worn measures a fresh delight and brilliancy. For a good quarter of a minute after she had finished the man was silent. When he spoke it was to nod a brief, "You'll do."

"Of course she'll do," said Mme. Worbell. "She's got the figger and the voice and the brains; only remember, dearie, that you gotta show choice in what you say and sing. You ain't on the vaudeville stage when you're doing this. He's a nice old gentleman, elegint and refined and dotty about old songs and hymns. Remember that, dearie, and nix on the slang.

"I get you," said Miss McGlynn, nodding. "We'll run through it once now, just to see if I've got the lines, and to-night I'll be here at eight."

"Seven-thirty," corrected madam's husband. "You see you gotta be dressed and in your place and waiting when we're ready for you."

Which explains how it chanced that at quarter past eight the later exponent of character songs and imitations might have been—but fortunately wasn't—found crouching in a dark passageway with her right hand manipulating a well-oiled sliding bolt.

She was dressed in a white gossamer gown that shimmered phosphorescently or would have so shimmered had it not been completely covered by a long black

cloak that shrouded her from her shining hair-flowers to her refulgent slippers.

In the panel door a peephole gave her a glimpse of the room on the other side—the near right hand corner curtained off into a triangular "cabinet", and the believers facing cabinetward from a semicircle of hard wooden chairs.

In the very middle of the first row sat the man for whom she was to appear!

His hair was nearer white than gray, though his shoulders squared in a manner suggesting a younger man. But when Miss McGlynn looked at his face her heart misgave her.

There was about its wrinkles a kindliness—a groundwork of simple trust—that made her present act loom up as a monstrosity. Nor did she find comfort for herself in Mme. Worbell's reasoning that it was "all for his own good, and if he didn't like it he wouldn't be paying for it."

"Anyhow," Miss McGlynn reflected philosophically, "I've got started and I'm no quitter."

In any event it was too late in the game to quit, for at that moment came the voice of Mme. Worbell, soothing, yet authoritative, as a signal to the girl behind the wall.

"Now, if some one will turn out them lights altogether I'll be much obliged. You see the inflooences are all around us, but they can't manifest themselves without the lights are extinguished. Thanks. Now, if you'll just sing that last verse once again I'll see what I can do."

The burden rose, a little quavering and uncertain, but eked out by the thunderous bass of Mr. Worbell, who was playing the rôle of a devout believer.

"When our friends return from yonder,
When our friends return from yonder,
When our friends return from yonder,
When our friends return from yonder
we'll be here."

It was the appointed time.

While the chorus still mouthed the last chord of the old camp-meeting rouse, very delicately Miss McGlynn slipped back the bolt and, sliding the panel ajar, stepped into the larger room. Pitch black it was, but the plan of the place hung vividly in her memory.

With slow cautious steps she made her way over to the corner of the room where, rope-bound and groaning behind the cabinet curtain, sat Mme. Worbell.

For a moment the girl turned in the direction of the chairs, making sure once more of the position of the elderly bereaved gentleman, and then slipped from her cloak the metal disk.

Its phosphorescent side she held toward madam's cabinet-curtain till the lower edge touched the floor when slowly she revolved it, at the same time settling it down like a plate phosphorescent side uppermost.

To the believers, ten feet away, it was as though a point of light had developed into a line, the line into an oval plane, and the oval into a mystic, shining, floor-grounded circle.

Very carefully the girl separated her black cloak, standing over the plate in such a way that to the spectators the oval phosphorescence seemed to have shot up ceilingward in a streak.

She widened the gap between the sides of the black coat; then with a quick move threw off the overgarment altogether.

She was a spirit, luminous, vapor-filled, light as a flame; a spirit materialized in full view and under the strictest test-conditions by the wonderful Mme. Worbell.

From the chairs came a groaning and an exaltation.

Taking great pains not to scuffle or trip, she swayed tiptoed toward the kindly old gentleman in the middle of the front row, pausing only a scant yard from his knees.

He was quite invisible except for a vague reflection of her phosphorescence on his white hair.

In her cabinet madam moaned as though tremendous supernatural forces

were racking her soul, and at the sound of this assumed agony quite suddenly Miss McGlynn dropped into her part. She was no longer the pert singer of vaudeville songs—she had become the spirit-wife of the old man before her.

So strong was the illusion that, even if she had wished, it would have been impossible for her to act out of character.

"Katherine"—his voice trembled—"you—you've come back to me!"

"Yes, dear!" Her voice was sunk to a whisper. She was playing the part even better than Mme. Worbell had planned—with a finer shading than even Mr. Worbell had devised.

"I've waited for you so long. I knew you'd come again. You're going to sing for me—aren't you?"

"What shall I sing—darling?"

"Would you sing 'Annie Laurie' for me? You always sang that so beautifully."

She swept her hand across his sleeve in caress. Then, throwing back her head and modulating her voice so that it would not seem overloud in the small room, she began.

The song was well done. She knew herself with what pains in the last two years she had kept her voice free from the vaudeville rasp. To the right and the left of the circle of chairs choked sobs were her applause.

Instinctively she knew that the moment for her departure was at hand. It could not be bettered. She retreated, swaying toward the cabinet.

"Katherine—you're not going! You mustn't go yet!"

She did not speak—she knew that her silence was far more dramatic. She picked up her cloak from the floor, and by a reversal of the appearing process melted away into the darkness amid the ecstatic groans and sighs of the little circle.

As she slipped the panel door shut and shot the bolt she heard the old gentleman murmur brokenly:

"Katherine!"

Her part in the evening's entertainment was over and, grasping her right hand with her left, Miss McGlynn congratulated herself warmly.

"Kid, you're all right—you're a riot. You ought to have gone into the legit from the first instead of ragging it on the small time." A shade crossed her face. "But it's not exactly square to that old guy." The shade deepened to a frown. "Well, it's none of my bread and butter. You can't choose your job when you're broke."

It was a Tuesday night, and Miss McGlynn, already shimmering in her robes, paced up and down Mme. Worbell's apartment.

Two weeks of her new job had changed things tremendously. In return for a few whispered speeches and soft-voiced songs she had earned enough to satisfy her exasperated landlady, and provide in a way for a couple of weeks to come.

But there were drawbacks. For one thing, as often as she played this game of the other world she felt herself a changed person. A sort of ghostliness swept over her, whose effect was to drive the Texas Tommy part of her being into the background.

Indeed the gloom of the Worbell establishment had enwrapped her till she felt she was no longer Mary McGlynn—defiant, light-hearted, and full of strange gaieties—but merely a dismal sprite who appeared and vanished and sang according as the Worbells pulled the strings.

Moreover, there was a taint about the Worbells' money that would not out, and on this evening as she watched the medium stuff yards of luminous silk into a capacious waist pocket a quick revulsion against the whole spooky business swept her off her feet.

"Madam," she said suddenly, "this is my last night!"

The medium did not even look up.

"Well, that's all right, dearie. You've sure made one man happier—ain't it so? Why, you wouldn't hardly know him the way he's picked up since

you been talking to him every night. Lemme tell you them songs and words of cheer are worth a good deal more to him than the five dollars he's paying each sitting."

Miss McGlynn looked at madam before speaking.

"Five dollars! Is that all he's giving you? Why, you're handing me five dollars every time I go on. Where do you come in?"

Mme. Worbell walked over to the girl, laying a fat, motherly hand on the filmy dress.

"You know, dearie, I was just gonna tell you about that. When I hired you first, you remember, I explained I was hiring you for something special. Yes, dearie, I had a hen on all the time, and now I'm going to tell you what it is. You see ever since he started with me I've been telling that old boob that it's up to him to send something to you over in the spirit world!"

Miss McGlynn broke out laughing.

"To me?" she asked.

"Of course—you're his wife, ain't you? And spirits need things just as much as folks on the mortal plane. Most of all, I've been telling him you need money; so to-night he's drew out ten thousand dollars that he's been saving in some hick savings bank, and we're going to dematerialize it for him."

The girl jerked away.

"You mean you're going to steal it from him!" she cried.

"Steal! Why, dearie, think what happiness it'll be for him to do something nice for his dead wife, and, anyhow, you'll get a nice piece of it for yourself if you just act right—a nice little piece."

Miss McGlynn began to unpin the veil from her head.

"I'm through," she said; "I've had enough. It was the limit, kidding this old fool into thinking I'm his spirit-wife, but I'm not going to take his roll. Never mind paying me for last night—keep the change. Scrubbing floors would be a clean business compared—"

From the bedroom there burst a domestic cyclone in the person of Mr. Worbell. He rushed in red-faced and breathless.

"Oh, that's what you say, is it?" he barked. "Well, you get one thing straight—you're not going to crab things by side-stepping now. You're going to play your little game to-night, and you're going to tell the old man to put his wad right in your hands because you need it."

He caught her roughly by the arm, jerking her across the room, while a sharp pain sputtered in her elbow like a procession of electric sparks.

"Do you understand me?"

She found herself again. Her arm pained from shoulder to finger-tips as though some bone or muscle had been wrenched out of place, but she faced him bravely.

"I'll do nothing of the kind!"

His hand dropped to his side pocket.

"You'll do just what I say. I'll be following right behind you to-night in my 'blacks,' and if you hang back one little bit—" He drew out a wooden cylinder about the size and shape of those cork-grips on a bicycle handle. The touch of a spring released a five-inch blade. The steel shone with a hard bluish reflection.

"You see this? Well, if you hang back—God help you! Yes, God help you!"

"You wouldn't dare stab me."

Her voice was less certain than her words.

He sneered at her.

"Who's gonna know in the dark? Madam, you telephone to Jim that him and Mickey will have to do without me in front to-night, and tell 'em to keep on each side of that fat fella that joined Tuesday. I don't like his looks. And tell 'em I'll be working in rubber soles up along with you." He turned to the girl. "And now you sit down."

The old Mary McGlynn, Texas Tommy Tessie, would have turned her back on him, and with nose tilted in air would have sailed majestically out of

the door. But the old Mary McGlynn was gone.

Humiliated, hurt, frightened, the girl sank back in the nearest chair, nursing her sprained arm. She realized that now, if ever, was the time to assert herself, but the fear of the fierce-eyed Mr. Worbell held her fast. Madam strove diligently to reconcile her to the state of affairs.

"Why, believe me, dearie, if we didn't take it off that old simp (and him coming to me and fairly *begging* for these seeances!) somebody else would. Yes, dearie, if it wasn't for us some slick dame or some con-man would have his coin by this time, and he wouldn't of even had a run for his money."

"You don't have to argue with her," Mr. Worbell said grimly. "She's going to do her little job right on the tap, and no kick coming, either. You'd better go in and meet 'em, madam—it's most night."

Together the man and the girl waited outside the little sliding door. Through the peephole she saw again the face of the dupe whom she was to rob.

So old it seemed and so lined with careworn wrinkles that even then she was tempted to turn aside when the cold flat of the knife-blade caressed the back of her neck. She shivered and dropped back.

"Play it up to the limit," he whispered, "and when I catch hold of your arm like this sing—and sing good." By way of illustration he gripped the aching arm and pinched it till she could have screamed.

Cautiously, exactly, noiselessly the pair glided into the darkened room where the girl, after evolving from her phosphorescent circle, approached the old gentleman.

"Katherine, Mme. Worbell has been explaining to me about your life on the other side."

The steel seemed unnaturally hard and disagreeable.

"Yes," she managed to gasp.

"It's all right, dear, and I'm glad to have it dematerialized for you. It's every cent I've saved, but you need it more than I do."

The point began to press against her neck.

"Thank you," she whispered.

"And you'll sing again for me, won't you—one of the old hymns?" came the voice of the old man.

The goad left her neck while her arm was clamped suddenly between Mr. Worbell's sharp fingers. The grip itself was enough to make one cry out, but in addition the man commenced a twisting of the arm. It was Mr. Worbell's gentle hint to begin.

And begin she would have if the pain of the torture had not thrown her head into a dizzy confusion. Though in her heart she wanted to cry out the fraud, most of all she wanted to act her part and get away alive. She was just a poor little scared ghost, and the twisting hurt her cruelly.

Suddenly she stiffened with fright. She could not think of a single hymn to sing—she could not recollect even a single solitary chorus.

"Sing!" breathed Mr. Worbell, tightening the arm a notch.

Sing indeed! The gnawing, shrieking pain had driven every hymn-line—every last scrap of hymn-music from her head. There was not a bar left.

"For me, Katherine, one of the old hymn-tunes we used to like so well."

The fire in her arm had become intolerable.

"Sing!"

There was no music in her head—nothing but torment. She tried to reach out mentally and grasp a hymn—somewhere—anywhere. There was none in her universe.

She would have cried out a dozen times, but the fear of the night overshadowed all her impulses. Big red pinwheels revolved before her eyes. Her heart beat with great bruising throbs.

"Si—"

Then suddenly and altogether automatically in the blazing agony of the

moment her voice found words and she heard herself singing:

"I'm Texas Tommy Tessie and I got your number—Tag!
Swing round me, Baby! Oh, you Rag! Rag! Rag!
Swing-a this way round and back again—"

Mr. Worbell's whisper had developed suddenly into a snarl; the tension on her arm slackened, while furious fingers attempted to choke off her utterance.

But she had become herself again. The words, the swing of the music, had brought back the old Mary McGlynn feeling, and all the daggers and twisted arms in the world could not have stopped her.

She was no ethereal creature now, but simply the cool-headed, self-sufficing actress of the varieties.

With a quick half-turn she twisted her head loose while her right hand, the uncrushed, closed on the threatening fist.

"Fake!" she shouted: "it's a fake! *Hold on to your money!*"

It was as though her words had called into being a dozen spirits, for the room, dead quiet a moment before, was now as full of growls and blows as any first-class bear garden.

Nor was there any muffler on the series of very earthy words which Mr. Worbell contributed to the fracas.

Some one struck a match. In the moment's flash she caught the flicker of the knife. Her good hand, aided and abetted by the other, slipped to Mr. Worbell's wrist. The arm with the weapon hung in mid air, then slowly descended toward her.

She fought it back silently, desperately, till the phenomenon of a flying chair caused Mr. Worbell to grow suddenly limp and stagger groggily.

A window smashed to an accompaniment of screaming and hysterics. Mr. Worbell faced about to grapple some attacking foe while the knife flew aimlessly into the darkness, and Miss McGlynn darted back to the secret door.

She gained the movable panel—opened, crept through and bolted it on the other side just as Mme. Worbell, mysteriously freed from her bonds, joined the battle royal.

With trembling fingers and much hampered by the bad arm, she slipped on her street dress, and by way of madam's little sitting-room hurried to the door. But that exit was barred by a policeman who, night-stick in hand, was standing like a terrier at a rathole.

Back she went and through the hall to the basement where, dodging past the furnace, she sought the street by way of the janitor's private entrance. Carefully she looked up and down the block.

Her arm pained her so that she closed her eyes and leaned back against the wall for a minute or two before making a rush to the nearest trolley line. With an effort she winked back the pain and had taken the first step toward the doorway when her elbow was suddenly pulled back from behind.

It was the hurt arm. Miss McGlynn wanted to scream, but she didn't. She merely looked around with great outward calmness and said:

"Well? Oh—uh—"

And stammering was quite in order, for it was the old gentleman of the séance by her side, but somehow strangely animated and different.

"Go ahead—swing on me if you like. I can take care of myself. I'm just past thirty-six, even if the top of my head does look like grandpa's. I can turn a back-flip, and most of these wrinkles are plain make-up."

Miss McGlynn bit her lips. The arm was getting worse.

"It's like this: I'm a sort of peculiar old person, and I feel that my job in life is running down folks of this sort. I know it listens foolish, but I like it."

Miss McGlynn nodded a bit uncertainly.

"We had it all framed up this P.M. to flashlight the Worbell's running off with the alleged coin, but you spoke too soon. Just the same it was hawful plucky of you, and I'm proud to meet

you. I chased out here to find you so I could tell you so."

She was silent. He took in her clear-cut, firm-lipped face, her rounded, yet active boyish figure, and her general aura of self-reliance and good nature.

"Look here," he broke out with an odd rush of words, "you don't belong in this rotten business, and you know it."

She tried hard to smile.

"Sure I know it; but how do you know it?"

"I don't, but I'm going to find out. Here's my card. It's where my sister and I live. To-morrow night at six-thirty there'll be one large porterhouse steak smoking on the table, and you're invited to— Hey, you cop, there! Stop that taxi! The lady's fainted!"

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# A RICH MAN'S PEARL

**A SHORT STORY**

## BY J. S. WOODHOUSE

LIKE a golden link to bind in happy unison the democratic and aristocratic extremes of the social chain, the little one-story yellow cottage of Magnus Hertz occupied a geographically harmonious position between the minor and major keys of a thriving municipal life.

From under this modest little roof a man—because of his broad shoulders, his long, lank body, and his sinewy arms—went down the hill, pierced the smoky counterpane that almost hid the lowlands, and worked among the giant engines where there was heat and dirt and foul air.

And the woman, because of her natural charms of beauty and grace of manner, went up the hill to mingle with those of the social set.

They had married because of an ardent love for each other, but gold is a rare metal that cannot resist a strain with the tenacity of the more vulgar iron or steel or brass, and the opposite weights were beginning to pull hard on this fragile link of love.

Her intercourse with the more genteel had served to magnify in her eyes the crudity of her husband's manners, and by gentle remonstrances at first she had undertaken to correct them.

Her esthetic sense had developed to the point that it grated harshly on her nerves to see him drink his soup from the bowl. He had laughed first at her criticisms and joked her about her newly acquired airs, but repeated censure became annoying, and he had resented it with such imperativeness that she revenged herself by serving no more soup.

In the beginning she had tried to induce him to go with her into this newly discovered world. But he just laughed, lighted his corn-cob pipe, and sat contentedly down by the fire after a day of hard toil to enjoy a pleasant relaxation.

All her coaxing would not alter him. He aspired to no society beyond the geniality of his home, and his chief demand of wifehood was good cooking and a sweet disposition. Her increasing social indulgence but magnified in her eyes the shortcomings of

the husband, and frequently elicited from him a reproach.

The time devoted to her social ambition was detracting from both of his chief demands of wifehood. This "social lure" then was the one element that had interfered with the hitherto perfect domestic peace.

It required a most remarkable incident to arrest the development of this rapidly widening domestic breach—one in which her inclination, to which he objected, led her to the very brink of ruin where she was miraculously saved unconsciously by the very crudeness of his manners, which had become so objectionable to her.

The catastrophe was precipitated by her vanity, coupled with a pronounced conceit.

The pretty compliments, the kind attentions, and the suggestions of wealth due such beauty, continuously showered upon her by men superior to her husband in both income and intellect, were attributed by her to no ulterior motives, but accepted with an audacious conviction that they were the truth.

She had nourished her vanity so far that she believed the diamond brooch, proposed by an ardent admirer as an acceleration to the beauty of her neck, might conscientiously be accepted by her without moral turpitude.

But one thing withheld the too eager hand from this and many other proffered gifts—the jealousy of her husband; a sentiment, she convinced herself, due only to his ignorance.

It must be conceded that Mrs. Hertz, regardless of the many indiscretions of which she might be guilty, was—when the question resolved itself to the one-element measure adopted by moralists to-day—virtuous.

But to sacrifice ambition within one's grasp to gratify the shortcomings of another is a concession that would wear on nerves even less feminine than those of Mrs. Hertz, and accordingly she soon found herself trying to evolve a method of harmonizing the difficulty that oppressed her on one side, and the temptation that lured her on the other.

How to accept from some admirer the wealth that would buy the dresses and jewels she would have and how to make her husband gracefully accept the same was a problem that would readily have confounded a less pretentious person.

Even she might have been compelled to bow beneath the weight of this problem had there not crossed her social horizon Horace Duval, who, as a distinguished visitor from the East, attracted considerable feminine attention, but who chose in turn to center his on the beaming Mrs. Hertz.

Ostensibly he was an importer of African furs and very wealthy, but with a ripening acquaintance he confided to Mrs. Hertz that in reality he was an Eastern fisher of pearls. To her curious eyes he exhibited some of the most beautiful specimens upon which she had ever looked.

One of exceptional size and beauty which appealed to her feminine fancy he frankly admitted was worth one thousand dollars. It became between them quite the chief topic of conversation, largely because a woman loves to revel in a secret.

It was at Mrs. Lancaster's ball his attentions reached the height of their manifestations, and he suggested he would love to shower jewels upon a woman of such magnificent beauty.

So while Magnus Hertz sat in his little cottage home trying to figure how he could make his meager income cover his rapidly increasing expenses, Horace Duval whispered in the wife's ear that he would gladly give her the big pearl if she feared not the husband's scruples.

That peculiar machination of intellect that formulates intricate plans within the twinkling of an eye and has been charged by some with being the devil himself, here entered with alacrity the woman's mind, and she accepted the gift that was pressed firmly into her hand, while the giver extracted per-

mission to call at her home the morrow afternoon.

It was an ingenious scheme that had entered the pretty head of this ambitious young woman!

It was with mingled feelings of astonishment, gratification, and hope that Magnus Hertz the next evening saw his wife bring to the table a steaming tureen of oyster soup. And seeing his wife's face beam with a patronizing smile, he accepted this as an ovation of peace and notice that hostilities had ceased.

Nothing so thoroughly appealed to the appetite of this thrifty worker as oyster soup, and when his wife passed his bowl he smiled so agreeably that it quite banished from her mind the wonder over the failure of Horace Duval to keep his appointment that afternoon.

She bubbled over with laughing chatter and gave an anxious glance at every spoonful of soup her husband raised to his mouth, blew lustily, and then sucked noisily through his lips.

"I was reading in the paper some time ago," she naively suggested, "of a man who found in his oyster soup a pearl worth several hundred dollars. Wouldn't it be fine if we could have such good fortune?"

"No such luck for us," was the frank opinion expressed between two spoonfuls of soup.

"Ah, but think," she urged, "what it would mean! You could take a vacation. You haven't had a day off excepting Sunday for five years."

In a meditative way he slowly skimmed the crackers from the surface and chewed them with a deliberation that extracted every flavor of the soup for the gratification of his taste, unconscious of the fortune that might lay in the dregs. Mentally she had counted the spoonfuls. He had eaten twelve already. It seemed there might be a thousand more in the bowl!

"And then," she continued, "I might have some new dresses and an opera cloak."

He commenced to eat faster while she chattered on in an incoherent way, scarcely knowing what she said, so intently were her eyes fixed on her husband's soup.

Then, suddenly, when but a few spoonfuls remained in the bottom, he thought of an incident at the shops, which he deliberately stopped to relate. It was something about the work of the men.

She lost her self-restraint and interrupted him abruptly:

"There's plenty more soup, Magnus, when you've finished that."

Before she could realize the effect of her words he had quickly grasped the bowl with a movement of gratification, raised it to his lips, and downed the rest with a single gulp.

Anxiously she looked into his face, confidently awaiting some exclamation of wonder or surprise. He interpreted the strange inquiry of her eyes as a rebuke for his greed, and blurted:

"Well, you said there was more, didn't you?"

She sank in a heap upon her chair. The glutton had swallowed the pearl!

Through her dizzy brain rushed the mocking recollection that she had, confident of her scheme's success, already ordered the desired new dresses and opera coat.

Then came the conviction that her husband's uncouth manners was the cause of her failure, and, fearing to tell the truth, she rose in haughty indignation, resolved to have revenge in a tirade on his vulgarity.

"Such manners—"

Her sentence was cut short by a loud knock at the door, one that waited for no answer, and husband and wife turned suddenly to look into the faces of several officers.

"I beg your pardon," cynically explained the leader, "but a notorious pearl thief, masquerading under the name of Horace Duval, who we tracked as the thief of the rare Cargan collection, has been arrested and has confessed. He has returned all the

jewels but one pearl, the finest of them all, which he says he gave to Mrs. Hertz. If you will kindly return it we will trouble you no further."

Color rushed suddenly into the woman's face. Now the husband's jealousy and ire rose in turn. The storm so suddenly calmed in her now raged in his breast, but it was stayed by her prompt reply:

"I have no such pearl."

"You will pardon us for seeming to doubt your word, madam, but our instructions are to make a thorough search."

The officers departed with apologies, after leaving a wild confusion of furniture, rugs, linen, and pictures. In the middle of it all, on the parlor floor, sat Mrs. Hertz, humiliated and dazed.

She was first startled to consciousness when her husband, who posed himself before her with arms akimbo, exclaimed:

"I have a feeling within me—"

"Oh, Magnus," she shrieked as she jumped to her feet and looked wildly into his face, "what is it? What—"

"I say," repeated the husband, "I have a feeling within me that, after this experience, the airs of these society strangers will not so belittle your husband's manners."

"You're right, Magnus," she sighed with relief, as she wound her arms about his neck and let her head sink on the shoulder of his rough working-shirt. "There is more true value in you than any man who eats his soup with a spoon!"

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# THE NICKEL

**A SHORT STORY**

**BY FRANK M. O'BRIEN**

FOR a long time the boy had had a suspicion that his family was going to move, but the suspicion did not ripen into certainty until the very morning when his mother told him to put on his best suit.

It was not a Sunday, and none of their relatives was dead, so the boy knew that they were going to move.

The Gilveys often moved; and not always because, as the neighbors would have it, it was easier to move than to pay rent.

Usually they moved from better quarters to worse, or worse to better, according to the varying income of Mr. Gilvey, who was a boilermaker in a shop that had a fluctuating demand for its wares.

When he wasn't a boilermaker at four dollars a day he was a molder at somewhat less.

Just now the boiler works had an order for a hundred boilers; and the Gilveys, basking in the dawn of prosperity, were moving to the other end of the town, where the rent would be higher and the bedrooms more abundant.

To Johnny Gilvey, moving was moving. When a boy moves he may as well move to the upper waters of the Nile as move ten blocks away. Boys may rove in bands, but their friendships are strictly local.

When a boy moves away from a

neighborhood he moves away from his gang, and the gang bids him farewell as one lost to them forever, not even uttering the hope, vainly voiced among their elders, that they will meet again.

Moving would be tragedy to childhood if it were not for the curing charm of that curiosity which has cultivated its microbes in the human soul ever since a certain awful sunset in Eden.

The boy may let slip a tear at the thought of losing his gang, but it only washes the eye and makes it ready for the anticipated pleasures and mysteries of the new home.

Johnny would have no time to say farewell to his brothers-in-arms. He knew they would learn that the Gilveys had moved to the North End, and that would be the last of it.

If the gang ever came to the North End it would be, collectively, a foe to some North End band of which Johnny might be a member, and then he would have to battle against the very boys with whom he had stood shoulder to shoulder.

But it struck him, as he took down the Sunday suit from the hook in the closet off the parlor and wondered whether he had better remove his shoes before he stuck his legs through the pants (yes, pants, not trousers)—it struck him that there was one friend he was going to miss, one who was in the gang but not of it, one who was high above the ranks of the other boys of Johnson Street because of his superior age, strength, and villainy.

This was Joe Parker, who numbered twelve years to Johnny's nine years, who didn't have to be home at nine o'clock at night, who went to school when he pleased—this was long before the day of truant officers — who chewed tobacco without becoming ill, and who swore as though it did not pain him.

Johnny had always looked up at Joe as a private might have looked up at Marshal Ney. In trades of cigarette pictures and the tin tags from plug tobacco Joe swindled him, and Johnny felt honored by the swindle.

Johnny felt it necessary that he should see Joe Parker before he went away.

He had a notion, or rather a faint hope, that Joe, who was happier in the street than in his own home, might, in some way still to be determined, move to the North End. A private, deserting to the enemy, would feel much relieved if a general should desert at the same time.

Cogitating thus, he entered his nether garment in triumph without removing his shoes, a process which saved labor and cleaned the shoes. Then he presented himself to his mother, who ceremoniously gave him a nickel.

Nickels were scarce in Johnson Street. The boys conducted their own youthful commerce in actual barter. But this day it was raining, and Mrs. Gilvey was mindful of Johnny's best suit.

"Take a car to the new house," she said, "and don't get lost. It's 128 Scepter Street, and draw all the tubs full of water from the well, because I've got to scrub the bedrooms before we sleep there to-night, for there's no telling who the people were—"

But Johnny was gone.

Until he saw the nickel he had not known just what to say to Joe Parker, but now all was easy. The nickel should be the princely parting gift of the squire to the baron.

Johnny knew where Joe hung out at that particular hour. Two blocks away, in the ghostly cellar of an abandoned church, this outlaw reigned.

"We're going to move, Joe," said Johnny.

"What do I care?" said Joe, not so brutally as carelessly.

Abashed, not knowing just how to proceed, the squire turned his glance away from the baron. And then the baron looked toward the squire and saw the nickel shining between forefinger and thumb.

He jumped from his packing-box throne, back-heeled the little boy, gripped him by the throat, and tore the nickel out of his hand!

Then, laughing, he ran up the rickety basement steps and disappeared around the corner, carrying the prize that would have been his by worshipful tribute, but now was his only in point of possession. Bad as the wrong was, if he had not run he might have continued to be a hero to the squire.

Johnny came up the basement steps very slowly and went through the drizzling rain to the house in Scepter Street, sometimes running, sometimes walking. But all the way he shook with the horrible, dry choke of grief.

The years moved, and so did the Gilveys; but sometimes the Gilveys moved oftener than the years. Johnny Gilvey saw many towns, many schools, and many gangs. Always the Gilveys followed the star of empire.

Johnny Gilvey never had time to become bad. Even if all the fates, all the firmament, and all the laws of eugenics declare that a boy shall be bad, he will *not* be bad if his parents move at average intervals of eight months. He doesn't have time to be bad. Your rolling-stone gathers no moss; neither does it gather beetles.

When Johnny lived in Johnson Street it had been his mother's intent to make a bookkeeper of him if he lived long enough for such a doom.

Johnny, who believed that the hardest work imposed upon a bookkeeper was the drawing of a straight red line diagonally across a blotless page of figures, had never objected to being trained for the stool and the eye-shade.

But after leaving Johnson Street the lad, to his father's delight, began to take an interest in Peter Gilvey's own stalwart trade. The father and mother, to whom the processes of deep thought were foreign, could not understand why their son brooded so much. He never told them of the baron and the squire.

When Johnny was seventeen the Gilveys, now anchored in a small Iowa city, stopped moving.

Peter Gilvey, with an able assistant in the person of Johnny, made a business of his own, and the pair worked together in their little shop. Johnny was a good boy, his father decided; as fast as himself and even stronger, for the youth never spared his own arms.

Johnny had no open vices and only one secret vice. He had a private box at the post-office, and he kept writing letters and receiving replies. Sometimes he sent money away in his letters, but if he ever got anything in return it was information.

He was trying to find Joe Parker!

One day in the shop, when Johnny had the black dog on his shoulders, a motorist who had had a tire inflated—for the shop was garage as well as smithy—tossed Johnny a nickel as a tip. The boy put it on an anvil, and with one sweep of a hammer left the coin as flat as if an engine had run over it.

Then he stepped to the door and threw the metal into the sky. But his father never inquired the cause of this or any other of Johnny's moods, for Peter Gilvey was a wise soul who would rather drink a cold glass of beer than ask a question that was not his question to ask.

Do not misjudge the elder Gilvey. He did not drink enough beer, cold or otherwise, to prevent him from making the firm of Gilvey & Son one of the great industries of the growing city; and when he died the son went on with the work, and made it so perfect in its particular line — pneumatic tanks for water systems—that a trust tried to invite him to lunch.

He declined the invitation in a somewhat surly way, for he happened, just then, to be looking at a nickel—one of a new coining. The cashier, who had just received it from the bank, had taken it to John Gilvey to show him how queer it was, and to ask him whether he thought the de-

vice as good as the nickel of years ago, with a plain figure 5 on it.

Gilvey said he didn't think it was, but in his heart he wished there had never been any nickels at all.

So the trust, enraged at having its luncheon invitation declined, offered one hundred thousand dollars more for the plant than it had expected to offer; and Gilvey replied in seven words, declining to sell.

He dictated, also, a longer letter—nearly thirty words—telling the State boss of his own political party that his business would not permit him to accept a nomination for Lieutenant-Governor.

Then he turned to his private mail—the letters that his secretary did not open—and read seven letters from detective agencies.

Six of the letters told him what the detective agencies had been telling him for years and years: that the Joseph Parker they had trailed at much expense per diem turned out not to be the Joseph Parker he was seeking.

The seventh letter told him what he had long feared—that Joseph Parker had been found in prison. More than that, Parker was in prison for a thirty-year term for complicity in a yegg safe robbery that had resulted fatally for a country constable. The prison was in Gilvey's own State.

Gilvey locked the door of his office and thought his own thoughts for an hour. Then the stenographer came with the transcribed letters to the trust and the political boss, and Gilvey tore the letters up and dictated others.

He accepted the trust's offer, a course which he knew would leave him without real occupation for the rest of his life; and he told the political boss that he would be delighted to serve his party. He did not say that he would dump fifty thousand dollars into the party war-chest; that was understood to be the obligation of all rich men to whom fell the honor of a Lieutenant-Governorship.

Gilvey made twelve speeches in the campaign, and came within five thousand of the great plurality the boss had promised him. The boss was a conscientious man, who always tried to give a rich candidate a spare vote for every dollar of the contribution.

He felt conscience-stricken when Gilvey got only forty-five thousand plurality, and astonished when Gilvey assured him that forty-five units would have been plenty.

Before the time came to take office Gilvey made friends with the Governor-elect. They had gone different ways on their speaking tours, and, as they happened to be from different ends of the State, they hardly knew each other.

Gilvey, through mutual friends, went out of his way to establish cordial relations with the head of the ticket. This pleased the incoming Governor, who felt that Gilvey might help him with the obstreperous Senate over which the boilerman was to preside, or might even assist him in some of his own private enterprises. For Alanson had enterprises, but Gilvey had money.

The first session of the new Legislature was long and weary. Sometimes it seemed to the Governor that Gilvey tried to make it long and weary; for Gilvey, disregarding the traditions that would make a Lieutenant-Governor only an ornament to the Senate, made himself a part—a very active part — of the upper house; and was able to manipulate delays and adjournments—whenever they did not harm the political machine—about as he pleased.

But as Gilvey never hurt Alanson's personal machine, and, in fact, helped to oil it with the financial aid he gave to Alanson's private business, the Governor could wonder, but not protest.

The Legislature adjourned in the latter part of May, just after Alanson showed signs of nervous prostration. John Gilvey uttered words of deepest sympathy and advised Alanson to go to Europe. Alanson pleaded that he

could not afford the trip. His salary was only five thousand dollars.

His real reason for demurring was that a beneficial trip to Europe would keep him away from the State two months, and, under the State constitution, the powers of the Governor passed to the Lieutenant-Governor in case the chief executive was absent from the State more than thirty days.

Gilvey read the Governor's mind.

"I'll lend you the money, if that's al that is bothering you," he said. "As for leaving me with the full powers of your office, remember that the Legislature is not in session, and I can't enact a single law. Every employee that I could dismiss has the approval stamp of Henderson (the boss), and I'm not going to cross swords with him."

Alanson seemed a bit relieved at Gilvey's attitude.

"All you could do," he said, with a smile, "would be to pardon all the crooks in the State prisons."

Gilvey nodded.

"And thus," he replied with sarcasm, "increase the percentage of honesty among our glorious citizenry."

"You wouldn't say that on the stump," said Alanson with a grin.

Gilvey laughed.

"If you ever see me on the stump again," he retorted, "you'll hear me say that very thing."

This cheered Alanson more than he wished to show.

"Don't you want to be Governor next term?" he said, thrown off his guard.

"I'll be all the Governor I want to be while you're in Europe," said Gilvey.

And upon this Alanson telephoned to his wife to pack her trunks.

On the thirty-first day of the absence of the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor Gilvey, on being assured by the Attorney-General of the State that he was as free to behead, appoint, or pardon as if he had been elected Governor by the masses at the polls, sat in the executive chamber and rang for the pardon-clerk. That official quickly appeared.

"Prepare whatever papers are necessary in the case of Joseph Parker, Convict 12482 in the West Mill Prison," he said, "and have them here within two hours."

The pardon-clerk, a slave to precedent, was shocked.

"But, Mr. President—" he began, using the title due to Gilvey as the chief officer of the Senate.

"Governor," corrected John Gilvey.

"I beg your pardon," stammered the clerk.

"This is my day to grant pardons," remarked the frivolous Gilvey.

"But, Mr. Governor," pursued the clerk, "no application has been made for the pardon of any convict named Joseph Parker. No petitions—"

"I do not wish to interfere with your hoary customs," said Gilvey. "If an application is necessary, make one out and I'll sign it myself. If a petition is customary, bring one to me and I'll call in the people off the streets and have as many sign as you wish. Any good American citizen will sign any petition on any subject."

The pardon-clerk backed toward the door.

"And," continued the acting Governor, "don't traipse in here later and begin a recital of the crimes the convict has committed, in prison or out. I know all about them. And, above all, don't tell me that you're sure Governor Alanson wouldn't pardon him if he were here, because I'm just as sure of it as you are."

The pardon-clerk disappeared, bowing. Gilvey rang for his secretary and directed him to find out under what circumstances a pardoned convict left the prison. In ten minutes he had a report.

"He will have a suit of clothes," said the secretary, "and whatever little money he has earned—about fifteen dollars in this case—and a railroad ticket to his last home."

The acting Governor snorted.

"Tell the warden to consider the capital as Parker's last home, and have a keeper start with the man for this office as soon as the pardon reaches the prison. Tell him to have Parker here surely by to-morrow afternoon."

After which John Gilvey went for a long walk.

The office of the acting Governor was not busy the next afternoon. The politicians had it from headquarters that Gilvey would not take advantage of Alanson's absence, and that neither plums nor lemons would be distributed.

Gilvey spent the waiting hours either perusing a most absorbing treatise on open-hearth steel or looking out of the windows at the drizzle of the summer rain. At three o'clock his secretary announced the arrival of the keeper with the pardoned Parker.

"Give the keeper three cigars and my compliments," said Gilvey, who was always specific, "and tell him to return whence he came in an orderly manner, stopping at not more than seven saloons on his way to the station. Then bring Parker in without telling him who or what I am, close the door, take your hat and umbrella, and go away. The business of the State has ended for to-day."

Parker, as he stood before the acting Governor five minutes later, stared at him in a dull, stolid, defiant way. He did not know John Gilvey. Gilvey would hardly have known Joe Parker if they had met under other circumstances.

Parker knew that the man before whom he stood was an official and in some way responsible for his sudden, almost unwelcome, freedom, and he was prepared to answer the usual questions as to firm purpose of amendment, new starts in life, and similar impossibilities.

"How much money did you bring out of prison?" asked the acting Governor.

"Sixteen dollars," replied Joe Parker, wondering whether his inquisitor was going to double it or graft on it.

"No more than that?" demanded Gilvey.

"Fifty-five cents more," said Parker, wiggling his hat uncomfortably and shifting his hulk of a body from side to side, as an elephant weaves.

"Let me see it," ordered Gilvey, and Parker drew the bits of silver from his pocket.

"Put the half-dollar back in your pocket," said Gilvey.

Parker obeyed and stood dumbly, the nickel between his thumb and forefinger.

"You realize that you are a free man?" asked Gilvey.

"Yes," said Parker.

"And that you have a right to keep every cent of your money? That no man can take it from you without unlawful force?"

"Yes," said Parker.

"My name is Gilvey," said the acting Governor—"Johnny Gilvey—and you stole a nickel from me in the basement of the church."

Parker's dull eyes became a bit brighter, and then they widened as the acting Governor sprang at him.

Gilvey back-heeled him, threw him flat on the deep, soft carpet, throttled him, and tore the nickel out of his hand!

Then he opened the door and, as Parker rose, shoved him into the deserted corridor. Then he went to the window, and very soon he, the erstwhile squire, saw the erstwhile baron as the baron ran down the street through the drizzling rain. And the baron's shoulders were working as if he choked from some strange shock.

"I wish you would return as soon as you feel well enough to," the acting Governor wrote to the Governor that night. "I have just come into a certain amount of money, the lack of which has kept me with my nose to the grindstone longer than I have wished to stay."

**You can join THE CAVALIER LEGION and receive the red button with the green star free of charge by sending your name and address to the editor of THE CAVALIER, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. Everybody's reading it now.**

# HEART TO HEART TALKS

## BY THE EDITOR

MANY of the most distinguished men in history were unable, for some reason or other, to get along with their wives. The record of these mismated couples reads like acid splashed on the page of time.

Sir Walter Scott and his wife were constantly at swords' points. Lady Scott had a tongue both forked and red-hot. The gentle Scott made every conceivable effort to keep the conversation down to normal temperature, but without success.

One day, while walking with his wife in the fields, he pointed to some lambs, remarking, "Are they not beautiful?"

"Yes," said she. "Lambs are beautiful—boiled!"

Haydn's wife cared nothing for music, nagged him constantly, and made curl-papers of his musical scores. She kept at it for thirty-two years, at the end of which time Haydn closed his piano and beat it away from there. She was the only living person who could disturb his sunny disposition.

Lord Lytton and his wife, both of whom had bad tempers, quarreled incessantly.

Charles Dickens and his wife were so unsuited to each other that they lived apart several years preceding the novelist's death.

A young painter once communicated the fact to Sir Joshua Reynolds that he had taken a wife. "Then you are ruined as an artist," replied the Royal Academician.

Therefore it would seem that when great genius is blended in the holy bonds of wedlock the storm signals ought to go up. Let us see whether or not such is the case.

This whole idea of incompatibility is the basis of

## THE BLOOD TIE

### BY FRED JACKSON

and relates the love story of *Foulke Richardson* and *Marguerite Stevens.*

*Richardson* was an actor and *Marguerite* a society girl. *Richardson* was quite as eminent in the Thespian world as was she popular in society.

The extraordinary thing about the story is that the bride did not know the groom was an actor until she became engaged to him. In view of the fact that she was genuinely in love with him, it came as something of a shock when her friends and relatives insisted that such a marriage was out of the question. Every effort was made to induce her to reject him. She agreed, however, to marry him on condition that he give up the stage.

In so far as love is blind, *Foulke* acceded to this preposterous demand and made his farewell appearance. From that very hour he lived a life of torture and regret. He knew that the concession exacted of him was unfair and unjust. The situation became unbearable, and he returned to the stage, not so much on his own account, but in response to the importunings of the theater-loving public.

On the first night of his reappearance the most tragic thing that can happen in a man's life happens to *Foulke Richardson.*

Surely, you cannot expect me to relate just how *Marguerite Stevens* and her talented husband came into each other's lives again. But they did, nevertheless.

It is too bad Sir Joshua Reynolds isn't a reader of THE CAVALIER, so that he might read Fred Jackson's novelette, which will appear October 18.

Well, you can't have everything, Josh.

☙ ☙ ☙

Also, a very unusual serial, entitled

# THE LOOM OF LIFE

**BY STELLA M. DURING**

begins next week.

This is a story in which the hero appears to be foredoomed by fate. From the very opening chapter in the story, in which he is injured while saving the pet dog of the heroine, *Ruth Ericsen,* our young hero steps from misfortune to misfortune and tragedy to tragedy. He is even charged with murder, and the net that is woven around him is too tight for comfort.

The woman he loves doubts him.

He goes to Africa and returns only to see his mother die.

In an effort to clear himself of a false charge he once again goes out on the world's highway in search of proof that he is guiltless.

Nemesis gives him a breathing spell. The sky clears. Sunlight again enters his life. *Ruth* reappears, and in the end there is happiness. Just how this happiness is won and lost and won again is told with that charm that marks all of Stella During's literature.

☙ ☙ ☙

"BOOT ACRE'S LAST MAN," by L. T. Patterson, is one of those rare humorous stories of the West.

It is about a lawless mining town and the advent of a Chinaman, who one day tramped into the settlement and established a hand-laundry. The name of the town doesn't matter, but its most thickly populated section, the cemetery, was called Boot Acre. I suppose this was a corruption or an abbreviation of the idea that in that country men are laid to rest in God's acre with their boots on.

In any event, it was a serious question as to who would be the last man to be put away in Boot Acre, and just at that point the Chinaman drifted into town. The shootings went on unabated, but nobody plugged the chink—he was too valuable. So he washed and ironed and prospered until one morning another chink appeared on the horizon and established a rival laundry. Did the first Chinaman object? He certainly did! And from that moment there started a tong war which would put to shame the frenzied shootings in the Chinese quarters of either San Francisco or New York.

Sounds raw and melodramatic, doesn't it? Well, in spite of it all, there's a good laugh at the finish.

☙ ☙ ☙

"THE AIR OF CELAJES," by Willett Stockard, marks the return of a very popular writer.

It is a story of the hunter and the hunted, a pastime just now very much in vogue along the Mexican border. A man who seeks to escape the vengeance of another finally locates in Celajes, a fair garden in a country of gardens fair. The air of the place gets into his blood and he lolls away the days and nights in luxurious adolescence. In these surroundings his past overtakes him, and until the curtain is finally dropped on this amazing little drama, one feels nothing but the air of Celajes. It is sure to impress the readers of the story as it did the characters therein. No blood and thunder in this yarn.

☙ ☙ ☙

"JANE WARNER'S WAITING," by Anna Louise Forsyth, is a pathetic story of the girl who waits.

After all, women have a tough time of it. I suppose men think it's pretty soft to sit with folded hands and wait—wait until he asks her to marry, or, after marriage, to sit alone and wait until he comes home. Oh, yes, this is soft, soft as a bunch of cactus.

*Jane Warner* was one of those who sat and waited for the man to ask her to marry him. And she waited twenty years! Then, when he did muster up

spunk enough to pop the question, did she take a high dive to his manly buzzum? *She did not!* She tied a can to him as big as a gas-tank.

Now don't throw this story down with a bang and say: "Oh, shucks! Darn such a rotten ending, anyway." 'Cause the story has a good ending. If it hadn't, I wouldn't have bought it; honest to goodness, I wouldn't!

## "THE MASTERPIECE OF MAGAZINES"

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

You can rest assured that I shall always secure a copy of THE CAVALIER wherever I go, providing I can obtain it. In fact, I may truly say that *The Munsey*, in general, and the masterpiece of magazines, THE CAVALIER, in particular, have become a habit with me.

I always enjoy the Heart to Heart Talks because very often one finds therein some good criticism, convincing proof of the more than average intelligence of your readers. And as for you: Apart from the fact that you edit the best magazine published in any part of the world, I like the few words you do say, not because they are few, but because there is "vim" to them. You possess the rare knack of putting a great deal of truth and good sense into a few words.

I cannot conclude without expressing the pleasure I am getting out of the stories "Another Man's Shoes" and "A Forty-Story Fugitive."

Yours in "fiction and good fellowship,"
P. HOLLOWAY.

## WANTS IT DAILY

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have read the Heart to Heart Talks in the last issue (August 30) and wish to repeat what Mr. Burns says: "Make it daily."

Have just finished the third instalment of "Another Man's Shoes." It is fine.

Hurry along with "The Night Wind" please.

"Business Is Business" was a very good story, but "Jack Chanty" was better. Give us more like them.

May you live forever.

(MISS) MABEL WHITE.
205 Third Street,
Colfax, Washington.

## A LIST OF THEIR FAVORITES

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

THE CAVALIER is the best magazine of its kind, barring none. My husband and I read every story.

My favorites of late are: "The Catspaw," "A Halt for the Night," "Jack Chanty," "The Poacher," "The Forgotten Wedding," and others on that order. But I wish the author had told us what became of *Cecil* in the latter story.

I am very much interested in "The Girl Who Saved His Honor" and *can't hardly wait* for the next issue.

THE CAVALIER for ours every time.

MR. AND MRS. A. A. GLEASON.
543 Averill Avenue, Rochester, New York.

## STILL THE LEGION GROWS

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I wrote to you several days ago about sending me some CAVALIER LEGION buttons. Fearing you have not received this letter, I take the opportunity to write you again.

I wanted ten buttons for members of a club of which I am secretary. They are all CAVALIER readers, and we never let a week go by without having THE CAVALIER to read from. We all think it a wonderful magazine and advertise it above all other magazines in our district. We keep a record of the people who are now reading THE CAVALIER through our efforts, and to date it amounts to thirty-two.

Thanking you in advance for your favor, I remain

Yours very truly,
M. J. FLAHERTY,
Secretary American A. C.
48 Porter Street,
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## "WHERE PROSPERITY BECKONS"

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I am a constant reader of THE CAVALIER and one of its best friends.

Words fail to express my gratitude to you for placing before the reading public such a valuable pastime. I eagerly await every issue of THE CAVALIER.

I consider Fred Jackson one of the greatest writers of fiction we have and wish he would write a story every week, as I never grow tired of reading his work.

I would be highly pleased to wear a CAVALIER LEGION button if you will kindly send one to me.

Wishing you the success you so deserve, I am

Respectfully,
GENE MATHIS.

Our slogan: West Palm Beach.
"Where Prosperity Beckons."
West Palm Beach, Florida.

## WE'VE GOT THEM ON THE LIST

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I wish to congratulate you on Arnold Fredericks's mysteries. His "Honeymoon Detectives" are fine. If you have more of his stories your magazine is worth $25.

I wait patiently for THE CAVALIER every week, and when I do not find one of Arnold Fredericks's stories I am disappointed. If you can't have one of his in each issue, have one by the author of "The Room of Secrets." Please have one of the two.

1766 Vinton Avenue, WM. LEVY.
Memphis, Tennessee.

## NOT A QUESTION OF PRICE

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Enclosed please find ten cents, for which send me THE CAVALIER for May 24. I have been buying the magazine for two years and this is the only copy I missed.

THE CAVALIER is the best ten-cent magazine published, and to my notion it is better than many of the higher-priced magazines. We have more calls for it than for some of those. I have introduced it to more than "three of my friends," who have fallen in love with it.

Don't stop publishing it while Zionsville is on the map, please.

MRS. WILL NORTHERN.

L. Box 174,
Zionsville, Indiana.

## THEY COME INTO THE FOLD

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

As we are new readers of your magazine, and also your Heart to Heart Talks, we will say that we certainly like the stories we have read so far. We have heard so much about Fred Jackson that we can hardly wait till one of his yarns is published. We have not read any of his stories as yet, as we are just beginners.

We are very much interested in "The Girl Who Saved His Honor" and think that Mr. Arthur Applin is certainly a good writer. In fact, the whole magazine is great.

We have purchased two numbers so far and intend to continue. Also, we wish to become members of THE CAVALIER LEGION, so please send us buttons.

EDWARD J. LAFFERTY.
FRANK SIFFEL.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

## FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I have the honor to be a reader of your weekly magazine, THE CAVALIER, as have two of my friends. After reading about your LEGION we thought that it would be a distinction to be the first in Subiaco to become members. So, if Australia is not too far out of your way, you would oblige us by sending our three buttons care of the below address.

I might mention that I have not missed a copy of THE CAVALIER since it has been on sale in W. A. and am not likely to for a long time.

W. A. CRAIN.

61 Heytesbury Road,
Subiaco, West Australia.

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

Thought I would let you know that you have readers in this southern world paying nine pence per copy for THE CAVALIER, getting four issues at a time once a month. The best story in your magazine, or any other for that matter, to my mind was "Through the Portal of Dreams," published some time ago. It certainly was a masterpiece.

Your magazine is the best there is and once taken becomes a habit.

If possible, please send me a button.

J. N. SQUIRE.

Gosford, N. S. W.,
Australia.

## A BRIDE AND HER CAVALIER

EDITOR, CAVALIER:

I wish to thank you for the button; also the sample copy of THE CAVALIER. But the friend who so kindly sent you my name is a little late, because I have been reading this king of magazines for over a year and I cannot express myself as to how much I like it.

A few months after I married my husband found a copy of THE CAVALIER on a train and brought it home. Since then I have never missed a copy, except August 23. But I enclose ten cents in stamps. Be so kind as to mail it to me, because I feel lost without it.

I have just finished reading "The Conqueror" and I cannot say enough about it.

I never get lonesome when hubby comes home late, as I have such a good companion. And I suppose he is glad I have THE CAVALIER so that I don't scold him. Really, THE CAVALIER is a peacemaker in my home.

Please don't forget to mail me THE CAVALIER for August 23.

MRS. S. GOLDSTEIN.

6008 Pine Street,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

# CAVALIERETTES

I hope my friends will get interested in THE CAVALIER, for it is the best fiction magazine for the money in the United States.

L. LYON.

I take four magazines, and THE CAVALIER is the best of them all.

ALBERT BACHMANN.

Egypt, Massachusetts.

Fred Jackson's stories are particularly fine and I would appreciate a picture of him very much. If such a request is too much trouble, would like to have a full description of him.

MRS. E. RYAN.

1200 Twenty-Ninth Street, N. W.,
Washington, District of Columbia.

In dear old California,
Where oranges grow all the year,
We have every kind of an attraction,
But none can beat THE CAVALIER.

WILMOT ADAMS.

East San Diego, California.

The above is not Swinburnian in its poetical perfection, but it is the incontrovertible truth and therefore a work of art, and I appreciate it.

# MADE TO ORDER

**A SHORT STORY**

**BY FRANK CONDON**

MR. TIMOTHY MULREAVY, the Fourteenth Street tailor, carefully poured a gallon of kerosene down the wooden cellar stairs, tossed a bushel of excelsior after the oil, and then lighted the match. He stood thus for an instant while the flame grew in his fingers.

Such is fate.

If Mulreavy's match had instantly flared into a broad flame this history would not be written, because he would have cast it into the oily excelsior and rushed from his shop, but in the instant it required for the bit of wood to glow a figure darkened the entrance to the shop and a deep voice inquired:

"What are you doing, Mulreavy?"

The tailor blew out his instrument of arson and turned around.

"When you were born, Mr. Burke," he said, somewhat bitterly, "the stars ordained that you should everlastingly butt into critical events. I was about to burn down the building and grab off enough insurance money to buy bread for the wife and children."

"And you think you could get away with that baby trick?" the newcomer scoffed. "You're a simpleton. You belong to the wrong race for that kind of chicanery. Why are you burning down the shop?"

"Business is rotten. I can make more money selling bone collar-buttons from a push-cart. It was either a case of commit suicide or burn up—and suicide is a sin."

Mr. Burke dropped into a chair and smiled.

"It's a lucky thing I happened in at this minute," he continued. "I've had you in mind all morning, and if I'd come two minutes later you would have spoiled my plans with your little bonfire. Did you know I've sold out the hand-book to a man from Speonk, Long Island?"

"I did not," Mulreavy growled.

"I have sold out completely. I am now free to engage in fresh enterprises. I have long believed that there is a bale of money to be made in this tailor business of yours, but not the way you're doing. You're behind the times, Mulreavy. The lads to-day want clothes that you don't sell. What this business needs is a strong injection of sulphate of brains, and that's why I've called in this morning."

"What are you talking about?" the tailor demanded.

"I'm saying that with your consent I'll come into this slowly petrifying business and bring it back to life. We'll make more money in a week than you do in a year; but you've got to do what I say. Your way is no good."

"What'll you do?" Mulreavy asked, with the first show of interest?

"Leave it to me," Burke replied. "Show me your books and tell me what stock you have on hand. Come along. We may as well start at once, because if we wait somebody else may grab this idea."

Then came a change in the appearance of Mulreavy's tailor-shop. The

dusty style-cards disappeared from his windows and the dim sign over his door came down, to be replaced by a gorgeous electric affair.

Burke found a boy and dressed him in a suit of green livery. There appeared in the window a monster sign in gold letters announcing:

**THIS STORE IS NOW UNDER A NEW MANAGEMENT.**

**Messrs. Burke & Mulreavy announce a new departure in the production of clothes for men. Come in and get your clothes from the firm that dresses America's greatest citizens. We make clothes for royal princes as well as bootblacks. Look at our uncalled-for suits. We have clothes made by New York's finest tailors for famous people who neglected to send for them. Perhaps one of these suits will fit you. Come in and see. Grand opening next Monday.**

When Mulreavy arrived at the store on the day of the "grand opening" he found Burke before him, in animated conversation with a little man in a faded green suit.

"Good morning, Mr. Mulreavy," Burke greeted him. "I want you to meet Mr. McWhortle." Mulreavy shook hands with the little man.

"A funny thing happened," Burke went on, staring at Mr. McWhortle in admiration. "I was standing in the door a little while ago wondering whether to ship that suit to the Duke of Connaught or wait till he calls for it when I saw Mr. McWhortle coming across the street. I want you, Mr. Mulreavy, to take a good look at Mr. McWhortle. The minute he came within earshot I says to him:

"'Good morning, Danny Maher, and whatever are you doing here in New York when only the other day I read that you'd won the royal palace stakes for the Emperor of Germany?' Naturally Mr. McWhortle looked at me in astonishment, because he ain't Danny Maher at all. But, Mulreavy, look at the resemblance? If Danny Maher's own mother came along this minute she'd be puzzled to know whether McWhortle is Maher or not."

"You *do* look like Danny, that's a fact," Mulreavy said, looking at McWhortle's stomach. What is your business?"

"I'm the circular-knife man in a head-cheese factory," Mr. McWhortle answered in a light tenor voice.

"And he's come in here by just plain, every-day dog luck," Burke went on, "to get a suit of clothes. Some men certainly fall into good things. Mulreavy, go back there in the vault and bring out that brown suit we made for Tod Sloane — the one with the pearl buttons. No, you wait here and I'll get it."

"You'd 'a' made a great jockey," Mulreavy said to McWhortle while his partner went after the suit.

Burke returned, holding aloft the sartorial triumph.

"That," he said, waving the suit before Mr. McWhortle, "was built for Tod Sloane along lines personally suggested to him by the late King Edward. We agreed to make it for two hundred dollars, and we did, but the greatest jockey of modern times was forced to leave it behind him when he started for Europe and it is consequently on our hands, Mr. McWhortle. It'll fit you like the plaster on the wall, and we'll give it to you for eighty-five dollars."

The head-cheese man listened to the siren tongue of Mr. Burke, went home and drew his wife's money from the Bronx Mortgage and Loan Company, and that same afternoon he returned and took away the celebrated suit.

"There," Burke said to his partner, going over McWhortle's money to make certain of the count. "You see what I mean by putting new ideas into the business."

From the moment Mr. Burke became a partner the tailoring business picked up. For the most part, Mul-

reavy stood aghast and watched his partner make sales, and Mr. Burke, being full of entertaining conversation, was satisfied to do most of the work.

It was Burke's theory that some part of every human body bears a resemblance to some part of another human body, and that, for instance, the lowly street-car conductor on the Third Avenue line may in no other way remind you of Napoleon Bonaparte, but that he may have the exact droop of the shoulders made famous by the Corsican gentleman.

Furthermore, Mr. Burke understood the vanity that is in man, and played upon it with results.

The first day's sales amounted to one hundred and forty dollars. Mulreavy was tickled, but Burke regarded the record as a mere start. The second day the partners sold ten suits and dragged in three hundred. Then business dropped off for a few days.

On Friday morning a citizen appeared in search of a suit, and Burke greeted him with acclaim.

"I've got a suit here," he said, "that ought to please you right down to the ground. Get me the tape, Mulreavy. I want to measure this gentleman." Burke measured and called off the figures while his partner marked them down secretively. Then the two went to one side and held a conference, during which they shook their heads mysteriously. The stranger waited anxiously.

"It's a strange thing about you, mister," Burke finally explained. "You're somewhat of a physical marvel. Did you ever know it?"

"I did not," replied the customer.

"Well, sir," Burke continued, examining his measurements, "you have a wonderful figure. When I went over your shoulders I was at once struck by the unmistakable fact that you and Jim Corbett are exactly alike. But there the resemblance ends, Mr.—"

"Mulheiser," said the man.

"Coming down," continued Burke, "I find that you have Jeffries's stomach and Fitzsimmons's legs, while your neck and head are so much like Bat Nelson's that a microscope couldn't tell the difference. You're not a fighting man by any chance, are you, Mr. Mulheiser?"

"I'm in the retail-liquor business," the customer said, somewhat impressed. "What I want is a stylish suit, but not too loud."

"I wonder," continued Burke timidly, "whether you'd object to wearing a suit that was made for a colored man? Wait a minute before you say no. You see, we've got a remarkable gray-green suit of clothes, made by Heinrich, of Fifth Avenue, for Jack Johnson. Johnson is in Paris, and will not return to America for some time on account of certain matters, and we took the suit off Heinrich's hands.

"It may be that Johnson is just a trifle thicker through the chest than you are, Mr. Mulheiser, but remember that Jack Johnson never even saw this suit, so there's nothing wrong about your buying it. We'll let you have it for an even fifty, and if Johnson had bought it he would have paid a hundred and fifty. Want to look at it?"

"Sure!" said Mulheiser.

"Tim," Burke commanded, "go get that Jack Johnson special."

Half an hour later Mr. Mulheiser owned the gray-green suit and the Burke-Mulreavy firm had agreed to reduce the Johnsonian chest to Mulheiserian proportions.

In the course of time Burke's skill increased. He made it a practise to find out from a prospective customer what line of human endeavor most interested him.

If a man was a baseball fan, Burke found in him resemblances to the diamond stars shining most lustrously at the moment.

He returned one afternoon to find a customer escaping from the artless hands of Mulreavy. The young man

was head clerk in a cigar-store, and from his pocket protruded a sporting extra.

"Sorry we couldn't please you," said Burke, taking off his hat. "Come in again some time. That was a great game Pittsburgh put up this morning."

"The Giants were off their stride," retorted the vanishing customer with some heat, because that morning the Pirates had wiped up the bosom of the earth with the prides of Gotham. "There ain't a team in either league can touch them when they're right. I'm tellin' you something. This old boy Matty is the greatest pitcher ever lived. Wait till you read the score to-night."

"Matty's a good pitcher," Burke smiled. "I know him well. Many's the suit we've made for him."

"You have?" exclaimed the prospect, with quickened interest.

"Got two suits waiting for him now. One of them he won't need. You're about his build, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't know!" answered the flattered cigar clerk. "Matty's a pretty big fellow."

"So are you," replied Burke. "Let's see, just for fun. We've got Matty's measurements on our books."

It turned out as Burke expected. The young man not only had the same waist line as the great pitcher, but he also had Walter Johnson's chest, Ty Cobb's hips, and Frank Baker's arms.

He left the shop of Burke & Mulreavy in a most satisfied state of mind. Behind him was an order for two suits of clothes and a twenty-dollar deposit.

Another young man in the lime-and-cement business on Amsterdam Avenue bought a suit intended for John Drew. As Burke truthfully stated, Mr. Drew had not seen the suit.

"You may or may not know it," explained Mr. Burke, "but John Drew can never wear a suit that allows for the muscular droop of the shoulders. He's not developed through the shoulder muscles and you are. That's why he wouldn't take this suit, and that's what makes it a perfect fit for you. He wanted us to change the shoulders, and I assured him that it would ruin the style of the garment—and rather than do that I preferred to wait until the right man came along. You don't know how lucky you are."

A hapless citizen from Jersey City inadvertently stopped before the Burke-Mulreavy windows to tie a flying shoe-lace, and the book under his arm was the tip-off to the quick-witted Burke.

It was a book of music, and before the Jerseyite escaped he had purchased a snuff-colored fall suit that John Phillip Sousa had neglected to call for.

The citizen had never seen Sousa, but he made up his mind he would do so at the earliest opportunity, because he had never known before that he and Sousa were as alike as peas in the well-known pod.

But, in spite of Mr. Burke's increased skill and persuasiveness, there remained one particular suit of clothes in the shop that would not sell.

Burke had gone through the realm of sport, politics, religion, literature, and war, gathering his heroes as he went, plucking from the dead as well as the living, and still the suit remained in the shop.

It was not a beautiful suit. Black was its color, and some uncaged maniac in the tailor business had inserted a pink stripe that ran through the sober black without regard for regularity.

Burke realized that the selling of that suit would take time and ingenuity. He put it up as a mark to shoot at, realizing that if he could wish it upon some unfortunate New Yorker and get real money for it there was nothing made by man he could not sell.

It was a long time before he could even get a nibble at the pink-striped black, but eventually there came a thin man who looked as though he might be slightly feeble in the pilot-house. To him Burke displayed the horror, speaking his kindest words.

To begin with, the suit did not fit the thin stranger, nor did it come anywhere near fitting him. He was very tall and caved in about the middle, and his legs were rambling and with knobs where the knees should be.

"I don't know whether I can take a chance or not," Mr. Burke said, studying the customer and appearing to suffer mentally. "These athletes are so uncertain, and he might take it into his head to come here and demand it. Then where would I be?"

"I don't get you," said the thin person.

"I'm thinking of Jim Thorpe, the Indian athlete," Burke continued. "He's had a suit here for so long that he may have forgotten it, and, while it's the exact suit that will make you look good to your family, I don't know whether I can let you have it. You know Thorpe, of course — the chap who won the Pentathlon over in Sweden and turned in the greatest all-around athletic record ever made?"

"Everybody knows about him," the stranger agreed.

"You can't afford to offend a customer like that," continued Burke, "but I'm going to take a chance, because it would be a shame to keep this suit away from you. You have the physique that needs this suit to bring out the good points. Boy, get me Jim Thorpe's suit—the one we had made for him when he returned from Europe."

They brought out the pink-striped nightmare, and Burke waited to see the effect. The stranger looked at it without blinking, and Burke was encouraged.

"If Thorpe had only had your legs in the Olympic games there wouldn't have been any other prize winners," Burke said admiringly. With Mulreavy's assistance, he urged Mr. Jarvis—Mr. Oscar Jarvis, he said was his name—into the suit and with the aid of pins they gathered up the billows until there was the imitation of a fit.

That night Mulreavy worked overtime on the suit, and the next morning Mr. Jarvis called, put on the garments, paid for them, and walked out of the shop. Burke & Mulreavy sighed a glad sigh.

It is customary for one who has made a pleasing purchase to celebrate the event, and Mr. Jarvis steered a straight course for Third Avenue, turned to the south, and, after walking several blocks, he entered a hospitable door and called for a celebrant.

The café was crowded with rough men, who, as a rule, pay little attention to the garments of their fellow beings, but the strange object who entered attracted their notice at once.

There were a number of critical comments which escaped the ears of Mr. Jarvis, who stood at one end peacefully libating. Then a large truck-driver looked pointedly at the new suit and remarked to his companion:

"Some suit, hey?"

"It reminds me of something I saw that time I had the tremens," the other answered.

Mr. Jarvis glanced scathingly at the commentors.

"If you two bums only had an education," he said pleasantly, "you would know that this is a high-grade suit, and I may add that it was made for Jim Thorpe, the athlete."

From that point the conversational ball passed back and forth with rapidity.

Mr. Jarvis indulged in some sarcasm, and, not understanding sarcasm, the truck-driver tossed his beer lightly toward the new suit, provoking a howl of rage from its owner.

The rage was all right, but when Mr. Jarvis undertook to sink his right fist in the driver's stomach the situation changed.

The next five minutes were devoted to hasty callisthenics, and at the end of the activity Mr. Jarvis and suit were shot through the swinging doors with extreme force and landed across the sidewalk, with part of the Jarvis person in the gutter.

Mr. Jarvis was suffering from contusions, abrasions, and sundry pains, and the suit was damaged. A crowd of passers-by gathered about his prostrate figure and sympathized with him, and a tall, broad-shouldered man with bronzed skin leaned over, took Jarvis by the shoulder, and lifted him to his feet.

Being still somewhat dazed, Mr. Jarvis tottered, and the powerful young man kindly placed him against a lamp-post. Then the rescuing citizen walked slowly away.

He was slight about the waist, but there was no mistaking the fact that he was a young Hercules, and, as Mr. Jarvis was scrawny and undeveloped, the man who picked him up was athletic and light on his feet.

"You know who that was, mister?" an impudent newsie inquired, poking his face under Mr. Jarvis's nose.

"No," Jarvis answered weakly. "Who was it?"

"Jim Thorpe," grinned the urchin. "The guy that plays with the Giants!"

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# REPAID

**By Evelyn Marie Stuart**

"WHERE did I come from, mama?"
A little girl asked one day,
And at her query the mother sighed,
Scarce knowing what to say.

The angels, the stork, or the doctor,
Which had it better be?
Then she met the little one's trust with truth,
"Darling, you came from me."

So she told her the old, old story,
The story so hard to tell,
With a clutch of fear at her mother's heart
Lest it might not all be well.

But the little one only answered,
With kisses that calmed her fear,
"That's why we love each other so well,
Isn't it, mother dear?"

Oh, mother, the truth is holy,
While a lie can never be white,
And the heart of a child will understand
If you tell it the story right.

# ALONG THE BACK TRAIL

A SHORT STORY

BY GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH

THE Royal Northwest Mounted Police had a man of nerve and brains in Corporal Wesly Dorrington; but Corporal Wes, as he was familiarly called by his boon companions, possessed the heart of a woman and the sympathies of a child, although this was not so well known except by a few.

The fugitive from justice took note only of his ironlike nerves when he made the round-up; of his cool, steady gray eyes that never flinched or flickered in emergencies; of his remarkable strength and endurance when on the trail; and, above all, of his absolute disregard of personal danger when duty called him to make an arrest.

Corporal Dorrington had thrice pursued his quarry to the lonely arctic regions and brought them back under conditions that excited the respect and admiration of even the hardy adventurers of the Northwest Mounted Police.

He had that great virtue of the human bloodhound of never abandoning the search, and when once camped on the trail of a fugitive he knew neither weariness nor discouragement.

He was now engaged in one of his tireless man hunts. The trail had led him from the comparatively summerlike atmosphere around Athabasca to Fort Resolution on the Great Slave Lake, and thence to Fort Good Hope under the arctic circle, where he once more plunged into the wilderness of snow and ice.

From this point on he had no trail or guide to indicate the destination of the murderer. He shrewdly surmised that his quarry would slacken his pace when once lost in the great white north where neither man nor beast could exist for long without supplies.

Corporal Wes had ways of shifting and foraging for food that made existence seem almost miraculous. When other men starved he grew sleek and fat; exposure to elements that killed many brought to him only the exhilaration of active, pulsing life. He could subsist on leather soup and sleep on an ice-hummock, and still retain his alertness of mind and body.

Somewhere between Fort Good Hope and the great arctic sea he stumbled upon the halting trail of his victim. This brought neither joy nor sadness to him. He simply grunted and continued his journey.

It was sixty degrees below zero, and storms of snow had continually filled the air with fine particles of hard pellets. He was a thousand miles north of civilization, and within a few score miles of the Arctic Ocean. In that great region of loneliness it was man to man, and the murderer had an equal chance with his pursuer. There was no law to punish the offender.

For days the corporal had seen evident signs of the escaping fugitive—a bit of charred wood where a camp had been made, a print in the snow that had not been covered by the drifting clouds of fine flakes, a strip of fur or other apparel that had been loosened and lost. Each sign showed him that he was getting closer to the man.

Then one day his eyes, searching the horizon, discovered a dark object that moved forward irregularly, hobbling and dragging weary feet that were palsied with the cold and fatigue. After that it was easy. Keeping the figure in view, Corporal Dorrington made the approach gradual, tormenting and worrying the game by tactics that he knew so well how to practise.

Twice the fugitive had turned and waited for him, but he had not accepted the challenge. Then, in desperation, the man had fled blindly and haltingly until his strength was exhausted; but he could not increase the lead. In his own good time and way the corporal would close in upon his antagonist and make the capture.

Then would begin the weary march back to civilization—the long days of travel and the sleepless nights of watching.

Now the quarry had settled down to a slow, dogged gait, with never a glance over the shoulder or any attempt to steal away. It was as if the man had resigned himself to the inevitable, but, driven by some spirit which he could not resist, he plodded onward, ever onward.

Still, the wary pursuer kept his distance. The shadow of his presence on the trail he knew would wear down and break the most stubborn spirit. It is not so much the capture as the dread of it that haunts and terrifies the criminal. In that great arctic desolation the tragedy was rendered a thousandfold more dreadful.

On the third day the fugitive stumbled, and appeared too weak to rise and resume the journey. He lay there huddled up in the snow, a mere blotch on the arctic waste. The corporal watched him carefully — and waited. If this was a trick to lure him to his death he would not be caught napping.

The dark object lay there so long that the pursuer grew worried. In that temperature it did not take many hours for the blood to freeze in the veins. If the fugitive was really exhausted there was danger of death cheating the corporal of his victim.

He approached warily, holding himself in readiness for quick action. In the dim arctic day the light was none too good, and it was necessary to study every footstep with caution. But the figure did not move.

Within fifty feet of the man the corporal could see that the hands were thrown out as if they had been flung there to intercept the fall. There was no weapon in either.

Corporal Dorrington closed in on the fugitive then swiftly and silently, but his caution and alertness were not needed. The form was motionless and inert. The head was buried beneath the outflung arms as if to protect the face from the icy blasts.

Corporal Dorrington lifted the stiffened arms and turned the body over. It was rigid and taut. The fear that he had waited too long galvanized him into sudden activity. When the face was turned toward him so that, even in the poor arctic light, he could see the features, he gave a little exclamation of surprise.

The features were unmistakably those of a woman—a young woman whose face, drawn and hagged from exposure and exhaustion, was still marked by lines of beauty.

For a moment the man stood in petrified amazement, gazing down into the still face.

Then he gathered the stiff body into his arms and carried it to the lee side of an ice hummock. The warmth of his own body helped to revive the unconscious woman, and a sigh in time escaped the lips.

Corporal Dorrington, still wondering, worked over her for an hour, rubbing and chafing the face and hands, and discarding his own outer clothes to wrap about her. Under his active exertions the woman slowly came back to life and the eyes opened.

They stared at the man in silent misery. Corporal Wes watched them, and when the eyelids fluttered shut again

he started as though he had forgotten something. He renewed the rubbing until the woman again stirred uneasily and winced.

"Is it necessary?" she asked, half opening the eyes. "I'm very tired and sleepy."

Even as the words left her lips she dropped off into exhausted slumber. He covered her with his own blanket, and then to keep warm busied himself in preparing a camp.

That night the mercury dropped almost out of sight. If there had been any one to take an official register of it the record would have been pronounced unbeatable. Corporal Wes never remembered experiencing any such frightful weather.

Finally, in fear lest his prisoner should freeze, he wrapped her in his arms, and through the long hours of the night they lay there, imparting warmth to each other.

When morning dawned he prepared their breakfast and noted with joy that the woman was strong enough to eat and drink. She had slept through the dreamless night and much of her weariness had departed.

She even attempted to smile when he placed the steaming coffee in her hands.

"You were a long time coming to my assistance," she said. "I think I must have fallen."

"Yes, you fell," he replied. "I found you half frozen in the snow. Another half-hour and it would have been too late."

She sighed and smiled bitterly.

"I don't think it would have made much difference. I wonder if you haven't done me more injury than good in saving my life."

"I don't know. I don't stop to think of that when I find a person in danger."

"No, I suppose not."

She drank her coffee in silence. When finished she lay back and stared at him with eyes that made him uncomfortable. They were as brown as a seal's and as bright as sparkling gems.

"I wonder why you were following me," she said suddenly, with a quizzical expression in her eyes.

Corporal Dorrington started at this query and cleared his throat. Then honestly he answered:

"It was a mistake. I took you for somebody else."

"And you were disappointed in finding only me?"

"Yes," he answered frankly, "I was; but more surprised than disappointed. I couldn't account for it. I can't now."

She laughed merrily. The sound of it rang sweetly on the cold air. It seemed to revive fond memories in Dorrington's breast, and he smiled down at her.

"It is so easy to deceive men," she said, looking up at him with her brown eyes.

He nodded gravely.

"Yes, I can imagine it is easy for you to deceive men—if you wanted to. You have a face that men would trust and love, but—"

"Well—what else were you going to say?" she remarked when he stopped.

"Nothing!"

"You were going to say something disagreeable. Well, say it. It doesn't matter out here. We can be as frank and unconventional as we please here. There is none to criticize us."

"Hardly," with a grim smile. "I think we must be five hundred miles from any other human being."

She shivered at this announcement.

"So far as that? How terribly lonely it is when you think of it! Before you came I—thought I'd go insane. I tried twice to go to you, but you always retreated. You ran away from me. Then I thought it—it must be a shadow, and not a real man. It frightened me, and I ran and ran until—until I fell and you found me."

"Then you weren't expecting me?"

"Expecting you? Why should I?"

There was a little defiance in the voice, but, in spite of the innocence of the face and eyes, he could detect a lurking fear. She was concealing something from him—but what?

He changed the subject abruptly.

"We must begin the return trip tomorrow."

"I—I don't think I'm able. You can go without me."

He smiled and shook his head.

"I won't go without you. If you can't walk I will stay until you can."

"My feet are frozen," she replied. "It may be days before I can use them."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he said. "They should be attended to at once. I will—"

He stooped down and tore off the lacing of the boots. The skin was red and swollen from the ankles down, but the flesh was soft and tender to the touch. With rare gentleness and skill he rubbed and chafed the feet with snow, but, in spite of his tenderness, she winced with pain. The feet were in a bad way, but they were beautiful and altogether too small and tender for such hardships.

He waited three days for the swollen feet and ankles to assume their normal condition. Meanwhile, he improved their camp, piling snow and ice cakes on the windward side until they had a very comfortable shelter.

Then he foraged around for such food as he could find. A snowy owl, a couple of ptarmigans, and a white fox were killed, and their flesh added much to their nourishment.

Always the corporal waited upon her with the delicacy of one accustomed to such service. A dozen times a day he replenished the fire, examined her feet, or made her drink of the hot broth he made out of the carcasses and bones of the animals and birds.

She watched him closely, often from between half-shut lids. He was good to look at, with his tall, lithe, closely knit figure. Even back in civilization where many others of his kind would challenge comparison he would attract attention.

As for her, with her jet-black hair, large, luminous eyes, and scarlet cheeks and lips, now that life and health were returning to her, Corporal Wes knew that she was beautiful, even as beauty is judged in New York, Paris, and London. In that lonely arctic wilderness he might well be excused for believing that he had never before looked upon such loveliness.

He had refrained from asking her pertinent questions. Somehow he took it for granted that she understood that he knew. Yet it puzzled him not a little. Somewhere back on the trail she had parted with the man he had been chasing, and then deftly and skilfully led the pursuer on the false scent.

It had been a clever piece of work—far cleverer than a man could have done. That is why Corporal Wes didn't feel the chagrin and disappointment of the baffled officer. It was no disgrace to be thus deceived by such a fair adventuress.

In a way he enjoyed it. In time he could pick up the trail of the murderer anew, and then—well, meanwhile, he could not leave her there in the arctic loneliness to die.

When the frozen feet were well enough to bear her weight they took up the back trail. Their march was interrupted by frequent halts, for she was still weak, and the feet would swell and pain her terribly.

"You know the trail with your eyes closed, I believe," she said on the seventh day of their adventure.

"Why, yes," he replied with a little surprise in his voice. "Why shouldn't I?"

"I thought the drifting snow would cover it up."

"I have other landmarks and signs. I've lived in these regions for many years."

She looked inquiringly at him, but he offered no further words of explanation. She closed her lips and

trudged on. It is an unwritten law of the Northwest that the past of a man or woman needs no explaining. The present is accepted of sufficient importance to determine one's status.

" Where are we going? " she asked suddenly, stopping.

" Where? Why, back to — to — where the trail breaks. Then I shall mark it and return after I conduct you to some safe place."

" Suppose I refused to go? "

He looked slowly and inquiringly at her.

" Why, you won't do that, I'm sure."

" No, I suppose not. You seem to have a masterful way with you. Do you always make your prisoners follow you so easily? "

" They always come — willingly or unwillingly."

She sighed. They walked along in silence; then, as she began to limp and drag her feet, he placed her arm across his shoulder and assisted her. She let him do it without protest.

They walked in this way for perhaps a mile, her body sagging and growing heavier at every yard. Suddenly she stopped. She thrust a hand in her bosom and drew something out and handed it to him. It was a small revolver.

" I could have killed you a dozen times. Why didn't you take this from me before? Don't you generally disarm your prisoners after arresting them? "

" But I knew you wouldn't. You're not my prisoner, you know."

Her face wore a puzzled expression.

" No, I didn't know it."

His own face broke into a smile as he answered:

" Do you think I would arrest you for that? If you had been a man I might. But a woman—no, I couldn't do it."

" Then why are you so anxious to return? Couldn't we take another direction? "

" This leads back to the break in the trail. I must find that first, and then escort you to some safe place."

She nodded her head in understanding.

" You think," she said again, " that you will find him? "

" Yes, I know I will. I always do."

His confidence nettled her, and once or twice she tried to lead him astray, exerting all her ingenuity to deceive him. But he only smiled and shook his head.

" No, that isn't the way."

She pretended great weariness at day and complained of her feet with forced tears in her eyes; then at night after hours of rest she felt refreshed and begged him to go on with her. So they trudged through the snow under the darkness of the black night. But her ruse failed. When morning dawned she saw that they were still on the trail. She could not lead him astray even in the darkness.

" I believe you have the eyes of an owl! " she exclaimed petulantly.

" Why? " he asked innocently.

" Nothing. I'm tired. Let me rest."

They rested for an hour, and when they resumed she walked abreast of him with wonderful spryness.

" Your feet are better? " he asked.

She nodded without speaking. For four hours they kept up the steady pace. Then suddenly the woman stopped in her tracks. Her face was white and her eyes startlingly brilliant.

" What is it? " he asked, stopping to gaze at her.

" Nothing—only we're near it."

" The break in the trail? "

" That's what you call it," she replied. " I don't know why. You've never told me."

" I thought you understood," he said simply. " It's where you threw me off the scent. You took this trail and he took the other. I must start fresh from that point—after you are safe."

She stood looking steadily at him, her face puckered up with doubt and

inquiry. Slowly the light of intelligence dawned on it.

"You think," she said slowly, "that he took another direction — left me there, while I—I went this way to deceive you?"

"What else could I think?"

"Then you don't know?"

He was puzzled at this question, and only stared hard at her. Women were so hard to read!

"I thought you knew, and that — well, come, I will show you."

This time she walked ahead. She followed the trail as unerringly as a man. She never hesitated nor turned aside, but with the sureness of a bloodhound on the scent retraced her footsteps, although drifting snow had long since obliterated any imprints.

They crossed icy snow ridges and skirted high hummocks that were too steep to climb over. Then they debouched into a sea of drifting ledges that stretched out endlessly ahead. She reached the center of this desert-like level and stopped.

"Here it is!" she announced.

He looked about him, but saw nothing. The flush that entered his cheeks amused her. She smiled in spite of her grim misery.

He was closely scanning the obliterated trail, going back and forth and circling round and round like a retriever, but no light of intelligence entered his face. He was clearly puzzled. She watched him in silence and waited.

"It is very puzzling," he admitted after a long pause. "I find the break, but nothing else. There is only one trail."

"Did you expect to find two?" she asked.

He nodded and resumed a search of the snowy landscape with his sharp eyes.

"You came up here—two of you—and then you took this direction; but the other—where did he go?"

"How do you know there were two?"



He shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't at first. I was stupid. I wasn't expecting any one else until I met you. Then I knew I had been deceived. He had used you as a blind to lead me off his trail."

Suddenly his eyes brightened.

"I have it," he said with a smile. "He went back. Of course he did. That was the game. He hid until I passed him, and then he retreated. I am very blind."

An expression of doubt entered her face. She looked closely at him with eyes narrowed to mere slits and nostrils distended. Her hands were clasped in front of her.

"Then if he has escaped — gone back on the trail—you—you will not place me under arrest — for complicity in—"

He shook his head negatively.

"You must have had some good motive," he replied gently. "I won't ask you what it is, but, Lord! I can't understand how any such beast as he could have an influence over a woman like—like—"

He did not finish the sentence, but walked away with a rumble in his voice. He made another examination of the trail, and finally returned to her.

"We will go on now."

"Where?"

"Back to Fort Good Hope—unless I can pick up his trail on the way. Then I might send you on alone, and I will follow him. You see I must have him—dead or alive."

"Oh! — dead or alive?" she repeated.

"Yes, he can't escape me—not so long as I live."

She stood in perfect silence, staring at him until, uncomfortable under her gaze, he moved uneasily and said:

"Come, we are losing valuable time. We must go."

She seized his arm suddenly and detained him. Her eyes were strangely bright.

"No, we can't go on until I tell you."

"What is there to tell?"

She moved away, plucking at his arm to make him follow. A dozen yards away she stopped and shivered. Corporal Wes looked down at her in surprise.

"What is it?" he asked in answer to her unexpressed words.

"He did not escape," she whispered, swaying slightly toward him.

"Did not escape?" he repeated stupidly.

"No, he is here."

He gazed around him in absolute mystification.

"Where?"

"I buried him under the snow and ice—there at your feet. Oh, you can find him, but I—I—can't look at him."

She covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

"He died here, and you buried him?" he stammered.

She made no immediate reply. Her figure shook as dry sobs agitated it. Then she looked up bravely.

"No, I killed him!" she exclaimed, trembling.

Corporal Wesley Dorrington never started so violently before in his life. For once he was completely taken off his guard. He stared at the woman in baffled surprise.

"You killed him?" he murmured helplessly.

"Yes. I shot him. I followed him night and day—night and day—until I overtook him here. Then—then—I crept upon him and—shot him!"

Again she covered her face and shook with agitation.

"But why?" he asked in a low voice.

"Because—because," she stammered between muffled sobs, "he killed my father—murdered him in cold blood before my eyes, and — and — I swore vengeance!"

Corporal Dorrington waited for the sobbing to cease.

"And you buried him here in the snow?"

She nodded.

"Then why did you go on? Why didn't you return?"

"Because I knew you were coming after him. I thought I could elude you—make you think it was his trail you were following. I didn't care where I went so long as—as— Oh, it has haunted me night and day! I—I couldn't sleep. It has been terrible! Now—I'm glad you've come."

She removed her hands and looked him fearlessly in the face.

"I am your prisoner, after all — don't you see?" she added with a wan smile.

Corporal Dorrington looked away from her. He was silent for so long that she watched him with apprehensive eyes.

"He was a bad man," he said finally, as if talking to himself. "A price was on his head. I was ordered to take him—dead or alive. Well, he's dead. I can report that back to headquarters. That is all."

"You—you're not going to take me—you're not going to report that—that—"

"Yes, I'm going to take you back—if you will come. But you needn't—not if you don't want to. It will be a long trail, but I hope there'll be no breaks in it. Will you come, or—"

She smiled through her tears as she fastened her eyes upon him.

"You're a very masterful man. I wonder if you treat your prisoners harshly."

"No," he answered, smiling now himself. "I have the reputation of being very gentle with them if they come willingly."

"I think, then," she answered, "that I will go — willingly. I am terribly lonely now that father is dead."

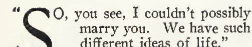
"I will make you forget your loneliness," he said simply. "Come, we must be going."

Then they took up the back trail and trudged together through the rising storm of snow, but as they breasted the icy blasts they hardly felt the sting of the arctic pellets.

# ELIZABETH'S CONVERSION

A SHORT STORY

BY STANTON LEEDS



"SO, you see, I couldn't possibly marry you. We have such different ideas of life."

Saying this she had taken, as it were, the intertwining silver cords of their boy-and-girl affection, full twenty years of intimacy, and snapped them clean and clear. This from Elizabeth! He hardly credited his hearing.

Sharply as lightning cuts the appalling blackness of a rain-swept night, so sharply did her clipped, brief words cleanse the distemper of his mental attitude toward her that it needed a silent minute for him to sense his innate and changed awakening.

Then he shook back his shoulders and stood up. He was free.

When William—or Bill, as he was called without his mother's permission—went to New Haven he became a famous half-back.

It was about the same time that Bill went to Yale as a freshman that Elizabeth Trevor, whom Bill had known so long that he had forgotten when he had not known her, came back from being finished at a New York boarding-school and packed up to go to Paris.

Elizabeth had gone away a blue-eyed doll, with soft hair falling down her back in a wealth of tossing curls. She returned from school a young lady. She returned from Paris—spoiled.

"Good-by, Billy," she said to him at the station.

She shook hands with him frankly but stiff-armed, thereby leashing his tendency to show affection.

When she came home from her stay in France she had acquired ideas about life. She called Billy by his last name and practised indifference. He took it calmly at first. Yale had taught him things, and he had another year there.

"Dear old Hathaway," said Elizabeth, when Bill returned late in August from a camping trip in Maine and for the first time saw her after a three years' lapse. "Dear old Hathaway."

She placed her hands on his shoulders and looked down at him.

"Same old boy," she informed him. "Same dear, silly old face."

"Say," he demanded, "where'd you cop the accent? English or a mongrel?"

"I'm really no longer American in sympathy," she imparted. "Why should I cling to the twang, dear boy?"

Why, indeed? Bill couldn't say.

"Gosh," he gasped, recovering his breath. "Goin' on the stage, or is it for home consumption?"

Elizabeth looked pained.

"Have you pulled this on your dad?" he questioned.

"Dear old governor," she told him with a sigh. "He doesn't understand."

"No wonder," after reflection William added feelingly. "When you ask him for more money, do you do it in American, so he'll get you sure?"

Bill—it seems so unsociable to call him anything but Bill, despite his mother's prohibition—Bill went back

to New Haven in September for the football practise.

His mother was a lady much given to having her own way. She tended as well to campaigning militantly for the ballot. His father was a gentleman of decision. He also liked calling his son just plain Bill.

Mrs. Hathaway had named her son for a favorite brother, William Geoffrey, who, by devoting his attention strictly to his own affairs, added to himself holdings that rendered naming a son for him desirous for other than sentimental reasons. And aided, though he knew it not, by his sister's thoughtful but unneeded efforts, he remained a bachelor.

So when her brother unexpectedly expired one August day from the heat and inanition, his sister mourned duly and dyed black even her newest frocks. With her husband and son she left for a neighboring town for the funeral.

After the ceremony the will was read, and Mrs. Hathaway, with unbelieving ears, learned that her brother's moderate accumulations had been devised unconditionally to a woman of whom she had not the most remote remembrance. Upon investigation she piously thanked Heaven she had not, and forthwith left entirely from her supplications all petitions for the peace of her brother's soul.

"He should worry," her husband said, and was reproved promptly for ungodliness.

Mr. Hathaway had been rendered caustic by his wife's disinclination to be reminded of her brother by his tendency to call his son Bill. He grew more so when all effort to annul the document proved futile, and he was further stigmatized.

So, despite the christening, they were poor. To Elizabeth, who enjoyed a soul-satisfying reputation with herself for aristocracy, this grew to have significance. Aristocrats must live up to the manner born.

It was while she was still in Paris that such income as the Hathaways had, from the not inconsiderable salary the head of the house drew monthly, was imperiled. In his younger days Mr. Hathaway had been much given to drinking.

Of this Mrs. Hathaway had disapproved, and, after her fashion, she had disapproved out loud. Time came when Hathaway père lay close to death of pneumonia, and an impaired constitution led his physicians to despair. He pulled through, however, and cronies of club and imbibing trooped in to congratulate him.

"Great victory for us wets," Hathaway chortled to them. He was lying, wan but convalescent, on a bed placed near the window. Nevertheless, he swore off.

This, then, was young William's inheritance. It troubled him little, and on Yale field he outgrew it. It troubled Elizabeth not at all.

She had cut few of the leaves of the book of life, and none of the book of eugenics. For small favors William had something to be thankful that August day she once again illumined his outlook.

Whether Elizabeth was or was not a pretty girl is needless to the unfolding of this story. Some thought so, others not. Bill adored her—tip-tilted nose, corn-colored hair, what he was pleased to call her cerulean eyes, and all.

As for Bill himself, he never had been a thing of beauty, and was less so after he took to playing football with more nerve than caution. Womanlike, Elizabeth mentioned this to him once when he annoyed her. The week following he broke his nose in the Syracuse game.

"How shall I have it set?" he wired her. "Greek or Roman?"

"The brute," she thought. "No refinement, no culture." "Culture" was a favorite word with Elizabeth. It had made her its own.

So she invited a young Englishman, whom she had met casually, to join her father and her friends in the party they

were making up to see the Yale-Harvard game in New Haven the latter part of November.

The young Englishman did dictionary work in New York at a salary of twelve dollars a week. For which occupation Oxford had equipped him mentally and for nothing else.

He lived, however, on money sent him from England by a father whose idea of what to do with a third son was inspired by the somewhat vague advantages of "shipping him off to the States."

So they went up to New Haven a gray November day, a pleasant gathering of Elizabeth's new friends among whom her father and mother felt unhappy. People, they were, who put on Eastern manners as they would a garment, because they think it becomes them. Mr. Trevor had suggested that they picnic from a basket at the field.

"It really isn't done," Elizabeth informed him. They lunched in town, and in the absence of a motor-car walked afterward to the field. In intent, at least, they were truly patrician.

"What a fine place," Elizabeth remarked casually, surveying Yale field's wooden bleachers—"what a fine place, if it were in England, for the militants to burn!"

"Aw," said her Englishman.

"Girls will be girls," Mr. Trevor contributed, anent the militants.

A whistle sounded shrill through the crisp November air. The crimson line-up spread out across the center of the field. After a few preliminaries the ball rose with a thud and settled comfortably into Bill Hathaway's outstretched arms.

As he began his fleet-footed dodging, Elizabeth jumped to her feet, only to see him tumbled to the ground by a lank individual in a crimson jersey who dove at his knees.

"Sit down," grumbled a man behind her. "I can't see."

"What horrible manners these Americans have," thought Elizabeth. She sat down, and told her young English friend not to mind the disagreeable person in the rear. He didn't.

The annual struggle was on. It swung back and forth across the white-lined field without result till the middle of the second half.

Then, unexpectedly, while the stands volleyed and thundered, commingling roars of "hold 'em," and "stone wall," and "take her down," a light-haired stripling, slender but lithely built, aflash with scarlet as he raced across the dirt-dug turf, ran in behind the Harvard line-up and touched the towering Cambridge full-back on the shoulder.

A moment later the newcomer stood far behind the tensely braced forwards, his arms outstretched. He opened his fingers, and, describing a long arc, the pigskin fell neatly into his hands and sailed away from his foot with a sharp report.

The youngster came to earth with a crunch under the combined charge of three Yale men, but the ball, tumbling end over end through the air, finally fell neatly through the goal posts.

Harvard rose to a man.

It was three minutes from the end of the game when Elizabeth jumped to her feet with a shriek. After all, Yale was a tradition in her environment, and, after all, it was big Bill Hathaway who had just struggled loose from an entangled mass of players and was racing down the length of the field with the ball tucked under his arm.

He had struggled out of the scrimmage, lit on his shoulder and somersaulted to his feet. Only the young man who had kicked the goal stood between him and the Harvard line.

With a long diving tackle the youngster struck the Yale half-back's pounding knees, and rolled then, limp and helpless, on his side. But he had halted Hathaway. The Harvard quarter-back ended that perilous run by perching himself securely on Bill's head.

He was still sitting there when the whistle sounded and the game ended. Well could she spare them one victory. Yale! the mother of victory, the mother of mighty men.

And when the great frog chorus, triumphant and undespairing, crackled across the field, with that rolling volume only the hoarse-throated undergraduates can give to those nine cannoning Yales, and she heard Hathaway's name at the end, Elizabeth was so thrilled that she forgot all her ideas about life.

A distinct lapse for Elizabeth. She made up for it. The young Englishman recalled them to her on the homeward journey.

" But so bally uncivilized," was his final comment, as they stood, wide-mouthedly reaching for air, in the crowded aisles of a special train hurrying toward the metropolis.

" Yes, isn't it? " Elizabeth assented.

It was late in the spring when Elizabeth, replying to his invitation to attend the commencement exercises at New Haven, informed him letterwise " she wasn't quite sure she could manage it; " that William's thoughts turned the shamrock's color and distinctly anti-British.

As for the young Englishman and Bill's boyhood flame, their friendship had progressed. First he had called her Miss Trevor. Then he called her " you," and finally Elizabeth.

It was a short step from Elizabeth to Betty. Elizabeth herself saw that the young over-the-water collegian did not slip in taking it. To obtrude on this intimacy was just Bill's luck when he returned from Yale.

They called together one evening. Elizabeth kept the peace. Both finally said good night quite formally, after an endless effort each to outstay the other, and walked down her father's steps together.

" Have you known Betty long? " inquired the Briton.

" What! " Bill exclaimed. " Oh, Lizzie. Yes, some time."

So, later—he bided neither his nor his rival's time—William picked a quarrel on a subject quite unrelated to Elizabeth, and the young graduate of Magdalen ceased to trouble.

Why he cared so much whether or no a word was pronounced in the Oxford or American fashion, the Briton could not and had no time to fathom. For William, quite evidently, did care. He cared, in fact, to the point of fistic emphasis.

So the young Englishman decided to stay in New York where the constabulary, who are nothing if not peacemakers, see that the amenities of differing opinions are more generally observed.

Elizabeth could meet him there when she came to the city shopping—for tea and a crumpet—was his suggestion, and, without explaining his appearance or his haste, he took his leave.

Elizabeth learned the truth later.

" Hathaway's so vulgarly American," she told her mother. " Fancy that. It really isn't done, you know. Beating him up I presume he'd call it. Rotten, rather, I call it."

" Hathaway? " exclaimed her mother incredulously. " Do you mean Willie? The idea! "

" Glad the Englishman's gone," her father said briefly, chuckling safely to himself. Her father was likewise given over to vulgar Americanisms. He liked occasionally to hear the big stick whiz.

So Elizabeth took day trips to the city while Bill went to work. His father had said to him:

" You know I'm no Vanderbilt, son, though sometimes I've calculated you thought so. Now play football, will you, with this new job of yours, and see if you can't make it hum. You've got beef and brains and friends. No youngster ought to ask for more. And I don't want there to be any question of whether you're going to the country club in the middle of the afternoon or off to play tennis or spoon with

Elizabeth. There isn't going to be any argument about that. You're going to work."

Bill took this injunction to heart. Early in the fall, however, he sat with Elizabeth on her porch, while the moonlight, falling in evanescent magical white on the autumnal foliage, evolved in him temporary derangement.

"So, you see," Elizabeth explained, as he at last got up to go, "I couldn't possibly marry you. We have such different ideas of life."

He returned to work, and dreamed that he was free, but when the spring came and loosened the ice in the world and his heart he knew he was not.

Thoughtfully he sought out his father and laid the case before him. Mr. Hathaway was really a gem of a father. To all forms of distress his heart widened as the petals of a flower open to the sun.

"If you feel that way," said Mr. Hathaway, "you'd better go. If this is preying on your mind, and interfering with your work, better brush it all away. Try the West, and forget it."

So it was arranged. Bill called Elizabeth up on the telephone and invited her to dine with him alone at the Country Club. She demurred, but when she learned he was going offered to consult with her family concerning the conventions.

"It really isn't done, you know," her father said.

"It really isn't done," echoed her mother.

"Well, I'm going," declared Elizabeth flatly.

They went. As he ran her down to the club in his father's runabout he told her he was going away, and he told her why. She listened and regarded indolently some flowers he had given her.

"Now, listen, Elizabeth," he said, as they seated themselves at a table by one of the high French windows overlooking the Sound, "I want to tell you—"

"Must we go into all that," she interrupted, with the accent on the "must."

"Oh, no," he replied. His voice had a drawl, and he appeared so composed that Elizabeth felt something within her stir irritatingly. "I just wanted to tell you about my plans. Thought you'd be interested."

He sat thoughtfully regarding her.

"Foolish," I should think," Elizabeth ventured. "No one knows you there."

He did not answer her. It was only after they had sent away several courses that he leaned toward her, suddenly, impulsively, with that apprehensive eagerness that had characterized his boyish advances.

"It's not my idea," he began, "to rehash all — well, you know what I mean."

He hesitated and let his teeth play havoc with his lower lip.

"Oh, gee! Elizabeth," he went on with a sharp catch of impatience, "even as a kid I was sure that you were the loveliest little girl in the world; as mad as a March hare, and as sweet as a rose. Now — I don't know. Got the signals mixed, I guess.

"Gee, somehow I sort of pity the children, with their innocent boy and girl hearts. Can't you see them there by the fireside, dreaming of Prince Charming and the princess with golden hair who so rarely, rarely come? The children—poor kids—so soon to leave their romantic dreaming and face the world."

"What are you talking about?" she demanded crossly. Her eyes held the color of fleeting water adrift in shallows.

The dinner was not a success. That was certain. He went out at ten o'clock and she waited on the porch while he got the runabout. When he came round with it and halted below her under the porte-cochère Elizabet'

hesitated and lingered for a moment on the top step. She stood there drawing circles on the floor with the point of her slipper.

"Get in," he said briefly.

They started, the diminutive car leaping like a thoroughbred spurred to action. As they whirled through the entrance to the Country Club the near mudguard caught on the gate and was ripped off.

Elizabeth shrieked.

Muffler wide, banging and echoing like a gatling-gun in action, the runabout shot down an open stretch of moonlit road. Elizabeth hung on. Suddenly she felt herself flatten against his shoulder.

"Bill!" screamed Elizabeth.

"Keep still, will you?" he snapped.

The road they were traveling now lay directly across the marsh through which an inland river flowed. Far ahead, the iron of its framework outlined against the sky, was a bridge. Coming in from the sea, with sparks spouting firelike from her funnel, was a tug-boat drawing a barge.

Almost before Elizabeth could realize it they were mounting the rise to the drawbridge. From the first crossbeam of the bridge's ironwork a red lantern swung ominously.

The revolving wheels on the circular track under the center of the bridge were creaking. At either end of the bridge a triangular space, with open water underneath, was slowly widening.

"Bill, Bill, it's opening!" cried Elizabeth frantically.

The little car fairly leaped through the air to the bridge. Clutching at Bill's arm the frightened girl moaned faintly as the car jumped the chasm on the other side and landed on the road.

The rear wheels skidded over the edge of the road, pulled free, and they headed for the ditch on the farther side. With a twist of the wheel Bill brought her back into the road, and they were off again with a rush.

"Some car," said Bill.

Winding her arm into his, Elizabeth drew herself close to the strong protection of his presence.

"Oh, Billy," she protested, "why hurry so—to-night?" she added.

Suddenly, then, she felt as if she had needed and wanted him always. The flood of that awakening ran like a burning river through her heart, pleasure and pain commingling.

Turning into Main Street he drew the car sharply into the roadway as they skidded across a car track and whirled round a corner. Elizabeth found herself looking up under the arching maples along the side avenue where they lived. The runabout came to a halt at the curb.

Bill wormed himself from under the wheel and stepped to the ground. His face was grim, and he seemed disinclined to be talkative.

"Get out," he said, taking her by the arm.

Elizabeth stepped down and they walked silently to the door.

"Well, Billy," she said. Her voice seemed struggling to be at once petulant and plaintive. "Is this good-by?"

"Sure," he replied cheerfully.

To her great amazement, and almost before she knew it, she found herself alone in the unlighted hallway of her home.

Well, of all the nerve! What was his hurry, she reflected. Was he tired of her, or had he some other place to go? So ill-bred, too—well, not that. It was a funny world; all wrong, somehow. And just as she had begun to want him. Oh, dear—she climbed the stairs and closed herself in her room.

On the chiffonier was a picture of him, taken long ago. She had always left it there, because she had read somewhere in the reflections of a cynic that if a woman loved a man she hid his picture.

She walked over and clutched at it vindictively. As she did so, unex-

pectedly, there rose in her throat a dry, quick sob which was feminine if it was nothing else.

It was mean of him, she told herself; and it was such a beautiful night, too. The moonlight was flooding in through the window, and she walked to it and looked out. A startled cry came from her lips.

He was sitting in the runabout by the curb, his feet stretched out on the hood, his arms folded, and he was looking up at her window. She leaned out. The awful boy! Was he grinning at her? She watched him get out and crank the motor and crawl back behind the wheel.

As the little runabout puffed up the street he turned smilingly toward her, and, waving his hand, blew her a kiss.

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# A R T

**By Mary Coles Carrington**

A POET wrought a little rime,
  Inspiriting and sweet,
Quick-throbbing measures marked the time,
  As if for dancing feet;
The world swayed to its witchery,
  Its lilting, joyous art—
Nor guessed the mocking beat to be
  The poet's breaking heart!

A wild musician softly played
  A wistful, haunting air;
Its pure, appealing beauty made
  Each cadence seem a prayer.
The busy world just glanced aside
  And cast a careless dole—
Nor recked that in the violin cried
  A troubled human soul!

A painter set in colors gay
  A simple fireside scene;
Perfected peace within it lay
  And happiness serene.
The world surveyed it with a yawn,
  "Too commonplace! Too true!"
Nor dreamed a lonely man had drawn
  The home he never knew!

# THE NECKLACE OF RUBIES

A SHORT STORY

BY LEE HOLT

"SHAMEFUL!" ejaculated Catherine II, and she flung down her cards.

"Your majesty!" and Ivanivitch Zkarkoff, with whom she was playing, half rose from his seat.

"Pshaw, man," she continued; "the devil take these cards! This is the third time you have repique."

"I shall indeed count my luck accursed," said Zkarkoff diplomatically, "if it brings a frown on the fairest face in the world."

"Vadi Boga—no compliments, I pray you!" cried Catherine, but her deep, gray eyes dwelt approvingly on her reigning favorite.

Tall, with a slight stoop, the prince was dressed, as usual, very quietly in plum-colored velvet, on his breast a rose given him by the empress that morning as a love-token.

The great queen was at this time verging on forty. A large woman, with fair skin and hair, and something masculine in the contour of her face and jaw and in the way she held her head.

Her long, brocaded pelisse, bordered with sable, fell to her feet, almost concealing the white silk dress beneath it.

At a discreet distance stood her maids of honor, while close to her chair, out of a basket lined with crimson satin, peeped the wizened head of a small monkey.

She was passionately attached to this animal, and it never left her presence night or day.

The room was large and the walls entirely covered with pictures, chiefly of the Flemish school, all hung without frames and with little regard to effect.

In places even where the canvases did not exactly fit they had been cut by some vandal hand to the desired measurements. In a conspicuous position hung a large painting of the siege of Otchakoff.

The artist had depicted a scene of carnage and blood so horrible as to cause a shudder to any but the iron-nerved Catherine.

A few mahogany chairs inlaid with mother-of-pearl stood about the room, and on a small stand a golden scent bottle perfumed the air with the fragrance of rare, Eastern flowers.

"My code is at length completed," said the empress as Zkarkoff shuffled the cards for a fresh game. "I have ordered the parchment taken to your rooms. I desire your opinion."

"Tell me," replied Zkarkoff, "must I judge your majesty's work as a faithful subject or as a courtier?"

"As the former," said Catherine quickly, "From whom should I hear the truth if not from Zkarkoff?"

"It shall receive my devoted attention," said the prince, and dealt the cards.

"I trust Kurichkin pleased your majesty this morning," he continued; "the dog is indeed happy to approach so perfect a form."

"He has but just left," said the queen carelessly as she counted her

points. "He appears to know his work. My surtout is to be made of that wondrous green silk Mohilof Panin sent me last week."

Zkarkoff glanced up quickly at the empress, who appeared unconscious of his scrutiny; though a coquette to her finger-tips, she was well able to divine his feelings.

"Since when have the gifts of Mohilof Panin been preferred to mine?"

The empress tittered: "I feel I have been unjust to Panin. Only this morning he sent me the most magnificent necklace of rubies."

Very dark grew Zkarkoff's face, and the nose, whose peculiarity had made him famous, quivered perceptibly.

"So," he thundered, "the Count Panin dares to send presents! It is well I am told! I entreat your gracious permission to withdraw and attend to this matter."

He rose in pretended annoyance.

"Stay, Zkarkoff!" commanded Catherine, in evident enjoyment of her favorite's anger. She had no feeling for Panin, and was deeply in love with Zkarkoff. "It is my pleasure that you see and admire this beautiful gift."

She turned to one of the two maids in attendance. "Nathalie Lydowska, fetch hither the necklace sent me by the Count Panin this morning."

While the girl was away on her errand Zkarkoff, ever watchful, noticed a certain embarrassment in the manner of her companion, Alexandrina Petya. She was standing quite still, but her expression was strained and anxious.

Her history was familiar to him. Early left an orphan, she had been brought up by the Prince Drovsa and his wife, and was said to be in love, against the empress's wishes, with Paul Kourazine, one of the most headstrong and wildest youths about court.

As he turned the cards on the table Zkarkoff pondered vaguely on the cause of that uneasiness, for in his scheme of life he judged the smallest incidents of account.

The little monkey played round Catherine, receiving soft strokes and sharp pats by turns while she hummed:

> *"Mi Ka, Mi Ka,
> Yeschcho. Yeshco Naddai.
> Mi Ka, Mi Ka.
> Vashi siatels too—Irka!"

Here she bowed mockingly to the ape.

There was a sound of hurrying footsteps, and in rushed the girl, Lydowska: "Highness! Gracious majesty! The necklace has gone! It is not to be found!"

She cast herself down and beat the floor with her hands.

There was a change in Catherine's face. The gray eyes grew cold and hard, and the corners of her mouth drew together with a sinister expression.

"The necklace has gone! So! In whose charge was it?"

"In that of Moushka," faltered the terrified girl, "and she swears she placed it in the Siberian lapis lazuli cabinet. No one has entered the room."

"Except Kurichkin," interrupted Alexandrina eagerly, her lovely face and neck flushing a deep red. "Your majesty will remember he, and he only, entered beside ourselves and others of the household."

"The girl speaks truth," said Catherine, and she stamped her foot.

A guard presented himself, bowing low, his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Arrest Kurichkin, the tailor, and bring him here without an instant delay! Should you catch him before he reaches his home, so much the better. Go!"

The guard vanished.

"A trifling matter," remarked Catherine, "but it must be looked into thoroughly."

She took a pinch of the famous snuff

*Rain, rain,
Go away. Come again another day.
Your excellency—Irka!

made from tobacco grown in her own grounds at Tsarkoe Selo, and said: "Another pique!"

The game began again. Refreshment was brought in—some favorite cakes of the empress. They were made of a paste of rye flour into which skimmed milk and cheese had been placed, the whole cooked in hot water.

These delicacies had hardly made their appearance with some sweet sirup when a loud clamor and shouting was heard outside the window.

"Long live one little mother who gives us bread, food, and glory. Down with the Jews! Long live Catherina!"

The empress's face broke into smiles of self satisfaction. "My good people, how they adore me! I will show myself and it will brighten the day for them." With a heavy step she walked to the window.

Outside in the street, whence the shouts had proceeded, was assembled a crowd of excited people, conspicuous among whom were the vivid red uniforms of some palace guards, as they forced their way like a wedge through the struggling mass.

"It is the Jew tailor," said Zkarkoff quietly, his eyes on Alexandrina. "They will tear him in pieces."

"They shall have that pleasure later," coldly remarked Catherine, "should he prove guilty.

"My snuff, girl."

Alexandrina hurried forward with the mosaic box, but her hand trembled and she awkwardly let it fall! It flew open and the snuff scattered in all directions.

"Fool! dolt! idiot!" cried the queen furiously, and she gave the girl a sounding smack on the cheek. "Am I to be crossed at every turn to-day?"

The guards had now succeeded in getting their prisoner to the door of the palace, and then inside free from the yelling crowd. In a few moments a forlorn object was brought to the empress.

Caught in a moment of highest hope, to which the royal command had raised him, his downfall was the more cruel.

He knew the pitiless injustice he was likely to meet with, and despair was in every curve of his drooping figure. His nose had been broken in the scuffle, a most painful wound, and his face was covered with blood.

"Has he been searched?" demanded the empress.

"Gracious majesty, yes! We have found nothing."

The wretched Jew burst forth into supplications and prayers for mercy.

"The man is innocent," said Zkarkoff briefly.

Catherine turned on him sharply:

"I cannot recall having asked your advice, Ivanivitch Zkarkoff. The man innocent; then who is guilty, forsooth; but I understand your motive! You do not wish me to recover my necklace, and would prefer that the thief get away."

"It is true; I am innocent, gracious little mother!" screamed the Jew, his dark eyes shifting from face to face. "They found nothing on me," and he stretched out his shaking arms imploringly.

"You wrong me," said the prince in an undertone, "and to prove it I stake my Romanoff estates that the necklace shall be in your hands before noon to-morrow."

"Good!" cried Catherine. "You speak with great assurance! Let us see how you redeem your promise. But I take my own way.

"The knout each day till he speaks," she continued, turning to the guards.

A shriek of despair burst from the wretched tailor, and his face was ashen as the soldiers dragged him away.

"Truth is a hard juice to extract," said the queen as she sat down to her cakes; "but pain is a good press. Under the lashes of the knout a lost article is quickly found."

Zkarkoff bowed and took his leave.

The monkey climbed on to the em-

press's chair, pawing at her arm and giving odd, shrill, little cries while she rapidly swallowed large mouthfuls of the cheese cakes, occasionally glancing at the painted horrors of the siege before her.

II.

The palace of the Zkarkoffs was a huge mass of gray stone with a semicircular façade, and had been built by Ivanivitch's grandfather during the reign of Mikail, last of the Romanoffs.

The principal rooms were thrown open occasionally for some ball or banquet, when the fancy took Zkarkoff, but he reserved for his private use one small wing.

Into these apartments no one was admitted except his three attendants, known as "the Zkarkoff trinity," while a guard from his own sotnia of Cossacks did duty at the palace night and day.

Ten o'clock had struck that evening when the prince arrived at the small side entrance and, after giving directions to the servant, passed up-stairs to his study.

This was a simple room, plainly paneled to the ceiling and austere in its severity. Rumor, however, had it that this apparent simplicity was but a mask concealing much that was curious and interesting to those who knew its secrets.

There were two doors, one facing the center-table, at which the prince now seated himself, and another behind him. Zkarkoff took up the bundle of papers bearing the imperial seal and began deciphering that mixture of ignorance and talent, which the empress designated as her code.

Passages had been freely borrowed from Montesquieu's "Esprit des Lois," which Catherine in true autocratic spirit had calmly appropriated without acknowledgment. He was still engaged in the perusal when eleven o'clock struck from a clock on the wall.

Hardly had the last vibration died away before a knock came at the door, which opened to admit the tall, thickly veiled figure of a woman. Zkarkoff rose.

"I am indeed honored, Alexandrina Petya."

The girl started and dropped her veil.

"Prince Zkarkoff," she exclaimed, "there surely must be some mistake! They have brought me to the wrong house."

"Not at all," said Zkarkoff, and he smiled. "I have been expecting you. You will pardon that slight ruse of a note, and will not, I trust, begrudge me an hour."

He spoke soothingly, and yet his words seemed to terrify the girl. Her eyes sought the room as if searching a way of escape.

"Prince, I beseech you, do not keep me. The empress! I shall be lost."

"Calm yourself," said Zkarkoff, and he moved a chair forward. "Rest assured if you give me your confidence the empress shall never know of your presence here to-night. I pray you be seated."

The girl obeyed. Her face was ghastly pale, and her dark eyes were red-rimmed with weeping. Zkarkoff looked at her narrowly, and taking up a paper-knife played with it idly as he spoke.

"I have long wished to see more of you. You are very beautiful, countess."

Alexandrina started.

"Nay, fear not! I desire not to make love to you. I know your affection is already given to Paul Kourazine, and I share a woman's love with no man."

"You know," muttered Alexandrina.

"Surely! Did you think that love can be so easily disguised? You have a telltale face, countess! Those blushes reveal much. Only last Tuesday when you and Count Kourazine

were having such a pleasant chat in the garden—"

The girl sprang up.

"When?" she stammered. "How did you know?"

"Again, dear countess, you credit every one with being dense. It is a great mistake to underrate the abilities of our fellow creatures. Even I, stupid as I am, have observed the course of true love flowing not altogether smoothly. The count is fond of play—is he not? And that causes you anxious moments. Very natural—very natural indeed!"

The girl moved uneasily in her chair.

"May I beg your excellency to tell me what you wish of me? Every moment I remain here adds to my peril."

"Have I not said that if you place yourself in my hands unreservedly you need fear nothing? Perhaps I brought about this personal interview in order to assure myself of your feelings with regard to Kourazine—whether you wish to marry him? A word in the empress's ear might marvelously smooth the path before you. But—" Alexandrina stood up and clasped her hands.

"Oh, if you would! If you would!"

"You really care for this youth?" inquired Zkarkoff banteringly.

"More than myself," she whispered.

Zkarkoff got up, paced the room, then stopped suddenly in front of the girl.

"Why did you steal the necklace?" he suddenly demanded in a voice of thunder.

Alexandrina screamed. She sprang up, holding to the table with one hand.

"I—I—I! What mean you?"

"Speak!" thundered Zkarkoff. "You gave Kourazine that necklace. Is he in debt?"

"I did not! Indeed I did not!" said the girl, trembling. "Paul has not the necklace. I swear it on this cross!"

She touched with her lips a small cross which hung by a slender chain round her neck.

"Where is it, then?" came the sharp and stern tones.

White as a sheet, Alexandrina replied in a voice hardly audible:

"I do not know."

"You defy me? Do not force me to take other means—less pleasant."

Zkarkoff's narrow eyes were fixed on the girl. His words took effect like the lash of a whip. She raised her head, and, facing him with courage, cried:

"You wrong me, prince. I have nothing to conceal. You have trapped me here for some reason, but I am innocent — innocent as the poor tailor now in prison."

Her eyes flashed and her beautiful face glowed with indignation.

The prince struck a small gong which stood on the table at his side. The door opened and a short man dressed in red, with the wide face and slanting eyes of a Mongol, entered. Zkarkoff nodded without speaking and the man withdrew.

Presently came the tramp of feet, and there entered a young man with a handsome, dissipated face, closely guarded by two soldiers.

"Paul!"

The girl had crossed the room and thrown her arms about the prisoner's neck. They clung together for a moment. Then Zkarkoff's voice, cold and cutting, said:

"Very interesting, but this is hardly the moment for embracing. Countess, kindly resume your seat. Guards, remove your prisoner," and he waved to the door behind him.

The lovers exchanged glances of despair and the door closed with a loud snap.

Zkarkoff turned to the girl.

"Alexandrina Petya," he said, "I would willingly spare you pain — I regard women as companions for our hours of ease, for relaxation from the strain of public affairs, to be handled gently; but in this case I have no choice. I ask you, and I pray you answer: Where is the necklace?"

The countess did not raise her head.

" I do not know," she said very low. " I have told you."

Zkarkoff struck the floor with his heel. Suddenly there reached them in the room a groan that was half a sigh.

Alexandrina trembled. " What was that? " she faltered.

" They are trying to find if Kourazine knows the answer to the same question I have put to you."

" They are torturing him! " she said with white lips.

" Probably." Zkarkoff's tone was dry.

" But he knows nothing—nothing."

" But you do! "

" Fiend! " cried the girl. " You would torture him to make me speak! God in Heaven! Can He let such monsters exist? "

Zkarkoff sat in his chair, still playing with the paper-knife.

" What are they doing to him? "

" The thumbscrew, I imagine, is a very insidious little persuader."

A scream, agonized and piercing, rang through the room. It was echoed by the wretched girl.

" Paul, Paul! " she screamed.

There was no answer. Her wild eyes met those of Zkarkoff's, hard and mocking.

" They say women are tender of heart," he remarked. " In your case it would not appear so."

He stamped again upon the floor, and in reply apparently there came another scream, and yet another more despairing.

The girl rushed to the door and beat on it with her fists.

" You will find my doors are made of strong material, countess," remarked her tormentor calmly.

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the hard, gasping sobs of the woman as she crouched on her knees at the door. The chorus of some drunken roisterers outside in the street came in by the open window.

Its careless gaiety struck a discordant note with the tense atmosphere within.

" I am waiting, countess, for your answer," said Zkarkoff quietly.

" I have none," returned the girl; but she clasped her hands together tightly, and they trembled.

A low murmur arose from the inner room—a moan of awful agony, which broke into a shriek of pain. It was as if the utmost limit of endurance had been reached.

The girl sprang up, rushed to Zkarkoff, and, seizing his arm, cried:

" Stop it — stop it! Do you hear me? They will kill him! Merciful Heaven! I will tell you everything! "

" With pleasure! " Zkarkoff rose and went to the door, which he struck twice.

Then he smilingly approached the countess.

" I am ready, Alexandrina Petya, to hear you."

Alexandrina was changed from the beauty of Catherine's court. Her face was the color of ashes, and her eyes sunk and red.

She began to speak in short, hurried sentences.

" The count and I are secretly married; we have one child."

" I know," said the prince; " you are speaking the truth. Continue."

" We have no money! " gasped Alexandrina; " my husband has had losses, and the woman who has my child is hard and wants much to keep my secret. And the boy is so beautiful and—"

" The necklace? " reminded Zkarkoff's voice gently.

" I will tell you. This morning the empress after admiring it placed it on the table, and I thought—I thought—"

" That you would like to have it," said the quiet voice.

" Yes! I was wicked enough to wish for it to buy food and protection for my child. I snatched it up and hid it in my bodice. But it was big and heavy and the corners showed, so I pulled it out and put it behind the

pillow on the divan, meaning to return and take it later. But when I came back it was gone. My husband knew nothing. He is guiltless. On the head of my child I swear that I speak truth!"

"Yes!" said the prince; "the truth has been hard to extract, but we have it now. But what has become of the necklace?"

Zkarkoff's face was clouded. His reputation was at stake, and he was absolutely without a clue. So certain had he been of this girl it had not occurred to him to suspect any one else.

A metal clang sounded outside, a signal that a message had come from the empress.

A small negro, clad in yellow and gold, rushed in, and he threw himself at Zkarkoff's feet.

"A letter?" inquired the prince. The boy rose, and, drawing a note wrapped in lilac silk from his vest, gave it to Zkarkoff, who read hurriedly:

> Beloved! Thy prophecy has come true! The necklace has been found in Irka's (the monkey's basket.) Was this a jest of thine? I will scold thee for it to-morrow. Thy tailor is released. 'Twould have been in truth a pity to kill him before he had finished my surtout, which promises well. Thine ever,
>
> CATERINA.

"Humph!" cried Zkarkoff. "Fortune must have thrown her shadow on me to-day. Countess," he continued, to the woman waiting in anxious suspense, "the necklace has been found, and you are free. Your husband will take you home. The marriage must be publicly announced. I will speak to the empress. My promise is given, and the count's affairs will be put in order. I have shown you I can be determined; let me also show you that Zkarkoff can be generous."


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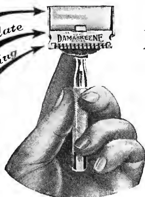


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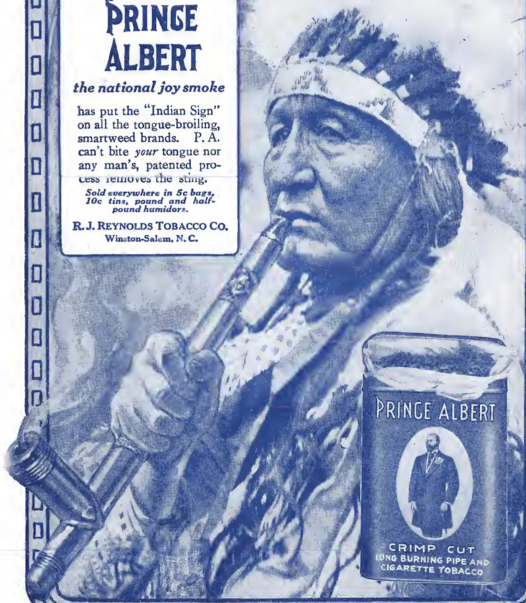
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