



THE
DISTANT DRUM

J. DUDLEY STURROCK



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THE DISTANT DRUM

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By DUDLEY STURROCK

“Some for the Glories of this world; and some
Sigh for the Prophet’s Paradise to come;
Ah! Take the Cash and let the Credit go;
Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum.”

OMAR KHAYYÂM.



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THE DISTANT DRUM

PART I

CHAPTER I

AN oasis of vivid colour and teeming life set in the dull flatness of the Long Island country. The humid atmosphere shimmering and dancing with intense heat. Monotonous stretches of rough grass, broken here and there by clumps of trees and grey roads, filled with line upon line of automobiles. Solid banks of dust converging upon the staring newness of wooden grand-stands, dotted with the conspicuous colours of the English and American national flags. And automobiles everywhere—surging, struggling to reach the stands and discharge their passengers.

Meadowbrook on the day of the first International Polo match had drawn the pleasure-hungry smart set of America's capitals to itself.

Half an hour before the start of the game, the prevailing impression, typical of American society gatherings, was that of a colossal family party. New York shook hands with Chicago, Boston chatted with Philadelphia. Among the restless throng little groups formed and dissolved continually, talking gaily and irresponsibly in competition with the music of the band and the eternal hooting of automobiles, and slowly moving over the green turf shifted toward the enclosures. The whiteness of the unpainted stands began to be picked out here and there with irregular splashes of colour, and the seats rapidly filled. In a far corner of the ground, by the stables, little sharp-faced grooms were walking strings of ponies up and down.

As the moments passed, the club enclosure became the centre of interest. Well-known clubmen stood about in groups and lounged against the railings eagerly discussing the coming game. A fashionable New York actor strolled about arm in arm with a cheery-looking, red-faced cotton broker. In the balcony of the club-house a famous English aviator flirted mechanically with a pretty girl from Philadel-

phia. The latest French dancer, with the glamour of her royal lover's attentions fresh upon her, drove up with a reputed French Baron and entered her box, causing a stir of interest in the immediate neighbourhood.

The ringing of the bell for the first *chukka* served to bring the game of polo to a start without too abruptly interfering with the various other games of *le monde où l'on s'amuse*. One couple in the grand-stand, however, were evidently discussing some very serious matter, to judge from their earnest expressions and low, intense tones. The incongruity of choosing such a time and place for what seemed to be almost a matter of life and death, attracted the wandering glance of a spectator who was carelessly leaning against the gate between the enclosure and the boxes.

"Say, Thorne, there's a man who could open your eyes about things if he wanted to."

The speaker's companion was an Englishman. The cut of his clothes and his lazy interest in the stream of arrivals made it palpable enough that he was a newcomer. As a matter of fact, Bernard Thorne had only sampled his first

cocktails and clam broth that morning. Although in other respects just an ordinary-looking, big, bronzed young man of twenty-seven or thereabouts, his face was particularly noticeable by reason of the sheer virility of its lines.

“My dear Ralph, if you persist in this process of eye-opening, I shan’t be able to go out without blinkers,” replied Thorne flippantly. “Where is this wonderful pal of yours?”

Ralph Delamotte nodded towards the tiers of boxes. “You see that man three rows up in the near corner?”

Thorne glanced up. He saw a big, coarse-looking man dressed in a Derby hat and a closely buttoned overcoat, the only one to be seen on that grilling afternoon.

“That’s Johnny Flinn. He’s nominally a real-estate man; actually, what is more important, he’s a political boss.”

“Is that what you call a senator?”

“No, hardly. Senators are the official machinery. Flinn’s one of the unseen heads of the factory that designs and turns out the machinery for the power-house of the State. Incidentally,

he often pulls it back for alterations and repairs. He's a big man, is John Flinn."

"He looks it," Thorne replied tersely. "If his machinery is as rusty as his clothes—"

"Pardon me." A woman's clear, decided voice behind them interrupted him. They turned abruptly, standing aside from the gate.

A pair of cool, deep, grey eyes under a daintily exquisite black hat caught and held Thorne's quick glance—held his eyes for perhaps a fraction of a second longer than was necessary.

"Good afternoon, Ralph."

She passed on as Delamotte raised his hat and held the gate open. Thorne stared rudely after her. He saw her, leading a daintily dressed little girl, move towards her box with a slow sinuous grace of movement, carrying her little head imperiously. A slender figure, dressed in perfect white, dignified but with a hint of voluptuousness in its outline.

Quite the smartest woman he had ever seen, Thorne decided, and he rather prided himself upon his taste.

"Why, Delamotte, who's that?"

"Oh, that's Mrs. Sebastin," replied Delamotte. "Lovely woman, isn't she?" glancing at him curiously. "Let's go up and see Flinn," he went on. "He seems to have finished his business." He led the way to where Flinn and his friend were sitting. The introductions were made.

"Well, Mr. Flinn, Mr. Thorne wants you to tell him all about American politics."

Flinn grunted. "Don't know the first darned thing about them. Not in my line. I'm a real-estate man," he replied in an utterly expressionless voice, but his eye twinkled.

There was no intentional rudeness in his manner. It was simply characteristic of the man. His whole appearance was expressionless and commonplace. The shabbiness of his clothes was accentuated by his one apparent vanity—a large pearl tie-pin. His heavy body was fat to the point of coarseness, and his face was flabby and insignificant—insignificant until one caught the expression in his remarkable eyes; little, restless, beady eyes that held the whole secret of his power.

Finding him in an unusually sociable frame

of mind, they remained chatting and watching the game. The third *chukka* was well advanced, and there was keen excitement in the stands as the visiting team began to press hard for the first time, keeping the game well down in the American end. But in spite of Thorne's interest in this temporary advantage of his own countrymen, he found his attention continually wandering in the direction of Mrs. Sebastin. He could only catch a glimpse of the large black hat, and of a perfectly gloved arm resting languidly on the edge of her box. During one interval, however, it seemed to him that he caught her looking rather pointedly in their direction. But the excitement was increasing with each *chukka*, as the scores remained very nearly level, and Thorne had very soon forgotten that such a woman as Mrs. Sebastin existed.

It was certainly the fastest game in the history of polo, but although the English team made desperate efforts to bring off a win, in spite of their obvious disadvantage in the matter of ponies, they had been beaten by a score of four and a half goals to three when the bell

rang at the conclusion of the play. Then behind the stands the parked automobiles began their frantic chorus, as the engines here and there were started with a roar and throttled down into a steady throbbing, until the whole ground seemed to quiver with the impatience of twenty thousand horse power held under leash. As the crowd streamed out, the scene became one of hopeless confusion, and Thorne had become thoroughly resigned to a twenty-mile tramp back to New York before Delamotte found his car. They moved off into the procession that was struggling towards the main road. Reaching the Jericho turnpike, they were able to make a smarter pace.

As they approached a cross-road, a big Renault limousine overtook them, and slowing down to take the corner ran level for a moment before turning off to the right. The few seconds that they were alongside gave Thorne ample time to recognise the woman who had had such a curious effect upon him at Meadowbrook.

“Jove!” exclaimed Thorne. “Am I likely to meet that beautiful lady in New York?”

“No,” said Delamotte shortly. “That is”—
he went on by way of explanation—“you see, she
really very seldom comes into town, so I’m
told.”

CHAPTER II

A WEEK later Ralph Delamotte sat at breakfast in his apartment at the Gardenia, reading a letter propped up against the coffee-pot. The more he studied the bold, upright, regular handwriting the more aggrieved he became. It read as follows:

“My Dear Ralph

“As I have to be in town to-morrow morning, don't you think it would be nice if you were to give me some lunch at Delmonico's? Say at 1 o'clock. With your usual cleverness you will immediately think that I want to inveigle you into some deep-laid plot. Well, you're wrong this time. I haven't yet made up my mind what I want you for. It may be to help me to buy a picture or even—more difficult still—to choose a hat! At any rate, I will just remind you to get a table next the window; you know my little fads!

“Yours most sincerely,

“YVONNE SEBASTIN.”

Now, Ralph Delamotte had sometimes to admit humorously to himself that he was a man to be pitied. In his principal capacity, that of a physician, his large private income enabled him to practise as much or as little as he might feel inclined, and in this respect he had nothing to complain of. But in his other capacity—the more arduous one, he was wont to complain—that of counsellor and confidant of many men and more women in a city where there is probably more intrigue to the square mile of society than in any other on the globe, he often felt his position an irksome one. An entirely unwilling victim in most cases, he considered that he had been elected to this latter position under false pretences. He wished heartily that people would take their troubles to other quarters; but appearances had always been against him. Many foolish—and sometimes frail—women, taking stock of his strong, clean-shaven, rather ascetic-looking face and kindly, blue eyes, his well-modelled head with its crisp, closely-trimmed hair slightly grey at the temples, had marked him down as a fitting victim for their occasional outbursts of conscience,

and—more frequently—as a refuge when in need of more material help.

In this unwelcome manner, he had become the storehouse of more secret history than probably any other man in New York society. He knew himself to be, of course, merely a man blessed with an infinite capacity for enjoying life in his own way. He was, in fact, selfish, he persuaded himself; but his great grievance was that it was impossible for him to get his friends to believe it. And so, at times, it happened that when they wanted advice or money—or both—he was the unlucky man to be singled out.

And this particular sunny morning was apparently one of those times. Delamotte was by no means deceived by this effusion of Yvonne Sebastin's. What, he reflected, could Yvonne possibly want him for this time? As far as advice was concerned, her usual method, according to his experience of her, which extended over some years, was the simple and eminently satisfactory one—to herself, at any rate—of first asking his opinion on a certain course of action, and then telling him it didn't matter

what he said, as she had already firmly made up her mind about it. The essential difference, he remembered, between her and others of her sex whom he knew, was that when her mind was made up she stuck to her guns with considerable determination and desperate ingenuity until the particular venture was carried through to her own entire satisfaction—a satisfaction not always shared by others who might happen to be involved. As for money, Yvonne was very well provided for in that direction, so it couldn't be that.

After all, he asked himself, what did it matter? He would enjoy the goods that the culinary gods of Delmonico's might provide, and in any case some of these little escapades, to which she so earnestly devoted herself now and again, tickled his keen sense of humour as being such a contrast to the attitude of the *grande dame* which she normally affected. At this point in his meditations, Thorne was announced.

He strode in, whistling softly.

"Hullo, Bunny! Have some breakfast?"

"No thanks, old boy." Thorne settled himself deliberately in a deep armchair and crossed

his legs. "No, the old nine-o'clock porridge and bacon sees me through all right till lunch. But I'm in a devil of a mess this morning, Ralph."

Delamotte chuckled. "You haven't wasted much time. Who is she?"

Bunny Thorne smiled darkly at a Greuze on the wall. "Oh, *you've* seen her. She's very fascinating, of course—to me, at any rate; it's largely a matter of taste— She's very fast, *and* looks it; wants a lot of attention, too. But she's got lovely lines—lovely, Ralph."

"I don't recognise the description. Wherever did you find her?"

"Oh, in Paris, about a year ago," Thorne replied airily. "Brought her over here with me."

Ralph looked amazed.

"As a matter of fact I've been trying to get her through the customs all the morning," Bunny explained. "Lord! I've been the best part of twenty-four hours over it," he went on, his facetiousness giving way to indignation, "and I don't seem to be any nearer with the darned business than when I started. Poor old Mercedes! She's been standing in the shed for a week

now, dying for a few pints of petrol. I've been arguing since nine o'clock this morning with an imitation yachtsman about her."

"Oh, that's the trouble. Well, I daresay I can put you right."

"By the way," Thorne went on with apparent irrelevance, "do I look like a guy?"

Ralph looked amusedly at the good-humoured face and careless figure in easy grey tweeds. "Oh, you've come up against that!" He laughed and explained the meaning of the word "guy" as used by harmless customs appraisers and other Americans addicted to slang. Thorne's face took on a look of hopeless resignation. Then he swore softly. "At any rate, I'm going to get on their track again." He rose briskly and reached for the cigar box. "I want the old car and I'm going to get it."

"Look here, Bunny." Delamotte looked at his watch. "I know a useful shipping man who'll get it through in no time. I'm booked for lunch at one o'clock, but we'll go down together this afternoon if that'll suit you."

"Right. But I'd no idea I'd have to bother you so much when you promised me last year

that you'd see me through if I came over."

"Rubbish! I'll call for you at the Blitz at three o'clock. What are you doing to-night? How about *The Perfect Lady* at the Times Square Theatre? You haven't taken much notice of our pretty American girls so far since you've been over." Ralph looked at him with a twinkle in his eye. "I bet *they*'ll fix you all right."

"I'm afraid I'm not much of a lady's man, Ralph," he said lightly. "I must admit, though, I've never seen so many smart women as I have here. By the way, I saw that Mrs. Sebastin dining with some people at the Blitz last night. I wish you'd tell me something about her."

"Well, there's nothing much to tell. She's a very charming, beautiful woman, as you can see. She divorced her husband a year ago—which is nothing unusual—and for the rest she just lives the ordinary life of a smart New York woman. But come along, let's go to the club and have a cocktail. There's just time before lunch."

Delamotte collected his hat and stick and they went out into Fifth Avenue. Thorne, like

every other stranger to New York, had from the first been struck by the glamour of the wonderful highway, by its vista of splendid buildings, breaking off into the distant green of Central Park, by its testimony to the power of wealth—store and mansion towering side by side, giant monuments to the pioneer brains of a new country. At noon-time on this summer day the scene gave him the impression of tireless life and energy. The whole street was in the possession of an army of automobiles, manœuvring intricately up and down, now and again drawing up into a solid phalanx at the sharp command of a traffic policeman's whistle. Bunny was deeply impressed with it all as he strolled along. Suddenly the insistent, imperative clang of a fire-bell broke in upon the busy hum of the street. The statuesque figure of a mounted policeman became alert and business-like as he instantly cleared a narrow lane through the traffic. A large red touring car bearing the plate FIRE DEPARTMENT in front, came tearing through on its mad, swaying course, the driver huddled over the wheel as if he were steering a Grand Prix racing machine.

"That's about the third I've seen to-day already," he observed. "New York strikes a stranger as being one vast conflagration."

They turned into the club and spent an idle half-hour drinking cocktails, until it was time for Delamotte to meet Yvonne Sebastin.

He found her waiting for him in the hall of Delmonico's, dressed with the smart simplicity that characterises the American woman in the morning. She went up to him eagerly.

"Why, Ralph, this is charming of you. I'm starving. I motored up at nine o'clock this morning. You've no idea what an early bird I am these days."

"You seem all the better for it, Yvonne." Delamotte was looking at her with a critical smile. "You were a bit pale when I saw you last at Meadowbrook. But come along." He found his table and they took their seats. The famous room was nearly full, and throughout the meal Yvonne Sebastin was in her most animated mood, chatting, laughing, at one moment mercilessly criticising the cut of a costume, in the next breath giving Delamotte some graphic little sketch of her life in the country.

"But why don't you come down and see me, Ralph?" she asked at length. "I haven't seen you for over a week."

"Well, my dear lady, you haven't asked me. I should never dare to intrude without a summons from you."

"Don't be absurd! Surely you know me well enough not to require a formal invitation. You're a bad man, Ralph."

"Besides," continued Delamotte, "all this week I've been acting as guide, philosopher and friend to an Englishman that I met last year in London. There are so very many pitfalls in New York for a good-looking stranger, eh, Yvonne?" Delamotte laughed.

"I suppose there are, Ralph," she replied innocently, gazing out of the window. "Why—why—it's—raining." There was a slight pause. Suddenly she turned and looked Delamotte coolly and deliberately in the face. "Why not run down to-morrow and bring your Englishman with you?"

Delamotte snapped his cigarette case and his face grew suddenly stern. He gave her a long, searching glance, then dropping his eyes he lit

his cigarette. She watched him intently. He carefully and methodically extinguished the match and dropped it in the tray. Then slowly raising his head, he smiled into her eyes. "I'm afraid that's impossible, Yvonne. He's leaving New York to-morrow."

As Delamotte spoke, a look of intense irritation flashed across her face. The next instant she was speaking unconcernedly.

"Now, I thought you were cleverer than that, Ralph. For a moment you nearly made me angry, though. Anyhow, it doesn't matter." She rose from the table. "Shall we go?"

Without a word he escorted her outside.

Pausing for a moment with one foot on the step of her car, she turned to him with a smile. "Anyhow, *you'll* come and see me soon, won't you? Au revoir!"

"Au revoir, pretty lady. Run away back to the country and keep the roses in your cheeks," Delamotte replied lightly, closing the door upon her.

He stood and watched the big limousine till it disappeared round the corner, then turned and walked briskly towards the Blitz.

CHAPTER III

“BOSS” FLINN stumped laboriously up the dirty stone stairs of the *Manhattan Magnet* building, pushed his way through a door marked EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT and planted himself squarely behind the low railing of an untidy room, littered with papers and filled with desks at which shirt-sleeved reporters were clicking out copy on their typewriters. A city editor glanced up casually. Seeing Flinn he rose and came across to him with the nearest approach to excitement in his manner that a city editor is capable of showing.

“Morning, Mr. Flinn. What’s doing?”

“I want to see Mr. Davenport,” replied Flinn stolidly.

The city editor stopped a boy who was scurrying past.

“Go and tell Mr. Davenport Mr. Flinn wants to see him. Quick, now!” Turning to the

Boss he went on, "If there's anything on, Mr. Flinn, put me wise. We're going to press soon."

"Nothin' doin', my lad. Nothin' doin'."

The boy came running back. "Come this way, please."

Two or three reporters looked up at Flinn as he followed the boy across the room to Davenport's office and went inside. They turned their heads anxiously to the city editor's desk, but, getting a shake of the head from him, returned to their copy.

The private office of the president presented a striking contrast to the untidy hustle of the rest of the building. Simply but comfortably furnished with a few leather armchairs, a solid-looking writing table with several neatly arranged piles of correspondence, and a few sporting prints on the walls, it gave little indication of the variety of interests of its single occupant.

Davenport looked up from the table where he was reading a letter spread in front of him.

"Hullo, John, glad to see you. Sit down. I'll be ready in a minute."

Flinn sat down, stuck his cigar in the corner of his mouth, and waited.

The particular letter Davenport was reading was not of great importance, but he required a little time to prepare himself for the battle of wits which he knew was inevitable, and at which he felt himself rather at a disadvantage. Davenport was not a particularly clever man. Whatever success he had obtained had rather been due to sheer hard work, combined with a large amount of ambition which was conveniently untrammelled by moral scruples. He had become the owner of the *Manhattan Magnet* when it was in a comatose condition for want of any decided policy, and by instituting various campaigns of what he called social and political reform—but for which his enemies had the much shorter and more expressive term of blackmail—he had succeeded in painting the *Magnet* as yellow as the worst of its competitors. His present campaign was directed against Flinn and his party. In this he had been remarkably successful, and with conscientious thoroughness and the lavish employment of the unscrupulous methods of this section of

the newspaper world, he had managed to bring home several crushing blows upon Flinn's carefully-laid schemes. At this particular time these attacks had reached the limit of open virulence, and it was therefore with a slight sinking of the heart that Davenport speculated on the reason for Flinn's visit.

He carefully marked the letter with a blue pencil, placed it with the others at his side, and drawing his chair back from the table turned to Flinn.

"Well, Johnny, we don't often see you around here these days," he said, with a slight touch of nervousness.

He was a slightly bald, smartly-dressed man of a pronounced down-town type. A dissipated-looking mouth, barely concealed by a grey moustache, and an unnaturally high colour gave him the appearance of being a heavy drinker. He looked at Flinn uncertainly.

"No," Flinn said shortly, "and I shouldn't be here now, only your dirty rag has got me going this time, you damned grafter."

Davenport's courage returned. From long experience of Flinn's moods, this unusual dis-

play of feeling indicated to him that the Boss felt himself to be in a weak position, and if his only weapon was to be bluster of this description, there was nothing to fear.

"Grafter!" He laughed. "That's good from Johnny Flinn! If you're going to talk like that, I'll have one of my boys in and make a column of it. It'll make good stuff."

"Aw, cut it out," said Flinn disgustedly. "See here, Davenport, when are you going to stop this knocking? Are you going to wait till I have to make you? I'm getting sick of this. Here's Doherty coming to me this morning and turning it up after what you said yesterday about him and those cement contracts."

"My dear Flinn, you don't understand the position." Davenport was speaking seriously enough. "You ought to know that when I took over the *Magnet* I determined from the start that it must be run entirely independent of party considerations and business interests. I have endeavoured to expose glaring abuses of all kinds, irrespective of individuals. One after another of these has been shown up and now it's your turn. If, in the course of following what

I as a newspaper man conceive to be a public duty, your pet schemes get knocked, it's up to you to change your policy. The truth, Flinn, is—”

“Oh, nix on that stuff!” Flinn broke in impatiently. “What's Villiers paying you?”

“Have it your own way, Johnnie. I'll talk to you in your own language, then. I'll tell you right now he's paying me a damned sight more than you could put up. Besides, for my own reasons in this case I'm not to be bought. You can take that as final. If you've come here to-day for that, you've wasted your time.”

“Say, here, Mr. Davenport, you can't get away with it like that. You know Johnny Flinn by this time. I've got something up against you that's going to make you change your mind.”

Davenport laughed amusedly. “Don't rake up that old Brooklyn graft again. You know you can't give me away without getting yourself in wrong. You ought to be too clever to think you can make me change my policy like that.”

Flinn got slowly to his feet, watching Daven-

port closely. "Say, Davenport, you're right. I am too clever for that. I've got something comin' for you, and it'll be too late to change your policy. You'll just have about time to change your clothes, if you're lucky, and beat it out of the country."

"What do you mean, Flinn?" Davenport's manner betrayed slight nervousness.

Flinn went on deliberately. "What about the New Era Mines?"

Davenport shifted uneasily. He spoke with an obvious effort. "The New Era Mines? Why, what's that got to do with me?"

"I guess it's got a lot to do with you, Mr. Davenport, from what I hear. Those mines are a plant, and you're working it. I know it. Now what have you got to say?"

Davenport looked ghastly white. His mask of indifference had been completely torn away by Flinn's sudden onslaught. Making a supreme effort to regain his control, he sprang to his feet. "You go right ahead and prove it first—if you can," he cried. "Then we'll talk business."

"I can prove it all right. But say, my boy,

you don't quite understand the situation this time. I'll talk to you in *your* language, you mutt. This is an abuse that I feel it my duty to my own interests to put down, and this is your last chance to do a deal before my conscience gets the better of me." Flinn was unusually sarcastic for him. "Now, what's your answer?"

Davenport was still clinging to a faint hope that Flinn was bluffing. "Let's have your proof first," he replied.

"Well, how about Ford of the *Financial Clarion*? I've got him. How about Witman, that you sent to Mexico to report, and called back again? I've got him." Flinn was carefully watching the effect of this on Davenport.

"Go on, any more?"

"I think that's about enough for a start," said Flinn, keeping up his appearance of assurance, "and I've got a line on one or two more."

As he heard these names, Davenport rapidly regained his normal self-assertiveness. He breathed freely again, realising that Flinn had been raising him on a pair of twos all the time.

Offering a silent prayer of thanks that he hadn't thrown in, Davenport laughed quite genially.

"Come again, Johnny, another day, when I'm not so busy, and bring a few more names with you. You know as well as I do those won't help you." Davenport reached for the telephone. "Well, Flinn, I'm afraid I must get on with it. Sorry to turn you out, but you will come in again, won't you?"

Flinn shook his head meaningly. "No, I shan't be back. I've given you your chance to-day. One more name will be enough for me, and then it's yours for the open country."

Davenport went with him to the door. With his hand on the knob he paused and turned to Flinn, with a mocking smile. "I say, Johnny, don't let any of those boys of mine outside get hold of you. You're in a very communicative mood to-day. They might get a story out of you. How would half a column headed 'John Flinn Denounces Graft' suit you?"

Flinn grunted. "That's all right. There'll be plenty of dope in a few days, only I've got a better place than this to send it to." He walked out.

Davenport closed the door after him. "Hell!" he muttered, and crossed the room unsteadily to a plain oak cupboard on the wall where he kept his brandy.

Flinn strolled along pondering the situation. He felt ruffled and undecided. He knew that he was on a hot scent and he was not going to let the matter rest until he had formulated a fresh plan of campaign. The information he had managed to obtain from Witman and Ford, and also from his own man whom he had taken the trouble to send to Mexico, was good so far as it went, in that it proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the various properties were worthless and that the whole promotion was a plant. That, however, was useless for Flinn's purpose, unless he could directly prove Davenport's connection with the scheme, and Davenport, up to now, had been exceedingly clever in covering up his trail. This alone had been holding Flinn up. His visit to Davenport that morning, in the hope that a chance shot might reach its mark, had been his last resource. It was exceedingly irritating to him to think that it was only his ignorance of the identity of the

actual man behind the scenes in Mexico who was doing all Davenport's dirty work that caused the present deadlock. Once he knew this man's name, it would be a strange thing, he reflected, if he could not put sufficient pressure upon him, one way or another, to obtain the necessary evidence. He determined to go and see Witman at once, being not at all sure that he had exhausted this source of information. He turned his steps towards the Brooklyn Bridge subway entrance, boarded an up-town local train, and alighted at Thirty Fourth Street. Witman's office was in Herald Square, and Flinn made his way carefully across the mid-day traffic of Fifth Avenue in that direction.

It was outside Riker's drug store that he met Yvonne Sebastin.

Now, Yvonne's moods—and they were many—were largely determined by her environment. Her tall, slender, perfectly-proportioned figure, and delicate finely-chiselled features were best suited by the air of rather languorous dignity and repose that she usually wore. But there were occasions when she was roused into an appearance of intense animation. Driving her

smart little cream-coloured two-seater, taking an early morning gallop, or playing a game of golf—to all of which she was an enthusiastic, if somewhat erratic, devotee—produced an acute state of mental exaltation; but surest of all in bringing out this mood was a shopping expedition. There was a certain keen delight to her in starting out with a firm determination not to spend more than fifty dollars, and invariably finishing up by finding that she had got rid of two or three times that amount. Judging from her manner that particular morning, she was evidently nearing the five hundred dollar stage, and her spirits were correspondingly high. The habitual expression of deep pathos in her eyes—her most striking feature—was almost flooded out with sheer, effervescent joy of living.

John Flinn had never been accused of wasting his time over women, but obeying some unreasoning impulse he stopped and spoke to her. It was an impulse utterly opposed to his usual taciturnity. Just a momentary whim, it was nevertheless destined to have disastrous consequences—a capricious gust of wind over

summer waters snatching unsuspecting lives into a hidden maelstrom of wreckage. The Fates certainly lit on Thirty Fourth Street that morning, for a moment, in their eternal search for victims.

Flinn greeted Yvonne almost genially. "Why, it's Mr. Flinn, of all people!" she exclaimed. "How are you?" She was manifestly surprised and amused. "I don't often see you up-town in the morning. You don't mean to say you're shopping? I've had a glorious time. Been to almost every shop in Fifth Avenue. Started out to buy a few things for my little niece, and found I wanted no end of things for myself. I'm a perfect fool with money." She chatted on breathlessly, flitting butterfly-like from one topic to another, without pausing for replies, until Flinn was quite appalled at the embarrassing torrent of words he had brought on himself; and he was vainly trying to break away, when a turn in this one-sided conversation brought his wits into action again.

"But you haven't answered me, Mr. Flinn. Where have you been this morning?" she was saying.

"Waal, I've just come from the *Magnet* office," he replied patiently.

"Oh, really. Did you see Mr. Davenport? How is he? Very busy as usual, I suppose?"

"Yes, very busy. He used to be rather a friend of yours, didn't he, Mrs. Sebastin?"

"Yes, we used to see quite a lot of one another," Yvonne replied with a smile. "He was always running about after me."

"H'm! Did he ever talk to you about his business affairs?"

"He chats about them sometimes when I see him—not very much, though. Why?" Yvonne was getting curious.

"Did he ever mention the *New Era* Mines?"

"Yes, I believe he said something about them. Aren't they the ones somewhere in Mexico? What are you driving at, Mr. Flinn. You're making me quite excited," she said frankly.

Flinn was carefully watching the effect of his words. "Waal, he didn't mention any names in connection with it, I suppose?" he said.

"No, I don't think so—no, I'm positive about that. But I shouldn't remember them, any

way." A little frown puckered her forehead. This cross-questioning was puzzling her.

Flinn paused a moment, with his eyes still on her, then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he transferred his attention to Riker's window. "No, I guess you wouldn't," he drawled. "I hope I haven't bothered you with it, but I've got rather an interest in it myself. I mustn't keep you any longer, Mrs. Sebastin. Glad to have seen you looking so well. Good-bye." He raised his hat and continued his way to Herald Square, leaving Yvonne wondering a little at his questions. She was quite persuaded now that he had stopped her with a definite purpose, but, to her disappointment, the matter did not show any signs of proving interesting. After all, there was a matter of a new French model at Altman's that positively must be attended to before lunch.

CHAPTER IV

TWO or three seedy, furtive-looking ticket speculators, busily at work in the glare of light outside the Times Square Theatre, were doing a good trade. "The Perfect Lady" had danced her way merrily through a record number of performances and these embryo financiers had little difficulty in selling their stock. They sidled to and fro among the likely looking individuals who stopped to read the announcements at the entrance, keeping a careful eye on their common enemy—the policeman.

Two of them had ceased operations for a few moments to discuss some knotty point of etiquette of their precarious profession.

"Say, you big boob, if I lamp youse buttin' in again on a guy what I've got cinched, I'll knock yer block off, do yer git me?"

"Aw, hell, I'll git yer good and plenty. Why don't you beat in back to T'oid Avenue and sell pea-nuts?"

This unfeeling reference to his enemy's former humble calling was too much for the latter's self-control, and, without further taxing his stock of repartee, he proceeded to carry out his threat. The combat, which was viewed with great approval by their fellow conspirators, who took the opportunity to corner some of their customers, brought them to the edge of the sidewalk just as a taxi drove up. A misdirected blow landed on Bunny's shirt-front as he stepped out. Politely enough he took a firm grip of each by his collar, lifted them from their feet and deposited them gently in the roadway. Delamotte paid the taxi and turned with a laugh to Bunny.

"Now, you've lost me two of my oldest friends. I often have to rely on them for tickets. Come on, don't let us miss the opening."

They turned a deaf ear to the blandishments of the remainder of the speculators, who approached with considerable caution, possibly fearing a similar fate, and made their way inside to their box. The curtain had just gone up.

A large and shapely bevy of dressmakers' manequins were extracting every ounce of en-

joyment to be had from a day at a brand new country farm. A tuneful orchestra was unfortunately drowning what was no doubt a perfectly satisfactory explanation of their presence there, in company with a number of flashily dressed, uncomfortable-looking young men, apparently much below their station in life. After this explanation had been received by the audience with the silent contempt which it deserved, a still more flashily dressed young man, who had come on by the next train to this country retreat, galloped on. He was very popular amongst a certain section of his lady companions, who immediately arranged themselves round in an effective semi-circle. The remainder left in disgust to change their dresses for the next effort. The aforesaid young man, after a few lines of pleasant but unconvincing banter, and as a somewhat lame excuse for his tardy arrival, burst into song to the effect that he was "Phil from Philadelphia."

As the plot developed along these lines, Delamotte's restless, critical instinct, which had long ago exhausted the possibilities of New York musical comedies and their particular type of audi-

ence, focused itself on his friend Bunny. He was lazily and without much enthusiasm taking stock of a pretty silk-stockinged milkmaid at the end of the row, who seemed to find him attractive. Delamotte was diverted to notice Thorne plainly show the amount of impression she had created on him by transferring his attention to his programme with a yawn. Various unexpected sidelights on Thorne's character and tastes were always making him an interesting study to Delamotte. His first impression, a vivid one, when he was introduced to him at a meet of hounds on the Worcestershire estate of his father, was simply one of careless, self-confident strength, mental and physical, without a touch of self-consciousness. But this appearance of rugged strength, he confessed to himself, was rather misleading. With all his perspicacity, he was only just beginning to fathom certain unexpected inward and spiritual graces of which this masterful exterior was no indication. Certain trifling episodes occurred to him, as he sat in the shadow of the box half listening to the dreamy notes of a tenor love melody. One recollection was of a noisy party at home

in England, searching for Bunny one evening to make up a game of bridge, bursting upon him at last in the lonely formal drawing-room, to find him pensively strumming some little songs of Grieg to himself. How could he draw an analogy between that solitary dreamer and the man who fought his way smilingly through two weary years of the Boer war as a trooper in a tough colonial corps? Then again, he remembered his surprise at the reckless pace and utter disregard of everybody, man, woman and child, when Bunny ran him down one day to Brooklands automobile track on his big racing Mercedes—a mad drive that only miraculously avoided disaster to all and sundry on the road by great good fortune and the skill of the driver. How could he reconcile that callous phase of his character with that of the same man who, while hurtling along at a hundred miles an hour on the track a few hours later, had made a wild hair-raising skid from the top of the banking almost down to the railings, and although recovering control well in time to avoid plunging into a crowd of specta-

tors, had deliberately pulled up, throwing away the race in order to go back and apologise to some ladies for frightening them?

But there was one phase of Bunny's character that was completely veiled from Delamotte. Women, although they were almost invariably attracted by Bunny, seemed to play a quite unimportant part in his affairs. He always made himself pleasant enough, and he was by no means without his adventures, but they seemed to leave no impression on him. In fact, he was so reticent on that point that Delamotte wondered sometimes whether Bunny had been badly stung at some period of his rather eventful existence. Whether this were the case or not, Delamotte decided if he ever did fall in love there would be no half measures about it. It would be a case of neck or nothing. This line of thought suggested certain possible developments which sent Delamotte's musings into a rather deeper channel, until he was interrupted by the general stir occasioned by the fall of the curtain on the first act.

"Why, hanged if that isn't young Bywaters;

and he's got Reid of the Second Horse Guards with him. I must introduce you to them. Come along."

Thorne's friends were lost in the shuffle, but with unerring judgment he made towards the saloon across the street.

"They're funny boys, Ralph, and you'll probably think at first they ought to have been drowned when they were young. Have you ever met any London 'nuts'?"

Ralph nodded. "Yes, I've met 'em. Those meteors that blaze over the firmament of the West End for a short space with a coruscating tail of motor cars and chorus girls, eh?"

"Yes, and generally vanish into obscurity leaving a trail of wrathful tailors and unpaid supper bills," Bunny added. "But these two are rather more in the nature of fixed stars. As a matter of fact, they're quite shrewd fellows, and they've got a very keen sense of humour. Some Englishmen have, you know, Delamotte!" He looked at his friend quizzically.

They found the two others, as Bunny had anticipated, ordering whiskies and sodas. Their exquisite clothes might have been made from the

same pattern. They both wore carnations in their buttonholes, and they were both trying very hard to hide what were really quite pleasing and intelligent expressions behind a mask of utter boredom. For the rest, the dark, clean-shaven face of the one, and the fair curly hair and slight moustache of the other, instead of differentiating them, rather served to accentuate the similarity of their almost effeminate bearing.

As they caught sight of Thorne, they forgot their languid manner and came towards him cordially.

"The devil!" exclaimed one.

"It's Bunny Thorne!" from the other. "Why, Bunny, what are you doing in New York?"

"Nothing much. Just having a look round. What brings you so far away from Piccadilly?" asked Bunny, shaking hands.

"I managed to screw a couple of months' leave out of old Jenkins. He noticed I was over-worked," replied Reid genially.

"Well, you've chosen a good place for a rest cure," Bunny chaffed him. "Let me introduce you to Mr. Ralph Delamotte. Ralph, these

two gorgeous fellows answer to the names of Bywaters and Reid."

"Glad to meet you. Are you going back to see the rest of the show?" asked Delamotte.

"Well, we must stop to the end," said Bywaters, he of the dark hair. "Reid here has got a pet girl that he used to know in London, who's in the show, and he's promised to meet her afterwards."

"Oh, I see. Well, why not bring her along to supper, and we'll make a little party at Jules Cartin's. They've got rather a good cabaret show there. That is, unless you'd rather be alone with her," Delamotte said obligingly.

Thorne broke in. "Oh, it doesn't matter what he wants. Bring her along, Reid. Now, what are we going to drink?"

"Same old thing, I suppose, Bunny. Whiskies and sodas. All right, thanks, we'll come along after," replied Reid. "We're very glad to have someone to show us round. We've got plenty of introductions, but Bywaters never has his breakfast till four o'clock in the afternoon, so it doesn't give one much chance to look him up."

"That's all very well," replied the indignant

Bywaters. "But on the one occasion when we did have invitations to dinner Reid drank six different kinds of cocktails in his bath while I was dressing, then he changed his mind and went back to bed."

Several more drinks had to be consumed before the occasion, in the opinion of these two, had been adequately celebrated, and by the time they all found themselves in Delamotte's box the last act was half over, the scene now, of course, being a restaurant. Reid pointed out his girl with a blasé air of proprietorship, the effect of which, however, was somewhat discounted by the fact that at the moment she was displaying an unmistakable interest in a youth in the front row of the stalls. She may have thought from Reid's empty stall that he had deserted her, and perhaps she was loath to lose her supper. However, the play kept bravely on, in spite of the interruptions of a comic waiter, and the nobly concealed disappointment of the guests at the absence of any signs of food. As a fitting climax to the scene, the hero, who was described as an English Duke, arrived at the restaurant, quietly and becomingly attired

in the full-dress uniform of a colonel in a German Guards regiment. Reid pointed out this discrepancy with keen appreciation.

“Let’s get out before the rush,” said Delamotte. “Mr. Reid, will you follow us to Cartin’s when your charmer is ready. If you give my name when you come in, they will show you the table.”

Reid parted with them at the entrance and they walked slowly down Broadway towards Times Square.

Incessantly the mammoth electric signs were blinking their glittering reminder of to-morrow’s business at the night-world of pleasure. A polo-player blazed into life, swung a flashing arm, struck at the ball and was blotted out, to repeat the monotonous game a second later. Automobiles and taxicabs glided up to the theatres, lingered a moment, and darted away to stately hotel and gaudy lobster-palace. Through the crowd-invaded street clanged an impatient line of trolley-cars. The feverish half-hour of the eternal tragi-comedy of the white lights, when the players move on to the

next setting, had begun. Ralph Delamotte led the way through the doors of Jules Cartin's, to where an impassive waiter was with difficulty persuading numbers of pleading, expostulating, smartly dressed men and women that the supper room above was full. But at sight of Delamotte he bowed him and his friends into the elevator and signalled to the attendant. They stepped out at the fourth floor into a little forest of hats and coats, which was curtained off from the supper room beyond, and took their places at the entrance to the crowded floor with the men and women who were waiting for the nod of the anxious-looking maître d'hôtel. The room was large and handsome, with mirrored walls reflecting hundreds of well-dressed visitors sitting in twos and threes at little white-topped tables. Here and there were a larger party of ten or a dozen.

In a bare roped-off oblong of polished floor a Spanish dancer was swaying her body and clicking her castanets to the lively tune of a string orchestra. To the two Englishmen, the scene was a novel one.

"Oh, for something like this in London," groaned Bywaters.

"Yes, it reminds one of the Rat Mort, doesn't it? But there's a different atmosphere about it," observed Thorne.

"Well, Bunny, they've only just started this idea and people aren't quite used to it yet," Delamotte explained.

"But anyhow, you can't get the real atmosphere of the Latin Quarter anywhere outside Paris," he replied.

"Except perhaps San Francisco. But come along, I've managed to get a table next the ropes."

Their table gave them an excellent view of the whole room. Delamotte ordered cocktails.

"I say, who's the walking jeweller's shop coming in?" Bywaters indicated a stout, elderly man, escorting a well-known vaudeville actress. He wore enormous pearl studs and sleeve buttons.

"Oh," laughed Delamotte, "that's a celebrated down-town broker. He's a very kind-hearted chap with a great weakness for jewellery, and he's commonly reported to wear black pearls on

his pyjamas, but I won't swear to that. There's your friend, Bunny." Delamotte rose, caught Reid wandering distractedly round with his erstwhile milkmaid, who was looking quite charming in her evening frock. She was introduced as Mamie Maxwell, and speedily made herself at home.

"Say, I'm just tickled to death at meeting three Englishmen all in one evening," she said vivaciously. "I met such a lot of nice boys when I was in England with *The Maid of Manhattan* last year, didn't I, Bobby?"

"Yes, and nearly killed them all off. Do you remember the night when we took your word for it that you could make cocktails? And you put some green Chartreuse into what you called a 'dry Martini—to give it a pretty colour?"

"Yes, you didn't look very good after it, but it was pretty, though, wasn't it?" she said plaintively.

The orchestra was softly striking up the stimulating strains of "The Beautiful Doll," and she glanced round.

"Oh, there's that lovely François going to dance a turkey-trot!" she exclaimed excitedly.

A loud burst of applause greeted the great François. He entered in a self-conscious manner and a plum-coloured dress suit of extravagant cut, bowing his pretty companion in elaborately. They began.

François was an artist. Gazing into his partner's eyes, he led her with his light magnetic touch hither and thither, now poised in the centre, their bodies swaying slightly to the rhythm of the music, then darting away elusively, until he transformed the usual monotonous crab-like shuffle into a dance, graceful and fantastic—gripping the true spirit of Southern rag-time. He finished suddenly and unexpectedly with a careless, sweeping bow in the midst of a storm of enthusiasm.

“My! Isn't he great?” exclaimed Mamie breathlessly, her eyes sparkling. “Bobby, if you bring me here again some evening, I will get him to dance with me.” She looked at him audaciously. “He will if I make love to him.”

Bobby was drinking a glass of champagne which went down the wrong way and prevented him from expressing an adequate opinion of this.

Mamie went on irrelevantly, “Say, Mr.

Delamotte, I expect you know lots of people in New York. Have you met Mrs. Sebastin?"

"Yes, I know her. Why?" Delamotte looked rather surprised at the question.

"Well, she was in front to-night. Isn't it strange she—"

Bunny was looking up with interest. "Where was she?" he interrupted.

"Why, in the box above you. Do you know, I haven't seen her for years," she resumed. "I thought she lived in California. Isn't she a lovely woman? There used to be a boy who was very sweet on me, and he used to talk about her. He said—"

"Oh, she's been in New York, on and off, for about a year now," Delamotte explained lightly. "But, like all you charming women, she flits about a good deal. I suppose you'll be off to London with the company soon. I hear they're going to take *The Perfect Lady* over there."

Bywaters, who had been assiduously consuming cocktails and champagne alternately in the intervals of watching the dancing, and was consequently in an advanced stage of exhilaration, here announced his firm intention of dancing

the turkey-trot, which provoked derisive comments from his friend Bobby. Mamie, however, seeing that he had made up his mind to dance or die in the attempt, was diplomatic. She suggested going to another place where Bywaters would not be quite so conspicuous. This idea luckily being approved of by this somewhat ruffled wooer of Terpsichore, they left the restaurant in a body and proceeded on their adventurous way in Bywaters' magnificent saloon-bodied car, which, in spite of the advice of his chauffeur, he insisted on driving himself. The ensuing heated argument with the policeman in Columbus Circle, however, necessitated a rearrangement of their plans. Bobby and Mamie escaped in a taxicab, and the other two kept Bywaters company during his brief but illuminating appearance at the night court, in the course of which he cordially invited the magistrate to breakfast and was fined ten dollars.

CHAPTER V

“**A**UNTIE 'VONNE! Don't stop there all the afternoon!” A little petulant voice floated up from the lawn. “You've done nothing but lie in that horrid old hammock, and I'm tired of playing all alone.” A delicate-looking little girl dressed in white clambered up the steps leading to the verandah and ran across to where Yvonne Sebastin was dozing in a hammock. She awoke with a little start.

“Oh, Mabs, dear. Don't worry me to-day. Auntie's got a bad headache. Run in and get Ballard to play with you.” She turned her head away irritably from the child, who stood looking at her for a moment with a hurt expression, and then walked sulkily into the house.

Yvonne looked very ill. The pallor of her face was heightened by large dark circles round her eyes. She lay inert gazing through the trees to where the quiet waters of Long Island Sound lazily lapped the rock-strewn edge of her

grounds. Set on a gentle wooded slope of the prettiest part of the North Shore, overlooking Manhasset Bay, her country home breathed a spirit of peace and solitude. The only link with the outside world was a long drive, wandering aimlessly down from the house until it lost itself in a belt of trees, several hundred yards off, which screened the road. The low, rambling house was built for comfort. The front porch gave immediately on to a large lounge where deep armchairs and divans standing here and there on the polished floor, with a few handsome rugs scattered carelessly about, a grand piano standing open at an angle to the wall with a pile of music thrown on the top, all gave an impression of coolness and ease, characteristic of this summer retreat of Yvonne's. The large French windows and verandah overlooked a wide grass slope stretching away to the bathing house and the beach. Away to the left, at the far boundary of the grounds, was a gravel tennis court, which made the only break in this expanse of scorched turf. A border of trees formed a lattice work of green against the blue waters of the Sound.

Yvonne's mind to-day, however, was at discord with her tranquil surroundings. Since she had left Delamotte outside Delmonico's a fortnight previously, her brain had been actively at work. Without knowing entirely why, she had not been exactly surprised at his attitude. His motives did not trouble her much. The main point was that she had not achieved her object, and this alone to Yvonne was sufficiently galling at the time. But to-day, she suddenly realised that the desire to meet this Englishman, which had originated as a mere whimsical fancy, had grown into an almost complete obsession. She tried with much painstaking, self-analysis to determine whether this was merely a direct result of being thwarted, or whether it could possibly be that she had fallen in love—she admitted the expression to herself with considerable misgiving—with a man whom she had rarely seen and never spoken to. This sudden interest in a man was quite strange to her; in fact, she rather prided herself upon her invulnerability. As her musings reached this point, she abruptly came to the conclusion that something about Thorne—she had found out his

name with the exercise of a little characteristic ingenuity—had appealed to her strongly from the moment when she had come face to face with him at Meadowbrook. That being so, she at once conceded that something must be done promptly, and that she must use all her strategy to get to know him without wasting any more valuable time.

Now, Delamotte had definitely refused to help her. Who else, that she knew, could do so? She almost wished—and she smiled—that she were able to use the simple but effective methods of introduction practised by members of “the oldest profession on earth.” The only other person she had seen him with was Flinn. Johnny Flinn! She almost laughed aloud at the idea of asking him to waste his time over a matter like that, even if he remembered meeting Thorne, which was very doubtful. And yet she could not quite get Flinn out of her mind. Her thoughts began to run around in circles, vainly casting about for some means of getting the necessary introduction. But for some vague reason they kept returning to the old “Boss.” Suddenly the details of her meet-

ing with him outside Riker's came to her mind, and she pondered mechanically over his mysterious questions. At length she realised that she was not coming to any satisfactory solution by thinking of Flinn, and she decided it was best to put the matter right out of her thoughts for the time being and go to her room and rest. If this terrible feeling of weakness would only leave her. Rousing herself with an effort, she walked slowly into the house and rang the bell for her maid.

"Where is Miss Mabel, Ballard?"

"She is with me, ma'am."

"Well, I'm going to lie down. Don't disturb me for anyone. I shan't want any dinner. Has anyone telephoned this afternoon?"

"Only Mr. Davenport, ma'am. I told him you were not well and could not speak to him."

"Did he leave any message?" asked Yvonne.

"No, ma'am. He seemed in a great hurry and told me to mail a letter which he wrote when he was here yesterday afternoon, and forgot to take with him. He said it was most important."

"Oh, very well. Have you sent it?"

“No, ma’am. Hudson is going down with it in a few minutes.”

Yvonne moved towards the stairs and then stopped. “Ballard, you might bring it to me.”

The maid went out and appeared with a letter on a silver tray. Yvonne took it up casually. As she glanced at the address she started, then stood a moment, holding her right hand to her forehead thinking furiously.

“Ballard!” she said sharply. “I remember I have to go to the village. I’ll send this off myself. Tell Hudson to be ready with the Renault—no, the two-seater—in ten minutes.” She went quickly upstairs to her bedroom. Closing the door carefully, she entered her dressing room and lit a spirit lamp under a small kettle of water, and waited impatiently for it to boil. Then taking up the envelope she held it carefully in the steam until the flap began to curl at one edge, when she inserted a small knife, and carefully peeled the envelope open.

A first perusal of the letter puzzled her. Then a look of understanding dawned upon her as she sank upon the edge of the bed and read it again more carefully.

The sound of a throbbing engine broke the silence. A sharp grating noise came from the side of the house and a crunching of gravel, as the gear was engaged and the car moved from the garage. Yvonne slowly and deliberately put on a hat and dust coat and, dropping the letter into her bag, went down to the porch. She slipped into the driving seat and motioned to the man to get in beside her. Yvonne took the four miles of leafy lanes very carefully, contrary to her usual wild dash down to the village. At the post office she alighted and went inside.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Sebastin," the girl greeted her respectfully.

"Good afternoon. I want a Brooklyn call, please." She gave the number and waited.

"You're through, ma'am."

Yvonne went into the booth. "Is that Mr. Flinn's office? I want Mr. Flinn, please.—Mrs. Sebastin—tell him I must speak to him. Say it's in reference to the matter he was discussing with me a fortnight ago.—Ah, is that you, Mr. Flinn?—Oh, yes, I can't tell you over the 'phone, but I've got some very important information; will you come down to dinner to-

night?—All right, I won't wait dinner, but I'll expect you not later than ten. Good-bye."

Yvonne smiled pleasantly at the girl as she left the post office.

"Hudson, I shall walk home," she said to the chauffeur. "When you get back tell Ballard I've changed my mind about dinner. Ask her to have some chicken and a salad ready, and a small bottle of champagne put out, for seven o'clock."

Yvonne stepped out briskly in the track of her automobile, which disappeared in a cloud of dust.

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Shortly before ten that night, Flinn arrived. Yvonne greeted him at the porch, with some show of anxiety in her manner.

"I'm glad you could come, Mr. Flinn. I've been very worried this afternoon. That's why I telephoned you."

Flinn grunted, and looked round for a place to put his hat.

"Shall we go out on the verandah?" Yvonne suggested.

With a sigh of resignation, he put it back on

his head and followed her. A single shaded electric lamp dimly lit up a couple of easy chairs drawn closely together in the far corner of the verandah.

"Will you have a highball, Mr. Flinn? You'll find everything at that table beside you." Yvonne sank into one of the easy chairs.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sebastin, thank you." He mixed himself a drink, lit a cigar and sat down heavily beside her.

"Mr. Flinn, I'm not going to waste your time. I know you'd prefer me to come straight to the point," she began.

Flinn was puffing his cigar and staring out across the calm moonlit Sound to where the lights of Manhasset shone faintly through the black silhouette of the trees. He was apparently quite oblivious to what she was saying.

"You asked me some little time ago for a name," Yvonne went on. "Well, I've got it."

He turned and looked at her. "Waal, Mrs. Sebastin," he said ponderously, "if it's the name I want I guess I'm not out for wasting any time either. Let's talk business. What can I do for you?"

Yvonne was inclined to be tearful. "You know it's not a question of that. I know nothing about business."

Flinn was looking at her searchingly. "Waal, suppose I like to call it business, Mrs. Sebastian? Go on."

Yvonne shrugged her white shoulders. "It's this way. I've got the name you want, and a good deal of information besides, and I've decided I ought to give it to you."

"As I said before, I'm open for a deal."

"Mr. Flinn, understand me," she said with dignity. "I don't want to be insulted. I want to protect myself, but at the same time to act conscientiously. Please put that everlasting idea of business out of your head for to-night and give me your advice as a friend." She met his ferrety eyes unflinchingly.

"I'm afraid," Flinn said laconically, "I don't understand you. But please go on."

"Tch!" She gave a gesture of impatience. "Of course you don't understand. It was absurd of me to expect it. I could as easily coax Chopin out of a cash register as get sentiment

from you. At the first key I touch, up springs a dollar ticket."

Flinn was flattered. "Some people are mighty glad if it isn't a 'No Sale,'" he countered with a twinkling eye.

Yvonne regarded him dubiously. "I don't believe you are as hard as you make out, Mr. Flinn. At any rate I'll give you the information, but I'm relying on you to be lenient with Mr. Davenport—that's why I haven't gone straight to the police."

"Well, what can *I* do?" Flinn grumbled. "As you say, it's entirely a matter of business with me, however praiseworthy your motives may be. I've got to use the dope."

Yvonne pressed her forehead distractedly. "This is a very difficult position for me. Let me think," she went on slowly. "My information consists of a letter to—to a man who seems to be his agent at Tampico. What do you propose to do with it?"

"Publish it, of course," Flinn replied unhesitatingly.

"Then that means—"

"The Tombs!" He examined the ash on his cigar ruminatively. "That is, if he's still to be found," he concluded with a very straight look.

"Oh!" Yvonne paused. "Well," she went on with decision, "I suppose there's no alternative, unless—" She tapped a little black satin shoe on the floor, "well, would it suit your purpose as well to give him time to get out of the country?"

Flinn rubbed his fat hands briskly. "That's a deal. I'll give him a week."

Yvonne bit her lip with vexation, and smiled wearily at him. "You're incorrigible, Mr. Flinn. It's a good thing for you I've got a sense of humour to come to my rescue. Now, wait a moment and I'll go and fetch the letter."

She rose and went into the house. Flinn settled himself deeply into his chair and resumed his scrutiny of the distant light of Manhasset. Yvonne returned with an open letter.

"Listen to this," she addressed Flinn, moving towards the light.

The cold glare threw into relief and emphasised the whiteness of a smooth bare shoulder of perfect contour, and the pallor of her deli-

cate, clean-cut profile as she stood erect with her graceful head slightly bent. A clinging black evening gown, with a single note of colour where a broad crimson scarf gathered it below the knees accentuated every mature curve of her slender figure.

A strangely assorted pair, these two. The glory of the night and the fairness of the woman were surely calling for the words of a lover, and not the wiles of an old crafty politician.

Yvonne began to read the letter.

“Dear Kamphausen,

“Yours of the 19th received. No, certainly not. You must go ahead exactly as you did on the first two properties. That’s essential to the whole scheme. I don’t want to risk ten years for the sake of saving a few hundred dollars. I am sending on the pyrites by the first coast boat addressed to Hickman at Tampico and you must get it up to him at the mine as best you can and tell him to make a good show with it for the next few weeks until the remaining flotations Nos. 5, 7 and 8 on your schedule are through. Get through a word of caution to Hickman. If he smells any of Flinn’s men around Texapetl or any of the other *New Era* properties tell him to

put the greasers on to them and get them running. I don't want him to get wise. Don't go near the place yourself. I'll write again in a few days. In the meantime communicate with me as before. I hope you have heard that Mrs. Kamphausen is better.

“Yours,
“W. K. D.”

“I'm going to give you this letter, Mr. Flinn.” Yvonne folded it nervously and made a movement as though to hand it to him. He rose clumsily from his chair.

“That's good enough for me. I'll hunt up W. K. D. to-night,” Flinn said with laboured facetiousness, and stretched out his hand. Yvonne seemed not to notice it.

“By the way, Mr. Flinn,” she continued, looking down at the letter in her hand, “I don't know when I'll be meeting you again, so there's one trifling thing I'd like to ask you now. Do you remember meeting an Englishman named Thorne? At Meadowbrook? I've an idea I'd rather like to know him. I wish you could arrange to introduce me to him. It's a stupid thing to ask you to-night, isn't it?”

Flinn faced her with an inscrutable look in his hard little eyes. "All right, I'll see to it."

"That's so kind of you, Mr. Flinn," Yvonne said brightly. She handed him the letter, which he read over and put in his pocket.

"Will you have another highball? No, then I'll see you to your car."

Yvonne walked with him to the porch.

"Good night, Mrs. Sebastin," Flinn growled. "You can make your mind easy now."

Yvonne stood watching the red tail light of his car twinkling away down the drive, then slowly she turned and, sweeping through the warm radiance of the lounge, sat down at the piano.

A rose-shaded lamp close by lent a faint glow to her cheeks and caught the birth of a little smile on her uplifted face—the tender face of a nun at evensong.

Then softly, lingeringly, her fingers touched the keys, and the notes of Puccini's *Due ladri occhi neri* stirred the breathless night with their passionate challenge.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN FLINN'S chauffeur, following out his master's emphatic but profane instructions, gave him an extremely creditable imitation of a joy ride in the nether regions, and the clock on the Metropolitan Tower barely pointed to eleven as he jumped out of the car at the Queensborough Bridge to turn out the headlights.

Flinn's first idea had been to drive straight to Davenport's office, where he was always to be found at this time of night, but with a certain grim humour he changed his mind, and beckoning the chauffeur to him, redirected him to Davenport's apartments on Riverside Drive. He found the valet just on the point of going out.

"Mr. Davenport won't be back to-night, sir," the man explained.

"He'll be here in an hour," Flinn said abruptly, pushing past him.

"I don't think so, sir."

Flinn walked into the dining-room and seated himself at a writing table. "Say!" he growled over his shoulder, "I'm going to write a note to Mr. Davenport and I want you to take it down to my chauffeur."

"Very good, sir." The valet waited obediently.

Pulling a piece of paper towards him, Flinn scribbled a few lines quickly, hesitated a moment, and tore it up.

According to reliable historians John Flinn, political boss, smiled five times in his life. This was one of the recorded occasions. He took a fresh sheet of paper and chewing the end of the pen for a few seconds, started again more deliberately.

"Dear Mr. Davenport

"I have just looked in at your apartments to see if you'd care to come back and have a bite of supper and a chat. I'm disappointed to hear from your valet that you're not expected back to-night and I don't want to upset your arrangements, but in case you could manage it, I'll wait here until twelve fifteen. I can't wait any

longer as I may have to look in at the *Financial Clarion* before it goes to press—Here Flinn scratched his head with the end of the pen and continued.—By the way, Mrs. Kamphausen is doing very well. A quarter after twelve.

“Yours faithfully,

“JOHN FLINN.”

Flinn read this guileless effort again with considerable relish before sealing it in its envelope.

His own thoughts and Davenport's whisky provided pleasant enough company for him until a certain distinctive hoot and a shrieking of brakes on the Drive below rose above the vague noise of the traffic, and roused him. He glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece and waited till he heard the front door close. Then, crossing the room, he opened the door quickly, and with surprising neatness seized Yvonne by the arm and half dragged her out of the darkness of the hall into the room.

“Good evening again, Mrs. Sebastin!” He closed the door quietly behind her.

“My God! How you frightened me!” Yvonne's features were an interesting blend of

fear, indignation and amazement. "Is Davenport here?" she gasped.

It was seldom she was caught at a disadvantage, but for a moment she clutched at Flinn for much-needed support. He was mildly amused at the success of his little surprise.

"He's coming, but he can't arrive for half an hour," he said imperturbably. "You silly woman, what ever made you come up here?"

Yvonne gripped her self-possession with an effort and shook herself free. "I didn't expect to find you here—I thought you'd be at his office."

Flinn was almost playful. "Waal, we've fixed up a little supper. Are you going to join us?"

"Mr. Flinn, I'd better go," she said nervously. "I—I only came for some letters."

"Oh—ho! Like that, eh?" He still kept his position by the door.

"Yes," Yvonne continued rapidly, "just something foolish. I—I promised to marry him once. There, now, I've let it out. I didn't want to leave them here now—you can understand that, of course."

Her agitation, however, seemed more than this somewhat conventional explanation of her presence warranted. Flinn was frankly puzzled.

“Well, hurry up, you silly child,” he said. “Get them. Don’t mind me.”

Yvonne started off again irrelevantly, casting uneasy glances round the room. “However did you know it was I?”

“Your chauffeur told me—” Flinn began stolidly.

Yvonne looked incredulous.

“—when he sounded that new French hooter of yours as he drove up. I haven’t heard another like it in New York. But come along, get your letters and run away.”

Yvonne was not accustomed to having her pet schemes treated in this off-hand fashion. Showing signs of considerable pique she glanced hurriedly round the room and walked to the writing table. Flinn watched her carefully as she pulled out drawer after drawer at hazard. Then her right hand attracted his attention. He went casually up to her. “Mrs. Sebastin, don’t be foolish!” He laid his hand on her arm in

a fatherly manner. Yvonne turned in surprise. "You know you're not looking for anything," he went on.

"I—*beg* your—"

Flinn suddenly shot his hand away from her arm and before she could make a move, had withdrawn a letter from her low corsage. "That's more like it!"

"Give that to me at once!" Yvonne screamed, and made an infuriated lunge at him.

"Now, Mrs. Sebastin, stand over there and keep quiet. I haven't much more time for this playing about," Flinn said curtly. Still keeping his back to the door, he opened the letter and read it. "H'm! Very pretty, v-ery pretty! So *I* stole Davenport's letter, did I? Well, well—" He shook his head. "You've the makings of a clever woman, but—"

Yvonne broke in desperately. "I *had* to do it—can't you see, I *had* to do it? Directly you'd gone I realised what a dangerous position I was in. I'd overlooked that. I was at his mercy for a whole week." She went up to Flinn appealingly. "For God's sake, let him have it! It can't do you any harm, and he might—oh,

he might do anything if he found out that I'd given you the letter. I came straight up here to leave this rubbish to keep him quiet. I can't risk a scene with a man like that—a crook—” Yvonne broke down and put her hands on Flinn's broad, shabby shoulders. “Ah, God! I'm afraid—desperately afraid!” she sobbed hysterically.

Flinn took a long steady look into the depths of her streaming eyes, and was apparently satisfied with what he saw. “Come, Mrs. Sebastian, that'll be all right. Don't get yourself all fussed up,” he said awkwardly. John Flinn was not experienced in the art of handling lovely, distressed women. “I'll see that Davenport gets your letter.”

Yvonne's little storm was gradually dying away. “You're a perfectly sweet old man, Mr. Flinn, really.”

“Now then, cut it out,” Flinn shook a fat finger at her. “You'll be flirting with me next.”

She smiled at this dark innuendo.

“But take a word of advice from an old—cash register,” he went on. “If you must write letters in your automobile—oh, yes, you did, you

had no time after I left, because you were only fifteen minutes after me, and my lad lost no time—if you must do it, I say, don't use a leaking pen!"

Yvonne, dumfounded, looked at her right hand, the glove dangling from her wrist. Flinn held open the door.

"Oh, just a moment, Mrs. Sebastin. Say, you got me guessing over where you had that letter," he said gravely.

"Oh, yes, of course," Yvonne stopped at the door. "How on earth did you know where it was?"

"I *didn't* know—except that it was on you somewhere." His manner was verging on the severe, but his eyes betrayed him. "Goodness knows what I should have done if it had been in your stocking. It had to be found, you know! Good night."

A light little laugh came from Yvonne as Flinn closed the door on her.

It was obviously an occasion to be celebrated, Flinn decided, chuckling happily at the subtlety of his little joke.

After putting back the decanter, he returned

to the excavation he had already made in Davenport's favourite chair. He was quite aware that Yvonne had gone off in some irritation in spite of her gracious smile, and that the feeling that would, not unnaturally perhaps, outweigh all others in her Napoleonic mind, as she drove home, would be the uncomfortable one of having been treated with the amused tolerance extended to a naughty, spoilt child. Though it had amused him to foster this impression, Flinn had a very lively appreciation of her capabilities, and he was quite convinced that, had not the little incident of her inky finger given him the key to the situation, she would have found some means of leaving her letter unobserved while under his very nose. Flinn pulled out the letter and read it again with increasing admiration.

"Wilbur,

"I am very upset at what I have discovered to-day about you. You will have heard from Flinn what has happened. I had to send for him when I discovered the letter, as he had dropped hints some time ago which had worried me, but I had no idea it was anything so crooked as that. It seems that the *New Era*

Silver Mines are nothing less than a gigantic swindle that you and this man Kamphausen are working. I think it is disgraceful. All the same I am sorry he got the letter. I had no idea he would use force, although most women would have felt justified in deliberately giving it to him. I feel very, very strongly about it all. It seems so terrible that I can hardly realise it. It was all I could do to get Flinn to give you a week to get away in. I hardly know what to think. You can't expect me to feel very affectionate at present, but you must promise me not to come near me for the week before you go if you want me to stick to you. Go away and start afresh, and I'll wait. I've done all *I* can. I am driving up at great speed to leave this, and scribbling it on the way. You can communicate with me through my brother.

“YVONNE.”

Flinn was by no means annoyed at the unblushing slander it contained of his own lofty principles; in fact, he was quite proud to make a burnt offering of them on the altar of her ingenuity. He was satisfied, from his own keen observation, that the feeling of anxiety which had prompted Yvonne to concoct this master-

piece of plausibility was genuine, and he failed to see the need for such a state of apprehension in a woman who was so remarkably capable of looking after herself. To Flinn, whose ready nerve had been his greatest asset through life, Yvonne Sebastin's reputation for cool presence of mind had always made particular appeal, while Davenport's bluster, he knew from personal experience, was always ready to desert him when in contact with a show of firmness. And, for this reason, his forthcoming interview was not likely to be half as entertaining as his little duel with Yvonne.

As Davenport entered, Flinn saw at once that his surmise had been correct. It was going to be too easy.

For an exasperating twenty minutes or so Flinn refused to take him seriously, and insisted upon having an impromptu supper in which Davenport was only interested to the extent of three large brandies. During the course of the meal, Flinn contented himself with a few mild gibes as to the future prosperity of the *Magnet* under a new *régime*, and then, having carefully withdrawn his napkin and picked his teeth, he

lit a cigar and laid a brutally plain statement of the situation before his victim.

"And so," he concluded affably, "I guess you'll see you're up against it good and plenty, this time."

Davenport did see it. So plainly that metaphorically his hands went up at once.

"For God's sake listen to reason," he pleaded. "I'll make any terms you like."

Flinn's tone changed completely. "See here, young man, you had your chance a fortnight ago. I'm not here to make terms with you. Anything I do is to suit my own arrangements. Now, with this evidence," he tapped the table with Davenport's incriminating letter to Kamphausen, "I could start you to the Tombs to-morrow. Well, I'm not going to do that."

"Thank God! Thank God! I—I knew you didn't mean that, Flinn." Davenport stopped his nervous pacing up and down and made quickly towards Flinn, holding out his hand. "I—you wouldn't let me—"

"Aw, get away, you boob!" Flinn's opinion of this outburst landed neatly in the fireplace. "I'd let you go plumb to hell for all I care.

You don't suppose I'm going to let you get away with it. You've been playing dirty tricks on me now for three years—durned dirty tricks. There's even a clean way of grafting, but you don't know the first thing about it. You sold your friends right and left, and now I've got you. I'm not going to take any more chances. I've got my own reasons for not giving it to the police, but you're a gol darned dirty rat and I'm going to twist your tail, and this'll do it." Flinn slammed the letter violently on to the table and stood up, his flinty eyes gleaming with contempt.

"What do you mean, Flinn?" Davenport lurched towards him again, brokenly.

"You've got to beat it clean out of the States. I'm going to give you a week because I shall have some dope to go in your paper first before it goes to bed for the last time. D'you get me? You've got to put me right. After that, well, you know who's waiting to publish that letter, eh? Now, then,"—Flinn walked to the writing table and studied a calendar with his back to Davenport—"this is the sixteenth. You've got till midnight on the twenty-third before I

publish the—” Flinn’s mind flashed back to the letter to Kamphausen which he had left on the table. He wheeled quickly round. As he feared, Davenport had it. He was backing away to the far side of the table, clutching the letter and glaring at Flinn. His white, twitching face began to be smeared with dull blotches of unhealthy red and a pulse drummed madly in his temple.

A long string of foul, inconsequent oaths rushed to his lips and burst out hysterically. He consigned Flinn to all known forms of torture on earth and improvised unspeakable agonies for him in his future state. Then with a triumphant wave of the letter he broke fresh ground. “You blasted fox! You were too damned clever this time,” he screamed.

Flinn was impassively watching every movement of the letter. “Wilbur K. Davenport isn’t done yet by a long way,” Davenport continued. “It’ll take something more than a clumsy old fool like you to get it from me!”

Flinn decided upon a gamble, thanking his lucky stars that Davenport so far did not know of the existence of Yvonne’s letter to him.

Davenport stretched his hand towards a box of matches on the white tablecloth, and went on with strained jocularly. "Watch me do a little conjuring trick with this bit of paper. You can take the result back to that lying she-devil who gave it to you. Think I don't know who started all this?" He drew in his breath sharply and paused. "God!" he muttered, and his voice broke. "Flinn, you don't understand the worst part of this for me. I was crazy about her—crazy. She's finished it—with this." The suggestion in the words roused him to frenzy, and he fumbled for a match and struck it. "She's tried to put me away—and, God help me, I'm crazy about her now—always shall be, the damned—"

"Davenport!" Flinn's sharp ejaculation halted the little blue and yellow flame. It flickered uncertainly an inch off the letter.

"Don't burn that yet, you fool!" Flinn said evenly. "Here's a letter from Mrs. Sebastin that'll change your mind. I'll trade it."

Davenport peered at the handwriting on the envelope in Flinn's hand, hesitated, and then blew the match out. "What's it about?" he

said unsteadily. "What the hell are you doing with it? Give it to me."

"Don't be a fool. I'll read it to you." As he did so, he looked up now and again to watch the effect on Davenport. At the concluding lines Davenport looked up eagerly.

"Well, Flinn?"

"It's like this," Flinn began, emphasising every word. "I'm not going to bluff you. This letter of Mrs. Sebastin's is not so much good to me as the one you have. It's not what I want—you know that. But I'll go further than that. It might take much longer to do anything with her letter than that one. But"—Flinn looked very steadily at Davenport and played his trump card with little hope of success from his estimate of the latter's character—"if you won't trade, I shall publish her letter instead of yours—and that won't do her a lot of good, will it?" Flinn waited.

The other man handed him the incriminating letter cheerfully. "You can do what you like with this one, John. I'd rather have Mrs. Sebastin's," he said simply.

Flinn shrugged his shoulders and made the

exchange. "Waal, this goes in on the twenty-third," he said gruffly. "I wish you luck."

"Thanks! I'm glad there's one thing you can't do me down for." Davenport was bitter. "You think you got me beat, but I've got quite a lot left. Go away and leave me with it, Flinn." He fingered the letter impatiently.

Flinn picked up his hat and stood undecided for a moment. Then he walked quickly to the door.

"Good night," he said.

There was no answer. He looked round at Davenport. Then, "Say, that's a cruel fake of hers!" he muttered to himself. "Poor devil!" and went out quietly.

Flinn drove moodily to his modest home in Brooklyn where his pleasant-faced old Southern wife was waiting up for him.

It was a long time before he could rid himself of the memory of that lonely man—a crook and a blackguard—looking out beyond the dark Hudson, building up a new life contentedly on his only asset—a letter!

CHAPTER VII

BUNNY THORNE stood patiently by the last hole, flicking at the angry mosquitoes with one hand and holding up the flag with the other. A cloud of sand rose lazily into the still air from the depths of a bunker beside the green, followed by a little terse commentary on the vagaries of golf balls in general with a gloomy hint as to the ultimate destination of one in particular. Thorne grinned brutally.

“How many’s that, Mrs. Sebastin?” he called out. “You’re not leaving much sand for the next players!”

Yvonne’s flushed face appeared over the edge of the bunker. “You beast!” she exclaimed with an heroic attempt to be crushing. “You needn’t laugh at me. I’ve still got two for the hole. Now, don’t interrupt. I’m busy.” The golden-brown head dipped out of sight again, and Thorne subsided, awaiting the result of Yvonne’s hidden machinations. Then a clean-

cut metallic click preceded another miniature sandstorm and the ball was rolling limply on to the edge of the green.

“Oh, good shot! You’re just over!”

Yvonne climbed up triumphantly and took her putter from the bag. “Now, then, Mr. Thorne, I’m playing the like. Watch me hole out.”

He laughed cheerfully as he surveyed the dozen yards of rolling turf between him and the ball. “I *have* seen those missed, Mrs. Sebastin—not by you, of course,” he added hastily as she gave him a withering glance.

With amusing concentration Yvonne took her stand and glared at the unfortunate ball for some seconds. Finding, however, that this produced no perceptible effect, with the deadly playfulness of a cat administering the last rites to a captive mouse, she gave the ball a pat. Thorne’s spontaneous chuckle died away pitifully and his expression became one of reverent awe as the demoralised victim of her hypnotic gaze took a halting, drunken course down hill, and with a final, inconsequent swerve dived into the hall.

"There! what did I tell you?" Yvonne said with a casual air. She watched him darkly. Realising that the occasion was too great a one to be spoilt by mere words, Bunny silently walked to the hole, picked out the ball and held it to her gingerly between his thumb and forefinger.

"Don't lose this, Mrs. Sebastin. It ought to be worth money, whatever it is. Can we get a cup of tea here? It might pull me together."

"Oh, that's mere laziness," Yvonne retorted. "You can last out till we get home. As a matter of fact, though," she went on ingenuously, "I wasn't sure at one time that it was going in."

"I couldn't have sworn to it myself," Thorne remarked drily. "However—well, let me see, you beat me by three holes. Twenty-five cents a hole—that's seventy-five cents." He produced a crumpled handful of bills from his trouser pocket. "Help yourself, Mrs. Sebastin. I'm not quite at home with this money, yet. Here, have this one. It's the cleanest."

Yvonne glanced at the bill he was offering her. "Never mind now," she said amusedly.

“Wait until you’ve got change. As a matter of fact, I never carry as much as that when I’m golfing.”

Bunny took stock of it more carefully, and laughed. “A hundred, eh! Stupid of me!—I beg your pardon, let me take your clubs.”

They sauntered off the links into a green cavernous lane, pierced here and there with flashing blades of sunlight. Bunny walked beside her with long patient strides and head bent, contentedly studying the simple graceful figure in white with its shining glory of golden-brown hair. The clubs jerked awkwardly behind him as he held them on his shoulder with a bare, sunburnt arm. Yvonne prattled away charmingly, making careless digs at the sandy road with her sunshade.

“I suppose everything is strange to you at first,” she said presently. “I’m always so interested in Englishmen’s impressions that I have to catechise them. Tell me, what do you think of this little city?”

“The same, I suppose, as every other visitor. All the women are lovely, and most of the buildings immense! I know when I get back, I shall

look upon London as a collection of thatched cottages."

"It's quite a merry little village, though," Yvonne continued dreamily, "from my recollection of it. The lads and lasses haven't much to learn from us. I had a splendid time when I was there. Why do you spoil us Americans so?"

"I'm just beginning to realise how backward we are in that respect," he replied. "American hospitality is a lesson to me. There's nothing to equal it on our side."

"Do you really think so, Mr. Thorne?"

"I do," he replied with conviction. "We think we're doing a stranger well if we ask him to lunch. But over here! Why, I could pack up and go away for three months on the invitations I've had from acquaintances of an hour's standing."

Yvonne was amused. "I hope you're not going to be as popular as that, or we shan't be able to have many more games of golf."

"Oh, it isn't a question of popularity, Mrs. Sebastin. It's just sheer good feeling. Take Mr. Flinn, for example. I'm not the sort of man to appeal to him in any way, and yet he

took the trouble to hunt me up—I'd only met him once before for a few minutes—and take me down to Sand Beach last Thursday. Indirectly I owe these charming days I've spent with you entirely to that hospitable notion of his. It's very lucky for me that you happened to be lunching there as well."

"I'm very glad I was," said Yvonne frankly, "although I often take a book and run over there these hot days."

The cool shade of the interlaced foliage deserted them as they turned into the naked white road leading to her house.

"What a terrible glare! I don't know how you manage to survive Garden City in this heat. I had a look round there myself, before I took this house, but it seemed to be one eternal hum of mosquitoes and aeroplanes."

Bunny laughed. "Well, there is a good deal of competition between them, sometimes, certainly, but it's a very nice spot and there are some charming people there. Besides it's much preferable to getting down from New York at five in the morning to get the right weather."

"I suppose you're determined to go on with

this idea of flying," Yvonne said casually. "Whatever made you take it up? I know wings are very ornamental, but why anticipate them? We shall all have them one day if we're good."

"My dear lady," he replied, "the order was placed for yours in the next world the moment you were born. We others, who are not so certain of them, have to content ourselves with an early delivery for cash."

"That's very gallant of you, Mr. Thorne, I only hope it's true. But—oh, well, you won't take any notice of what I say—do take care of yourself, that's all," she said lightly as they turned in at the drive. "Tell me, have you started housekeeping yet with your friends?"

"Oh, yes, I meant to tell you." Bunny smiled with sudden recollection. "They arrived at the cottage from New York at four o'clock this morning with two valets and a parcel of ham and eggs. So any doubts I may have had were at once dispelled—although we haven't any servants yet."

Yvonne shuddered. "The possibilities of such a *ménage* are too vast for my imagination. Who's going to do the cooking?"

"Bobby Reid offered to look after it to-day, but he's been relieved of any further duty. He shirked it disgracefully at lunch and we had to drink the pancakes!"

"You poor thing! In that case I withdraw my remarks about flying. If it will make you miss any meals, keep in your aeroplane. But no wonder you want your tea. Hullo, Mabs, darling!" she cried delightedly, as the little figure in her white frock jumped down the porch steps and ran up to them. Yvonne bent down and kissed the delicate face.

"Oh, Auntie 'Vonne, I'm so glad you're home. I do want to have a swim. Can't we go and undress now?"

Yvonne laughed and stroked the dark curls caressingly, as they went into the house. "You can't always be in the water, Mabs. I took you in this morning. Perhaps we'll take you in the motor-boat presently if you're good. Now, run and tell Ballard we want tea at once." Mab's long legs flashed out of the room excitedly.

"Put those clubs down anywhere and make yourself at home. I'm quite tired," said Yvonne.

"Bright kid, that little niece of yours, Mrs. Sebastin," said Bunny, pushing an easy chair up to the table for her.

"Yes, she's a dear little thing, but a bit of a 'terrible child.' One has to be deaf and dumb sometimes when she's about. She told one of my dearest enemies the other day that she was with me when I got my face colour. And unfortunately it was true."

"Where was that?" Bunny asked with interest. "On the golf links?"

"No. In a drug store," Yvonne replied with enjoyment. "Now, don't trouble to reply to that, because it's unanswerable. Here's the tea."

Mabs followed the maid in, with the dignity befitting her responsible position.

"Come and sit by auntie, you imp, and tell her what you've been doing this afternoon."

"I haven't done much while you've been out," Mabs replied in a matter-of-fact manner. "I helped Ballard feed the chickens, and I watched Hudson clean the car, and I found a worm—"

"Don't be horrid! Pass Mr. Thorne the cake." Yvonne was busy ferreting out a small lump of sugar.

“—a worm, and I cut him up—”

“Mabs, will you be quiet. Pass Mr. Thorne the cake, I said.”

“—and he had green blood—”

“Mabs!”

Thorne laughed outright.

“—blood—” she rummaged desperately in the pocket of a clean pinafore, becoming aware from an ominous look on Yvonne’s face that her moments were numbered, then held out her hand.

“—and here’s his tail!—” she managed to shout triumphantly before she was seized and led out to execution. Yvonne returned as the telephone bell rang. Helpless with laughter she went to a side table and lifted the receiver.

“Hullo!—yes, long distance——speaking——all right, I’ll hold the line.”

With the receiver at her ear she turned a flushed, smiling face to Thorne. “Isn’t that child the—” She broke off. Fear leapt into her eyes and her face blanched and grew rigid. She wheeled back to the telephone.

“Shall I go?” Thorne rose quickly from his chair in some embarrassment.

Yvonne put her right hand over the transmitter. If she paused it was barely noticeable.

"Oh, it's—it's nothing. I'd rather you waited." She dropped her hand from the transmitter, and keeping her back to him, spoke in a rapid, perfectly natural voice.

"Yes, Mr. Davenport—speaking——because I've been out a good deal I suppose——you're going to-day——what——what can I do?—I don't want to be harsh, but I couldn't dream of being mixed up in such a disgraceful business. Look at the position you might have put me into, after receiving you at my house——I did say so, but how could you possibly expect me to marry you now——I am absolutely through. You mustn't speak to me again——what?——how dare you, you crook!—" She slammed the receiver back violently, and buried her face in her hands. A long-drawn shuddering "Oh-h" escaped from her.

Thorne walked quietly out on to the verandah.

A few minutes later Yvonne followed him. "Come back and let's finish our tea, Mr. Thorne," she said brightly, "and then we'll take Mabs out in the motor-boat."

CHAPTER VIII

“**B**UT isn't it too windy to-day, Mr. Thorne?”

“What does that matter? I've got to get used to it sometime or other, and it isn't often one gets a wind in this frightful heat.”

Yvonne was persistent. “It isn't worth taking chances just for the fun of the thing. It's not as if you were a professional, and you've had very little experience. Even St. John isn't out yet, and he goes up in most weathers.”

Bunny was leaning carelessly against the radiator of his car. “I can't help that, Mrs. Sebastian,” he said firmly. “Besides, it's going down now. Look at the flag.”

Yvonne turned in the low seat behind the big raked steering wheel of Thorne's Grand Prix Mercedes standing in front of the open doors of his hangar, and glanced at a little Union Jack fluttering from the roof. She was looking slightly surprised at Bunny's unexpected terse-

ness. With a little gesture of annoyance she closed her sunshade and put her hands on the steering wheel. "Oh, very well, Mr. Thorne. Of course it's nothing to do with me. If you'll start the engine, I'll move the car out of the way of the machine."

Thorne absent-mindedly bent down and gave one or two vicious tugs at the starting handle without result. He looked up. "Give her a little more gas, Mrs. Sebastin."

Yvonne was smiling at him from under her big, shady, rose-covered hat.

"Oh, what temper!" She moved the throttle lever a fraction of an inch. "Now, then!"

He was successful this time. She skilfully moved the car into a better position, switched off the engine, and alighted. By the time Yvonne had leisurely opened her sunshade and sauntered back to the shed, Bunny was busily superintending the toilet of his Farman biplane. Finding that he was apparently too engrossed to talk to her at the moment, she wandered off with a shrug of her expressive shoulders.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and there was a fair sprinkling of spectators round the sheds at

the Garden City aerodrome. All the doors in the long line of green-painted hangars were swung back and from their interiors came an occasional, intermittent roar of an engine being tested. Already in front of one or two sheds stood big, clumsy looking biplanes, and their smaller sisters, the neat racy monoplanes. Blue-overalled mechanics were dodging round the machines filling the petrol tanks, testing the wiring or giving final touches to the engines. Here and there a leather-clad aviator was critically watching the effect of the wind upon the flags over the sheds, or doing his best to enlighten the interested but sometimes hopelessly ignorant spectators, upon the uses of different parts of the machines. Beyond the ropes, the undulating field stretched for half a mile, bare and deserted except for a few officials marking out a course with a long tape measure.

Yvonne, who had become quite at home among the various machines, and their owners, during the few weeks that Thorne had taken to this new hobby, was interested. A slim, long-legged youth in white flannels and tennis shoes approached her with the jaunty stride of an

over-grown schoolboy, hands in pockets. His open, sunburnt face flushed boyishly as he caught sight of her.

"How do you do, Mr. St. John?" she said pleasantly. "Are you going out soon? I want to see that new monoplane of yours I've heard so much about from Mr. Thorne."

"Oh, yes, I'm going to take the old bus for a joy ride in a few minutes," he replied. There was a hint of a strong personality behind his boyish manner. "She's nearly ready. I only got her through the customs this morning. Want a hop?"

"Not to-day, thank you. I expect you'll be busy enough. Everybody wants to go up with you."

He flushed again modestly. "It all means dollars, Mrs. Sebastin. I'm very mercenary, you know."

This was anything but the truth, for St. John, although one of the most skilful and daring flyers in the world, and consequently making huge sums of money, was at the same time one of the very few who flew for the sheer pleasure of it.

He went on. "There's Bunny Thorne's

machine out. What's he up to to-day—going to push over the Metropolitan Building?" St. John grinned.

"Oh, I think I'll go and see him start, Mr. St. John," Yvonne said. "Perhaps I'll see you at tea-time." She left him abruptly.

Thorne was sitting in his biplane, which had been hauled from its shed into the field. The Gnome engine was turning with an angry roar. Three or four mechanics, hanging desperately on to the tail of the impatient machine, their hair standing straight back from their heads in the fierce hurricane of dust raised by the propeller, were being dragged along, inch by inch, digging their heels in the ground. Seeing Yvonne approaching, Bunny switched off the engine, and the mechanics looked almost human again. She moved towards him gracefully, seemingly unconscious of the interest her appearance created amongst the crowd gathered behind the ropes.

"I'll be back in a minute!" Bunny shouted through the settling dust. "Will you wait in the car, unless—would you care to trust yourself to me?"

"Rather! I'd love to!" she answered quickly.

Thorne climbed down and showed her how to get up into the little passenger seat which was wedged in closely between the gasoline tank and his own perch on the edge of the plane. As she settled herself with some difficulty, feeling more self-conscious than nervous, two or three press photographers came running out and snapped her from different points of vantage. Thorne stood below, his hands on his hips, smiling up at her.

"You make a very pretty picture, Mrs. Sebastian, but you'll have to take your hat off. It might get blown into the propeller. Here, I'll give you a hand." He swung himself up on to the top step and helped her to disengage the hat-pins and fix her veil.

"Aren't you afraid of my hair going too?" She looked at him with mock anxiety.

"Not unless you lose your head as well, and that's not likely," he replied confidently.

She was glad that he turned round at this moment to hand her hat to St. John below.

Bunny settled himself down in his seat, grasped the lever in his right hand in a business-

like manner and with his left snapped on the switch. "All right! Start her up," he called out over his shoulder. A sudden deafening roar broke out right behind Yvonne, and the machine quivered all over. It was at this stage that she wished she had not been quite so impulsive. A vivid picture formed in her mind of the machine as it would appear from the ground in a few moments—a fragile thing of canvas and wire, tossing about in space at the mercy of the wind—and for the first time she felt distinctly nervous as she convinced herself that she would feel giddy and want to jump out. Her suspense increased as she wondered when the men were going to leave go. Bunny waved his hand and the biplane, suddenly released, started off across the ground, bumping and swaying like a Fifth Avenue motor-bus running amok. As it gathered speed her sinking of the heart grew stronger, until she was almost tempted to cry out to the broad, grey-flannelled back in front of her, to stop.

Suddenly the vibration of the wheels over the rough grass ceased and the machine became taut and steady. Screwing up her courage, she

looked down over the front edge of the plane and saw the ground falling away beneath them. They were in the air immediately. Her dread left her. As the big biplane forged its way upwards, she began to experience illimitable exhilaration. The movements, as it met the occasional gusts, contrasted strangely with her previous mental picture. To her now they resembled nothing so much as the slow deliberate rolling of a liner in a heavy swell. Tears were streaming from her eyes and her hair began to break loose from her veil under the determined buffeting of the terrific rush of air raised by the machine as the engine with ear-splitting racket drove it through the still atmosphere. Thorne turned his head and she heard his voice faintly above the din.

“Are you all right?”

She shouted back a reassurance, and at once realised how it must feel to be struck dumb. Then she bent towards him and summoning all her strength shouted again in his ear. She saw him smiling, and was aware of a stabbing thrill as her lips almost touched the crisp hair at the nape of his neck. Then a sense of weird inti-

macy stole over her, a sense of content at being so strangely, completely alone with this masterful man in this new world of theirs—and yet she did not know if he loved her. With unconscious continuity of thought she noticed the needle of the height recorder pointing to eight hundred feet. Some tigerish instinct surged up, and urged her to lay soft white hands on the brown neck so close and hurl them both to utter destruction—it would be so easy! She shuddered and sat back.

Presently her eyes began to wander curiously over the different fittings around her. She wondered vaguely why the revolution counter by Bunny's side was tied on so carelessly with string. Then there was the engine switch on the strut at her left, with the clamp that held it in its place half undone on one side. It didn't look as if it mattered. Why, she could press it herself, and then what would happen?—luckily for them both she didn't experiment—Then there were Bunny's shoes hanging over in space on the rudder bar in front, beautifully polished shoes. Just then, Bunny put up his hand and scratched his ear. She laughed. How matter

of fact everything was, up there, after all. She noticed the quick instinctive movements of his right hand on the control lever which were instantly answered by the elevating plane stretched away in front of them. He was levelling the machine out on to an even keel. They seemed to be barely moving over the field below, but this Yvonne knew, from the unabated fierceness of the blast, must be the effect of the height.

She looked down again and was astonished at the different aspect of everything. Her sense of proportion was absolutely upset. The wings of the aeroplane seemed to have grown to an enormous size, and the world below to be quite unimportant and trivial. Round the absurd row of hangars that would hardly house a decent sized dog in the world she had once lived on—years ago now—the crowd had evidently been replaced by a swarm of multi-coloured ants. Along the edge of the field a toy train bent its puny efforts to keep level with them as they floated imperially above. She noticed a tiny puff of white from the engine. It was a whistle, she knew, but no sound came up to her. What a wonderful new world it was, she

thought, secure in her perch in the heavens. There was no fear in her mind. It was impossible that anything could happen to her stately ship.

A sharp nudge from Bunny brought her back to realities. He motioned downwards with his left hand and then placed it on the switch.

The engine stopped.

For a fraction of a second a silence, vast, numbing, after the friendly, half-forgotten roar, closed round her. Then the world below tilted up on end and, spinning madly, a panic-stricken jumble of kaleidoscopic colour, flung itself at her. One agonised moment of unfathomed terror, then her mind cleared and she found herself thinking quite calmly. Something had gone wrong. How long would it be before the crash? This meant death, of course—mutilation. . . . She had read about it. She wondered vaguely what she would look like when she was picked up. And St. John had her hat. . . . But yet the machine seemed all right. It was the earth that had gone wrong in some extraordinary fashion. How big everything was getting.

Suddenly the confused medley ahead of the elevator resolved itself into a solid wall of green and rushed straight at her face. She closed her eyes.

“By Jove, Thorne’s getting quite good at those spirals, if he doesn’t overdo it. That was a good landing, too.” St. John linked his arm in Dick Bywaters’ and they strolled across to meet the biplane quietly bumping its way to a standstill. As they reached the machine, Bunny was helping Yvonne to the ground.

“Oh, that was wonderful!—Great!” she exclaimed breathlessly, her eyes shining with excitement, “but that last bit coming down took my breath away. But don’t look at me. My hair must be in a terrible state.”

They all disobeyed her as she put her hands up to her head.

“Can’t you leave it as it is, Mrs. Sebastin?” Bunny burst out unexpectedly.

She replied with a little grimace.

“Here’s your hat, Mrs. Sebastin. I hope I haven’t hurt it. I’m not used to these things,” St. John lied, unblushingly.

"Let's go and have tea. It must be getting quite late," Yvonne suggested.

They all laughed.

"How long do you think you've been up?" said Bywaters joyfully.

"Oh, I don't know. Have I said something foolish? It seems to be hours."

"Just about ten minutes," said Bunny. "But we might as well have tea."

St. John excused himself and the others made their way to the tea tent.

"Oh-h! I'm only just getting my breath back." Yvonne settled herself comfortably in a low wicker chair under the pink and white striped awning. "You'll take me up again, won't you, Mr. Thorne?"

Bunny had relapsed into his meditative mood. "Certainly, if you wish it." He ordered tea.

Bywaters stopped the white-aproned waiter as he was hurrying away. "Can I get something to drink?" he said in a hoarse whisper.

"Yessir. Ginger ale—lemonade."

Bywaters paled visibly. "What do you mean?"

"Don't be an ass, Dick," Bunny admonished him. "Tea's better for little boys."

"That's all very well for you, but I've been on the ground sucking up the dust. I'm not a bally eagle, you know."

"Never mind, Mr. Bywaters, better to be a lively grasshopper than a sulky eagle." Yvonne turned her chair a little towards him. "Where's your friend, Mr. Reid? What mischief have you two been up to the last few days?"

"I don't see much of him now," Dick replied resignedly. "He's crazy about Mamie Maxwell. He's always out with her."

"Mamie Maxwell! Who's she?"

"Oh, she's in *The Perfect Lady*. By the way, she told us she once knew someone who knew you in California."

"Oh, really," Yvonne said without interest. "I don't remember the name. Perhaps she was mistaken. I don't know anyone on the stage."

A loud humming noise was wafted in from the far end of the sheds. Bunny roused himself. "There's St. John starting off on his Nieuport. You'd like to see him, wouldn't you, Mrs. Sebastian?" he said quietly.

"Oh, yes, I must see that. We can come back to tea."

A monoplane, with a big fish-like body had just leaped off the ground by the far end of the shed and was tearing round the field. It shot past them with a murderous rush, and terrifying screech from its hundred horse power engine.

"That's a wicked-looking thing, isn't it, Bunny?" exclaimed Bywaters.

"Yes. Wants some handling, too. Clever fellow, St. John. It's the first time he's flown one of them. He's off across country now."

They watched it mounting higher and higher in the distance and went back to the tea-table.

"I say, Bunny, will you be able to run me over to Huntington later? I promised to join Bobby and Mamie there at dinner," said Bywaters.

"Well, I'm going to take Mrs. Sebastin to her—"

"You needn't mind about me, Mr. Thorne. I can easily telephone for my own car," Yvonne interrupted stiffly.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Sebastin, certainly not, please." Bunny hesitated a moment and then bent ear-

nestly towards her. "I'm afraid I haven't been very entertaining to-day, but I've been worried over something. Forgive me, will you?" He went on more lightly, before she had time to reply. "I tell you what we might do. Shall we both take Bywaters to Huntington, and then, if you've nothing better to do, you might dine with me either there or anywhere else you like. Would you care to do that?"

While he was speaking, an anxious, rather strained look had come over Yvonne's face. She looked down, playing with the tassel of her sunshade.

Bywaters broke in enthusiastically. "Good man! That's a splendid idea! If you've got the blues, Mrs. Sebastin's the very person to cheer you up. Besides, I'm a bad walker, and it's twenty miles to Huntington, isn't it?"

Yvonne laughed involuntarily. "That settles it, then," she said. "We mustn't disappoint you, Mr. Bywaters. But you'll have to sit on the step, you know."

"I'd rather sit on the radiator cap than walk. It's one of my few joys of life to squeeze in on a racing car, isn't it, Bunny?"

"Oh, he doesn't worry about anything like that," Bunny explained with a laugh. "The Surrey police at home could tell a few tales about you, couldn't they, Dick? Let's make a move now, shall we?"

They went off to the hangar. Bunny went inside to give a few directions to his mechanics.

"I've a horrible presentiment that I'm going to be made to start the engine, Mrs. Sebastin," said Bywaters desperately. "I don't suppose you've ever started up a hundred and twenty horse power Mercedes, but—well, it doesn't agree with me." He went on confidentially, "if you wouldn't mind getting in, I can fix myself on the step, then perhaps he'll forget to ask me."

Yvonne did as she was asked, with much amusement. She had quite regained her good spirits. When Bunny came back, Bywaters was sitting on the step with an innocent far-away expression on his good-looking face. Bunny stood and looked at him with a twinkle in his eye.

"Dick!" No answer. Dick's gaze was fixed on the far end of the field.

"Dick!" A little louder this time.

"Oh, hullo, Bunny, old boy!" with an exaggerated start. "Do you see St. John coming in over there?" he finished glibly.

Thorne climbed into the driving seat without a word, and leant back, whistling. Bywaters resumed his careful study of St. John's monoplane now just in sight. There was a pause. Yvonne was apparently sobbing behind her handkerchief.

"Dick, would you mind starting up the engine now that I'm in?" Bunny said with terrible distinctness.

"Eh? Oh, certainly!" Bywaters walked with studied nonchalance to the front of the car, carefully avoiding their eyes. As he bent down to grasp the starting handle, whistling an alleged tune out of *The Perfect Lady*, Yvonne's handkerchief betrayed her and she burst into an hysterical peal of laughter. Bywaters looked up innocently, caught Thorne's eye, and made a noble effort to keep his face straight. The

muscles of his mouth twitched spasmodically for a moment, then giving a wild yell of laughter, he swooped down on the starting handle, and gave a desperate heave.

“Go on, you old devil!” he shouted. “Let her rip!”

He leapt for the step as Bunny shot off with a thunderous din of exhaust, and for the whole of the twenty miles to Huntington even Bywaters' remarkable appetite for speed was satiated. He had reason to remember some of those corners for many a day.

CHAPTER IX

“WHAT an amusing couple those boys are! They don't seem to have a care in the world.” Yvonne was lazily sipping her coffee a couple of hours later, and watching Bobby's little party at the opposite end of the terrace, overlooking Huntington Bay.

“Yes, Mrs. Sebastin; they have their own philosophy and I'm not sure sometimes it isn't a good one,” Bunny replied.

“But it's a narrow philosophy, surely, that only takes into account a world of Mamies and motor cars? It doesn't 'give one to think' very much, does it?”

“No, but do they want to think? Do any of us want to if it comes to that? One's thoughts are apt to be poor company sometimes.” Bunny looked down from the terrace abstractedly to where a bather was dangling his legs over the edge of the diving stage in the calm bay, and watched him vaguely as with careless

grace he stood up, poised for a moment with arms outstretched and his body fired with the redness of the setting sun, then slowly swayed forward to meet the warm water. He looked back at Yvonne quickly. Her eyes were troubled as she leant forward on the table, chin in the palm of her hand.

"But come, beautiful lady, we mustn't get serious," forcing a light tone. "Let's eat, drink and be merry like the others. After all, in their way they're happy with their Mamie; in my way I'm happy with my—with you. Now," he added quickly, "you must drink up that liqueur. I insist on it."

Yvonne glanced wonderingly at him. "You're absurd to-night, Mr. Thorne. Shall we go? I'm feeling rather chilly, and this place bores me to-day." She pushed back her chair impatiently, and rose.

"I hope I haven't said anything to annoy you, Mrs. Sebastin."

She avoided his eyes. "Oh, no, no, but—but I want to have a chat with you to-night—will you drive me home now?"

"Certainly," he replied. "I'll go and fetch

the car, and meet you at the entrance." Thorne dropped his light-hearted manner the moment Yvonne left him. He realised that he was not looking forward to taking her home. It was only natural that Yvonne should be going to question him; and this was bound to mean an explanation which it would be very difficult—impossible—for him to give her. He had made no attempt to conceal his feeling for her during the past few weeks, a feeling which was growing with intensity at every meeting; and Yvonne was not the woman, if he read her aright, to ignore his sudden change of front to-day. He would have been disappointed in her if she did ignore it, and yet, what excuse had he to offer? he asked himself. None, none that he could offer Yvonne certainly. Had he even one that he could offer himself beyond this vague feeling of disquiet that had resulted from Delamotte's idle words yesterday. And yet what had they amounted to? That he should not spend too much time with Yvonne—that she was merely playing with him—and that she was not his type of woman and—that was all!

Not his type of woman! Bunny laughed

satirically. He had never wanted a type, that was the very reason why Yvonne so appealed to him. She belonged to no type. She was herself, exquisite and imperious. And yet he felt he could not rid himself of the effect of Delamotte's hint. In spite of the seemingly casual manner in which the subject had been broached, he knew that Delamotte was a man who never gossiped, and when he did open his mouth about anyone, his lightest word was bound to carry weight. Bunny knew, therefore, that he could not afford to ignore his warning completely, whatever his own convictions might be. It was with these conflicting feelings that he met Yvonne and assisted her into the car.

"Hadn't I better find you something warmer than your dust-coat if you're feeling chilly?" he asked her solicitously.

Yvonne declined his offer with haste. "No, no, thank you. I'm quite ready."

"Shall I want the headlights, Mrs. Sebastin?"

"I don't think so. It's only eight o'clock. It won't be dark till we get there. But you haven't tucked me in properly!" Yvonne

looked down with a pout at her little French shoes. "Don't be afraid of me, you great big man."

"Oh, but I am—sometimes." Bunny walked round to her and settled the rug about her feet.

Twilight was creeping in from the Sound and blurring the vivid summer green of the lanes into sombre greys and blacks as they drove quietly home. For the first few miles Thorne waited for her to speak. Then he turned.

"What do you wish to say to me?" he said gently.

Yvonne stirred and laid a hand softly on his arm. "Don't let's talk now," she said wistfully. "I'm enjoying it all so!"

Some hint of pathos in the attitude of her figure as she sat huddled up close beside him, with face averted, moved Bunny to pat her hand protectively. At once she slipped it away. Feeling ashamed of his unusual display of emotion, he left her to her thoughts. It was growing rapidly dark, and by the time he turned in at her gates he had difficulty in following the mazy wanderings of the drive.

As they arrived at the porch, Yvonne slipped

quickly out of her rug. "You'll come in, won't you, Mr. Thorne?" she said over her shoulder, and hurried into the house without waiting for a reply.

Bunny followed her into the lounge. She threw off her wrap and he caught an impression of strong emotion in the pallor of her face, before she turned aside with a weary gesture to the piano, and stood with her back to him, nervously handling the loose leaves of music.

The brave poise of Yvonne's head just failed to conceal a pitiable distress which was incomprehensible to Bunny. He could hardly imagine that he was responsible for it, yet it was a guilty feeling that prompted him to break the tension.

"I'm terribly sorry to see you upset, Mrs. Sebastin. What can I do?"

"You'd hardly understand," she began in a low voice. "It's just silliness on my part. You—you've been unkind to me to-day, and I suppose I'm not used to it." She laughed nervously. "I've always been spoilt—till I met you. That's about all, I think."

"That's not all, you know it isn't," Thorne

said, with determination. "I'm fearfully angry with myself for being a bear, but—oh, hang it!—what did you want to say to me to-night? I'm worried about you."

"Nothing, only—just that!" The words came faintly. Yvonne was tearing a sheet of music into long, neat strips.

Bunny thought a moment, Delamotte's words drumming in his brain. "Playing with you—playing with you!" Could she be playing with him now? If he could only see her face—"Mrs. Sebastin, listen to me. We both know that's not true. Now, I'm a very determined devil when the fit takes me, and to-night I'm more than usually obstinate. I'm not going from here till you do tell me."

At the note of command in his voice, Yvonne swung round quickly, one hand clutching at the piano. "You dare—" she began.

Bunny smiled impudently into her indignant eyes. They wavered a moment and dropped.

"You—you dare to speak to me like that," she faltered.

"Yes, just like that! I'm going to help you out whether you like it or not. Now, Mrs. Se-

bastin," he changed his tone and spoke very gently, "sit down and tell me all about it. You may be able to clear my mind a bit, too. I've an idea we may both be up against the same thing." He pushed an easy chair towards her, and Yvonne sank into it. She felt weak and overwrought. She told herself mechanically that this man had heard something, that he was weighing her up, that even at that moment he might be thinking that she was acting a part. In that case—well, the world she had been building up for herself the last few weeks must inevitably fall to pieces. It was so unfair—so desperately cruel! She almost moaned aloud as a blank, despairing self-pity swept her mind. And yet she must hear it from his own lips, there must be no shirking. But how? She must force herself to say something.

"Tell me, Mrs. Sebastin, I am waiting," Bunny's level voice broke in.

Yvonne nerved herself to look at him. He was busy lighting a cigarette, sitting on the edge of the table, with one foot swinging negligently off the ground. She took a breath and started recklessly. "Oh, it's only about to-day—your

manner. You've been so charming to me since I've known you, and I've—I've appreciated it very much, more than you can possibly have any idea of, and then—well, we're neither of us children, are we? I hardly know what I want to say, but—what has changed you? If it is the work of any of my kind friends, it's only fair to tell me, isn't it?"

Thorne smoked deliberately for a few long seconds, then his bronzed face frowned heavily, and he rose to his feet, viciously crushing his cigarette end against a little billiken tray on the table. "Mrs. Sebastin, I've got to make a very abject apology to you," he said, "and I don't expect you to forgive me. You've hit the right nail on the head. A remark was made to me, and like an utter cad I allowed myself to be influenced by it." He spread out his hands with a gesture of finality. "That's not exactly correct, either, but I did what was just as bad, I listened to it. I've nothing to say, except that I'm sorry. I've made a hopeless mess of what might have been"—he pulled himself up abruptly.

"Wait a moment," Yvonne said hurriedly.

"Mr. Thorne, I don't blame you. You're a stranger here, and you can't know very much about me. It's impossible for you to understand the extent of New York gossip. It's different for us. We know what it is worth, but you're bound to be influenced by it."

"That's no excuse. You know that," he muttered disgustedly.

Yvonne disregarded this interruption. "I appreciate your feelings about it, but there's no reason why it should make any difference between you and me—unless you want it to. But at the same time, Mr. Thorne, I think it's due to me to let me know exactly what was said, and who said it, so that I may clear myself."

"It isn't a question of your clearing yourself, but I will tell you. I was told by a man who knew that I was very much—well, interested in you—it will sound ridiculous, of course—that you were only amusing yourself with me: playing with me was the exact expression, I believe." He laughed grimly. "For reasons of my own it rather stung me. And the man was Delamotte."

"Delamotte!—Ralph!" Yvonne lay back in

her chair and laughed hysterically. "Oh, Mr. Thorne, you're a great big over-grown school-boy!" she gasped. "But I like you for it." She leant forward in her chair with mock solemnity. "Tell me, you foolish one, have you heard of a celebrated monster with green eyes, that goes about the world making trouble?"

"Do you mean to say—"

"Why, Ralph's been crazy about me for years! Everybody knows that. I shall have to talk to him severely if he is getting so foolish."

"Good Lord!" Thorne exclaimed bewildered. "I never dreamed of that. But it's hardly playing the game, is it?"

"Love is proverbially an excuse for trickiness, Mr. Thorne. But seriously, though, Ralph's a dear old thing, and we're awfully good friends. I shouldn't like him to think I was laughing at him. Don't say anything to him about it."

"That doesn't alter the fact that I had no business to listen to him," Bunny said.

"Oh, don't be stupid. Let's forget all about it." Yvonne smiled and rising from her chair, went to the piano. "Sit down, and I'll play to you."

She dashed impetuously into a few bars of a lilting two-step. Bunny leant over the back of a chair and watched her face, as she carelessly skipped from one tune to another—from grave to gay—from Pagliacci to *The Pink Lady*. There was still an unnatural tense look about the grey eyes, betraying some emotional stress that was inwardly agitating her. For a savage moment, remorse at the wound he had dealt bit him, and he looked away. Then to his amazement a vicious exultation surged through him, and he was glad that he had the power to hurt her. What a blackguard he was! Damn the music— He tried to dwell on the quiet country rambles over Long Island, on her charming confidences, on all the lights and shades of this cool, stately goddess of his—and failed.

His eyes sought Yvonne for inspiration, and found it. She was looking out through the open French windows, her shoulders sensuously following the mad music of the "Danse des Apaches."

Goddess! Who wanted a visionary goddess! He wanted her—this warm, live thing—this glorious, untamed creature of human clay. And

by heaven, he would have her—and break her—kill her if necessary. . . .

“What do you think of this—Bunny?” Yvonne was smiling up at him.

“I—I think you’re—lovely!” Bunny said in a low, strained voice.

“Ah!” She rose abruptly on a crashing chord, and swung fiercely round to face him, erect, magnificent in her arrogance of beauty. “Lovely!” her voice rang scornfully. “Of course I’m lovely! Look at me! I don’t want that—from you! I’ve—I knew it years ago. Is that all you can say to me?”

“My God! No—” Bunny strode towards her deliberately, holding out his arms. “You’re—*wonderful!*”

CHAPTER X

BOBBY REID'S valet, known officially as William, but to his intimates as "Skunk" from a propensity for using scent when off duty, came out on to the front porch of the cottage at Garden City, smoked a cigarette leisurely in the hot sunshine, and went inside to lay breakfast. The time was 1.30.

An aggrieved voice came from the kitchen. "Is Mr. Thorne comin' in for 'is lunch, Skunk?"

This being one of the regularly recurring periods when the little household found itself without a cook, William's colleague was trying to wash up and improvise breakfast for two and lunch for one at the same time.

"I dunno, Charles. 'E said so when 'e went out. But like as not there'll be a 'phone through from Mrs. Sebastin's house."

Charles's reply was inaudible.

"Ome again at 'arf past five, this morning, our two was, damnin' everything as per usual, damnin' *me*," William continued lugubriously.

"Oh, what a life!" He hummed softly to himself for a few minutes. "Ere, Charles, what do you think's the latest game upstairs? Pluggin' mosqueters with a golf club! The bloomin' walls look like a battlefield. Young Bobby 'e says it takes off from the bare look of the room. Says when 'e wakes up 'e takes 'em for roses on the wallpaper. Roses!" disgustingly, "I *don't* think!"

"What's the programme to-day, Skunk?" came through the open kitchen door.

"Gawd knows! Same as usual, I s'pose. Get up when they feel like it, telephone jingle-jangling all the afternoon. 'Ho! It's Miss Maxwell. Would you please ask Mr. Bywaters if I can use 'is ortomobile this afternoon,' and 'Is Mr. Thorne at 'ome? Say Mrs. Sebastin wants 'em.' Ho! I wish I 'ad 'is luck. She's the real thing."

"Yes, no chorus girl touch about 'er. Can't we take one or two like that 'ome for ourselves?"

"William!" Bobby Reid appeared at the top of the stairs in a well-thought-out scheme of silk pyjamas. "Bath and put my clothes out.

"Yes, sir. Which will you have to-day?"

"Flannels—grey flannels, lavender socks and tie."

"Very well, sir. Breakfast's ready now, sir. Shall I bring it up?"

"No, we'll come down. Serve it now." Bobby went across the landing to break the news to Dick.

"Starters for the first race, Charles," William called out philosophically. It was soon evident to William that something was in the air. So great was the preoccupation of his two pyjama-clad charges that afternoon at breakfast, that his neglect to hand the coffee on the right side—a daily lapse that resulted with depressing regularity in his instant dismissal, passed without comment. After his interest had been aroused by a few elaborately obscure remarks he was reluctantly compelled to obey an unmistakable jerk of the head from his master, and he slid out of the room.

"Well, Dick, what are we going to do about it?" Bobby dug into his cantaloup with unusual seriousness.

"Can't do anything except tell him what

Mamie says. I don't know what to say. Personally I think she's a jolly good sort."

"So do I, old boy, but then Mamie's no object in saying a thing like that unless she thinks it's true. After all, Yvonne's a bit of a mystery, isn't she?"

"Oh, I don't agree with you, Bobby. We don't know much about anybody over here, if it comes to that. Anyhow Bunny's not a man to be driven to drink," Dick said with conviction.

"No, he's not." Bobby mused over his omelette. "Still," he continued, "I think we ought to say something to him. It's easy enough to see he's crazy about her."

"I suppose you're right. We'd better get it over directly he comes in. But I don't like the job. I'll toss you for it."

Dick instinctively felt for his pocket and raised his voice.

"William!"

William appeared at the door. "Yes, sir!"

"Have you got a quarter on you?"

William had. "Will one be enough, sir?"

"It will be if it's got a head on it. Give it a spin," Dick said.

Bobby's fancy for a tail was unfortunate. "H'm! That's rotten luck," he said disconcertedly as William disappeared. "What have I got to say, then?"

"Oh, that's easy enough, Bobby. You've only got to tell him that you've heard Yvonne is an awful woman who drove her husband to drink, and then pushed him into a lunatic asylum. Bunny won't mind. He may kill you; on the other hand he may not. You never know your luck."

"Don't be a damned fool, Dick. I'm perfectly serious about it. He's a pal of ours, and I'm going to carry it through, whether he likes it or not."

"Sorry! Joking apart, from what we know of her, I bet it was the man's own fault, whatever happened to him. Now for it. There he is."

As they heard Bunny's car skid to a standstill and the engine die away with a deafening bang, they resumed their breakfast with studied unconcern.

"What's the matter, William?" They heard Thorne's good-humoured voice in the garden.

William's reply was apparently private and confidential.

"Oh, I see!" There was a pause before Thorne opened the door.

"Hullo, you lazy devils!" he exclaimed. "I'll teach you to have breakfast at lunch-time. Come right in, Yvonne!"

Yvonne fussed daintily into the room with a little joyous laugh. "Oh you, Bobby!" she cried.

The two gaudy conspirators sat petrified as this miracle of fragrant freshness stood and dared them with teasing eyes. Then adapting themselves to the occasion, with a presence of mind which turns beings of ordinary clay into heroes in a single second, they rose simultaneously.

"Good morning, Mrs. Sebastin," said Dick easily. "What are you doing out so early?"

"Early, you awful creatures! Why I was up at seven this morning, having a swim. And don't you dare to call me Mrs. Sebastin again. I'm always telling you about it. Oh, don't run away," she went on imploringly as they made a

flanking movement for the door. "I came in to have lunch with you. Besides, those are such pretty colours."

"Yes, you'd better not dress till after lunch," Thorne said banteringly. "I've got a surprise for you to-day that may influence you in the matter of clothes."

"In that case we'll go and get into dressing gowns, if you'll excuse us." They bolted upstairs, re-appearing in still more fearsome colours.

"Enter the famous Chinese jugglers," commented Bunny, heartlessly. "Never mind. You'll do. Now, then, what about food? William!" He called out. "What have you got to eat?" he asked as that individual appeared. William reassured him as to the raw material, but seemed to have little faith in Charles's ability to turn it into the finished article.

"Oh, Bunny, do let me go and help!" Yvonne broke in rapturously. "I'm quite a good cook, really." She turned to William. "Would Charles mind, do you think?"

Charles would be very pleased, if William

might say so. Yvonne swept off to the kitchen, threatening them with dire consequences if she was disturbed.

Bobby and Dick looked at one another sheepishly.

"What's your surprise, Bunny, old man?" Bobby asked. But Bunny gave them to understand that wild aeroplanes would not drag it from him before lunch and sauntered off to the window, whistling contentedly.

Dick gave a meaning cough. "Perhaps that business will keep for a bit, Bobby. What do you think?"

"Look here, I want to weigh it up again. I can't help thinking we're making a mistake. In any case it'll keep till to-morrow."

Thorne moved from the window and Bobby raised his voice.

"To-morrow! Much too fine to-day!"

"What on earth are you two muttering about?"

"Socks!" Bunny looked amazed. "Mending socks," Bobby concluded glibly.

Thorne's remarks regarding the effects of the sun on weak intellects were interrupted.

"Bobby! Dick!" An imperious voice came from the kitchen.

They found Yvonne radiant amongst the pots and pans assisted by her two admiring lieutenants, her expensively simple pink frock protected by one of Charles's aprons. "Come and wash up and make yourselves useful," she ordered. "And don't break anything if you dare. I'm going to give you a wonderful lunch."

"I've only just had breakfast, but I couldn't refuse anything if you cook it," Bobby began, gallantly flourishing a wet soup tureen. He stopped and picked up the pieces with an air of discouragement under Yvonne's scathing eye.

William, completely under her spell, began to give hitherto unpublished details of his past life much to Charles's ill-concealed amusement. He broke off to enter a mild protest to the jugglers in the corner that the plates upon which they were industriously engaged were "all right, sir—they'd only just been washed."

"There!" Yvonne turned round with a flushed happy face. "Fish cutlets, salad, isn't that clever of me?" She discarded her apron and drove her brood before her into the front

room. Shaking the roses in her big hat severely at Dick, she sat down at the table. "How many did they smash, Bunny?" she asked.

"Total bag was a soup tureen, two plates and three glasses."

"Well, there are plenty more where they came from, I suppose. Wish you'd come in and cook every day, Mrs. Seb—Yvonne," said Bobby cheerfully.

"By the way, Bobby, can I have your chauffeur for an hour this afternoon?" asked Bunny. "I want the Mercedes got ready for a few days' trip."

"Of course you can. So that's your surprise, eh? For heaven's sake don't go and leave us here alone. I say, Yvonne, can't you stop him?"

"I'm afraid not." Yvonne's eyes were rather misty as she looked up at Bobby. "You see—well, I'm going, too."

"Look here, my lads," Thorne broke in abruptly. "To cut a long story short, Yvonne's going to be foolish enough to marry me—to-night!"

"Oh, er—yes, of course—" Dick passed a

hand distractedly across his forehead. "Say that again, old man, I didn't quite get it."

But before Bunny had time to get very far with his repetition, Bobby and Dick had recovered from their surprise. With one accord they pushed back their chairs and went to Bunny.

"Congratulate you heartily, Bunny. If it ever comes to my turn, I'll be content with half your luck," Bobby said simply and sincerely.

"Same here, old boy." Dick gripped Bunny's hand fiercely, and looked across at Yvonne. She was drawing little nervous patterns on the tablecloth with her fork. "Yvonne, I hope you'll both be terribly happy. Damn it, I've fallen in love with you myself, to-day!"

There was a knock at the door and William entered with a large bunch of roses. He cleared his throat as they all stared at him in surprise. "Excuse me, ma'am, but Charles sends his respects, and takes the liberty of asking you to accept these flowers, as you are—that is, in case—" he floundered in hopeless embarrassment.

Yvonne rose, and taking them from him, shook

his hand impulsively. "Oh, William, that's perfectly sweet of you both. Tell Charles—tell Charles—" she broke off and the tears rushed to her eyes.

"Very well, ma'am, thank you." William made a hurried exit.

"Now, then, Bobby, what about the champagne?" Thorne said, taking charge of the situation. "I suppose there's none left. Take the car and run down to the hotel and get some, will you?"

"All right," replied Bobby, moving towards the door. "I say, Yvonne, you shouldn't have laughed at William. You've hurt his feelings."

A rainbow broke through the mist in her eyes and the little summer shower was over. "Oh, Bobby, you're hopeless! I couldn't help being stupid. Everybody has been so—so ripping! There, that's an English word for you."

"Well, you'd better get used to them," said Bunny darkly. "You'll be an Englishwoman yourself, in a few hours."

Yvonne made a little grimace at him. "I'm going to drive Bobby myself for that. Come

along, Bobby!" She seized him by the hand, and they dashed out down the path.

"By Jove, Bunny, this is a surprise," said Dick, as Yvonne disappeared down the road behind the big steering wheel. "You sly old devil to keep it so dark!"

"Didn't know it myself, until this morning," said Bunny, filling his pipe. "I asked Yvonne a fortnight ago, but she wouldn't fix it up unless it could be done quietly. She's arranged for us to be tied up to-night at half past seven at some parson's place over in Jersey City. I'm jolly glad. I don't want a lot of stuff in the papers."

"Any of her people going to turn up?" asked Dick.

"Brother and sister-in-law, that's all. I met 'em a few days ago. Her father and mother are in Europe. Look here, Dick, you two have got to come and see me through."

"You bet your life we will," Dick said emphatically. "Where are you going afterwards?"

"Atlantic City for a few days, then we're coming back to the North Shore. You two

have got to chuck the cottage and come to us as long as you stay over here. We may be going back to England about the same time." Thorne turned towards the door. "I'm going to tell William about the packing now. I'll be back in a minute."

"I must go and jump into some clothes," Dick started with sudden recollection. "Great Scott! Bunny, are you aware that Yvonne is tearing about the roads with Bobby in a dressing gown and pyjamas?"

"So she is!" Bunny chuckled. "Well, everybody is a bit crazy to-day. I daresay Yvonne's reputation will survive it for once. She'll have to buy the bubbly, though."

They went upstairs.

Silence fell on the room. The stale rays of the afternoon sun slanted beams of golden dust across the table, where the marauding flies hovered over their indecent feast. A faint drone came lazily in from the flying ground a few hundred yards away. Upstairs Thorne's luggage groaned a dull protest as it was dragged from its lair, and Dick whistled monotonously the refrain of "Everybody's doing it."

Presently Dick walked across the landing and lounged against the door of Thorne's room with his hands in his pockets. "Those two seem to be a dickens of a time," he remarked.

Bunny looked up with his knee on a suitcase. "I expect they've eloped. Just my luck! Bobby hinted at it before they left." He got up and relit his pipe. "Let's walk down the road and see if we can find any clues. William, you can look after the rest, can't you?"

They sauntered out of the house, and along the scorching road. As they turned into the wide avenue, at the end of which the big red brick hotel was barely visible through the trees half a mile away, they came upon an effective little tableau in the middle of the road. Bobby was standing by the side of a large touring car, containing a quiet family party, and he was evidently getting the worst of an argument with an infuriated elderly gentleman sitting next to the driver. The ample folds of Bobby's Chinese robe, with its wide flowing sleeves lent picturesque but unconvincing colour to his story. Bunny halted in their tracks fascinated.

"I'm nothing of the sort, sir," Bobby was ex-

plaining with dignity. "I'm an English gentleman in distress—in great distress. I have been waiting here for—for days, starving, for gasoline—"

"Do you eat it?" shrieked the old gentleman.

"You misunderstand me, sir." He indicated a pink dot far down the road with an airy wave of his sleeve. "I and my wife, a very beautiful woman, who is sitting by yon tree—"

As the car shot away, the recipient of these harrowing confidences was understood to make some incoherent reference to a bug-house. Bobby turned on his heel with resignation, and a broad grin spread over his face as he saw the others. "There's a bad-tempered old sinner, Bunny. That's the fourth I've stopped. They've all been like that. Have you brought any petrol?"

Bunny and Dick cursed him between their sobs and led him back to his deserted spouse.

"You've managed to catch him, then," Yvonne said. "What about the gasoline?"

"Never mind that now, child. We've waited long enough for this drink." Bunny took one of the bottles of Cordon Rouge from the foot-

board of the disconsolate-looking grey Mercedes.

"I'm sorry there's no glass for you, Yvonne. But I can't be expected to think of everything," Bobby said virtuously. "Hurry up with that cork, Bunny."

"Oh, you're all too ridiculous!" Yvonne laughed happily. "We can't drink champagne here."

"Don't you interrupt, madam. I was always brought up to the belief that little ladies and gentlemen could drink champagne anywhere," reproved Bobby. "Now, try and smile while I think of a toast." He knitted his brows deeply while the hilarious trio seated themselves on the grassy border of the road.

"Oh, well—here's—here's to a jolly good time, and all that, and"—he looked at Dick meaningly, "—to the socks that don't want mending."

PART II

CHAPTER I

“**T**HANK Heaven!” Betty Fawle drummed her pretty heels vigorously on the floor of the taxi. “Another five minutes and I should have screamed! Dear people, those Van Heydens, but oh, how dull! Surely, Bunny, one can be virtuous without dining at places like the Café de l’Espagne—and two hours tramping round the Poultry Show!” She abandoned herself to the dingy comfort of the cushions with a sigh of relief.

“I’m sure I’ve a lot to apologise for,” replied Bunny remorsefully. “Van Heyden’s a man I’ve got to keep in with, for business reasons, but I didn’t mean to let you in for it, like that. You behaved beautifully.”

“Don’t worry about that, Bunny. I don’t mind a bit, really. But I’m rather annoyed with Yvonne for backing out at the last minute. She knows I gave up a dinner at the

Blitz because I thought she was coming. What on earth is the matter with the stupid woman?"

"It's not her fault, Betty." Bunny looked worried. "She's been seedy on and off for some weeks now. Her nerves seem to be all out of order. The poor old girl was in bed when I got home to dress."

Betty Fawle gave a gesture of impatience. "Nerves? Rubbish! She's no business to know anything about nerves. She imagines she's got them. You mustn't let her do it."

Bunny was silent. She looked at him curiously. "You're not looking any too well yourself, Bunny. You've got quite thin since you came back from Europe."

Thorne forced a laugh. "There's nothing the matter with me. You're imagining things yourself now, Betty."

"Look here," Betty continued, "you and I are pals, and we're both Britishers in a very strange country, only I happen to have been here for some years, and I know my lady Yvonne pretty well. I'm going to ask you plainly: is there anything wrong?"

“Lord, no! Only I’ve been a little anxious about her health, that’s all.”

The cab turned into Fifth Avenue. “Would you like some supper?” Bunny asked.

“No, thanks, I’m rather tired after that exhibition. I don’t think I shall ever be able to look a chicken in the beak again. Old Van Heyden must have thought I intended starting a poultry farm in my kitchen, he took such pains to show me everything. I suppose he meant very well, poor old thing.”

“The old lady’s taken quite a fancy to you, too,” remarked Bunny. “She was talking again about your likeness to Yvonne.”

Betty laughed. “I suppose, in your eyes, that’s the greatest compliment she could pay me. However, I’ve got used to that comparison.”

“It’s noticeable enough, certainly,” Bunny looked at her. “You have the same features, the same figure and apparently the same dress-maker. The only difference that I can see is in your walk.”

“Ah, you’ve noticed that, have you? That’s funny.”

“Why?”

“Well, I don’t know, but it’s always seemed to me there’s something very characteristic about the way Yvonne comes into a room. Still, perhaps it’s my imagination.” Betty sat up abruptly. “Here we are, Bunny. Will you come in for a whisky and soda?” Bunny opened the door as the taxi stopped outside a large new block of apartments near the park. “Not to-night, thanks. I want to get back and see if Yvonne’s all right. I’ll send her round to make her apologies to-morrow if you’ll be in. Good night, Betty.”

As Thorne drove on a grey, chilling fog of uneasiness that had been hanging over his mind of late settled down relentlessly, distorting the clear-cut outlines of his saner judgment into weird phantoms of uncertainty. He pulled out his cigarette case and opened and shut it aimlessly. What right had Betty Fawle to take that tone about Yvonne, he thought, however well she might think she understood her? How the devil could she turn out to-night if she was ill in bed? Poor old Yvonne, she certainly had been having a bad time lately with those wretched nerves of hers. Whatever did Betty

mean by suggesting it wasn't nerves?—unless she thought Yvonne was shamming. And why should she be shamming?—unless—suppose she were out when he got home! He shifted suddenly in his seat and let down the window with a vicious tug at the strap. “Bunny, my boy,” he said aloud, “you’re becoming a drivelling idiot.”

He took a cigarette from his case and struck a light. The spasmodic dance of the flame, as he held it up, arrested his attention. With a persistent effort of will power he gradually controlled his nerves until the match burnt steadily, and then cursed himself heartily for a morbid fool. Betty was talking through her hat, he assured himself. How these women loved to make mischief about nothing. Yvonne’s attacks lately that had resulted in such irritability were naturally enough induced by her worrying over her money troubles. But there was nothing really wrong—nothing. Nevertheless, he wished the driver would put a little more ginger into his work. He put his head out of the window and voiced this feeling with some emphasis.

As he entered the hall of his house in East Fortieth Street, a clock struck twelve. Bunny went straight up-stairs and quietly opened the door of his wife's bedroom. The light was out and he was on the point of retreating noiselessly to avoid disturbing her, when the still black menace of the room made him pause and stare for some moments at the pall of darkness enshrouding her bed. He knew the room was empty. Turning on his heel he felt his way to the head of the stairs.

"Ballard!" he shouted. "Where is Mrs. Thorne?" Barely waiting for a reply he called out again. A door opened on the floor above.

"I don't know where she has gone, sir, but I heard her use the telephone and go out five minutes ago."

"Very well!" replied Bunny curtly.

The humid air of a stifling New York summer night hung about the house and intensified the feeling of foreboding which possessed him as he stood there, sending his brain racing distractedly to find a way out of the maze of suspense and doubt. Those few sentences which had floated over to him in the dining room of

the Club last week flashed across his memory again, striking his tired brain with the loud insistence of an alarm clock. He had long ago reasoned out that that was utterly absurd. It couldn't have been *his* wife that little Joe Stevens was discussing. The whole thing was due to this confounded depression that had gripped him so hopelessly these last few weeks.

It was high time that he got into a different frame of mind, or—Bunny roused himself suddenly, and stumbling into his wife's bedroom, pressed the switch. A single rose-shaded globe over the dressing table sprang to life over Yvonne's portrait in its plain silver frame standing in the midst of the dainty monogrammed *débris* of her toilet. A portrait of a lovely woman, surely, and yet to-night he seemed to see a mocking smile in those wonderful eyes. Something faintly elusive, something a little cruel, something one might almost expect to find if she were the sort of woman that little cad Stevens was talking about.

It was ridiculous, he argued, but he must get rid of that portrait. Not that he believed that he saw anything unusual in it, but—well,

all their friends agreed it was a bad likeness. He would drive her to Marceau's in the morning and have some new ones taken. He must take her away to Long Island where she was always happy. Away—anywhere away from that damned house.—Ah, that was it! He stood staring vaguely at her portrait wondering at the idea. It was the house that always depressed him. And yet somehow he knew he had had this feeling all along—a feeling as of a shadow stalking him through the rooms, even this rose and grey nest of hers. A change would do them both good—a few weeks away from the house. Suddenly with amazement he realised he was afraid—what on earth, he asked himself, could he be afraid of? He looked at her portrait again. The little cruel smile he had never noticed until that evening became accentuated, and over her face had come an expression almost devilish in its seductiveness.

Then, like a flash of light piercing the fog, realisation came to him, realisation of what he had never dared to admit to himself all these months since his marriage—he was afraid of Yvonne, afraid of the possibilities in that beau-

tiful form which he had worshipped ever since he had met her a year ago. Bunny could not understand his feelings. He tried to thrust it all away from him, and to remember only the wonderful days before their marriage—and after; but the little red flames of suspicion that he knew now had been licking at him these last few weeks burst out into a fire that consumed his brain and maddened him. He fought with it, arguing desperately with himself. What was this nameless harm that could be in her? It was only the phantasy of a worried brain, a horror that must be wrestled with and strangled before he saw her again, or else he must lose her utterly. She must never see that he could suspect her of anything, even the littlest of the sins.

Suddenly, imperatively, a bell rang below. Bunny sprang up, his hands gripping the edge of the dressing table. His haggard face stared at him out of the glass behind Yvonne's portrait. He moved slowly backwards to the door, fumbled for the switch and snapped the light off. Again the bell rang. Bunny felt better now that the sinister influence of the portrait

was blotted out. He cursed himself again and made a desperate effort to rid himself of the dread that shook him—the dread that the face he had seen in Yvonne's portrait might be the true one, the real explanation of many things hitherto a mystery to him.

Groping his way down the stairs he opened the door to his wife.

CHAPTER II

YVONNE swept inside, and waited for him to close the door. "Well!" she said defiantly.

"Didn't you take your latchkey with you?" Thorne inquired.

Yvonne betrayed some surprise at this unexpected question, but she replied without hesitation. "Yes, but I lost it outside. Why do you ask?"

Thorne started in amazement at an utterly foreign tone that had crept into her voice, a note of coarseness, almost brutality.

"Is it too much trouble for you to let me in?" Yvonne continued, moving towards the stairs.

"That's not the way to talk to me, Yvonne. Please come in here a minute." Bunny motioned her into the dining room. "Kindly tell me where you've been to-night." He faced her firmly, his hand on the door knob.

"Don't take the trouble to bully me, because

I'm not going to tell you. It's no business of yours."

"This sort of thing won't do, Yvonne," he said curtly. "Answer my question."

Yvonne eyed him insolently. "Oh, well, if it will amuse you, I'll tell you." She leant an arm carelessly on the mantelpiece and played with a string of pearls around her throat. "Directly you went out I telephoned to a man I know very well, and asked him to take me out to dinner." She smiled retrospectively. "He didn't want very much persuading. He took me back to his apartment afterwards—to show me some French prints he had just got over from Europe; then we went to supper at a quiet little place down-town, and—here I am. I spent such an amusing evening. Quite a change."

"Oh, I see!" Thorne was thoughtfully examining her rather white face. Then, "Sit down, Yvonne, won't you?" he asked solicitously. "I want to have a chat with you."

"No, I won't. I've nothing to say to you." The coarse note was back again.

"Sit down when I tell you!" Bunny thundered at her with sudden violence.

Yvonne obeyed him quickly.

"I beg your pardon," her husband went on more calmly, "but I don't understand you to-night. I haven't seen you like this before. What's the matter?"

"Matter?" Her face was taking on an expression perilously like the one he had read into her portrait. "Nothing. But you didn't suppose I was going to sit at home all the evening, while you amused yourself with Betty? As if I couldn't see the whole affair was a put-up job."

"Don't be a fool, Yvonne, and don't use slang. It doesn't suit you. Don't you remember telling me that you were too ill to go out and that I spent half an hour trying to persuade you to come? I offered to stay with you myself, but you wouldn't hear of it. Come, be reasonable."

"Don't flatter yourself I care whether you go out with Betty or not!" Yvonne sneered. "Go and live with her altogether if she'll let you. She probably would."

"It's a good thing Betty can't hear you, Yvonne. I don't fancy she would stand much of that sort of rubbish."

"Oh, I know she's everything that's—"

"Stop that, please, and listen to me," Thorne interrupted harshly. "Now, I happen to know that you only went out about five minutes before I came in, and that little story of yours was, I suppose, invented for my benefit. I expect you telephoned to Betty and found out that I'd just left her. Isn't that so?"

Yvonne made an effort to appear at ease, but her mortification was plainly evident. "Utter rubbish!" she said. "Do you think I should take the trouble to dress myself, just to play a trick on you?"

"I can't see why you should, but there it is. And the taxi that you were supposed to have come home in, where did that disappear to so quickly? You mustn't take me for a fool." Then with an impulse of tenderness he went up to her. "Yvonne, dear, don't spoil yourself with these confounded childish tricks—"

Yvonne turned on him viciously. "Get away from me, you—" She flung a foul epithet at Bunny and rushed to the door. He seized her arm roughly. "That's enough!" he rapped out. "You're forgetting yourself. Before you go to bed, I want you to understand this. I'm

very much in love with you, but I don't like this new manner of yours, and I don't intend to see any more of it."

She laughed defiantly. "And if this new manner of mine, as you call it, pleases me, then what?"

He faced her squarely. "Then what? Then I shall break you of it, that's all."

"Oh!" Yvonne eyed him again, and paused, then she turned towards the door. "I've nothing more to say." Her face was hard and implacable.

Bunny stood aside, with a shrug of his shoulders, as she left the room, and making her way listlessly up the stairs, called for her maid. A few moments later Bunny heard the key turn in her door.

"God! Does she think that necessary—to-night," he muttered stung into savage misery by her callousness.

He went to his own room wondering cynically if that evening were to mark a tragic beginning of the end, or merely the conventional end of the beginning. His ideals, he supposed, had, all things considered, been a little impossible.

Perhaps an osprey suited Yvonne better than a halo.

Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Thorne's seven months of married life had not been without its vicissitudes. Bunny had started off gaily enough with an assured income of a thousand pounds a year of his own, with the determination and capability of adding thereto in some way or another. He had also understood more or less vaguely from Yvonne that she had ample means derived from trust securities. "Enough to dress myself on," as she had once lightly but comprehensively expressed it. In strict justice to Bunny, it must be recorded that at the time of their marriage he had taken little notice of the amount of deference paid her by her bank manager. The study of so glorious a woman as Yvonne precluded any desire to usurp the uninteresting duties of an accountant. However, such a remark from one of the smartest women in New York—and therefore in the world—hinted at an income that might have been anything from ten thousand dollars upwards, without reckoning upon such incidental expenses as her two houses and her automobiles.

It was under these favourable auspices that they had wandered back hand in hand from their honeymoon, and had begun to set their house in order before leaving for a trip to Europe.

A few days before they had been due to sail on the *Mauretania* came the first cloud to break the clear blue of their sky. Yvonne approached Bunny at the breakfast table with a penitent face and a long list of figures.

“Bunny, dear, look at these. I’ve got to tell you. I seem to have got in a muddle with my money.”

“These” had turned out to be a rather appalling collection of hoary headed debts. Yvonne was apologetic, but she couldn’t pay them. She explained that she had paid off as many as she could, and could settle them all out of her next quarter’s money in a month’s time.

“The worst of it is, Bunny. I must leave five thousand dollars before we sail. What can I do about it?”

Bunny had pulled a wry face at the figure, but being very much in love had told her not to worry. He could just manage it, but it would

nearly clear him out. Upon Yvonne's assurance that they could just manage to get along for a month, Bunny had found the cash. This delightfully simple arrangement of Yvonne's, however, was doomed to disaster. For quarter day had presented her, not with the necessary draft, but a tersely worded cable signed "father," to the effect that he, as guardian of her trust fund, had been compelled to hold up her money till certain of her difficulties had been met, and advising her to return at once. This cable had found them while they were on a visit to Bunny's people in Worcestershire. Yvonne had no explanation to offer beyond the obvious, but not very helpful one that she must have forgotten something.

Bunny, having by this time experienced several ingenuous examples of her ideas of high finance, was not entirely surprised. The state of her bank account was always as complete a mystery to Yvonne as the water supply of her bathroom, and, unfortunately, she insisted on treating the one as being as inexhaustible as the other. Bunny recalled gloomily one occasion when this theory had resulted in a polite

reminder from those in authority that she was overdrawn thirty dollars. Yvonne, in attempting to check this statement, had succeeded after an hour's pencil sucking, in stupefying even herself with the discovery of some two hundred thousand dollars to her credit. She had never thoroughly accepted Bunny's painstaking explanation that the totals on the debit side of each page of her pass-book should not be added in as separate items, especially as she had accepted unreservedly the bank's totals for the credit side!

Bunny had immediately decided that the cable in question must be another consequence of his wife's genius for figures. Whatever the reason, it had put him in the humiliating position of having to approach his father for a substantial advance, while their plans for wintering at Adelboden had to give way to the necessity of an immediate return to New York.

During the voyage Yvonne had been very reticent about the whole affair, but just before docking she became hurriedly confidential, and told Bunny that it would be better for him not to approach her father at all. She frankly con-

fessed that he was a man of very peculiar ideas, that he had been violently opposed to her marrying an Englishman, and that, in short, he would not recognise any relationship. Bunny's protest had been met with an agitated assurance that his interference would do her infinitely more harm than good. So he had rather irritably agreed to leave her affairs to her own tender mercies.

Bunny's first move after they had settled down in her house in Fortieth Street had been to consider the question of bringing some grist to the mill. His Farman biplane was still stored down on Long Island, and he came to the conclusion that the quickest way would be to turn his knowledge of flying to account. He soon found that it was fairly easy to obtain contracts—of a kind. There was quite a lot of money to be made by such acrobatic tricks as flying through the subway, or delivering a packet of tea to the top of the Metropolitan building for a leading dry goods store. But to obtain an agreement that did not ingeniously provide for sudden death for the "party of the second part," was another story altogether. However, he had

found a transient fame quite unexpectedly. Happening to fly, one fine evening, a few miles out of the aerodrome with Yvonne, his engine stopped and he made an involuntary landing in the grounds of the President of the Toothpick trust. The great man asked them to stop and share his modest meal, and the next day a highly imaginative account of this harmless little episode appeared in a leading newspaper under the headlines: "TO DEATH—OR DINNER PARTY."

Soon after this Bunny obtained the first of a series of quite remunerative engagements which brought an occasional welcome cheque to the household in Fortieth Street.

Yvonne's reports at this time of her financial transactions had not been encouraging and, a month after their return, she delivered the final verdict that her father refused to release the money and she couldn't touch a cent of it for months. Bunny had assured her that it didn't matter, that she was the sweetest woman in the world, and—would she like to dine at the Blitz and finish up at Jules Cartin's?

They had been a happy enough couple then, going their own unfettered way as the days

drew in at the fierce bite of winter, seeking little company beyond that of Ralph Delamotte and a few chosen spirits; at times of affluence plunging into the feverish hurly-burly of the City, at others dropping quietly away in their battered Mercedes to roam the deserted lanes of the North Shore. They had many ups and downs of fortune during the winter. Yvonne's long-forgotten debts seemed to have a knack of obtruding themselves just when Bunny was congratulating himself that he was beginning to attain some measure of prosperity.

Then there came a time when he first noticed a mysterious change coming over her. She began to have unaccountable fits of moody abstraction. For two or three days at a time, she seemed to avoid his company. There were occasions, too, when he found her out in lies—petty little lies about nothing in particular, but worrying, nevertheless. But always, just when he was on the point of taking up the matter seriously with her, she would suddenly fuss round him again more fascinatingly than ever. Bunny had been frankly puzzled, but he thought he

had found an explanation when her nerves began to give way. It must be her money affairs, of course.

Starting with mere occasional fits of irritability, these attacks grew rapidly more serious until they culminated in the hysterical prostration from which she was suffering when he had left her, to go to the Van Heyden's dinner party.

This occasion of their first serious split, however, seemed to be the storm to clear the domestic atmosphere, for the next morning, the sun of Yvonne's rare charm was shining in its old glory. She flitted about the house for the following few weeks, cunningly contriving little schemes to please Bunny; at one time settling herself down industriously to sew cretonne covers for the furniture, at another affording him endless amusement by some wild effort at economy, until the black memory of the night, and the fantastic revelation of her portrait became banished to the shadowy recesses of his mind.

But even then he had a vague premonition that some intangible influence was working in Yvonne that he would have to fight and master

before very long. To be exact, it was a month later that the conflict started in earnest with a blow that sent him reeling.

CHAPTER III

“A MR. THORNE to see you, sir.”

Charles Willsher turned from the window of his office, overlooking Fifth Avenue. A tall, neatly dressed, strong-looking man of fifty years of age, there was a careworn look stamped on his straight, firm features, about his stern blue eyes, that told of some restrained sorrow in his quiet, well-ordered existence. He was the treasurer of a reputable real estate corporation, the head of a comfortable, unassuming household, a keen student of auction bridge in his spare time, and—the father of Yvonne.

“Mr. Thorne?” he repeated interrogatively.

“Oh, yes, of course. Ask him to come in.”

Bunny was astonished at the cordiality of his reception. “Thank you, sir, I’m very well,” he replied. “I must apologise for intruding upon you, as I understand that—well, you’re not very favourably disposed towards me.”

Willsher was looking mildly surprised.

“Nothing of the sort, Mr. Thorne,” he replied. “I’m very pleased to make your acquaintance. Sit down.”

Bunny did so. “But, sir—” He paused with a perplexed frown. “Well, what I came about, Mr. Willsher, was Yvonne—her health. She’s been very upset lately, and I thought it best to come straight to you, and discuss the whole matter. I should, of course, have called on you when we were married, if you had not been in Europe.”

“Europe?” Willsher exclaimed. “I’ve never been to Europe in my life.”

Bunny’s forehead wrinkled again. “I must have made a mistake, then,” he said quietly. “But it doesn’t matter. I took the liberty of coming to see you now principally about Yvonne’s money affairs. To-day she is quite broken down again, evidently through worrying about them, so I thought it best to come to you. I haven’t taken this course, before, because I promised Yvonne not to, rather foolishly, but now—”

“Quite so, Mr. Thorne,” Willsher interrupted with quiet emphasis, “but I’m afraid I can’t help

you very much. I know nothing whatever about Yvonne's affairs. She never consults me about them; in fact I never see her."

"But what about her trust fund, Mr. Willsher?" Thorne began incredulously. "I understand you act as her guardian."

Willsher shook his head patiently. "I wasn't aware that she had any trust fund. If she has, I should be the last person to act for her in any way."

Bunny looked dazed. "But I saw a cable you sent her when we were in Europe," he persisted.

"Now, see here, Mr. Thorne, I probably understand this better than you do, I'm sorry to say. In the first place I never sent any cable—I didn't even know she was in Europe—secondly, I've only seen her once in the last two years, and that was a few months ago when she came in to tell me that she'd married you." The lines of haunting anxiety on Willsher's face were accentuated as he continued with bitter resignation. "I suppose it's another little game of hers. I'm sorry for you, my boy." He got up and began to pace the room slowly. "Lies—lies—nothing but lies! I don't know what's the

matter with that daughter of mine. She's been a trouble to us for the last five or six years, and she's nearly broken her mother's heart. My other children are steady enough, but—well, it puzzles me, Mr. Thorne." He raised his hand with a gesture of utter weariness and dropped it limply to his side, as he faced his son-in-law.

Bunny drew himself up sharply. "I can't doubt your word, sir, but there must be a bad mistake somewhere. I've found Yvonne everything that I could wish for. If you could come round with me to Fortieth Street—"

"No, no, my boy; I'm sorry. Don't ask me," Willsher replied hastily. "Nothing I could do or say to Yvonne would have the slightest effect. It's a hard thing to have to say, but I had to wash my hands of her long ago. I don't wish to say any more, but—be careful."

"I'm sorry you've reason to speak of Yvonne like that, Mr. Willsher. At any rate, if it's any consolation to you, you can rely on me to do my utmost to protect her from any trouble. She's very dear to me, you must understand."

"Ah, yes, I'm sure of that—I'm sure of that.

Well," the older man's emotion was very near the surface, "I hope things will go well with you both. Just one word of advice, Mr. Thorne. Be firm with her. She's got a mean temper sometimes. You look as if you could be on occasion. Good-bye, my boy. Come in and see me whenever you like. I'll be glad to see you." He wrung Bunny's hand roughly and turned back to his desk.

Bunny drove straight back to Fortieth Street.

An hour later Yvonne came upon him smoking furiously in his study. Her mouth was a thin, straight line.

"So you've been to my father?"

"Yes." He looked up quietly. "I hadn't intended to tell you, though."

"You can't do those dirty, underhanded tricks without me finding you out, you fool. I saw your car at the door of his office. You great boob, taking your troubles round to him! He's got no use for you! You're only making a fool of yourself! You're a fine pair! Well, are you satisfied?"

"No, I'm not," he said unmoved. "Lies are never very satisfactory. And I'm going to

break you of it. Do you understand? Break you!"

"Lies!" Yvonne spoke with cold, deadly significance. "Yes, I did lie to you. I had my own reasons for it. But since you're so fond of the truth, you shall have it. I don't care what you know now. I had that cable sent myself when we were in England, because I wanted to get back to New York—to New York," she repeated. "There's another little confession that may interest you. I told you a few days ago I'd borrowed a thousand dollars from my mother, the night you went to Boston to fly. Well, you probably know now I didn't get it from *her*—I haven't seen her for two years. I got it for nothing—from a man! Not quite for nothing, either. I had to stop at his apartment all night—do you understand? That happens to be the truth, this time!"

CHAPTER IV

FOUR days later Betty Fawle was sunning herself in Central Park, in joyous possession of the second pannier gown to arrive in New York from the Rue de la Paix. Perhaps it was the consciousness of being one of the very few women designed by Nature to walk in one of these inventions without looking ridiculous that tempted Betty to stop her car and take a stroll on the footpath.

In her less palmy days—some eight years before—this innate trick of dress had caused a far-seeing New York dressmaker touring Europe for fresh ideas to lure Betty from a London shop to his laboratory in the Avenue. Betty's taste quickly made her the darling of his capricious customers, and her ability soon enabled her to be sending home useful drafts to a weary little mother at Putney. To Betty, at the flood of her success, had come a pleasant young man of much wealth, whom she had

loved and married. After a riotous year of happiness a sudden attack of double pneumonia had left her a widow—twenty-three and inconsolable. Since that time her good looks and dollars had brought Betty many admirers. In some of these she had been sufficiently interested to convert them by the strength of her personality into staunch friends.

But lately Betty's thoughts had been running rather persistently on one man—one of the few, incidentally, who had never shown any signs of making love to her. As she walked through the Park that afternoon, tranquilly sniffing the warm summer air, her little firm chin proudly tilted, she came upon him striding towards her.

"Why, Ralph!" she exclaimed, beaming. "This is delightful. But what brings you out here? I thought the Park was woman's shrine in the afternoon."

Delamotte looked heartily pleased to see her. "I am but an aimless worshipper, Betty. Will you be the divinity to shape my end for an hour or two?"

Betty laughed. "I was brought up as a milli-

ner, not a manicurist, Ralph. But I'd love to have tea with you, if that's what you mean."

"That's the idea, Betty. Say, how about running out into the country somewhere?"

"Yes, that would be nice. Where shall we go? Oh, I know! If you've got time, Ralph, we might run down to Garden City and see the flying. My old Panhard's waiting round the corner."

"Good enough!" Ralph replied promptly. They turned and stepped out briskly. "Bunny Thorne will be down there, too. By the way, Betty, you're the second original soul I've met this afternoon."

"Ah, Ralph, then I have a rival," Betty said brightly.

"Impossible! It was a mere man. A certain friend of Bunny, by name Robert Archibald McCurrach Reid. I don't think you met him when he was over last year."

"I should hope not, indeed!" Betty shivered. "What's he like? It doesn't sound promising."

Ralph smiled reminiscently. "No, he's a dull dog."

They reached Betty's car. He handed her in

and, directing the chauffeur to the aerodrome, settled himself beside her contentedly. "Ah! This is good, Betty!"

The car sped away out of the park, across the Queensborough Bridge on to the main road, Betty chattering energetically.

"Have you seen the Thornes lately?" Delamotte asked at length.

"Only occasionally." Betty grew contemplative. "What do you think of that couple?"

"Oh, as to that—" Delamotte paused. "Thorne's a very nice fellow, isn't he?"

"He's terribly fond of her, too." Betty turned to him and laid a hand on his arm. "Oh, I do hope it's all right! I can say that to you, Ralph. You know I'm not a gossip. But I'm afraid—"

"Well, to be frank, so I am. Although, mind you, Betty, she was in love with him when she married him. Probably is now—in her own sweet way."

"Yes, but you know what that way means with Yvonne," Betty interrupted.

"I don't know what to think. She's always seemed different with him. I thought it was

going to be a good thing at first. But have you noticed anything wrong?"

"Heavens, yes! Long ago. She's started those everlasting tricks of hers. It's beginning to have the usual result—even on Bunny. You remember Sebastin?"

"Oh, yes, Betty, I remember lots of things. But I'm very mad about it this time. I'd have sworn she wouldn't have got away with it with Bunny."

"Well, Ralph, I think it's a shame. I don't understand it," Betty replied.

Ralph looked at her troubled face very seriously. "No, you wouldn't, Betty." He paused a moment. "I'm very glad you can't understand it. It's not the sort of thing one cares to think of in your gentle presence." Betty's eyes turned to meet his, amazed. He went on softly. "It's out of your kingdom."

They sat silent and thoughtful through a mile of the ragged, inglorious country-side until Betty began to speak of other things.

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Bunny's aeroplane was standing close to the ropes as they sauntered into the aerodrome.

They found Yvonne and Bobby close beside it. She greeted them charmingly.

"Bunny's having a busy time with passengers to-day, Betty. Oh, let me present Mr. Reid to you. Mr. Reid—Mrs. Fawle."

Bobby bowed quietly. He was looking rather subdued.

"How do you do?" Betty said graciously. "Are you *the* Mr. Reid?"

Bobby swelled visibly. "Oh, well—er—"

"I beg your pardon. That was rather rude of me"—Betty smiled mischievously, taking an instant liking to his fair, open countenance—"but Mr. Delamotte led me to believe that you were an elderly Scotchman with a red beard."

A chill ran down Ralph's spine at the exceeding sweetness of Bobby's smile.

Bunny came out of his shed and lounged towards them. "Hullo, Betty," he said wearily.

Yvonne glanced quickly at him and suggested tea.

"Why, Bunny, what's the matter?" Betty began.

"How are you?" Delamotte interrupted,

going up to Bunny quickly. "I suppose you've finished flying for the day? Good idea of yours, Yvonne, we'll all go and have tea."

"Not for me," Bunny said roughly. "I'm going up again in a minute." He turned away to the machine. Yvonne went to intercept him while Betty shot a significant glance at Delamotte.

"Bunny, dear old thing," pleaded Yvonne. "Do give yourself a rest."

"Go and have tea," Bunny said over his shoulder. "I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Come along, Yvonne," Delamotte broke in briskly. "I want mine badly. Bobby, are you looking after Mrs. Fawle?" He walked Yvonne off with him to the enclosure.

Bunny was standing down by the tail of the biplane, fidgeting with a rudder wire, and watching a mechanic filling the gasoline tank from the pilot's seat.

"Don't spill that stuff all over the plane, you damned fool!" he called out irritably. The mechanic looked up in surprise.

Betty, after a word with Bobby, pushed her

way through the crowd round the machine. "Bunny," she said hurriedly. "I want to speak to you a moment."

Mechanically he drew aside with her.

"Bunny, old boy," she continued in a low voice, "what's the matter? You mustn't go up like this." She summed up his untidy appearance with a swift glance, and searched his eyes for an explanation. There was a look of latent horror in their depths, as of a man seeing unnamable things crawling up to him to drag him down to their own pestilential haunts. "You mustn't go up like this," Betty repeated firmly.

Bunny laughed uneasily. "Like what, Betty? You silly little soul, of course I must. Why not?"

"You can't deceive me like that. You're not in a fit state for this. You ought to be in bed, not here." Betty was severe.

"Rubbish, Betty! In any case, look at all these passengers gasping to hand over fifty dollars." He jerked his head towards a little group waiting patiently by the head of the machine. "There's very little one wouldn't do for

money nowadays, you know." His laugh grated on her.

"Look here, Bunny. Make a pal of me. Money isn't everything. Don't take Yvonne so seriously. I know she's hopelessly extravagant, but she means well. She told me a lot the night she stayed with me. Oh, don't interrupt. I know more than you think. I'm sure she's trying to save you worry in her own way. That's the reason she borrowed that thousand dollars from me. I was—"

"Betty, tell me for God's sake!" His voice was hoarse with suspense. "What night was that?"

Betty glanced at him in surprise. "Why, about a week ago. The night you were away flying. Boston, wasn't it? Didn't you know?"

Bunny put a shaking hand to his forehead. "Oh, yes, yes, of course, Betty. I—I had forgotten. Of course I knew she was with you."

Then Betty, watching his pallid face, understood. "Oh, Bunny, you don't mean—that!"

He drew himself upright with a shudder, and his jaw squared. "I mean nothing," he said

almost roughly. "Forget everything I've said. Everything! Do you understand? I wasn't very fit, but I'm all right now." He looked her straight in the eyes. "Now, run along with Bobby, there's a good girl. They're waiting for me here. Say I'll be back in a few minutes." Thorne strode back to the machine. "Now, then, who's the next?" he called out. A merry, athletic-looking youth stepped forward. "Here you are, Mr. Thorne," he said eagerly. "Jump up, then. Look out, don't put your foot through the fabric." Thorne climbed up after him, and starting the machine off across the field, jerked it viciously off the ground before it had got up sufficient speed. He had to jockey it carefully before starting to climb.

The eternity of torture he had been suffering the last four days had given way to a smouldering rage against his wife and all her works, far outweighing the relief that Betty's words had given him, and as the machine rose his feverish throbbing brain left the control of the machine to the mechanical care of his right hand, and his feet on the rudder bar. Presently he looked down. Somewhere in that little patch of colour

a thousand feet below, the awning of the enclosure, was the woman who had done this thing to him, who for a touch of spite, had left him to the fettered darkness of those days—of a lifetime, perhaps, but for a chance remark. He could see her in his mind, cheerfully chatting and pouring out tea. His wife! Good God!

The knees of his passenger closely pressing Thorne's sides, were trembling slightly. Bunny half turned his head and saw a hand tightly clenching the wooden upright at his side. At these usual signs of a nervous passenger he smiled slightly. What had that youth got to worry about? he thought. He wished fervently he could change places with him—with anybody, even with the nigger who looked after the sheds at night. Still, he supposed this fellow had had enough of it. He might as well take him down; and he wasn't feeling any too well himself. Suddenly his head reeled under a momentary spasm of dizziness, and his grasp on the control lever stiffened. He recovered sharply. That was nasty, he thought. He must get down quickly, there might be more. Keeping

the engine full on he pointed the elevator down sharply.

A mad rush for two hundred feet, and then a clutching at his heart made his hand pull back on the elevator. The biplane straightened out and wallowed perilously. The sweat broke through the skin of his forehead and dried instantly in the rush of air. Bunny felt his instinctive touch had gone. He had to *think* it all out carefully. Setting his teeth, he forced his disobedient muscles to pull sideways on the lever and bring the right wing up, steadying the machine. His treacherous brain cleared again for a moment, and switching the engine off and on he fought his way down with parched mouth, till the recorder showed four hundred feet. Another and sharper pang of dizziness, and he levelled out again.

A gust struck the machine, and the right wing canted high, almost throwing him out of his seat. Again he forced his sluggish muscles into action—just in time, and the wing sank again. He caught a confused impression of the upturned faces of the crowd running out of the enclosure. Grimly he thrust the machine

down again with a rapidly weakening grip on the vital lever. At a hundred feet from the ground another gust pitched the machine sideways. His brain, tightening as in a vice, struggled for command, but the mutinous muscles refused altogether. The pressure of the knees behind him suddenly ceased.

“Sit down!” Bunny yelled. “Hang on like hell!” He felt as if he were speaking in a dream. He made a last desperate, convulsive effort, and this time his hand answered. He jammed the lever hard over to the left—too late.

The left wing tilted slowly, irrevocably, until it towered into the blue vault. Then began an interminable couple of seconds. Bunny’s work was done. He could only watch—and he did, curiously. The whole world seemed hushed, waiting for that wing to stop climbing. It gradually eclipsed the yellow ball of the sun, and a shadow fell on his face. Below, the sunny green turf and the faces of the transfixed crowd away by the sheds staring—staring. . . .

Then a harsh creaking from up aloft and the machine staggered and fell sideways in a shrill

whistling of air. Bunny's left hand shot out helplessly on to the wooden upright, and fell on another's—his passenger's.

"Oh, God!" he heard an agonised cry behind him.

A dark mass shooting over his head, a terrific blow on his forehead, something warm trickling into his eyes, and darkness closing over him, as as of a mighty forest tearing itself to pieces.

he sank slowly into the rending, crackling ruins,

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Yvonne was handing Bobby a cup of tea when a sharp, loud exclamation came from a pilot leaning over the railings.

"Great Snakes! Look at Thorne's machine! Guess he's jammed a warping wire."

Yvonne dropped the cup, and rising quickly got to the railings first, with a little rush, as the crowd of idlers under the awning stirred excitedly. "Oh, Ralph, look at that!" Yvonne cried as the machine oscillated violently, and steadied itself again after its first dive. "I'm sure Bunny's in trouble!"

Ralph was watching the biplane anxiously. "No, he's got it again. Ah!" as it tilted down

at an alarming angle. He turned to Betty. "Look after Yvonne. I'm afraid there's going to be a smash." He ran after Bobby to where Thorne's mechanics were standing round his car, gazing upwards.

"There's something wrong with 'is control, there, sir," said one of them slowly. "And yet we look those wires over every time 'e goes up."

Bobby nodded silently.

The little group watched Thorne's struggles with breathless impotence.

Then a groan of horror broke from them all. They turned simultaneously to the automobile.

The biplane hung straight up and down, wavered a second as if hesitating whether to overturn completely, and slid down with a scythe-like sweep until it had almost regained the horizontal. It struck the ground on one wing, reared like a great beast in its death agony, and collapsed in a cloud of dust.

The big car with Bobby and Delamotte, the mechanics clinging on anywhere, dashed up a few seconds later.

Over the half mile of grass from the enclo-

sure to the tangle of splintered struts and rent fabric came stringing out a heterogeneous company of officials, spectators and mechanics, chilled with the cold breath of apprehension.

Bobby rose from his knees and intercepted Yvonne as she stumbled out of Betty's landaulette. Half supporting her by the arm, he drew her aside. "He's all right, Yvonne," he jerked out. "Don't upset yourself. He's had a wonderful escape. Nasty smack on the head, that's all. Delamotte's looking after him. Go back to the enclosure with Betty."

She struggled faintly, her eyes drenched with agony—Bobby thought he had never seen them so lovely—"Let me go to him! Why are you keeping me back?" she cried. "You're not telling me the truth!"

"I swear I am! Go back!"

"Then why can't I go?" She was staring at a group of men, a dozen yards away from the pile of debris. Sketchily between their legs she could make out a dark form. And a hand, a twisted horror—outstretched, limp. Two more men joined the group, and looking down bared their heads.

"Not that, Yvonne!" Bobby snatched her round. "That's the passenger!"

Yvonne broke away from him with a peal of laughter to the other group standing ankle deep in the wreckage. Delamotte was on one knee wringing out a piece of cotton waste. His hands were red.

"Give that to me! It's mine!" she cried, tearing it from him in ragged strings of crimson.

Later, Betty drove Delamotte back to the city.

"Well, Betty," he said as he stepped into the car. "She wouldn't have anything to do with me, so I've sent Reid back with them."

Betty was very quiet. "I suppose Bunny will be quite—quite safe with her?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, there's no serious damage. Slight concussion and some nasty cuts. What a wonderful escape, eh? His mechanic tells me he must have broken his fall by coming through the fabric of the top plane. We found the other fellow quite a distance from the machine—killed instantly, poor chap. His neck was broken. The whole thing's a mystery, too. Horrible!"

"Horrible!—and unnecessary."

"Yes." He lit a cigarette. "I suppose, strictly speaking, all these smashes are. Still Bunny was looking rather run-down to-day. With anybody not so strong I should have said it was nerves." He looked at Betty. To his surprise, her eyes were flaming.

"Ralph, listen. I'll tell you why it was. Bunny was a wreck. He'd been living in hell for the best part of a week! The man had been—been *scared!* I saw it in his eyes. You know what I mean—not of flying—of her, something she had done." She paused.

"What, Betty?"

"Well, playing with fire as usual. And this time she's set the house alight. A week ago Bunny was away for a night at Boston. Yvonne was with me all the evening, chatting, and as it got late she stayed the night. She was very worried about her affairs, and I lent her a thousand dollars. There's nothing in that, of course. I found out accidentally what Bunny's trouble was, this afternoon." Betty was deliberate, merciless. "She had actually told him, or led him to believe that she had sold herself that night! She deliberately threw him into a hell

like that, and kept him in it—even this afternoon when she was purring round him! And she's supposed to be a human being, Ralph, and I'm supposed to be like her. I hope it's only outwardly."

Delamotte sank back on the cushions with an oath. "I beg your pardon, Betty, but it's the limit. What a devil! There's a man who's crazy about her—a strong man, and she trying to do him in. God knows why. Perhaps because he *is* a strong man. And she'll finish him—you'll see if she doesn't. No man's armour is proof against that sort of thing, unless he doesn't care, and Bunny isn't that sort. He's going to stick."

"I believe you, Ralph," Betty said resignedly. "To-day's bad enough, but there'll be worse. Nobody can do anything more. We tried the experiment of taking her up again after her marriage. But we were fools. The result was inevitable with a woman like her. She's tainted!" Betty blazed into sudden passion. "I ought to have known better. She even served me a trick, two years ago—you know about that, Ralph. A little thing compared to

some of the others. I'd almost forgotten it until to-day. Now I'm finished. I shan't be rude to her, but if I ever get a chance I'd like to give her a dose of her own medicine."

"You're quite right," Delamotte replied as the car turned into Fifth Avenue. "It's time sentiment over Yvonne gave way to sense. To put it bluntly, she wants the whip."

CHAPTER V

YVONNE'S fair head was bent over a book. At the base of the sharp cone of light from the shade of a reading lamp, the open page showed white and naked out of the soft harmonies of grey shadow and rose-coloured drapery about her bedroom.

Through the open door came the grave, companionable "tack-tock" of a grandfather clock on the landing, making patient effort to keep time with the difficult breathing of the sick man, at whose feet Yvonne was sitting. As she rustled a leaf noisily, the clock gave out a faint warning rumble from its chest, hesitated a second doubtfully, as if fearing to disturb the sleeper, and then with laboured responsibility counted out ten. Outside a newsboy ran past with an "extra," raucously disturbing the quiet street. Yvonne caught the word *Carpathia* and looked up, remembering it was the night when the survivors of the *Titanic* were expected.

All New York would be down at the dock to see the *Carpathia* come up the river. Perhaps that was why everything seemed so still, so awe-inspiring, she thought, recalling the city as she had seen it that afternoon, a hushed city, waiting for her home-coming dead.

Bunny stirred restlessly, and opened his eyes.

"What is it, dear?" Yvonne asked gently. Going to him, she laid her hand on his bandaged head.

"Have you heard if that boy's any better yet?"

"Oh, yes, much better," she answered readily. "Out of danger, Ralph tells me. But don't think about that, dear old thing." Her hand trembled, as she smoothed the pillow. "Go to sleep again. You want plenty of rest."

"How long is it now since the smash?"

"A week."

"I wonder if you're lying to me now. I've an idea he's dead," Bunny muttered wearily, and closed his eyes.

Yvonne went back to her book. For a long time, she sat staring past it, with miserable eyes. A tear fell and splashed heavily on the white page—and another.

Presently her maid tip-toed into the room and whispered to her.

"Mr. Davenport?" Yvonne repeated dully.

"Yes, ma'am. Mrs. Sebastin he asked for," the maid explained with diffidence.

Yvonne got up quickly. At the door she turned. "Stay here till I come back," she ordered in a low voice. "Don't leave Mr. Thorne." Gathering her skirts around her, she ran down the stairs.

She found Davenport in Bunny's den. He was wearing a shabby overcoat, too small for him, and clutching nervously at a soft felt hat on the table. In the second before he spoke, Yvonne noticed vaguely that he looked ill. He seemed to have been drinking a little, of course. But there was a light in his eyes, a terrible gladness.

"Yvonne—Yvonne—" he jerked out helplessly, and took a step towards her. "To see you—after nearly a year."

Yvonne closed the door.

"How are you, Wilbur?" she said coldly from the opposite side of the table. "I didn't know you were back."

"I've just landed. I came straight to you." His eyes were pleading to her. Yvonne was looking down. She made no reply. "Haven't you anything to say to me?" he asked hoarsely. "Oh, don't judge me by these clothes. They're all I could get on the *Carpathia*."

"The *Carpathia*!" Yvonne was roused to astonishment. "Why, were you on the *Titanic*?"

"Yes," he said shortly. "Never mind about that. Do you care?"

"Of course I'm glad you were saved."

"Yes, yes, but more than that." He drew in a sharp, apprehensive breath. "Do you want me back?"

Yvonne's mind was made up. She looked at him insolently. "I think I put you wise about that over the 'phone the day you went away."

"Ah, *that*!" His eyes dulled a moment. "I didn't let myself take much notice of that. When you said you wouldn't marry me—when you answered questions I hadn't asked—I knew you were speaking for somebody's benefit. That's an old trick of yours, you know." He spoke quite simply. "I had your letter. That's what I've been banking on."

"Oh, is it?" An ugly coarseness smirched the fairness of her face and crept into her voice. "Well, you've got a fine chance, let me tell you—a fine chance!" she drawled.

Davenport flinched and put his hand to his forehead.

"I don't know how you've had the nerve to come back," she went on cruelly. "But if you come here again, I'll get you put away for good."

Davenport shook his head doggedly. "If you mean that, Yvonne, for God's sake do it right here, for I don't care—now." He spoke in quiet desperation. "I took my chance of that when I went on board at Southampton. Took my chance to see you"—he raised his voice—"do you get me? Just to see you. Perhaps I'll get twenty years for it, but if I think it's worth it, who the hell's business is it but mine? That's what you are to me—all that. I suppose I thought there was a chance to get you back, and I gambled on it."

"Don't speak so loud, you fool!" Yvonne interrupted. "I don't want the servants to hear. Now, listen to me. There's another man now

—has been for some time. If you knew me so well you might have guessed that.”

“My God!” Davenport shuddered, and the lines on his face deepened. “Is that true?”

Yvonne laughed lightly.

“Oh, of course it is. As you say, I ought to have known—I ought to have known!” He sat down heavily. “I kept your letter through everything, Yvonne.” His hand strayed pitifully to the breast of his shabby, ludicrous coat. “And yet I suppose I did know, on those endless empty nights when I’ve looked out of my window, and been maddened to think of *you*—and *that!*—behind the silence of the thousands of miles—somewhere—” He paused and looked at her hopelessly. “It is true, of course?”

“You bet your life it’s true,” she said, unmoved. “A better man than you, too. A man who thinks I’m the best woman living, who doesn’t drink, who understands me.”

“Thinks you the best woman in the world? Then he *doesn’t* understand you!” Davenport sprang to his feet, staggering, and flung his forlorn hope at her merciless stronghold. “Nobody does, as I do! Not even yourself. I don’t

think you're the best woman in the world—I've no delusions, no pipe dreams about you. I want you, that's all there is to it. And remember this, there's nobody who knows how to make it worth your while like I do!"

Yvonne winced and looked up, a faint gleam of interest kindling in her cold eyes.

"I've got the money, for one thing, honestly enough, too, though I don't think you bother about that for all your talk. I've had to work damned hard for it since I left. God knows I kept every cent for you, but that isn't the point. Oh, I know every turn and twist of your mind. It's not the money, it's the way we knew how to spend it—you and I—in the old days"—he turned on her with sudden ferocity—"you haven't forgotten them, you never could, it's in your blood, you devil! Does he know your moods, this man of yours? When to take you out, and when to leave you alone? What to give you to eat! Does he know the night-life of New York as I do? The restaurants from Herald Square to Columbus Circle, where every damned head-waiter would give us the best table when everybody else was turned

away? Where we'd stay till daylight, and go home to fight with one another because I'd been drinking—drinking!"—he laughed deliriously—"what the hell did you care whether I'd been drinking or not! You liked to know you could make me drunk—drunk with your beauty! Does he know the whole wild life of Broadway as we knew it? The white lights, Yvonne, and everything it means to you?—Ah!—" he broke off, panting.

Yvonne was staring at him wide-eyed, swaying ever so little as if listening to the dance of the spirits he conjured up.

"Does he know? Tell me!" Davenport flung at her. "No, of course he doesn't. I can see that." His voice dropped and became dry, rasping. "I suppose he thinks that sort of life's not good enough for you—prefers to think you're the best woman in the world, and gets scared to death when he finds you're not. Taken in by your looks, like everybody else, except me. You mustn't do this and you mustn't go there, and it's not quite nice for you to meet so-and-so—oh, hell!" He pushed the table aside, and striding forward, pinned her by the arms.

"How long will that suit you? There's nothing like that about me. I know you're rotten, but that's the pull you have on me. It's your badness I love, and it's that I've come back for."

Her breath came in quick gasps as she wrenched herself free and turned away. "No, no, *no!*" she began. "Go away now, I must have time to think."

"Then you'll see me—to-morrow?"

She shivered a little. "Oh, I don't know. Perhaps. But say, Wilbur, by the way," she went on impulsively, "Jacques has started a new cabaret, you remember Jacques of the Tabarin!" She stopped confusedly. "Oh, what am I saying, why can't you *go*, man? But wait a moment; I want to tell you something. I'm living with this man, do you see? And people think we're married. I've given it out, so don't be surprised if you hear it."

Davenport laughed shortly. "I shouldn't be surprised at anything I hear about you, Yvonne. But I'm not likely to believe that."

"No, I suppose not. Now, go, Wilbur, at once. You quite understand you're not to come here any more?"

Davenport swung towards the door. As he came by her, he halted and turned. Yvonne stepped back quickly. "Don't be crazy!" she exclaimed, frowning. His arms dropped to his side.

"Same old Yvonne!" he said. "Well, it's your one good point. I'll telephone you tomorrow where you can find me. What's your number?"

She told him and let him out of the hall door without another word.

At the door of her bedroom her maid met her. "Mr. Thorne's asleep, ma'am," she said. "He's been reading."

"Very well, you can go."

Yvonne glanced at the bed, and began to pace the room with nervous steps. Suddenly she stopped by the window, and holding aside the shade looked out. Away to the left the purple pall of the sky was torn into a ragged golden fringe, where the glare of Broadway overflowed the broken line of roofs. There was a deeper glow on Yvonne's cheeks than they owed to the dimly lit hangings beside her, as she stood gaz-

ing out towards this hidden land of the White Lights.

She dropped the shade abruptly, and running lightly to the bed crouched down beside her husband, and threw an arm over the pillow.

The book that he had been reading lay open by his side. She picked it up—it was her copy of the *Poems of Pleasure*—and glanced at a few marked lines on the page.

“Tune up the fine, strong instrument of thy being
To chord with thy dear hope, and do not tire;
When both in key and rhythm are agreeing,
Lo! thou shalt kiss the lips of thy desire.”

She closed the book gently, and it slipped from her hand to the floor.

“His—dear—hope!” she repeated.

Again the clock fussily cleared its throat: again it hesitated, but this time, with less kindly impulse, it mocked her as it marked the passing of another hour.

“His—dear—hope—his—dear—hope—his—dear—hope—his—dear—”

And Bunny slept quietly.

CHAPTER VI

BUNNY'S injuries kept him an impatient prisoner in the house for another fortnight, and on calling terms with his doctor for some considerable time after that. From the very outset, from the time when he had been taken off the field after his accident, Yvonne had taken charge of the case with a thoroughness which admitted of no interference from anybody, and which at times produced an uneasy feeling in the mind of the doctor himself that he was, in spite of his thirty years' experience, little more than a budding medical student. For her own reasons, or possibly for no reason at all, Yvonne refused with much pretty show of gratitude Delamotte's offer to attend to Bunny himself. But she had devised a somewhat intricate schedule of the days and hours at which she considered it suitable for Ralph and Bobby to make their appearance, a copy of which she presented to each.

From a close study of these time-tables it appeared to them that, for reasons of hygiene, presumably, they were only permitted to make their appearance at one and the same time on a certain afternoon in each week. This precaution against the dangers of overcrowding they nullified by conveniently losing the documents altogether "on a ferry-boat," an explanation which Yvonne received with the respect it deserved. What Yvonne lacked in experience she certainly made up for in enthusiasm. It was impossible, for instance, to shake her faith in the miraculous properties of a wet sponge applied to the face at intervals of five minutes during the day, a conviction which amused Bunny in his easier moments, and brought back vividly to him the well-meaning efforts of the amateur nurses during the Boer war.

But her entire sweetness and devotion to him during the early days of his suffering almost negatived the feeling of repulsion which the discovery of her latest and most deadly trick had produced in him. Almost, but not quite; he had his darker hours, when the pain he suffered from the shock of the accident and the

stinging cuts on his head and body was negligible beside the pain of his restless mind. And it was always at such times that he found, almost with a feeling of irritation, that Yvonne seemed to him most particularly and unconsciously charming. That was, of course, had he but known it, merely another way of impressing upon himself that he was just as determinedly and madly in love with Yvonne as ever.

If he was logically compelled to condemn her, at the back of his own mind, he never allowed a hint of such a thing to come from anyone else. It was, curiously enough, Ralph Delamotte who was the first to voice the general feeling in his circle of intimates as to the cause of his accident. About ten days after it, they came to the conclusion that it was time to tell Bunny of the death of his passenger. Ralph led up to the subject casually enough, sitting on the edge of the bed with a highball in his hand and a strong distaste for his mission in his mind. Bunny, however, took the news with more equanimity than Ralph had dared to hope for.

"I was pretty sure of that, Ralph, all the time. He went over my head, you know, just before I

lost my senses. I wonder if he jumped. I remember shouting to him not to, poor devil!"

"He didn't jump, Bunny. We saw him flung out after the machine struck," Ralph observed. "Oh, well, Bunny, it's a chance everyone has to take, flying. Don't worry yourself about it."

"It's not a chance everybody takes. It wasn't that time, anyway," Bunny said bitterly. "I'd no business to have taken anybody up that afternoon. I knew I wasn't fit. That fellow's death will hang over me like a nightmare all my life."

"Rot! Even if you weren't yourself, somebody else should be blamed, not you." Ralph said with ill-advised bluntness. "You mustn't mind my saying so, but it was plain enough that—well, that Yvonne had been upsetting you."

Bunny sat up heatedly. "I do mind your saying so, very much. Understand that. In the first place you're entirely wrong about Yvonne, entirely. In the second, I'm not a child to have to be told whether it's right for me to do a thing or not. If I didn't feel fit to fly, it was up to me to chuck it for the day, and

not to throw away a life because I didn't have a nursemaid to take me home in a perambulator." Bunny spoke with cutting emphasis. "I don't want to hear you or anybody else talk like that again. It's cowardly. Time enough to do so when I start to blame Yvonne for anything I do, and that'll be a hell of a long time, believe me."

Ralph apologised and led the conversation to safer channels, but it gave him food for reflection.

Yvonne at this time was as indefatigable as ever in her efforts to make Bunny as comfortable as possible, and, when she was not pottering about the house, she was busily engaged in ransacking the drug stores for all the known—and unknown—products of the fertile brains of the patent-medicine maker. Bunny noticed eventually, however, that Yvonne's energy on his behalf was apparently beginning to have its effect. She came in one afternoon, a week after Davenport's visit, looking white and tired out, and he thought it was time to make a protest.

"You're overdoing it, Yvonne, old girl," he said kindly. "You'll be getting ill yourself,

next, and then what should I do? Give yourself a rest, won't you? Here," he reached out for her hand, "come and sit down."

Yvonne snatched her hand away and gave herself a little nervous shake. "Oh, don't, Bunny! I'm—tired." She walked to the dressing table, hesitated, and came back. "I'm sorry, dear, I didn't mean to be cross."

"Anything worrying you, Yvonne? Oh, by the way," he took up an envelope from the side of the bed. "Here's a cheque that's just come. I daresay you can do with it. It's a thousand."

She took it and laid it aside. "All right, Bunny," she answered abstractedly.

A few days later he got up for the first time, and shortly afterwards was able to go out for occasional drives with Yvonne. He was noticing more and more plainly the signs of the dreaded demon of nerves. Frequently she would spend the best part of the afternoon fidgeting with a pack of cards, pretending to play patience; or at other times she would sit gazing vacantly before her, to get up suddenly and go out on some mysterious errand. All these little straws seemed to show that the ca-

precious wind of Yvonne's emotions was tending to blow in some direction at present unrevealed to him. It was disturbing, but he was able to extract considerable comfort from the fact that they had made arrangements to get away within a few days from the city for a month or so, and he hoped that the change to the country would bring back the blessed frame of mind that he had first found her in a year ago.

The days passed uneventfully but for these uncertain moods of Yvonne's, and by this time he had practically thrown off the effect of the accident. Yvonne, too, seemed to liven up under the stimulus of their approaching departure, and she was entering spiritedly into her preparations. It had been decided that they were to give up the house in Fortieth Street entirely, and Yvonne had some friends who wished to take it off their hands.

On a particularly hot evening—it was now getting well on towards June—Yvonne had gone out to dinner with these people to make the final arrangements, and Bunny was facing the rather cheerless prospect of spending the

evening in the discomfort of disordered furniture and littered trunks; and when Yvonne packed her clothes for a long absence baggage was apt to hit one in the eye at every turn, as he had reason to remember.

He dined quietly by himself at his club, as the servants had been given an evening out, and walked home, rather glad of the fact that Delamotte had rung up and said that he would look in to keep him company. Letting himself into the gloomy hall Bunny made his way up to the library, and throwing off his coat, dropped into a chair at his desk, and set to work on some files of correspondence. At length the front door bell disturbed him and he went down and let Delamotte in.

"Hullo, Bunny! All alone?" he said rather shortly.

"Yes. I'm glad you came along. Here, give me your hat."

Delamotte strode into Bunny's den on the right of the hall, and sat down abruptly.

"Thorne, I've come here to speak to you very plainly to-night. I can't help whether you

mind it or not. I've watched things going plumb to hell with you long enough, and it's time you knew it."

"What do you mean, Ralph?" Bunny said, with some annoyance.

"What do I mean? Sit down, and I'll tell you. Good Lord! It's always the husband who's the last to know these things, that's the damnable pity of it. Thorne, you'll admit that I'm your friend—the best friend you've had since you came to New York last year? All right, then. You'll also admit that I know what goes on in New York pretty well? Well, I'm going to say something to you to-night that will probably want to make you kick me out of the house."

Thorne had started up out of his chair, but the finality of the other man's manner forced him back. In a sub-conscious way, he felt that something like this had to come, that he had been expecting it, although now he was desperately afraid of what he was going to hear.

Delamotte lit a cigarette, watching Thorne all the time with stern, unyielding blue eyes. He went on. "I'm going to talk to you about

Yvonne—about your wife. I know it's a thankless job, to interfere in these things, but I like you, Bunny, and, as you're the particular sort of fool who can't or won't see what everybody else has known for years, I've got to do it. Now, don't interrupt me. I'm going to take up about twenty minutes of your time to state the case as I know it. In the first place, Yvonne's had two husbands, not one. She's been clever enough to divorce them both. The first one is now in a lunatic asylum; the second one is fool enough to be drinking himself to death about her now."

"Stop, Delamotte. That's quite enough. I've no doubt you mean well, but it's quite useless. Now, you know me by now for a fairly obstinate fellow. Well, my mind was made up when I married Yvonne and I'm not going to change it. I'm quite willing to accept your word for these things, and any others you insist on revealing. I'm quite ready to remind you myself of one or two tricks she's played which haven't made life any too pleasant, just to emphasise what a fool I am, if you like, but, as a matter of fact, I'm going to stick to her.

Whether I'm right or not is a matter of opinion as to what one gets married for."

"Bunny, I shouldn't have been such a fool," Ralph persisted, "as to come here to tell you what I have, and nothing else. You must allow me to finish what I came to say. Whether it affects your decision or not, remember that I am here to help you. Listen. Do you know what her relations were with Wilbur Davenport? Friends! Yes, they were, very good friends. She'd been his mistress for over a year."

"Not that!" Thorne made a great effort to control himself. His face was ghastly. The dulled memory of Yvonne's portrait as he had once seen it stood again before his eyes, with vivid insolence. "Ah! I remember," he continued. "Delamotte, in this case I happen to know you're wrong. Yvonne in my presence broke off her engagement to Davenport over the 'phone, and told him that she was quit of him. It was when she found out about that crooked business of his that he had to clear out for."

"Look here, Bunny, it *is* true," Delamotte

said earnestly. "I wish to God it were not. She never had any more intention of marrying him than me. I don't know anything about that telephone message, but, you can take it from me, it was some sort of fake."

"Wait a minute, Delamotte. There's one little thing you're not being quite straight about. Aren't you allowing your feelings for Yvonne to influence you in what you're saying?"

"My feelings for Yvonne! I think I've given you a pretty good indication of what they are. What do you mean?"

"Well, it's a delicate thing to talk about, but we're not mincing matters to-night, apparently. Aren't you influenced in what you say by a certain amount of jealousy? I understood there was something of that sort in your warning to me before we were married."

"Did she suggest that?" Delamotte laughed with frank amusement. "Oh, Yvonne! Yvonne! Oh, well, in case you think there's anything in it I can assure you it's been quite difficult enough to be even friends with Yvonne for the last few years. But, Bunny," he continued seriously, "I want you to cut it out. She's

killing you by inches. It doesn't take a doctor to see that. Everybody notices it. What? Bah! What are business worries? I've got 'em, so has everybody these days."

"She's been ill lately, you know," Thorne said quietly.

"Ah, ill! I'll tell you about those illnesses. Remember, I've known Yvonne for a good many years. She's now twenty-eight, isn't she? Well, seven years ago Yvonne was a beautiful woman, and she was never ill. Now she's a beautiful woman, perhaps more so in some respects, but there's a difference. She's been a drug fiend on and off all those seven years."

"For God's sake, Ralph—"

"No, no, listen to me. You're a sensible fellow, Bunny. You know you might as well hear me out. Mind you, I've always liked Yvonne. One can't help it. I know Yvonne's better side, the side that appeals to you: her little ways with children, her love for the country, the open air—oh, a hundred things about her that are lovable, but I've got to do my best to prevent another tragedy. I've watched her go down the hill in those seven years, bit by bit, only

slowly to begin with, but gradually getting up her pace until she seemed to be going too fast for anything to stop her. It started with little ugly rumours. Then the women began to give her up; you know what that means! Latterly she had known most of the men and none of the women in New York. Oh, Wilbur Davenport hasn't been the only one, and she couldn't play straight with any of them. Then she met you. Now, Bunny, Yvonne's always taken a certain amount of notice of my advice, and she came to me about you. She said that she was in love with you and was going to marry you. I told her of course that she had no right to marry anyone; at any rate, without telling him a good many things he ought to know." He turned to Bunny. "I want to make the situation clear."

Thorne's face was stern and purposeful. "Go on, get it over," he said shortly.

"Yvonne assured me that she still had her few ideals left and that, whatever I advised, she was going to marry you and cut out the old life. Well, she meant it at the time, I could see that, but that was where I made my mistake. She can't cut out the old life. I'm per-

fectly willing to believe that she wanted to at the time. Of course she'd never been loved by any of them as she was by you, and she was tremendously influenced by that. Then you married her, and that's how things stood till a month or two ago, but when she came back from England she started the drug business again. Remember, I've watched things rather closely, both from a medical and psychological standpoint, and I know what I'm talking about. There's another thing. I know you didn't marry Yvonne for money, but you knew she had a good deal, didn't you?"

Thorne nodded.

"And after you were married I suppose she told you her money was held up by her creditors. Well, that money was stopped by Davenport when he left the country, because he hadn't any more to give her."

Bunny sprang up. "If all this is true, and I suppose I ought to call you a damned liar, can't you understand, man, what I'm driving at? That I wouldn't allow it to influence me now, because she is my wife. Although it's flung me down into hell, what of it? I can climb up

again and carry her with me away from it all, away from the men and women who won't let a woman rest with the man who loves her, who are content to live their own rotten lives as long as they're not found out. I tell you this, Delamotte, once and for all, my life with Yvonne started from the day I married her. Anything that happened before that time may be my own particular hell, but it isn't to affect her, do you see? You may be right about her taking drugs, you may be right about lots of things, but I've got my own ideas of how to deal with them. Isn't it up to me, her husband, to take her away from it all? To help her with it by showing that her confidence in me is justified? To prove to her that she has been starved of the things that really matter, and that she's going to have them with me, and to have them for good this time? That's my answer to you, Delamotte, and nothing you can say will shake me." Thorne was speaking coolly and deliberately. "I was letting my nerves get the better of me, but now I can see plainly enough that I am wanted, and I'm going to start right away. I'm going to take her away from here to-morrow."

"No, to-morrow will be too late!"

"What do you mean? Tell me at once, Ralph!"

Delamotte watched him. He knew that he had to strike him hard, and for a moment he hesitated. Then, "Because to-morrow she is going away with Davenport!"

Thorne's self-control left him completely. He strode over to Delamotte, his hands clenched, his chest heaving with the unreasoning fury of a madman. Delamotte rose quickly and faced him.

"Yes, you poor fool. Of course she's going away with Davenport. I saw them dining at Cartin's just before I came here, and that means only a question of hours, for I'll say this for Yvonne, she wouldn't do it if she weren't going to leave you. She's got more pride than that. It's no good, Bunny. I admire your pluck, but you can't bet against certainties. She's heard the call of the old life again, and there's no help for it. Davenport's the sort of man for her. She probably doesn't care two cents for him. But he understands her." Delamotte flung out his hand impatiently.

“There’s many a man has tried the same thing as you have, and where are they to-day? You’ll find plenty of them in the saloons of New York, the veldt of South Africa, the underworld of Paris and London. I’ve seen them as you probably have, wearing their bodies and their hearts out for things like that.” Ralph snapped his fingers towards a photo of Yvonne on the mantelpiece. “I’ve left it too long, I know, but I’ve come here to-night, to get you to come back with me, to get right away to-night, before she can be dangerous, because she means to be. Oh, of course you don’t believe it. Even what you have been through lately hasn’t taught you. But I know what I’m talking about. Will you come?” He looked straight into Thorne’s eyes and held out his hand.

Bunny was looking past him out into the darkness of the hall.

Delamotte stood for a moment, then shrugging his shoulders went to the front door and opened it. Thorne did not move. Delamotte took him impulsively by the shoulder.

“Bunny, old man, I’m sorry I lost my temper. Forget it and come home with me, will you?”

Bunny still stood unheeding, rigid. Then from the blackness upstairs came the shrill summons of the telephone bell. Bunny relaxed with a shudder, and made for the stairs. Then he hesitated and called to Delamotte in an unnatural voice. "Turn up the light, Delamotte, will you?"

Delamotte found the switch and clicked the light into the dark places of the stairs. He waited while he heard Thorne go into the bedroom and lift the receiver.

"Hullo——yes, Yvonne, where are you?——with Davenport!——I thought you were going to the Anderson's——what?——no, nothing the matter except you've no business to be running about New York with him——no, I don't want to know anything about it now. Hurry up and come back——oh, yes, yes, I believe you——good-bye." The bell tingled faintly and Thorne came down the stairs at a run. Delamotte met him, his face working with anger.

"Man, you're hopeless! I've done. Take her to your arms, let her whisper her smooth lies in your ear! There's an end coming. Now, mark what I say, she's dangerous to-

night. What she's up to I don't know, but you can bet your life she's planned it out pretty carefully—because she means to go away with Davenport to-morrow. She's a very cunning woman, almost cunning enough to be clever, sometimes, and she's going to finish you off as she finished the others. Now, what's your answer?"

"I gave you that half an hour ago, when you first came." Thorne stood alert, defiant, more like his old self. "I'm going to stand by Yvonne whatever happens. And I shall come out on top. Your elaborate psychology means nothing to me whatever. Her tricks and lies, such as they are, I'm going to knock out of her in my own way. As for Davenport, I don't believe a word of it, and if I did, I should still have the same answer. Good night."

"Good night, Bunny."

Delamotte stepped outside and closed the door carefully.

CHAPTER VII

THORNE listened to the footsteps going slowly up the street, turned and went quickly back to the room.

Obeying a sudden impulse, he went to a cabinet standing against the wall, took out a decanter of brandy, and pouring himself out a large glassful gulped it down. Thorne had never been a drinking man, but he wanted it to numb the agony of his mind, the terror at his heart that amounted to a physical pain. He took another and another glassful. For a few moments he stood there as the fumes mounted to his head. Queer disconnected thoughts began to roam through his mind, tumbling over one another, racing round and round, grotesque, inconsequent. Little unconsidered trifles about the room stood out importantly. He found himself studying them, wondering why he had never noticed them before.

But for the sirens of the East River ferry-

boats, ceaselessly playing their deep musical notes, and the occasional momentary roar of a Third Avenue Elevated, passing the end of the street, there was breathless, portentous silence. Bunny put back the decanter and glass in the cabinet. As he did so, he heard the rattle of a taxicab coming slowly down the quiet street. He went to the door to meet her—he knew it must be Yvonne—and opening it watched the taxi lurch heavily over the badly paved street, the driver peering at the numbers. At last he pulled up at the house. Bunny's brain throbbed wildly. As he started down the steps, Davenport, drunk and dishevelled, half fell out of the taxi, dragging Yvonne with him, and staggered up towards Bunny. Yvonne wrenched herself free and ran up to her husband.

“Listen to me, Bunny!” she gasped, catching him by the shoulders. “Get him inside! Bunny, dear, believe me, it's all right. Get him inside. I'll explain everything. Send the taxi away. There mustn't be a scene here.” She ran from him into the hall, and stood panting, one hand clutching her side.

Bunny's chest heaved with one supreme effort to control himself, and then he went down the few steps to where Davenport was leaning against the parapet. Remembering the waiting taxi driver he turned and threw him a dollar bill. Then, without a word, he clutched Davenport by the collar and flung him up the steps into the hall, closing the door after them.

"In here, Bunny, bring him in here." Yvonne went swiftly into Bunny's den and stood by the table. Her face was ghastly white. A silk opera wrap flung back from her shoulders revealed her lovely figure clad in a clinging black frock. As she stood there, with her little head held back, she made a superb picture.

Bunny gave one look at her, and came to a quick decision. He half dragged, half pushed Davenport into the room. "Now, then, you, whoever you are," he said curtly, "what's the meaning of this? Tell me quickly, and mind what you say, if you value your neck."

Davenport was recovering rapidly. His fuddled brain was beginning to realise that it would want all its powers to deal with the situation. He leaned up against the bookcase, and

wagged a shaky forefinger at Thorne. "S' you're th' guy, are you? Well, I've got a sh'prise for you," he started, and looked at Yvonne. "To make long shtory short, I knew 'Vonne long time b'fore you did—" He stopped and gave a cunning look at Bunny, who was devoting all his attention to the pattern of the carpet. Davenport plucked up his courage, and proceeded to fire his bombshell. "'N fact I lived with her for 'year."

A pause. Davenport was disconcerted. Yvonne was staring at Bunny, her bosom heaving, fear and wonder alight in her eyes.

Bunny raised his head. "I beg your pardon, what were you saying?"

Davenport, reassured, raised his voice. "I said I lived with her for 'year. Di'n't I, 'Vonne?"

"Oh, Bunny, I can't bear it! It's—"

Thorne was looking Davenport up and down critically. "If that is so, I don't admire her taste," he interrupted quietly. "She must have had a remarkably bad time. If you have anything further to say, please be quick about it. Yvonne, will you go upstairs? It's getting late.

I'll be coming to you when I have seen this—gentleman out." He held open the door for her.

She gave one long bewildered look at him, hesitated, then passed slowly out and up the stairs.

"Is there anything else?" he asked as steadily as he could, finding the effort of keeping this up almost too much for him. All the concentrated misery of his life during the last two months was rising up in him, urging him to get to grips with Davenport, and silence him for ever.

Davenport was speaking again. "Yes, there's 'lot more." His rage was having a sobering effect on him. "You may be sh'prised to hear it, but I loved 'Vonne a long time, and you took her from me." He straightened himself up. "I still love her, and I've done my level best to get her back. Well, she's coming away with me. To hell with you! It isn't often I don't get what I want with her, and I knew she would sooner or later, you gol darned Englishman! You don' know how to keep her, you an' your best woman in the world! Oh, she's tol' me all about it!"

Thorne laughed shortly and stepped up close to him. "The only thing I admire about you is your nerve, you beast," he said. "Do you know that, ever since you got out of that taxi, you've been within an inch of sudden death? Now I've had enough of you, you'd better go."

Davenport got as far as the door, and suddenly bolted up the stairs before Bunny could realise his intention. He was quickly after him, cursing himself for having allowed Davenport to give him the slip so easily. As he reached the bend in the stairs, he saw Davenport stop suddenly, staring with horror into Yvonne's room. Bunny rushed up the remaining stairs, past him and into the room. He was not a second too soon. Yvonne stood in front of her dressing table, her right hand at her throat, grasping an open razor. He seized her wrist, but she showed more strength than he had thought possible. It was only after a struggle that Bunny was able to wrest the razor from her. Closing it, he slipped it into his pocket, and leaned exhausted against the mantelpiece. The dressing table glass reflected Davenport's leering face for an instant.

The front door shut noisily and the sound of a man running up the street came through the open windows of the library.

Davenport had fled.

Yvonne sat huddled up on the edge of the bed, sobbing quietly, her face buried in her hands. Her husband made a move as though to gather her up in his arms, but checked himself and began to pace restlessly up and down the room. All the evening's happenings came back to him and he felt dazed. Yvonne must give another more or less plausible explanation, of course; but he wanted a little time, a breathing space to think things over.

Bunny went downstairs to his den. Taking out the brandy, he drank a wineglassful thirstily, and flung himself into a chair. Yvonne's monotonous weeping vaguely irritated him. "Why," he asked himself, "should she want to weep? Was it not he who would have to face the world with the burden of Delamotte's disclosures weighing him down for the rest of his life? And yet he knew life to be impossible without Yvonne—he knew it more than ever to-night. Something must be done.

He must go to Yvonne and talk it over with her.

Suddenly he was aware of a rustle of skirts in the doorway. He looked up. Yvonne was staring at the brandy decanter on the table, with fear in her eyes.

“What’s the matter now, Yvonne?” Bunny said irritably. “Haven’t we had enough scenes for to-night? Can’t you sit down?”

She crossed the room and pulling a chair up to the opposite side of the table, sat down shuddering. “Bunny,” she began in a low weak voice, “what does this mean, this bottle?”

He stared at her amazedly.

“Bunny, I’ve got a lot to explain to-night. Let me go on. You don’t understand. I’ve got to try and make you, because I love you. I knew when I came in to-night, you’d been drinking, and it frightened me.”

Bunny broke in brutally. “You ought to be used to that.”

“Yes, you’ve every right to say that. It’s true, but it’s because I’ve been used to it, that I’m afraid—of you.” She was clasping and unclasping her hands nervously. Bunny never

took his eyes off her face. He was groping in the dark for the meaning of what she was saying.

"It's because it's you that I'm afraid," she went on. "Listen! You've heard something about my life, my taking drugs. I'm sure of it. Well, there's no excuse, but I want to make things a little clearer to you. I've married twice before, not once—perhaps you know that, too. I was married first when I was eighteen, and I found he was a drunkard. I lived with him for two years. He was always drinking. I tried my best to stop him, but it didn't seem to be of much use. At last I divorced him; I couldn't stand it any longer. Shortly afterwards he went insane and had to be put away. They say—they say I drove him to it. Bunny, it's a lie. I want you to believe me. I never cared before whether I was believed, but I want you to."

"Yvonne, dear," Thorne said pityingly, "it's not a question of whether I believe. You're not fit to talk to-night. Forget about it. Talk it over some other time. I'm going to carry you off to bed." He got up and started

to go to her; but she sprang from her chair and moved away. "No, Bunny, not—not that! Wait. I'm sorry, dear. I want to finish. Sit down over there again, will you?"

Bunny stood still perplexed, then he went back and sat down.

Yvonne continued, her breath coming in gasps. "You've got to believe me. Bunny, I suffered terribly then. I was beginning to hear things about myself, little things that hurt. Then I married again. Oh, I don't know why. For protection, I suppose, I wasn't in love. I found he drank, too. I never guessed it till I married him, and I think it nearly killed me. There were—other women, too. I took to drugs, never mind how. After a few months I ran away and left him, and divorced him. People began to cut me. Every man I met seemed to drink. Oh, Bunny, you've seen some of it in New York. It's different in your country. They keep it away from their women there. Then there was Davenport. What he said to-night was true. By that time I didn't care."

Bunny tried to interrupt her. "No, no,

Bunny, I *must* tell you. I suppose I got used to the life I was living, to being a—a kept woman. But it was the drug always that saved me from killing myself.” She sank back into her chair. “Then I met you, and I got to love you. Everything was so different. You brought me back into the world again, and you weren’t always drinking. I was so terribly afraid you’d get to know about me. But I took a tremendous chance over it and married you. I was even afraid of Davenport making trouble, although he’d had to leave the country. That’s why I insisted on it being done secretly. Then when he came back he began to worry me, and, Bunny, I started taking drugs again. I think I nearly went out of my mind. That and the worry of your being ill, but all the time I felt somehow that I could rely on you, even if you were to hear anything.

“I had that one great fact to comfort myself with—you weren’t a drunkard. I always felt that if you did start drinking, if anything should make you, you’d be so different, different to these other men who drink because they’ve nothing else to do. I should be afraid of you. I haven’t

much more to say. This morning Davenport rang me up and he said—oh, a lot of things that hurt and terrified me. He said if I didn't come to dinner with him to-night he'd come and tell you everything. I made up my mind to go. He wanted me to leave you and go back to him. I told him it was impossible, that I loved you. He insisted on coming to see you, and you know the rest. I don't suppose I was surprised when you didn't take much notice of what he said. I'd always thought you were that sort of a man, at any rate I'd hoped so. God knows I had!" She stood up. "Now, Bunny, I'm going away from here to-night."

"Going away? Why? Where are you going in the name of Heaven?" Bunny went up to her. "Yvonne, don't go and make a mess of things now. Let's go away and try and get on together better. I'm going to stand by you always."

Yvonne shrank away from him. "Bunny, dear, I'll be all right. I'm going out. Don't follow me. I'll come back in the morning, if you want me, I swear I will. But to-night, you've been drinking and I'm desperately afraid

of you. I can't explain it, but—oh, let me go! Let me go!" She rushed to the door sobbing hysterically.

Bunny planted himself before her. "Yvonne, you shan't go. It's absurd. Why, you know you could never have anything to fear from me. I won't let you go."

She caught hold of him, struggling fiercely, madly to get past. Taken by surprise he let go of her, and she dashed away down the stairs like a wild thing, opened the door and ran into the street.

Bunny rushed after her, and reached the steps in time to see her cross Third Avenue, running in the direction of the river. She had barely time to reach the opposite side of the street before he was upon her. She turned upon him like a maddened animal.

"Yvonne, come back. You don't know what you're doing," he cried, seizing her by the arm and attempting to force her back towards the house. The strong glare of a street lamp lit up her features. They were transformed into an expression of devilish malignity. A mur-

derous purpose blazed in her eyes, and her bearing was that of a snake about to strike.

To Thorne's amazement she screamed shrilly and struck him full in the face. Almost immediately a policeman came running up.

"Now, then, what's all this?" he said roughly, turning to Thorne. "I've been watching you two. Why don't you leave this woman alone?"

Before Bunny could protest, Yvonne was pouring out a disjointed torrent of accusations. "This man—my husband—" she gasped. "Keep him away from me! I'm afraid of him! He's trying to kill me!"

Bunny turned to the officer. "It's ridiculous, don't take any notice of her. She's hysterical, and I'm trying to get her home." He again caught hold of Yvonne's arm. She shrank away.

"Don't let him near me—he'll murder me!"

"Oh, this is all too absurd!" Bunny exclaimed angrily, shaking her.

She shrieked again madly, and tore herself loose. "He's threatened me with a razor!" she cried.

"Yvonne, what the devil—"

"I swear he did! It's in his pocket!"

Bunny shrugged his shoulders. "Let's put an end to this," he said shortly to the policeman. "You'd better satisfy yourself and search me before I take her home."

The man hesitated, then ran his hands rapidly through Thorne's pockets.

In a few seconds he was holding out a razor before them. Bunny stared at it with astonishment and incredulity. Then he gave a start as recollection flashed across him. All the events of the evening surged through his mind in hideous sequence, and he understood for the first time the real meaning of his wife's portrait.

He straightened himself up and shrugged his shoulders again.

"Delamotte was right, then, Yvonne," he said quietly.

PART III

CHAPTER I

THERE are few places less stimulating than an empty court-room, and yet Magistrate O'Reilly's at 8.30 on the morning after the fulfilment of Delamotte's prophecy looked almost cheerful. Through the large open windows streamed the warm spring sunshine, taking pity on the cold, shabby bareness of walls and benches. Through them, too, came the surge of the busy trolley-cars, and an occasional clatter of hoofs, as the police-vans drove up from the different "precincts" with their daily collection of dead-beats. At intervals some bare-headed policeman swung in briskly to busy himself with documents on the magistrate's desk, and disappear again.

Presently an over-pressed blue serge suit drifted in from a side passage. The face above, self-satisfied and insolent, with the peculiar insolence of the fledgling New York "cop"

chewed gum assiduously. It directed itself casually towards a coloured clerk, writing at a desk.

"Got a swell guy for youse, this morning, Joe," it volunteered.

The clerk looked up. "What's th' dope?" he asked indifferently.

"Pinched him threatening his wife last night, T'oid Avenue."

"What yer git 'im fer dat? Seven days?"

"Found a razor on him," the face explained tersely.

"Oh, concealed weapons, eh, boss? Seven years, den?" The clerk smiled appreciatively.

"Yep, something like that. That English aviator guy!" The face ejected the chewing gum expressively. "She's good an' mad with him, I seen her this morning. Peach, she is. Swell dresser, too. You'll have the papers in a minute." The suit drifted out into the passage again and the clerk went on with his writing.

As the hands of the clock above the desk worked their way towards the hour, the usual crowd, curious as to what the police vans might

have disgorged, began to filter in, heralded by a few unconsidered trifles of humanity, who peered round the open door at the end of the room, to slink towards the back benches for their day's entertainment. Clipping their time to the last second, three callous-eyed young men whizzed through the door towards the reporter's bench and hit their target as the officials rose at the magistrate's entrance.

Among the first to arrive had been Bobby Reid. He had been summoned from his bed at the Blitz by an unenlightening but urgent note from Thorne addressed from the court. His interview with Bunny through the bars of his cell was brief and proceeded upon negative lines as far as Bunny was concerned. He did not wish any legal assistance, he did not know what the hell it was all about and he did not wish Yvonne to be interfered with by anybody. Anxious and bewildered, Bobby had returned to the court-room, to run into Delamotte.

"You've heard then, Ralph," he exclaimed. "What's it all about? I've just seen Bunny, but I can't get anything out of him."

Ralph looked utterly disgusted. "Yes, I've

heard. She telephoned me early this morning. Some long story about Bunny fighting her with a razor, and a policeman, and her efforts to get it hushed up. I rang off. She's out to finish him, Bobby. We must get him counsel, quickly."

"It's no good, Ralph. He won't have one. Come and sit down. We may be able to do something when we hear the charge."

"I'll telephone Betty to come along. She may be able to do something with Yvonne."

When he returned they seated themselves on the front bench facing the magistrate's desk.

Two or three minor cases were disposed of.

Bobby nudged Delamotte. "There she is. Looks the part of the injured wife well enough, doesn't she?"

Yvonne certainly did. Dressed in unrelieved but remarkably becoming black and heavily veiled, she moved slowly to a seat by the witness stand, accompanied by her maid, and sank down with an air of complete prostration.

An old coloured man was at this moment eloquently pleading his cause. "A'shuah you,

sah, as de Lord am ma witness, not a drop ob drink hab passed ma lips foh—”

The magistrate waved his pen impatiently. “That’ll do. Three days. Call the next case.”

Bunny’s name echoed down the passage to the cells. He strode into the court and faced the magistrate indifferently, without a glance at his wife. Both Delamotte and Bobby noticed also that Yvonne studiously avoided looking in his direction.

The indictment was read out by the clerk. Reduced to plain language it amounted to the simple fact that Bernard Ulick Thorne of — East Fortieth Street, New York City, was charged with contravening the laws of the People of the State of New York by carrying a concealed weapon, to wit, a razor, and with using threats towards his wife, Yvonne Enid. Bunny pleaded “not guilty” and was told that he might sit down on the front bench. He turned to do so, and seeing his friends, nodded coolly and sat down beside them, under the watchful eye of the gum-chewing policeman who had arrested him.

“Why don’t you let me get you counsel,

Bunny? It's a very serious charge," Delamotte said earnestly.

The policeman was called to the witness stand.

"That's all right, Ralph," Bunny replied lightly enough, but his eyes were very noticeable. "It's not worth bothering about. Interesting situation, though, isn't it?" He crossed his legs and stared out of the window.

Bobby here drew all eyes upon himself by rising suddenly. In the sombre pools of Yvonne's eyes behind the black veil, two specks of light glowed for an instant as she turned her head sharply.

"I beg your pardon, sir," Bobby began distinctly, squaring his shoulders and clicking his heels together. "I wish to ask your permission to represent Mr. Thorne in this case."

The magistrate showed signs of surprise.

"I am aware that I have no legal standing," went on Bobby quickly, "but, in view of the gravity of the charge, I hope you will grant my request."

"There is no necessity—" Bunny began hastily.

Bobby cut him short. "As to my position, I am a personal friend of Mr. Thorne and his people in England, and"—he tilted his fair head perceptibly higher—"I am an officer in His Majesty's Brigade of Guards. As this is a case where he certainly requires a friend"—Bobby emphasised the word—"to watch his interests, I—hope—that is, I would consider it an honour to be allowed to do so."

The magistrate surveyed him with keen, clever eyes, eyes trained to sift the wheat of sincerity from the chaff of make-believe as an ordinary part of the day's business. He considered a minute, while Bobby's face grew flushed with self-consciousness.

"Very well, Mr.—?"

"Reid," prompted Bobby.

"Very well, Mr. Reid. It's irregular but I will permit you to do so in this instance."

Bobby thanked him and sat down. A reporter leaned over eagerly with a whispered question, but got little satisfaction.

The policeman started to give his evidence at a nod from the magistrate. He described briefly how his attention had been drawn to the

prisoner about twelve o'clock the previous night, in Third Avenue near East Fortieth Street, by seeing him running across the street in pursuit of a woman. He saw him catch her up and shake her roughly by the arm. He was going towards them when he heard the woman scream several times. He ran up to them and asked the prisoner what he was doing. Prisoner seemed to be the worse for drink and made no reply. The woman seemed to be very afraid of him, said he was her husband and that he had threatened to kill her with a razor that was in his pocket. Upon searching him he found the razor. (The policeman here produced it and handed it to the magistrate.) It was an ordinary bone-handled one. Continuing his evidence, he said he had then taken the prisoner to the station and charged him with being in possession of a concealed weapon. The prisoner's wife had accompanied them to the station and repeated her story to the lieutenant in charge. She was in a very nervous state and had evidently been badly frightened.

Bobby (rising): "What made you think Mr. Thorne was the worse for drink?"

Policeman: "Well, he smelt slightly of brandy and he seemed unsteady."

Bobby: "I suppose one glass would make him smell of it, wouldn't it? Never mind that, though. When did you arrest Mr. Thorne?"

Policeman: "I don't quite understand the question. I arrested him in Third Avenue after I found the razor."

Bobby: "Not till after? Then how did you come to search him before he was under arrest?"

Policeman (hesitatingly): "He asked me to."

Bobby: "Oh, he asked you to, himself, eh? Did he make any remark when you found the razor?"

Policeman: "He seemed rather surprised and made some remark that somebody was right. I didn't get the name he mentioned. He said nothing else at all."

Bobby: "Now, tell me this. Did you hear this gentleman use any threats at all at any time towards his wife?"

Policeman: "No, I can't say I did. But his wife told me—"

Magistrate: "Never mind what his wife told you. Do I understand that no threats were made at all in your presence?"

Policeman: "No, sir. I heard none."

Yvonne turned to the magistrate and started to speak.

"Sit down, Mrs. Thorne," he said peremptorily. "Your turn will come in a minute. Any more questions, Mr. Reid? Very well, then, you can stand down," to the policeman.

The clerk called out "Mrs. Bernard Thorne."

The sparsely filled benches rustled expectantly as Yvonne went up the steps of the witness stand with an air of resigned dignity. Her pose reminded Delamotte irresistibly of a treasured old print of Mary, Queen of Scots, mounting the scaffold.

Thorne moved suddenly, leaning over to Bobby. "Look here, Bobby, I'm very obliged to you, but I don't want you to question her at all. I'd rather manage this part of it myself." He spoke quietly but Bobby noticed the ugly set of his jaw, and assented with a shrug.

"—and nothing but the truth, so help me, God." Yvonne's low mechanical tones died

away as she raised her right hand with the book.

"And she'll want all His assistance for that," Delamotte muttered with satirical profanity.

"Now, Mrs. Thorne, please give me your account of what happened," said the magistrate incisively.

Yvonne began in a subdued parrot-like monotone, standing erect with hands holding the rails before her. Her features were indistinct behind her veil, and her expression could only be guessed at.

"I am sorry to have to take this position with my husband, but I am forced to ask for protection against him. For some time now, he has been threatening and abusing me till it has made me a nervous wreck. I'm sure I have done all I can to make him happy—"

The magistrate interrupted her sharply. "Yes, yes, Mrs. Thorne, but I want the facts of last night as briefly as possible, please."

The two gleams behind her veil showed again. "I was trying to give you them," her voice broke out harshly. It softened again as she continued. "Last night I was dining with some friends—"

Mr. Thorne knew perfectly well who they were—" she turned her head and stared deliberately at Bunny as she went on with her evidence. He was still looking out of the window. "My husband had not been feeling very well and he did not accompany me. Feeling rather anxious about him, I telephoned to see if he was all right, and to say I was coming home immediately. I arrived at the house in a taxi. He rushed down the steps and shook me by the arm very excitedly, as soon as I got out, and asked where I had been."

Delamotte noticed Bunny throw a quick look at her for the first time that day, a look of utter astonishment. A second later he was again gazing out of the window.

"I was frightened at his manner because I could see he had been drinking." She turned her head to the magistrate again for a moment. "He never does drink very much. I've always been so glad of that," she explained. Looking fixedly again at her husband she resumed. "I paid the taxi while he was abusing me. After it went away he swore at me violently. I was so frightened that I ran down the street. He

ran after me and caught me in Third Avenue, and struck me on the arm. I screamed and the policeman came up, and I told him my husband was threatening me, and then he found the razor on him. I went—”

“Wait a minute, Mrs. Thorne,” the magistrate interposed brusquely. “You told the policeman the razor was on your husband. How did you know that?”

Yvonne turned her veiled face towards him and showed slight confusion as she saw her slip. “Oh, yes—why, of course, he pulled it out of his pocket outside the house, and threatened me with it. That was why I was so frightened. I said so just now.”

The magistrate was watching her intently. “No, you didn’t say so.”

“I must have forgotten it then.” Yvonne said calmly.

“Oh, you forgot that he actually threatened your life with a razor! It’s rather an important point, isn’t it? It’s extraordinary that you should have forgotten that.”

Delamotte turned to Bobby. “That’ll let him out,” he whispered, “unless she’s got some-

thing else. The Lord only knows what really did happen, but it's plain enough O'Reilly's up against her."

Again Yvonne looked straight towards her husband. "I suppose the taxi driver could be found who drove me home? He heard Mr. Thorne threaten me with the razor," she said coldly.

Again Thorne was surprised into looking round for a moment.

Yvonne went on. "Then I went to the police station with them, and I was so terribly afraid of him that I had to make the charge. I think Mr. Thorne means well enough, but he seems to lose control of himself. He's had a lot of business worries lately. And sometimes I think he's hardly in his right mind." Her voice became pathetic. "It's been a terrible thing for me the last few months. He's been doing a lot of flying, and I suppose an aviator's wife is always more or less anxious. I don't wish to do him any harm if I can help it, but he's always led rather a reckless life and I think it makes him hold other people's cheaply. Anyhow things have got to such a state that I must ask

for protection." She swayed and gripped the rail tighter. "Please, please keep him away from me," she concluded faintly.

"Any questions, Mr. Reid?" asked the magistrate.

"No, sir," came quickly from Bunny.

The magistrate surprised, turned to Yvonne. "You can stand down."

She went back to her seat beside the maid. As she raised her veil to dab her eyes with an absurd scrap of lace, her face showed pale and set with a faint bluish tinge about her tightly shut lips.

"Veronal!" commented Delamotte under his breath.

The assistant district attorney crossed the floor to the magistrate's desk, carried on a short whispered conversation, and moved away again.

"Do you wish to give evidence, Mr. Thorne?" the magistrate asked.

Bunny hesitated. "Perhaps I might as well, sir," he said casually. He stepped up to the stand and took the oath. Yvonne sat very still, watching. Delamotte turned hastily to Bobby.

"Ask him what time she telephoned?"

Bobby nodded.

The magistrate was looking at Bunny interestedly. "What have you to say?" he asked.

Bunny's face was a mask of indifference. "Very little, sir. It's simply a misunderstanding. I should be the last person to do her any harm. The idea's ridiculous, of course." He rapped out the words curtly. "I've nothing to complain of in my wife, she's only been rather hysterical lately. As for the razor, I was shaving last night before my wife came home, and I happened to slip it into my pocket, as I went down to let her in. I may have been a little sharp with her, but as I said she has been in a nervous state lately, and when the policeman came up I was merely having a stupid argument with her—about whether we should go out to supper. A ridiculous place to have an argument, I admit." He laughed shortly. "That's all, sir." Bunny relapsed into impassive silence. The magistrate was scrawling on his writing pad, abstractedly.

"You have nothing more to say, then?" he asked.

"No, sir."

Bobby stood up as Bunny turned to leave the stand. "What time did your wife telephone you, Bunny?" he asked.

"Oh, let me see. About a quarter to twelve, I suppose. She came home immediately afterwards, any way." He smiled at Bobby and stepped quickly out of the stand.

"Silly ass! Bunny," Delamotte said as he sat down. "One would think you were crazy to see the inside of the Tombs. If I didn't think you were pretty safe, now, I'd get up and say what I know."

Bunny smiled queerly.

The magistrate looked dubious. "Have you any other witnesses, Mrs. Thorne?"

"Yes, my maid."

"What can she say about it," he asked sharply. "Was she there?"

"No, but she's been in the house when Mr. Thorne's been so queer lately, when he's threatened me," answered Yvonne.

This latest strategical move of Yvonne apparently took her faithful body-guard by surprise. The only point the maid seemed to be quite firm about was her name and address. A

few direct questions soon reduced her rambling evidence to the plain statement that she had never heard Mr. Thorne use any threats in the house against her mistress. She had noticed, however, that Mr. Thorne had seemed a bit queer lately, since his accident with his airship.

“Aeroplane, you mean,” corrected Bobby.

“P’raps I do, p’raps I don’t,” said she with irritation.

“What do you mean by queer?” Bobby ventured again. “You’re English yourself, aren’t you?”

“Yes, and I know something about Guardsmen,” she snapped.

Bobby sat down hastily. The magistrate smiled involuntarily and dismissed her. (The same fate no doubt awaited her from Yvonne—without the smile.)

He conferred again with the assistant district attorney, then he sat up in his chair with decision. “I have come to the conclusion that this is a case that should never have been brought before me. I think that considering the position that you both occupy, Mrs. Thorne, you

should be able to find a better way than this of settling your difficulties with your husband, whatever they may be." He paused and looked at her severely.

Delamotte saw the danger-signals gleam again in the darkness of the veil. He caught Bunny's sleeve and whispered anxiously.

"Come straight to my apartment with me when you get outside. Don't go near her."

"Rats!" replied Bunny.

The magistrate continued. "I have heard no evidence from any source to corroborate your charge and I am bound to say that your story alone is too unsatisfactory to justify me in committing your husband to the general sessions. I am prepared to believe Mr. Thorne's explanation as to how the razor came to be in his pocket, and therefore the charge of carrying concealed weapons cannot be sustained, as a razor can only come under that heading if it is carried on the person for an unlawful purpose, and this has not been proved. I shall, therefore—"

"I have something further to say." Yvonne's voice cut in distinctly, staying one of the callous-

eyed young men as he reached the door stuffing a note-book into his pocket.

The magistrate broke the silence. "What is it?" He frowned.

"Something about the razor that will alter your opinion," said Yvonne. "As you take the attitude that my evidence is not worthy of credence, I must ask you to listen." She waited insolently.

"Well, go on, go on," the magistrate said, with obvious irritation. "You can stay where you are."

"My husband never uses that razor for shaving. Hasn't done so for the last three months." Yvonne had thrown off all disguise. The inflection of her voice was deadly and menacing. "He always uses a safety razor. That I can swear to, and so can my maid."

Delamotte laughed aloud and sprang up with blazing eyes. "This is too much, sir," he began indignantly.

Thorne was on his feet. He grabbed Delamotte's arm and forced him back to his seat. "Damn it, man, *will* you let me look after my own business?"

"Silence, there! Silence!" A police sergeant took a step towards them.

"Gee! And I nearly missed this stuff!" The callous-eyed youth who had returned from the door gasped to his neighbour.

Yvonne went on fiercely. "That thing you have there has been put away somewhere else for a long time. The safety razor that he uses every day is on the shelf in the bathroom with the rest of his shaving things. If you don't believe me, send down to the house now and prove it!" She paused with heaving breast, and then made a final vicious thrust. "You'll find a loaded revolver on the same shelf. That's the sort of life I've been living!"

"A loaded revolver!" The magistrate took her up quickly. "Then can you suggest a reason why your husband did not use that in preference to the razor? Especially as according to you it was so much more handy."

The veil hid the effect of this rebuff, but Bunny could picture Yvonne's lower lip suffering for her tongue's indiscretion. He wondered dully why he still felt sorry for her—mightily sorry.

"No, I—I can't." Her hesitation was only momentary. "I'm not here to guess riddles," she retorted.

The magistrate turned to Bunny. "Have you anything to say to this? I warn you, I consider Mrs. Thorne's statement about the safety razor very important."

Bunny stood up. "Nothing except that she's making a mistake about the revolver-being loaded. As a matter of fact I have no cartridges for it. As for the safety razor, her remarks are quite correct. I simply happen to have been using the other the last two days as its blades are all rusty. My wife probably doesn't know of this."

"You can sit down," the magistrate said. "Now, Mrs. Thorne, I want to point out the situation as clearly as possible to you. Your husband is charged with a very serious offence, and whether I commit him or not for trial rests entirely upon your evidence. As I have previously said the fact of a razor being carried on the person does not make it a concealed weapon, but—and this is what I want to impress upon you—if the person carrying the

razor is proved to have used threats of violence, such as you allege your husband to have used, it automatically comes under this act. And I wish you to understand there is a very serious penalty for it indeed. Now, I was on the point of dismissing the case when you made your last statement. That statement was bound to influence me considerably. It has, at any rate, raised a fresh element of doubt in the case. Now, I am going to put it to you. If you still persist in saying that your husband threatened you, I am afraid I have no option but to commit him for trial. If, on the other hand, you are able to say to me that you may be mistaken, that perhaps you were over excited and exaggerated the incident, I shall be glad to listen to you."

There was a dead silence. The only person in the court not looking at Yvonne was her husband. He was lounging back with his hands in his pockets. A reporter scribbled with feverish concentration. Somewhere by the back benches, a foot scraped over the floor harshly.

Then Yvonne spoke. "I am sorry the matter should be so serious, but I regret I am unable to correct my statements in any way."

An angry murmur spread through the court. Bobby jumped up as Yvonne gracefully resumed her seat, her chin tilted disdainfully.

“I wish to avail myself further of the privilege you have extended to me before you announce your decision,” he said hastily. “I hope you will make allowance for the fact that I am speaking without any legal knowledge, but on Mr. Thorne’s behalf I wish to lay stress on one or two points that no doubt you—er—you already appreciate. There seems to me to be no proof at all that Bunny—Mr. Thorne—had used threats at any time, beyond the bare word of a very hysterical woman. I have had the pleasure—I have known her for a year, and I can assure you that she is subject to occasional attacks of hysteria and it would be very unfair to Mr. Thorne to place much weight upon her words to-day. None of us who know Mr. Thorne would imagine for a moment that he would do anything to upset his wife in any way. He is much too devoted to her. He has his own reasons for not wishing to defend himself more fully, and I hope you will put the right construction on his reticence.”

As Bobby sat down, the magistrate nodded towards him. "I should, strictly speaking, commit the prisoner to the general sessions, but I am not quite satisfied as to Mrs. Thorne's fitness to appreciate the situation to-day. I am of your opinion, Mr. Reid, that she is in an hysterical state, and I shall take the responsibility of adjourning the case until to-morrow." He turned to Yvonne. "If you are not able to reconsider your evidence by then, Mrs. Thorne, I shall have no option but to commit your husband." His eyes reverted to the papers on the desk before him. "I shall put the prisoner under one thousand dollars bail," he concluded curtly.

Yvonne rose immediately and left the court.

CHAPTER II

BUNNY refused to go out on bail. His only answer to Bobby's heated expostulations was unsatisfactory but firm. "I'm sick of the whole business, it's too hopelessly sordid. I don't want to see anybody till the whole thing's settled. It's no good arguing, Bobby. I'll see you to-morrow." He turned on his heel, and followed the policeman to the cells as the court emptied.

Betty was waiting for them at the door, raging. She had received Delamotte's telephone message in time to see the case open, and had been sitting at the back of the court. Her opinion of Yvonne was immediately made clear. "And she actually had the audacity to bow and say 'how d'you do' as she went out! Ugh!"

She got into a taxi with Bobby and Delamotte. On the way to her apartment, Bobby was inclined to vent some of his wrath on the head

of the taciturn Delamotte for not backing him up better in his efforts to get Bunny to come out.

Delamotte shook his head testily. "My dear fellow, he's much safer where he is till to-morrow. If he came out to-day, she'd only kill him—or he'd kill her!"

"Oh, do you think Bunny would do that?" said Betty, her little mouth agape.

"I suppose so. Why shouldn't he?" Delamotte said in a matter of fact voice. "Besides, why do you suppose Bunny was wandering about with a razor in Third Avenue last night? To persuade her to go out to supper with it?"

"Oh, well, anybody could see he was doing all he could to shield her," replied Bobby.

"Shield her, yes, that's right enough," Delamotte snorted. "There's a lot behind it we don't know anything about. But I can tell you one thing that wasn't brought out, Bunny wasn't telling the truth about that telephone message. I know it was nearer ten than twelve when he got it, because I was there!"

"You were there?" Betty repeated amazedly, "then you know all about it!"

"I know nothing, because I left just after—nothing except that Yvonne was out with Davenport. He's back again, Betty. You can guess what that means!"

Betty ruffled her plumage and Bobby looked mystified.

"A lot can happen in two hours when there's a woman in the case—like Yvonne!" Ralph finished significantly.

"But wouldn't that have made a difference if you'd said that in court?" Betty asked.

"It might have if Bunny had borne it out, but he wouldn't hear of any interference. I was going to eventually, but you saw the way he took it."

"Well, I think it was fine of him! Wouldn't you do the same thing yourself?"

"It depends on the woman," he said quietly.

"Well," Bobby observed, "I suppose it amounts to this, if Yvonne doesn't change her mind by to-morrow—and that's highly improbable—poor old Bunny's finished."

Betty left them outside her apartment, with the understanding that they should all set their wits to work at once to see if anything could be

done for the obstinate prisoner, and talk it over again at dinner with her that evening.

Betty conscientiously started to fulfil her part of this loyal conspiracy as she pulled out her hat pins. But she was half way through her solitary lunch before she had any idea on the subject worthy of the name. Then she laid down her fork suddenly. Why, Davenport, of course! He must have the key to the situation. Ralph had hinted as much. She wondered if he was doing anything in that direction, and wondering immediately decided to get in first. Her task was rendered all the more difficult by the fact that Davenport was one of Yvonne's friends whom she had studiously refused to meet. Although she knew a good deal about him, she had no idea where he was to be found. Undeterred by this obvious difficulty, she determined to try.

Betty left her cutlet to look after itself and consulted the telephone book, turning to the "D's." There was no Wilbur K. Davenport. Her finger travelled aimlessly down the column: Davis, Dean, Deitz—she read the names idly while her brain cast about for a clue—Del-

monico—why, he might be lunching there! H'm! That was hardly a place he would frequent. More likely some place in the White Light district. Ah! That's an idea—they would be sure to know him there!

Inspired by this accidental line of thought, as fast as she could get the calls through she rang up Kirkhill of Kirkhill's, Schweitzer of the Café des Beaux Yeux, Cartin of Cartin's, and other demi-gods of Broadway, but without success. All were deferential at the mention of her name, but ignorant of Davenport's whereabouts. At last Betty got Jacques of the Marguerite on the wire and was rewarded for her pertinacity.

“Ah, is that you, M'sieu Jacques? This is Mrs. Fawle—M'sieu Jacques I want you to help me—thank you, that's very charming of you. Do you know Mr. Wilbur Davenport?—You *do*—then could you tell me where I could find him?—oh, he is there now! Thank you so much—no, no, thanks. Good-bye!”

Betty, too elated by her success to look very far ahead—she had little experience as a schemer—had only one thought, a taxi. But

by the time she arrived at the Marguerite the magnitude of the task she had set herself rather appalled her. Her smart tailor-made covered a very fluttering heart as she sent a bell-boy to find Jacques while she waited in the hall.

“Oh, M’sieu Jacques, is Mr. Davenport still here?”

Jacques’s beady eyes twinkled with pleasant appreciation as his bushy black beard hid another button of his waistcoat. “Yes, madame, I believe so.”

“Please give him a message from me—yourself, will you? You know who I am. Will you tell him that a lady wishes to speak to him outside? Don’t mention my name.”

Jacques disappeared and Davenport, looking very surprised, came out a minute later, holding an evening paper in his hand. Betty noticed that he was very smartly dressed. Taking her courage in both hands she addressed him hurriedly.

“Mr. Davenport, I am Mrs. Fawle.”

He bowed. “Yes, I know you by sight, Mrs. Fawle, although I haven’t had the pleasure—” his voice trailed off inquiringly.

Betty hesitated, then she decided that her only chance—and a slight one at that—of getting a hearing, would be to come as an emissary of Yvonne. After that, well the affair would be on the knees of the gods. “I am, as you know, a friend of Mrs. Thorne’s,” she began.

Davenport glanced at the paper in his hand and crumpled it into a ball viciously. “If you’ve come from Yvonne, I’ve nothing to say. Mrs. Thorne—Pah!”

Betty looked at him wide-eyed at the unexpected effect she had produced. *Davenport was mad with Yvonne*—over something. Surely, she thought with anguished impatience, this must be her chance if she could only find the key.

Davenport was eyeing her defiantly, waiting.

Then joyously, she understood. He was mad over the *case!* That was the meaning of the crumpled paper. This *was* her chance! Betty seized it with an avidity worthy of a graduate in Yvonne’s own school of intrigue.

“I have come about Mrs. Thorne,” she said hurriedly, “but I must confess I’ve not come entirely in her interests. There was a case this

morning in which she was concerned—I don't know if you have heard of it—and, to be perfectly frank with you, I understood that you might have been able to throw some light on it, as you were seen dining with her last night. It was an impertinence to come to you, as I can see you would take her side in the matter, and I must apologise. I have made you angry and perhaps I had better not pursue it any further." Betty stopped and looked at him diffidently.

Davenport apparently swallowed the bait whole. "It is for me to apologise, Mrs. Fawle. My annoyance was from quite a different cause, and I would be very pleased to discuss the matter with you, but"—he looked around him and smiled—"we can't get much further, in the hall, can we? Will you allow me to ask Jacques if he can find us a place a little more private?"

"Certainly, Mr. Davenport."

He hurried off. The forthcoming interview with this well-known *mauvais sujet*, in a private room at the Marguerite, Betty awaited with the mixed feelings of a small boy stealing his first cigarette.

Davenport returned shortly, and conducted

her to Jacques's private office, which he had borrowed for the occasion. "Now, Mrs. Fawle," he began, "I must tell you I've just read the account of that trial. I've got to ask you rather an extraordinary question before we go any further." He paused and smoothed out the paper that was still in his hand. Betty noticed that it was shaking. "Are you sufficiently in Yvonne's confidence to know if she is really married to this man?"

Betty was surprised. "Oh, yes, Mr. Davenport, there's no question of that," she replied decidedly.

"You are certain?" he persisted awkwardly.

"Quite! I have seen the marriage certificate. In any case I should never have doubted it."

"Ah!" was all he said.

"Why, don't you believe it, Mr. Davenport?" asked Betty.

"Yes, of course," he clipped out. "Well, what do you want me to do?"

Betty was taken aback. This was quite different from her ideas of the delicate fencing to be expected from a properly trained adventurer. "Well, you were dining with Mrs. Thorne last

night before her husband was arrested," she faltered, "and I—"

"Yes, and you think I can tell you what happened perhaps?" Davenport prompted.

"I thought you might know something about it," said Betty, with an ingenuous air.

Davenport almost smiled in spite of his anger. "And you want me to tell you?"

"Oh, yes, please!" she beamed at him and decided forthwith to start in opposition to Pinkerton.

"Well, I'm not concerned with your reasons for wanting to know, but if it's going to give Yvonne a taste of her own medicine, I'll tell you."

Betty thought of her own words to Delamotte on the day of Bunny's accident and her triumph was complete.

Before Davenport spoke again he stared vacantly at a column of the newspaper for some moments. "Mrs. Fawle, you're a woman with a very good name in New York," he began bluntly. "I never could understand your association with Yvonne. But still," he continued quickly, "that's nothing to do with the ques-

tion. I'll tell you what happened last night fully, but I'm going to ask you to listen to my reasons for giving her away." As he looked up there was a slow smouldering rage in his eyes. Betty nodded silently. "You will have guessed from my question that I didn't know Yvonne was married. That's not the only surprise I've had to-day. First of all I must explain, in case you don't know it," he looked at her directly, "that I'm supposed to be a crook. Nearly a year ago some business of mine leaked out, and I had to leave the country. I found out to-day, that Yvonne had opened a letter of mine and sold me—sold me because she wanted this other man.

"However, she had sent me off with a letter saying that she would wait, and I came back a little while ago at the risk of being arrested, to take her away. I found her with this other man." His nervous fingers were tearing pieces from the newspaper on his knees. "Well, I thought at the time I was a hunted man, and I had to lie very low, but I managed to see Yvonne. She assured me she was not married and told me to wait while she got rid of

the man, and then she would come away with me. I thought it was only a question of weeks before I was arrested, and I meant to spend them with her. I didn't tell her so, though; but that's what I came back for—a short life and a merry one with the woman I was crazy about!" He laughed grimly.

"Yesterday she promised that she would run away with me. To-morrow she will be at the Pennsylvania station at two o'clock with her baggage." He sprang up from his chair and began to stride up and down the room fiercely. "Well, I shan't! I shall be leaving to-day from the Grand Central at four o'clock for the West—for the West! To-day I'm no longer a hunted man. The evidence against me had all been in the hands of one man, and he told me to-day that he had never used it. Well, Mrs. Fawle," he stopped and faced her. "That and this last damned trick of hers has altered everything as far as I am concerned. It was one thing to take a chance with her when I expected to have only a few weeks liberty, but things are different now. She's not worth it; and this business to-day has scared me off completely. It's shown

me she's too dangerous altogether—even for me! I've got a life to live now, and I'm damned if she's going to play hell with it any more. I can sympathise with that fellow to-day, and I'll tell you the truth. If you can do anything with it to get him off, good luck to you."

Betty drove home half an hour later with all the facts of the previous evening safely pigeon-holed in her memory, with a feeling of surprise that the Concert of Europe had kept its harmony so long without the assistance of her diplomatic powers. When she reached her apartment, she rushed to the telephone with her news, but both Delamotte and Bobby were out. She curbed her impatience as best she could, and summoning her car took a drive in the park.

Seven o'clock brought the other sleuth-hounds, and also, alas, disillusionment.

The moment they were seated at dinner Betty turned to Ralph. "Any news, Ralph?" she asked casually.

"Nothing of any importance. Yvonne is absolutely relentless, of course. But what's yours? I suppose that's what you wanted me to say."

"How did you know I had any news?" They both laughed.

"Betty, your face is as full of head-lines as the front page of the *Manhattan Magnet* used to be!"

"Oh-h! Well, let me see," Betty considered. "I had lunch in a private room at the Marguerite with a very interesting man I'd never met before." She waited for the effect.

"What!" They both shouted with suspicious simultaneity.

"Well, not exactly lunch," she went on airily. "Do you ever take girls to private rooms, Bobby?"

Bobby was equal to the occasion. "Only when they're not good-looking enough for the restaurant—and that wouldn't apply to you, of course," he added hastily.

"That," remarked Ralph, "is his way of turning a compliment. When you have fully digested it, do you mind telling us the name of the handsome stranger?"

"Davenport!" she replied.

The effect she produced was genuine enough this time.

"Yes, Davenport, and he told me everything that happened last night. I managed to get it all out of him after only two or three questions," she confided modestly, and proceeded to give a painstaking repetition of Davenport's story.

"Betty, that's a scoop!" cried Delamotte. "And it's darned clever of you. We've got Yvonne beat this time. We'd better look Davenport up after dinner, Bobby, to make sure he turns up."

Betty looked wise. "Oh, you won't be able to do that. He's gone West this afternoon on the four o'clock."

Bobby abstractedly took a long draught from his finger-bowl.

"Gone West!" Ralph shrieked. "Betty, you haven't let him *go*?"

Betty's heart sank with sudden misgiving, but she did her best to keep up a bold front. "We don't want him now we know all about it, do we?" she inquired.

Delamotte recovered with an effort. "Well, you see, Betty, it's necessary for him to speak as a witness," he explained kindly, seeing Betty's distress, "otherwise what have we gained? A

second-hand story from a man who can't be produced."

"But what about me, Ralph? I can swear to it, because he told me."

"That's not admissible as evidence, Betty. Say, it's a pity, though. There's no doubt we've got the truth. It's just the sort of thing she would do." Ralph drummed his fingers on the tablecloth.

"Look here, Ralph," Bobby suggested briskly, "there's only one way we can make use of this as far as I can see, and that is for somebody to get hold of Yvonne. If she's faced with the facts perhaps she can be bluffed into dropping the case."

Ralph conceded this. "But who's going to do it? After what we said to her this afternoon, she'd never let us within a mile of her."

Betty, who had been sitting very quiet, with puckered forehead, brightened up. "Ralph, I might be able to do that. She'd probably be tickled to death to give me some long account of how she's been ill-used. I'll get her on the 'phone."

"The 'phone!" Ralph laughed derisively.

"You'll be lucky! She's had a few hundred calls this afternoon already! Everybody has been at her—everybody who has had a grievance against her for the last seven years, and that's a few. Still, there's no harm in trying."

Betty went to the telephone. "Central? Give me one-five-four-nine-eight Murray Hill, please."

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At the first shrill call of the bell, Yvonne's wide-open eyes glittered savagely in the half-light of the shaded room. At the second, her outstretched body shuddered and lay tense; her hand shot out towards the telephone, but drew back slowly. At the third, she sprang up from the bed and clawed the receiver.

"Yes, who is it now?" she said in a low, purring voice. "Oh, *you*, Betty!" Her straining breast quieted as she listened. Then in the same soft voice she spoke again. "I can't tonight, Betty, I'm busy, and oh! so tired.—Yes, I'd love to come—Nine o'clock?—I'm sure you'll be able to understand. Good night, dear."

Yvonne drew away and crouched on the edge of the bed, watching the receiver as though it

were a living thing. Her quick, tortured breath quivered through the stillness, as she waited with naked hate in her eyes. Then again the loud challenge from the outer world.

“Yes, speaking, who is it?——The *Morning Star*?——No, I’ve nothing to add——What other people say doesn’t affect me—to hell with you all, to hell with you!” She caught sight of the firm face of her husband looking straight at her from its frame on the bureau. “*Ah!*” Snatching up the loose wire in both hands she tore it from the wall and hurled the receiver from her. It struck the photograph frame and the glass fell tinkling to the ground.

A timid knock at the door swung Yvonne round.

“Well?”

“Mrs. Van Heyden has called and wishes to see you particularly.”

“Leave me alone—leave me *alone!*”

The terrified maid crept down the stairs.

With maddened eyes, Yvonne darted to her dressing table and rummaged at the back of a drawer filled with frothing laces. She drew out a little white cardboard box with a plain

white label, and clutched it tightly, shrinking back at the sight of her face in the glass.

“My God! *No!* I mustn’t; sleep or no sleep! No mistakes to-morrow!” she said aloud with a sudden, fierce laugh. Holding the shade aside, she threw the little box far out into the soft twilight. Then she turned and walked deliberately to her husband’s photograph. “Damn you!” she flung at it with curling lips. “*Damn* you! You think you can break me! Do it then—do it *now*—in your cell! I put you there, you poor thing, and I’ll keep you there! I’m a free woman! Free to do as I like!”

The firm face scrutinised her gravely.

“Free! do you hear me?” she shrieked, struggling in her agony against the strange relentless tide that was bearing her away from her easy accustomed waters.

“Free!” She dashed her clenched white fist against the jagged glass of the frame and sank quietly to the floor.

CHAPTER III

“**I** WONDER if we’re inaugurating a new craze, Bobby,” Delamotte said with an attempt at cheerfulness. “Breakfast parties before the police-court! I wonder what Betty’s will be like.”

Bobby looked despondently at a kidney placed before him by Delamotte’s valet. “Interesting, but utterly futile, I should imagine,” he replied. “I wonder what poor old Bunny’s doing with himself.”

“I’m afraid he’s smoked his last cigarette for a few years,” Ralph replied. “Imagine him taking all that on for a vampire like she is! Well—coffee?”

Bobby snorted. “I suppose somebody will waste a cartridge on her eventually!”

“She’s completely finished herself over here, even amongst her own pals—and some of them are none too particular. There’s nothing left for her but to turn into an out-and-out adven-

turess. You'll run up against her some day in Rome or Shanghai or Johannesburg looking perfectly charming and telling the same old story to some poor devil—and almost believing it herself!”

“I used to think she was the sweetest woman I'd ever met, Ralph,” Bobby sighed. “So did Bunny, I suppose, or he wouldn't have married her. It's a pity.”

“He still does. That's the trouble,” Ralph commented grimly. “You won't get any more out of him this morning. What are you going to do?”

“I can only put the facts to her, I suppose. They'll both deny them.” Bobby shrugged his elegant shoulders. “It won't be any use.”

They relapsed into gloomy silence. Ralph took up a newspaper and gazed at an alleged photograph of Bunny heading a long and imaginative account of his life—obviously inspired by Yvonne. He threw it aside disgustedly, and ruminated on Bunny's extraordinary obstinacy—because it must be sheer obstinacy, he thought. Bunny couldn't possibly have any ideals about her now. He must know now that what he had

been pleased to think was a heart was no more than a mere organ for pumping blood, that his beautiful dream-lady laughing joyously among the roses of a Long Island summer garden had long ago materialised into a vicious desperate thing, maddened by the lights of the City.

His valet came into the room. "Mrs. Thorne wishes to see you, sir."

Delamotte smiled. "Very well, show her in." He turned to Bobby as the man disappeared. "I wonder what her latest move is, Bobby," he said resignedly. "Heaven knows what she's come for, but it'll be amusing to watch how she goes about it." He looked at the clock. "H'm! Eight o'clock! She hasn't been to Betty yet."

Yvonne entered the room, but even Delamotte was shocked at the agony of her eyes as she lifted her veil. He found her a chair as Bobby bowed coldly.

She was dressed in black again—a different but equally fascinating frock, and a daring black hat with a single large white ostrich feather.

"Ralph, I've changed my mind," she said.

Delamotte was guarded. "Oh, really,

Yvonne," he said with cutting politeness. "Well, I'm very glad to hear you say so, naturally. We're just off to the court now."

"Of course, you don't believe me," she said weakly.

Ralph shrugged his shoulders and waited.

Yvonne turned towards Bobby, gripping the arm of the chair with her gloved hand. "Can't you believe me, Bobby?" she pleaded, with a catch in her voice.

She was doing it very well, Delamotte thought.

For a moment Bobby's chivalry fought with his memory of that broken man, his friend, behind the bars. Then he answered her stiffly. "I'm afraid I've no reason to, Mrs. Thorne."

The room was very still. Yvonne buried her face in her hands and shuddered. A stifled sob, and then she slowly drew herself up and stood erect. "I'm not surprised," she said quietly. "I'm just as sick of myself as you are of me. I've realised what I'm like when it's too late and I've lost you all—and Bunny. I'm going to tell the truth and get him off. Any questions you ask me in court, Mr. Reid, I'll answer. Now I'm going to Betty's. Good-bye." She

looked at each of them in turn as they bowed. Delamotte went to the door and held it open. She walked out slowly, keeping her chin up with a brave effort. He followed her to let her out of the apartment.

When he returned Bobby was fidgeting with the newspaper. They looked at each other awkwardly.

Then Delamotte crashed his fist on the table. "No, I'm damned if I think it's all right. I'll believe it when I hear it in court!"

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Ten minutes later, Betty welcomed Yvonne quite pleasantly at the door of her apartment. "You're an early bird, Yvonne. But come and look at these hats."

Yvonne was very subdued. Presently she told Betty of her intention with dull, abstracted manner.

Betty was, of course, incredulous. "Oh, Yvonne," she said, leaning her elbows on the table and looking across at her. "How can one—" she broke off.

"Believe me?" Yvonne finished for her in a faint voice. "Oh, well, it doesn't much matter,

does it? Besides, I've told Ralph and Bobby this morning, so I couldn't get out of it now if I wanted to."

"Oh, you have!" Betty looked eager. "Did Ralph tell you what we found out yesterday afternoon?" She watched Yvonne narrowly.

"Found out? No, what?"

Betty immediately decided that Yvonne had never been near Ralph at all. "Oh, we found out what happened on Thursday night," she said, returning to her former air of casual unbelief. She flatly refused to satisfy Yvonne's rather excited enquiries as to what she knew, and how she knew it, and relapsed into preoccupation.

"Well, Betty," Yvonne said with a little plaintive smile. "I don't seem to be much of a success to-day. If you don't wish to tell me, well—that's all there is to it. However, you'll soon have a chance to hear me speak the truth for once in my life, at any rate." She laughed nervously. The conversation became casual and disjointed until Betty suddenly walked to the telephone. She picked up the receiver, and holding it to her ear, turned her face to Yvonne.

"I'm going to ask Ralph if you did see him this morning, Yvonne," she said deliberately.

As she turned back to give the number, Yvonne was stung into resentment of this crowning insult. "Don't trouble!" she sneered. "You won't find him. He's out!"

"Ah!" She turned back to the instrument. "Never mind, Central." She snapped back the receiver decisively, all her suspicions confirmed.

Yvonne shrugged her shoulders, and going to the piano, began to play quietly until breakfast was announced.

.

The court-house that morning presented quite a different aspect from its routine-bound dulness of the previous day. Even the wiliest of the tattered *habitués* of the back benches found difficulty in gaining their day's shelter. At the point where the imaginations of the callous-eyed young men had failed, the insidious infection of rumour had stepped in, and by ten o'clock a chain of automobiles was winding slowly up to the entrance.

When the magistrate took his seat, he faced a fashionable *matinée* audience waiting eagerly

for developments of the plot. Here and there a mere man dodged irritably a threatening hat-brim. It was significant that the more exclusive circles of the *demi-monde* were well represented. Delamotte and Bunny's self-constituted counsel occupied the front bench again. The prisoner showed a complete lack of interest in the preliminary proceedings, although his set face looked perhaps ten years older.

Punctually at half-past ten the case opened and shortly after Yvonne's name was called.

There was no arrogance of bearing about the woman who stepped into the stand and gave a shrinking glance, through her thick veil, at the insolent eyes of her resplendent audience—eyes that spoke ostracism to her as plainly as ever the down-turned thumbs of Rome spoke death to the defeated gladiator.

The magistrate tapped his pen on the desk. "I adjourned the case yesterday," he said sharply, "to enable you to consider the position fully, as I concluded you were not in a fit state to appreciate your evidence. What have you to say?"

She spoke in a low, hurried voice. "As you

have given me the opportunity, I wish to withdraw everything I said yesterday against my husband." She paused.

The murmur of surprise that surged through the room and died away at an involuntary exclamation from Bunny was eloquent testimony to the popular conception of Yvonne's character.

The low voice grew lower and more hurried. "I am going to make a full explanation. My husband has always treated me as if I were the best woman in the world, and I think I must be one of the worst. My life has been one long succession of tricks—"

The assistant district attorney looked quickly at the magistrate. To his surprise the latter made no move of interference.

"—and I've only just realised the awfulness of it all. If I can make some reparation to-day perhaps it will save me from—from something worse. I tricked my last husband into a lunatic—"

Thorne sprang to his feet. "Yvonne, I insist!" he shouted and turned to the magistrate. "I must ask you, sir, to put an end to this. I—I plead guilty—I'll take any course—"

The magistrate held up his hand for silence. "Mrs. Thorne," he said gently, "this court cannot enter into questions of that nature."

Thorne sat down dazedly, as another murmur arose from the benches.

The magistrate continued. "Please let me have the plain facts about this case."

"I am sorry. With regard to my statements yesterday, I had been taking drugs, and I hardly knew what I was saying. Mr. Thorne never used any threats to me, either on Thursday night or at any other time. What actually happened is this: I had been out to dinner with a man whom—whom my husband did not approve of, and I was mad enough to take him back to the house with me. He was very—drunk, and tried to have a row with my husband. I think fear must have driven me out of my senses then, and I rushed upstairs and took that razor—I hardly know why, I think I was going to cut my throat. My husband came up and took it from me and put it in his pocket away from me. The other man ran out of the house. My husband was very nice to me. I suddenly took it into my head to play this fiendish trick on him. I

ran quickly out of the house into Third Avenue, and you know what happened. I did it because—because I thought I wanted my husband out of the way—because I'd promised to run away with this man Davenport—because he was a man I'd lived with—because I was mad—”

The magistrate stopped her quickly.

Thorne lurched forward in his seat and fell fainting to the floor.

CHAPTER IV

BUNNY was quickly brought back to a state of dazed consciousness, and the magistrate dismissed the case without comment. But Delamotte soon discovered that his collapse was a good deal more serious than a mere fainting fit. His one idea, however, as he left the court on Bobby's arm was to get back to Fortieth Street.

"Don't be a fool, Bobby," he said feebly. "I must go to Yvonne after that. Why did you let her leave the court?"

"Oh, she ran out the moment it was over, like a hare," replied Delamotte. "You'll find her at home all right. But come along first with Bobby and me and have a brandy and soda." Bunny eventually consented to this, but on the distinct understanding that he would only stay for a few minutes, and they got in a taxi.

"Well, Ralph," he said quietly, "how's that for pluck, eh?"

"Very fine, Bunny, very fine!" Delamotte's

blue eyes looked troubled. "Psychology badly at fault this time, eh? Er—what are your plans going to be, Bunny?" he continued rather awkwardly.

"Oh, I know we've got to leave here," was the bitter reply. "Might as well get down to Nice, or somewhere round there, I suppose. God! My head's splitting!" He dropped his head into his hands.

Bobby looked concerned, and exchanged a glance with Delamotte. When they reached the Gardenia, Bunny gulped down a brandy and soda thirstily, while Ralph took the opportunity of escaping to the telephone in his surgery. He came back looking rather puzzled.

"I've just telephoned to the house, Bunny, to ask Yvonne to come along here to lunch. She's not home yet from the court, but I left word with her maid for her to ring up directly she comes in. Betty's coming round in a few minutes, so we'll have a lively little luncheon party," he concluded cheerfully.

At this point, Bunny, who was lounging in an armchair, showed unmistakable signs of another collapse. Bobby went up to him.

"I say, Bunny, old boy, why don't you go and lie down for a little while till Yvonne comes? A sleep would buck you up." Without further argument, he took him firmly by the arm and led him through the folding doors into the adjoining room.

"Here you are, Bunny, take this." Ralph held a phial to his lips after settling him comfortably on a couch. They chatted with him for half an hour till he began to doze off, and returned to the other room as Betty came in: a glad symphony of flushed cheeks under a Leghorn hat and little red shoes twinkling from beneath a white tailor-made costume.

"Oh, you glorious thing!" cried Delamotte. "My poor roses will wither away with shame!"

Betty smiled and brought another victim to her feet.

"Consider the lilies of the field—" began Bobby, not to be outdone.

"Lilies! *And* roses! Solomon *would* feel a shabby old man beside me then," said Betty merrily.

"Who's Solomon?" queried Bobby.

They laughed delightedly. "When you start

on a quotation you should be sure where it finishes," observed Delamotte, leaving Bobby in a state of vague alarm. "But say, Betty," he went on, "poor Bunny's in rather a bad way. I'm afraid he's in for a nervous breakdown. Can't wonder at it after what he's been through since his accident."

Betty's face clouded. "Oh, poor thing! I am sorry. Is it serious?"

"He only wants a good rest—a sea voyage. He's talking of going to the Riviera."

"With Yvonne, of course?" Betty said quickly.

"Oh, yes. I dare say it will do her good, too," he replied, with feeling. "Poor Yvonne! She made a wonderful effort this morning, didn't she?"

"Yes, splendid. By the way, she told me at breakfast that she had seen you this morning."

"Oh, yes, she was here."

Betty started and her colour left her.

"Why, what's the matter, Betty?"

"Oh, I—I didn't believe her," she replied, confusedly. "I was rather rude about it. But why didn't you tell her what we knew?"

Delamotte spread out his hands deprecatingly.

"I'm afraid we were all pretty beastly to her," Bobby said. "We didn't take her seriously enough to discuss the thing at all. I'm sorry now."

"Good Lord, man, what could she expect?" Delamotte burst out vexatiously. "It's the old story of the boy and the wolf. But she ought to be here now. Run into my surgery and telephone again, Bobby. I left word for her to come along to lunch," he explained as Bobby trotted off.

"Lunch?" Betty said impulsively. "Oh, she won't be able to come to lunch—" She caught Delamotte's surprised glance and stopped short in confusion.

"Why, have you seen her?" asked Delamotte quickly.

Betty hesitated. Then, "Oh—er—no, I haven't seen her. But I'm sure she wouldn't be in a fit state to come to lunch, would she, Ralph?" Betty rose from her chair and buried her face in the bowl of roses on the table. "I'm dreadfully sorry for her, but I'm sure everything will be all right now." She stood up with dimmed eyes. "Let's all be as nice as we can to her be-

fore they go, and send her away to a new life: a life as fresh and sweet as—as these roses.” Taking a glorious Caroline Testout from the bowl she tucked it into her coat and walked to the window. Delamotte looked after her reverently.

“As your own, Betty,” he said.

Bobby came back into the room. “Her maid says Yvonne’s not back yet. Somebody’s just rung for you, Mrs. Fawle. She’s on the wire now.”

Betty’s eyes asked a question.

“No, it’s not Yvonne,” he said quickly. “I don’t know who it is.” Betty left the room hastily.

She stood in the doorway a minute later with bloodless lips.

“Why, what’s wrong, Betty?” Delamotte moved anxiously towards her.

“Ralph,” she said with a little helpless gasp, “I must go out for half an hour, but—”

“But—you’re in trouble?”

“No—it’s nothing.” The rose on her bosom trembled. “I’ll try and be back to lunch, or—or telephone, or something—you’ll be here, won’t you?” Without waiting for a reply, she

ran down the passage. Standing amazed, they heard the front door slam.

Bunny's voice came from the next room, faintly. "Is that Yvonne?"

Bobby went in to him.

Later, Bobby and Ralph sat down moodily at opposite sides of a table laid for five, but it was plainly a formality. After a few half-hearted efforts, Delamotte consigned the lobster to a warmer place than his shady dining room, and took up an evening "extra" that his valet had placed beside him. The first thing to catch his eye on the front page was an account of that morning's proceedings at the police-court.

"Look at this, Bobby," he sighed. "The yellow press yelping at their heels already."

Bobby got up and glanced at the head-line.

WIFE GETS HUSBAND OFF WITH LURID CONFESSION

NOTORIOUS "MRS. SEBASTIN" TELLS LIFE STORY
IN COURT

YESTERDAY SHE SAID, "OH, HOW I HATE
YOU!"

TO-DAY: "OH, HOW I LOVE YOU!"

Bobby read aloud the opening lines of the report:

“AN EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENT in the sensational razor case occurred this morning at Magistrate O’Reilly’s Court. The beautiful Mrs. Thorne, who before her latest venture into the realms of matrimony—to which she seems to take as easily as a duck takes to water—”

Delamotte dropped the paper, and leant his chin in his hands.

“It looks pretty bad, doesn’t it?” Bobby said reflectively, staring at the tablecloth. “But sure enough, it’s the best thing that could have happened to him.”

Delamotte shook his head. “No, no, he won’t give her up. Why, the man wouldn’t have an object in life without her. Besides,” he jerked his thumb towards the room where Bunny was lying, “her work is just starting now. He’s a very sick man, Bobby.” He paused, thinking deeply. “And, don’t you see, he’ll have to take her away from here—from New York, from the old lures, and that’ll give her her chance. I think she’ll be glad of it from what happened to-day. That’s been the trouble all along.” He looked up at Bobby standing by his side.

“He ought never to have let her set foot again on Manhattan. She was a different woman altogether on Long Island, after Bunny found her—as happy as a child; not a rotten idea in her head. I tell you, Bobby, as long as she’s in New York she’ll never be different.”

Bobby, with hands thrust deep in his pockets, began to pace the room energetically. “How is it she’s different to-day then? She’s still in New York. No, I think you’re wrong, Ralph. I didn’t mean that he was going to give her up either. But it’s not a question of Long Island, or New York or—or anywhere else. She would be all right anywhere now.”

Ralph looked at him quizzically. “Why, what’s your idea about it, Bobby?”

“Well, I’ve got my own opinion about it. I don’t know—perhaps I’m wrong. But Bunny’s a very obstinate devil, you know. He generally gets his own way.”

Delamotte pondered over this remark until he was aroused by the telephone bell ringing in the surgery. He jumped up with relief and hastened away to answer the call.

Then "Bobby!" came a sharp call from the hall. He went out quickly to find Delamotte putting on his hat.

"I'm going round to Betty's. She's telephoned me. There's something wrong." He was plainly labouring under strong excitement. "Stop here with Bunny. Don't tell him where I've gone." He flung open the front door and rushed to the elevator.

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Betty's eyes were wide with horror and fear—fear that shook her limbs and twitched the white fingers digging into her cheek. "Thank God you're here, Ralph! Please, *please* come and look at Yvonne."

"Yvonne?"

He followed Betty quickly to a room on the left of the hall, her bedroom, and halted in dismay on the threshold.

Yvonne lay on the bed—very still.

He strode forward, and drawing back the pink silk *négligée* half covering her form, plunged his hand beneath the fine lace about her bosom, and waited.

By the dressing table cowered Betty's maid, sobbing quietly.

Suddenly he looked up and flung an abrupt question at Betty. "When did she die?"

Betty's eyes pleaded with the dumb anguish of a stricken animal. "Oh, God! Are you sure she is dead?" she moaned.

Delamotte turned back to the body without a word. For a minute—an eternity, he bent over it. Betty drew in one long fierce breath and watched him. The maid sobbed helplessly. Through the window came the first faint sounds of tramping feet and the rolling of drums, as a military parade swung along the Avenue, somewhere away by Forty Second Street.

Then Delamotte started up aghast, and stood thinking, thinking, while the veins stood out like blue cords on his forehead. Suddenly and peremptorily he motioned the maid from the room. As the door shut behind her, he drew the pink robe over Yvonne's cold breast and turned to Betty. "What's the meaning of all this, Betty?" he said coldly. "What have you done?"

"Done? Why?" she gasped.

Delamotte put a shaking hand to his forehead. "Good God, woman, the case didn't finish till eleven this morning!"

Betty forced herself to look at him. "Well, what of it?" She flung the question desperately.

"She's been dead since ten o'clock," he said shortly.

Betty rushed up to him and clutched him frantically by the shoulders. "Oh, Ralph, it was a trick! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean to kill her—I only gave her twenty grains—at breakfast—and she's so used to it—"

"Veronal?"

She nodded dumbly.

The strains of the music were swelling, and the marching of men.

Then great raking sobs broke out, tearing at the very heart of her. "I didn't believe her this morning, and she really meant it after all—I'm sure of it now—somehow! Ralph, she was lying there *dead* while I—I was playing a wretched trick on her—and I've killed her—"

Delamotte lifted her hands from his shoulders and held them fast. "Dear—it's not your fault," he said, "she died of heart failure." He

paused and looked straight into Betty's haggard eyes. "She died of heart failure," he repeated, "and as to the time, it happened at—any time I like to say."

Betty freed her hands gently, and went to the bed. Taking the rose from her coat she placed it on the dead bosom.

"I'm sorry, Yvonne," she whispered.

Delamotte closed the door softly as he led her out, a stricken woman.

A glad ray of afternoon sunshine danced about the room—over the daring hat with the big white feather lying amidst the gleaming ivory of the dressing table—over the soft folds of the black silk gown flung across the back of an arm-chair—and over the calm, sweet beauty of the face on the pillow, kissing away the death pallor, to leave a sleeping woman.

The steady tramping of feet came nearer as they swung to the sound of a curt "Tap! Tap!"

Then a crashing roll of drums broke out triumphantly, and swelled louder—louder—louder. . . .

And the only answer was the lazy flapping of the half-drawn shades in the cool breeze.

L'ENVOI

SIX months later a letter, with the original address buried under many superscriptions, and bearing the postmarks of many cities, was handed to Wilbur Davenport at the Ocean View Hotel, Durban.

He read it, as he lounged in a deck chair in a shaded corner of the verandah overlooking the Bay—read it twice, three times before he looked up. His fingers mechanically refolded it, as he gazed down over the three miles of green wooded slopes of the Berea to where a toy red-funnelled boat cut a tiny white line in the mighty stretch of sapphire sea—the huge *Kenilworth Castle* homeward bound.

The letter was from Yvonne.

“EAST FORTIETH STREET,

7, A. M.

“Wilbur:

“I can't come with you. I've changed my mind. If you get this before two o'clock, as

I hope you will, you may be able to understand why. If not, well, to your mind, I shall have played you another trick. Really, though, I have been played one myself, and you will laugh, of course, when I tell you that my husband has done it. He's tricked me into thinking that he is about the best man in the world. And, imagine! I never really suspected how cleverly he was doing it till this morning. I really don't pretend to know how it has come about—if I did I shouldn't tell you—but I've changed somehow. Last night I went to bed a crazy woman, thirsting for his blood. This morning, I rather think I'd die for him if he asked me to. Now you may laugh! I'm going now to the court to fetch him; if he will have me after what I've done to him, I shall never want anyone else. If he won't I shall still never want anyone else, and that's all there is to it. You must never annoy me any more, do you see?—or I might—scratch! I'm a terribly selfish woman, as you know, and I want to be left in peace with him. I want to get away with him somewhere, if it isn't too late. I want—oh, so many things that you wouldn't understand—roses and sunshine, and blue skies, and—the laughter of little children. Good luck and good-bye.

YVONNE."

JUN 10 1913

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