FIGHTING SNUB REILLY

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FIGHTING SNUB REILLY

AND OTHER STORIES

By EDGAR WALLACE

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Fighting Snub Reilly

Ten minutes before Snub Reilly left his dressing-room a messenger delivered a letter. His seconds and his manager protested against his reading anything which might well be disturbing at such a critical moment, for the little man was fighting for his title, and Curly Boyd, the aspirant to championship honors, had knocked out four successive opponents before he claimed his right to a meeting with the World Champion.

"Let me see it," said Snub, and he was something of an autocrat. The letter was typewritten and was signed by two reputable men whose names were honored in the sporting world.

Snub read the letter slowly.

"A challenge," he said tersely, "for £10,000 a side."

"Who is the feller?" asked his manager.

"They call him 'An Unknown'; he wants to meet the winner of tonight's fight. Send a wire and say I accept."

His manager grinned. He was a stout man with a moist face, and he had infinite confidence in Snub, but——

"Better wait till after the fight?" he suggested.

"Send it," said Snub curtly, and put on his dressing-gown.

Manager Seller dispatched the wire, not without some discomfort of mind. The fourth round brought him relief.

Curly Boyd, an approved European champion, had himself to thank for such an early ending to his rosy dreams. He had detected, as he thought, a certain unsteadiness in Snub's leg movements, an uncertainty that was a hint of a stagger. So Curly, relying upon his excellent fitness, had put everything into a projected left and right. Incidentally he was fighting the greatest ring strategist of his day, and when he uncovered his jaw for the fraction of a second . . .

"Eight . . . nine . . . ten—out!" said a far-away voice in Curly's ear. Somebody shook him by his gloved hand, and he heard above the roaring in his head a louder roar, and dropped his head wearily to catch a glimpse of a figure in a flowered dressing-gown slipping through the gangway into the gloom behind the ring seats.

It was a fine thing for Snub, because the eyes of the world were on that fight—outside the building limousines were parked twenty deep—and before he reached his dressing-room the news of his victory was quivering in dots and dashes on every line and cable that ran from the city.

He stripped off his dressing-gown and submitted to the attentions of the masseur with some sign of impatience. Ten minutes after the fight he left the building by a side door, and mingled with the thousands who crowded about the entrances. Modesty was Snub Reilly's favorite vice.

The echoes of such a combat were not to die down in a day, for Snub was something of a national hero. This champion who never gave interviews, who was so taciturn and secretive that his very seconds did not meet him until the day before his fights, appealed to the popular imagination as no other ring favorite had done. And when, at the end of the press description, it was announced that "An Unknown" had challenged the winner for a purse of $50,000 (£10,000), and the challenge had been accepted, there was an added value to the news.

Even staid and sleepy Rindle, dedicated to the education of youth, was excited, wildly excited for Rindle. The headmaster read the account of the fight at breakfast and hummed and ha'd his approval of the lightning stroke which laid the presumptuous Curly Boyd so low. And on the opposite side of the breakfast table Vera Shaw, nineteen and beautiful, hid a newspaper on her lap, read furtively and was thrilled. A group of boys *en route* from their dormitories-houses to prayers and morning school, gathered about one daring soul who had broken all school regulations by purchasing forbidden literature, and whooped joyously.

It was natural that Barry Tearle, the mathematical master, should stop in the midst of correcting exercises, hitch up his gown at the neck for comfort, and sit back to study the account. Natural, because he was also games master and instructor of the noble art to Rindle School.

He put down the paper with a thoughtful frown and went back to his exercises, lighting his pipe mechanically the while. Presently he gathered the papers together and rose. The bell was clanging the warning for prayers in Hall, at which solemn function all masters were expected to be present. He hurried across the quadrangle-campus and under the archway above which was part of the head's quarters. He never passed under that arch without wondering whether Vera owned those rooms. It was part of the daily routine of unconscious speculation, and he was so wondering as he turned to join the stream of boys on the flagged path to Hall, when he heard his name called.

He turned quickly, startled almost, and swept off his cap.

It was the subject of his thoughts.

“I saw you come home this morning.”

She pointed an accusing finger and he blushed.

“Did—did you? My car had a breakdown near Northwood—I hope I didn’t disturb you?”

No errant boy called to his study to explain a delinquency could have looked more patently guilty than he, and she laughed, and when Vera Shaw laughed, it required all his self-possession to behave sanely.

“No, you didn’t disturb me. I couldn’t sleep and was sitting at the window approving of the moon when you sneaked into the quad—there is no other word for it. Did you see the fight?” she asked suddenly, and he gasped.

“No, I did *not* see the fight,” he said severely; “and I’m surprised——”

“Pooh!” She flicked her finger at him. “I’ve read every bit about it. Do tell me who is ‘An Unknown’ who is going to fight that darling Snub—run, you’ll be late!”

The bell had stopped, the trembling note of the organ quivered in the still air, and Barry gathered up his gown and sprinted. He hoped she would be waiting when chapel ended, and was the first to leave after the final “amen.” She was standing where he had left her, but Sellinger was with her, and, forgetful of the admirable charity toward all men which he had so recently intoned, Barry cursed Sellinger most heartily.

John Sellinger lived in Rindle; his ancestors had founded Rindle School, and he himself assumed the style and manner and mental attitude of hereditary patron saint to the school. He was tall, overtopping Barry by six inches, florid, well fed, and prosperous. He was good-looking too, in a heavy, aquiline way. And he made no secret that his patronage of Rindle might extend to acquiring relationship with its headmaster.

“Morning, Tearle. I suppose you didn’t see the fight?”

“No, I *didn’t* see the fight,” said Barry savagely. “Have I nothing better to do—did you?” he asked suddenly.

“Yes, rather—I was just telling Vera all about it. Wonderful fellow, Reilly. Smaller even than you.”

“Is it possible?” asked Barry, affecting an extravagant surprise. “Could you see him?”

“Don’t be sarcastic,” said Mr. Sellinger. “Of course you could see him—you don’t see much of him from where I sat, he doesn’t stand still long enough, but, boy, he’s a fighter!”

“So the papers say,” said Barry wearily.

“As to the unknown idiot who wants to fight him——”

“Good morning,” said Barry shortly, and with a lift of his hat went on.

“Curious fellow that.” Sellinger shook his head. “Can’t quite make him out, Vera.”

“Mr. Sellinger.” Her tone was very quiet.

“Yes, Vera?”

“Will you please not call me by my Christian name?”

He was surprised and hurt.

“But, my dear child——”

“But I’m not your dear child,” she said in the same voice. “I’m not even a child.”

He drew himself erect, for he was a Sellinger of Rindle; and Sellingers of Rindle have drawn themselves erect for several centuries at the mere suggestion that they could not do just what their sweet fancy dictated.

“Of course, if you wish it, Ve—Miss—er—Shaw; by all means. I’m sorry if I’ve offended you.”

He was not sorry except for himself, of course; but it was the kind of reply that a representative of the oldest family in the county should make.

“You haven’t offended me—only I don’t like it. Why do you think that Mr. Tearle is curious?”

“Well,” he hesitated, “a schoolmaster isn’t the best paid professional in the world, and yet Tearle lives in style, has a car of his own, is always dressed well.”

She looked at him in that weary, patient way which women can make so offensive.

“Other people have money—you have money, and yet it isn’t curious,” she said coldly. “Or do you think it is curious because you haven’t got it all?”

He smiled indulgently.

“How like you to defend him!” he said, and before indignation could permit an appropriate reply he went on: “Did your father say whether the School Extension Committee was meeting at the usual hour?”

She shook her head and half turned to go.

“I wish——” he began, and stopped.

“You wish?”

“Well”—this time his halt of speech was less natural—“I wish that other arrangements would be made about——”

“About what?” She was exasperated by his studied hesitations, but she was curious.

“About the money that has been raised for the school extension. It is a tremendous sum for a—well, for an ill-paid master to handle.”

He knew he had made a mistake before the words were out, for the girl’s face had gone from crimson to white as the drift of his meaning appeared.

“Do you”—she was breathless, and her voice sounded strange even to her—“do you—mean to suggest that Mr. Tearle—gets his money for motor-cars . . . oh, it’s too absurd—too wicked—how dare you!”

He blinked at her in amazement. He had never regarded her as anything but a soft, fluffy, kitteny thing, and a possible ornament to his gloomy house. He looked aghast upon a fury; her gray eyes, dark with passion, her lips straight drawn and unbecoming. That is the impression he carried away with him—her mouth was unbecoming in anger.

“My dear——” he began.

“You must have an evil mind to think such things,” she flamed. “I hate you!”

He stood as a man petrified until she had disappeared through the porch of Dr. Shaw’s study. Then he pulled up his collar, and stalked haughtily through the schoolhouse gate.

“Very unbecoming,” he spluttered to himself. “Very unladylike . . . very unnecessary . . .”

Vera Shaw saw him depart from the window of her bedroom, and made faces at him which were unbecoming and certainly unladylike. Then she sat on the edge of her bed and wept bitterly. Which was unnecessary.

Dr. Shaw came into lunch ten minutes earlier than she had expected, and

brought Sellinger with him, to the girl's intense annoyance.

"I've asked Sellinger to stay to lunch, Vera," he said. "Will you tell Mrs. Burdon to put another place at the table? We have a meeting of the Extension Committee this afternoon, and I cannot send Mr. Sellinger all the way back."

A more sensitive man than Sellinger might have been hurt by the apology for his invitation; but Sellinger was not that kind of man. He smiled graciously upon the girl, and in that smile conveyed a tacit agreement that what had happened that morning should be overlooked and forgotten.

Fortunately for Vera, there was little need for her to speak, for the conversation centered about the afternoon committee meeting. She was alert for any comment which might be remotely disparaging to Barry Tearle; but Mr. Sellinger, with unexampled wisdom, was careful to keep off the subject, and when Tearle's name came into the conversation it was Dr. Shaw who was responsible.

"There was rather an unpleasant little incident this morning in town," he said—and when those of Rindle School referred to "town," they meant all that part of Rindle which was not school. "I don't know what started it, but I'm quite sure the boy was not in the wrong."

"Is one of the boys in trouble, Father?" asked Vera quickly.

"Well, not exactly in trouble. You remember—do you know the man Crickley—he has a tumbledown shanty on the Jamaica Road?"

She nodded.

"An awful ruffian," she said; "he was at court last year, and he drinks, doesn't he?"

"I should imagine he had been drinking this morning. He was going through the town with his unfortunate wife, and apparently something she said disagreed with him—at any rate, the brute hit her first with his stick, and although I don't suppose he hurt her very much, one of the boys of the fifth—young Tilling, to be exact—who happened to be passing, interfered . . ."

"Good for him!" said the girl, her eyes sparkling.

Dr. Shaw smiled.

"It looked like being bad for him," he said. "For the blackguard turned his attention to the boy, and had him by the scruff of his neck, according to accounts, when Tearle, who was going over to the higher mathematical set, came upon the scene. I understand he asked the man very civilly to release the

boy; whereupon he certainly loosed his hold of the boy, but he struck at Tearle."

The girl opened her mouth in consternation.

"Was he—was he hurt?" she asked.

"No, I don't think he was," the doctor chuckled quietly. "Tearle, you know"—he turned to Sellinger—"is our games master, and a rattling good instructor in boxing. I saw the captain of the school, who witnessed the encounter, and he is most enthusiastic about what followed."

"Did he strike the man? Was there a brawl?" asked Sellinger, ready to be shocked.

"I don't think there was much of a brawl, but he certainly struck the man," said the doctor dryly. "Crickley had to be assisted away."

Sellinger shook his head heavily.

"I don't know whether that sort of thing's good for Rindle," he said, in his capacity of patron saint.

"Nonsense!" said the doctor sharply, and the girl beamed upon her father. "A most excellent lesson and example to the boys. It means, of course, that the boys in Tearle's form will give themselves airs, but it is what I would term a most excellent thing to have happened."

Sellinger was discreetly silent on this conclusion.

"I talked to Tearle after school," he said. "Of course, Tearle was most apologetic." He paused and frowned. "Do you know, Vera," he said, "I had the most extraordinary impression when I was speaking to Tearle. In this morning's paper—which, of course, you haven't read, my dear, at least not the part that I am referring to—there was a reference to a challenge which had been issued by a certain Unknown to the boxer, Snub Reilly."

"You don't mean that——" she said breathlessly.

"Yes, I had that impression—that Tearle was the Unknown. You see, I mentioned the fight of the previous evening, and I talked to him about the challenge, just as I might talk to Sellinger here, in an ordinary matter-of-fact way. And do you know that he went as red as a beetroot?"

Sellinger laughed loud and heartily.

"That would be too absurd," he said contemptuously. "I grant that our friend Tearle may be a most excellent boxer, but an excellent amateur has no earthly chance against even a third-class professional; and Snub Reilly is at the

top of his class."

Dr. Shaw shrugged.

"I agree it is ridiculous," he said.

"Besides," Sellinger went on, enlarging his argument, "before that match can occur, somebody has got to find ten thousand pounds; and ten thousand pounds is a lot of money——"

Vera was looking at him, and their eyes met. She saw in his the dawn of a great suspicion, and her hand gripped the handle of her bread-knife murderously. It was Sellinger who changed the subject abruptly, but the girl knew that he was far from relinquishing his theory.

Sellinger went out to telephone to his house, and the girl was left alone with her father.

"Daddie," she said, "do you like Mr. Sellinger?"

He looked at her over his glasses.

"No, dear; to be candid," he said slowly, "I think him a most unmitigated bore."

She held out her hand solemnly and her father gripped it.

"I think you are the most wonderful father in the world," she said. "And all this time I was thinking that you loved him."

"I loathe him," said her father frankly, "in so far as it is possible for a person of my profession to loathe anybody. But the Sellingers are a sort of tradition at Rindle, and one has to be civil to them."

"I'm going to tell you something."

She walked over and shut the door which Sellinger had left open.

"Do you know what he suggested to me this morning?"

"Who, Sellinger?"

She nodded.

"He suggested that the School Extension funds are being stolen by Mr. Tearle."

Dr. Shaw jumped up, pink with anger.

"How dare he? It's a monstrous suggestion!" he said. "I shall tell him——"

"No, you'll tell him nothing," said Vera hastily. "What is the use of my

giving you my confidence? I am only telling you for your guidance."

Mr. Shaw sat down in his chair again.

"A disgraceful suggestion," he rumbled, "and palpably stupid. Certainly, Tearle as treasurer has control of the money."

"Is it cash? I mean, could you go into a room and take so many hundreds or thousands from a box?" asked the girl, and Dr. Shaw laughed.

"Of course not. The money is represented by certain securities—stocks in various industries and railways. Tearle has the handling and the care of these stocks—he is a capital man of business. But to suggest——!" he fumed, and it needed all the girl's power of persuasion to bring him back to a condition of calm.

Mr. Sellinger went home that night deep in thought, and sat up until two o'clock in the morning writing letters to his friends. One of these friends was an editor of a newspaper closely identified with sport, and from him in a few days he learned more particulars of the challenge which had been issued to the great Snub Reilly. The fifty thousand dollars had to be deposited by the fifth of the following month, the sum being lodged in the bank in the name of three prominent sportsmen, one of whom was the writer. Where would Tearle get his fifty thousand? He was absolutely certain that Tearle was the challenger, and the news he had from the school confirmed him in his opinion. Further confirmation came one day at a committee meeting when Tearle had taken some papers from his pocket. Amongst them Sellinger saw a somewhat gaudy print. It was strangely familiar to him, but it was not until he got home that it flashed upon him that the print was a program of the Reilly-Boyd fight! So Tearle had been a spectator after all! And he had sworn that he had not seen the fight! The master, too, was in strict training, and once, looking from his bedroom in the dark hours of the morning—Sellinger was not a good sleeper—he saw a figure in white vest and shorts run past the lodge entrance, and recognized Barry Tearle as the runner.

The weeks that followed were for Mr. Sellinger weeks of interest and investigation. At a meeting of the Extension Committee, which gathered once a week to transact formal business, he asked for and secured a list of the securities held by the treasurer. And with this in his possession he bided his time.

There arrived at this period an unobtrusive individual who took lodgings in the village and appeared to have very little to do except to loaf about the school and watch the boys and the masters go in and out. He was a charming man, who made friends with the postmaster, and was on good terms with all

the tradesmen before he had been in the village three days. One night Sellinger was finishing his dinner when a visitor was announced. It was the stranger, who greeted his employer deferentially.

"Well, Mr. Sellinger," he said, with satisfaction, "I have a few items of information for you which will interest you."

"Have you got him?" asked Mr. Sellinger eagerly.

"I wouldn't like to say that," said the detective, "but I rather fancy that if we haven't got him, we've put him in a very tight corner."

He took a notebook from his pocket, and turned the leaves.

"Yesterday afternoon Tearle sent a registered envelope to Taylor and Grime, the brokers. I got the address, because I'm a friend of the postmaster's —anyway, that was easy. I went straight up to the city by the night train, and called at Taylor and Grime the next morning, and it couldn't have happened better for me, because there's a clerk in the office who I know very well. As a matter of fact, I saved him from a whole lot of trouble a couple of years ago."

"What was it that Tearle sent?" asked Sellinger, holding his breath.

"Five thousand shares in the Rochester and Holbeach Railroad, one thousand shares in the Land Development Syndicate, and a thousand shares in the Newport Dock Corporation."

"Wait a moment," said Sellinger hastily, and went to his desk. He came back with a list.

"Read the names of those stocks over again," he said, and the detective complied.

"That's it!" Sellinger nodded. "All these shares are held by Tearle on behalf of the School Extension Fund!"

The detective looked at him curiously.

"Well, what are you going to do—pinch him?" he asked, and Mr. Sellinger smiled.

"No," he said softly, "I don't think we need arrest him yet awhile."

He paced up and down the room.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'm having the masters up to dinner tomorrow night. It's a practice that the Sellingers have always followed since the foundation of the school—I suppose you know that Rindle School was founded by one of my ancestors."

The detective did not know, but bowed reverently.

“Tearle lives with old Mrs. Gold in the High Street,” Sellinger went on. “She’s as deaf as a brick, and I believe goes to bed every night at nine o’clock. His rooms are a long way from where she and the servants sleep, and anyway she’s so deaf that she wouldn’t hear you.”

“What’s the idea?” asked the detective.

“Whilst I have Mr. Tearle here”—Sellinger emphasized his words with a regular thrust of his finger into his hireling’s waistcoat—“you will make a very careful search through Tearle’s papers.”

The detective nodded.

“I get you,” he said. “But how am I to find my way into the house?”

“The front door is always unfastened when Tearle is out at night,” said Sellinger. “He was telling the Head last week that he never carried a key, and most of the houses leave their doors open—there is no crime in Rindle.”

“Except what we commit,” said the detective humorously.

“That,” said Mr. Sellinger gravely, “is an impertinence. This is not a crime: I am acting in the best interests of justice.”

The Sellinger dinner, which, as Mr. Sellinger said, was a feature of Rindle School life, was a deadly dull affair to two of the guests. For the host, with commendable foresight, had so arranged the seats that Vera Shaw sat at one end of the board on his right, and Barry Tearle at the other end of the long table on Dr. Shaw’s right. This arrangement suited Mr. Sellinger admirably, because he had a proposal to make to Vera, the terms of which had taken a good day’s thought. The girl, who would never have attended but for the fact that the three mistresses which Rindle boasted were present, was openly bored—a fact which Mr. Sellinger did not observe.

They were half-way through dinner when Sellinger exposed his grand scheme.

“Miss Vera,” he said (he had compromised to that extent), “I want to make a suggestion to you, and I wonder how you’ll take it?”

“That depends upon the suggestion,” she said coolly.

“It may shock you,” he began cautiously, lowering his voice. “But—how would you like to see the fight?”

“See the fight?” she repeated, startled. “Do you mean the fight between ____”

“Between Snub Reilly and the Great Unknown,” he said jocularly.

She thought a moment.

“I hardly think I’d like to see it at all,” she said. “I do not approve of women attending such exhibitions.”

“Suppose the Great Unknown were a friend of yours?” he said deliberately, and her face went pink.

“How absurd! Do you suggest——”

“I not only suggest, but I know,” he said. “You must promise not to tell Tearle, because, if my surmise is correct, he would be upset by your knowing, and maybe the thing would peter out.”

“But it’s nonsense,” she said contemptuously. “How could Mr. Tearle find ten thousand——” She bit her lip.

“He may have friends,” said Sellinger suavely.

There was a silence.

“Do you think he could win—supposing he were—the—Unknown?”

“Why not?” lied Sellinger. “I’m told he is a very brilliant boxer, and I’m not so sure that Snub Reilly couldn’t be beaten.”

He saw the girl’s head turn slowly, and, as if obeying a common impulse, Barry Tearle raised his head at that moment.

“Why do you want me to go?” she asked suddenly. But he was prepared for that: it was in framing the answer to such a question that he had spent the morning.

“Because,” he said stoutly, “I think he will win. And, what is more”—it cost him a greater effort to deliver this sentiment than to carry out the rest of the scheme—“because I’ve an idea that Tearle is fond of you.”

She turned quickly away, and did not reply for some minutes.

“I’ll go on one condition,” she said, “and I think that it can be managed. I have to go to town, and my aunt has asked me to stay the night—I can easily pretend that I am going to a theatre. Who will take me?”

“I, of course,” said Mr. Sellinger gallantly, and she nodded.

“What is the condition?” he asked.

“That if you find you are wrong, and the—the Unknown is not Mr.—

Tearle—you will take me away."

"Of course," said Mr. Sellinger heartily. "I wouldn't dream of allowing you to see the fight unless our friend was involved. Now remember, Miss Vera, it is absolutely necessary that you should not mention this matter to Mr. Tearle. Let it be a surprise to him. I can imagine," he went on, "how delighted he would be, how nerved for the—er—combat."

"Don't let us talk about it any more," she said.

To Barry Tearle's intense disappointment she left with her father, and scarcely spoke two words to him. He was puzzled. What had she and Sellinger been talking about so earnestly? he wondered. Did they know—he went pale at the thought.

He walked back to his lodgings a greatly worried young man.

The last guest had hardly departed before the detective was ushered into Sellinger's library, and one glance at his face revealed to that gentleman the measure of his success.

"We've got him, sir," he said exultantly. "Here you are." He laid a sheet of paper before the other.

"What is this?"

"I've copied them from a letter which I found on his table."

Mr. Sellinger picked up the paper and fixed his glasses. It was from a city bank and acknowledged the receipt of fifty thousand dollars which had been paid into Barry Tearle's account. But it was the second extract which filled Mr. Sellinger with joy. It was merely three lines copied from the counterfoil of Barry Tearle's check-book, which showed that the sum of fifty thousand dollars had been made out in favor of the Fight Committee!

Mr. Sellinger rubbed his hands.

"You've done splendidly, my friend, splendidly," he said. "Now, what shall we do?"

"You ought to have him arrested at once," said the detective, shaking his head. "Unless you take immediate steps, you'll never recover that money."

"No, no," said Sellinger.

He knew something better than that, but this he did not explain to the detective. He was going to see Tearle beaten—and somebody else was going to see him beaten too. And when the fight was over, the comedy would develop into drama and melodrama at that.

“I want somebody to have a lesson,” he said solemnly, “a lesson which they will never forget in their lives, and which may have a lasting beneficial effect upon their future. To the uninitiated, my act may seem a cruel one; but it is often necessary, my friend, that one should be cruel to be kind.”

“But what about the money?” asked the puzzled but practical detective. “That is going to be lost.”

“I don’t think so,” said Mr. Sellinger. “If it is, then I am happily in a position to make good to the school the amount that this man has stolen.”

He might have kept his secret, he might have maintained his outward calm to the grand dénouement; but it was impossible that he could keep his knowledge pent so long. The girl left for town early on the morning of the fight, and Barry, when he learned she had gone, and had gone without seeing him, felt as though the motor of life had dropped out. He himself went up by the afternoon train, having secured permission from the Head. An hour before he left, Dr. Shaw sent for him, and the doctor was obviously ill at ease.

“You wanted me, sir?” said Barry, coming into the study, and the Head looked round with a start.

“Yes, er—yes, Tearle,” said the doctor uncomfortably. “Sit down, will you? I wanted to say to you—that I wish you luck.”

He put out his hand.

“I’m a little worried, you know, Tearle, about it all, and to me it seems that you haven’t a ghost of a chance.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I mean, I believe you are the Unknown who has challenged this boxer, and somehow I wish you hadn’t. It is not that I disapprove of boxing, and although there is certain to be a little trouble if the truth comes out that you are the challenger, we can get over that. No, it’s the fear that you have risked your own private fortune”—he hesitated—“unless, of course, you persuaded your friends to assist you?”

“No, sir, it is all my own money,” said Barry Tearle steadily.

“I hope you win.” Dr. Shaw shook him cheerfully by the hand. “You’re a good fellow, Tearle, and—and I hope you win; and I’m sure if my—if my girl knew, and of course she doesn’t dream that you are taking part in this contest, that she would echo my wishes.”

Barry wrung his hand in silence and left with a little lump in his throat.

It was a grand adventure for the girl. All day she had thought about nothing else, and alternated between hope and dread. Sometimes it was dread of the spectacle she would see; sometimes—and more often—it was the picture of Barry Tearle's failure which made her shiver. The faithful Mr. Sellinger arrived at nine o'clock in the evening. He was in his most jovial mood, as he had reason to be, for he had just parted from two Central Office detectives after putting them in possession of the vital facts.

He had arranged that the girl should arrive at the theatre where the fight was taking place, in time to miss some of the minor encounters which preceded it, and it was while they were waiting in the vestibule for one such contest to finish that he was hailed by a friend, and left her for a moment.

Vera was feeling self-conscious and uncomfortable. It did not bring ease to her mind that there were other ladies present. She felt ashamed and furtive and mean, and for the first time she began to have serious doubts as to what effect her presence would have upon the man whose victory she desired.

She still told herself that Sellinger was mistaken, and that the challenger was some other person than Barry, but in her heart of hearts she knew that she would see the man she loved within that cruel ring; and the thought of it set her heart thumping wildly.

"Talk to me later, Johnson. I'm going to get my seat," she heard Sellinger say, and then he took her arm and led her down a long aisle.

The theatre was in darkness save for the brilliant lights which hung above a square, white platform.

So that was the ring! It was smaller than she had expected. She looked round at the spectators in the gloom, and thought she had never seen so many thousands of faces so close together. She was seized with a panic as to what all those thousands would say if Barry was defeated. Would they cheer? She stopped, gripping fast to Sellinger's arm. She couldn't bear that.

"I don't think I'll go in," she whispered. "I really don't think that I can stand it."

"Come along," said Sellinger soothingly, and led her down to a ring seat.

She was too near. She knew that she was too near. She would rather see this thing at such a distance as made it impossible to distinguish between one fighter and the other. But she was there now and she must stay. And then it was that Sellinger could keep his secret no longer.

There was some delay, they learned. Snub had not arrived, but had

telephoned that he was on the way. But for the delay, and the opportunity which it gave him, Sellinger might have maintained his silence to the end. But now he bent over the girl, and step by step traced the progress of his investigations, and she listened, chilled with horror. She could not even find the words to protest.

He might have noticed her distress, and in pity have toned down his lurid recital; but he was hot with triumph, and found a joy in his brutality. And then the climax came, when the girl was clutching to the arm of her chair, half fainting. The man to whom Sellinger had spoken in the vestibule came up, and said Snub had arrived. Mr. Johnson was stout, red faced, and white haired.

"Is the Unknown here?" demanded Sellinger with a grim smile.

"Oh yes, he's here. I'm told he's going to——"

"He's going nowhere," almost shouted Sellinger. "I've got a couple of detectives waiting for him, my friend."

"Oh, don't, don't!" said Vera, white to her lips.

"A couple of detectives?" The man looked from one to the other. "Well, I think that's rotten of you, Sellinger. The man has had his punishment. Why should he have more?"

"You know him, then?"

"I know him very well indeed," said Sellinger. "I don't know about his punishment."

"He had two years' imprisonment for forgery in Australia. He was one of the best lightweights we've had in this country for years. I told them that they ought to have come out boldly and told the public that it is Kid Mackay who was challenging; but the men who are behind him insisted on introducing him as 'An Unknown,' an idiotic piece of tactics."

The color was coming back to the girl's face as her eyes were fixed upon the other.

"Who is he?" she whispered.

"Kid Mackay, madam," said Sellinger's friend, and went on: "One of the best lads in the ring three years ago——"

"Then it's not Tearle?" wailed Sellinger.

Such a look of bewilderment was on his face that she could have laughed. Then with a start she remembered.

“You must take me away. You promised that if it was not——”

Her words were interrupted by a roar. A man was coming down one of the aisles in a purple dressing-gown. As he swung up between the ropes, his broad, good-humored face all smiles, one half the audience recognized the Unknown as the erstwhile champion and understood the reticence that his backers had shown.

But now a greater roar shook the building. Another figure moved amidst his seconds, and leaping lightly up to the ring, dodged through the ropes. From every part of the vast hall came a shout:

“Snub—Snub Reilly!”

“Snub Reilly!” Mr. Sellinger’s voice was hollow, and then Snub Reilly turned, and the girl half rose from her seat.

For the man who stared down at her with wonder in his open eyes was Barry Tearle!

Mr. Sellinger sat, stricken dumb, his mouth agape. As for the girl, she looked on as if in a trance. She saw the preliminaries, watched the opening of the first round, her eyes never leaving the lithe figure that leaped and lunged. She could hear the thud of gloves as they struck, but whose gloves they were and who was being struck she could not tell. It was at the beginning of the second round that “the Unknown” forced the fighting, in spite of the injunctions and prayers of his seconds to remain strictly on the defensive for the first eight rounds. Right and left flashed Snub’s terrible fists. The Unknown staggered. A second blow to the jaw landed, timed to the fraction of a second . . .

The fight was over. It was over, too, for Vera Shaw, and Barry Tearle leaped the ropes in time to catch her as she fainted . . .

It was in the Head’s study the next morning that Barry Tearle, unmarked by his exertions the night before, told his story.

“My father was a boxer,” he said. “He used to travel the country fairs, and every penny he made he put into my education. He did something more—he taught me the game as no man knew it better than he. He died whilst I was at the University, and it looked as though my education was going to stop short. I loved my studies, and I loved the life I had planned for myself. But I wanted money. I had no friends or influence. One morning at breakfast I saw in the sporting press a challenge issued on behalf of a man whom I had seen fight, and whom I thought I could beat. I pawned everything I had to cover his modest stake, and, adopting the name of Snub Reilly—Reilly is my second

name, by the way—I fought him and won. I have fought during every vacation for three years, and"—he looked down at the girl—"I have fought my last fight."

The doctor cleared his throat.

"Vera has told me something of Mr. Sellinger's accusation. You sold some bonds?"

Barry nodded.

"They were my own bonds," he said. "I had to raise ten thousand pounds to cover this challenge. They were bonds similar to those which you held for the Extension Fund."

"Naturally," Dr. Shaw nodded, "you would buy the best stock, both for the school and for yourself."

He was looking down at his blotting-pad thoughtfully.

"You have fought your last fight?" he said.

Barry nodded.

"Yes, sir. From now on, Snub Reilly disappears. I have made a considerable sum, quite sufficient for my needs."

"Nobody at the school knows you are—Snub Reilly?"

"Except Mr. Sellinger," said Vera.

"I do not think Mr. Sellinger will be anxious to talk about the part he has played in a business which is only discreditable in so far as he has been concerned," said Dr. Shaw.

For the second time in twenty-four hours he put out his hand.

"I rather think," he said, "I should like to have seen that fight. Wouldn't you, Vera?"

The girl shuddered and shook her head.

"Of course not, of course not. How could I ask such a thing?" said the doctor tenderly, and he dropped his hand on her shoulder. "You couldn't imagine my little girl in that sort of atmosphere, could you, Tearle?"

Mr. Barry Tearle shook his head. He and Vera went out together into the old-world quadrangle, and neither spoke.

"I must go into the house now, Barry," she said. "You—you weren't very much hurt last night?" she added anxiously. "Oh, my dear, I was so happy

when you won." She laid her hands impulsively on his breast. "And I've quite forgiven your little lie."

"My little lie!" He was astonished.

"You said you had not seen the fight that night."

He smiled.

"I didn't see it," he insisted. "I felt it—but I didn't see it."

Since the classrooms overlook the quadrangle, what followed would have been witnessed by the whole of the fifth classical form but for the tact of the head prefect of School House who happened to be standing by the window, and closed it with a bang.

Circumstantial Evidence

Colonel Chartres Dane lingered irresolutely in the broad and pleasant lobby. Other patients had lingered awhile in that agreeable vestibule. In wintry days it was a cozy place; its polished panelled walls reflecting the gleam of logs that burnt in the open fireplace. There was a shining oak settle that invited gossip, and old prints, and blue china bowls frothing over with the flowers of a belated autumn or advanced spring-tide, to charm the eye.

In summer it was cool and dark and restful. The mellow tick of the ancient clock, the fragrance of roses, the soft breeze that came through an open casement stirring the lilac curtains uneasily, these corollaries of peace and order had soothed many an unquiet mind.

Colonel Chartres Dane fingered a button of his light dust-coat and his thin patrician face was set in thought. He was a spare man of fifty-five; a man of tired eyes and nervous gesture.

Dr. Merriget peered at him through his powerful spectacles and wondered.

It was an awkward moment, for the doctor had murmured his sincere, if conventional, regrets and encouragements, and there was nothing left but to close the door on his patient.

“You have had a bad wound there, Mr. Jackson,” he said, by way of changing a very gloomy subject and filling in the interval of silence. This intervention might call to mind in a soldier some deed of his, some far field of battle where men met death with courage and fortitude. Such memories might be helpful to a man under sentence.

Colonel Dane fingered the long scar on his cheek.

“Yes,” he said absently, “a child did that—my niece. Quite my own fault.”

“A child?” Dr. Merriget appeared to be shocked. He was in reality very curious.

“Yes . . . she was eleven . . . my own fault. I spoke disrespectfully of her father. It was unpardonable, for he was only recently dead. He was my brother-in-law. We were at breakfast and she threw the knife . . . yes . . .”

He ruminated on the incident and a smile quivered at the corner of his thin lips.

“She hated me. She hates me still . . . yes . . .”

He waited.

The doctor was embarrassed and came back to the object of the visit.

“I should be ever so much more comfortable in my mind if you saw a specialist, Mr.—er—Jackson. You see how difficult it is for me to give an opinion? I may be wrong. I know nothing of your history, your medical history I mean. There are so many men in town who could give you a better and more valuable opinion than I. A country practitioner like myself is rather in a backwater. One has the usual cases that come to one in a small country town, maternity cases, commonplace ailments . . . it is difficult to keep abreast of the extraordinary developments in medical science . . .”

“Do you know anything about Machonicies College?” asked the colonel unexpectedly.

“Yes, of course.” The doctor was surprised. “It is one of the best of the technical schools. Many of our best doctors and chemists take a preparatory course there. Why?”

“I merely asked. As to your specialists . . . I hardly think I shall bother them.”

Dr. Merriget watched the tall figure striding down the red-tiled path between the banked flowers, and was still standing on the doorstep when the whine of his visitor’s machine had gone beyond the limits of his hearing.

“H’m,” said Dr. Merriget as he returned to his study. He sat awhile thinking.

“Mr. Jackson?” he said aloud. “I wonder why the colonel calls himself ‘Mr. Jackson’?”

He had seen the colonel two years before at a garden party, and had an excellent memory for faces.

He gave the matter no further thought, having certain packing to superintend—he was on the eve of his departure for Constantinople, a holiday trip he had promised himself for years.

On the following afternoon at Machonicies Technical School, a lecture was in progress.

> “. . . by this combustion you have secured true K.c.y. . . . which we will now test and compare with the laboratory quantities . . . a deliquescent and colorless crystal extremely soluble . . .”

The master, whose monotonous voice droned like the hum of a distant, big, stationary blue-bottle, was a middle-aged man, to whom life was no more than a chemical reaction, and love not properly a matter for his observation or knowledge. He had an idea that it was dealt with effectively in another department of the college . . . metaphysics . . . or was it philosophy? Or maybe it came into the realms of the biological master?

Ella Grant glared resentfully at the crystals which glittered on the blue paper before her, and snapped out the bunsen burner with a vicious twist of finger and thumb. Denman always overshot the hour. It was a quarter past five! The pallid clock above the dais, where Professor Denman stood, seemed to mock her impatience.

She sighed wearily and fiddled with the apparatus on the bench at which she sat. Some twenty other white-coated girls were also fiddling with test tubes and bottles and graduated measures, and twenty pairs of eyes glowered at the bald and stooping man who, unconscious of the passing of time, was turning affectionately to the properties of potassium.

“Here we have a metal whose strange affinity for oxygen . . . eh, Miss Benson? . . . five? Bless my soul, so it is! Class is dismissed. And ladies, *ladies, ladies*! Please, please let me make myself heard. The laboratory keeper will take from you all chemicals you have drawn for this experiment . . .”

They were crowding toward the door to the change room. Smith, the laboratory man, stood in the entrance grabbing wildly at little green and blue bottles that were thrust at him, and vainly endeavoring by a private system of mnemonics to commit his receipts to memory.

“Miss Fairlie, phial fairly; Miss Jones, bottle bones; Miss Walter, bottle salter.”

If at the end of his collection he failed to recall a rhyme to any name, the owner had passed without cashing in.

“Miss Grant——?”

The laboratory of the Analytical Class was empty. Nineteen bottles stood on a shelf and he reviewed them.

“Miss Grant——?”

No, he had said nothing about “aunt” or “can’t” or “pant.”

He went into the change room, opened a locker and felt in the pockets of the white overall. They were empty. Returning to the laboratory, he wrote in his report book:

“Miss Grant did not return experiment bottle.”

He spelt experiment with two r’s and two m’s.

Ella found the bottle in the pocket of her overall as she was hanging it up in the long cupboard of the change room. She hesitated a moment, frowning resentfully at the little blue phial in her hand, and rapidly calculating the time it would take to return to the laboratory to find the keeper and restore the property. In the end, she pushed it into her bag and hurried from the building. It was not an unusual occurrence that a student overlooked the return of some apparatus, and it could be restored in the morning.

Had Jack succeeded? That was the thought which occupied her. The miracle about which every junior dreams had happened. Engaged in the prosecution of the notorious Flackman, his leader had been taken ill, and the conduct of the case for the State had fallen to him. He was opposed by two brilliant advocates, and the judge was a notorious humanitarian.

She did not stop to buy a newspaper; she was in a fret at the thought that Jack Freeder might not have waited for her, and she heaved a sigh of relief when she turned into the old-world garden of the courthouse and saw him pacing up and down the flagged walk, his hands in his pockets.

“I am so sorry . . .”

She had come up behind him, and he turned on his heel to meet her. His face spoke success. The elation in it told her everything she wanted to know, and she slipped her arm through his with a queer mingled sense of pride and uneasiness.

“. . . the judge sent for me to his room afterwards and told me that the attorney could not have conducted the case better than I.”

“He is guilty?” she asked, hesitating.

“Who, Flackman . . . I suppose so,” he said carelessly. “His pistol was found in Sinnit’s apartment, and it was known that he quarrelled with Sinnit about money, and there was a girl in it, I think, although we have never been able to get sufficient proof of that to put her into the box. You seldom have direct evidence in cases of this character, Ella, and in many ways circumstantial evidence is infinitely more damning. If a witness went into the box and said, ‘I saw Flackman shoot Sinnit and saw Sinnit die,’ the whole case would stand or fall by the credibility of that evidence; prove that witness an habitual liar and there is no chance of a conviction. On the other hand, when there are six or seven witnesses, all of whom subscribe to some one act or appearance or location of a prisoner, and all agreeing . . . why, you have him.”

She nodded.

Her acquaintance with Jack Freeder had begun on her summer vacation, and had begun romantically but unconventionally, when a sailing boat overturned, with its occupant pinned beneath the bulging canvas. It was Ella, a magnificent swimmer, who, bathing, had seen the accident and had dived into the sea to the assistance of the drowning man.

“This means a lot to me, Ella,” he said earnestly as they turned into the busy street. “It means the foundation of a new life.”

His eyes met hers, and lingered for a second, and she was thrilled.

“Did you see Stephanie last night?” he asked suddenly.

She felt guilty.

“No,” she admitted, “but I don’t think you ought to worry about that, Jack. Stephanie is expecting the money almost by any mail.”

“She has been expecting the money almost by any mail for a month past,” he said dryly, “and in the meantime this infernal note is becoming due. What I can’t understand——”

She interrupted him with a laugh.

“You can’t understand why they accepted my signature as a guarantee for Stephanie’s,” she laughed, “and you are extremely uncomplimentary!”

Stephanie Boston, her some-time room mate, and now her apartmental neighbor, was a source of considerable worry to Jack Freeder, although he had only met her once. A handsome, volatile girl, with a penchant for good clothes and a mode of living out of all harmony with the meager income she drew from fashion-plate artistry, she had found herself in difficulties. It was a condition which the wise had long predicted, and Ella, not so wise, had dreaded. And then one day the young artist had come to her with an oblong slip of paper, and an incoherent story of somebody being willing to lend her money if Ella would sign her name; and Ella Grant, to whom finance was an esoteric mystery, had cheerfully complied.

“If you were a great heiress, or you were expecting a lot of money coming to you through the death of a relative,” persisted Jack, with a frown, “I could understand Isaacs being satisfied with your acceptance, but you aren’t!”

Ella laughed softly and shook her head.

“The only relative I have in the world is poor dear Uncle Chartres, who loathes me! I used to loathe him too, but I’ve got over that. After daddy died I

lived with him for a few months, but we quarrelled over—over—well, I won't tell you what it was about, because I am sure he was sorry. I had a fiendish temper as a child, and I threw a knife at him."

"Good Lord!" gasped Jack, staring at her.

She nodded solemnly.

"I did—so you see there is very little likelihood of Uncle Chartres, who is immensely rich, leaving me anything more substantial than the horrid weapon with which I attempted to slay him!"

Jack was silent. Isaacs was a professional moneylender . . . he was not a philanthropist.

When Ella got home that night she determined to perform an unpleasant duty. She had not forgotten Jack Freeder's urgent insistence upon her seeing Stephanie Boston—she had simply avoided the unpalatable.

Stephanie's flat was on the first floor; her own was immediately above. She considered for a long time before she pressed the bell.

Grace, Stephanie's elderly maid, opened the door, and her eyes were red with recent weeping.

"What is the matter?" asked Ella in alarm.

"Come in, miss," said the servant miserably. "Miss Boston left a letter for you."

"Left?" repeated Ella wonderingly. "Has she gone away?"

"She was gone when I came this morning. The bailiffs have been here. . . ."

Ella's heart sank.

The letter was short but eminently lucid:

> "I am going away, Ella. I do hope that you will forgive me. That wretched bill has become due and I simply cannot face you again. I will work desperately hard to repay you, Ella."

The girl stared at the letter, not realizing what it all meant. Stephanie had gone away!

"She took all her clothes, miss. She left this morning, and told the porter she was going into the country; and she owes me three weeks' wages!"

Ella went upstairs to her own flat, dazed and shaken. She herself had no

maid; a woman came every morning to clean the flat, and Ella had her meals at a neighboring restaurant.

As she made the last turn of the stairs she was conscious that there was a man waiting on the landing above, with his back to her door. Though she did not know him, he evidently recognized her, for he raised his hat. She had a dim idea that she had seen him somewhere before, but for the moment could not recollect the circumstances.

“Good evening, Miss Grant,” he said amiably. “I think we have met before. Miss Boston introduced me—name of Higgins.”

She shook her head.

“I am afraid I don’t remember you,” she said, and wondered whether his business was in connection with Stephanie’s default.

“I brought the paper up that you signed about three months ago.”

Then she recalled him and went cold.

“Mr. Isaacs didn’t want to make any kind of trouble,” he said. “The bill became due a week ago and we have been trying to get Miss Boston to pay. As it is, it looks very much as though you will have to find the money.”

“When?” she asked in dismay.

“Mr. Isaacs will give you until tomorrow night,” said the man. “I have been waiting here since five o’clock to see you. I suppose it is convenient, miss?”

Nobody knew better than Mr. Isaacs’ clerk that it would be most inconvenient, not to say impossible, for Ella Grant to produce four hundred pounds.

“I will write to Mr. Isaacs,” she said, finding her voice at last.

She sat down in the solitude and dusk of her flat to think things out. She was overwhelmed, numbed by the tragedy. To owe money that she could not pay was to Ella Grant an unspeakable horror.

There was a letter in the letter-box. She had taken it out mechanically when she came in, and as mechanically slipped her fingers through the flap and extracted a folded paper. But she put it down without so much as a glance at its contents.

What would Jack say? What a fool she had been, what a perfectly reckless fool! She had met difficulties before, and had overcome them. When she had left her uncle’s house as a child of fourteen and had subsisted on the slender

income which her father had left her, rejecting every attempt on the part of Chartres Dane to make her leave the home of an invalid maiden aunt where she had taken refuge, she had faced what she believed was the supreme crisis of life.

But this was different.

Chartres Dane! She rejected the thought instantly, only to find it recurring. Perhaps he would help. She had long since overcome any ill-feeling she had towards him, for whatever dislike she had, had been replaced by a sense of shame and repentence. She had often been on the point of writing him to beg his forgiveness, but had stopped short at the thought that he might imagine she had some ulterior motive in seeking to return to his good graces. He was her relative. He had some responsibility . . . again the thought inserted itself, and suddenly she made up her mind.

Chartres Dane's house lay twelve miles out of town, a great rambling place set on the slopes of a wooded hill, a place admirably suited to his peculiar love of solitude.

She had some difficulty in finding a taxi-driver who was willing to make the journey, and it had grown dark, though a pale light still lingered in the western skies, when she descended from the cab at the gateway of Hevel House. There was a lodge at the entrance of the gate, but this had long since been untenanted. She found her way up the long drive to the columned portico in front of the house. The place was in darkness, and she experienced a pang of apprehension. Suppose he was not there? (Even if he were, he would not help her, she told herself.) But the possibility of his being absent, however, gave her courage.

Her hand was on the bell when there came to her a flash of memory. At such an hour he would be sitting in the window-recess overlooking the lawn at the side of the house. She had often seen him there on warm summer nights, his glass of port on the broad window-ledge, a cigar clenched between his white teeth, brooding out into the darkness.

She came down the steps, and walking on the close-cropped grass bordering the flower-beds, came slowly, almost stealthily, to the library window. The big casement was wide open; a faint light showed within, and she stopped dead, her heart beating a furious rat-a-plan at the sight of a filled glass on the window-ledge. His habits had not changed, she thought; he himself would be sitting just out of sight from where she stood, in that window-recess which was nearest to her. Summoning all her courage, she advanced still farther. He was not in his customary place, and she crept nearer to the window.

Colonel Chartres Dane was sitting at a large writing-table in the center of the room; his back was toward her, and he was writing by the light of two tall candles that stood upon the table.

At the sight of his back all her courage failed, and, as he rose from the table, she shrank back into the shadow. She saw his white hand take up the glass of wine, and after a moment, peeping again, she saw him, still with his back to her, put it on the table by him as he sat down again.

She could not do it, she dare not do it, she told herself, and turned away sorrowfully. She would write to him.

She had stepped from the grass to the path when a man came from an opening in the bushes and gripped her arm.

"Hello!" he said, "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"Let me go," she cried, frightened. "I—I——"

"What are you doing by the colonel's window?"

"I am his niece," she said, trying to recover some of her dignity.

"I thought you might be his aunt," said the gamekeeper ironically. "Now, my girl, I am going to take you in to the colonel——"

With a violent thrust she pushed him from her; the man stumbled and fell. She heard a thud and a groan, and stood rooted to the spot with horror.

"Have I hurt you?" she whispered. There was no reply.

She felt, rather than saw, that he had struck his head against a tree in falling, and turning, she flew down the drive, terrified, nearly fainting in her fright. The cabman saw her as she flung open the gate and rushed out.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I—I think I have killed a man," she said incoherently, and then from the other end of the drive she heard a thick voice cry:

"Stop that girl!"

It was the voice of the gamekeeper, and for a moment the blood came back to her heart.

"Take me away, quickly, quickly," she cried.

The cabman hesitated.

"What have you been doing?" he asked.

“Take—take me away,” she pleaded.

Again he hesitated.

“Jump in,” he said gruffly.

Three weeks later John Penderbury, one of the greatest advocates at the Bar, walked into Jack Freeder’s chambers.

The young man sat at his table, his head on his arm, and Penderbury put his hand lightly upon the shoulders of the stricken man.

“You’ve got to take a hold of yourself, Freeder,” he said kindly. “You will neither help yourself nor her by going under.”

Jack lifted a white, haggard face to the lawyer.

“It is horrible, horrible,” he said huskily. “She’s as innocent as a baby. What evidence have they?”

“My dear good fellow,” said Penderbury, “the only evidence worth while in a case like this is circumstantial evidence. If there were direct evidence we might test the credibility of the witness. But in circumstantial evidence every piece of testimony dovetails into the other; each witness creates one strand of the net.”

“It is horrible, it is impossible, it is madness to think that Ella could——”

Penderbury shook his head. Pulling up a chair at the other side of the table, he sat down, his arms folded, his grave eyes fixed on the younger man.

“Look at it from a lawyer’s point of view, Freeder,” he said gently. “Ella Grant is badly in need of money. She has backed a bill for a girl-friend and the money is suddenly demanded. A few minutes after learning this from Isaacs’ clerk, she finds a letter in her flat, which she has obviously read—the envelope was opened and its contents extracted—a letter which is from Colonel Dane’s lawyers, telling her that the colonel has made her his sole heiress. She knows, therefore, that the moment the colonel dies she will be a rich woman. She has in her handbag a bottle containing cyanide of potassium, and that night, under the cover of darkness, drives to the colonel’s house and is seen outside the library window by Colonel Dane’s gamekeeper. She admitted, when she was questioned by the detective, that she knew the colonel was in the habit of sitting by the window and that he usually put his glass of port on the window-ledge. What was easier than to drop a fatal dose of cyanide into the wine? Remember, she admitted that she had hated him and that once she threw a

knife at him, wounding him, so that the scar remained to the day of his death. She admitted herself that it was his practice to put the wine where she could have reached it."

He drew a bundle of papers from his pocket, unfolded them, and turned the leaves rapidly.

"Here it is," and he read:

> "Yes, I saw a glass of wine on the window-ledge. The colonel was in the habit of sitting in the window on summer evenings. I have often seen him there, and I knew when I saw the wine that he was near at hand."

He pushed the paper aside and looked keenly at the wretched man before him.

"She is seen by the gamekeeper, as I say," he went on, "and this man, attempting to intercept her, she struggles from his grasp and runs down the drive to the cab. The cabman says she was agitated, and when he asked her what was the matter, she replied that she had killed a man——"

"She meant the gamekeeper," interrupted Jack.

"She may or may not, but she made that statement. There are the facts, Jack; you cannot get past them. The letter from the lawyers—which she says she never read—the envelope was found open and the letter taken out; is it likely that she had not read it? The bottle of cyanide of potassium was found in her possession, and—" he spoke deliberately—"the colonel was found dead at his desk and death was due to cyanide of potassium. A candle which stood on his desk had been overturned by him in his convulsions, and the first intimation the servants had that anything was wrong was the sight of the blazing papers on the table, which the gamekeeper saw when he returned to report what had occurred in the grounds. There is no question what verdict the jury will return . . ."

It was a great and a fashionable trial. The courthouse was crowded, and the public had fought for a few places that were vacant in the gallery.

Sir Johnson Grey, the Attorney-General, was to lead for the Prosecution, and Penderbury had Jack Freeder as his junior.

The opening trial was due for ten o'clock, but it was half-past ten when the Attorney-General and Penderbury came into the court, and there was a light in Penderbury's eyes and a smile on his lips which amazed his junior.

Jack had only glanced once at the pale, slight prisoner. He dared not look at her.

"What is the delay?" he asked irritably. "This infernal judge is always late."

At that moment the court rose as the judge came on to the Bench, and almost immediately afterwards the Attorney-General was addressing the court.

"My lord," he said, "I do not purpose offering any evidence in this case on behalf of the Crown. Last night I received from Dr. Merriget, an eminent practitioner of Townville, a sworn statement on which I purpose examining him.

"Dr. Merriget," the Attorney-General went on, "has been traveling in the Near East, and a letter which was sent to him by the late Colonel Dane only reached him a week ago, coincident with the doctor learning that these proceedings had been taken against the prisoner at the bar.

"Dr. Merriget immediately placed himself in communication with the Crown officers of the law, as a result of which I am in a position to tell your lordship that I do not intend offering evidence against Ella Grant.

"Apparently Colonel Dane had long suspected that he was suffering from an incurable disease, and to make sure, he went to Dr. Merriget and submitted himself to an examination. The reason for his going to a strange doctor is, that he did not want to have it known that he had been consulting specialists in town. The doctor confirmed his worst fears, and Colonel Dane returned to his home. Whilst on the Continent, the doctor received a letter from Colonel Dane, which I purpose reading."

He took a letter from the table, adjusted his spectacles, and read:

> "DEAR DR. MERRIGET,—It occurred to me after I had left you the day before yesterday, that you must have identified me, for I have a dim recollection that we met at a garden party. I am not, as you suggested, taking any other advice. I know too well that this fibrous growth is beyond cure, and I purpose tonight taking a fatal dose of cyanide of potassium. I feel that I must notify you in case by a mischance there is some question as to how I met my death.—Very sincerely yours,
>
> "CHARTRES DANE."

"I feel that the ends of justice will be served," continued the Attorney-

General “if I call the doctor. . . .”

It was not very long before another Crown case came the way of Jack Freeder. A week after his return from his honeymoon, he was sent for to the Public Prosecutor’s office, and that gentleman interviewed him.

“You did so well in the Flackman case, Freeder, that I want you to undertake the prosecution of Wise. Undoubtedly you will gain kudos in a trial of this description, for the Wise case has attracted a great deal of attention.”

“What is the evidence?” asked Jack bluntly.

“Circumstantial, of course,” said the Public Prosecutor, “but——”

Jack shook his head.

“I think not, sir,” he said firmly but respectfully. “I will not prosecute in another case of murder unless the murder is committed in my presence.”

The Public Prosecutor stared at him.

“That means you will never take another murder prosecution—have you given up criminal work, Mr. Freeder?”

“Yes, sir,” said Jack gravely; “my wife doesn’t like it.”

Today, Jack Freeder is referred to in legal circles as a glaring example of how a promising career can be ruined by marriage.

A Romance in Brown

"Romance . . .? Yes, of a kind. Romance brings up the nine-fifteen . . . and there is romance in . . . well, courtship and that sort of thing. But life is fairly humdrum and unexciting. Wars . . . at a distance are immensely stirring, but close at hand, look rather like a street accident multiplied by millions. Life is utterly devoid of sensation, and romance is really sensation of a pleasant kind."

James Calcott Berkley sniffed.

"I wouldn't have your mind for money," he said, and his senior partner chuckled softly to himself.

He was a stout man and comfortable. You could not imagine him without a stiff collar and a heavy watch-guard. Jim often wondered what he looked like in pyjamas—the chances were that he wore a nightshirt anyway—a silk nightshirt with broad magenta stripes.

"Money doesn't buy experience," said Mr. Galley. "Years, disappointments, knowing successions of exquisitely featured chorus girls and small-part ladies, who look like Athens at its palmiest, and talk like the Old Kent Road; it's being looked at with pure limpid eyes, so big and innocent that you get a lump in your throat, and watching them change to granite when they price the little present you've given to their owner."

This time Jim Berkley sighed.

"What a perfectly horrible past you must have, Calley!" he said.

"On the contrary," protested the stout Mr. Calley, "my life has been singularly free from complications. There is a gray which has a purplish tinge—that is the color which most nearly represents the past of Cæsar Calley. We look at the matter from the standpoint of fifty and twenty-seven. You ought to be married," he went on, and Jim closed his eyes wearily. "That statement may make you dither, but it is a fact. Marriage destroys the icing, but reveals the cake, and you can't live on almond icing any more than you can make a square meal of Turkish Delight. You're well off, you're nice looking, you have decent standards of conduct . . . in fact, you're a desirable match."

"I have never actually met anybody . . ." said Jim. "There are thousands of girls, of course——"

"But they lack the atmosphere of romance," interrupted the other dryly; "they eat food and they ride to hounds, and they are entirely without mystery.

You'll never get married if you wait for mystery. There is nothing mysterious about women—they are just men with a different code of honor. They never pay their card debts, but they won't take tea in your rooms unless they bring their aunts."

"Br-r!" shivered Jim. "Marriage! The wedding reception . . . the awful church and the best man and the tight boots and the confetti!"

Mr. Calley put on his gold-rimmed glasses and surveyed his partner dispassionately.

"Even Prince Charming had to go through something of the sort when he wed the Fairy Princess," he said, "and I guess the fairy princess sat up half the night worrying whether the bridesmaids ought to wear gray charmeuse or white tulle. There is nothing wholly romantic and nothing wholly sordid. You can't have silk without worms."

Jim Berkley made a hasty exit. Marriage was a subject which irritated and annoyed him. And when Calley said that no woman had mystery . . .!

His watch said twenty minutes past three o'clock, and he stood at the window looking down into Gresham Street. He was so standing, absorbed in his thoughts, when Calley put his head in at the door.

"Hullo? Looking for the Brown Girl?" he asked.

"No!" said Jim loudly.

"Thought you might be; queer bird—I'm off. Shan't be up tomorrow—I'm playing in a foursome at Mid-Surrey."

"Good-night," said Jim absently.

"As to romance," insisted Calley, "have you ever considered Boccaccio's stories in cold blood? Why, there isn't a Sunday newspaper that doesn't beat the story of Violante and Theodoro——"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Jim, and his amiable partner closed the door grinning.

The bells of St. Olives tolled the half-hour, and then James Calcott Berkley reaped the reward of his vigil. The Brown Girl was walking slowly along the pavement on the opposite side of the road—as she walked every day when the bells of St. Olives rang the half-hour.

He took up the pair of field-glasses that were on his desk, and standing back from the window, focused them. She was exquisitely beautiful—he had never seen such loveliness in his life. Invariably she was dressed in brown; but

seldom did she wear the same costume twice. Who was she? By the regularity of her appearance, he was certain that she was employed somewhere in the neighborhood. Yet, she was too well dressed to be an ordinary employee, too young to hold any responsible post. And then, most unaccountable phenomenon of all, there was the little old woman who was always waiting for her, and to whom she invariably handed a letter with a little smile.

Every day this happened, the little old woman in the plaid shawl hobbled across the street and took the letter; there was a brief exchange of words and the little old woman crossed the street again, and the girl passed on out of sight. That happened today.

It was Calley who had first seen her, and in his prosaic unimaginative way had christened her “the Brown Girl.” And yet it was a name which Jim liked. “Queer bird!” He shuddered at the grossness of the description. Presently she was out of sight, and he turned with a sigh and a sense of bitter resentment to a review of the day’s transactions, for Jim was a stockbroker, as his father had been before him.

The arrival of his secretary with letters to sign gave him an idea.

“Thompson, I’ve often wondered how . . . well, poor people, without opportunities for meeting socially . . . get acquainted.”

“Yes, sir? Well, they sort of meet,” said Thompson vaguely. “You mean young men and young ladies?”

Jim, very hot, nodded, not daring to meet the eyes of his clerk, lest his secret be read.

“Generally the girl’s got a brother who asks a boy to the house, or they meet at a dance. There are thousands of ways.”

Jim coughed as he scribbled his name.

“Yes . . . but suppose he doesn’t know the brother—if there is a brother. Just sees her on the street, and . . . well . . . falls in love with her and all that sort of thing?”

Thompson was young, but experienced.

“That’s a bit difficult,” he said, “because no lady likes to be picked up, in a manner of speaking. He just finds out who she is, and gets somebody to introduce him.”

Jim shook his head impatiently.

“But, suppose he doesn’t know who she is . . . suppose he just sees her and

doesn't know from Adam or Eve what her name is?"

Mr. Thompson considered this weighty problem.

"There are several stunts he can work, such as picking up a handkerchief and saying 'Excuse me, miss, is this yours?' or he can follow her home and make inquiries, or he can pretend that he's met her before——"

"None of which methods appeal to me, Thompson," said Jim sharply, and went a fiery red under Thompson's suspicious scrutiny.

He went back to his flat in Portland Place, his mind wholly occupied by the Brown Girl, her mystery, her glorious beauty. That night he dreamed of her; she and he were sitting on the yellow sands, and before them stretched the unbroken horizon of a sunlit sea. He was holding her hand, sublimely, supremely happy, and she was looking at him shyly and saying, "Harold, do you think you really will be happy?"

When he awoke, and recalling the dream realized that his name was not "Harold," he was aggrieved until he remembered that dreams go contrariwise, and that no unknown Harold would ever hold her hand.

Calley was away next morning and he was glad, because he had determined to follow Thompson's advice—with modifications. He must discover who she was. The uncertainty was worrying him—spoiling his days and disturbing his nights.

At three-thirty, when the clock of St. Olives struck, he was waiting in the doorway of his office. He saw the little old woman come into Gresham Street from the Moorgate Street end, and take up her station.

And then he saw the Brown Girl. Nearer at hand, she was more radiantly lovely than ever. Looking neither to left nor to right, she came slowly on, and the little woman in the plaid shawl crossed the street to meet her. There was a brief colloquy, the invariable flash of the Brown Girl's smile, and then the little old woman recrossed the road, clutching tightly at the white envelope. The Brown Girl resumed her walk, and Jim, with a flutter at his heart, followed her boldly.

She turned into Moorgate Street, with Jim a dozen paces behind her. Her costume *was* expensive, her feet were daintily shod, her stockings of silk—he knew this much of woman's mystery.

Suddenly, to his surprise she stopped by the side of a limousine that was drawn up by the side of the street, opened the door and stepped in. He could only stand still, paralyzed with astonishment. The car was on the move, when

the door opened and the girl stepped out. The reason for this reckless action was not at first apparent, for Jim did not see the bag she had dropped until after he had sprung forward and lifted her from where she lay.

"It is nothing. I'm sorry to have troubled you. . . I tapped on the window, but Bennett did not hear me. . . . I was so alarmed about losing my bag . . . ."

Nevertheless, she limped as she walked to where the bag lay. Jim snatched it up for her.

"Are you sure you aren't hurt?" he asked, and in his agitation his voice sounded as though it belonged to somebody else.

"No . . . really . . . it was stupid of me."

"Can't I take you somewhere . . . to a doctor's?" he asked, as he helped her into the car. The crowd that every such occurrence attracts had gathered.

"No . . . yes, please come in with me," she said hurriedly, and when he followed her and the machine moved on: "I'm really not hurt, but I didn't wish to argue with you before all those people. I really am quite well—you won't mind if I drop you at Liverpool Street? I am awfully grateful to you."

She also was a little incoherent.

Jim sat by her side, bolt upright, hardly daring to breathe. He was dazed and bewildered, and had not recovered when, in response to her signal, the car pulled up.

"I feel I'm being very rude in turning you out," she said, and her smile was adorable, "but . . . I don't want mother to know that I have been in the city."

"Of course not," said Jim. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that she should not wish her mother to know that she had been in the city.

He took her hand and dropped it instantly. She seemed amused. Watching the car as it plunged into the traffic he saw her looking back through the glass panel in the hood, and waved his hand. He was astounded at his boldness.

That night he thought of her. He found time to have dinner and read the evening newspapers, but these were the briefest interruptions to his thoughts.

Calley was boisterously cheerful next morning. He and his partner had unexpectedly beaten the club champions.

"My putting was a little short of marvelous," he said immodestly. "I'll show you one shot I did—Ferguson, the pro., said he'd never seen anything approaching it. Now, suppose this paper-weight is the ball . . ."

“And, by the way, Jim,” he said, when he had finished his demonstration, “I want to be away all next Thursday. I’ll look in in the morning, but I want to go almost immediately. I’m playing Jack Anderson, and we’ve got a side bet of a tenner. Will you remember that? Somebody must be at the office to deal with Balter’s account—he’s buying now, and he’s a tetchy devil.”

“I’ll be here,” said Jim, “though it is deplorable that a man of your age and substance should spend his days chasing an inoffensive ball.”

“You don’t know what golf is to an intellectual man,” said Calley.

He went away after lunch and Jim was thankful. Ordinarily, golf talk mildly interested. Today it was torture.

At three-thirty the Brown Girl came into Gresham Street. He was watching her from the shadow of the doorway, and, waiting until the little drama had been played out and the woman in the plaid shawl had left her, he quickened his pace and overtook her as she turned the corner of the street.

“Forgive me the unpardonable liberty,” he stammered, hat in hand, “but I was worried . . . I wondered, I mean, if your ankle was better?”

For a second she looked at him distrustfully.

“Yes; it is quite well. It is kind of you to ask.”

Here he was at a loss to find an excuse to continue the conversation, but he was desperate.

“There is something I should like to say to you, Miss——”

He saw alarm in her eyes and cursed himself for being the cause.

“Jones—Ella Jones. My name isn’t Jones, really, but I can’t tell you . . .” she said. “I’m afraid I can’t wait . . . I have an appointment . . . you aren’t Signor Vallassini, are you?”

The question took him aback.

“No,” he said. “I’m not. I’m—not Signor . . . I didn’t catch the name?”

“It doesn’t matter—besides, I ought to have known that you weren’t Italian. Oh!”

She was frightened now, looking at him with wide-opened eyes.

“You’re . . . a detective!” she gasped.

He hadn’t the presence of mind, nor yet the power of speech, to deny the charge.

“Will you come with me, please?” she asked hurriedly, and he accompanied her in silence to the waiting car. She gave some instructions to the driver and then stepped in. Jim followed, his heart beating wildly.

A detective? What had she to fear and who was Signor Whatever-his-name was? Into what tangle of trouble had this beautiful girl strayed?

“I won’t ask you who you are, but I have a feeling that you have been watching me.”

She waited for him to speak.

“Yes,” he hesitated. “I have been . . .”

“For long?”

He nodded miserably.

“And you have seen me give the envelope to the agent?”

“To the old lady,” he said, and she bit her lower lip.

“I meant ‘old lady,’ ” she said. “You think it is strange, but I cannot explain. There are others involved—it is not my secret.”

“I’m sure it isn’t,” said Jim. “My name, by the way, is Jim——”

“Don’t tell me!” she begged earnestly. “I don’t think it would be fair to you. You are doing your duty and it is hateful of me even to suggest that you can be bought——”

“I’m not a detective,” said Jim. “Believe me, Miss Jones, I’m *not* a detective. I’m a very prosaic stockbroker, but if there is anything in the world I can do for you, I’d . . . I’d die to serve you!”

There was no mistaking his sincerity. Startled as she was by his passionate declaration, she recognized the earnestness of the man by her side. She went red and white, and then:

“I wonder if I can trust you?” she asked in a low voice.

Jim Berkley could only nod rapidly. He was incapable of speech.

“I can’t tell you the whole story,” she said, “but briefly it is this. My father, as a young man, lived in Italy and became, half in fun, half for the adventure of the thing, a member of a secret society. When he left Italy he thought the matter was ended, and indeed for many years the Milani—that was the name of the gang—left him alone. He became rich and married. A year ago he received a summons from the Milani, calling on him to assassinate——”

She mentioned a name revered in certain political circles, detested in others, and Jim gasped.

“Alternatively he was to pay a certain sum of money every day. They refused to accept a lump sum, wishing to give him a daily reminder of his obligations to the gang. Every day I come to Gresham Street, where I am met by one of the emissaries of the Milani——”

“That old woman?” asked Jim incredulously.

“That old woman,” nodded the girl; “poor dear, I’m sure she doesn’t realize the dreadful character of her errand, or the kind of people she is working for. The head of the movement is a villain named Vallassini—an Italian.”

“But why doesn’t your father inform the police?” asked Jim.

“He would be shot dead tomorrow,” said the girl. “No, that isn’t the way out. I have thought of a dozen.”

“If you can tell me in what way I can help,” said the fervent Jim, “I’ll do anything!”

The car was passing through the streets of Bloomsbury. They might have been running along the top of the great wall of China for all that Jim noticed. He was conscious only of this vital and blessed fact. He was alone with the Brown Girl, her sleeve touched his, her little shoe was against his. He touched it furtively.

“There is one thing you could do,” she said, “but it would involve such risks that I hardly dare ask you. You have been a soldier?”

“Yes—who hasn’t?” said Jim, daring to smile for the first time. “And please do not worry about risks. There is nothing on earth I wouldn’t face ——”

“I’m sure,” she said hastily; “but this is no ordinary risk. I want to know where these people live. Especially the Italian.”

“Vaselini?” asked Jim. “I can remember his name by thinking of cold cream.”

“Vallassini,” corrected the girl; “the woman goes to him every day. Follow her . . . yet I hate asking you. These people are desperate——”

Jim drew a long breath.

“So am I,” he said; “I’m desperately anxious to help you.”

She dropped him at the end of Portland Place. It was a coincidence that she chose this spot, and this time he held her hand a little longer.

"You will see me tomorrow. After the old woman has left me, follow her. I will meet you . . . where?"

Outside the Regent's Park Station he suggested, and to this she agreed.

It required a little maneuvering to get away from the office next day. Calley was in one of his rare working moods.

"Going home?" he said in surprise, and looked up at the clock. "Well, perhaps you're right . . . I've a good mind to go myself. I'll walk with you."

"Don't trouble," said Jim in haste. "I'm—I'm meeting somebody quite close at hand."

"Somebody romantic, I hope," said Calley, crudely sarcastic.

Jim did not trouble to reply. Again he watched the meeting, but this time he followed the little old woman. He saw the girl pause at the corner of Moorgate Street and look back; he sensed approval and gratitude in that glance, and his heart swelled with pride.

The woman in the plaid shawl made her slow way across Southwark Bridge. On the other side she boarded a car and Jim followed. . . .

At eight o'clock that night he met the girl at the appointed rendezvous.

"Your old woman's name is Murphy. She has a fruit stall near the Exchange, and she lives at 47 Paton Street, Herne Hill—she has one room," he reported. "She has twice been in the hands of the police for violent assaults on other ladies of her calling, but of late years, owing to infirmity and her conversion to the temperance movement, she has lived a fairly uneventful life."

"And Vallassini?"

Jim shook his head.

"Nobody knows him; the old woman has no visitors so far as I can discover."

They were pacing together the deserted pavement of Park Crescent. It was very dark and once, when her foot slipped, she caught Jim's arm and did not let it go.

"I want to ask you something," said Jim huskily, after they had walked to and fro for a quarter of an hour, mainly in silence; "I want to ask you

something.”

She inclined her head.

“I love you,” said Jim.

He felt the arm in his shiver—but she did not take it away.

“I love you dearly . . . I have loved you ever since I first saw you. You are my dream girl . . . the mystery I have worshipped . . .”

“Oh, please!” she whispered imploringly. “I can’t . . .”

“I want you to marry me. I am . . . well known . . . I mean I’m not . . . I mean I can give you a position.”

“Oh, Jim!” she murmured, and he stooped and kissed her.

“My father will be furious,” she said in a muffled voice. He was holding her very tightly at the time. “But I do love you . . . and I don’t know your name even, except Jim . . . and I hate the thought of marriage and all the fuss that people make.”

“I loathe it too, darling. I want to run away to some quiet registry office ____”

“That’s just how I feel—but we’ll have to tell father.”

“I suppose so,” said Jim. “Of course we must tell him. Why not now?”

She did not answer at once.

“Mother will be horrified,” she said, “and father will hate you. He has always wanted me to marry a rich man—are you rich?”

Jim laughed and kissed her again. He needed very little excuse.

“I’m not poor,” he said. “Who was the man?”

“An awful person. I’ve never met him, but he must be a terrible prig. He thinks women are commonplace, and he says he’ll not marry until he meets the ideal woman. I hate being trotted out for inspection like a prize horse that has to impress the purchaser, so the only time he came to dinner I went to bed.”

“The brute!” said Jim. “Do I know him?”

“You may do. He’s well known in the city—James Calcott Berkley.”

“Eh?” said Jim Berkley hollowly.

“Do you know him? You must. Daddy has always poked fun at me because I am romantic. I love romance and all that is colorable in life. I love all that is

out of the beaten ways. At first daddy's story thrilled me—then it frightened me. When he asked me to help him, I was glad—because he is a dear, even though he sneers at things that are precious to me. He always says I'll never find romance in this humdrum city—but he's wrong!"

She squeezed his arm and he kissed her again. He was calm now.

"What is your father's name, darling?" he asked softly.

"Cæsar Calley—of Berkley & Calley."

"Cæsar Calley!" repeated Jim. "Do you mind if we don't tell your father, Ella? Do you mind if I get a license tomorrow and we're married secretly the next day—that will be Thursday?"

She put up her face to his.

"Yes . . . I have an idea that father is playing golf on Thursday."

"I have an idea that he isn't," said Jim Berkley.

So on Thursday morning they were married, and Cæsar Calley, with his golf clubs propped against his desk, waited impatiently for the arrival of his junior partner to release him for his match. In a sense the day was spoilt for Mr. Cæsar Calley. In another sense it was the happiest day of his life.

When the telegram came, he sat back and smiled and did not stop smiling all day.

As the bells of St. Olives chimed the half-hour after three, he went down into Gresham Street and interviewed the old apple woman in the plaid shawl.

"The young lady hasn't come, sir," she said.

"No, and she won't come any more, Mrs. Murphy," said Cæsar Calley as he opened his note-case. "You'll miss the little money I sent you every day, but here is sufficient to last you for a year."

The little old woman took the notes and slid them into her skirt-pocket.

"Five shillings a day you used to send me," she quavered, "and I never earnt money easier. Not quite right in her head, you said, sir?" she asked.

"She's recovered now," said the shameless Calley; "quite recovered!"

Discovering Rex

In the office of the Public Prosecutor was a young lawyer named Keddler, for whom the prospects were of the brightest until he grew impatient with the type of evidence which was supplied him by the painstaking but unimaginative constabulary, and went out single-handed to better their efforts. And he succeeded so remarkably well that a reluctant Commissioner of Police admitted his superiority as a detective and offered him a post at New Scotland Yard.

This offer was enthusiastically accepted, but since the regulations do not admit of amateur police work and he found himself relegated to the legal department, where his work consisted of preparing statements of evidence for his successor at the P.P. office to examine, he resigned at the end of six months. To return to his former position was, at the time, impossible, and against the advice of his friends and in face of solemn warnings from his old chief, he opened an office in the city of London, describing himself as an "Investigating Agent."

Despite the gloomy predictions of his associates, John Keddler grew both opulent and famous. The opulence was welcome, but the fame was embarrassing, not that John was unduly modest, but because it led on three occasions to his identification at a moment when it was vitally necessary that he should be unknown to the persons who detected him.

Starting on a small job for the Midland and County Bank, a matter of a forged acceptance, in which the real police had failed to satisfy the bank, he enlarged his clientele until he found himself working amicably with Scotland Yard in the matter of Rex Jowder, alias Tom the Toy, alias Lambert Sollon.

Rex was wanted urgently by several police departments for insurance fraud, impersonation, theft, forgery, and general larceny, but only the insurance fraud was really important because it involved a well-known Chicago house in a loss of 700,000 dollars, which they were anxious to recover before Rex, who was notoriously careless when he handled other people's money, dissipated his fortune in riotous living. John Keddler was commissioned by the London agents of the company to bring about this desirable result, but unfortunately the lean, shrewd thief had learnt from an indiscreet newspaper that John was his principal danger, and had spent two days waiting in the country lane in which the detective's modest little house was situated, and one dark night when John descended from his car to open the

gates of his demesne, six pounds weight of sand had fallen upon his shoulder. The sand was enclosed in a sausage-shaped bag, and it was intended for his neck.

Taken at this disadvantage Keddler was almost helpless and would have ceased to worry Mr. Jowder until the inevitable give and take of the Day of Judgment, only the assailant had placed himself in an unfavorable position to follow up his attack, though it was helpful to him that the red rear light of the car reflected on the polished steel of the gun John pulled mechanically.

He dived to the cover of a hedge and ran, and John Keddler had been so respectably brought up that he hesitated to scandalize the neighborhood by discharging firearms to the public danger. In some respects John Keddler was a slave of convention. But this mild adventure served to concentrate his mind and attention still more closely upon the case of Rex Jowder, and so well did he work that at the end of a week there was a police raid upon a certain safe deposit in the city, and there was discovered the bulk of the stolen money which the misguided Jowder had cached (as he believed) beyond the fear of discovery.

Why this raid was carried out is a story made up of John's instinct, a drunken man, a frightened woman (Rex was strong for ladies' society), and an indiscreet reference, repeated by his terrorized lady friend, to a mysterious key which hung about his neck. He would have been captured also, only the police were a little over-elaborate in their preparations.

With his money gone, the fruit of two years' clever and dangerous work, Rex Jowder became something more than annoyed. Before him was a life sentence, and standing at the focal point of his misfortune was one John Keddler. From the point of view of the insurance company whose gratitude he had earned, John was not a "good life."

"What about Jowder?" asked his confidential clerk.

"Jowder can wait," said John. "As a matter of fact I am not very much interested in the man any longer."

But the man was very much interested in John, and he was content to wait too, though his waiting had to be done in a mean Lambeth lodging.

As for John Keddler, he accepted in a joyous holiday spirit the commission which followed the loss of Lady Bresswell's jewelry, for Lady Bresswell lived on the Lake of Como, and John was partial to the Italian lakes. Incidentally this visit was to introduce him to the Marchessa Della Garda—that unhappy lady.

From the first the wisdom of Mona Harringay's marriage bristled with notes of interrogation—those little sickles that trim the smothering overgrowth of truth.

There was no doubt that the Della Garda family hated the Marchessa with a hatred born of an enormous disappointment. They referred to Mona as "The Señora Pelugnera" (they affected Spanish by virtue of their descent from the Borgias), and "Mrs. Hairdresser" was adopted to keep fresh the ghastly fact that Mona's father was the very rich proprietor of Harringay's Elixir for the Hair.

The marriage was in every way an amazing one, for Giocomi was no impoverished third cousin of the real nobility. Head of the Della Garda clan and immensely wealthy, the ordinary excuses and explanations of a marriage between an Italian marquis and the daughter of a rich American were wanting. They had met in Harringay's Long Island home where Giocomi was a guest. He was making his first long absence from the Continent of Europe. Therefore he was home-sick and miserable when he met Mona, and their marriage was the natural reaction. She, for her part, was fascinated by his good looks and a little overwhelmed by the impetuosity of his wooing. The wedding was the social event of a brilliant season.

Not until the liner was clear of Sandy Hook did Giocomi Della Garda emerge from his delirium, and face the certainty of his relatives' wrath. For all his good looks and his perfect manners, he was not a nice young man. He had, in particular, a weakness for approval, one of the most fatal to which the human soul is liable, and the nearer to Genoa the vessel came, the more and more he resented the existence of a wife who had already surrendered her mystery, that lure which had led Giocomi into so many adventures, but which had never before yielded him a wife.

Mona, Marchessa Della Garda, realized the bleak failure of her life long before she came home to the cold, oppressive atmosphere of the gloomy palace which had housed sixteen generations of the family. Neither the cold majesty of the Pallacco Della Garda, nor the exotic splendors of the Villa Mendoza, set amidst the loveliness of Lake Como, brought compensation to a disillusioned heart-sick girl. But her one and only visit to the Como home was not without its consequences. Lady Bresswell, a grateful and somewhat voluble lady (her lost jewels recovered without the scandal which would have attended the investigations of the police), was showing John Keddler the glories of the lake. They had brought her ladyship's expensive motor-boat to a rest near Cadenabbia, and the servants were spreading lunch when round a tiny headland came a boat, the sole occupant of which was a girl.

She pulled with long, steady strokes and seemed oblivious to their presence, although she only passed them a dozen yards away.

John Keddler, a man to whom all women were very much alike, gazed at her fascinated. The sun in her russet gold hair, the appealing sadness of her delicate face, the sweep of her perfect figure, took his breath away. It was as though he had seen a vision of some other world.

He watched her until she brought the boat to a white landing-stage, and stepping out and tying the boat, had disappeared behind a great fuchsia bush.

Then he heaved a long sigh, and like a man waking from a dream turned to meet the laughing eyes of his hostess.

"Who was that?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"I've told you twice, Mr. Keddler," smiled Lady Bresswell, "but you were so absorbed that you didn't hear me. She is lovely, isn't she?"

"Who is she?"

"The Marchessa Della Garda, an American girl who married Giocomi—poor dear. Giocomi is rather a beast."

"Oh," said John, and that was all he said.

Sixteen generations on her father's side of hairdressers, general workers, coal-miners, and peasants had supplied Mona Della Garda with the capacity for endurance and patience, but on her mother's side, she went back to some quick-drawing folks who had made the lives of successive western sheriffs exasperatingly lively, and when, some six months after John Keddler had seen her, Giocomi followed a flagrant breach of his marriage vows by boxing her ears, she took a pistol from the drawer of her dressing-table.

There was excellent reason for this act, for Giocomi was weeping with rage at her mild reproach and had flung off to his room in search of a hunting-crop. Following him went Pietro Roma, his valet, also in tears, for this man worshipped the young Marchessa and would have died for her. It nearly happened that he did, for in frenzy at his interference, Giocomi clubbed him into insensibility with the heavy end of the stock. He never used the whip.

The major-domo of his establishment, attending the cracked head of the valet, heard a shot and mistook it for the crack of a whip, until the Marchessa came downstairs wearing a heavy carriage coat over her evening dress and carrying her jewel-case in her hand. Even then, he did no more than wonder why the illustrious lady should go abroad on a night of storm.

Later came doctors, examining magistrates, and, one by one, white-faced Della Gardas to take counsel together. More than a week passed and Giocomi Della Garda was laid away in the dingy family vaults of SS. Theresa and Joseph, before the name of John Keddler was mentioned.

It came about that news reached Rome of Pietro Roma, who disappeared with a broken head the day after his master's death and had been seen in London.

"If she is in London too," said Philip Della Garda thoughtfully, "you may be sure that she will never be discovered. The English and Americans work hand in hand, and they will do everything that is humanly possible to cover up her tracks. I am all for employing the man Keddler. He recovered Lady Bresswell's jewelry last summer, and even at the British Embassy they speak of him with respect."

Prince Paolo Crecivicca, his kinsman, stroked his white beard.

"I shall never be happy until this woman is brought to trial," he said, "and I agree that this infernal rascal, Pietro, is probably in communication with her, for, according to Dellimono, he was the man who betrayed to 'The Hairdresser' poor Giocomi's little affair with the Scala girl, and these vulgarians would be on terms of friendship. Employ Mr. Keddler by all means. Wire to him at once."

John Keddler arrived in Rome thirty-six hours later—no miracle this, with the London-Paris, Paris-Milan, Milan-Rome air services in full operation. Though he answered the summons in such a hurry that Philip Della Garda not unnaturally believed he was eager for the job, he displayed no remarkable enthusiasm for the undertaking. Particularly was this apathy noticeable after all that Prince Crecivicca described as the "unfortunate facts" were revealed.

"In England, of course, she would be acquitted," he said, a little stiffly, "and even in Italy—do you think it is wise to bring this matter before your courts? The publicity . . . the scandal. . .?"

Philip Della Garda showed his small teeth in a smile.

"We are superior to public opinion," he said smugly. "Had this happened two hundred years ago we would have dealt with the Hairdresser without invoking the assistance of the courts. As it is——"

As it was explained by the Della Gardas in chorus, this woman must be subjected to the humiliations of a trial, whatever be the jurors' verdict.

"Of course," said John politely. "Have you a photograph of the lady?"

Not until then did he realize that he had been sent to track the woman of his dreams—the woman who had no name to him but “The Girl in the Boat.” They saw him frown and a queer expression come to his face.

“I will do my best,” he said.

When he had gone, leaving his employers with a sense of dissatisfaction, Philip Della Garda, accounted by his friends as something of a sportsman, had an inspiration.

“*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*” he demanded pedantically. “I will go to London myself.”

Passing through Paris, Keddler was seen by a journalist who happened to be on the aviation ground, and it was his speculative note on the occurrence which Mona Della Garda read in her Battersea lodging:

> “Among the famous people who now use the air express for their continental travels is Mr. John Keddler, the well-known private detective. Mr. Keddler, in an interview, says he finds the air-way an invaluable boon. He had been called to Rome in connection with the Della Garda murder, and was able to make the return journey in a little over twenty-four hours—a journey which ordinarily would have taken four to five days. He left immediately for London, and hopes to bring about the arrest of the Marchessa in a very short time.”

Of course, John Keddler said nothing about the Della Garda murder, or his hopes. He had grunted a “good afternoon” at the enterprising press agent of the Aviation Company, and there began and ended the interview—but Mona Della Garda, reading this paragraph, fell into a blind panic.

For now, the sustaining heat of righteous anger had departed from her, and the strain of the sixteen barber generations—they had been law-abiding and for the most part timorous barbers, with exalted views on the sanctity of human life—was asserting its pull. Murder in any degree was to them merely a phenomenon of the Sunday newspapers, as remote from reality as the moons of Saturn.

“I wonder, miss, if you ever read them agony columns in the newspapers?” asked Mrs. Flemmish one morning.

Mrs. Flemmish was her landlady and a woman from the Wessex borders of Devon, a woman of rolled sleeves and prodigious energy, whose stoves were brighter than the panels of limousines.

Mona had found her room by accident and was perfectly served, for Mrs. Flemmish had unbounded faith in the spoken word of her sex, and never doubted that "Miss Smith" was a young lady who wrote for the press. Mona had to excuse her feverish interest in the daily newspapers.

"Yes—yes," said Mona, going white. She lost her color readily in these days, and her frequent pallors gave her delicate face a fragility which Mrs. Flemmish in secret accepted as a symptom of lung trouble.

"I'd like to know who this 'Dad' is who keeps on advertising to 'M.', telling her to communicant—communicate, I mean, with him. Where's Long Island, miss?"

"In—in America," said the girl hurriedly, "near New York."

"I suppose she's run away from home," ruminated Mrs. Flemmish. "Girls be girls all over the world—but she ought to let her father know, don't ye think so, Miss Smith?"

Mona nodded. How could she let him know, other than by letter, and a letter was on its way. Mr. Harringay would pass that epistle in mid-ocean, for he had caught the first east-bound liner, a greatly distracted man.

If she could only get into touch with the devoted Pietro. The poor fellow was in London, searching for her—a mad search, since he would be followed, and he could not find her without also betraying her.

A thought came to her on the third evening after the return of John Keddler. There had been some reference to Pietro in the newspapers. A reporter had found him amongst the outcast and homeless on the Thames Embankment one night, and had secured a "good story" from him. Perhaps he slept there every night? She would search for him. A man's help might save her—even the help of this poor devoted servant.

"I am going out tonight, Mrs. Flemmish," she said.

Mrs. Flemmish made a little grimace.

"It's not a good night for ye, mum," she shook her head. "There's one of them Lunnon fogs workin' up. Did ye read the paper tonight about the Eye-talian lady, miss?"

Mona's heart almost stopped beating.

"N—no," she said; "is there any fresh—which Italian lady?" she asked.

Mrs. Flemmish had settled herself down in the chintz-covered arm-chair and was stirring the fire economically.

“They a’ set a detective on her, poor creature,” she said. “Do you think ’twas her father that put the advertisement in the paper?”

Mona had a grip of herself now.

“Perhaps,” she answered steadily, and Mrs. Flemmish, staring in the orange depths of the fire, nodded.

“If I were her, her bein’ a rich young woman, I know what I’d do, *ees fay*!”

Mona frowned. She had never looked to this sturdy country woman for a solution to her agonizing problems.

“What would you do?” she asked slowly.

“I’d marry a young Englishman,” nodded Mrs. Flemmish. “My man were in a lawyer’s office an’ clever he was, as all the Welsh people are, an’ often he’s told me that you can’t arrest an Englishwoman in England for a crime in foreign parts.”

The girl could only stare. That solution had not occurred to her, and if it had, she would have rejected it, for even the enthusiastic scientist is not prone to repeat the experiment which cost him everything short of life by its failure.

“Her has money, by all accounts,” said the woman, feeling furtively between the bars of the fire to dislodge a glowing piece of slate. “Her could buy a husband and divorce him, and even when she was divorced her’d be safe.”

Mona stood for a long time pinching her red lips in thought, and Mrs. Flemmish turned her head to see if she was still there, a movement that startled the girl into activity.

“I’ll go now, Mrs. Flemmish,” she said hastily. “I have the key . . .”

A light yellow mist lay upon the streets, which were crowded even at this late hour, for it was Christmas week, as the cheery contents of the shop windows showed. Great blobs of golden light looming through the fog marked the blazing windows of the stores, and she passed through a road lined with stalls that showed vivid coloring under the flaring, pungent naphtha lamps.

She checked a sob that rose in her throat at the memory of other Christmas weeks, and hurried her pace, glad, at last, to reach the bleakness of the bridge that crossed a gray void where the river had been.

A taxi-cab carried her to the West End, and this she dismissed in the darkest corner of Trafalgar Square, making her way on foot toward Northumberland Avenue. She had to pass under the brilliant portico lights of

the Grand Hotel, and had disappeared into the gloom beyond, before the young man who was standing on the step waiting for his car, realized it was she.

She heard his startled exclamation, and looking back in affright, recognizing Philip Della Garda, ran. Swiftly, blindly through the thickening fog she flew, crossing the wide thoroughfare and turning backward into Craven Street.

Philip Della Garda!

He hated London in the best of seasons. There could be only one incentive to his presence in the raw of December, and she was terrified. They would arrest her and take her back to Italy and a lifelong imprisonment. She had heard stories, horrifying stories, of the Italian prisons, where the convicted murderers were buried in an underground cell away from light and human companionship in the very silence of death. None spoke to them, neither guardian nor priest. They lived speechless until the thick darkness drove them mad.

She could have shrieked; the terror thus magnified by the uncanny mirk in which she now moved had assumed a new and more hideous significance.

Marriage could save her! It was this mad panic thought that sent her hurrying along the Strand, peering into the faces of men who loomed from the nothingness of the fog and passed, none dreaming of her quest. There were men who leered at her, men who stared resentfully at the eager scrutiny she gave them in the fractional space of a second that the light allowed.

And then the inspiration came, and she hurried down a steep slippery street to the Thames Embankment. The benches were already filled with huddled figures, so wrapped in their thread-bare coats that it was almost impossible to tell that they were human.

“May I speak to you?”

Her heart was beating a stifling tattoo as she sat down in the one unoccupied space which Providence had left by the side of the man whose face she had glimpsed in the light thrown by a passing tramway car.

Instantly she had made her decision. There was a certain refinement revealed in the lean face, a sense of purpose which seemed out of tune with his situation. He did not answer her, but drew more closely to the wreck that slumbered noisily at his side.

“I—I don’t know how to begin,” she said breathlessly, “but I’m in great trouble. I—I must tell you the truth; the police are searching for me for

something I did in Italy——”

She stopped, physically unable to go on.

“The police are searching for you, are they?” There was an undercurrent of amusement in the man’s words. “Well, I sympathize with you—I’m being sought for at this particular moment.”

She shrank back almost imperceptibly, but he noticed the movement and laughed. She recovered herself. She must go on now to the bitter end.

“Are you British?” she asked, and after a second’s hesitation he nodded. “Are you married?” He shook his head. “If I gave you money—a lot of money, would you—would you marry me—at once?”

He half turned and stared at her.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because if—if I became British by marriage they would not arrest me. I only want your name—I will pay you—anything, anything!”

Her voice was husky, and the underlying fear in it was not to be mistaken.

“I see,” he said; “you want to be naturalized by marriage. That’s the idea?”

She nodded.

“Could it be done—quickly?”

The man rubbed his chin.

“I think it could be done,” he said. “Tomorrow is Thursday. If I gave notice we could marry Saturday—where do you live?”

She told him and he rubbed his chin again.

“It might be done,” he said. “I’ve got a sort of claim to Battersea. If I—anyway you can meet me at the registrar’s on Saturday at twelve. What is your name?”

She told him that and gave him the other particulars he asked. He seemed to be thinking the matter over, for he did not speak for a long time. A policeman strolled past, flashing his lantern in their direction, and he dropped his head.

“There is one thing I want to say,” said Mona desperately. It took all her courage to tell him this. “I only want your name. When—when it is all over I shall divorce you . . . you understand?”

“H’m,” said the man, and got up.

“Let’s walk along,” he said. “I’ll take you as far as Westminster Bridge, and you don’t mind if I cross the road occasionally; it might be very awkward if I met a certain person, if I was with you.”

The man kept close to the parapet, Mona nodded, and they were abreast of Cleopatra’s Needle when he caught her arm and drew her to the recess. The fog had lifted and he had seen a tall saunterer walking near the kerb and scrutinizing the sleepers on the bench.

The searcher did not see them, and the man at Mona’s side looked after him.

“If you weren’t here,” he said softly, “I’d have settled an old score with that gentleman.”

He left her at the end of the Embankment and Mona went home, not daring to think. The next day was a day of torture. She was placing her life in the hands of a man who, by his own confession, was a fugitive from justice. And yet . . . she must do it, she must, she must, she told herself vehemently.

That morning the newspapers had given greater prominence to the Della Garda murder. There was an interview with Philip Della Garda, who had seen her and had told of his recognition in half a column of closely set type. From this newspaper, too, she had a clue as to the identity of her future husband. She found it in a note dealing with the activities of John Keddler.

> “Mr. Keddler, who has been commissioned by the Della Garda family to assist the police in their search, is also on the track of Rex Jowder, an international swindler, supposed to be of British origin, who is wanted for frauds both in London and New York.”

In a flash it came to her. That saunterer was Keddler—the man who was tracking her down, and her chosen husband was an international swindler! She wrung her hands in despair, and for a second wavered in her resolution.

Nevertheless, a sleepless night spent in a painful weighing of this advantage against that peril, brought her to the registrar’s office.

She carried with her a large portion of the money she had brought from Italy—happily, in view of a flight from the tyrannies of Giocomi Della Garda, she had kept a considerable sum in the house. She realized with consternation that she had fixed no sum; would he be satisfied with the four thousand pounds she brought to him? But what did that matter? Once she was married, she would be free to communicate with her father, and he would satisfy the most extravagant demands of her husband.

There was only one fear in her heart as she walked through the pelting rain to the dingy little office. Would the man repent of his bargain—or worse, would he be unable to keep the appointment? Both aspects of her doubt were cleared as soon as she set foot in the outer lobby of the office. He was waiting, looking more presentable than she had expected. His raincoat was buttoned to the chin and she thought him good looking in the daylight.

"I had the certificate made out in your maiden name," he said in a low voice. "It makes no difference to the legality of the marriage."

She nodded, and opening a door, they stepped into a chilly-looking office, and to the presence of an elderly man who sat writing slowly and laboriously at a big desk.

He glanced up over his spectacles.

"Oh yes—Mr.—er——" He looked helplessly at the certificate he was filling. "Yes—yes, I won't keep you young people longer than a few moments."

They sat down and Mona utilized the respite.

"Here is the money," she whispered, and pushed a roll of notes into his outstretched hand.

He took the notes without any great display of interest and coolly slipped them into the pocket of his raincoat without troubling to count them.

Presently the old man rose and beckoned them.

As in a dream Mona Della Garda heard his monotonous voice, and then a ring was pressed upon her cold finger.

"That's that," said her husband cheerfully. "Now come along and have some food—you look half dead."

She stared from him to the golden circlet on her hand.

"But—but I don't want to go with you," she stammered in her agitation. "It was understood . . . I leave you now . . . but you must tell me where I can find you."

"Young lady," the man's voice was not unkind, "I have taken a few risks for you and you must do something for me. There is a gentleman waiting in the rain for me; he has been trailing me all the morning, and my only chance of escaping a disagreeable occurrence is in your companionship."

"But I don't want . . ." she began, and seeing his face, "Very well, I will go with you to a restaurant."

He nodded and they went out in the rain together. Three paces they had taken when there was a sound like the sharp crack of a whip. Something like an angry bee in terrific flight snapped past Mona's face, and her husband leapt at a man who was standing half a dozen paces away. Again came the explosion, but this time the bullet went high, and in a second she was the terrified spectator of two men at grips.

The struggle did not last long. Three policemen came from nowhere and one of the men was seized. The other came back to her wiping the mud from his coat.

"I didn't think he was such a blackguard," he said.

She could only look at him in wide-eyed fear.

"Who was he?" she gasped.

"A fellow named Rex Jowder," said her husband; "he's been looking for me for a month."

"Then you . . .?"

"I'm John Keddler," he smiled, "and I think I've lost a good client. Come along and lunch and I'll tell you how you can get your divorce—I'm a bit of a lawyer, you know. Besides which I'd like to return all that money you gave me."

Whether or not, in the complicated terms of the Extradition Treaty between Italy and Britain, Mona Keddler could have been tried in London for a crime committed in Rome, no jurist would commit himself to say. John Keddler in his wisdom did not challenge a decision. He had an interview with his furious employer, who threatened and stormed—and went home. Mona he sent to a place of safety until the storm blew over; but the storm was the mildest of breezes.

The winter turned to spring and the spring to summer. The Italian Government notified all persons concerned that the Della Garda "affair" would be regarded as a lamentable family tragedy, for which nobody could be held liable; and the summer came to autumn again before Mona Keddler sailed for New York.

The question of divorce, in spite of many meetings at luncheon, dinner, and tea-tables, had never been properly discussed by either. It was not until the evening before she sailed for New York that Mona Keddler asked the question

that had puzzled her so through the six months of her curiously pleasant married life.

"I cannot quite understand, Jack, why you did it," she said.

"Did what?"

She hesitated.

"Married me," she said. "It has practically ruined your career, for I don't see just how we can divorce one another without . . . well, without unpleasantness. The divorce laws are so horribly strict in England. And you are married—without a wife. It was selfish, miserably selfish of me to let you do it—but why did you?"

He was unusually grave.

"For the last reason in the world you would suspect," he said.

"But what?" she asked.

Here he was adamantine.

"I'll keep my mystery," he said, "but I'll write my reason in a letter, if you swear you will not break the seal of the envelope until your ship is on the high seas."

She promised, and he watched the *Olympic* drift from the pier at Southampton with a little ache at his heart that nothing could assuage—watched until the trim figure on the promenade deck and the handkerchief she waved were indistinguishable from other figures and other wildly waving handkerchiefs.

Then he went back to town, heavy hearted, feeling that life was almost done with.

At that moment Mona Keddler was reading for the fortieth time the scrawled words in pencil:

"Because I loved you from the day I saw you rowing on the Lake of Como."

Her trunks were piled on the deck and she was watching the low-lying shores of France with a light in her eyes which no man had ever seen.

John Keddler had forgotten that the ship called at Cherbourg on the outward voyage.

The Man in the Golf Hut

He walked down the stairs from the great man's study, and at every two steps he came to a halt as some new aspect of the situation appeared to him. He had an absurd desire to sit down on the heavily carpeted treads and take his time over his musings, and once or twice he did lean on the sloping and massive handrail to allow himself a physical ease that his mind might work with greater smoothness.

Of course, the whole thing was madness—stark lunacy, and the greatest, least reasonable, most extravagant of all the lunacies was John Jenner's sublime egotism. *His* name must be protected; *his* honor must be avenged; *he* must face the world without blush or reproach.

Bobby Mackenzie chuckled hysterically but internally.

There were seven more stairs to descend before he came to the broad landing from whence one reached the drawing-room and Leslie Jenner.

"Phew!" said Bobby, drew a handkerchief from his sleeve, and wiped his brow.

He went down two steps and lingered . . . down three more and halted, drumming the handrail with nervous fingers . . . then boldly took the last two together, strode across the landing, laid a resolute hand upon the doorknob, and found his knees shaking.

And yet he was a sturdy young man, good and healthy looking, practised in the ways of social intercourse and one who was not unused to meeting difficult situations. Once, in a shattered trench fronting the Hindenburg line, he had pushed nerve-shattered men into action with a ribald jest which had become an army classic. At this moment he did not feel humorous.

He turned the knob with an effort of will which would have nerved a condemned man to put the rope about his own neck.

A girl was standing against the fireplace, her back to him. She did not look round even when he banged the door. He saw her shoulders shake, and looked back at the door.

"Miss Jenner," he said huskily, "don't . . . don't . . .!"

She turned, and he gasped.

"You were . . . laughing?" he asked incredulously.

“Of course I was laughing,” she scoffed. “Isn’t it laughable—father’s absurd scheme?”

He nodded very slowly. He was very fond of Leslie Jenner. Every man was fond of her—a wisp of a girl, light-treading, lissome, quick-thinking.

“I told you some of the story before you went up to father,” she said. “I suppose he told you the rest?”

“I suppose he did,” he admitted carefully.

“He told you that I had spent the night with an unknown man in the golf hut?” she said.

He nodded again.

“I’ll tell you the rest.” She settled herself on a fender-seat and pointed to the big arm-chair opposite to her. Bobby seated himself meekly.

“I’d been to the Winslows,” she said; “they’re great pals of father’s. Old Winslow is one of the two gods of finance whom father worships; father is the other. They had a birthday party—one of their numberless children has reached twenty-one without mishap, and naturally they wanted everybody to rejoice and be exceeding glad. Daddy was going, but something colossal happened at the last minute—steel rose an eighth or lard fell a twenty-fourth or something—and naturally the world stopped revolving. I went alone—Winslows’ place is about twelve miles out of town, and you have to cross a piece of waste land that is called Smoke Park. It is a desolation and an abomination——”

“Must you be scriptural?” pleaded Bobby. “I only ask because your parent has been——”

“The Book of Job?” interrupted the girl quickly—“ ‘He hath made me a byword to the people, and I am become an open abhorring’—I thought he might. Well, to continue this strange story. Nothing happened at the dance except that I saw you flirting outrageously with Sybil Thorbern——”

“Flirting!” groaned Bobby. “Oh lord!—well, go on.”

“Anyway, you were talking most earnestly to her—Jack Marsh pointed out that fact.”

“He would,” said Bobby. “I’m hardly likely to flirt with the wife of my best pal—but go on.”

“Coming back at a little after midnight,” she continued, “my car stopped. There was oil where gas should have been or gas where oil was due, I can’t tell

you. Anyway, Anderson, that's the chauffeur, disappeared into the interior of the bonnet and remained, uttering strangled moans from time to time, and emerging at intervals to apologize for the weather. You see, being a warm night I went in an open car, without hood or anything, and it began to rain like . . . like . . ."

"Hell," suggested the sympathetic man in the chair.

"Yes—thank you. I was getting wet through, and I remembered that there was a shelter—a small respectable hut which had been erected for golfers—we were on the course when we finally went dead. Without saying a word to Anderson, I tripped daintily along a path and found the hut. By this time it was raining—um—well, as you said. The door of the hut was closed, but it opened readily enough and I stepped inside. I was within hailing distance of the car, but the chauffeur had not seen me go, you understand?"

The other nodded.

"No sooner was I inside when I had a horrible feeling that there was somebody else there. I went spiney and shivery and made for the door. Before I could reach it somebody caught me by the arm. He was very gentle but very firm.

" 'If you shout,' he said, in a disguised voice—I knew the voice was disguised—'I'll knock your infernal head off!' "

"I see," said Bobby; "he was a gentleman."

"He wasn't bad," said the girl; "after that he was quite nice. He said that he hated doing this, but it was all for my good, and he hoped that I'd have the sense to see that he wouldn't have taken the step but for circumstances over which he had no control. In fact, it struck me that he was nervous himself."

"You couldn't see him?"

"No—it was absolutely dark. Then I heard the chauffeur's voice shout 'Are you there?' I was going to answer, but the man put his hand over my mouth. Then I heard the car drone down the road. Anderson thought I must have walked on, and went along to pick me up. I don't know what I said to the gentleman in the hut—I think I was offensive. He didn't seem to mind.

" 'You will stay here till one-thirty,' he said, 'and then you can go home.' "

"The brute! You were terribly frightened I suppose?" said Bobby.

"No—the queer thing is that I wasn't," replied the girl. "I just recognized that this was an unusual person. I even made up stories about him."

“Like what?” asked the interested Bobby.

“Well, perhaps he had committed a murder, an old feud, you know, and that sort of thing, and was making his escape when I came in upon him. I was puzzled about the one-thirty. Why did he want me to stay so long? Presently, however, I got a clue. There was a sound of a car coming along the road, and I saw its head-lamps appear over the rise. It was from the same direction as I had come, and stopped at identically the same spot where my car had stopped. I heard somebody get down, then I heard a whistle. And this is where the queerest part of the adventure began. My jailer literally pushed me into a corner of the hut.

“ ‘Don’t make a sound,’ he said quite fiercely, and then he walked to the door, opened it, and stepped out. I heard somebody say, ‘Is that you?’ and then my man replied in a horrid, gruff, growling voice: ‘Nothing doing!’ The other person made no reply, but I heard his feet scuttling back to the car, and presently the car moved on, working up to a terrific pace before it disappeared.”

“What did your man do?” asked Bobby.

“He came back,” said the girl, “and he was laughing as though at the greatest joke in the world. But it was no joking matter for him, for just as I started in to ask with all the dignity that I could command that he should escort me at once to my home, along came papa’s car from the opposite direction and pulled up near the golf hut. I heard father’s loud voice cursing Anderson.

“ ‘Of course she’s in the golf hut, you fool,’ he said. ‘Do you think a daughter of mine wouldn’t have sufficient sense to come in out of the rain? Give me one of those head-lamps.’

“He took the lamp in his hand, and then my jailer began to get agitated.

“ ‘Is he coming here?’ he whispered. ‘Who is it?’

“ ‘My father,’ I said very coldly.

“ ‘Your father!’ ”

“There was a kind of horror in his voice that went straight to my heart,” said Leslie. “He turned to me and asked: ‘What is your name?’ I told him, and I think he nearly dropped.”

“He didn’t realize how important a prisoner he had, I suppose?” suggested Bobby.

“Don’t be sarcastic—at any rate, father was no sooner on the path leading

up to the hut, when my ruffian threw open the door and bolted like a hare. I saw father's lamp turn in his direction, but daddy could only have caught a glimpse of his back. And then, Bobby," said the girl solemnly, "the fat was in the fire! Of course, if I'd had a glimmer of intelligence, I should have told father the truth and stuck to my story."

"Though it was an extremely improbable one," said Bobby gravely, and the girl nodded.

"It was improbable, but it was true. The improbability of the yarn, however, struck me first. My imagination was too keen. I pictured just how father would stand with his hands on his hips and his legs apart, glaring down at me, and I just didn't feel like explaining.

" 'Who was that man?' demanded father, and his voice was so deceptively mild and reasonable that I thought I had an easy escape—and I just gave the name that came into my head!"

"Which happened to be mine," said Bobby sadly.

"Which happened to be yours," she agreed.

"Did it strike you," asked Bobby, "that you would have the devil of a job explaining me away—especially as I bolted? That you were spoiling my young career, blackening my fair name, and jeopardizing my prospects?"

"Not until afterwards," she confessed ruefully. "When I got home I went to daddy and told him the whole truth, and he said I was shielding you, that by heavens I should make amends, by heavens he had half a mind to shoot you, and by heavens such a large blot had never been splashed upon the family escutcheon—of course, I knew I was wrong. I know I am wrong now. I want you to forgive me, Bobby. It is pretty hard on me you know—I've still to tell Jack Marsh."

"Oh, Jack Marsh!" said the young man softly. "Is he an interested party in this business?"

She hesitated.

"In a way," she said; "you see, there's a sort of understanding—I'll tell you frankly, Bobby. I'm rather fond of Jack, and I'm rather afraid of him. I'm fond of you too, but I'm not afraid of you. You see?"

"I see," said Bobby, "and that is rather a good thing."

There was a certain significance in his words, and she looked at him sharply.

“Oh, by the way, you haven’t told me what happened upstairs. Did father ask you to marry me?”

He nodded.

“He not only asked, he demanded.”

“Poor boy,” she smiled; “you had an awful difficulty in getting out of it, didn’t you?”

“Not at all,” said Bobby, brushing invisible crumbs from his knees, “not at all. In fact, I didn’t get out of it.”

“You didn’t—get out of it?” she asked breathlessly, staring at him.

“No,” said Bobby, “I didn’t. I just said ‘All right!’ ”

There was a long silence.

“What does that mean? Do you mean to say—that you accepted me?” she asked faintly.

Bobby nodded.

“There was nothing else to do,” he answered, with a dismal smile. “He insisted upon the affair taking place at once, and was frightfully keen on a quiet wedding.”

She had nothing to say, being literally speechless.

“It is extremely tough on me,” said Bobby bitterly. “I have always looked forward to a wedding with bridesmaids and crossed swords in the porch, and ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing!’ and all that sort of stuff. I was never so disappointed in my life as when he talked about a ‘quiet wedding.’ ”

“But—but Bobby,” she wailed, “you haven’t really——”

He nodded.

“I had to do it for the sake of your dear old family escutcheon,” he said. “I don’t know very much about your escutcheon, but if it’s anything like mine it wants electro-plating. Our family has been making mesalliances since the days of Robert Bruce.”

Suddenly she realized the horrible fact that, quite unknown to her, she was engaged.

“You mustn’t do it,” she cried vehemently. “Bobby, you must go straight to father and tell him—tell him you weren’t the man. The engagement must be broken off! I insist upon this! It is—it is *awful*!”

Bobby sniffed.

“Suppose you go to father and *you* tell him I’m not the man,” he said; “after all, you’re better authority than I am.”

“But this is tragic,” she said, pacing the room; “it is monstrous!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Bobby, sitting back in his chair and putting the tips of his fingers together; “I’m not so sure that it is so bad. Mind you, you’re not the kind of girl I should have chosen.”

“Bobby, you’re insulting!”

“No, I’m not,” he said; “honest to goodness, I’m not. I have a terrifically high opinion of you, and I should never have dared in my position to have offered marriage. Your father, however, insists upon the marriage taking place immediately, insists upon giving me £100,000 worth of shares in his shipping company——”

“He is going to pay you!” she gasped. “For marrying me! Bobby!” She swallowed something, then walked quickly to the door. “I’m to see father, and I’ll tell him the whole hideous truth. I love him dearly and I would do anything to save him unhappiness, but I am not going to have my life wrecked—I’ll tell him that.”

“You might tell him something about my life being wrecked too,” called Bobby from the chair.

Probably she did not hear him, for she was out of the room and half-way up the stairs before he had finished. She came to the door of the study and no farther. Three minutes later she made a solemn re-entry to the drawing-room, closing the door behind her.

“Bobby,” she said soberly, “I dare not do it. Poor daddy! I just opened the door, and he was——” she choked.

“Yes?” said Bobby interestedly.

“He was sobbing as if his heart would break,” gulped the girl.

“I shouldn’t have thought £100,000 would have affected him like that,” said Bobby thoughtfully.

“You brute!” she flamed. “Of course, it wasn’t the money. It was me—me.” She sat down, covering her face with her hands.

“It may have been me too,” said the insistent Bobby; “after all, a nice man like your father would be awfully cut up at the thought that a life such as mine promises to be, and a career——”

“Your life and your career!” she interrupted angrily. “Oh, what a fool I’ve been, what a fool!”

Bobby did not interrupt, to agree or deny, and presently she grew calmer.

“I’ll go through with it,” she said wearily. “I could laugh if it were not so terrible.”

“I couldn’t even laugh,” said Bobby; then: “I wonder if I could persuade him—I’d have had a try if you hadn’t told me about Jack Marsh.”

She swung round at him.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Just what I say,” said Bobby coolly. “It was the mention of Jack Marsh which has sealed your young fate.”

“Bobby!”

Bobby was standing up, his back to the fire, and his lips were tight pressed.

“We’ll go through with this marriage,” he said. “Maybe it is going to be pretty rotten for both of us, but I have an idea that it’d be worse for you if I didn’t go through.”

Another long silence, then:

“When shall it be?” she asked, averting her gaze.

Bobby scratched his chin.

“What are you doing next Thursday?” he demanded.

Three weeks later they sat on opposite sides of a breakfast table in a private sitting-room of the Hotel Maurice reading their several correspondence. Through the open window came the clatter and whirr of the traffic on the Rivoli and the indefinable fragrance of a spring-time which further advertised its presence in the masses of mimosa, the golden clusters of daffodils, and in the shallow bowls of violets occupying every table in the room.

The girl threw a letter across the table to her husband.

“You’d better read this,” she said; “it is from Jack Marsh.”

He took up the letter and read it from beginning to end, so slowly that she grew impatient.

“Oh, do hurry,” she complained; “there’s nothing in it. I think Jack is being

very nice about the whole business."

"Very!" he handed the letter back. "If you take my advice, you'll write to him, and having thanked him like a little lady, tell him that under the circumstances it is inadvisable that you should meet again."

She could only stare at him.

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded.

"You can add," he went on, "that your husband objects to the continuation of the acquaintanceship."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said the girl, the color coming to her face, her eyes shining dangerously.

"It is my wish," said the lofty Bobby. "Forgive me if I pull out the autocratic stop, but I have asked precious little of you since we have been married, and it is not my intention to make any other demands upon you. This, however, I insist upon. After we have been married a few years I will allow you to divorce me, and you can take as your portion those beautiful shipping shares which your dear father bestowed upon me as a wedding gift. But, in the meantime, you will do as I wish. Jack Marsh is an undesirable acquaintance."

"From your point of view," she scoffed.

"From your point of view too, only you haven't the—only you don't know it," he said.

She checked an inclination to throw a fish-knife at his head, and sat back, her hands folded on her lap.

"I shall take not the *slightest* notice of anything you say," she said; "my friends are my friends, and they will continue to be such. Perhaps you would like to see my other letters? I had half a dozen from feminine relatives, congratulating me upon my marriage and envying me my happiness. Do you mind if I laugh?"

"Why not?" said the imperturbable Bobby. "I can show you letters that I've had from maiden aunts, infinitely more comic. I could show you, I've got it here somewhere," he searched among the pile of letters at his elbow, "an epistle from Uncle Angus, reminding me that the first-born of the Mackenzies is invariably called——"

She rose from the table.

"If you're going to be horrid, I will not stay," she said; "that sort of humor doesn't amuse me."

They came back to London a week later to all appearances a happily married couple, and London relieved them both of a particular strain, for here each had friends and peculiar interests which neither shared with the other. The marriage was the most unreal experience which had come either to Bobby or to the girl.

Bobby described the ceremony as being rather like a joint application for a dog license, and said that it left him with the same emotions that would have been aroused by an appearance before an Income Tax commissioner. The "honeymoon" had bored them both, save for the odd intervals when they found a common pleasure amongst the treasures of the Louvre.

London and its gaiety spelt relief.

A few nights after their return, Mrs. Vandersluis-Carter gave a dinner and dance. Neither Leslie nor Bobby were invited to the dinner, but both went on to the ball. About midnight Bobby, wandering about in search of his wife, found her sitting in an alcove head to head with Jack Marsh. Marsh was doing the talking, and by his doleful appearance Bobby gathered that he was telling the girl the sad story of his life.

She looked up and saw something in Bobby's face which she didn't like, and took a hasty farewell of her former fiancé.

"Will you go along, Leslie?" said Bobby. "I'll join you in a few minutes. I want to speak to Marsh for a while."

"Let us go together," she said nervously.

"If you please," said Bobby, and his voice was firm, "will you go and wait for me?"

Marsh was on his feet too, sensing trouble. Leslie still hesitated, and the matter might have passed off quietly only Marsh felt it incumbent upon him to say a few words.

"Leslie was just telling me," he said, with all the geniality at his command, "that——"

"My wife's name is Mrs. Mackenzie," said Bobby. "You can forget that she was ever called Leslie by you."

"Bobby, Bobby!" whispered his wife in terror of a scene.

"And I would add this," said Bobby, taking no notice of her, "that the next time I catch you speaking with her I will take you by the scruff of the neck and I will kick you into Kingdom Come. Does that appeal to you?"

Marsh was white with rage.

“You’re a pretty good talker, Mackenzie,” he said; “you ought to be in Parliament.”

Bobby’s answer was appallingly unexpected. Without drawing back, his fist shot out and Mr. Marsh went to the floor.

“I’m not going to explain anything to you,” said Bobby to his agonized wife that night. “I’m only telling you that you must not meet Marsh or there will be trouble. In a few years’ time, I promise you, you can divorce me—just as soon as it is decent. In the meantime, if you want to avoid this kind of unpleasantness, you must also avoid J. Marsh.”

It was unfortunate that Bobby’s assault had been witnessed by the one person beside Marsh who hated him.

Sybil Thorbern had reason enough by her own code. Into the sympathetic ears of her husband she poured the story of Bobby’s infamy. He, poor, good man, listened uncomfortably because he was Bobby’s oldest friend.

“The man is a savage,” she said, “absolutely undisciplined.”

“Bobby isn’t bad,” protested her husband feebly. He was a ruddy man, twenty years his wife’s senior, an out-of-doors man with a detestation of any crisis which involved mental effort. “Bobby is a little wild, Sybil, but if he hit Marsh, you can be sure that Marsh deserved it.”

Whereupon, stung to indiscretion, Mrs. Thorbern blurted venom. She was a pretty woman and had many admirers. Her husband took almost a pride in the fact, but the kind of admiration which Bobby Mackenzie had expressed to his wife (as she told the story) left a cloud on his brow.

“When did this happen?” he asked.

“The night of the Winslows’ ball, a few days before this fellow married Leslie Jenner.”

“I can hardly believe it,” he said, in a troubled voice, “and yet——” he remembered certain circumstances, a packed valise lying in the hall, the discovery of his wife in traveling clothes ready to go out after midnight, and the lame excuse she made.

“I was mad,” she excused herself; “every woman has that spasm of madness, however much she loves her husband, and for a moment he carried me off my feet. And then I realized how sweet you were and how good and . . . Douglas, I hadn’t the heart . . .!”

She was weeping now passionately, but her hysteria was due more to fright than to contrition. For she had said too much, made her accusations too direct, and even in the exalted moment of her vengeance was panic-stricken at the possible consequences of her “confession.”

“Douglas, you won’t say any more about it, will you?” she pleaded. “I oughtn’t to have told you.”

“I’m glad you did,” he said. “I remember——” he said slowly, “some bruises on your arm that night—did he do that?”

She nodded.

“Yes, yes, but you won’t go any farther with this matter, will you, Douglas? Please, please, dear, for my sake!”

“I’ll think about it,” said Douglas Thorbern unsteadily, and went up to his room.

The next morning there was a meeting between two distressed women. Bobby was out when Mrs. Thorbern called at the hotel where the young people were staying, and Leslie, who knew her well enough and disliked her instinctively, received the wife of Bobby’s best friend.

“Leslie, I want you to help me,” she blurted. “I’m in an awful fix. I was very annoyed with Bobby, and I told my husband something about him and I’m afraid, I’m afraid . . .!”

“What did you tell your husband about Bobby?” demanded Leslie coldly.

The fact that she had parted from Bobby that morning in a spirit of the bitterest hostility did not lessen her feeling of antagonism toward Mrs. Thorbern. The woman hesitated.

“I—I told him that Bobby wanted to run away with me.”

Leslie sat down suddenly.

“Bobby wanted to run away with you?” she repeated incredulously.

The other nodded.

“When did this happen?”

“On the night of the Winslows’ ball, you remember?”

“Oh, I remember,” said Leslie grimly; “I have a very good reason for remembering. So Bobby wanted to run away with you, did he?”

Again Mrs. Thorbern hesitated.

“I told my husband so, but——”

“Did you tell him the truth,” asked Leslie, “or were you just lying?”

“I—well, there was some trouble with Bobby and me . . .”

“Were you speaking the truth or a lie?” asked Leslie again, and her voice was steady. “Personally, I know you were lying, because Bobby would not do so mean a thing.”

“Naturally you would defend your husband,” brindled Mrs. Thorbern.

“Naturally,” said the girl calmly.

“He’s a beast!” Mrs. Thorbern burst forth tearfully. “He has ruined my life!”

Her sincerity was unmistakable, and Leslie felt a little pang at her heart, but there was in her composition some of her father’s shrewdness, his dogged insistence.

“Did Bobby ask you to run away with him?” She returned to the question and knew that her own future happiness was at stake, for she had dreamed of a future which did not exclude from her life the man who met her at meals and talked solemn nonsense about matrimony.

“Yes!” cried Mrs. Thorbern at last, and Leslie smiled.

“That, my dear girl, is a naughty, wicked lie!” she said. “Bobby never wanted you to run away with him—in fact, I’m going to ask him to tell me the story, because I am sure you are concealing something.”

“All I want you to do is to warn Bobby to keep out of my husband’s way.” Mrs. Thorbern’s voice held a menace. “You’re horribly unsympathetic, Leslie; I did hope I should find a friend in you.”

“What do you want me to do?” asked the girl; “agree with you that Bobby is a blackguard? I rather think that I know him better than you.”

“I’m glad you have that illusion,” said Mrs. Thorbern icily. “Your understanding of him was violently sudden; there was something rather mysterious about your marriage.”

“Mysterious?” drawled the girl; “but aren’t all marriages a little mysterious?”

Mrs. Thorbern shrugged her shoulders and was on her way to the door when Leslie stopped her with a cry. The older woman looked round and saw a light burning in the girl’s eyes.

“Wait, wait,” said Leslie excitedly, “this story about Bobby—this story you told your husband—when did you arrange to run away with him?” and then, as the other hesitated, she corrected, “when did you tell your husband that Bobby wanted to run away with you?”

“On the night of the Winslows’ ball.”

“And did your husband—have any idea that you were going to run away—with anybody?”

“He knew nothing,” said Mrs. Thorbern, “he—oh, what is the good of telling you?”

“Oh please, please tell me,” begged Leslie. “I am really anxious to know.”

“Douglas found me dressed ready to go,” said Mrs. Thorbern slowly, “and he—he—discovered my dressing-bag in the hall. I didn’t expect him back that night. He had gone to Edinburgh on some business.”

“And you were meeting—Bobby—somewhere near the Winslows?”

Again the hesitation.

“Yes, I was meeting him—him——”

“At any time?” asked the girl breathlessly, and Mrs. Thorbern looked at her with suspicion.

“I told my husband,” she was careful to say, “that I was meeting Bobby between twelve and half-past one.”

“I know,” Leslie almost whispered the words; “you were meeting him at the golf hut in Smoke Park!”

It was Mrs. Thorbern’s turn to show astonishment and uneasiness.

“You were meeting him at the golf hut before half-past one—and it wasn’t Bobby you were meeting at all!”

“How do you know?” asked the woman harshly.

“It was Marsh—Jack Marsh—and Bobby knew you were going to run away, and he stopped you—that’s what you mean when you say he wrecked your life!”

Mrs. Thorbern’s breath was labored.

“Bobby is a sneak,” she cried. “He listened, he listened! I’d have gone with Jack then, but he caught me by the arm—your charming Bobby—I had the bruise marks for days!”

“And he was waiting in the hut for you,” said the girl slowly.

“Jack?”

Mrs. Thorbern looked at her open-mouthed, but the girl shook her head.

“No, Bobby,” she said softly, “the splendid darling! It was he who was in the hut all the time waiting for you to keep your appointment and determined to save your husband’s name. And that’s why he wouldn’t tell me—because it meant giving you away.”

“How do you know he was there?” asked the woman.

“Because I was there too,” said Leslie proudly.

Bobby came down to dinner that night, glum of face, and found his wife waiting for him in the hall.

“I’m in all sorts of trouble,” he said. “I’ve had a perfectly rotten letter from an old pal of mine.”

“He’ll write you an apology in the morning,” said the girl cheerfully.

He stared at her.

“How do you know? Are you going in for clairvoyance or something?”

“He’ll write you an apology, because I told his wife she had to tell him the truth.”

Bobby stopped dead.

“Look here, young person,” he said, “what is the mystery?”

She smiled up in his face.

“Don’t make a scene in public, Bobby,” she said, “and do take that gloomy look off your face. I want to start off on my second honeymoon without a sad thought.”

He stood gaping down at her.

“When do we start?” he asked hollowly.

“We’ll go by the boat train that leaves Victoria at nine o’clock in the morning,” she said.

He looked at his watch.

“What about the train that goes to Bournemouth tonight?” said he.

A Tryst with Ghosts

Once upon a time, in the far-away days of war, there was a mythical or semi-mythical individuality whom the British Tommies named “Quiff.” He was credited with a prescience which was quite inhuman. He knew when the divisions were mustering for attack; he warned commanders of impending raids; at his word battalion chiefs were superseded . . . for he had an uncanny instinct for weakness. He was the guardian angel of five hundred miles of trench line, and was visualized as a white-bearded gentleman, with a halo. When the enemy put a price on his head of 50,000 marks (in those days marks were real money), thus proving his tangibility, the line was immensely startled.

Nigel Porter was sitting in the shade of his porch one warm day in early December, reading a Vancouver newspaper. It was the anniversary of a battle in which the Canadians had been heavily engaged, and the writer of the reminiscences which he was reading recalled the fact that “Quiff” had warned the British higher command of the coming attack. This interested Nigel considerably. Later he saw a brief reference to himself, and the mention of his having been blown up by a land mine . . . . The paper dropped from his hands, and he jumped with an exclamation. He picked the paper up and looked at the date. Then he went into his house—too big for a well-to-do bachelor—and began routing out cablegrams. In four days he was speeding eastward with two suit-cases and a sense of guilt.

If anybody had asked him why he was taking that cold and very comfortless journey, he would have been ashamed to say. A man who owns farmlands in British Columbia views the barrier of the Rockies, which keeps in check the shrivelling winds that roar down from the frozen north, with the same satisfaction that a man, snuggled by a log fire, a pipe between his teeth and a book on his knee, might regard the frosted windows and the stout walls of the house that keeps from him the howling gale without.

And here he was, a lover of comfort, and a man who grudged every second of the cold months that took him from sight of the Pacific and smell of cedar pine, tossing and pitching in the gray, wintry seas of the Atlantic, in the teeth of a nor’westerly gale. The ship was not a large one, the accommodation was fairly poor, his fellow-passengers . . . but there was a Compensation.

The Compensation was amazing in many respects, for Nigel was not a woman’s man, and was almost, if not wholly, unromantic. If you forgot the extraordinary mission which was bringing him across the December sea, you

might have said that romance had no place in his equipment. The Compensation came aboard at New York, and their eyes met for the fraction of a second before she stumbled upon the slippery deck (it had been snowing) and was caught in his strong arms. There was a murmured apology, an embarrassed second of incoherence on his part, and then she had vanished. He did not see her till the second day out, and then, literally, he fell against her. He was on his way to the smoke-room, a journey which involved alternate climbing and sliding along the rubber-tiled alleyways, as bow and stern of the *Beranic* went up and down like delicately poised scales. Again she was in his arms for just as long a time as it might take to count three, quickly.

On the fifth day he found her on deck, stretched in a chair, inadequately covered by a rug. A little self-consciously, he arranged the covering without invitation and they talked.

Her name was Elsie Steyne, and she was traveling alone. She gave no explanation, such as fellow-passengers in the first moments of their confidence give to one another, for her solitary journey. When, after another day's acquaintance, he offered her the opportunity of telling him why she was coming to Europe in Christmas week, she hesitated.

". . . It is a queer season for holiday-making in Europe," she confessed, after a long and thoughtful pause, and then immediately; "but I am going to see my brother. He went over last week; it was arranged that I should spend Christmas with my mother in Ohio. But somehow . . . I am a little worried about him. And you, Mr. Porter? I suppose you are traveling on business?"

Nigel's blue eyes twinkled for a second.

"No, not exactly," he said, and she looked up at him in surprise.

"The fact is," he said humorously, "I have a tryst with a ghost!"

To Nigel's astonishment he saw the color fade from her face. She struggled up into a sitting position and stared at him.

"A tryst with a ghost?" she repeated, and her voice shook.

For a moment he was dumbfounded by the effect that his words had produced on the girl, and he cursed himself for his grim jest. Probably she was nervous; there were people in the world in whom the word "ghost" produced a shiver.

"I am very sorry, Miss Steyne," he said apologetically. "I am afraid I startled you."

Her eyes did not leave his.

“What do you mean?” she asked huskily. “A tryst with a ghost? Where did you hear . . .”

She stopped suddenly and, seeing the quick rise and fall of her breast, the pallor of her face, the queer, hunted look in her blue eyes, Nigel Porter became almost incoherent in his efforts to undo the mischief which his ill-timed remark had produced.

“The fact is,” he began, and then, realizing how fantastical and absurd the explanation that he was on the point of making would sound, he laughed. “It was a startling thing to say, wasn’t it? I am afraid I have a latent streak of melodrama in my composition. Won’t you please forgive me?”

She settled back in her chair, and for a while she gazed blankly out over the tumbling gray seas.

“It was stupid of me,” she said, “but my nerves aren’t in very good order. Would you ask the steward to bring a cup of tea?”

No further reference to his unfortunate *faux pas* was made. He saw her the next morning, when the ship was rolling through the English Channel and Devonshire was a gray blur on the northern horizon; and she was apparently so absorbed in the book she was reading that she only gave him a nod before she returned to a steadfast scrutiny of the printed page.

The morning on which they reached Cherbourg, Nigel made an unpleasant discovery. He had been out of his cabin all the morning, walking the deck, in the hope of seeing the girl. She did not put in an appearance, however, and he went down to his cabin to prepare for lunch, with an unsatisfactory feeling that the morning had been wasted. It was then that he had his shock. Somebody had been in his cabin. A trunk which was under the bed had been pulled out, and a brief examination of its contents told him that it had been subjected to a hurried but thorough search. His passport, which he kept with other confidential papers under his pillow, was lying open on the bed. He rang the bell, and presently the steward came.

“No, sir,” said the man in surprise, “I’ve seen nobody in your cabin. I’ve been on this deck all morning. Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure,” said Nigel irritably. “Look at this trunk. And that—I haven’t opened that passport since I left New York.”

The steward looked round inadequately.

“There’s nobody been in your cabin, sir, as far as I know,” he said. “Of course, I haven’t been watching it all the time, because I’ve been in the other

cabins, tidying up."

"Have you seen any of the passengers near the cabin?"

"No, sir—yes, I have," he corrected himself. "I saw that young lady in 87, Miss Steyne. She came down this alleyway by mistake. Her cabin is two alleyways farther along."

Nigel scratched his chin in perplexity. "Of course, it couldn't have been Miss Steyne," he said, and the steward, who was happy to agree that it could not have been anybody at all, nodded.

"It has been a clean trip," he said. "There are none of the gangs on board that usually work the line, and yours is the first complaint we've had—would you like me to report this to the purser?"

Nigel shook his head.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

When the steward had gone, he made a search of his belongings to find if anything had been stolen; but although the intruder had evidently made a systematic search of his cabin, nothing was missing. With his passport had been a letter of credit, and this apparently had not been taken from its envelope. He was a fool, anyway, to leave important papers lying around, he thought, and congratulated himself that he had not suffered any important loss.

For some reason he could not escape the conviction that the search of his cabin had been conducted with no other object than the examination of his passport. The intruder had been searching for a document. What that document was, Nigel could not guess, though he racked his brains for some plausible explanation.

He saw the girl on the tender at Cherbourg, and to his surprise she was not only friendly but communicative.

"I am going to Paris," she said. "You are going too, of course? Where are you staying?"

"I am not going to Paris," said Nigel, with a little smile.

Again that look of suspicion and doubt appeared in her eyes, but she made no further inquiries. He saw her through the Customs, and then made his way in a crazy taxi-cab to the town, where, if his cabled instructions had been carried out, the car would be waiting. He found it—an ancient French machine, but suitable for his purpose. His temptation was to stay the night in Cherbourg, but the time at his disposal was short. He had landed at the French port on the

24th, and he had less than twenty-four hours to reach his destination.

As the car bumped and jolted along the *pavé* road that makes at long last for Calais, he could only wonder at himself. It did not seem real, and yet it was true that, a little more than a fortnight ago, he had been sitting in the sunlight of British Columbia, when there had come to him, in the nature of a shock, the realization that he was fast approaching the Christmas of 1921. Once he remembered the date, there was no other course for him to follow, being the man he was. He did not regret his lost comfort; he did not feel sorry for himself; he did not even regret that he was in a car of uncertain age, rattling through a driving blizzard that obscured all view, that made the *pavé* so slippery that the car skidded every five minutes. And even when, tired and hungry, with the dawn just showing in a gray sky, he came into the station square at Ypres, he did not regard his adventure as being outside the limitations of common sense.

Ypres was changed, he noticed silently. Handsome red villas were going up in all directions. The Cloth Hall still pointed its maimed tower to the sky, and here and there, half covered with snow, he recognized a gaunt shell of a house that had been as familiar to him in those painful days of war as the Eros in Piccadilly Circus, or the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

Early as was the hour, there were workers abroad. A goods train was shunting noisily in a station which had been shelled out of existence in his days. Facing the station was a brand-new hotel, and he got down, gave an instruction to the weary-eyed French driver, and carried his bag into the dimly lit hallway. A sleepy man was sweeping the floor.

“Yes, monsieur, Major Burns is here, but he is leaving by the early train for England. He has twice been down to look for you. I will tell him you have come.”

Nigel made his way to the big, bare dining-room, redolent of new paint, and lighted by one yellow carbon lamp. A table had been laid near the window for two. This he noted with satisfaction. Burns had evidently received his cable and the wire he had sent from Cherbourg.

There was a quick step in the hall, and the Major, wearing his long military overcoat and (as usual) his cap perched rakishly on the side of his head, hurried in and offered a gloved hand.

“I’ve been over to the station to fix my trunks. I’m going on a month’s leave,” he said. “So you’ve come back to the salient? They all do. Had some fellows here last week who knew you. We were talking of old ‘Quiff.’ Do you remember him? Wonder what happened to the old devil . . . never heard about

him—hasn't even written a book! Do you remember that night when he tipped us off about the gas attack . . .?"

The Major rattled on reminiscently. He was a red-faced man, with a bright, twinkling eye, and he was obviously amused. Men who are amused at seven o'clock on a raw, wintry morning, amidst the sorrowful shades of Ypres, may be written down as possessing a strong sense of humor.

"I suppose you think I'm mad?" asked Nigel, when the other stopped.

Major Burns pursed his lips.

"I don't think so," he said at last. "No, I really don't think so. I suppose that, having lived in the midst of so much madness these past years, one takes a generous view of human sanity. 'Joseph' "—he beckoned the waiter —" 'coffee.' I can give you half an hour." he said to his *vis-à-vis*. "And by the way, here is the plan so far as I can reconstruct it from the old operation plans of 1917."

He lugged out from his inside pocket a thin sheet of paper and spread it on the table.

"There's Kelners Farm, there's Dead Horse Lane, and that's Windy Corner. You'll recognize Windy Corner; it's one of the few bits of the old battlefield that have been left. I had to get this, by the way, from the Belgians, because it was on their front, I think, that this happened. I must tell you that Houthulst Forest has entirely disappeared; you won't find any trace of it, except a few straggling trees . . . it's a perfect beast of a place, Nigel."

Nigel was examining the plan, and now looked up as he folded the paper.

"Do you think I'm mad?" he said again.

"I don't, probably because my knowledge of the circumstances is more or less shaky. If I had a larger understanding of what occurred, perhaps I would be less charitable. I only know that you cabled me from British Columbia that you wanted me to discover the exact place where you had been blown up, because you wished to spend Christmas Day in the hole. Which reminds me that I had a Belgian officer in here yesterday—Colonel de Villiers—who said that the mine craters still exist."

Again Nigel nodded.

"It was lucky your being here. Luckier still that I remembered you were here, Burns," he said, and then: "I'll tell you the story. It happened on Christmas Eve of 1917. As a matter of fact, it happened on the twenty-third of December. I was attached to the French corps that was holding the

southeastern edge of Houthulst Forest. I was working in connection with the Canadian Intelligence, and my instructions were to go over to discover the exact composition of the force that was holding the Belgian front. The G.O.C. wasn't at all satisfied with the intelligence he got from the Belgian staff, who were supposed to be *au fait* with these particulars, and of course the French had only recently come up, and were not in a position to give any accurate information."

He paused and looked out of the window, and it came to him sadly that this was not the Ypres he knew, that smouldering furnace of a town, bombarded daily, hourly, every minute; rocked and shaken by high explosive shells, a town that rumbled and thundered night and day, year in and year out; a gray, dusty town, where long files of men crept cautiously under such walls as existed, on their way to the muddy inferno which lay along the ridges of the north. Sadly, for he was thinking of all the brave hearts that were stilled and the bright, boyish faces that had gone and were no more seen.

"The curious thing was that, at the identical moment I went over into No Man's Land, a young German officer was sent to discover the exact composition of the French force that was holding this sector. We met half-way. To be exact, I stumbled over wire in the dark and slid down the edge of the crater——"

"Crater No. 17," murmured Major Burns. "The hole is about twenty metres away."

The other nodded.

"I was on the Hun before he knew what had happened. We both pulled our guns, and by the most extraordinary coincidence we both missed fire. It looked like being a real caveman's scrap, when the German chuckled and threw down his pistol.

" 'I think, my friend,' he said, 'we had better both go home again. It would be stupid for us to batter one another with our fists, for that would probably mean that we should both be killed in attempting to get back to our lines in a condition of exhaustion.'

"The logic of it struck me, and we just sat down and talked. We not only talked, but we exchanged confidences of a highly compromising character. He told me that the 18th Bavarian Division was on our front, and I responded politely with the information that the 43rd French Division was on *his* front. He didn't seem as interested as he might have been. He produced a packet of sandwiches, I had a flask of whisky, and we sat and talked, until——

“ ‘It will be daylight soon,’ he said. ‘I think we’d better go home.’

“So we shook hands, and we were half-way up the crumbling slope of the crater, when there broke out the most infernal fire that I had ever heard before or since. The air seemed to be so thick with traveling bullets and shells that you couldn’t have put up a fishing-line without getting it cut in three places simultaneously!

“ ‘I think we’d better wait,’ shouted the German.

“So we retired again to the shell-hole, and prayed fervently—at least I did—that ‘shorts’ on either side would be few, and in other directions than ours. Dawn broke, and the fury of the fire did not abate. And then I found myself talking about things I never thought I would ever discuss with a German. He didn’t tell me a great deal about himself, except that he was an officer in a Bavarian regiment. His English was perfect. I could have sworn, when I first saw him, that he was an American. Well, to cut a long story short, there we sat throughout the day. Christmas Eve came, and there was no slackening of the fire. Every gun, big and little, on both sides was in action, and we spent the night counting Verey lights and speculating upon what was the cause of this unseemly disturbance. Christmas Day came, but still there was practically no reduction of fire. I afterwards discovered that this was the preliminary bombardment to an attack which the French commander had planned, and which he hoped would bring the Forest into his hands. Poor soul! He never lived to know what a hell-trap that forest was! Later in the morning the fire seemed to die down just a little, and I crawled to the edge of the shell-hole to take observation. What happened I don’t know. I woke up to find my head on the German’s knee, and he was draining the last dregs of my whisky flask down my throat. My head was wet and aching, my eyes seemed to be filled with sand.

“ ‘Shell fragment,’ he said. ‘I don’t think you’re badly hurt. I have two sandwiches and half a bottle of water left. We look like having a peach of a Christmas Day.’ ”

“What was his name—did you find that out?” asked Burns curiously.

“Karl—that was all he told me,” replied Nigel. “That fellow was some prophet? I think both sides must have brought up all their reserves of artillery and trebled their stock of machine-guns. It was when I realized that we had had no ‘Quiff’ message from G.H.Q. that I knew the initiative was on our side. It was toward the evening that Karl said:

“ ‘If we get through this, my friend, I should like to have a little dinner with you somewhere.’

“ ‘When and where?’ I asked.

“He thought a long time before he answered.

“ ‘Maybe we shan’t get through,’ he said. ‘But I’ll tell you what I will do. If I am alive in four years’ time, I will come and meet you here; and if you’re not here, well, I’ll keep a tryst with your ghost.”

“Why four years?” asked Burns.

“He thought the war would last another three. He made it four to give us a chance of getting a peace. Of course, it was lunatic, it was childish, it was anything you like to call it, but there and then we made our agreement. It was the sort of thing that schoolgirls do, and . . . anyway, there’s something peculiarly simple and infantile about the full-grown soldier.

“It was eleven o’clock that night that the French fired the mine. My own impression was that it was just underneath where I was sitting, but my recollections of the circumstances are necessarily hazy. I just remember saying to Karl that I had a passion for marrons glacés, when I felt somebody slapping my face, and looked up into the eyes of an English surgeon who was in his shirt-sleeves. I just remember hearing him say ‘He’s all right,’ and then I sort of dozed myself out of Belgium and woke up in an English hospital. The body of Karl was found and buried on the very edge of the crater. We took the ground and lost it, took it again and lost it again, but I know he was found, because the officer who picked me up after the mine was exploded was in the next bed to me in hospital, and he told me all about it, how they found this poor chap quite dead and buried him.”

“Hum!” said Major Burns, gulping down his coffee. “I think you’re a fool, but it’s the sort of fool thing I should have done myself.”

He scrutinized the lowering skies through the window.

“You’re going to have a cold Christmas Day, my lad,” he said.

“I never expected any other.”

Just before noon Nigel came out of the hotel with a basket, a bottle of wine, and a box of cigars, which he stowed away in one of the car’s pockets. He himself went to the wheel, and in a few minutes was passing slowly westward. The car sped down a perfectly gravelled road, and passed cemetery upon cemetery crowded with white crosses, whiter for the rim of snow which lay upon their edges, and presently, turning abruptly from the main road, he came almost instantly into a region of desolation. The new red buildings were behind him. The road was no longer a road, it was a succession of deep holes

and ruts. Sharp-cornered paving-blocks jagged up from the sodden earth, stark walls that had once been houses loomed through the sleet on either side. Broken and jagged barbed wire, red with rust, trailed its tangled lengths by the roadside, and here and there he saw the drunken outlines of block-houses where men had lived horribly and had died in fear. Presently the car was lurching between flat heaps of rubble that the rains of the years had washed and pounded into little unrecognizable plateaux. A village had been here once. Rotting weeds showed where love and life had been, and holes gaped in the roadway before a medley of black, wrought-iron crosses which marked a graveyard that had been set around a church. There was no church.

These sights were too familiar to sadden him, though now it seemed, in the years of peace, that the ugliness of war was emphasized more strongly. He came at last, by the aid of his map, and after constant backings and changing of direction, and guided at the very last by a miserable-looking man who lived with his family in a deserted dug-out, to the edge of what was once a forest but was now nothing. For all that was left of the trees were blackened stumps and dead white stems that stood starkly against the cold sky.

He stopped his car, got out and took his bearings, and instinctively he went straight to the place he sought. The hole was deep: it was half filled with yellow water. To the right was a smaller hole, also water-logged, and he smiled faintly, contrasting the calm of that winter day with no other sound in his ear but the sough and sigh of the wind that swept down from the dunes, and the tawny sea beyond, with the deafening fury of the storm that swept this spot four years before. There was the grave: he saw it at once, a small black cross above a slab of concrete that the Government had laid down to prevent farmers ploughing ground hallowed by sacrifice.

Bending down, he read: “Allemand.” Karl was “Allemand.” In small letters was the word “officer.” It was not usual to distinguish the rank of the dead. That was all. It stood for life and humor and courage, and God knows what hope. It stood also for an enemy, but that was incidental and meant nothing to Nigel Porter, sitting there on the edge of the crater, with his fur collar pulled up about his ears.

His eyes roved around the starved landscape. It was such a foul setting for the rare jewel of a soul.

“Well, my friend,” he said—his tone was one of heavy jocularity; insensibly he had recalled, and was reproducing, the very tone of the man whom he apostrophised—“here am I, after four years? I owe you an apology, because I nearly forgot my promise. If I hadn’t read in a Vancouver newspaper some highly flattering references to my services during the war, I should

certainly have broken my promise."

There was such quiet dignity in that black cross, such serenity in the truncated pyramid of concrete that marked the abiding-place of this "Allemand, officer," that his voice died down. The dead are so immensely superior to the living that he felt abashed.

He sat for a long time, his gloved hands crossed on his knees, his head bent forward in thought, and then he got up with a sigh and dusted his coat.

"Well——" he began, and his jaw dropped.

Standing on the farther rim of the crater was a tall figure, draped from neck to feet in a long, dark cloak. It was bareheaded, and the wind had blown a lock of fair hair across the forehead of the man. Nigel stared open-mouthed, speechless, and then:

"Karl!" he croaked.

The voiceless figure stirred.

"Thank God! I thought you were a ghost."

In a dozen strides Nigel had flown round the edge of the crater and gripped the outstretched hand.

"What are you doing here?" he asked huskily . . . "Stupid question to ask, but you are——"

The other laughed.

"I'm keeping a tryst with a ghost," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes. "You see, I thought you were . . . dead. When our people took the ground they found a grave here."

Suddenly he gripped the other by the arm.

"Let's get out of this beastliness," he said. "My God! How hideous war is!"

They had nearly reached the sunken road where the stranger's car was waiting, when Nigel remembered that he had some responsibility in the matter of transportation.

"You can go back for it. I want to introduce you to my sister. By the way, my name is Steyne."

And there Nigel found the girl.

It was after dinner in the barracklike dining-room of the Hotel d'Ypres that

Nigel Porter heard and understood.

"No, I'm not a German," said Mr. Charles Steyne, pulling gently at his cigar, "I am an American. I was in the war from the very first month."

"On the German side?"

"Oh yes, I was on the German side. That is to say, I wore the German uniform and served in the German Intelligence Department. There were five of us originally, and we were employed by the most effective secret service that the world has ever known. I speak respectfully of Great Britain. Of the five only one is left alive. Taylor was shot in Hanover after being tried by court-martial for running the secret wireless by which the British were informed of the movement of German ships. Jack Holtz suffered a like fate on the Russian frontier, when he was trying to get through to the Russian headquarters the news of the German concentration—he owed his death to the treachery of the Russian General Staff, by the way; and Micky Thomas was killed by a night watchman at the German Foreign Office after he had got away with some very important documents which were necessary to your Whitehall. Long Bill Fenner was accidentally killed by an aeroplane bomb dropped by an American airman. And I was almost, but not quite, destroyed by the explosion of a mine . . . . Well, you know that story. If Elsie had only told me that she had met you on the ship, and had given me a hint about your keeping a tryst with ghosts—a phrase of mine, by the way, which, coming from you, so startled her that she nearly jumped out of her skin——"

Nigel was looking at the girl, and under his eyes the color came to her face, for she had anticipated the question which was coming.

"Why did you want to see my passport, Miss Steyne?" he asked.

"I think I can answer that," replied Charles Steyne. "My sister doesn't realize that war ever ends, and that the price the Germans put on the head of their pet enemy is no longer offered. She pictured you a member of the Government, tracking down the shy and elusive Quiff. . . ."

"Quiff!" gasped Nigel. "Then you were—?"

The other nodded.

"I was on my way to the French lines to tell the General not to attack. If I had told you I was 'Quiff' you would not have believed me."

"Phew!" Nigel sat back in his chair and stared at the girl, but she averted her eyes.

"I'm glad . . . you're not exactly German," he said, a little gauchely. "I

don’t believe in mixed marriages . . . . I mean . . .”

The ghost smiled wisely.

The Child of Chance

It is absurd to say that truth is stranger than fiction because, as everybody knows, fiction is the unstrangest product of life. That is to say, fiction would be very strange if it was *not* stranger. For if it had no novelty, it would be no better than the News-That-is-Fit-to-Print, which is just the dullest kind of printed matter (with the exception of the Theology section of a Free Library catalogue) that offends the eye of mankind.

There was a girl who lived in a tenement house in a very poor part of London, who used to pray to God every night that a nice clean dragon with blunt teeth would seize her and be starting to fly away with his prey, when there would appear upon the scene a young and beautiful man in shining armor, who would slice the head from the dragon and carry her off to a white castle on a purple hill where she would be arrayed in white garments by handmaidens, and given bread and milk in a golden bowl.

She never reached very far beyond that breathless preamble, leaving it to God to fill in the blanks of her imaginings and to supply an adequate continuation of her story—which she had designed as a non-stop serial, each chapter of which was to be more delicious than the last.

Her name was Verity Money, and her age was eighteen. She was very pretty, very slim, and childlike, both in her appearance and in her faith. Her uncle, for whom she kept house—there were two rooms and a kitchen, and she slept in the kitchen, which was warm and cozy—was a grim old market-porter intensely religious for eleven months and two weeks of the year, and somewhat unsober for the remainder. He was never unkind to the girl—indeed he was most lavish in his gifts, and had been known to present her with such undreamt of luxuries as a feather boa and a musical box.

For the other fifty weeks of the year he was a sober and taciturn man—you can picture him lean faced, with a fringe of gray whiskers, poring earnestly over the big print of his Testament and declaiming at length on the virtues of Paul and the vacillations of Peter, the girl, darning needle in hand, listening with every evidence of interest, but her mind occupied by visions of the mythological youth in glittering armor.

When Tom Money died, he left her about fifty pounds and all his furniture. He had been a careful man, and it was discovered that he had paid his rent in advance, and that there was still three years of unexpired tenancy.

So Verity Money lived alone, earning just enough by her needle to keep body and soul together, and was happy in her dreams, and as she had no women friends, she suffered no disillusionment. Her ideals had undergone a change, for a new factor had come into her life. The movies had opened a new world to her and shifted the angle of her visions. Now, she was a little girl with sunlight in her hair, with a slow dawning smile and little uplift of the big, serious eyes to greet the handsome stranger who had ridden into her picture from nowhere in particular. In fine, she adored Mary Pickford, and pinned a picture of that lady on the wall so that it was the first object she saw when she opened her eyes in the morning.

She would slip from her bed, carefully remove the print, and re-pin it above the mantelpiece. She could light the fire and wash the cups, spread the table and take her morning tea and bread and butter with a sense of companionship which was very precious to her.

Her heroes were no longer armed *cap-à-pie*. They were handsome young men in sombreros and who wore sheepskin trousers. They rode fiery mustangs and earned a precarious livelihood by shooting one another with revolvers . . .

The war brought nothing of reality to Verity Money. The wilful murder on a small scale which was screened for her amusement was more real, more terrible, more thrilling than the grand murthering up and down the hundred-league line, eighty miles from her door, where day and night the guns of Flanders crashed and roared and massed ranks went down before the spraying fire of machine-guns.

The war dawned upon her slowly as one by one her customers dropped their orders. Her work was the finest embroidery on cambric and silk. There was plenty of sewing work to be had, but she could not make soldiers' shirts or stitch button-holes in such quantity as would give her a living wage. She was slow and careful, and the few button-holes she made were very beautiful indeed, but she earned exactly eightpence in two days.

She had exhausted much of the money which had been left to her, and there came a time when she had to reduce her expenditure to a point which gave her one square meal a day.

She had no friends. There was neither boy nor man in her life. Her lovers were living in the sunny places of the world, holding their wide-brimmed hats on the pommels of high Mexican saddles whilst they passed the time of day with lovely girls who wore divided skirts and rode astride.

One day she started to starve and nobody knew anything about it. If she had died, the coroner would have had some unpleasant things to say about

moving pictures, because she had spent her last threepence to see a great railway picture where half the story was told in the cab of an engine and half in the bullion van, where train robbers and bullion guards took pot shots at one another with deadly effect.

On the second evening of her starvation she went to a house in Berkeley Square to deliver some d'oyleys. The lady was not at home, and nobody had orders to pay this girl with the curious pinched look in her face.

She came slowly down the steps of the house into the dark square, took a few steps, and staggered. Somebody caught her by the arm and pulled her to her feet.

"Hold up," said a voice, but she was beyond obedience, and the stranger lifted her in his arms as though she were a child and stood for a moment frankly embarrassed by the situation in which he found himself.

He looked helplessly around, then whistled to two bright points of light in the distance.

The taxi drove up.

"Take me to the nearest hospital," said the stranger.

"Middlesex?" suggested the driver.

The stranger hesitated.

"Is it near?" he asked cautiously.

"It's nearest if your friend is badly hurt," said the driver.

"That's just what I can't say," said the other.

"Put her in the cab," suggested the chauffeur, getting down; "there's an electric light inside."

"What a brain!" laughed the stranger.

He looked at the girl lying limp and white in one corner of the cab and whistled softly.

Then he pushed back his khaki cap and scratched his head.

"Now what is the matter with her?" he asked irritably—irritability is a natural condition of man in the presence of a sick woman.

"If you ask me," said the driver carefully, "she wants grub."

"Good Lord!" cried the soldier, startled; "food . . . hungry!"

The driver nodded.

“I’ve seen them symptoms before—I’ve driven a cab for twenty-eight years in London.”

Still the rescuer was undecided.

“Drive around for a while and if she doesn’t recover I’ll tell you—then you can go hell for lick to the nearest hospital.”

The car had hardly moved before Verity blinked open her eyes and stared, first at the cab and then with a frightened frown at the young man who sat on the opposite seat.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked.

She saw a soldier, indistinguishable from any other of the thousands who had passed her in the mist of her dreams. He was a good-looking mortal, as clean shaven as any cowboy or train robber or even as the blessed saint of England. His uniform was no different from any other, but the badge upon his collar was a bronze leaf.

She was seized with a sudden panic.

“Can I get out please?” she asked in a flutter.

“Sure,” he nodded, “but we’d better have some food—I’m starving, and you’ve made me miss an appointment with a fellow of ours.”

To say that she was horror-stricken at this last revelation, is to tell no more than the truth. She had never intruded her influence upon the machinery of society before. Not once, by any act, had she knowingly affected the plans or movements of others. She felt, as she looked at him with troubled eyes and parted lips, that no sacrifice she could make could be too great to repair the mischief which she had caused.

“I’m—I’m very sorry,” she gulped; “I would buy you some supper, but—but . . .”

She went red and her eyes were moist and shining. The young man whistled again—but quite inside himself.

“We will have supper together,” said he, with a smile.

So he brought her to a golden palace of splendor. She was not self-conscious and did not realize that she might be an incongruous figure in the midst of all this amazing luxury. He noted that she was neatly dressed and that she was very young—she saw only the clustering bulbs of light in the gilded ceiling, the snowy tables glittering with silver and glass, the gentlemanly

waiters who spoke English so funnily, the flowers . . . beautifully dressed ladies . . . some of them smoking . . . She drew a long breath which was half a sigh and half a sob.

They brought her soup—thick white creamy soup and curly strips of crisp brown sole, and white slithers of chicken, and an ice and coffee. The man did not offer her wine, knowing instinctively that she would be shocked, and for this reason he denied himself the half bottle of Chablis his soul craved.

He tried to draw her, gently and tactfully, but it was not until he touched on the cinema as a method of filling up odd moments of waiting that she began to talk. He did not laugh, he did not even smile when she revealed herself, her dreams (this she did with a naïveté which brought a lump to his throat), and her illusions. He told her something of the untamed places of the world, of the country north of Edmonton, of the forest of Ontario, of lumber camps on the Kootenay lakes, and of Alberta.

"Are you—you aren't American?" she asked suddenly.

He smiled.

"I am Canadian," he said, "but that is near enough."

She looked at him in awe.

"Do you have cowboys and—and things like that?" she asked. "I mean . . . is it dreadfully rough there?"

They sat until they were the last people in the restaurant and the waiters stood about them in silent reproach, and in that time he had learnt all there was to tell about her. He learnt, too, of the lady in Berkeley Square who had ordered d'oyleys and had not paid. Then he drove her home by way of the square.

"Lady Grant is a friend of mine," he lied, "and she would like me to see that you were paid—I will go in and get the money."

"Her name is Lady Grey," corrected the girl timidly.

"Didn't I say Grey?" he asked in surprise.

Though she protested that her client should not be disturbed at that hour of the night, he insisted; and stopping the cab some distance from the house, he disappeared into the darkness, returning in triumph with a whole pound note.

"Lady Green asked me to say——" he began.

She looked at him in consternation.

“You went to the wrong house!” she whispered in horror; “oh, you must go back, please! It was Lady Grey——”

He groaned in spirit.

“Lady Grey asked me to say,” he went on patiently, “that you——”

“But you said ‘Green,’ ” she protested.

“I did not mention the fact,” he answered gravely, “but I am color blind—I always say Grey when I mean Green—anyway, she said the work was so well done that she would like you to accept a little extra. . . .”

All the way to her rooms on the south side of the river she was one babble of gratitude and adoration; Lady Grey was so kind, so generous, so good.

He caught himself yawning.

He went back to his hotel that night singularly thoughtful. A lean man from Toronto sprawling on the settee in the vestibule of the hotel rose up to meet him, and Private John Hamilton met his disapproving eye with a guilty smile.

“I waited till nine o’clock for you at Frascati’s,” growled the man from Toronto, clipping his canvas belt together, “you’re the darnedest old——”

“Gee, Corporal, I’m sorry!” said the young man humbly, “but I met—my—er—cousin—and she—I mean he—well, he insisted——”

“Don’t you try to put anything over me,” warned the other, stretching himself. “I wouldn’t have waited up for you, but I’ve seen the Colonel—he’s going back tomorrow.”

He looked round and lowered his voice.

“There’s to be a big attack this week,” he said, “and the Canadians will be in it. I’ve made my will,” he added.

Hamilton looked at his lank friend with a twinkling eye.

“You’re a cheerful soul,” he said.

“Yep,” said the other complacently. “I’ve left twenty-four dollars seventy-five cents, and any balance due from my army pay, to three lawyer fellers in Toronto.”

He elaborated the scheme of his will, which with any good fortune must lead to endless law suits.

“I hate lawyers worse’n poison,” he said, “and I guess I shall be as cheerful as any poor guy that goes west this week.”

Hamilton was a long time getting to bed that night. He wrote a letter to his agents in Montreal and one to the manager of his office at Toronto—he was Hamilton of the Hamilton Steel Corporation before he became No. 79743, Private Hamilton of the 40th Canadian Infantry—and another to his London banker.

For an hour he sat on the edge of his bed, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, thinking.

At two o'clock in the morning he rang his bell and demanded of the astounded night porter the address of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The request was received tolerantly by the porter as an example of youthful good spirits. When the young man angrily persisted, the porter diagnosed the case as one of truculent intoxication and went in search of a reference book.

Verity Money had never received a telegram in her life and had no idea who "Hamilton" was. It was an imperative telegram ordering her to meet the said Hamilton at Marble Arch at three o'clock.

She obeyed the summons meekly, for it would have been flying in the face of Providence to disregard a message upon which nineteen cents had been spent.

In truth, she never suspected the identity of the sender, and puzzled her little brain to recall the Mrs. Hamiltons and the Misses Hamiltons who had swum majestically into her placid sea, had thrown overboard instructions and orders for embroidered nightdress cases and pillow-slips, and had as majestically retired.

She was dressed very plainly and very neatly in black, and could have found no more attractive setting to her undeniable beauty, for she was fair and petite, with a complexion like milk and hair of spun gold. Her big gray-blue eyes, her firm little chin, her generous mouth—all these details Hamilton took in as he came forward to meet her. She was frankly and unfeignedly surprised and glad to meet him. He had joined the angels, did he but know it, and was one with St. George and Bronco Billy and other great heroes.

"I want to talk to you," he said brusquely, and looked at his wrist-watch. "We have only a quarter of an hour."

He led her to a seat in the park under a big oak. They were free from interruption but, as the girl was relieved to discover, within call of the police.

"My name is Hamilton," he said, without any further preliminary, "and I am going back to the front by the six o'clock train."

She nodded and looked at him with a new interest. He was going back to the front! It seemed rather splendid and she regretted that she had not paid closer attention to the war. But then, of course, she had not known that he was in it, and that all the bombardments, charges, minings, and bombings had been either designed to destroy him, or to rescue him from danger. For the first time she felt a sense of personal animosity against the German Emperor.

"Now, I want to say this," he went on carefully, choosing his words and speaking slower than was his practice, "I have no relations in the world, and if I am killed nobody will be very miserable."

"I should be—awfully," she said, with an eagerness that brought a smile to his tanned face.

"I am sure you would," he said gently, "and that is what I want to speak about. You see, a man is always sorry for himself. The thought of dying and not being able to continue being sorry for himself is one of the most dreadful thoughts his mind can hold. You've read that in books, haven't you?"

She was doubtful, but admitted that she had often read of people who were quite bitter at the prospect of nobody being unhappy when they died.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "I want *you* to be unhappy——"

"But I shall be," she insisted, and he laughed again.

"I want you to have the right to be unhappy," he said; "naturally, I don't want to put people who aren't—related—or connected with me to a lot of trouble—so I thought it would be a good idea if you married me before I left."

"Married you?" she said blankly, and stared at him.

He nodded.

"But I—I couldn't marry you, could I—without being your wife?"

It was an insane question and she knew it, but for any words she could utter, she was grateful enough. She found speech almost a physical impossibility, and was amazed that she could speak at all.

"I have a special license," he said deliberately, "and I have a parson waiting. If you will marry me we shall have time for a meal before I go."

"But—I don't think I love you," she faltered, "and that wouldn't be right—would it?"

"I don't want you to love me," he said loudly; "all you have to do is to marry me and be sorry."

“Oh!”

She looked round helplessly.

She could hardly call the policeman to assist her in coming to a decision, and yet she felt the need of legal advice.

“I don’t know what to do,” she said at length, “I’ve never been—nobody has ever asked me—suppose I were your—your sister, what would you advise?”

“Come and be married,” he said practically, and rose.

At five o’clock she stood upon the platform at Charing Cross Station and waved adieu to the man whose name she bore.

She waited until the train was out of sight, gently twisting the gold band upon her finger, and then with a little lift of her chin she came out to the crowded courtyard.

“Cab, miss?”

She looked at the porter a little frightened, and then with no small amount of dignity inclined her head.

The cab drew up.

“Where do you want to go, miss?” demanded the driver.

“Mrs. John Hamilton!” said the girl and grew for a moment incoherent. “I mean—oh, Hagan’s Rents, please!”

Verity Money learnt much from books. Even by cultured standards she was well read, but she found neither in Dickens, nor Dumas, nor in the efforts of the modern authors any situation analogous to her own. Nor did the cinema help her, though she indulged in a systematic search for parallels.

She had letters from her husband—kindly, brotherly letters. He had been in a big fight, and had come out without a scratch, though his friend (“you remember the Corporal who was at the church?”) had been severely wounded, though he was now on the way to recovery. Was she well? Did she receive her allowance regularly? Had she moved as he suggested to the furnished flat he had urged her to take?

She answered his letters in a firm, childish hand, perfectly punctuated, and to his surprise and relief not only literate but literary in the sense that they conveyed a freshness and a clarity of view which was little short of marvelous.

“I shall try to be a good wife to you,” she wrote, “and I am already reading the newspapers carefully. I have written to Lord Kitchener——”

He sat back on the step of the trench and gasped—then he laughed and laughed till the tears rolled down his face.

“I have written to Lord Kitchener to ask him when the war will be over, and he has written to me saying that he isn’t sure, but he will let me know. I hope our marriage isn’t a mistake, but I will try to be worthy of a hero who is fighting for his country. I have a picture of a Canadian soldier, and I am learning to sing ‘The Maple Leaf.’ I went to the flower shop in Regent Street and asked them if they had any maple leaves, but they had none. It was so silly of me, but I did want to buy some.”

When John Hamilton came out of the trenches he went to No. 8 Base Hospital and saw a certain swathed and bandaged corporal, and discussed matters.

“Well, Don Quixote, and how is Mrs. Don?” asked the voice behind a large square of medicated gauze.

John sat on the bed and read extracts from the letter.

“I thought you were crazy,” said the wounded man, “but I guess you’ve instinct. There’s the making of a woman in that child. You’re not feeling sorry for yourself?”

“On the contrary, I’m looking forward to life—it has possibilities,” said the other.

Verity Hamilton in the Baker Street flat, with a maid of her own, was a serious little figure facing those possibilities for herself.

She adored her ten-minute husband because she was made to adore those who were kind to her. She prayed for him, she evolved great plans for his future, and she fought hard against the pin-point of doubt which had come into her mind and which was growing with every day which passed.

In a sense he had fulfilled her ideals and her dreams, for he had come violently into her life and had in a sense saved her from destruction. At any rate he had given her food when she was very hungry. And then she had seen him again—and whisk! she was married!

She used to sit with compressed lips, and eyes that were fixed in the far-away, wondering—and doubting.

He could not love her: he had never said that he did. He had not so much as

kissed her, and it was only the strong grip of his hand that she remembered.

Her problem was a simple one. She loved her husband and he did not love her. Why he had married her she did not ask herself, curiously enough. Who was she to inquire into his godlike whims?

How could she make her husband love her? That was the problem, and presently a fortuitous visit to the movies told her.

Four months after his marriage, John Hamilton was sent to England on sick leave pending his discharge. The shrapnel bullet which was responsible for so much left him with a perceptible limp, and there was a big chance that he might rid himself of all traces of his wound (so the army doctors told him), but it would take time.

He arrived at Southampton in the early hours of a spring morning, and telegraphed to his wife that he would be staying at the Cranbourne Hotel and that he would call and see her.

He expected she would be waiting for him at Waterloo, but here he was disappointed and a little hurt. Yet—he had heard something of the commotion she had caused at the War Office when the news of the wounding had come through; of how she had appeared armed with a letter authorizing her to call upon a high personage. Being somewhat vague as to her husband's position in the army since he had been promoted to lance-corporal, she had described him as "Colonel," which accounted for her facilities.

And she had demanded to be taken at once to the Holy of Holies to meet the steel-eyed man from Khartoum, and had wept on the breast of a flustered field officer when that permission had been gently denied her.

All this John Hamilton had learnt, and, lying on his back in the Versailles hospital, had chuckled the morning through at the recital.

Perhaps she had a surprise for him? She had indeed.

When he came to her flat the maid opened the door expectantly and primly.

Would he go to the drawing-room—Mrs. Hamilton was waiting.

The drawing-room door was opened and he was announced. He did not hear the door close behind him, for he stood out of breath and speechless looking down at the girl.

She was seated in a low chair before the fire, and on her knees lay a tiny pink-faced thing that scowled and spluttered and stared into space.

"My God!" whispered John Hamilton.

She looked up at him serenely with that smile which was peculiarly her own.

“Isn’t he lovely?” she whispered.

John Hamilton said nothing.

“Whose—whose baby is that?” he managed to say at last.

“Mine,” she said gravely.

“Y—yours—how old is it?” he asked, a cold sweat of apprehension breaking over him.

“Two months,” she said.

He sat down heavily and she looked across at him with growing distress.

“Oh dear—please, aren’t you glad?” she pleaded. “I thought you would be ——”

He glared from the child to Verity and from Verity to the child, and then he laughed, but it was not a happy laugh.

“What an ass I am!” he said, half to himself. “What a stupid blind fool!”

The tears were standing in her eyes, tears of disappointment and chagrin. She was hurt—he saw the immeasurable pain in her eyes and was kneeling by her side in an instant.

“My dear, my dear,” he said softly, “I am an awful brute—but it was such a surprise and I had no idea——”

“I thought—it would make you so happy,” she sobbed. “I wanted you—to love me—and children bring people together as nothing else does—I’ve seen it in stories and things.”

He patted her hand.

“Yes, dear—but this is not—my child.”

She looked at him open-eyed.

“Of course it is your child!” she cried.

John Hamilton rose unsteadily.

“I think—I rather think you’re wrong,” he said, his head whirling.

She laid the unconscious cause of her unhappiness upon the downy deeps of the big arm-chair and faced him, her hands clasped behind her back.

“It’s no use trying,” she said brokenly. “I thought you would love a little baby about the house—I’ll have to send it back.”

She covered her face with her hands.

“Send it back!” he gasped.

He took her by the wrists and gently pulled her hands apart.

“I—I was going to adopt it,” she gulped. “I have it on a week’s—a week’s trial——”

He took her in his arms and his laughter filled the flat with joyful sound. The baby on the sofa, scenting disaster for itself, opened its little red mouth very wide, screwed up its eyes into the merest buttons and added its voice to the chorus.

The Dear Liar

Sylvia Crest walked back to her surgery, her quick steps beating time to the song of triumph in her heart. She had declined Jonas Picton's offer to send her home in one of his many cars. Walking, movement of any kind, physical action she wanted to work down the bubbling exuberance which was within her. So she swung down the hill from the big house and through Broadway into busy Market Street, and people who knew her and who observed the lifted chin and the light in her eyes, saw Tollford's one woman doctor as a new being. They saw, though this they could not know, merely the reaction from months of depression bordering upon despair, months of waiting when her most precious quality, her faith in herself and her invincibility had been gradually shrinking until she had almost lost hold.

For she had thrown down the gage to the town of Tollford, and until this morning the glove lay moulding where it fell.

If Tollford had not been founded a couple of hundred years before the birth of Jonas Picton, it might and undoubtedly would have been known to history as Pictonville. It is on record that Jonas offered pretty substantial inducements, including the building of a new Town Hall, the presentation of a town park, and the equipment of a new Fire Station to induce such a change of name; but Tollford was more conservative in those days before Picton's tall smoke stacks stabbed the skyline east and north, and his great glass-roofed factory buildings sprawled half-way down the valley.

And when the Picton works, and some eight thousand Picton employees, had become so important a factor in the municipal life of Tollford, Jonas had outgrown the desire for advertisement and had found life held something bigger than the flattery of a purchased honor.

Yet, in every other sense, Tollford remained conservative. Strangers who came and surveyed the town and marked it down as easy, who saw gold lying on the sidewalks waiting to be lifted, and returned joyously to show Tollford how much better stores, theatres, and newspapers could be run—these people lost money.

Dr. Sylvia Crest had come straight to Tollford from Mercer's Hospital, her diploma painfully new but her heart charged with confidence. She, too, had surveyed the land and had duly noted the poverty of medical resources in the town. Of women doctors there were none—and there were at least four

thousand woman employed at Picton's. She sat down the night following her visit to Tollford, and, with a pencil and paper and the local health statistics before her, she took stock of opportunity and found the prospects beautiful.

So she arrived one dull day in February, rented a corner house, furnished her rooms with proper severity, put up her sign, and waited. The local newspaper man gave her a most outrageous puff, for Sylvia was pretty—the prettiness of regular features and a skin like silk; but, brazen sign and as brazen advertisement notwithstanding, few patients sought the advice of the new doctor.

Tollford was conservative.

Moreover, working women did not like women doctors. About the female of the medical profession all manner of legends circulated. Women practitioners (by local and even more general account) did not treat women as kindly as men doctors. They were liable to fainting spells, and think what would happen if, in the middle of a critical operation, the doctor needed medical attention!

All these things were said and agreed upon in the lunch hour at Picton's, when the women talked over the new arrival.

"I'd as soon die as have a woman doctor fussing round me," said one oracle, and her light-hearted preference for death before the attentions of one of her sex was endorsed with unanimity.

A haggard and droop-lipped Jonas Picton sitting in his ornate office at the works had heard of Dr. Sylvia Crest, and sighed. Where the great Steyne, most famous of modern physicians, had failed to find any other remedy than the knife, and offered even that dread remedy without assurance of cure, what hope could a "bit of a girl" bring? His secretary had pointed her out to him once when he was driving through Tollford. And yet one day in sheer desperation he had sent for her. The messenger had come at a moment when Dr. Sylvia was facing, perilously near tears, an accumulation of bills which called for an earlier settlement than her bank manager could sanction. No wonder that the sun shone more wonderfully, and the homely folk of Tollford took on a foreign charm under her benignant eyes as she made her way homeward.

Alan Brock was waiting in her study, and the hearth she had left clean and tidy was strewn with his cigarette ends. She looked suspiciously at him as she came in, his face was more yellow, his appearance more untidy than usual, and he had not shaved.

He was the one doctor in Tollford who had given her welcome—he was more presentable the first day he had called upon her—and she had been grateful. She did not realize until later that in seeking her out he had advertised his belief in her failure.

Alan Brock had neither friend nor practice in Tollford, and for good reason.

She took off her wrap, her disapproving eyes upon the figure sprawling in the one easy-chair she possessed.

“Doctor Brock, you have been taking morphine again,” she said severely.

He chuckled, stretching out his hand to flick away the ashes of his cigarette. “I must keep one patient, you know,” he grinned, “to alleviate suffering, to restore vitality—what used old Professor Thingummy say were the three duties of medicine?”

She smiled.

She was too elated to take anything but a charitable view even of one whose acquaintance she was determined to drop.

“Why don’t you go away from here?” she asked. “You need not be a doctor——”

“The good people of Tollford make it obvious,” he growled.

“You have money,” she went on; “why stay here where——” She stopped, and he looked up.

“Where I’m not exactly respected, eh?” he asked. “Well, there are several reasons, and you’re one of them.”

“Me?” she was genuinely surprised.

He nodded.

“Yes, you. Do you know, Sylvia, doctoring isn’t your line. You haven’t the temperament for it, for one thing—it’s a horrible profession for a woman, anyway.”

Her lips were set tight now.

“That isn’t the view you took a month ago, Dr. Brock,” she said, and he waved his hand feebly.

“A few weeks ago I wanted to know you and I wasn’t such a fool as to start right in telling you your faults. Sylvia, you and I are both hopeless failures.”

He rose unsteadily and reached out his hand. Had she not moved quickly it would have rested on her arm.

“I want you to listen to me, Dr. Brock,” she said quietly. “There is nothing in our relationship which justifies your calling me by my Christian name. There is, I am sorry to say, very little in our common profession which makes a continuance of our friendship possible or desirable—even the communion of failure has no attraction for me.”

He was standing by the table, swaying slightly. The effect of the morphine was beginning to wear off and his face was drawn and haggard. He muttered something and sank back to his chair. Then lifting his sunken head with an unexpected alertness:

“Look here,” he said, “I’ve got money, that’s true. I tell you I’m mighty fond of you, and that’s true also. Why don’t you throw up this business and come away? It would make a new man of me, Sylvia.”

She shook her head.

“Supposing I was fond of you, which I’m not, marrying a man to reform him would be a pretty thin occupation; and, honestly, I don’t think you’re going to be cured.”

“You’re certain about that, are you?” he said, with an ugly little smile.

“Do you realize,” he asked suddenly, “that you’re certain about almost everything?”

He was surprised to see the red come into her face. Later he was to learn the reason why.

“I’m sorry,” he said humbly. “Don’t let us quarrel—anyway, I’m leaving this hole. How did you get on this morning? Did you see the kid?”

“I saw the child,” said the girl.

“Well?” He was looking at her queerly. There was something skeptical and challenging in his attitude which annoyed her, until she remembered that there had been a time when this broken man had been Picton’s family doctor.

“I saw the child,” she said again, “and I think that the trouble is local—in fact, I am certain.” She cut the word short, as though it had slipped out against her will, and again she flushed.

“You think the spinal trouble will yield to treatment—in fact, you’re certain, eh?” he said slowly. “Well, you’re putting your opinion against the biggest expert.”

“I realize that,” she replied; “but I must say what I believe. I gave the child a thorough examination; she’s a pretty little girl, isn’t she? I am satisfied that with massage and fairly simple local remedies, the swelling on the back can be absorbed.”

Brock was silent. He sat with his chin on his hands looking into the fire.

At last he broke the silence.

“And naturally old man Picton fell on your neck and blessed you.”

She looked at him in surprise.

“He was rather grateful—why?”

“Because,” said the other grimly, “that’s the kind of verdict he’s been trying to get for years. Jonas Picton hates the knife. His wife died on the table. His mother died in similar circumstances, and I believe one of his sisters had a very unhappy experience at the hands of a fashionable surgeon. It is just the knife that he wants to avoid, and naturally he believed you and was glad to swallow everything you told him. Do you know what you are, Sylvia? You’re the straw, and he clutched you!”

The girl repressed her irritation with an effort.

“I gave what I believe to be an honest opinion,” she said.

Dr. Brock had reached out his hand and taken a book from the bookcase and was looking at it idly. He turned the cover.

“S. A. C.—your initials,” he said. “ ‘Sure and Certain,’ eh?” He laughed.

This time she made no attempt to conceal her anger.

“You are not quite as original as you think, Dr. Brock,” she said, her lips trembling. “Those initials have been interpreted that way before by a man who would be a little more competent than you to sit in judgment on my diagnosis.”

“Who is that?” he asked in surprise.

He had reached the stage in morphiomania where he found it impossible to take offense at rebuffs more pointed than Sylvia Crest’s.

“John Wintermere,” she said shortly, and he whistled.

“I remember,” he said softly. “I heard some story about it from Mercers. He was rather sweet on you, wasn’t he, and you had an awful row with him when you were a student, and--”

The girl had opened the door.

“If you will excuse me now, Dr. Brock, I shall be very glad to have this room,” she said. “I am expecting some patients.”

“Wintermere, eh?” He rose slowly, groping for his hat. “Good chap, Wintermere. He’s married now, isn’t he?”

He saw the girl’s face go white.

“Married?” she faltered. “I don’t know—perhaps—at any rate, it’s no business of mine.”

He chuckled. The effect of the marriage invention on the spur of the moment satisfied him.

“Perhaps he isn’t—now I come to think of it. I was wrong to say he was married. Scared you, didn’t it?”

She made no answer.

He turned at the door of the little house. “Jonas has taken you up and you’ll get all the patients you want now, but, take my advice, combine business and pleasure by getting John Wintermere down to see Picton’s kid. Picton has funked sending for him, though he knows Wintermere’s opinion is the last word on spinal trouble——”

The door was slammed viciously in his face.

It seemed almost as though Brock’s prophecy was to be fulfilled. As if some secret courier had run from house to house telling Tollford that the new woman doctor was under the sublime patronage of Jonas Picton and was no longer to be avoided. Patients appeared miraculously. Never before had Dr. Sylvia Crest’s waiting-room been so crowded as it was that night.

She called the next day at the big house to see her little patient. Picton’s car was at the door, and, as she walked up, the big man was pulling on his gloves in the hall and greeted her with almost pathetic eagerness.

“Just come into the library, doctor,” he said, opening a door. “I want to talk to you about Fay.”

He ushered her into the room, closed the door behind her, and lowered his voice.

“I didn’t tell you yesterday, doctor, that I had consulted Dr. Steyne. You’ve heard of Steyne?”

Sylvia nodded.

“I have heard of him,” she smiled, “and I also know that you’ve consulted

him."

Picton looked relieved.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said. "Somehow I didn't like telling you for fear"—he laughed a little nervously—"for fear the knowledge that Steyne had seen her would influence your opinion. You know that he takes a different view from yours? He calls the disease some infernal long name and says that it cannot be cured save by an operation, and that it is extremely rare that such operations are successful. Sit down, won't you?"

He followed her example, stripping off his gloves as he spoke, and gaining something of the animation and forcefulness which Tollford associated with his dominating personality.

"There's another man, Wintermere," Picton went on. "You've heard of him?"

"I've heard of him," said Sylvia steadily.

"Well, they wanted me to bring him down to see the child, and I've heard that he's a pretty clever man. I met him when I was on my vacation, and he seems a very clever fellow, though a bit young looking for a specialist."

The name of John Wintermere invariably annoyed her. Today, with the memory of Brock's gibes so fresh in her mind, there was sounder reason for her irritation. But John Wintermere had been her master in surgery, and common decency demanded a testimonial.

"I don't think I should be deceived by his youthful appearance, Mr. Picton," she said. "I think he is the greatest surgeon in this country."

Jonas Picton pulled a wry face.

"I don't want any great surgeons," he said shortly. "I want a cure without surgery. And you think you can do it, don't you?"

Only for the fraction of a second did Sylvia hesitate.

"Yes, I think so, yes, I am cer—I am confident I can cure the child," she said, and if he noticed her confusion of terms he made no comment.

He rose quickly and gripped her arm with his big hand.

"My friend," he said, and his voice was a little shaky, "put my girl right and you shall never regret having come to Tollford."

Sylvia went up alone to the room of her patient, and she seemed to have lost something of the sprightliness of mind with which she had greeted the day.

In a large room chosen for its situation because its windows offered no view of her father's commercial activities, was the center and soul of Jonas Picton's existence.

"Hello, Miss Doctor!" said a cheery voice from the white bed, and Sylvia went across to her patient and took the thin hand in hers.

Fay Picton was seventeen and a prodigious bookworm; books covered the table by the side of the bed and filled two long cases which ran the length of the room. She was a pretty, fairylike thing who turned big, smiling eyes to the newcomer.

"You're the first interesting doctor I've had," she said, "and I've had a lot. Your name is Sylvia, and it's what I'm going to call you. I couldn't tell you this yesterday because Daddy was here, and I had to appear impressed by all that stuff you were talking."

"And weren't you impressed?" smiled Sylvia, as she sat by the bed.

"Not a dreadful lot," said the girl, with disconcerting frankness. "You see, I know much more about my unhappy case than you or Daddy. I've read a lot about it."

But Sylvia was nettled. To suggest the fallibility of the young is outrageous.

"You ought not to have read any medical books," she said severely.

"Oh, skittles," said the patient contemptuously; "you don't suppose they'd let me have medical books, do you?"

"Well, where did you read about it?"

"In the encyclopædia, of course. Everything's in the encyclopædia, isn't it?"

Sylvia, for the first time in her life, was genuinely embarrassed.

"Well, anyway, we're going to cure you," she said cheerily, and Fay Picton laughed quietly.

"Of course you're *not* going to cure me," she said calmly. "This thing is more or less incurable. The only remedy is an operation, and there have been just four cases where an operation has been successful. Only Daddy shrieks inside himself at the very idea—poor soul!"

This was not exactly the start which Dr. Sylvia Crest had expected. She was dismayed at the thought that her task was to be doubly difficult and that she had two fights to wage—one against the disease and one against the

skepticism of this self-possessed young person.

“You see, doctor dear, the spine and all its eccentricities is *terra nova* to the poor doctor,” the patient went on remorselessly. She stopped suddenly as she saw the look in Sylvia’s face. “I’m awfully sorry.” She put out her hand and laid it on Sylvia’s knee. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter; do your best and come every day and talk to me, and I’ll pray hard for faith in your treatment.”

That was the beginning of the curious and torturing friendship which shook the self-confidence of Sylvia Crest more than the admonitions of professors or the jeers of Alan Brock.

“Fay is quite brightening up under the care of that woman doctor,” Picton told his cronies, his managers, and the few who enjoyed the privilege of intimate friendship with him. “Never saw her looking so cheerful, my boy.”

One afternoon Sylvia went in haste to her patient, obeying an urgent telephone summons from the nurse, and found the girl lying on her side, haggard and white, with a queer little smile on her face.

“Doctor, darling,” said Fay, “send that gaunt female out of hearing and I’ll tell you something.”

Sylvia dismissed the nurse.

“Bend down as they do in books,” whispered the girl, with a little laugh that ended in a grimace, “and I will tell you my guilty secret.”

“What is wrong, dear?” asked Sylvia.

She was in a panic—an unreasonable, fearful panic—and there was need to exercise control, lest her voice betrayed her. The girl’s bright eyes were fixed on hers, and there was elfish laughter struggling with the pain in her voice.

“If we could have a little slow music,” she whispered, “I think it would be appropriate. Sylvia, you won’t let that raw-boned creature weep over me, will you?”

“For God’s sake, Fay, be quiet,” said Sylvia hoarsely. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m going to glory,” said the girl. “I sort of know it.”

“Let me see.”

Sylvia’s hand trembled as she examined the spine. The tiny swelling which it had been her daily care to reduce had grown ominously, and there were other certain symptoms which could not be ignored.

Jonas Picton, called from a board meeting, came back to the house and listened in silence whilst Sylvia told the new development.

He seemed to shrink visibly at the telling, and when he spoke his voice was husky.

"I—I had a lot of confidence in you, doctor," he said. "Do you think—do you think there is anything to be done——"

Sylvia was silent for a while. But he might have foretold her answer in the sudden stiffening of her body and the upward throw of her chin.

"I still have faith in my treatment," she said.

He did not speak again, but sat on the edge of his chair, his head bent forward, his fingers twining, and then without a word he rose and went up to the girl's room.

Sylvia did not follow him. Somehow she knew instinctively that he wished to go alone. She waited for ten minutes and then he came back. He did not look at her, but walked to the window and stared out. Presently he turned.

"Who is the best surgeon in this country?" he asked.

"John Wintermere of Mercer's Hospital," she replied.

He nodded and went out of the room. Then he came back and opened the door wide, but he did not come into the room, nor did he look at her.

"You'd better go up and see Fay," he said. "I've telephoned to Dr. Wintermere, and he will be here this evening."

Sylvia Crest walked heavily up the stairs. She had heard the doom of her professional career, as though it were pronounced by a judge.

Fay lay with her face turned to the door, and as the girl entered she beckoned her.

"I had to do it, Sylvia darling," she said. "You don't mind me taking liberties with my staid old family doctor?"

She took the older girl's hand between hers and fondled it.

"Had to do what, dear?" asked Sylvia quietly.

"I had to tell him to send for Wintermere."

"You told him?" said Sylvia in surprise.

The girl nodded.

“You see, I’ve been thinking things out, and it occurred to me that I might be the fifth case in history, and really, for poor Daddy’s sake, I ought to take a chance. You don’t mind, do you, not really?”

Sylvia stooped and kissed the girl.

“No, dear,” she said.

“It means a tremendous lot to you, in your profession, doesn’t it, I mean your—your——” Fay checked the words.

“My mistaken diagnosis,” finished Sylvia, with a laugh. “Yes, I suppose it does, but it means more to me that you should have the best treatment, irrespective of my fine feelings, and even though the treatment is contrary to my idea of what is right.”

Sylvia waited at the house the whole of that afternoon, and she was alone in the drawing-room when John Wintermere came. She had nerved herself for the meeting, and was in consequence more cold and more formal in her attitude than she intended.

He walked slowly across the room to her, and it seemed as though the passage of six years had made no alteration in the disparity of their relationships. He was still the professor, she was still the student, though she felt she had grown older at a faster rate than he. But he was also the man who had held her hand one sunny day in the hospital gardens and had spoken incoherently of love, urging her to drop the profession to which she had dedicated her life. Perhaps the memory of this added to the awkwardness of the meeting.

“I’m glad to see you again, Sylvia,” he said in that soft voice of his. “It is curious I should be called into a case of yours. Won’t you tell me about it?”

She did not resent the “Sylvia.” It came so naturally and rightly, and, in the detailing of Fay Picton’s case, her nervousness wore off. He listened gravely, interjecting now and again a question, and when she had finished he heaved a long sigh.

“Well?” she challenged.

He hesitated.

“It may be what you think,” he said, “but it seems to me that the symptoms suggest a series of complications. Have you”—he hesitated again—“have you offered a definite opinion?”

She nodded.

“Did you tell Picton that the case would yield to your treatment?”

She nodded again, and his face lengthened.

“So if the opinion I give is in contradiction to yours . . .?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“If that is the case,” she said, “I shall regret not having followed the advice you offered to me six years ago.”

He was looking at her thoughtfully.

“It would mean ruin for you, of course,” he said. “I—I wish I had not been called in.”

“That’s absurd, Dr. Wintermere,” she said sharply. “Personal friendship and that sort of thing—I don’t mean friendship,” she went on confused, “I mean——”

“I know what you mean,” said Wintermere. “Will you take me up to the child?”

Jonas Picton was in the room when they went in, and he remained by one of the windows whilst the examination was in progress. After a while Wintermere rearranged the bedclothes.

“Well?” said Fay, looking up into his face, with a smile; “to be or not to be?”

He smiled back at her and gently twigged the end of her nose.

“That is the privilege of an eminent specialist,” he said gravely.

“To be or not to be?” persisted the girl.

“Fay, Fay, don’t talk about such things.” It was her father who had come to her bedside and had taken her little hand in his. “Don’t talk about things so flippantly, darling. You hurt your old Dad.”

Then with sudden resolution he looked across the bed to Wintermere, and asked harshly:

“Is an operation necessary?”

Sylvia held her breath. Her heart was pounding violently, and she felt as though she were going to faint. What would the verdict be? She knew too well what sentence would follow that verdict. She met the grave, earnest eyes of John Wintermere, and there was in hers a momentary plea for mercy. She hated herself for it. She knew that deep in her woman’s heart was only one

desire—the health and the life of the frail child who was looking with a quizzical smile from one to the other.

"Well?" asked Picton. "Is an operation necessary?"

Wintermere cleared his throat.

"An operation is not only necessary but imperative," he said steadily, "and it must be performed at once."

Picton, with a groan, turned on his heel and walked from the room.

Sylvia saw the doctor only once again before the operation. At the request of the girl she was staying in the house. Picton had retired to his library and was not visible, and the girl was left alone in the big, cheerless drawing-room to plan her new future. She would have offered to help had Wintermere given her any encouragement, but he had (purposely, it seemed) made her attendance unnecessary by telephoning for an anæsthetist. So Sylvia sat and thought. She told herself a dozen times that every doctor makes a mistake, and the fact that their diagnoses were occasionally refuted does not ruin their career.

But it was not what the world might think of Sylvia Crest that worried her and that drove her to a condition of blank despair. It was the shattering of her own faith in Sylvia Crest.

At ten o'clock that night she went up to see the child and found her cheerful—even gay.

"Sylvia, my duck, sit down here," said Fay Picton, patting the side of the bed with her white hand, "and don't worry, because I'm going to be the miraculous fifth. I like your Dr. Wintermere."

"My Dr. Wintermere?" The protest was forced from Sylvia.

"Your Dr. Wintermere," said the girl coolly. "He's awfully good-looking, isn't he, and not so very old. I should hate having a man with whiskers carving me about. And he's fond of you. I saw him looking at you like the film hero looks at the poor but honest shop-girl. He devoured you—that's the word, my dear."

"Don't talk nonsense, please, Fay. You ought to be preparing yourself."

"For a happier life," the patient laughed softly.

"Now go down and see father, and tell him that I am brave but happy."

She had left the room, and was at the head of the stairs when she met Wintermere. They stopped, facing one another on the landing, and it was Sylvia who spoke first.

“I hope it is going to be very successful, doctor,” she said.

“I hope so,” he replied drearily. “God knows, this is the most awful end to six years of dreaming that could be imagined. Anybody but you—if it had been anybody but you, Sylvia.”

She shook her head.

“If I am wrong, I am terribly wrong,” she said. “If you are right, I shall thank God for it all my days.”

He bowed his head for a second and walked past her.

To Sylvia’s surprise she found Picton waiting for her in the drawing-room. And he was calmer and more friendly than she had expected. She delivered her message in a modified form, and he nodded and turned the conversation to a more general subject. So they talked for half an hour on matters which did not interest them, and their hearts and minds were in the room above.

Unexpectedly the old man turned the conversation to Sylvia herself.

“Doctor,” he said, “I know you did your best for my little girl, and you’ve done all you could to make her happy—to make me happy too,” he added, then paused as though he was in some doubt as to how he should proceed. “What I mean is this,” he said, with an effort—“that whatever is the outcome of this,” he waved his hand to the door, “I do not blame you.”

“I shall not need your blame,” said Sylvia in a low tone; “if I am wrong, I shall never practice again.”

“You’ll never practice again,” he repeated. “Then this is a tragedy for both of us.”

She bent her head. The handle of the door turned, and both sprang up as John Wintermere came in. He wore a long white wrapper, and had evidently come straight from his task. His face was white and drawn, and he looked from one to the other in silence as he closed the door behind him. Picton was shaking in every limb.

“Well—well?” he asked in a curiously squeaky voice.

John Wintermere nodded.

“Your daughter will recover,” he said, “and, I believe, will be a strong and healthy girl.”

“Thank God for that!” gasped the old man, and falling into his chair, he covered his face with his hands, his shoulders shaking.

“I want to say something else, please.”

Picton lifted his tear-stained face to the man in the white wrapper, but John Wintermere was looking at Sylvia.

“I want to say this,” he said, “that when the operation was well advanced I discovered that it was unnecessary.”

“Unnecessary!” cried Sylvia.

And again he nodded.

“I am satisfied,” he said, speaking slowly, “that had Dr. Crest’s treatment been continued, your daughter would have made a complete recovery without recourse to the knife.”

Then he walked from the room without another word.

It was the anæsthetist whom Sylvia saw just before he left the house that night, and she talked to him as doctor to doctor.

“Yes, he’s a wonderful chap, Wintermere,” said that medico, with a sigh of admiration and envy. “She’ll recover all right. Yes, he’s a wonderful fellow. Good-night, doctor.” She smiled to herself in the darkness of the porch before the house.

Wintermere was saying good-night to Picton, who was almost hysterical in his relief and happiness. When he came out, Sylvia was waiting for him.

“Send your car on,” she said; “I want to walk a little way with you.”

It was a slow and a silent walk, and when the time for parting came, Sylvia turned to the man at her side and laid her hands on his shoulders.

“John,” she said, “I’m going out of this profession.”

“You’re mad,” he said, and his voice trembled. “You—you were right in this case.”

She laughed quietly.

“You dear liar,” she said, and kissed him.

The Christmas Princess

There were times when John Bennett Watson (abbreviated for office purposes to “J. B.”) wished he were not the Managing Director of the Western Commercial Corporation; moments when he envied the manager of the Broad Street branch of the Southern & Eastern Bank. This in spite of the fact that he was a normal man of thirty-something, without any business worries whatever, enjoying the best of health and an income which, at a moderate estimate, was twenty times larger than the hard-worked bank manager.

J. B. was a man who in no circumstances interfered in other people’s affairs; meddlers, he loathed; outside folks who knew how things could be done better, he abominated, and yet there were certain domestic arrangements of the Southern Bank that he would alter.

Gray, the manager, a harassed little man with a straggling beard, came over to see him about a draft, and John made an awkward dive to the matter that at once intrigued and irritated him.

“You are very busy at the bank, Mr. Gray?”

“Yes,” sighed Gray, rising and gathering up his documents, “too busy! With the annual audit coming on, the slump in industrials, the heavy cash balances I must carry to meet end-of-the-quarter demands, I look like having a happy New Year! Good morning!”

“I was working late in my office the other night,” said John hastily, arresting the official’s departure, “and, looking across the road, I saw a girl working at eleven o’clock—she was still working when I left, and the next morning I saw her at her desk when I arrived.”

The manager scratched his beard.

“Who can that be, now?” he asked absently. “Oh yes, that is Miss Welford. She was secretary to our late accountant. Poor fellow! He died leaving things in a terrible muddle, and if it wasn’t for the fact that she has an instinct for banking and has got his department work at her finger-tips, I should be in a fearful muddle. She is the only member of my staff that I would leave on the premises by herself, I assure you!”

“I thought I’d met her somewhere,” said John carelessly and most untruthfully.

“I dare say,” said the bank manager. “She is the sort of girl who has moved

in a very good set. Her father lost his money in the rubber slump. By the way, rubber is a market that looks like reviving, Mr. Watson."

"I dare say," said John, to whom the fluctuations of the rubber market meant less than nothing. "I think I remember her—*Annie* Welford, isn't it?"

The manager shook his head.

"I don't know—'F. G.,' her initials are." He frowned. "I never trouble about the names of people. Oh yes, it's Frances; that's the name. I've often thought she's quite a good-looking girl."

"You've often thought that, have you?" said John scornfully.

The man was scarcely human, and yet he was loath to let him go, and searched around in his mind for some excuse for detaining him.

"Where do you go for Christmas, Mr. Gray?"

"Home," said the other, showing the first sign of animation. "The two days in the year I look forward to are Good Friday and Christmas Day. Christmas is the one day I can't work and can be really a perfectly happy man! I sit in front of a fire, and my children read to me or tell me Christmas stories, and that's my idea of a perfectly happy day."

"Great heavens!" said John, aghast. "You *are* human, after all! Though I confess that, if anybody tried to tell me a Christmas story on Christmas Day, I should go and look for a hatchet. And your staff—do they work?"

"I'm sorry to say that headquarters won't allow that," said the manager regretfully. "It would add to my enjoyment considerably if I knew that somebody else was working."

John took an instant dislike to him, had thoughts of changing his bank.

"Do you mean to tell me you would let her—them, I mean—work on Christmas Day? Why, it would be disgraceful!" he said hotly.

When the bank manager had gone, John strode over the carpeted floor of his office and stood, staring across at the trim figure visible—more visible than he had hoped—from the window.

"Quite a good-looking girl!"

He smiled at the impertinence of the man. She was beautiful, the complete satisfaction of all his uncatalogued requirements. If he could only hear her speak! He shrank from the possibility of disillusionment. What would she do on Christmas Day? he wondered. Hold revel in her suburban home, possibly in the company of her sweetheart. He made a little grimace at the thought.

Yet it was perfectly ridiculous to suppose that such a girl would be without admirers, and that from their hosts she should not have given preference to one over all the rest.

If Gray had been just a little more human, it would have been possible to secure an introduction, though he shrank even from that prospect.

He was staring at her when the girl looked up, saw his dim figure behind the window-pane, and, as though conscious that she had been the object of his scrutiny, got up quickly from the table, switched on the light, and pulled down the shade. It was the first time she had ever noticed him, he reflected glumly, and it was not very pleasing that her acknowledgment of his admiration should be so emphatically resentful.

John Watson went back to his bachelor flat in St. James's with a feeling that the day had not been well spent, and that something in this one-sided intimacy had gone out of his life. He could no longer picture himself speaking to her, could weave no more dreams in which she played a complacent and agreeable part. Drawing the blind seemed to shut out even the visions that a pipe and a fire and a sprawling terrier bring to the most unimaginative. He must needs fall back upon the Princess.

Her Serene Highness had been a figure of speculation from the day when old Nurse Crawley, who attended his infant needs, and was locally credited with being possessed of the devil, predicted that he would inherit a great fortune and marry a princess—a faith from which she never wavered all the days of her life. Fortune had come unexpectedly and vastly, and had been doubled and trebled by his own peculiar genius. But the Princess remained amongst the glowing and shadowy shapes of the fire, less tangible than the blue smoke that curled from his pipe.

And now the Princess bored him. He wanted to meet "F. G. Welford." He wanted badly to meet her: first, to apologize for his rudeness, and then to ask her . . . well, just to ask her if life held any greater attraction than the balancing of a late accountant's books.

The blind was drawn the next morning when he looked out. It was drawn on the morning of Christmas Eve. He had brought his bag to the office and lost two trains in the hope that she might relent. She was inexorable. He always traveled to Tatterdown by train because the cottage (it had been his father's before him) had no accommodation for a car, and somehow his big limousine did not attune with the atmosphere of that faded and fragrant place.

The taxi-cab that took him to the station was half-way up Broad Street

when he saw her. She was walking toward the office; had evidently been out to tea; and his cab was near enough to the sidewalk to give him the nearest view of her face he had yet had. He drew his breath at the sight of her, and for a second was seized with an insane desire to stop the cab, get out, and, on some desperate excuse or other, speak to her. But before he could commit that folly, she was gone.

Gray was a slave-driver, he decided, a sweater, a man of no sensibility or feeling. Christmas Eve! And to allow a girl to work. . . . Perhaps the cunning devil had lied to him, and she was working on Christmas Day. He hated the unhappy Mr. Gray, hated his baldness, his beard, and all that was of him. Such a man had no soul, no proper appreciation of values. He was a cold-blooded exploiter of all that was best and noblest in humanity.

By the time he had reached Bullham Junction, John Bennett Watson was better balanced in mind, could chuckle at his own extravagances without wondering at them, which was ominous.

There was no conveyance at the station, and he walked through the one street of Bullham to the Red Lion.

"Excuse me, Mr. Watson."

He turned, to see the rubicund countenance and the blue coat of a policeman.

"Happy Christmas, Mr. Watson. You going out to Tatterdown?"

"Why, yes, sergeant, as soon as I can get a cab."

"Likely you'll see my dog Mowser round about the village; he's a rare fellow for Tatterdown. There's a dog there he's always fighting. Will you send him home with a flea in his ear? Give him a whack and he'll go. Getting into bad habits, that dog. Comes home in the middle of the night and scratches the door till I let him in."

J. B. smiled and promised.

Mowser, a bedraggled wire-haired terrier, he found literally on the doorstep of the cottage, and Mowser's feud had evidently found expression in violence, for he was slightly tattered.

John took him in and fed him. The hour was late, and he decided to send him back in the morning—an arrangement wholly agreeable to Mowser, who finished his scrap and went to sleep under the kitchen table.

So small was Tatterdown Cottage that the man and his wife who acted as

caretakers had no accommodation and slept at the village—a risky proceeding, as an insurance company had told him, but one which he preferred, for there were memories about this little house with its thatched roof and Elizabethan chimneys which were very pleasant, and the presence of strangers was insufferable. Here, for ten years, John Watson had wakened to hail the Christmas morn and listen to the silvery bells of the parish church, and had spent the morning in the sheltered garden, tending those hardy plants that reveal their treasures in bleak December. For ten Christmas Eves he had sat, huddled up in the big, chintz-covered chair, with a pipe and a book and his pleasant thoughts, listening to the drip of rain or the thin whine of the wind, or watching, on one never-to-be-forgotten Christmas Eve, the snowflakes building white cobwebs in the corner of every pane.

It was half-past eleven, and he had risen with a yawn to stretch himself preparatory to going upstairs to bed, when there came to him from outside a sound which was familiar. He passed down the little passage, unbolted the front door, and stepped into the garden.

Out of the darkness came the peculiar and distinctive sound of an aeroplane's engines that were not running sweetly, and presently, peering overhead, he saw the shadow of great wings. Suddenly a blinding white light showed in the skies, illuminating fields and road, so brilliant that Tatterdown Parish Church, a mile away, was visible. The light swooped in a circle, coming lower and lower, and finally vanished behind the privet fence of the Hermitage field, its radiance throwing the trim boundary hedge into silhouette.

Going back into the cottage for his coat, Watson ran through the garden, across the road, and, vaulting the gate, stumbled over the frozen plough-land to the place where the landing lights of the big machine were flickering to extinction.

"Hello!" called a voice, and John answered the hail, and presently came up with the two men who were standing by the under-carriage. One was lighting a cigarette, and the newcomer caught a momentary glimpse of his face, long, white, and blackly bearded. The other he could not see, but it was he who spoke.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"Tatterdown, six miles from Pelworth," Watson answered. "You got down without accident?"

There was no reply for a few seconds, and then the bearded man laughed softly.

“We got down, but not without accident,” he said, a dry note in his voice. “Is there a house where . . .”

Here he stopped and said something to his companion in an undertone. The short man grunted an inquiry in the same tone, and:

“I’ll ask,” he said. “Are we near to a village?”

“No—not nearer than a mile,” said Watson. “I have a cottage, but it is rather isolated.”

“Wife and family?”

John laughed quietly.

“No,” he said; “I am all alone.”

Again the whispered colloquy.

“It may sound a little—unusual and impertinent, these questions,” said the tall man at last, “but we have a passenger who, for State reasons, is traveling incognito. I must take you this much into my confidence and tell you that she ought not to be within a thousand miles of England. May I therefore rely upon your discretion?”

Dumbfounded, John Watson listened, his sense of adventure piqued.

“Certainly, you may rely upon me,” he said. “I am a bachelor and live alone—I usually come to Tatterdown to spend Christmas—and I haven’t even a servant in the house. I was born here, and have a certain sentimental feeling towards the place. I am giving you confidence for confidence. My name is Watson, by the way.”

“Thank you,” said the other simply. “My name is James—Colonel Alfred James.”

He walked towards the machine, and John heard him speak.

“You may descend, Highness,” he said.

His eyes now accustomed to the darkness, J. B. saw a slim figure descend, and waited whilst the two men and the woman spoke together in a whisper. So far as he could gather, the lady said little, but the conversation continued for so long that John began to feel the cold.

“Will you come this way?” he called.

“Lead on,” said the gruff voice of the smaller man, and the owner of Tatterdown Cottage led the way to the gate, and, after some delay, opened it and ushered them across the road into the cottage.

The tall Colonel James followed, carrying two heavy bags; then came the girl; and thirdly, the shorter of the two, a round, red-faced man with a slight moustache and a pair of small eyes that were set a trifle too close together.

The big man deposited the bags on the floor of the sitting-room.

"I present you, Mr. Watson, to Her Serene Highness, Princess Marie of Thurgen," he said. "Her Highness has a very dear friend in London, but owing to the War and the restrictions which have been placed upon Germans visiting England, it has been necessary for Her Highness to make a surreptitious and in some ways unauthorized trip to London. Whilst we realize that to land in England without a passport and without the necessary authority from the Home Office constitutes a technical offense, my friend and I have gladly undertaken the risk to serve one to whose father we are under a heavy debt of obligation."

All the time he had been speaking, John's wondering gaze had never left the girl's pale face. She stood with eyes downcast, hands lightly clasped in front of her, and only once during the interview did she look up. Presently John found his voice, though he spoke with extraordinary difficulty.

"I shall be happy to place my room at the disposal of Her Highness," he said.

"You have no telephone here?" asked the little man suddenly.

John shook his head.

"No," he said, with a half-smile, "we have nothing quite so modern at Tatterdown Cottage except a very modern bathroom leading from my room. May I show Your Highness the way?"

The tall man inclined his head gravely.

"Will you go first, please?" he said.

Lighting a candle, John went up the narrow stairs, opened the door of his chamber, a cozy room with its old four-poster and its log fire smouldering in the grate.

"This will do very well," said the tall man, who had followed him. "In here, Your Highness."

He put his hand on the girl's arm and led her into the room. Then, coming out quickly, he closed the door behind him. At the foot of the stairs stood the little fat man, grotesquely huge in his leather coat and as grotesquely ridiculous in his leather headgear.

"Her Highness is comfortable," said the bearded man. "You can go to work

on the machine. Do you think you can get it right by the morning?"

"I ought to have it right in two hours," said the other, "but we couldn't possibly take off in the dark. I don't know the size of the field. It's ploughland, too, and that'll make it a bit more difficult, but I'll certainly be ready for you at daybreak."

With that he was gone, leaving John alone with the colonel.

"Will you come into the sitting-room?" asked John.

"I think not," replied James. "You see, Mr. Watson, my responsibility is a great one. Certain things have happened in London which have reduced Her Highness to the verge of despair. She has enemies—personal enemies, you understand?—who would not hesitate to take her life."

He pulled up his leather coat, and from his pocket slipped out a long-barrelled Browning and snapped back the jacket.

"I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Watson. You may go to bed with the full assurance that you have rendered an inestimable service to what was once the greatest ruling house in Germany."

John laughed softly.

"Unfortunately," he said, "I have no bed, and if you mean that you are going to sit up all night, you have relieved me of a great embarrassment, for I should have had no place to offer you but the settee in my sitting-room. You are welcome to that."

James shook his head.

"I will remain here," he said, and sat on the lower stair. Suddenly he got up. "Is your sitting-room beneath your bedroom?"

John nodded.

"Should I hear any—any noise above?"

"Undoubtedly," said John. "Every floor in this old house creaks."

"Then I will join you. It is inclined to be draughty here."

He accompanied his host into the sitting-room and stripped the leather coat he was wearing, pulled off his helmet, and sank, with a luxurious sigh, into the deep arm-chair that John had vacated when the sound of the aeroplane's engines had come to his ears.

"Christmas Eve, eh?" said the colonel. He extracted a cigarette from the case and tapped it thoughtfully on his thumbnail. Then, seeing John's eyes

resting on the pistol that lay on the table by his elbow, he asked: “Looks a little theatrical, don’t you think? I suppose firearms are not in your line, Mr. Watson?”

“I have an automatic at my London flat,” said John, with a smile, “but I can’t say that I get a great deal of pistol practice. Do you seriously mean that you would use that in certain extremities?”

The big man blew a cloud of smoke to the ceiling and nodded.

“I mean that,” he said curtly.

“How fascinating!” said J. B. “And how unChristmaslike!”

The other smiled broadly.

“There are one or two things about you that puzzle me,” J. B. went on slowly.

“Such as——?”

“Well,” he hesitated, “did the Princess come to where the aeroplane was? I presume it was somewhere outside of London?”

“We picked her up in a car,” said the other shortly.

“I see,” said J. B. “How queer!”

“What is queer?” frowned James.

“The whole thing,” said J. B. Watson. “You can’t say that it is a usual experience for a bachelor to have a princess drop on to him from the clouds. And, for a reason which you won’t want me to explain, I am especially interested in princesses. It goes back to a very old prophecy that was made by my nurse.”

There was a slight movement above their heads.

“Excuse me,” said James, and, rising quickly, ran up the stairs.

The sound of a low-voiced conversation floated down to John Watson, and, after a while, the footsteps of James upon the stairs. When he came in he was looking a little worried.

“Did Her Highness require anything?”

“Nothing.” This time the man’s voice was curt. “She wanted to know when the machine would be ready, that is all.”

They sat in complete silence for half an hour till John rose.

“I’ll make some coffee, or I shall go to sleep. And you would like some coffee too?”

James hesitated.

“Yes, I think I should. I’ll come with you and see you make it,” he said.

A sleeping Mowser lifted his wiry head inquiringly as the two men came into the kitchen, and watched them with unconcern, till, realizing that nothing in the shape of food was imminent, he tucked his head between his paws and went to sleep again.

James took a chair and watched the percolator working without comment, and J. B. could not escape a feeling that he stood in relationship to the man as a convict stands to a prison guard, and this impression was strengthened when, the coffee made, his guest walked behind him to the sitting-room again. It was some time before the steaming cups had cooled sufficiently to drink, and John took a sip and made a wry face.

“Do you take sugar?” he asked. “Because I do.”

He went back to the kitchen, but this time the man did not accompany him. But he was standing in the doorway when J. B. returned.

“You took some time to find it,” he said gruffly, and saw that his tone was a mistake, for he went on, with a laugh and a return to his old suavity: “Forgive my infernal cheek, but this little adventure of ours has got on my nerves.”

“I couldn’t find it,” said John. “My caretaker discovers a new place to hide her stores every visit I make to the cottage.”

He dropped two lumps into his coffee and stirred it, and, finding that the bearded colonel desired to do nothing more than to smoke an endless chain of cigarettes, he took down a book from the shelf and began to read.

Presently the heavy boots of the smaller man sounded on the paved pathway outside the cottage, and John jumped up.

“That must be your friend,” he said, and went to admit him.

The pilot, for such he seemed to be, came in, grimy of face and black of hands.

“I’ve put it right,” he said. “You can be ready to move as soon as you like. I have explored the field, and there’s plenty of room to take her off.”

“Go back to the machine and stand by,” said the other sharply. And then, to John: “I am extremely obliged to you for courtesy, and I’m glad we have not

had to trespass longer on your hospitality than was necessary. And may I add the thanks of the Princess to mine?"

"You may," said John.

James ran up the stairs and knocked at the bedroom door.

"I am ready, Your Highness."

There was a pause, and then the key was turned and the door opened. It closed again upon the man, and all that John Watson could hear was the murmur of voices through the ceiling.

He laughed softly, pure joy in every note. So old Nurse Crawley had been right, after all, and a princess had come into his life, and the prophecy might yet be fulfilled.

The door was opened, two pairs of feet descended the stairs, and presently James stood in the light of the table-lamp, which flowed through the open door of the sitting-room into the passage. In each hand he carried a bag, and behind him was a muffled figure in a fur coat, who kept her face steadily averted from John's eyes.

"I thank you again, Mr. Watson. If I have put you to any expense——"

"None whatever," said John politely.

He stood with his back to the fire and watched. He heard James put down his bag and turn the handle of the door, but it did not move. He tried again, feeling for the bolts, and finding that the door was of stout oak and the lock of ancient solidity, he came back to the sitting-room.

"I can't open your door, Mr. Watson."

"Very true," said John pleasantly, "very true!"

The man's brows gathered in a frown of suspicion.

"What do you mean—very true?" he asked harshly.

"You can't open it because I've locked it, and the key is in my pocket," said John.

Instantly the automatic appeared in James's hand.

"Give me that key," he said coldly, "or there'll be a village tragedy that will mystify the reporters. I ought to have shot you anyway," he said, "and, by God, if you don't—give me that key!"

John shook his head. His hands were still behind him, and, with a

smothered exclamation of rage, the man pressed the trigger. There was a dull click.

“I took the precaution of unloading your pistol when you went upstairs an hour or two ago, Mr. James, or Colonel James, as the case may be,” said John in his conversational tone. “I have also sent, attached—via the back door—to the collar of a small and intelligent dog, an urgent message to the Bullham police to put in as early an appearance as possible. I’ve been expecting them for the last five minutes.”

With a roar of rage the big man sprang at him, and, as he did so, John withdrew his right hand and struck at his assailant with the poker, which it had held throughout the interview. Quick as a cat, the man dodged the blow, and in another instant he had gripped the other in his powerful hand. John wrenched his left arm free and struck twice at the man, but his padded coat softened the blows, and it was not until a lucky blow caught Colonel James under the jaw that he went floundering to the ground. There was the sound of voices outside. John took the key from his pocket and flung it at the foot of the terrified girl.

“Open the door, quick, Miss Welford!” he hissed, and turned to leap on his half-maddened adversary, who had thrown open his coat and was groping for a second pistol. Before it could be drawn, the room was full of people, and he went down under the weight of two policemen and the local blacksmith.

“This is the real miracle-play,” said John. “But to make the miracle complete, you’ve got to stay here and have dinner, Miss Welford.”

“But what I can’t understand is, how you recognized me?” asked the puzzled girl.

“I not only know your name, but I know the whole story,” said John. “You were working at the bank late, and these two gentlemen, who must have long planned the coup, broke into the vault to secure the very large sum in ready cash which would be on the bank premises on Christmas Eve. They then discovered that you were among the treasures that the bank contained——”

“I heard the noise and went down. They took me away with them in the car because they were afraid that I should identify them. I had no idea that, when the machine came down, they swore that, if I betrayed them, they would not only kill me but kill you also. They had to explain me, so I became a princess. But how *did* you know that I was not?”

“I knew you were a princess all right,” said John. “I’ve known you were a princess ever since I started peeping into your palace window.”

She drew a long breath.

“Oh, were *you* the man?” she said. “I’ve often wondered since. I never knew you.”

“You know me now, and you will know me much better. Will you stay and have Christmas dinner with me?”

She looked at him quickly, then dropped her eyes.

“I think I will,” she said. “I owe you so much, Mr.——”

“On Christmas Day,” he interrupted, “I am ‘John,’ even to my enemies,” and she smiled.

“I don’t feel like an enemy,” she said.

Findings are Keepings

Findings are keepings. That was a favorite saying of Laurie Whittaker—a slogan of Stinie Whittaker (who had other names), her father.

Laurie and a youthful messenger of the Eastern Telegraph Company arrived simultaneously on the doorstep of 704 Coram Street, Bloomsbury, and their arrival was coincident with the absence, in the little courtyard at the back of the house, of the one domestic servant on duty in that boarding-house. So that, while the electric bell tinkled in the kitchen, the overworked domestic was hanging up dishcloths in the backyard.

"I'm afraid there's nobody in," said Laurie, flashing a bright smile at the youth, and then saw the cablegram in his hand. "It's for Captain John Harrowby, isn't it?" she asked. "I'll give it to him."

And the boy, who was new to his job, delivered the envelope and accepted her signature in his book, without a very close regard to the regulations of the Cable Company.

Laurie slipped the envelope in her bag and pressed the bell again. This time the servant heard the signal and came, wiping her hands on her apron, to open the door.

"No, miss, Captain Harrowby's out," she said, recognizing the visitor, and giving her the deference and respect which were due to one who lived in the grandest house in Bedford Square. "He's gone up to the city. Will you step in and wait, miss?"

If Laurie felt annoyed, she did not advertise the fact. She gave her sweetest smile to the servant, nodded pleasantly to the pretty girl who came up the steps as she went down, and, re-entering her limousine, was driven away.

"Who is the lady, Matilda?" asked the newcomer.

"Her?" said the girl-of-all-work. "That's Miss Whittaker—a friend of Mr. Harrowby's. Surely he's told you about her, Miss Bancroft?"

Elsie Bancroft laughed.

"Mr. Harrowby and I are not on such terms that he discusses his friends with me, Matilda," she said, and mounted to her tiny room on the top floor, to turn over again more vital and pressing problems than Captain Harrowby's friendship.

She was a stenographer in a lawyer's office, and if her stipend was not generous it was fair, and might have been sufficient if she were not the mother of a family—in a figurative sense. There was a small brother at school in Broadstairs, and a smaller sister at a preparatory school at Ramsgate, and the money which had been left by their father barely covered the fees of one.

Two letters were propped on her mantelpiece, and she recognized their character with a quaking heart. She stood for a long time surveying them with big, grave eyes before, with a sigh, she took them down and listlessly tore them open. She skimmed the contents with a little grimace, and, lifting her typewriter from the floor, put it on to the table, unlocked a drawer, and, taking out a wad of paper written in a crabbed handwriting, began to type. She had got away from the office early to finish the spare-time work which often helped to pay the rent.

She had been typing a quarter of an hour when there was a gentle tap at the door, and, in answer to her invitation, a man came a few inches into the room—a slim, brown-faced man of thirty, good-looking, with that far-away expression in his eyes which comes to men who have passed their lives in wide spaces.

"How are you getting on?" he asked, almost apologetically.

"I've done about ten pages since last night," she said. "I'm rather slow, but ——" She made a little grimace.

"My handwriting is dreadful, isn't it?" he said, almost humbly.

"It is rather," she answered, and they both laughed. "I wish I could do it faster," she said. "It is as interesting as a novel."

He scratched his chin.

"I suppose it is, in a way," he said cautiously, and then, with sudden embarrassment, "But it's perfectly true."

"Of course it's true," she scoffed. "Nobody could read this report and think it wasn't true! What are you going to do with the manuscript when you have finished it?"

He looked round the room aimlessly, before his eyes returned to the pretty face that showed above the machine.

"I don't know," he said vaguely. "It might go into a magazine. I've written it out for my own satisfaction, and because it makes what seems a stupid folly look intelligent and excusable. Besides which, I am hoping to sell the property, and this account may induce some foolish person to buy a parcel of swamp and

jungle—though I'd feel as though I were swindling a buyer!"

She had pushed the typewritten sheets towards him, and he picked up the first and read:

"A Report on the Alluvial Goldfields of Quimbo,"

and, reading it, he sighed.

"Yes, the gold is there all right," he said mournfully, "though I've never been able to find it. I've got a concession of a hundred square miles—it's worth less than a hundred shillings. There isn't a railway within five hundred miles; the roads are impossible; and even if there was gold there, I don't know that I should be able to get it away. Anyway, no gold has been found. I have a partner still pottering away out there: I shall probably have his death on my conscience sooner or later."

"Are you going back to Africa?" she asked curiously.

He shook his head.

"I don't think so." He hesitated. "My—my friends think I should settle down in England. I've made a little money by trading. Possibly I'll buy a farm and raise ducks."

She laughed softly.

"You won't be able to write a story about that," she said, and then, remembering, "Did the maid tell you that Miss Whittaker had called?"

She saw his start, and the color deepen in the tanned face.

"Oh, did she?" he asked awkwardly. "Really? No, the girl told me nothing." And in another minute he was running down the stairs. She did not know whether to be angry or amused at this sudden termination of their talk.

Captain Harrowby had been an inmate of the boarding-house for three weeks, and she had gladly accepted the offer, that came through her landlady, to type what she thought was the story he had written. The "story" proved to be no more, at first glance, than a prosaic report upon an African property of his, which, he told her, he was trying to sell.

Who was Miss Whittaker? She frowned as she asked herself the question, though she had no reason for personal interest in the smiling girl she had met at the door. She decided that she did not like this smart young lady, with her shingled hair and her ready smile. She knew that Captain Harrowby spent a great deal of his time at the Whittakers' house, but she had no idea that there

was anything remarkable in that, until the next day, when she was taking her lunch at the office, she asked old Kilby, who knew the secret history of London better than most process-servers.

"Whittaker?" the old man chuckled. "Oh, I know Stinie Whittaker all right! He runs a gambling hell in Bloomsbury somewhere. He was convicted about ten years ago for the same offense. I served a couple of writs on him years and years ago. He's more prosperous now."

"But surely Miss Whittaker doesn't know?" said the shocked girl. "She's—she's the friend of a—a friend of mine."

Old Kilby laughed uproariously.

"Laurie? Why, Laurie's brought more men to the old man's table than anybody else! Know? Sure she does! Why, she spends all summer going voyages in order to pick up likely birds for Stinie to kill!"

The news filled the girl with uneasiness, though she found it difficult to explain her interest in the lonely man who occupied the room beneath her. Should she warn him? At the mere suggestion she was in a panic. She had quite enough trouble of her own, she told herself (and here she spoke only the truth). And was it likely that a man of his experience would be caught by card-sharps? For six days she turned the matter over in her mind and came to a decision.

On the evening she reached this, John Harrowby dressed himself with great care, took a roll of notes from his locked cash-box, and, after contemplating them thoughtfully, thrust them into his pocket. His situation was a serious one; more serious than he would admit to himself. Laurie had cautioned him against playing for high stakes, but she had not cautioned him against Bobby Salter, the well-dressed young man-about-town, whom he had met first in the Bedford Square drawing-room. Bobby had told him stories of fortunes made and lost at cards, and even initiated him into a "system" which he himself had tested, and had been at his elbow whenever he sat at the table, to urge him to a course of play which had invariably proved disastrous.

John Harrowby was without guile. He no more thought of suspecting the immaculate Bobby than he thought of suspecting Laurie herself. But tonight he would play without the assistance of his mentor, he thought, and drew a deep breath as he patted his pocket and felt the bulge of the notes.

He threw a light coat over his arm, and, turning off the light, stepped out on to the landing, to stare in amazement at a girl who was waiting patiently, her back to the banisters, as she had been waiting for ten minutes.

“I wanted to see you before you went, Captain Harrowby,” said Elsie, with a quickly beating heart.

“Anything wrong with the manuscript?” he asked in surprise.

She shook her head.

“No, it isn’t that, only—only I’m wondering whether——”

Words failed her for a second.

He was palpably amazed at her agitation, and could find no reason for it.

“Oh, Lord,” he said, remembering suddenly. “I haven’t paid you!”

“No, no, no, it isn’t that.” She pushed his hand from his pocket. “Of course it isn’t that, Captain Harrowby! It’s something—well . . . I know you’ll think I’m horribly impertinent, but do you think you ought to play cards for money?” she asked breathlessly.

He stared at her open-mouthed.

“I don’t quite know what you mean,” he said slowly.

“Haven’t you lost . . . a lot of money at Mr. Whittaker’s house?” She had to force the words out.

The look in his face changed. From amazement, she saw his eyes narrow, and then, to her unspeakable relief, he smiled.

“I have lost quite a sum,” he said gently. “But I don’t think you——”

“You don’t think that’s any business of mine? And neither is it,” she said, speaking rapidly. “But I wanted to tell you that Mr. Whittaker . . . is a well-known——”

Here she had to stop. She could not say the man was a cheat or a thief; she knew no more than old Kilby had hinted.

“I mean, he has always had . . . play at his house,” she faltered. “And you’re new to this country, and you don’t know people as—as we know them.”

This time he laughed.

“You’re talking as though you were in the detective service, Miss Bancroft,” he said, and then suddenly laid his hand on her shoulder. “I quite understand that you are trying to do me a good turn. In my heart of hearts I believe you’re right. But, unfortunately, I have lost too much to stop now—how you knew that I’d lost anything, I can’t guess.”

She nodded, and, without another word, turned abruptly away and ran up

the stairs to her own room, angry with herself, angry with him, but, more than anything else, astounded at her own action.

No less puzzled and troubled was John Harrowby as he walked into Bedford Square.

Elsie had some work to do; but somehow she could not keep her mind fixed upon her task, and, after spoiling three sheets of paper, gave up the attempt and, sitting back in her chair, let her mind rove at will.

At half-past nine the maid brought her up a cup of tea.

"That Miss Whittaker's just gone, miss," she announced.

Elsie frowned.

"Miss Whittaker? Has she been here?"

"Yes, miss; she come about a quarter of an hour ago and went up to Captain Harrowby's room. That's what puzzles me."

Elsie stared at her, open-mouthed.

"Why on earth did she go there?" she demanded.

Matilda shook her head.

"Blest if I can tell, miss. She didn't know that I was watching her—she sent me down to the kitchen to make a cup of tea for her, which was only a dodge of hers, and if I hadn't come back to ask her whether she took sugar, I wouldn't 'a' known she'd been out of the droring-room. I see her coming out of Captain Harrowby's room as I was standing in the hall. You can just see the door through the banisters."

Elsie rose, and went downstairs. Harrowby's door was ajar. She switched on the light. What she expected to find, she did not know. There was no sign of disorder. Possibly, she thought, and she found herself sneering, it was a visit of devotion by a love-stricken lady; but there was a cupboard door ajar, and half in and half out the cupboard, a japanned box that was open. She took up the box. It was empty. She put the box back in the cupboard and went thoughtfully out on to the landing.

"I think I'll go and see Captain Harrowby," she said, obeying a sudden impulse, and, a few minutes later, she was walking through the rain to Bedford Square.

She was within a dozen paces of the door of Mr. Whittaker's house when a cab drew up, and she saw Laurie Whittaker alight, pay the cabman and, running up the step, open the door of the house. Where had she been in the

meantime? wondered Elsie. But there was no mystery here. It had begun to rain heavily as Laurie left the house in Coram Street, and she had sheltered in a doorway until a providential taxi came along.

Possibly it was the rain that damped the enthusiasm of the amateur detective; for now, with the Whittaker house only a few paces away, she hesitated. And the longer she waited, the wetter she became. The taxi-man who had brought Laurie lingered hopefully.

"Taxi, miss?" he asked, and Elsie, feeling a fool, nodded and climbed into the cab, glad to escape for a second from the downpour, and hating herself for her extravagance.

The cab had turned when her hand touched something on the seat. A woman's vanity-bag——

"Findings are keepings," according to the proverb, though there is an offense in law which is known as "stealing by finding."

Elsie Bancroft knew little of criminal law, but she was possessed of an inelastic conscience, so that when her hand touched the bag in the darkness, her first impulse was to tap at the window of the taxi-cab and draw the attention of the driver to her find. And then, for some reason, she checked the impulse. It was a fat bag, and the flap was open. Her ungloved fingers stole absently into its interior, and she knew that she was touching real money in large quantities.

During the war she had worked in a bank, and the feel of banknotes was familiar. Mechanically, she slipped their edge between her nimble fingers. One . . . two . . . three . . . she went on, until . . .

"Eighty-four!"

They might be five-pound notes—four hundred and twenty pounds. She felt momentarily giddy. Four hundred and twenty pounds! Sufficient to pay the children's school fees—she had had an urgent, if dignified, request from the principal of Tom's boarding-school and a no less pointed hint from Joan's—sufficient to settle the problem of the holidays; but——

She heaved a deep sigh and looked through the rain-blurred windows. She was painfully near to her destination, and she had to make her decision. It came as a shock to her that any decision had to be made; her course of duty was plain. It was to take the number of the cab, hand the bag to the driver, and report her discovery to the nearest police station.

There was nothing else to be done, no alternative line of action for an

honest citizen. . . .

The cab stopped with a jerk and, twisting himself in his seat, the driver yanked open the door.

Harrowby blinked twice at the retiring rake. A mahogany rake with a well-worn handle, and with an underlip of brass so truly set that even the flimsiest of banknotes could hardly escape its fine bevel. And there were banknotes aplenty on the croupier's side of that rake. They showed ends and corners and ordered edges, notes clean and unclean, but all having a certain interest to Harrowby, because, ten minutes, or maybe ten seconds before, they had been his, and were now the property of the man who wore his evening suit so awkwardly and sucked at a dead cigar.

John Harrowby put his hand in his pocket; as an action it was sheerly mechanical. His pocket, he knew, was a rifled treasury, but he felt he must make sure.

Then came Salter, plump, philosophical, and sympathetic. Salter could afford both his sympathy and philosophy; the house gave him a ten per cent commission on all the easy money he touted, so that even his plumpness was well inside his means.

"Well, how did you do?"

Harrowby's smile was of the slow dawning kind, starting at the corner of his eyes and ending with the expanse of a line of white teeth.

"I lost."

Salter made a noise, indicative of his annoyance.

"How much?" he asked anxiously.

He gave the impression that if the loss could be replaced from his pocket, it would be a loss no longer. And Stinie, he of the awkwardly worn dinner-jacket, sometimes minimized a client's losses and based his commission note on his pessimistic estimate.

"About two thousand pounds," said Harrowby.

"Two thousand pounds," said Salter thoughtfully.

He *would* be able to buy the car that he had refused in the afternoon. He felt pleased.

"Tough luck, old man—try another day."

“Yes,” dryly.

Harrowby looked across to the table. The bank was still winning. Somebody said “Banco!” in a sharp, strained voice. There was a pause, a low consultation between the croupier and the banker, and a voice, so expressionless and unemotional that Harrowby knew it was the croupier’s, said “I give.”

And the bank won again.

Harrowby snuffled as though he found a difficulty in breathing.

He walked slowly down the stairs and paused for a second outside the white-and-gold door of the drawing-room, where he knew Laurie would be sitting. A moment’s hesitation, then he turned the handle and went in. She was cuddled up in the corner of a big settee, a cigarette between her red lips, a book on her lap. She looked round, and for a second searched his face with her hard, appraising eyes. She was a year or two older than he . . . he had thought her divine when he came back from Central Africa, where he had spent five bitter years, a trader’s half-breed wife and an occasional missionary woman, shrivelled and yellow with heat and fever, the only glimpses he had of womankind.

But now he saw her without the rosy spectacles which he had worn.

“Have you been playing?” she asked coolly.

He nodded.

“And lost?”

He nodded again.

“Really, father is too bad,” she drawled. “I wish he wouldn’t allow this high play in the house. I hope you’re not badly hurt?”

“I’ve lost everything,” he said.

For a second her eyebrows lifted.

“Really?” It was a polite, impersonal interest she showed, no more. “That’s too bad.”

She swung her feet to the floor, straightened her dress, and threw away her cigarette.

“Then we shall not be seeing a great deal of you in the future, Captain Meredith?”

“I’m afraid not,” he said steadily.

Was this the girl he had known, who had come aboard at Madeira, who had made the five days' voyage from Funchal to Southampton pass in a flash? And now he must go back to scrape the earth, to trek into the impenetrable jungle, seeking the competence which he had thought was his.

"I think you are damnable!" he said.

For a second her brows met, then she laughed.

"My dear man, you're a fool," she said calmly. "I certainly invited you to come to the house, but I never asked you to gamble. And really, John, I thought you would take your medicine like a little gentleman."

His heart was thumping painfully. Between the chagrined man whose vanity has been hurt, and the clean anger of one who all his life had detested meanness and trickery, he was in a fair way to making a fool of himself.

"I'm sorry," he said in a low voice, and was walking out of the room when she called him by name.

"I hate to part like this." Her voice was soft, had the old cooing caress in it. "You'll think I'm horrid, John, but really I did my best to persuade you not to play."

He licked his dry lips and said nothing.

"Don't let us part bad friends." She held out her hand, and he took it automatically. "I thought we were going to have such a happy time together," she went on, her pathetic eyes on his. "Can't I lend you some money?"

He shook his head.

"I'm sure the luck would turn if you gave it a chance. Couldn't you sell something?"

The cool audacity of the suggestion took his breath away.

"Sell? What have I to sell?" he demanded harshly. "Souls and bodies are no longer negotiable, even if there was a twentieth-century Mephistopheles waiting round the corner to negotiate the deal!"

She toyed with the fringe of a cushion.

"You could sell your mine," she said, and his laugh sounded loud and discordant in the quietness of that daintily furnished room.

"That's worth twopence-ha'penny! It is a cemetery—a cemetery of hope and labor. It is the real white man's grave, and I am the white man."

She brought her eyes back to his.

“As you won’t borrow money from me, I’ll buy it for a thousand pounds.”

Again he shook his head.

“No, I’m afraid there’s nothing to be done,” he said, “except to wish you good-night.”

As he turned, she slipped between him and the door.

“I won’t let you go like that, John,” she said. “Won’t you forgive me?”

“I’ve already forgiven you, if there’s anything to forgive,” he said.

“Sit down and write me a letter saying you forgive me. I want to have that tangible proof,” she pleaded.

He was impatient to be gone, and the foolery of the suggestion grated on him.

“Then I’ll write it,” she said, sat down at the little escritoire and scribbled a dozen words. “Now sign that.”

He would have gone, but she clutched him by the sleeve.

“Do, please—please!”

He took the pen and scrawled his name, without reading the note, which was half concealed by her hand. Looking through her open fingers, he saw the words “Quimbo Concession.”

“What’s that?” he said sharply, but she snatched the letter away.

“Give me that paper!” he demanded sternly, reaching out for it, but in another second an automatic pistol had appeared in her hand.

“Go whilst the going’s good, Harrowby,” she said steadily.

But she had not reckoned on this particular type of man. Suddenly his hand shot out and gripped her wrist, pinning it to the table. In another second he had snatched the letter and flung it into the little fire that blazed on the hearth. He held her at bay till the last scrap of blue paper had turned to black ashes, and then, with a little smile and a nod, he went out of the room into the street and the pelting rain.

He was wet through as he opened the door of No. 704 Coram Street. Matilda, half-way up the stairs, turned with her startling news. He listened and frowned.

“Miss Whittaker been here?” he said incredulously.

“Yes, sir . . . and Miss Bancroft went to tell you all about it. Didn’t you see

her?”

He shook his head.

What had Laurie Whittaker wanted? he asked himself, as he went up the stairs to his room. The girl must have been mistaken.

He took one glance at the open cupboard, and then the truth leapt at him, and, snatching at the box, he put it on the table and threw open the lid. There had been a square sheet of parchment in a broad envelope, and on that parchment was inscribed his title to the Quimbo Concession. It was gone.

He turned with an oath. A girl was standing watching him with grave eyes.

“Is this what you’re looking for?” she asked.

Her face was very pale. She held out the envelope, and he took it from her hand.

“Where did this come from?” he said, in amazement.

“I stole it,” she answered simply; “and I think this is yours.”

He took the envelope from her hand with a frown, extracted a cable form and read. It was from his partner.

> “Gold found in large quantities near Crocodile Creek. Congratulations.”

“How did you get this?” he gasped.

She held out a little French vanity-bag, and he recognized it instantly.

“I found it in a cab; Miss Whittaker left it there,” she said. “There is also four hundred and twenty pounds which belongs to her.”

“Which belong to us,” said John Harrowby firmly. “Findings are keepings in this case, my child. She found me and kept most of my money—I’ve got fifty pounds left at the bank—and I think we’re entitled to this little salvage from the wreck.”

And then he kissed her, and it seemed such a natural thing to do, that she offered no protest.

The Little Green Man

I

An understanding, disturbed or terminated, has a more tragic aspect than a broken contract. For understandings are without the foundations of pledge and promise written or spoken.

There was an understanding between Molly Linden and Thursby Grant. Neither was important, because they were young; they were as yet nebulæ, hoping to be worlds. He was poor in the sense that he could afford no more than a Kensington flat and the lightest of light cars; he was (Molly thought) very handsome and very, very nice.

Mr. Fathergill amused her—fascinated her by reason of his great age and romantic past. He was forty, and his immense riches were common knowledge. But that did not count with Molly. She much preferred riding in his smooth-running limousine to being buffeted and rattled in Thursby's two-seater. Mr. Fathergill's little dinners at the Ritz had a comfort which was not afforded by the solid restaurant where tablecloths were only changed when absolutely necessary.

Still, there was a sort of understanding. If the matter had been allowed to remain where Charles Fathergill left it, that warm night in June when they paced the scented dusky garden, Thursby Grant might have become a tender memory or a bitter disappointment, according to the way he accepted his *congé*. Unhappily, Molly's father had been a little tactless.

She carried the news to him in his study; she was fluttered, a little tearful. One nice word about Thursby would have swung her definitely to the side of Charles Fathergill.

Instead, Mr. Linden said:

"Thank God for that, Molly! You had better write to young Grant and tell him he need not call again."

There was no reason in the world why he should not have called again; why he should not have appeared with a sad, brave smile and a hearty, "Good luck, old girl!"

But Mr. Linden had been brought up in the Victorian tradition. Then and there Thursby Grant was martyred for love; became a radiant figure of persecution. Worse, he himself accepted the martyr's rôle, and indited severe

and haughty letters to Molly's father, to Molly's fiancé.

One evening he walked fiercely down Pall Mall, entered the sublime portals of the Disraeli Club and, thrusting his hat at an inoffensive page-boy, was ushered into the smoke-room. For the greater part of an hour he sat in a sort of trance, listening to Mr. Charles Fathergill, who was never averse from talking . . .

Just beyond Fathergill's chair was a high marble pillar of a rich red, broken by white spots and minute serpentines. Thursby Grant had been staring at that pillar for twenty minutes with a painful intensity, some place in his brain busy with the baffling quest for the exact part of the world where such marble may be quarried. *Rosso antico*—that was its technical description. He remembered a big house in Marlborough with a fireplace. Rosso antico. That was it.

Behind the pillar, half concealed, was a hatchet-faced little waiter, whose livery hung upon him in folds. He was staring out of the window at the white façade of the Auto Club.

A big room, rather over decorated, with red paper and dingy gildings. Scores of well-used, cozy chairs about round tables, where middle-aged men sat smoking over their coffee and told one another of the queer thing that happened to them, twenty?—no, it must be twenty-five—years ago.

Rosso antico . . .

A buzz of talk as even as an asphalt pavement lay on the club smoking-room. Fathergill's voice, pitched on an infinitesimally higher plane, rippled along its surface.

All Thursby's brain which was not occupied by rosso antico was at Fathergill's disposition.

". . . hundred, two hundred years ago, quite a lot of people would have hired a bravo to cut me up. Possibly you would not have descended to hiring an assassin. A quarrel in a coffee-house, chairs to Leicester Gardens, and a few passes with our swords would have settled the matter. Satisfactory—in a way. It would depend entirely upon who was pinked. Now we take no risks, carry no swords, do nothing stupid, and only a few things that are vulgar. Slay and heal with currency; the age of reason."

Fathergill's head was long and narrow. He had a dark face and black, abundant hair brushed back from his forehead. He affected a tiny black moustache, an adequate occupation for his long fingers in moments of abstraction. His lank body was doubled up in a low chair, and he lay back so that his knees were level with his chin. When he spoke he waved one hand or

the other to emphasize a point.

With the free part of his mind Thursby found himself wishing that the man did not wear diamond studs in his dress shirt.

"I asked you to dinner tonight—you preferred to come in for coffee. I appreciate your feelings. You are hurt. You are saying to yourself: 'Here am I, a struggling engineer, who has found a nice girl who likes me'—I grant that —'and here is a fellow worth millions who comes along and cuts me out, not because he's more attractive, but because he has enough money to order life as he wishes it.' "

"It isn't much to boast about, is it?" asked Thursby, his voice husky from a long, dry-mouthed silence.

Charles Fathergill shook his head.

"I am not boasting. You have suddenly found the door of a nice house on Wimbledon Common closed to you—or only opened as far as is necessary to tell you that Miss Molly Linden is not at home. All this is unexpected—rather staggering. Your letters are returned, your telephone messages not delivered. You know I am a friend of the family, and you ask me if I can explain. I bring you to my club, and I tell you plainly and honestly that I intend within the next twelve months marrying Molly Linden, that her father has agreed, and that she —seems reconciled. Could I be fairer?"

Thursby drew a long breath. It almost seemed that he had suddenly awakened from a heavy, ugly sleep.

"Money could not have been the only inducement," he said.

Fathergill shrugged one shoulder, silently inserted a cigarette in the end of a long holder, and lit it with deliberate puffs.

"The key to all power is knowledge," he said—"and ruthlessness."

Throughout the interview his tone, his manner, had been most friendly. The wrath of this good-looking young guest, who had come with murder in his heart, had been blanketed under the unconscious friendliness of one whom Thursby Grant so little regarded as a host that he had not sipped the coffee that had filmed itself cold under his eyes.

"I started life as a bricklayer's assistant"—Fathergill watched the ragged wisps of smoke dissipating with an air of enjoyment—"and at an early stage of my career I began to *know*. I knew that we were cheating the Borough Surveyor. The Borough Surveyor gave me ten shillings for my information. He took me into his office. He had a love affair with his typist. I knew—I was

assistant store-keeper at eighteen."

"That sounds almost like blackmail to me," frowned Thursby.

Mr. Fathergill smiled slowly.

"Never label things," he warned. "Know them, but never commit yourself to labels."

"You mean you have some hold over Linden?"

"Melodrama," murmured the other, closing his eyes wearily. "How terribly young you are! No. I know that John Linden wants to marry again. He is fifty, and young for fifty. A good-looking man, with an ineradicable sense of adventure. You would not be able to marry Molly for three years—at least I would marry at once; she asks for a year. Molly must have an establishment of her own before John Linden makes his inevitable blunder and brings his inevitably youthful bride to Wimbledon!"

Again Thursby discovered that he was breathing heavily through his nose, and checked his rising anger.

"I think that is about all I wanted to know," he said, and rose awkwardly.

"You *know*: that is important," said Fathergill, and offered a lifeless hand.

As much of this interview as he deemed necessary went forward to Wimbledon.

John Linden, gray and red-faced, read scraps of the letter written on club notepaper to his daughter. Over his glasses he looked to see how she took the news. Her face was expressionless.

"I really think that a year will make all the difference," he told her—and himself. "I like Thursby, but, my dear, I have to consider you."

She raised her eyes from the plate. She was not especially beautiful: she was distinctly pretty—the kind of cultivated-garden prettiness which youth brings, and good, simply cut clothes adorn.

"Are you very rich, father?"

She had never asked him such a question before.

"Why, my dear? I'm not rich in money and not particularly rich in property. Why?"

She looked past him through the leaded casement window.

"Only . . . Charles never made the least suggestion that he wanted to marry

me until he came back from Roumania."

He laughed loudly at this.

"What a romantic little devil you are!" he said good-humoredly. "I see how your queer little mind is working. Fathergill went to Roumania and discovered my oil property is worth a fortune; he kept the knowledge to himself and came back to propose to my daughter."

If she had not thought this, she should not have gone scarlet. He did not add to her embarrassment.

"I should be glad to get back the money I have sunk in Roumanian oil," he said. "You seem to forget that I have an agent in Bukharest who keeps me *au fait* with all that is happening."

"Thursby says you can buy any Roumanian agent for a thousand *lei*," she protested, and he shook his head.

"You seem to forget that Charles Fathergill is a millionaire——"

"He says so. Thursby says——"

Mr. Linden consigned Thursby to the devil.

"I really am in love with Thursby," she said haltingly.

Mr. Linden said nothing. Soon after she got up from the table hurriedly. She was rather young.

It could not be said that Charles Fathergill was well known in the City. The obvious is accepted without analysis: that is the deadly danger of the obvious. One knows that Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square is built of stone. Nobody knows or cares who built it or what stone was employed. Everybody knew that Mr. Charles Fathergill was immensely rich. He had a flat in Carlton House Gardens, and paid a twenty-thousand-pounds premium to secure it. The cabmen he tipped, the club servants, the policeman on the beat—who else matters?—could all testify to his wealth and generosity. He grew richer by being rich. When interested people inquired as to his stability, Stubbs pointed out the fact that he had never had a judgment recorded against him; his lawyers certified him as a desirable client or customer to any person who wished him as a client or customer; one of his bank managers—he employed several bankers—seconded the reference. There is only one peculiarity which need be mentioned—each of his bankers was under the impression that they were carrying his smallest account, and often hinted to him that they would like to carry one of his heavier balances.

As has been remarked before, he was not known in the City, for he did not speculate or engage in commerce. And not being known in the City has this advantage, that nothing is known to your disadvantage.

Mr. Linden met his prospective son-in-law at the club a few days later.

"Going to Roumania?" Mr. Fathergill's eyes opened. "Good heavens!—why? I haven't been back four months."

Mr. Linden tossed down a cocktail and wiped his mouth busily.

"I thought I'd go . . . may meet the girl of my dreams, eh?" A long chuckle: John Linden was old enough not to be ashamed of dreams.

"When do you think of leaving? I am going as far as Budapest. I have some big interests there."

A rapid calculation produced the assurance that Mr. John Linden's many directorships and annual general meetings would make it impossible to leave before another month. Charles pursed his lips thoughtfully. He must go before then, he said.

He left London within a week.

Thursby Grant was at Victoria Station saying good-bye to a friend who was traveling to the Near East. He acknowledged Fathergill's smiling nod without effort, being helped to toleration by a letter which crashed all solemn promises made by the writer.

"Good Lord!" said Thursby's friend. "Do you know Charles Fathergill? They say he is a millionaire five times over."

"Six times," said Thursby, suddenly sour. "Why damn his reputation for a million?"

II

Mr. Linden's agent in Bukharest was a lawyer, one Bolescue. He was a stout man, with a large, damp face, who loved food and music and baccarat. Otherwise he and discretion and probity might have walked hand in hand. As it was, he vociferated refusals, his countenance growing moister, talked wildly of "committees," fearfully of engineers, but never once of the majestic law, soon to be flaunted.

Charles Fathergill had a letter of credit for many thousands of pounds. His French was not too good; the money spoke with the purest accent. M. Bolescue, with his light heart fixed upon the gambling tables at Cinta, agreed that certain reports might be postponed, an engineer's emphatic opinion

suppressed, borings now in progress slowed till the coming of Mr. John Linden, and then suspended.

“After six months’ more time all subterfuges is impossibility,” said M. Bolescue, who occasionally tried to speak good English.

“After six months nothing matters,” replied the lank man.

His plan was to stay a fortnight in Bukharest, leaving for Constantinople to avoid John Linden. But a fortnight is a long time, and the joys of motoring in hired machines are too easily exhausted. Nor had beautiful Cinta in the hills, with its glorious surroundings of mountain and forest, any attraction for him.

On the eighth night he sent for the hall porter of the Petite Splendide, and the official came quickly, Mr. Fathergill being a lordly dispenser of tips. A short man, square-shouldered, bow-legged, resplendent in gold lace, he came, hat in hand—would have crawled.

“I’m bored, Peter,” said Mr. Fathergill.

His half-eaten dinner was on the table. He had scarcely touched his wine.

“Ah!” said Peter, and beamed.

“I want amusing: somebody who can talk or sing. God! I’m sick of Bukharest.”

He was justified, for into Bukharest seem to have seeped the dregs of ancient Rome—dregs that have gained a little foulness from Turk and Slav. A rococo Rome.

“Talk . . . seeng . . . hum!”

Peter’s stumpy hand caressed two of his blue-black chins.

“The book I can bring . . . some beautiful ones—no? Talk and seeng—ah! Gott of Gotts!”

He resolved into a windmill of waving palms; noises of pride and exultation came from him.

“One who never came to the books! New—a princess, Mr. Fat’ergill! No! I swear by Gott”—he put his hand on his heart and raised his eyes piously to the ceiling—“I would not lie. You will say, Peter says this of all. But a veritable princess. Russian . . . from—I don’t know—the Black Sea somewhere. You say yes?” He nodded in anticipation, and then his face fell. “You must be rich for this princess . . . wait!”

He rummaged in the tail pocket of his frock coat and found a packet of

letters, fixed steel-rimmed pince-nez, and sought for something, his lips moving in silent speech—a comical, cherubic bawd of a man.

"Here—it is in French . . . I read. From she—to me!" He struck an attitude. "Irene . . . listen . . ."

He read rapidly. Charles could not understand half the letter: the important half was intelligible.

"All right; tell her to come up and have a glass of wine with me."

"I shall telephone," said Peter . . .

Ten struck when Irene came. Charles, reading a week-old *Times*, looked up over the newspaper at the click of the lock and saw the door opening slowly. She stood in the doorway, looking at him. Very slim and lithe and white. Her black hair dressed severely, parted in the center and framing her face. Clear-skinned, no art gave her aid there. The exquisite loveliness of her caught him by the throat. He rose instinctively, and then the faintest smile twitched the corner of her blood-red mouth.

Regal . . . and Russian. Russia was in her dark eyes—the inscrutable mystery of the Slav . . . a million æons removed from Western understanding.

"May I come in?"

Her voice was as he had expected—rather low and rich. There was a sort of husky sweetness in it that made his slow pulses beat the faster. Her English was faultless.

"May I have a cigarette?"

She was at the table, looking down at him, one hand already in the silver box.

"Sit down, won't you?" He found his voice.

He drew up a chair so that he faced her.

"Do you want me to sing—really? I'm afraid my voice isn't awfully good. Or don't you?"

He shook his head.

"What are you doing . . . here?" His gesture embraced not only the material part of Bukharest, but the place she occupied in its social life.

Again that faint smile.

"One must live . . . singing and . . . and talking to people. I have not really

begun my career as . . . an entertainer. You are my first audience. It may prove to be very amusing after all."

"Very amusing," he repeated mechanically.

"So many things have seemed—impossible." She blew ring after ring of smoke between her words. "So many nights I have sat on my bed and looked at The Little Green Man and wondered . . . and wondered. Then I have put The Little Green Man under my pillow and said: 'Let me see tomorrow—it may be fun.' "

She was smiling at his perplexity, reached for the black velvet handbag that she had laid on the table, and, opening it, took out a small green bottle. It was fashioned like a squat Russian moujik, wearing a heavy overcoat belted at the waist. The hat was the stopper. As she held it up to the light, Fathergill saw that it was three parts filled with a fluid.

"In other words, poison. That's rather theatrical, isn't it?"

"Is it?" She was interested. "I don't know. Professor Bekinsky gave it to me the week before he was arrested. He was a Jew and a good man. They blew his brains out in front of the house where I was staying in Kieff."

Charles Fathergill was chilled: this was not amusing.

"Has it any special properties—arsenic . . . aconite . . .?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. He called it 'knowledge'—he had a sense of humor." She made a wry little face at him, then laughed softly. It was one of those delicious chuckling laughs that are so beautiful when heard from a woman. "You would rather I sang?"

"No . . . only it *is* rather depressing, isn't it?"

She asked him who he was. On the subject of Mr. Fathergill he could be eloquent. To talk of himself without exposing his theory of life was difficult. She listened gravely. He felt that it was impossible that she could be startled.

Lovely, he thought as he talked—amazingly lovely. The contours of her face had some indefinable value that he had not found in any other. In a pause she asked:

"But you are ruthless!" (He rather liked that.) "You would stop at nothing to reach your end?"

"Nothing. Knowledge is power only when it can be utilized for the benefit of its holders."

She shook her head.

“That is strange—because it seems you have no objective. You wish to get nowhere, only somewhere better at all costs. I could understand if it was for a definite place.”

He was flattered by her disapproval.

“Have you any objective?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Happiness . . . security. The security that a peasant workman could give his wife.”

“In fact, marriage?” he smiled.

She nodded slowly and mushroomed the red end of her cigarette in the silver ash-tray.

“Yes . . . I would fight like a devil to retain that. It is my idea of heaven. I have a little sister—here in Bukharest.”

She looked up at him slowly.

“A sister is like a baby: one does things and puts The Little Green Man under the pillow for her sake.”

She seemed to shake herself as though she were throwing off an unpleasant garment. When she spoke her voice was almost gay.

“We are getting tedious. Shall I sing, or shall we talk?”

“We have talked too much,” said Fathergill.

He walked to the window and pulled the curtains together.

III

A few months later an eminent firm of lawyers wrote to Mr. Linden to the effect that they had a client who wished to acquire oil land. They understood he had a property, etc.

Mr. Linden, a very happy and cheerful man, wrote asking that the offer should be reduced to sterling.

There were many reasons why adventures in Roumanian oil should have no further appeal, and why he wished to convert a property of dubious value into something which paid six per cent with monotonous regularity.

Mr. Fathergill, who had reached Paris, received the lawyers' intimation with mild interest. It was curious, he mused, how much labor, how many hours of anxiety are involved needlessly and uselessly because one cannot foresee the end. In the months that had elapsed between his going to Roumania and his return to Paris he had become a millionaire, and every one of his banks believed that they carried his heaviest account.

He had met a man in Constantinople, an international financier, who bought properties for a song and talked them into cantatas. Dog does not eat dog except in Constantinople. Mr. Fathergill was unaware of this exception. He acquired a tract of wild mountain-land, and a concession sealed and signed by the Turkish Government. And on the day his check was honored and the vendor was on his way, per Orient Express, to acquire a timber concession in Sofia, a miracle happened. A forgotten and unpaid prospector made a discovery. Mr. Fathergill believed in quick profits, particularly if they were big profits. The syndicate which took over his holding and his concession offered him a head-reeling sum.

The oil proposition was now an amusing sideline . . . but there was Molly.

"That may be awkward," said Charles, and pulled at his nose thoughtfully.

For Mr. Linden was married again. Molly had mentioned the fact in one of her cold, proper letters. She did not tell him that John Linden had become de-Victorianized and that Thursby Grant was a frequent visitor at Wimbledon Common.

John Linden wrote. The letter was awaiting the wanderer on his arrival at the Maurice. Would he come over and spend Christmas with the family?

> "I am getting rid of my oil lands—some foolish man wishes to buy and has offered me a good price."

Charles left for London on the next day: he would have preferred to have spent Christmas in Paris. The boat train was crowded, the sea choppy. Mr. Fathergill arrived in London a very ruffled man. Paris would have been ideal at Christmas—or Bukharest. Irene! A most unsubstantial dream. The fragrant memory of her caught at his heart. A week after he had left Bukharest he had gone back to find her. Peter contorted himself apologetically. The lady had left Bukharest: he had inquired for her; some other guest had desired speech and song. It was a thousand pities. She was a veritable princess. But (here he brightened) there was a beautiful little girl, a veritable lady . . .

Charles Fathergill had shaken his head. He looked for her in Budapest;

caused inquiries to be made in Vienna . . . no.

He stalked up and down his beautiful drawing-room, his hands in his pockets. Wimbledon . . . roast turkey . . . plum pudding . . . Molly Linden . . . he shuddered.

Snow was falling heavily when his car pulled up under the portico, and there was John Linden, rubicund and white, and there were holly wreaths hanging on the panelled walls of the hall, and Molly, gauche and awkward, and an uncomfortable Thursby Grant—Charles could have fallen on his neck. And there too was a stranger—a pretty, slim child in white, with a clear skin and dark hair and eyes, and . . .

"You haven't met Mrs. Linden, old boy." John was very jovial, very excited. "I told you I would get my romance. We met on the train just outside of Trieste . . . Irene, darling!"

Irene, darling!

There she was, her calm, glorious self, framed in a doorway, as he had seen her before. Only now she wore purple . . . it suited her better than black, completed her regality.

Her eyes met his. Only the faintest hint of recognition lit and died within their unfathomable deeps. Had she been prepared, he would not have seen even that.

"Glad to meet you . . . Mrs. Linden."

He took her hand in his; the pressure was just as firm as, and no firmer than, one would expect in a hostess.

"Come along to my study—the man will take the suitcase to your room."

In the study Charles drank a little port and listened.

"Um . . . about Molly. I've been thinking—you don't mind if we have this out right away?"

Fathergill shook his head. He preferred that the matter of Molly should be disposed of.

"My wife—by the way, she was the Princess Irene Dalruski—had a terrible time in the revolution; I will tell you all about it one of these days—my wife thinks it would be a mistake for Molly to marry except where her heart is. Old fashioned, eh?—By the way, did you see Vera—my wife's sister, a dear kid . . ."

How curiously futile everything was, Charles Fathergill thought. All his

scheming—the Roumanian lawyer with a moist face. Suppose now he had put no spoke in the wheel, had let the reports go forward, and John Linden had entered into his minor riches, and instead had fastened to himself with hooks of iron this find of Peter's . . .

He was very silent at dinner; scarcely looked at the glorious being at the head of this suburban table; permitted himself the fatuity of wearing a paper cap. Molly thought he was sorrowing over a lost bride and cried herself to sleep that night.

"Have a talk with Irene. I'd like you to know her," said John Linden.

There was a little drawing-room that was half conservatory, and was in consequence a place that smelt faintly of the earth. Hostess and guest detached themselves from the noisy group about a Christmas tree.

"Well, my dear?" Charles Fathergill closed the door. His heart was beating a shade faster than usual, a sense of exhilaration made him feel a little drunk.

"Well?"

She did not sit down. Curiously was the scene reminiscent of another meeting—eighteen hundred miles away.

"You have reached your objective?" he said, and, when she slowly nodded: "I have searched Europe for you."

She looked at him steadily.

"Why?"

He was nonplussed for a moment.

"Why do you think?" he asked, and went on quickly: "We're going to be very good friends, aren't we?"

"I hope so. You won't come here again, of course?"

"Why not? Linden's a great friend of mine."

She nodded.

"That is the reason. I have heard a great deal about you, without realizing who you were."

He smiled at this; the hinted disparagement pleased him. She had aroused that kind of emotion once before.

"You still believe that knowledge is power?"

He still believed that. This was the moment he would have chosen to

hammer home the guiding principle of his life.

"And The Little Green Man?" he bantered. "Has he been smashed?"

She shook her head.

"No. Once or twice I thought I would bury him, with all that belongs to his day. Something prevented me."

A very long, uncomfortable silence followed. The sound of laughter came faintly from the larger drawing-room.

"I have rather a nice apartment in Carlton House Gardens. I hope you will come along and see me. Often."

She made no reply. He repeated the invitation.

"You mean that I should enter a new bondage for an indefinite period?"

She looked round.

"It needs Peter to smooth over the crudities."

He thought she was being very sensible and was relieved.

"And if I cannot find time to see your beautiful flat? Will you grow reminiscent some day when you meet John Linden?"

He did not hesitate.

"Yes. You may say: 'What purpose will that serve?' You asked me that before. I reply now, as I replied then: 'Knowledge is of value so long as it is used. A threat of its use, unless it is backed by the will to use it, is so much foolish talk.' It is because you believe, rightly, that not in a spirit of revenge, but as a logical consequence . . ."

"I see."

She half turned towards the door.

"I wanted to be sure. Come and be festive . . . have you seen my little sister?"

"A lovely child," he said conventionally.

That was all that passed between them: they did not speak again. He asked for a glass of milk to be sent to his room, and this was done.

When he went upstairs to bed he looked for her, but she had already retired. The servant who knocked at his door the next morning could not make him hear. She went in and drew up the blinds, put down the tray, and did not

notice that the glass she had taken up the previous night was gone.

“Your tea, sir,” she said.

Even John Linden did not believe that Fathergill was dead until the doctor came.

“I am sorry your Christmas has been spoilt,” said Irene gravely, and looked from him to the big fire which burnt in her bedroom. The Little Green Man had already melted out of sight.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A Table of Contents has been added for reader convenience.

[End of *Fighting Snub Reilly and Other Stories* by Edgar Wallace]