

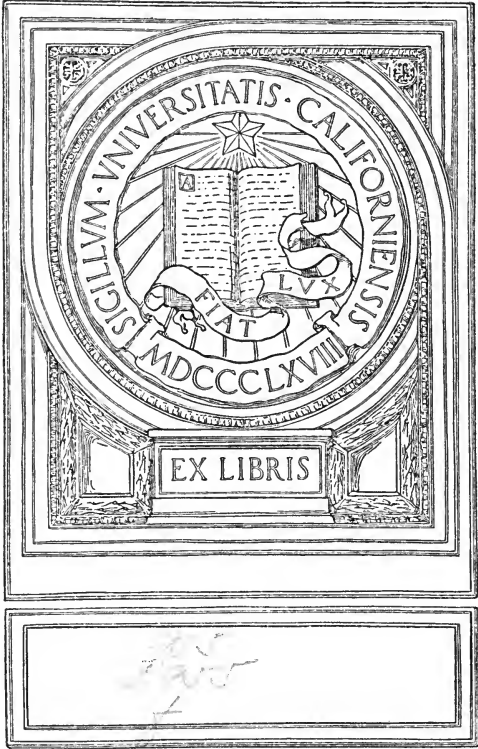
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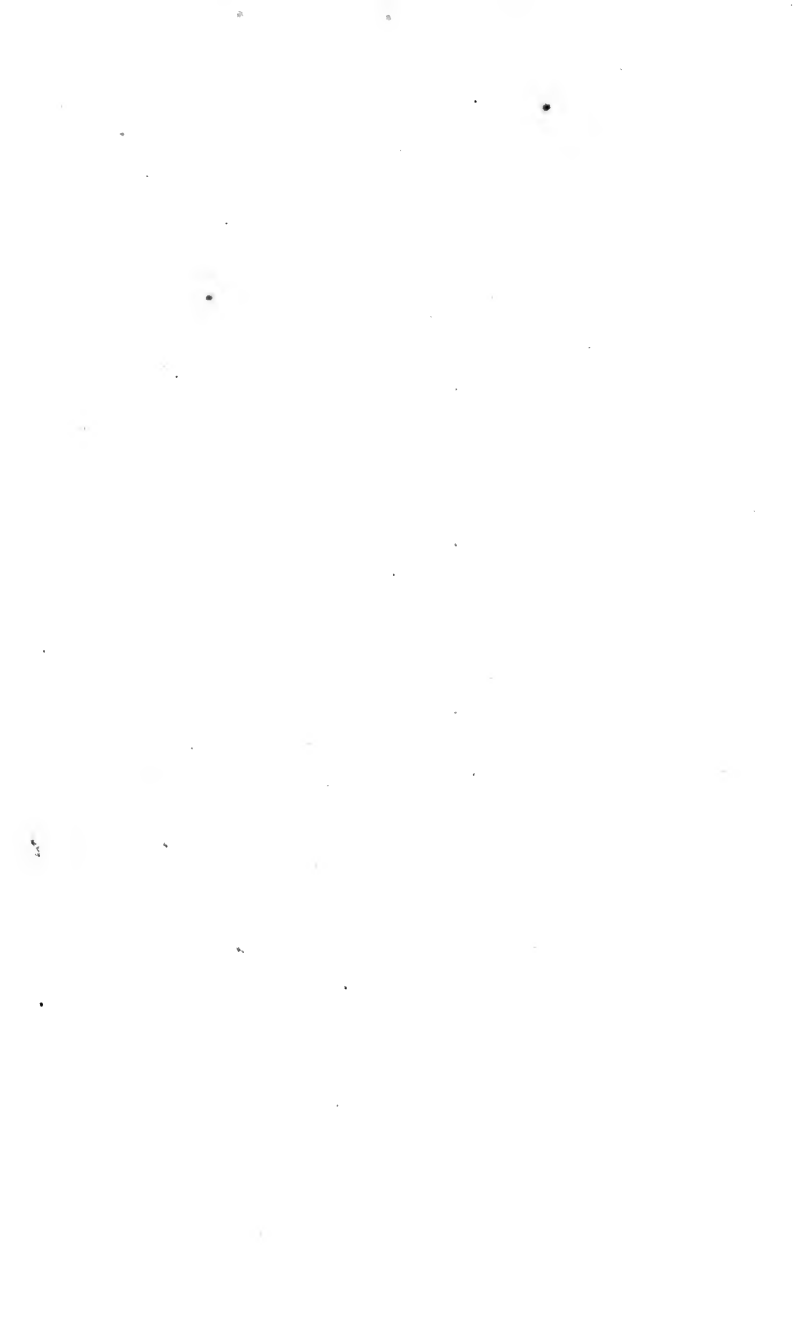
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# FIND THE WOMAN

## GELETT BURGESS



Bernice V. Devereux  
August 1912.





**FIND THE WOMAN**



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Oh! I beg your pardon "

# FIND THE WOMAN

*By*

GELETT BURGESS

*Author of*

VIDETTE, THE HEART LINE, ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

HANSON BOOTH

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TO  
SCHEHEREZADE, BARON MUNCHAUSEN  
JACQUES CASANOVA  
ALEXANDER THE GREAT  
AND  
GLENMORE DAVIS  
THESE FEEBLE ATTEMPTS OF FANCY TO  
RIVAL FACT ARE HUMBLY  
DEDICATED

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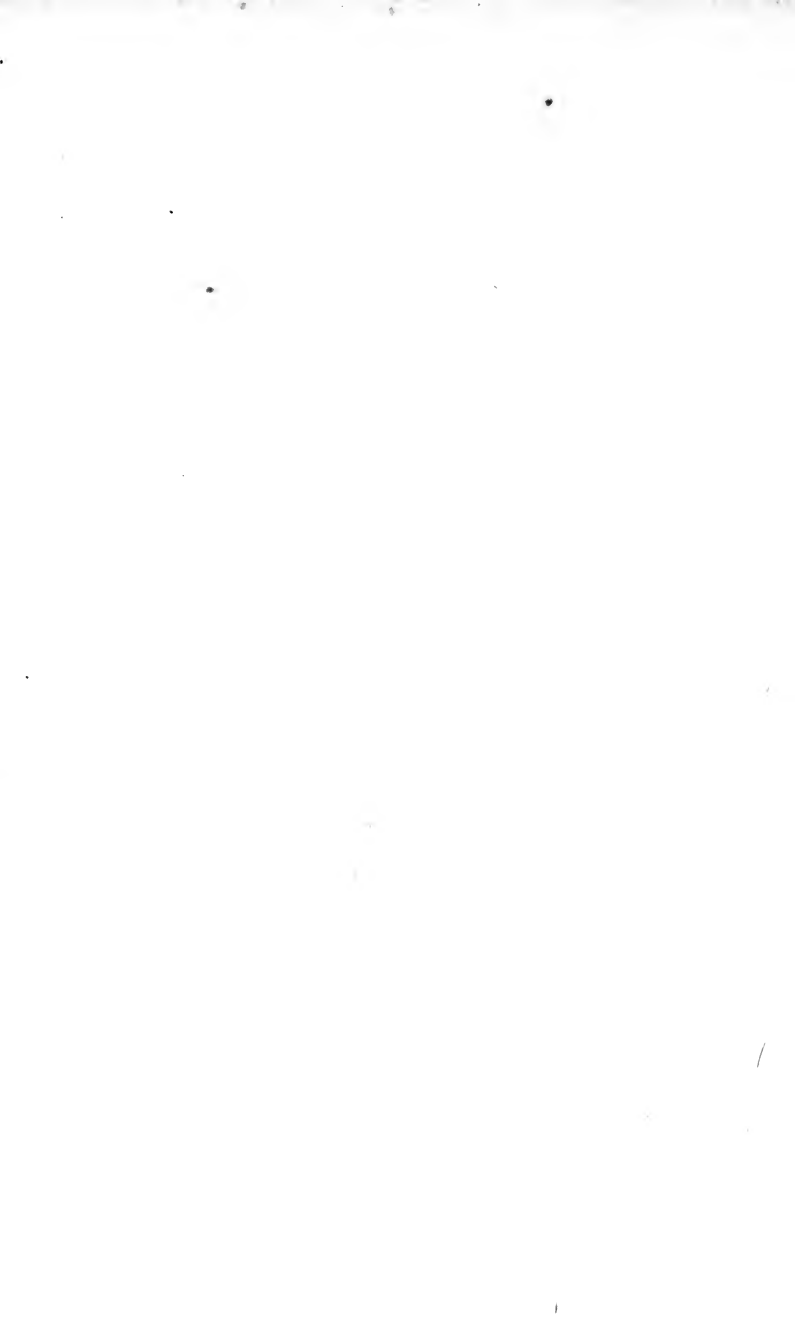
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# FIND THE WOMAN

## I

### PROLOGUE

IN WHICH IS EXPLAINED HOW AN ARCHITECTURAL  
DRAFTSMAN CAME TO POSSESS THREE SETS OF  
NAMES BEFORE HE WAS TWENTY-ONE, AND  
HOW A PORTRAIT DISTURBED HIM

**W**HO was Belle Charmion? If you really care to know, as John Fenton did, you must go with him on his quest, hither and yon over New York, into strange houses and through side streets at midnight, a shuttle in the secret loom of fate, weaving in and out through many-colored threads, until the pattern of the mystery is made clear. For the warp of his strange, adventurous career—love and beauty and diamonds. For the woof—some few cross currents of crime and misery. There, in brief, is the web of his drama. So, if you ask for such diversion, the narrative must perforce begin with a

prelude, that you may make acquaintance with the hero, and see what manner of youth and temperament sped him on his way.

To explain why an engineer's draftsman of no especial talent should, at twenty-one, have already had three sets of names, the review of his history should be divided into five epochs. The first, a prehistoric era, that of his babyhood, was, in his memory, a mere blur of confused, faded pictures, amongst which stood out one vivid, sharp recollection—a scene on a ferry boat, swept by keen brisk winds, cool under a watery spring sun. He was playing on deck with a little yellow-haired girl under the careless supervision of two indefinite elders. With a small boy's insistence he was teasing his companion, clutching at a gold heart-shaped locket with a white star, which hung about her neck. She pulled away from him, the chain broke, and she ran crying to her guardian, leaving the locket in his hands. . . .

The second epoch, that of his childhood between the ages of four and eight, was somewhat more clear in his mind, although there were many gaps he could never account for. He was living in South

Boston, and now his name was Michael O'Shea. His scarlet hair had gained for him amongst the children of his street the easy sobriquet of "Reddy"; and at first he had not consented to the name without many savage protests. Living with an uncle and an aunt, the O'Sheas, hard by the Blind Asylum, his life was a street urchin's career of conflict and roving, with intermittent enforced sessions at the primary school. He roamed from the Point to the Dover Street Bridge; he knew the docks to the last pile, from the land and from the water; he felt, too often, the missile of an opponent gang—a snowball enclosing a rock. Of his lineage he heard only that his mother had been a mill hand in Fitchburg and that his father had died at sea—this information, embroidered by diverse details which, little by little, he perceived as lies, was always told him with winks and smiles, as if, concealed within their falsehoods, was some consummate joke. He grew tired of questioning, finally, and brooded sullenly over the puzzle of his birth.

When he was eight years old the O'Sheas, with a shiny black valise and a paper-covered trunk, moved to New York. They took two rooms in a tenement on the east side—a place of multitudinous fire es-

capas, waving blankets, screaming children and dented ash barrels. But in that place, "Reddy" O'Shea was not to stay long.

The day after moving in, while Mrs. O'Shea was unpacking the trunk and Mangus O'Shea was shaving at a broken triangle of mirror stuck in the window, the boy's eyes caught a shiny something in an open cardboard box. In wonder, with a queer, sickish feeling of recognition he stooped down and took it—a little golden heart with a star of white stones on the cover. Strange memories, as if of a long forgotten dream, stirred him uneasily as he handled it. The next moment he was knocked down by a violent cuff on the ear, and Mangus O'Shea stood over him, his small reddish eyes blazing, ugly with anger, his snarling lips, parted, revealing a broken row of little black teeth, horribly distinct in the middle of his lathered face.

"Look at that what's ye've done now!" he exclaimed to his wife. "After four years av hidin' and pullin' the wool over his eyes! It'll be your fault now if he begins to prick up his ears. Why didn't ye lock it up from him?" He turned to the boy and shook a great scarred hairy fist. "If I ketch you snooping round after things again, I'll break every



rib in your body, and mind ye that!" He struck "Reddy" again viciously to enforce the warning, and returned to his shaving.

No sooner had he turned his back than the boy slipped out, ran down the narrow, dirty stairs of the tenement and was out on the street. He hurried down-town as fast as his legs would carry him.

There followed two days of wandering, starvation, cold. . . . He crossed the Brooklyn Bridge and lost himself in a wilderness of narrow streets with rows of dreary looking houses. . . . When Dr. Hopbottom found him, he was only half conscious. . . .

The third epoch, that of his adolescence, was the wretchedest of all. A household drudge, enslaved by Mrs. Hopbottom for domestic assistance, washing dishes, sweeping, cooking, a hundred other degradingly feminine tasks which went even to sewing and darning the doctor's woolen socks. Joe Hopbottom, as he was now called, almost forgot that he was a boy. He lived in squalor, gnawing scraps in the kitchen, scolded by Mrs. Hopbottom continually, and continually preached at by the doctor, a hoary old hypocrite, whose face Joe loathed.

The doctor's favorite occupation was to lecture the boy on the simple life. "Plain living and high thinking, Joe," he would say, his cheeks bulging with mince pie or suet pudding. "Don't make your belly your god!" as he shoveled in loaded knife fulls of hot pork. The doctor's face was greasy with exuding fat. His hands were pudgy. "Manners make the man, Joe, not clothes!" he often said to his miserable, ragged ward, as he strung a heavy gold watch chain across his embroidered waistcoat. "I think that suit of yours will do another year, with a little brushing." And so it went.

The doctor did not drink or swear. He had all the virtues of the Pharisees, including a goat's beard; but for every worldly vice he had an efficient substitute. Instead of alcohol he used coffee with an equally stimulating effect, injecting it under his skin till he was as yellow as a Moor. In the place of profanity, he made use of a highly original but perfectly adequate diction composed of scientific terms. To poor, terrified Joe this jargon seemed worse than any oaths sanctified by custom. "You toxoleucocyte," he would exclaim to the boy, "what do you want to make a phenyltrybrompropionic hypothe-

nuse of yourself for?" To such mysterious apostrophes Joe could make no answer.

Only once did he see Mangus O'Shea. That was when he went to New York with the doctor to attend the meeting of a committee investigating the white slave traffic. They were walking up the Bowery, the doctor absorbed in the theatrical posters, when the Irishman passed them. He stopped and stared. Joe, turning around fearfully to see if he had been observed, caught O'Shea's eager red eyes upon him. He clung to the doctor's hands and urged him forward. Dr. Hopbottom reluctantly resumed his journey. At the next stand, bearing the picture of "Pulchritude's Peacherino Burlesquers," the boy turned round and saw that O'Shea had followed. At Canal Street he was lost in the crowd. Joe dreamed of him for seven nights running, but then a new interest diverted his thoughts.

Rummaging in the dusty attic one day while Mrs. Hopbottom was at her sewing-circle, Joe discovered some old numbers of the "Studio" left by a lodger; and, between his washings and his darnings, he pored over wonderful photographs of paintings and sculpture, hiding the book under the eaves when

he went back to work. At night, when he had a few moments to himself, he copied the pictures with pencil, patiently, lovingly, abominably.

The Hopbottoms did, at least, permit him an education; and he had almost finished his course at the high school, before the crash came. The "Studio" and a boy in his own class brought on the crisis. His friend was a member of a private life class which rented a studio on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, hired an inexpressibly ugly model and drew therefrom in charcoal. The class was composed mainly of architects' ambitious draftsmen, and with his friend's influence, Joe was permitted to join. Finding money for paper and charcoal and board seemed at first impossible, but the sale of old rags and bottles filched from the Hopbottoms' cellar at last sufficed for the purchase of his material, and the men allowed him to attend for a while, gratis. The boy was already a personable, good-natured youth and soon became popular. His explanation of his absence was that he was attending a Bible class at the Y. M. C. A.

His industry was great, if not his talent. By the time he was sixteen years old, a fat roll of terrible studies from the nude was hidden away in the

attic. Joe had become so enthusiastic in the pursuit of art that he had almost forgotten the chaste point of view of the Philistines. Dr. Hopbottom still preached asceticism (for others) gesticulating with his pie; and still his fat increased. Still he preached the simple life, the renunciation of the flesh, the temptation of the senses.

One night Joe and his friend left a vaudeville theater in shocked disgust at the row of vulgar, half-clad females, who were performing a suggestive burlesque. As he went out, he saw Dr. Hopbottom's unctuous grinning face in the audience, his eyes devouring the charms of the actresses.

It was the next morning the explosion came. Mrs. Hopbottom, climbing up-stairs for a spring cleaning, discovered Joe's charcoal studies from the nude. There was a hysterical tumult, lightnings of her flashing eye, thunder of her expostulation, a storm of tattered charcoal drawings. Joe put his head through the doorway to find the cause of her temper. With his ear in one hand, and the sole survivor of his sketches (as a sample of sin) in her other, the lady stalked into the doctor's study. His wrath was sublime—moral precepts, sermonettes, warnings, prayers, reproaches, quotations from the Bible, Tim-

othy iv, 12; Leviticus xxvi, 27-29. He invoked pictures of future torment—and made a closer inspection of the drawing. He put it away carefully in his desk, waving his wife's itching fingers aside, and invoked Heaven, raising his eyebrows.

Joe could stand it no longer, told, pithily, of the previous evening's vaudeville horrors (it was prayer meeting night) then left the doctor and his blazing spouse to fight it out together. He packed a few clothes with deliberation, and walked calmly, happily, back across the Brooklyn Bridge. He was free; a great peace was in his soul. Half way across he wafted a gorgeous resolution forth upon the breeze. The loathly name of Hopbottom sailed from his body, never to return. Stealing a new one from the first theatrical bill-board he passed, he entered New York as John Fenton. So began his youth.

We may pass lightly over the next five years of his life. He had been trained to take hard knocks, he had industry and a savor of humor—he made his way. Some of his draftsmen friends busied themselves for him and he soon found a position as an office boy for a firm of architects. Between his petty duties, he practised lettering, copied the orders, made

blue prints and tracings. What he lacked in genius he made up in determination; and, at the age of twenty-one, he earned eighteen dollars a week, and by frugality and a cheap Harlem lodging house saved the half of it. The red of his hair had toned to a deep auburn; gymnasium work, long walks and simple living had improved his looks till many a girl's eyes gave him a second glance as he passed. He had, even in his obscurity, the habits of a gentleman and a way of wearing his ready-made clothes that took off the curse of cheapness. His landlady was wont to gossip over his charms and his aristocratic manners. She let many a room on the strength of them.

Once, five or six years after he had escaped from Brooklyn, he came upon Dr. Hopbottom in a penny arcade. The doctor was looking into a moving picture machine bearing the legend, "The Story of an Artist's Model." He was turning the crank slowly—very slowly. Something arrested his attention; he looked up with a guilty face.

"Good morning," said John affably, wondering why he had ever feared this senile old fool.

"You correlated dimorphic appendix, you, what

are you doing? Some blastodermic correlarious mischief, I suppose?" The doctor tried to look dignified.

"Oh, I'm going in for architecture. I see you're at your old game, though!" said John; and, giving him a withering smile, passed on.

And so at last we come to the picture which inaugurated John Fenton's fifth epoch.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucky for men that all have not the same tastes! Lucky for men that each chooses his own type of beauty! Lucky that no one woman can please all men! Else, every woman might be a Helen of Troy and war would rage amongst men over her everlastingly. Unlucky for "Melton's Magazine," however, that there were not more John Fentons to mob the news stands and buy up a certain edition of that periodical. Comparatively few men, perhaps, would call the girl's face pretty. Most, at least, would turn the page with small regret. But to John Fenton, the sight of that face was the starting of many emotions; in that glance he achieved maturity; his youth ended on page two hundred twelve, manhood began at page two hundred thirteen.

He came across the magazine in a friend's studio, and, not daring to confess how much the picture af-



fecting him, he sought a chance, cut out the page and concealed it under his coat. It showed the face of a girl of perhaps twenty years, with soft, parted hair rolling away from her forehead, eyes wide apart under level brows and a smiling mouth at once demure and whimsical. So much for the outward aspect. Beauty, however, is subjective. In John Fenton's mind something responded as to a message—the secret call of a subconscious desire—potent as a magic charm. To win that girl he would have ploughed across Arctic snows, fought his way through tropical jungles, chanced peril, war or pestilence. So much he resolved at first glance.

When he got the page safely home he smoothed out its wrinkles and studied it, perturbed and trembling. By a sorry trick of chance some one, cutting a paragraph from the opposite side of the page, had deleted the name of the girl. Not till he had had the portrait on his wall for a week, not till a new element had begun to creep into its attraction for him, did he realize that he had been a fool not to look at the magazine and see its name and date, that he might procure an undisfigured copy. It was now impossible to trace it, and the girl must remain unnamed.

As he studied it, day by day, its charm grew more potent. Something more than the girl's mere physical attraction moved him. The romance and mystery of the face became more and more magnetic—at first vague and troublesome, it at last absorbed him; it seemed to promise some hidden meaning for him alone. The talk of a Theosophical fellow-worker at his office began to simmer in his brain. Had he perchance known this girl in some previous life? Were their destinies linked? Had they made Karma together? In such wise he mused. At times the strain on his imagination grew so tense that he would put the picture away and busy himself with prosaic subjects—some competition for court house or pergola. But the lady did not long hide her face. Back she came to his wall again, now as expensively framed as a dry-point Helleu etching—and again John Fenton's thoughts roved on the wings of romance.

## II

### THE HOUSE OF THE FORTUNE TELLER

HOW JOHN FENTON WENT DOWN-TOWN WITHOUT AN  
OBJECT, AND BECAME INVOLVED IN A PICTUR-  
ESQUE ADVENTURE WITH A CERTAIN  
STRANGE LADY

**J**OHAN FENTON returned from the office one April evening and as usual gazed long at the picture. He went out with the spell still upon him; it charmed him even in the heated, sordid, commonplace atmosphere of the cheap restaurant where he habitually dined. Aforetimes, he had held interrupted jocose intercourse with Millie, his favorite waitress; but of late Millie's charms had faded. He had begun to notice that her hands and ears were large. After his small, squat cup of adulterated boiled coffee, he took a subway express to Times Square and, as was his wont, wandered down Broadway—into the splendor of modern Babylon.

New York was waking up to its perfervid night life. The electric signs blazed convulsively, throw-

ing spasms of red and white and green against the darkling sky. The taxicabs grew nervous, hurried, searching here and there like roaches in a dirty kitchen. The women of the shadow began to emerge into the glare, overtly stalking their prey. John Fenton, still wrapped in his dream, walked on unregarding, like a machine.

At the opera house he waked up enough to take his accustomed place in a shy corner to watch the influx of wealth and fashion. He had a new measure for their grace and beauty, now; and as they entered, one by one they failed. Once he had a sudden, clutching gasp of surprise as a girl passed him cool and imperious, in her long cloak of chinchilla. He stared. At first he wildly thought his time had come and she was the girl of the picture. But she turned full upon him and he saw her mouth was selfish, cruel, false. He turned and walked down-town, trembling; and after a while passed still dreaming, into a side street to escape the crowd.

He had not gone far when his idly roving eyes encountered a sign on a door, reading "Madame Oswald, Palmist and Medium." He stopped and stared at it curiously. Why not, for once, seek that vulgar shrine, consult the oracle and illumine his fate?

Life, of late, while seeming duller of fact, had to his fancy become suddenly stimulated. That fancy must be fed—a mere portrait could no longer satisfy him. He was in a mood for romance, and here was one of Romance's immemorial priestesses. He slowly ascended the steps, rang the bell, waited.

A negro servant opened to him, and led him into a front parlor, lighted by a single lamp on a table. He sat down, already embarrassed, upon an uncomfortable red plush sofa and gazed, fascinated, at a huge painted panel on the opposite wall, whereon some audacious amateur had copied some wearied professional's conception of Francesca da Rimini and her lover. The black eyes of the heroine held him till Madame Oswald appeared, massive, blonde, swathed in a purple gown.

There were the usual preliminaries; Madame's quick, close scrutiny appraising him at a glance—an attempt to secure a "full life reading" at double the ordinary price,—the production of a velvet pad upon which his hand should rest—and the drone of prophecy began. She prodded his palm with a little ivory pointer, noted extraordinary lines, stars and mounts, and brought forth her three inevitable themes. The gentleman was of a strangely sensi-

tive nature, and was much misunderstood. He was worried over something, and didn't know quite what to do. He had intuition, psychic power, mediumship, but it was undeveloped. A course of developing seances, now, at five dollars a week, would bring out unexpected powers. . . . No? Well, then, let him ask a question. She leaned back and closed her eyes. Fenton watched her bulky satin chest heave heavily as she breathed. Her large placid face, with its one hairy mole, fascinated him. Then the picture came into his mind, and he asked in a whisper: "Who is she?"

"Who is she?" she repeated, as if to some spirit guide. Her voluminous bust expanded in a gasp. She quivered, rolled her head, and finally answered: "I see the letters B. C." She opened her eyes suddenly and shot at him, "Ain't that right?"

"Darned if I know," he replied.

At that she plucked up courage and went on without hesitation. "B. C.," she repeated. "It's Belle, or Blanche or Bessie. I ain't sure which. But she's in your life current, and she's attracting you her way. Yes, yes,—you're going to marry her, and marry with money, too. I ain't sure if it's hers or yourn. But look out for one thing, and that's a man with a

split ear. Don't you trust him! Is they anything else you wanted to know? Fifty cents, please!"

Fenton never paid the fee; for, no sooner had she spoken than, with a terrified expression, she jumped up and ran to the window. She turned back to him a large white anguished face.

"My God! The police! They are a-goin' to pull me!" She began to pluck at her breast and moan.

Fenton rose, beginning to be frightened himself. "What the devil's the matter?" He grabbed up his hat and his coat.

"Oh, I knew they was a-roundin' up the mediums and palmists this week," she cried, "but I come across with my tax to the captain all right, only last Tuesday, and he swore they'd never touch me. This means a hundred dollars out for me, an' I ain't got ten! Say, kid, you get out quick, or they'll hold you for a witness! I don't want no more evidence than I can help—hurry, for God's sake! Get out through the back parlor, there!"

Even as she spoke the front door bell rang, and the handle was rattled to enforce the summons. Fenton did not stay to see the issue, but ran in between the folding doors to a room cluttered by feminine garments in scandalous disorder. He opened

a door into the hall, but, on the instant, heard the officers entering. He could not escape that way. If he could not find some other exit he would be caught like a rat in a trap. He darted to the window and saw a fire-escape landing. Out he climbed.

The back yard showed no feasible route of egress. He ran up the iron ladder, peered into a window, tried it and found it locked, then hurried up to the next floor. Here the window was opened and the room lighted. He glanced in and gave a suppressed cry of surprise.

Stooping down to the floor, a woman, dressed in Russian sables, was gathering into a traveling bag, by handfuls, a profusion of gems, that, scattered upon the carpet, made the place a miracle. By the vivid flashes of red, blue, yellow and green that dazzled his eyes, there must have been, in all, some two hundred precious stones, set and unset—rings, bracelets, necklaces, pins and pendants. Where there was not the prismatic fire of precious stones, there was the dull sheen of gold. For the most part the jewels lay in a puddle of gorgeous color; but, spattered from this, all over the floor single sparks of radiant light twinkled as if a rainbow had exploded in the room, and lay in splendid fragments.





“ I swear I am innocent ”

70 VIII  
ANEXILLO

As he stood there transfixed, the woman turned, caught sight of his white face and screamed. With a sudden movement she threw herself full length upon the floor like a hen trying to protect her chicks at the approach of a hawk. Fenton was too astonished to think of his own peril, too astonished even to speak; it was the woman who broke the silence.

“Who are you, for God’s sake?” she moaned.

Still Fenton stared, aghast, inarticulate.

“Are you a burglar?”

His tongue loosened at last. “The house is raided! The police are down stairs—they’ve got Madame Oswald. What in Heaven’s name does all this mean?”

She paled, she faltered; then, with a shocked face, arose and stood, with her hand to her head, as if panic stricken. Fenton got a good look at her now and saw that she was beautiful, with a piquant, eager face, exquisite scarlet lips, and deep brown eyes suffused with tears. Her skin had an olive cast and her hair was dark. Altogether she was unlike any woman he had ever seen—an exotic type with a sensuous prettiness made delicate, refined by great intelligence. Was she Oriental? There was at least something tropical about her beauty—it was too vivid, too moving for an Anglo-Saxon.

She had stood staring at him, thinking intently; now she darted to the window and laid a gracile hand upon his arm, as she looked sharply into his face. She spoke under her breath: "You look honest and brave. Will you help me? I have not a moment to lose, if the police are in the house. Quick!"

Without waiting an answer she dragged him over the window sill into the room. Before he had collected his wits she was scrabbling the jewels from the floor and loading them into his pockets.

"I swear I am innocent of any crime!" she exclaimed passionately, as she gathered a handful of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds from the floor and dropped them into his overcoat pocket. "You've *got* to help me out—there is no one else to save me—and the honor of a great family."

She ran to the door, listened, and returned with compressed lips, to stoop for more jewels. They dripped from her fingers as she rose, great drops of iridescent color, the hues of blood and poison, to be gathered again in her little hands. "All I want is that these things should be restored to their rightful owner. Why, if the police find them here it will be awful—I can never explain—a terrible scandal will

come out!" Again she scraped up her hands full—chains of fire opals, brooches of carved emeralds, topazes and sapphires, a tiny enameled watch, a half dozen rings, dazzling with rubies. Already his inside pockets were full, the stones pressed hard against his sides. She opened the flaps of his outside pockets and thrust in more gems. "Don't ask any questions—there's no time. I hope to God you can get away safe—you must do your best—I am being followed, but they won't suspect you. Now then, be quick!"

By this time the last jewel was concealed, and Fenton, his coat bulging with the treasure, stood before her pale and trembling with excitement. Just then there came a noise from the stairway, a bang upon the hall door.

"Out the window!" she hissed. "Get away somehow, for heaven's sake—and meet me at Scheffel Hall—and wait till I come!" In another instant she had hustled him out onto the fire escape, shut the window behind him and turned off the gas. As he climbed the next flight of iron steps, out of sight, he heard the pounding on the door grow louder; some one was shouting for her to open.

### III

## SCHEFFEL HALL

HOW OUR HERO, IN THE PURSUIT OF HIS ADVENTURE, MET AT HIS RENDEZVOUS A FRIEND OF HIS YOUTH, AND HEARD A TALE OF JEWELS AND HORROR

SO up Fenton went with his heart pumping, obstructed by his overcoat, gained the next landing and looked about for a means of escape. Three or four feet away from him the roof of an ell stood, its flat roof level with his landing. With no definite plan of escape, he jumped across the opening, landed upon the gravel roof and hurried along, dodging under telephone wires, to where another roof rose, a few feet higher. Up this he scrambled and looked about. There was a trap door a few yards away. He made his way to it, tried it, and found it unlocked. Lifting it, he gazed down into a black hole. At first he could see nothing, but as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he made out a ladder leading down. With terror in his soul, he cautiously

groped his way to the foot, bumped his head, felt about for a door, opened one and found himself, to his immense relief, in the upper hallway of an apartment house. Here he paused for a moment to regain his breath and his courage.

There was nothing for it but to descend boldly and trust his luck not to be observed. He got down the first flight in safety, meeting no one, but at the next landing was suddenly confronted by a young girl coming up. She started in surprise, eyed him keenly, but said nothing. He felt her eyes upon him as he went down. In the lowest hall a negro lad was dozing at a telephone desk. He did not move. Fenton opened the front door; the boy waked, caught sight of him and shouted something. Fenton hurried out, not daring to run, got down the front steps with his pulse quickened to fever speed, and turned toward Broadway.

One glance over his shoulder showed the patrol wagon still standing at the door of Madame Oswald's, a few houses away, and, by the opposite curb was a shabby coupé, with its driver on the box watching the excitement. Men were running up to the scene of the raid; one large, pompous-looking man jostled Fenton and nearly knocked him down;

but at last he was free of the crowd and walked south, his hands in his pockets, his fingers burrowing in the diamonds. Judging the lights of Broadway safer than dark side streets, he kept down to the Flatiron Building, and then, looking suspiciously to right and left, crossing the street whenever he saw a pedestrian approaching, he zig-zagged to Fourth Avenue and gained Eighteenth Street. Once a bedizened woman accosted him with a wheedling voice. Once a shabby loafer hailed him, requesting money for a cup of coffee. . . . "Up against it, sir. Can't get work—nothing to eat for two days." Fenton did not reply. The burden of his treasure was a horror and a menace; it seemed as if he would never reach the restaurant. But, at last, he entered the swinging doors and sat down at a table with a sigh of relief. Here was respite for a while—till the woman should arrive—if she ever did arrive. What if she did not?

He ordered beer and pretzels and took up a copy of the *Fliegende Blaetter* to distract his thoughts. The German letters danced on the page. The pictures had no meaning. Then, seeing a ragged copy of "Melton's" on the table he took it up.

It was a tired looking old magazine, half the pages



torn, spotted with eggs and gravy, having evidently been left in the restaurant by some patron, and read to death by subsequent guests. He turned the pages listlessly, his mind on other things than storiettes or descriptive articles. But, when he came to the pages of fair women he stopped suddenly at a half page. It was the desecrated portrait of the Girl—his wonderful girl with the whimsical smile and the level eyebrows. His heart stopped—then he glanced at the caption under the half-tone. Half of it was gone. What remained read as follows:

“Miss Belle Ch  
One of the season’s most”

“Belle Ch—” it was maddening. Then, in a flash, he recalled the fortune teller’s prediction. What was it Madame Oswald had said? “B. C.—Belle, or Blanche, or Bessie—she’s in your life current—you’re going to marry her—and marry with money.” Strange how the girl pursued him! Would fate indeed bring them together? He cut out the half page and put it in his pocket. There was no time to muse upon this fancy, his present situation was too compelling. He resumed his lookout for the mysterious woman who had promised to meet him.

He had been there a scant half hour when he saw her enter the door and give a quick glance about the room. Seeing Fenton, she walked smiling toward his table.

"Thank God, you got here all right!" she said as she sat down. "I had a narrow escape, myself. The police came in, but found no evidence to hold me. I told them I was rooming in the house and knew nothing. All the same I have been followed, and I daren't take the gems. You will have to help me further."

"See here," said Fenton, "I've had enough of this. It's a little too suspicious for me, and I don't care to get into trouble with the police."

"It's not the police you have to fear most," she exclaimed.

"Who is it, then?" he demanded nervously.

"Won't you help me?" She shot a languishing look at him. Surely she was beautiful—but her beauty had a savage note in it—it was the beauty of a tigress—there was strange electric force in her glance, in her mysterious smile.

"I won't help you till you tell me what it all means," was his answer.

She kept her gaze on him steadily, and spoke as if

to herself. "I hardly know how to tell you. . . . It's such a great responsibility. . . . A family's good name is in your power. . . . But I must have help." Still she stared at him.

Fenton turned away his head, embarrassed. He was upon the point of refusing her outright, handing over the jewels and making his escape back into the peace of commonplace things. There was something sinister about it all. It was too dangerous. As he looked abstractedly toward the door it opened and a man entered. Fenton felt his blood run cold. Who was the man? At first he did not know, and yet there was something familiar about him, in his furtive walk rather than his face, which stirred vague memories. The man passed, gave a blank stare at Fenton; and Fenton recognized him.

It was Mangus O'Shea, with whom he had lived in South Boston, whom he had always been told was his own uncle. The man had grown old, but, by the small reddish eyes and the broken black teeth, Fenton knew him indubitably. As the Irishman passed it was as if a chill wind had swept after him, making Fenton shiver with apprehension. At this look at O'Shea, the first for so many years, Fenton saw him as a cruel and an evil thing, a man to shun and

dread. It was as if his own sub-conscious mind had been for years pondering a problem and needed but this encounter to fan hidden coals of thought into a fierce flaming idea. He was sure now that O'Shea was not his uncle, sure that the Irishman knew the secret of his birth, had done him some fearful wrong, perhaps. His look was criminal; Fenton, with his pockets sagging with precious stones, felt his peril increase every minute.

If the woman opposite him had noticed the episode she did not show it. Her eyes were still on him, but her thoughts seemed far away. Now she appeared to awake and cast some horrid apprehension from her. She leaned forward and touched his hand.

"Listen," she said, "I'm going to tell you why and how much I need you. If you have any chivalry in your nature you can not refuse me."

With this preamble she began her story.

#### THE DEAD FARE

I am going to make you my confidant in two secrets—one, my lover's I hoped never to divulge. The other is my own I hoped to keep that for ever

also; but it doesn't matter now. . . . I have negro blood in my veins; I am an octoroon. Will that kill your sympathy? I hope not, . . . but I have to tell you—it will explain everything.

Perhaps you have noticed it already. Have you suspected me, under my powder, under my wig—this horrible thing that I've worn so long? Well, my lover never suspected it, I know. Perhaps he wouldn't have cared if he had. I like to think so—for he loved me.

Gordon Brewster rescued me from hell. Do you know what it means to have negro blood in your veins—mixed with white—to have sensibility, refinement—surely I have that—and to be for ever outside the pale? I can mingle freely with neither my own people nor yours. One sort is too low, the other too high for me. I have a college education—I studied for four years at Tuskegee Institute—after that I tried to teach. Then for three years I was alone in New York, seeing almost no one. I write special stories for the papers, never going near the offices, and supporting myself fairly well. I have a little apartment on East Thirty-third Street, with a colored maid—I am afraid of any other.

. . .

It doesn't matter how I met Gordon Brewster. There is no need of your knowing—that part of my life is sacred. But, in spite of everything, we fell in love. Can you imagine what that meant to me? A man like him—a gentleman? It was a dream come true—it was a fairy tale. Can you see how I hid my secret—my shame? I think that my soul is as white as . . . well, never mind. I couldn't tell Gordon; how could I risk it? I was so happy! I was sure of his love, but I was afraid of something stronger than himself, some instinct, some inevitable revulsion of race feeling. . . . I didn't know how it would end—I didn't care, only that I resolved never to marry him—unless . . . I wonder if I *could* have told him? . . . Well, it's too late now . . . All I have now is his honor to protect and cherish. The happiness of knowing him was all I ever had. . . . We walked all that three years on the edge of a precipice that he never saw. . . . I saw it always. . . .

He had plenty of money, at first. It was all I could do to prevent his spending it all on me. No one ever knew, no one ever talked about us—no one at least, except an intimate friend of his, Harry Hay.

Mr. Brewster had a string of race horses—no other business—the family is old, and rich. He put all his money into his stable—and lost steadily. If I had known of it in time, I might have saved him . . . but it was not to be. . . .

Last evening, at about half past seven o'clock, when I was dressing for the evening, the door bell rang, and Eliza, my maid, came in to tell me that Mr. Brewster had come. It was so early I had not expected him for some time yet. I told Eliza to show him into my little parlor while I completed my toilet. As she helped me with my dressing I heard him tramping up and down the room, and wondered at it.

Before I had finished, he knocked on my door and called out for me to hurry. His voice was so harsh and excited that it alarmed me. I threw my things on hurriedly and ran in. He was terribly excited. He told me to get rid of Eliza—he wanted to talk to me alone. So I sent her away, and he walked nervously up and down till she had left.

Then he came up to me and took both my hands in his. "Get your things packed up at once!" he said. "Enough to travel with, at least. I am going to marry you right away! We're going to

take the train to New Orleans to-night, and then by a fruit steamer for Central America. I'm dished!"

No, I didn't cry. It was too critical a situation. I thought then that the time had come when I would have to tell him my secret. Oh, he had asked me to marry him scores of times; I had always been able to put him off with an indefinite answer. I couldn't bear to lose him, but I was determined not to be his wife until I had confessed what I was. But now I saw he was as determined as I. I said, "What has happened, Gordon?"

Then he told me—told me what I dread to tell you—only, of course, you see, then I didn't understand how awful it was. He was ruined. His favorite filly had cost him every cent he had in the world, and he owed money everywhere. He had even . . . I don't think I need tell you all of it . . . perhaps that can be covered up, too . . . At any rate he was desperate. Nothing would do but for us to be married that night and get away before he was arrested.

Think of it! The temptation to be alone with him—his wife—sure of one friend for ever! But the cost! I couldn't do it! How could I think of his losing his honor, his good name—



I don't know what I said, but I refused. I told him that he couldn't marry me, that he must stay and face his trouble—stay and make a fight for it—then, when he was square with the world, if he chose, I would be his wife—wasn't I right? I loved him too much!

I never had time to finish. You see, he had brought two pieces of luggage with him. One was a suit-case, the other a smallish traveling bag. Before I had ended my talk he was fumbling in the bag. I didn't realize what he was doing till he had pulled out a revolver. His look was horrible—he could hardly speak through his passion, but he cried out: “Well, if I can't have you—I'll end it all now!” Then he pulled the trigger—shot himself in the temple. . . . I fainted on the floor beside him. . . .

The next thing I knew the bell was ringing. I don't know how long it had been ringing . . . it was some time before I could get up, and it kept ringing persistently, horribly. It wouldn't stop ringing. . . . I shut my ears to it, hoping whoever was there would go away . . . but the bell kept on ringing . . . can you hear it? Gordon dead on my parlor floor, and the bell ringing . . . God!—I can hear it yet . . . ringing.

I managed to open the door part way—a crack—and saw Harry Hay—Gordon's best friend—the only one who knew of our friendship.

"For God's sake," he said, "is Gordon here?" He pushed past me—I couldn't answer—he got into the parlor—and saw. . . . I sat down on the sofa and began to cry, then . . . it was such a relief to have somebody there. I couldn't look . . . Gordon was dead, sure enough. There was no doubt about it. . . .

He felt of Gordon's heart . . . and closed his eyes. . . . Then he told me Gordon had been to see him yesterday to borrow money. Harry Hay didn't have it, and, not knowing how serious it was, had refused. Then, afterward, hearing a few things about Gordon's affairs, he had raised a few thousands in a hurry and had come to offer it to him . . . knowing Gordon would be at my place. . . . Think of it! Ten minutes too late. . . . wasn't it ironic? Harry was a good friend, God knows. . . .

Harry Hay was wonderful . . . what I would have done alone, I don't know. Of course, the suicide itself was awful enough; but for Gordon to be found in my room, in the room of an octoroon! Think of the scandal! It would be terrific! . . .

Then, there were Gordon's debts, his dishonesty. . . . It couldn't be. I plead with Harry to find some way out. Then we discovered the jewels, and we understood how far poor Gordon had fallen!

They were in the traveling bag which he had opened to take the pistol from. It was half full. The Brewster jewels . . . thousands of dollars' worth of them. . . . Gordon had taken them from the family safe. He had the combination, and his parents were away from home, in Europe, or rather, they were expected back any day. Well, we talked it over. What could we do? I took a dose of strychnia and it braced me up. . . . Finally Harry thought of a plan.

"There's a hack stand around the corner," he said. "I'll go round there and see if I can jolly the driver into renting his carriage. If I can, perhaps we can make it. If not, the thing will have to come out. It's our only chance, anyway." So he left to try it. I locked the door behind him, and went into my room and lay on my bed thinking . . . you can imagine how my mind worked. . . . I could see Gordon lying on the floor as plainly as if I were in that room with him . . . hours seemed to go by before Harry Hay rang the bell.

When I opened the door I didn't know him at first; I was terrified. He had on a cab driver's smelly coat and old high hat, borrowed, I don't know how—I believe he told the cabby it was a practical joke. . . . He told me to get on my hat and coat and wait for him in my room. He went into the parlor. . . . Once he came to my door and asked for warm water and towels. Then he returned for cotton wool . . . Oh, God! . . . I didn't dare ask him what for. . . . The third time he knocked he told me that everything was ready. I gulped down a drink of brandy, clenched my teeth and went in. . . . I wish I could ever forget what I saw. . . . Gordon was huddled on the sofa, his hat and gloves were on . . . he seemed to be asleep . . . his head was turned away . . . the hole in his temple was filled with cotton. . . . I felt myself fainting again, went to the bath room and dashed my face with water, then returned. . . . Harry had the hall door open.

Well, we got the body down-stairs somehow, one supporting each arm. . . . I held Gordon while Harry looked out to see if there was any one who might see . . . then we carried him into the cab. . . . We got the body on to the seat and I fol-

lowed and sat down and held it up. . . . Then Harry ran up-stairs for the suit-case and bag, threw them into the floor of the cab, got on the box, and we drove off.

Was there ever such a drive, I wonder? Past the Waldorf-Astoria, past Sherry's and Delmonico's, in and out through a stream of automobiles and carriages . . . the body lurched and swayed . . . once it fell on the floor—I had to lift him up. Past the Cathedral, the great hotels at the plaza, and then we plunged into the Park . . . it was cool and dark . . . my last ride with Gordon Brewster . . . the last time I would touch his hand! It was the last service I would ever do for him, I thought, . . . but there is still another . . . you must help me . . . can you have the heart to refuse, after this? . . .

Gordon had lived alone in the Brewster house on Seventy-second Street, with nobody but an old caretaker—Flint, his name is—I didn't quite trust him, but he was our only hope. Would Flint consent to help us? That was the question; if he would, we could manage it. We stopped at the house, and Harry Hay left me alone and went in to break the news to the old man. . . . He was gone some time. He

must have paid Flint money—big money. Had that body been any one's but Gordon's, I would have died, or lost my senses right then. The suspense, you know. But how can you abhor the body of one you love? Our last ride together . . . was over.

Harry Hay came out at last with Flint, who was shivering with terror, expostulating. Harry Hay took one arm of the body, Flint the other—touched it, that is, and then ran back into the house, sobbing, terrified. . . . Aren't men cowards? . . . I had to help . . . the body was stiffened with the cold . . . we had to fairly drag it into the house . . . the boots scraped on the sidewalk . . . at the basement entrance, Flint was white as ashes, holding the door . . . then into the shooting gallery, where Gordon had his bowling alley, his foils and gloves . . . and rifles. . . . We laid him on the floor. . . .

Harry Hay took a target pistol from a case and asked the way to the coal cellar . . . he went with Flint through a little low door . . . then I heard a shot. My God! It made me shriek, my nerves were so on edge. It was only Harry shooting into the coal to empty the cartridge. He came back and laid the pistol down beside the body. . . .

Then I turned away, sick. He was removing the cotton . . . we were afraid the wound wouldn't bleed. . . . Oh, God! . . . it bled fast enough.

Flint was told to wait fifteen minutes, then telephone to the nearest police station. . . . He was to say he had heard a shot . . . that Gordon had let himself in alone while Flint was up-stairs . . . that he probably was practising, as he often did. You see, he was a noted shot . . . we hoped the death might perhaps pass as accidental . . . that was the plan. . . . I think it worked all right, . . . but the police suspect something I think. . . . Did you read the papers? There was a notice . . . there is to be an inquest . . . the house is guarded.

We came out, at last. Harry Hay got up on the box and drove off. I felt relieved. So far as we knew, nobody had seen us come. I thought it was all over, the strain of it, the horror, and my strength began to go . . . I collapsed . . . it had been too much. . . . I was roused out of a sort of stupor by finding myself slipping to the floor as we slewed round a corner. When I tried to get up my feet struck something—the suit-case and bag. Do you see? We had been so worked up over the thing, so

excited, so nervous, we had forgotten to leave Gordon's luggage at the house. Both of us had forgotten—God knows we had enough else to think about—it isn't strange we forgot. Well, I thought it wouldn't matter much about the things—only clothes. I was too upset to remember what was in the small bag.

Then, as we passed an electric light I happened to look down at my feet. The small bag had become unfastened in some way, and the whole floor of the cab was covered with jewels! . . . You've seen them, too—on the floor—you know how I must have felt. Thousands of dollars' worth of jewels! I gathered them up and stuffed them into the bag. At the next street lamp I looked and found more in the corners, and still more . . . it seemed as if I'd never find them all. . . . First I thought I'd stop Harry Hay and tell him, . . . but I waited till we got to my house, . . . then I told him.

What were we to do? We couldn't take them back; it was too late, then, for the police had undoubtedly been notified—there would be officers there, and the coroner's men. Harry Hay was getting nervous about the cab-driver, and anxious to return the carriage. He told me that I would have



to see about the jewels—told me to telephone Flint and see what could be done to return them safely, so that no one would know they had been taken. . . . It was a tremendous responsibility for me, but, to save Gordon's honor, I consented to do it.

I got Flint on the telephone, after a while, and told him. He was awfully excited, and said he had found the safe door open, and had suspected the theft. He proposed that I should carry the jewels up to his brother's house in Harlem, where, as soon as he could get away, he would meet me. Then he would return them to the safe and lock the combination. No one would ever know. But, owing to the coroner, he couldn't get away till late to-night. . . . I promised to come. . . .

I tried to sleep to-day, . . . but how could I forget? . . . After I had concealed the suit-case, my mind went over and over the horror of it all, and I thought I should go mad . . . the forenoon was bad enough—but the afternoon was worse. . . .

As I was trying to eat my dinner the bell rang. Eliza came back, grinning, to say a man wanted to speak to me. . . . I couldn't understand why she was laughing. Then, when I saw him . . . for a moment my heart stopped beating. I thought it was

Harry Hay, in the cabman's coat and top hat again. . . . It was as if I had to go through that horrible ride again. . . . I couldn't believe my sight. . . . It was the cab-driver himself . . . he had vicious cross eyes. . . .

He began with a horrible, sneering grin, to tell me that my friend had damaged the cab. . . . I denied knowing anything about it, but he said he had followed Harry, and had watched at the corner . . . he had seen us coming out . . . with Gordon. Think of it! For one moment I couldn't tell how much he knew, and I was tempted to kill him then and there . . . I almost wish I had! . . . Then he spoke of "my friend with the jag," and I saw he didn't know the truth. But he knew something queer had happened. He said he wanted a hundred dollars. . . . I gave it to him and told him to go away. Wasn't I a fool?

Of course it was a fatal thing to do. . . . The moment I had done it I was in despair. He would be sure something wrong had happened . . . he would come again . . . and again . . . he would find out. . . . I went wild.

I didn't dare stay at home any longer, then; and so, putting all the jewels loose into a velvet work-

bag, I hid that in a large mink muff and went out . . . I didn't know where. . . . I decided to go to some restaurant, or to a theater—anywhere to be in a crowd, safe . . . and wait until Flint could take the things. . . .

I had scarcely turned from Thirty-third Street into Fourth Avenue, when I saw a cab driving up slowly behind me. . . . I was afraid it was the man, but was not sure. . . . I walked hurriedly along . . . he followed . . . like a horrible creeping thing.

Why didn't I take a car? Oh, I don't know! I was distracted . . . and, anyway, he would have followed me. . . . I turned west at Twenty-ninth Street . . . the cab crawled along after me . . . down Broadway—I couldn't shake it off. I turned into Twenty-sixth, and for a few minutes I thought I had lost him. . . . I crossed Seventh Avenue, past little bake-shops, groceries, cobblers' cubby-holes and sticky-faced children. Then, half way up the block, came a cab jogging along toward me. I was terrified; I lost my head—I turned and ran. . . . There was no doubt that it was the cross-eyed cabman. I knew him now, a quarter of a mile away. . . . I became confused, fearing he would stop

me . . . discover the jewels. . . . I looked about for some escape, saw a fortune-teller's sign, and ran up the steps. The front door was unlatched. I went in and darted up-stairs. . . . I had lost my reason, now. . . . I was acting through blind instinct . . . taking the first chance that occurred to me. . . .

Up two flights, and I came to a door ajar. I went in and locked it. Then I looked about for a place to conceal the jewelry. Not a closet, nor a cupboard, nor a bed. . . . I knelt to rip up the carpet, thinking I could stuff the things underneath, when I heard a pounding down-stairs. . . . I got up and grabbed the muff—the jewels came flying out of the bag and scattered all over the floor. Then I looked up and saw your face! God, how you terrified me! . . . Well, you know the rest.

For some minutes neither spoke. The girl, as if relieved of some physical burden, sighed, and rested her head on her hand, gazing at the young man. Fenton looked at her amazed at her story. He understood, now, something of her strange beauty—the sensuous charm of the octoroon spiritualized by love. That beauty which had before been tantaliz-

ing, troublesome, urgent, disturbed him no more. He looked through it to the woman whose character had been revealed. With a quick toss of his head he reached over and held out his hand. She took it without a word, and smiled sadly.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked.

“Take the jewels to Flint’s rendezvous, five-fifty-five West One Hundred and Forty-sixth Street.”

“You think it is dangerous?”

“I’m sure of it. That cabman is still tracking me. But you don’t lack courage, I know.”

“I think I’ll try it,” said Fenton calmly. “I’ll do my best, at any rate. Where can I find you to let you know the result?”

“I don’t dare go home,” said the octoroon. “I’ll take a room at the King William Hotel, and you can telephone me there. Call for Miss Green.”

She rose, cast a look about, and added: “If there is anything I can ever do for you—”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said Fenton. “You’d better get away now while you can. Good night.”

She bowed to him soberly, gave him another long, heartbroken look, and then walked away.

Fenton, freed from the potent charm of her personality, looked about, almost wondering if she had

indeed been there at all. The German restaurant seemed to be the abode of the commonplace—how could Romance have entered? All about were peaceful, prosaic patrons, intent upon their meal. . . . Then he remembered O'Shea. Was he still there? He scanned the people at the tables, one by one. No. Fenton felt relieved. His eyes fell idly upon a stout, muscular looking man leaning against a table near him. He wore a shepherd's plaid suit. A protuberance behind his hip looked as if it might be a concealed revolver. Fenton wondered if he were a detective. . . . But the time had come for him to act, himself, and he rose to go.

## IV

### THE LIARS' CLUB

HOW OUR AMATEUR ADVENTURER FELL A VICTIM TO  
HIS OWN INEXPERIENCE, WAS RELIEVED OF HIS  
TREASURE, AND FELL IN WITH A PRECIOUS  
COMPANY

FULLY convinced of the truth of this extraordinary woman's tale, and with all the chivalry of a romantic youth aroused, John Fenton set out to restore the jewels. With his overcoat pockets still clumsy with the treasure, he left Scheffel Hall and went out into a chill, misty night, intent upon his adventurous errand. What danger lay in wait he did not know, nor care. He was no longer a poor, unknown draftsman; he was a knight-errant bent upon the rescue of imperiled honor. The city had become, of a sudden, strange, mysterious; every shadow was a suggestion of malice. So he walked hurriedly along Eighteenth Street to the Subway entrance. Once he turned round, and saw two men following him . . . he increased his speed. The

lights of the glazed entrance promised a safe haven.

His haste, however, brought disaster. At the entrance a step was raised a scant inch from the bricks of the sidewalk, upon that low projection his toe caught, and he fell, sprawling, hitting his forehead upon the iron plate. And as he fell his overloaded pockets disgorged jewelry and precious stones all about him. For a moment he lay there, stunned, only half conscious.

The next thing he knew, two men were helping him to rise. His head was buzzing, blood was dripping from his face; he would have fallen again but for their assistance. In another moment he smelt the sickish odor of chloroform, and he lost consciousness for a moment. Before he went off, voices sounded strangely in his ears, and his half-opened eyes caught sight of Mangus O'Shea supporting him . . . he was too dazed even to realize his danger.

When he regained partial use of his senses he was walking, still supported by the two men. He could scarcely support his own weight, and they held him up by sheer strength of arm. He caught a few words.

"There's a stable round the corner. I'll get a cab,



and we'll take him to . . .” It was Mangus O'Shea who was speaking.

Then, as in a dream, he walked on, tottering. It seemed to last for hours, that horrible journey. Slowly he began to revive, and started to protest.

“Hist! He's coming round again,” said another voice. “Give him another whiff.” A damp handkerchief was held hard to his nostrils for a few seconds; he struggled weakly and went back into oblivion. So, alternately walking and dozing off again, trying to shake himself free, as from some awful nightmare, he was dragged on, and on, and on. . . .

The next thing he knew, he was in a cab. This time he had wit enough not to show signs of reviving, but sat, huddled between two men, listening. His pockets were being deliberately rifled; O'Shea was filling his own with the spoil as he talked.

“To Peter Stow's loft,” he was saying. “Peter won't be there to-night; he'll be at the club, telling his fool stories. . . . We can make a good getaway . . . take his pants off, and he'll stay awhile. . . . We'll divvy up at the Norcross, and catch the first boat over the pond.”

Then, an indiscreet movement of Fenton's head

attracted the notice of his captors. The chloroform handkerchief was pressed firmly to his nose again, and Fenton knew no more. \* \* \*

He awoke, he had no idea how long afterward, with chilled legs, to find himself lying on his back, sick with nausea, his trousers missing. He was in some dark place, and could see nothing except at one side a row of dim spots that were from time to time obliterated, one by one, and reappeared again like holes in the dark, admitting the merest trace of light. He was not out of doors, though the floor he lay on felt as if covered with gravel. There was a close, unfamiliar smell in his nostrils, and in his ears a confused noise like cooing, a low, persistent, guttural sound he could not at first explain. So soon as his brain cleared, he made out, by the fluttering of wings back and forth, and the peep of chicks, that he was in some sort of a large dove-cote or pigeon house. Every little while he felt a sharp peck at his bare legs, and feathers brushed his face. . . . He reached out his hand cautiously, felt a bird slip away from him, and his hand fell upon some small eggs, still warm from the mother.

He lay there a while longer in wonderful discomfort, trying to puzzle out his situation. As the nau-

sea wore off he arose and, stumbling over pigeons and smashing eggs at every step, groped his way toward the light. The windows were too small for him to see anything outside. He started to explore the garret. Bang!—he suddenly fell, just escaping being precipitated into a hole in the floor, square, like the opening for a ladder, though no ladder was there. He thanked his lucky stars that he had only barked his shins, and rubbed them till he found they were sticky—whether with blood or broken eggs he could not, in the darkness, be sure.

No light came from the trap in the floor—all he could see about him were vague forms that flitted to and fro, all he could hear was the monotonous, brooding murmur of doves. There seemed no escape till some one came. He shouted aloud, shouted again and again, waited and listened. His overcoat was gone, and the pockets of his coat had been rifled. He found a single match. Lighting it, he gave one glance about, which revealed nothing more than his imagination had pictured—hundreds of pigeons on the floor, on the rafters, flying hither and yon. He was trying to devise some means of escape, yelling with all his might, meanwhile, when a light flickered in the hole below him, and a voice came up to him.

"Who's there?"

Fenton stuck his head through the trap, and discerned a spectacled old man with scrawny beard, holding a lantern, and looking up at him, mouth agape in wonder.

"Let me out, for heaven's sake!" Fenton cried.

"Who the devil are you, anyway, up in my pig-eon-cote?"

"Come up and I'll explain. I've been drugged and left here. By robbers!"

"You're drunk!" said the old man, holding the lantern above his head. Then chuckling inanely, he walked off, to return with a ladder which he lifted to the trap.

Fenton protested volubly against the accusation and with exclamatory eloquence described what had taken place after having left the restaurant. The old man still laughed as he climbed up.

Fenton grew more vehement, but his tale was incredible. The old man sat down on the floor, with his feet on the ladder, and roared till he wept.

"I say," he shouted, "I know where *you* belong, and there you go, too, and that's the Liars' Club, right away. That story will get the prize to-night, all right. Robbed, eh? Pockets full of diamonds

and rubies and truck? Fine! Say, by the time we get down there you can touch that tale up a bit and make it hum! Never drunk in your life, then? Say, you certainly must have been up against some merry jags this evening! Well, I like a practical joke as well as any one, provided it ain't on me. Come on down, and I'll have you initiated right away!"

"But I've got to hurry up to Harlem!" Fenton insisted. "I must give notice right away that the jewels have been stolen."

"You're coming with me to the Liars' Club first!" the old man repeated.

"What the devil is that?" Fenton wondered if he had to do with a crazy man.

"Oh, just a crowd of good fellows that meet every night to swap yarns, that's all. We have to tell a tale apiece, lies or truth, it don't matter, so long as the story's good. Only, no one can peep about anything afterward. That's the only rule; that, and no newspaper men. Because why; some of our stories come pretty near being the truth—not like this fairy tale of yours—" and he poked Fenton in the ribs.

"Well, I have no time for fooling around. I don't care how much fun you have. You must get me a hat and a pair of trousers somewhere, and let me go!"

“Not a bit of it; don’t you think of it!” The old man grew surly. “You come with me, or you go out half naked, whichever suits you best. But if you’re a good fellow and don’t make trouble, I’ll see if I can’t get you something to cover your legs.” And, so saying, he went down the ladder.

Fenton had no desire to go abroad upon the street in his present condition. A combination of blood and birds’ eggs had streaked his shins with scarlet and yellow. The droppings upon the floor of the garret had left his coat a sight for mirth. Moreover, he found he had no hat, and no money. He picked his way down the ladder, therefore, in no jubilant frame of mind, but determined to make the best of his situation. Perhaps some of the members of this extraordinary club would take his tale seriously. But, willy-nilly, there was nothing to do but follow his chuckling guide. Peter Stow, the pigeon fancier, led the way down a flight of stairs, and through a door in the rickety partition abruptly into the next stable loft.

A whoop of laughter greeted his entry, as Fenton found himself in a large room filled with tobacco smoke, roughly fitted up with straw chairs and a long table. About a keg of beer in the corner a

group of men turned in amazement to see his ridiculous figure, and came forward to make a hilarious inspection of him.

The pigeon fancier introduced him. "Gents, here's the prize live liar of the evening, captured, after a hard struggle, in my pigeon loft, making omelets and murdering my squabs. I say keep his story till the last; cause why, it's dead sure for the prize." He turned to Fenton and exhibited him as if he were a curiosity.

"Gentlemen, I've been robbed!" Fenton exclaimed angrily. "I appeal to you to give me assistance!"

"Don't spoil the point of the story!" cried the old man.

"I had a fortune of precious stones in my pockets—I've been captured and drugged—"

A heavy, horsey looking man with a square jaw, in a striped sweater, stepped forward and laid a massive hand on Fenton's shoulder. "See here, kiddo, you follow instructions, see? They's enough of us here to handle you all right, if you kick up a row. You'll have your chance in good time. Sit down in that chair and have a mug of beer and a pipe. Now then, boys, we'll have another story."

Seeing by the cynical faces that further objections

would be useless, Fenton sat down and hid his bare legs under the table. Beer was set in front of him, and tobacco offered. It was evident, now he had time to observe the crowd, that the meeting had been interrupted by his advent, so he decided to make the best of it and watch his chance for escape.

The man addressed as the next speaker was a merry-looking, red-faced man of forty, with a patch over one eye. By his fat stomach and his tinted nose he had apparently once lived well and at the expense of others. Fenton labeled him as a second-rate gambler or a confidence man, now out of the running. His voice was good-natured and easy. He stuffed his hands in his pockets, stared at the president with his good eye, and proceeded to tell, with winks and chuckles, his story.

#### THE TIME OF HIS LIFE

My mother's cousin was in town last Sunday. Seventy-two years old, and never been in New York. Lives down on Cape Cod. Keeps a sort of tavern for summer boarders, runs a general merchandise store, lets cat-boats and horses, the main Henry B. Manager of the town of Barnstable. He



came up to have the time of his life—at seventy-two—can you beat it?

I used to know Uncle Jerdon when I was a boy. He was postmaster then, in the days when there was so little mail that he could read off the names of all the letters, morning and evening, beginning with “Huldah Hoxey” and ending with “Jeremiah Phillpots, all *done!*” Nowadays the whole town is full of summer folks, and the natives pick 'em good and plenty while the weather lasts.

Uncle Jerdon was a deacon in the Methodist church, and always led the experience meetings with telling how big a sinner he used to be. But, lord, everybody knew he'd never done anything worse than swear at his old blue mare when she wanted to stop at the watering trough. “Go 'long, thee darned old slut!” was his idea of profanity. You see, his folks brought him up to be a Quaker, and early influence stuck.

Well, those experiences he used to make up were the only outlet for as good a little streak of hellishness as any man ever had. They were the only chance he had to make good as a sport, and it kind of got on his nerves. I remember going down to Barnstable for a vacation, once, a couple of years

after I'd moved to New York. Say, the old man's questions would have made you yelp. He knew no more about life than a Brooklyn baby, but he made it up in curiosity. I recall how he used to take me into a corner behind the shoe counter and ask me, "Jared, did thee ever go on a bust?" And what I hadn't done I had to invent, the same as him. Lord, I made myself out a red-hot hellion for his benefit! I liked the old man.

Well, he talked with all the drummers that came along, asked about the Tenderloin and the theaters and masked balls—he took a particular fancy to masked balls, did the old man—and all the sporty eating houses in this old burg. The drummers must have strung him good and plenty. When I saw him next he seemed to have an idea that millionaires skated down Broadway in dominos and red masks, and artists' models in scant attire rioted on the trolley cars. Madison Square Garden, to him, was something like the three-ringed palace of Nebuchadnezzar or who's-this that built the tower of Babylon in Sodom—or was it Gomorrah? He was dying to see a real gambler.

Well, leading such a confounded virtuous life in Barnstable that it got on his nerves, he figured it out

that he'd just *got* to have one good fling at real life in the Metropolis to get it out of his blood, and then settle down to the cat-boats and prayer meetings and clams and be good for ever after. They's nothing for itching like scratching, and he'd never be satisfied till he'd had his time.

So he started to sow his belated wild oats crop, with the cunning of a bank cashier contemplating a trip to Morocco. He squared his insurance and his mortgage debts, laid in a good stock of doodads for the summer trade, bought his wife a new silk dress and filled in details all along the line till they wasn't a duty undone nor a debt unpaid. Meanwhile, little by little, he began to salt away the coin for the trip to the great city. Boston wasn't half wicked enough for him, lord, no! He was going to do it big and fling his hard-earned money into the Great White Way. So he scrimped and saved for pretty near three years, and in that time he scraped up a thousand dollars, which was what the drummers had told him a good spender would need for one week in Gotham. On top of that he had to collect enough for the trip back and forth—something like fifty dollars.

Ain't that the beginning of a bumper crop of

adventure? Can you see that old hypocrite, singing psalms every Sunday and Thursday night, and reading the "Police Gazette" behind the counter in between-times?

I say, when I met him at the train I near laughed my head off. If you can imagine a healthy sixteen-months infant calling for cocktails and smoking a Carolina Perfecto at the Hoffman House bar, you'll understand how it struck me. Well, he wanted me to show him the sights, no limit, and him to pay all the expenses. If he didn't have the time of his life, I certainly was going to.

Well, he blew in on a Saturday night, and, feeling a little groggy myself, I induced him to turn in at the La Marquette Hotel, and said I'd call around next forenoon, and not to do anything rash till he saw me. It was all I could do to hold him in; he wanted to do Chinatown right away that night, see Chuck Connors, do a roof garden and see somebody shot and go on a joy ride with chorus girls. Finally I persuaded him to go in and take a long breath before he jumped into the gayety of city life.

"But it'll be Sunday," says he.

"They ain't no such thing as Sunday in New York!" I told him. "They ain't had a Sunday for

forty years!" And I believed it. A lot I knew about it, rounder as I was. Well, you don't always know how the other half lives! Live and learn!

I slept late that night and didn't get round to the hotel till about one o'clock next day—Sunday. There he was in the lobby, with a big carpet bag and a face like a drowning horse. Buncoed? Well, yes, but you'll never guess how. This is what happened.

He had got up at about 6 q. m. like all hayseeds, and went down to the news stand in his slipper feet for a morning paper. Then who did he run into, bang! but the Methodist minister who had preached at Barnstable four years before. A Reverend Willey, it was. And Uncle Jerdon simply couldn't get away. He said he was on business, buying boats or something, but the Reverend insisted he'd got to go to church with him that morning. They was no visible way out of it, with Uncle Jerdon's pious reputation, and so, cursing inside, he pulled his Sunday face and trotted along, clean over to Brooklyn. Wasn't that rubbing it in?

It was a clean red brick church they went to, with a new minister who was crazy on Foreign Missions. And at the end, after the sermon, just before the

contribution, the minister turned himself loose to persuade money out of stingy pockets.

“Just think of it!” he says, “one dollar will provide red calico enough to cover the nakedness of twelve of our heathen sisters! One dollar will buy tooth brushes enough for a whole savage tribe in the South Seas! One dollar will provide a Bible to convert a cannibal king, and one dollar will buy a marriage certificate for poor pagans who have previously lived in sinful polygatlude!” He got the house. Misers who had never put in a dime before sweetened up the plate. Uncle Jerdon had to make good. It cost him a pang to spend a cent for the Lord on this trip—this was his time with his long-lost cousin, the devil. But he dipped into his pocket and, thinking a dollar would make a good show, threw a bill into the plate.

The deacon counted the contribution while the congregation sang “From Greenland’s icy mountains to India’s coral strand!” There was a hush while the audience rubbered. Then the treasurer of the church tiptoed up with them religious squeaky shoes to the pulpit and whispered behind his hand to the minister. The minister got up, coughed, and rolled his eyes to heaven.

"Beloved brethren," he said, "the Lord hath moved us in wondrous manner this day, and has shed His blessing upon our efforts. The sum collected at the contribution is one thousand and twenty-five dollars and thirty-one cents. The Lord be praised!"

"Amen!" from the congregation, and everybody looked at everybody else to see if Carnegie or Rockefeller was there in disguise. Uncle Jerdon was as puzzled as anybody, till he put his hand into his vest pocket and felt for the unbroken thousand-dollar bill he had put aside to spend on the primrose path. It wasn't there! He had put it into the plate, thinking it was the one-dollar bill he had left from his traveling expenses. Can you beat it?

And the man with the patch on his eye reached into his hip pocket for a well-gnawed plug of tobacco and took a plenteous bite.

The roars of laughter had not subsided before the big president rose with a surly face and pointed dramatically across the table to where a young man sat in the shadow of the lamp, his chair tilted back against the partition. He had a chubby face with a huge, good-natured mouth, and had been puffing in-

cessantly during the recital, as if he wished to conceal himself behind a cloud of smoke. A couple of boxes emptied of their Havana cigarettes and the butts of some two dozen on the floor testified to his industry. Now every one turned to look at him. He stared back at them without embarrassment.

“Who is that chap?” demanded the president. “I never saw him here before.”

“Oh, this is Jack Richmond,” said a thin, cadaverous looking youth with a chauffeur’s cap, who had been coughing behind his hand. “Friend of mine. He’s all right, I guess. Met up with him at a moving picture show. Want to hear my yarn?”

“He’s a reporter!” thundered the president. “I can tell by the shape of his head. Whenever you see a chap with a long egg-shaped coco that hangs over behind, you can bet he writes for the papers.”

“Rats!” said the chauffeur. “Richmond’s all right, I guess.”

But before he had finished, the massive president strode over to the suspicious character, took hold of the lapel of his coat and threw it open. With a quick movement he snatched a card from the young man’s vest. “Look at that!” he yelled. “What did I tell you? The *Morning Item*—reporter’s card!



Now get out of here! Against the by-laws to have newspaper men present. These stories don't get into print if I know it." He shook his heavy hand in the young man's face. "Will you leave easy—or hard?"

"I think," said the chubby young man, rising hastily and drawing on a soft hat, "I'll say good-bye while the walking is good. I apologize for having that card. It was lent me by a friend to get inside the fire lines while my own house and family was burning up alive, last night. But of course, being a liars' club, I have no place here, and the plain unvarnished truth is at a discount. I'm a victim of circumstantial evidence. Good day, gents! Saint Ananias guide thee!" And he made his exit two feet ahead of the toe of the president's brogan.

"Say, that's a shame!" said the thin young chauffeur, scratching his head. "We lost a peach of a good story when he threw him out, I'll bet! I'll have to hump myself if I want to make up for it. My turn next, ain't it?"

"If you've got anything on your chest," the president announced affably, "this here's the time to cough it off."

"My text is the Psychological Rule of Three," said the chauffeur.

"Say, this ain't no Browning Club!" objected the pigeon fancier.

"No Browning sharp could ever explain the psychology of three consecutive coincidences," said the youth. "It's a case for Henry James."

"Is he a member?" asked the ex-gambler. "I never heard of him. What is he, a chofer, or what?"

"He is a literary chauffeur, as you have guessed. And he always exceeds the speed limit. When he comes in next, I'm going to put it up to him straight: Why is it that no man can stand three strokes of lightning without expecting a fourth? I'll put it another way. When a man has three bad lucks running, he'll manufacture the fourth himself in trying to escape what he considers inevitable."

"Faster, kid, faster! Your act is flopping! Steer out of the tall-word contest, and harness on to your pet prevarication."

"I'll do it," said the thin one. "Take it from me, the only living gasoline-eater who never eloped with a rich man's wife, I'm telling you the unenameled truth. I've got a tale with a wallop. This is a song of my brother's submerged E-flat luck. I'm reminded of the trilogy of sad events by the announcement in to-day's papers of the death of a young

swell named Brewster, who blew his brains out yesterday on account of losing his wad backing a bandy-legged mule named Belcharmion."

Fenton looked up in amazement. Surely the name of Brewster was familiar! Then the other name rang queerly in his ears. He thought of the picture in his pocket—"Belle Ch—" Could Charmion by any streak of chance be the name of his dream-girl? He began to tremble; he could not take his eyes from the chauffeur's face, as the thin young man, coughing between sentences, told to the circle about him his story.

#### THE RULE OF THREE

My brother Bill had been running a hog ranch near Temple, Arizona. Despite the fact that this particular town is ten degrees hotter than the boiling lava of Vesuvius, he had prospered sufficiently to retire a year ago with a bank roll of eleven thousand dollars. With the wad and a hunger for something to eat better than canned peaches, cactus and Bull Durham tobacco, he pulled up stakes for Chicago, spent a couple of days in the Annex Bar and hit the trail for the Big Noise at the mouth of the Hudson.

When it came time for him to quit the buffet car and hunt his mat, he mosied back through the train until he came to a sleeper named Belcharmion. In it he had lower berth number three—a fact which may or may not be significant. Upon awakening in the morning he tried to negotiate some eight dollars' worth of ham and eggs, with a grape fruit on the side, but was attacked with a violent nausea. He retired to the observation car and remained there, shivering and shaking with ague until the flyer rolled into New York. Then, piling into a taxicab, he told the driver to take him to the nearest hospital. The doctors analyzed him hurriedly, pronounced his trouble a sort of cross between typhoid and the bubonic plague—clapped him into bed in ward number three, and there he remained for three weeks. Three separate and distinct times he would have died but for the thought of the pink-haired nurse and his bank roll. It's a pity he didn't take the count then and there. He would have missed a lot of trouble.

On the third of May the doctors declared him graduated, and with seventy-four hundred dollar notes in his wallet he wobbled to the exit, where he collided with a weak-eyed quik whose shaky legs and

shop-worn appearance stamped him as a fellow-con-  
valescent.

"Just getting well?" says Bill.

"Yep," says the live dish rag.

"Where you bound for?" says Bill again.

"Me for the race track," says the other, leaning  
against the elevator shaft and panting for ozone.  
"The docs have all my coin, but I'm good for a  
marker, and before the last goat comes rompin'  
home to the paddock my pants is goin' to be lined  
with yellow-backs or it's me for a Brodie into the  
brine."

Bill hungered for excitement enough to hire a  
benzine buggy, and together the two cripples went to  
the race track. In the first race Bill backed a Hag-  
gin horse named Tatters and spilled a hundred. In  
the second a skate named Melon Boy went to pieces  
in the stretch and stung my brother twelve hundred  
dollars. Bill was feeling blue, but his friend was  
talking pert. He was a couple of centuries ahead,  
and together they walked into the paddock to take a  
squint at the ponies and jocks that were getting  
ready for the third race.

"See that swell girl there with the black plumes,  
the big eyes, the parasol and the aristocratic ankles?

That's Miss Charmion, a society pet," says the little fellow, who was so weak he could hardly stand. "They's a zebra in this race named after her. Belcharmion's the filly, and young Brewster, the son of the millionaire, owns the beast."

"Sufferin' Spanish mackerel!" thinks Bill. "Typhus fever in berth three of a sleeping car named Belcharmion. Miss Belle Charmion on the third of May, and a horse named Belcharmion in the third race! What's the answer?"

The bell sounded, and everybody started to run toward the grand stand or betting ring. Bill waited long enough to take another look at the filly, then hustled for the ring as fast as his bum legs would carry him. Belcharmion was favorite at three to five. Removing a single hundred-dollar note from his roll and sticking it in an inside pocket, Bill handed the entire remainder—five thousand, two hundred dollars—to a greasy-faced bookie, got a card showing that he played the filly across the board, and went out on the lawn to hold his breath.

They got away in a bunch and swung round the track so fast that Bill couldn't see which was ahead. Coming into the stretch ten million people commenced to pound each other on the head and yell

"Come on you Belcharmion! Oh, you Belcharmion!" and Bill knew his nag was in the lead.

A hundred yards from the finish, just as the leaders were right in front of Bill, the filly stumbled, turned a double somersault, slid into the fence and killed her jockey. My brother crumpled up on the grass. When he came to, somebody had frisked him for the hundred, and he was flat broke in a strange land. He hunted up his hospital friend, who slipped him a wad of sympathy, a five-case note and his address.

"Come round and sleep in my folding bed," said he.

Bill said he would.

The address was a hundred and twelve East Twenty-sixth Street, and at six o'clock that night Bill, after a fifteen-cent meal at Child's and a ride on the Third Avenue "L," finally located the place and, half dead with weakness and a grouch, made for the entrance. His mind was so fussed that he didn't notice anything until his feet collided with a rubber door mat in the outer lobby. On it in white letters appeared the name of the house—"Belcharmion."

"Not for *mine!*" thinks Bill. "Nothing with that

tag to it will ever make a hit with me. I'm onto my luck, this time. If I enter this cursed shack, I'll be skun out of my clothes in a pinochle game, or be arrested for blackmail, or fall in love with a blond chambermaid, or pitch down the elevator well, or something as fierce. That name Belcharmion is the wrong recipe for my health, I've found *that* out!" And so he turns out in a hurry, thanking his stars that he'd found sense at last.

Just as he reached the sidewalk somebody yelled "Look out!" and whing!—a forty-foot swing stage hit him on the top of the head for a ten week's trip to the hospital again. What did I tell you? Moral: Don't dally with the Rule of Three!

The iteration of the name Belle Charmion smote upon John Fenton's ears like the ringing of a bell far away in some secret chamber of his mind, behind some locked door. Why should that name excite him? He did not know. It seemed to be vaguely familiar, but he could place it nowhere in his memory. He was puzzling over it when his attention was called to the next speaker of the evening—then, suddenly, a new thought excited him.

The man addressed by the president was a cross-



eyed, coarse-faced individual, who, by the cut of his coat and the battered top hat on the back of his head was indubitably a cab-driver. Immediately Fenton's mind went back to the Octoroon's story. She had been pursued by a cross-eyed cabman—could this be the man? Fenton listened eagerly to see if anything in his speech would confirm this surmise.

"This is a perfectly true story," the cabman was saying.

"Stop there!" the president thundered. "If a story is funny, it's not true, and if it's true, it's not funny. That principle has been proved in this club beyond peradventure. Cut out this 'I-knew-the-man-that-died' stuff! We want no true stories here: we want good ones! Wherever a good story travels, there's always some fool who wants to tack it onto some maternal aunt of his—and ten to one he actually believes what he says. All good stories come from Herodotus, and the best we can do is to cut 'em over to a nineteen hundred and eleven model, touch 'em up with rouge and powder and send 'em out as 'The Latest.' No man can invent a good story: but he can improve a poor one. No true tale is fit to tell—the naked truth must be adorned."

Peter Stow, the pigeon fancier, awoke from his

doze. "Well, *is* this a Browning Club or not?" he asked, sleepily. "Why not play ball?"

"I second the motion!" said the chauffeur.

The president nodded, and the cab-driver shifted his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other and began.

#### THE SLEEPY BRIDEGROOM

It was a funny story how young Michael Carnarvon got married. I never heard of such a wedding in my life.

You see, young Carnarvon was really what you might call roped in. The Schufelt girl was a manicure working in the Hotel Persimmon, and from the day she laid eyes on him she began to wire things up to marry him. I s'pose all women do that, one way or another; she done it by listening instead of talking. When he began to call on her—she lived over on Charles Street with her mother—she kept him talking about himself till he thought she was the cleverest girl in New York, which, in some ways, she was. What with playing the innocent sympathetic, keeping her mother out o' the way and padlocking her temper, which was something sav-

age, she got him going till he popped the question. She certainly managed it great.

Carnarvon's folks was wild when they heard about the engagement, but by this time he was deaf and blind to the fact that the Schufelt girl was only after his money, and had the reputation around Chelsea village of being a regular Rocky Mountain catamount when she got mad. Lord! It must have been a strain for that girl to hold her tongue, sometimes, but she never boiled over till after the wedding. You'd have thought she was half-witted, almost; she was so tame when Carnarvon was around. But Lord, how her mother used to catch it when he left the flat!—and her mother could put up a pretty good jaw-fight, too.

Well, three days before the wedding Carnarvon had to work like a donkey-engine to get his business straightened up, so he could get off on his honeymoon. He was at the office night and day working himself to a frazzle. In that time he hadn't slept more than three or four hours, all told, and on the morning of his marriage he was about as near all in as a man can be, and keep awake. In fact, he *couldn't* keep awake, and that was the trouble. They tell me that last forenoon he was practically walk-

ing and talking in his sleep. Black coffee didn't do no good at all, for he'd been living on it for a week, practically. He dictated his letters staggering up and down the room, and every time he sat down at the desk to sign his name to 'em, the typewriter had to stick hat pins into him to wake him up. He took snuff to make him sneeze, he washed his face in cold water every ten minutes, he kept the windows wide open—everything he could think of to brace him up, but he just naturally got drowsier and drowsier every minute.

They was things that simply had to be done, if he was going to git off next day, and so he kept to it till late in the afternoon, so dopey he couldn't talk American. "Blub-blub" was about all he could say. It was something awful. His clerks implored him to let them finish up, but he didn't dare trust them, so he stuck to the ship. At six o'clock he was like a living corpse, half blind with sleep, yawning continually and having to be hauled up off the floor every five minutes. He was living on sheer nerve. Blind staggers was nothing to it. But he left to go home declining help from the boys—and of course, owing to ructions in his family, not likely to get much assistance when he did get there.

Well, on the way home he dropped in at a drug store for a dose of something, strychnia or some such stuff, to brace him up through the ceremony. After that he didn't care, just so long as he made good with the minister. How he asked for the dope, I don't know. He must have said something about sleeping, I suppose; but anyway, the clerk thought he wanted a sleeping draught, and he gave him what turned out to be a twenty per cent. solution of morphine. See? There he was, hardly able to see straight anyway, with a double dose of dope on top of it.

He took a cab home, and the driver had to pry him out of the seat when they got there. He crawled up-stairs, wondering how he was ever going to make it that evening. His medicine didn't seem to help, much, so he took another swig at it. How he ever got his clothes on, his man can't exactly explain. It was a job for an undertaker, not a valet. But after a regular nightmare of it Carnarvon started for the Schufelt flat. He didn't dare take a cab this time, for fear he'd be found asleep and they'd think he was drunk. So he walked. It must have been horrible. Most of the time he staggered along with his eyes shut, hoping he'd run into somebody who'd

punch him in the head or give him a good kick to wake him up. No such luck.

Well, he got to the Schufelt flat, somehow, and just before going in, he emptied the bottle in hopes it would carry him through the ceremony. That last dose made him feel as if he was living inside a blanket soaked in molasses, with his arms and legs tied. Lord, that man was game!

He just got in, and that was about all, for he stumbled on the first rug, fell feet down on the floor and began to snore. Mrs. Schufelt picked him up, and she and Nanny lugged him into a bed-room and tried to wake him up. By this time he was just muttering to himself something like "I don't give a darn for anything. I'm tired of swimming through jelly—blub, blub—blub— I want to lay down and die decent."

Of course they thought he was drunk. What else was they to think? But so long as she was safely spliced to him, Nanny didn't care—she was determined not to make a miss of it, and as soon as she was Mrs. Michael Carnarvon she knew she'd give him a tongue-lashing that would sober him up. So they slapped wet towels at his face, stepped on his toes, tickled the soles of his feet, used a few needles,

brushed up his hair backwards, and dragged him in to greet the friends of the family. Wow! He tried to crawl on his hands and knees, but they wouldn't have it. Everybody thought it was a disgrace; but he was rich, and that always explains a lot.

After he was introduced to the minister he melted down into a chair, shut his eyes and opened his mouth. Nanny pinched him good. He got up, in a kind of a trance, fell into Mother Schufelt's sister's lap, stepped into the rubber plant, upset a table full of wedding presents, and then the old lady decided to hurry things and get the agony over. How she induced the minister to do the job I don't know. Perhaps it was the hundred dollar bill Carnarvon had in his vest pocket did the trick. Anyway, they propped him up on each side and one behind; and the parson done his act. Everybody present swore, afterwards, that they heard him say "I will."

And as soon as it was over he collapsed and they laid him out on a sofa and covered him up with a table cloth, while Nanny changed her clothes. The guests went into the dining-room to feed and drink his health.

Now, whether it was the champagne young Carnarvon had paid for, or just the natural tendency

of wedding guests to play the goat, I dunno. But, anyway, they fixed up a joke on the happy pair. There was one cut-up there, a rising young plumber, he was, named O'Square, and first I knew of the thing, he come round to my stand and wanted to hire my hack. It was him what put me onto the whole thing. He was fairly busting with it. He offered me twenty dollars for the use of my cab and my hat and overcoat, and I surrendered. Naturally, I followed round the corner to see the fun. He sent away the taxicab Carnarvon had waiting, and went up-stairs to see if all was ready.

The rest of them had everything fixed. They got young Carnarvon down-stairs, holding him up the way you do a drunk, and they rammed him into the cab. Then they brought down Nanny, who was beginning to talk. Lord, you ought to have heard her remarks—they was something bloodthirsty. The guests only screamed and laughed at her. O'Square got on the box—we all tied up the trunks with ribbons, and off they went, Nanny's language dripping out of that cab like a leaky watering cart.

O'Square brought back my cab toward one o'clock next morning. He didn't say nothing, but I heard afterward that he dumped 'em out, Carnarvon dead



asleep, Nanny fighting mad, and the trunks covered with old boots and white ribbons, on a little cross road in the middle of Van Cortlandt park. That was his idea of a joke. What happened after that I don't know, except that a week afterward Michael Carnarvon brought suit for the annulment of his marriage, on the grounds that he was asleep during the ceremony.

The cross-eyed cabman paused, and felt in his inside coat pocket. "If you don't believe it," he remarked, "look at this here thing! I found it tucked into a nook in the seat cushion of my cab, when I cleaned her out the next day." He held up a locket—heart-shaped, with a star of white stones. It flashed like a handful of sparks in that smoky, dusty room.

"I ain't *sure* it was Carnarvon's wedding present to his wife," he explained. "It wasn't never advertised for, and so I never said nothing about it. You know us cab-drivers has got to have some perquisites."

The suspicions which had arisen in Fenton's mind at first sight of the cross-eyed cab-driver were confirmed long before the story was finished. As it progressed, Fenton was amazed at the man's au-

dacity in weaving in, point after point, the facts of the octoroon's narrative.

The sleepy bridegroom could, of course, be none other than the dead fare, Gordon Brewster—the picture which the cabby had seen as he watched from a near-by corner was almost the identical one the octoroon had described—the tragic truth disguised in this comedy recital. As chorus after chorus of guffaws applauded the tale, Fenton wondered at the cleverness of the man who was, no doubt, adapting some old narrative to fit the needs of his case.

At sight of the locket, however, Fenton's thoughts took a new turn. The ornament had a mystery of its own connected in some incomprehensible way with his own life. He had but a glimpse of it, as it was displayed, but he was sure there was no mistake. It was exactly the same as the one he recalled—first, during that half-forgotten scene on the ferry-boat, when he was a mere child, afterward in the O'Shea's tenement, after they had come to New York. What did it mean? How did the cabby really get it? There was only one possible answer.

Undoubtedly it was one of the Brewster jewels, spilled out of the traveling bag, as the octoroon had

said, while the dead body was being driven to Seventy-Second Street. If so, the cabby's suspicions of queer work must have gained ground—he had, perhaps, already communicated with the police. At any rate, Fenton now had a double reason for wanting to gain possession of it, and he was determined that at the first opportunity, he would attempt to get it. He would watch his chance.

With all this flashing through his mind, it did not take him long to perceive that he could not safely tell his own story before the driver. Once he was connected with the jewels, the cabby would be on his track. He determined, therefore, to invent some fantastic tale—anything would do—which might rescue him from his embarrassing dilemma. The cab-driver's story suggested a plot. It was vague, but he relied upon inspiration for some amusing narrative. His mind was already busy upon the fiction when he was called upon for his contribution to the evening's entertainment.

“We have with us to-night,” said the president, impressively—“Hooray!” from the circle of auditors—“a newcomer to our glorious midst. As an amateur liar, we expect little—and yet the gentleman's costume warrants some hope of amusement.”

He turned to Fenton. "Now, bare-legs, you can spiel your tale. What's all this about being robbed of seventeen million dollars' worth of diamonds, anyway? Make it short, for we're getting tired. And don't spare the ginger—we need to be waked up. All ready—fire away!" He sat down.

Every one looked at Fenton, and laughed again. He did not, in truth, present a very dignified aspect. The blood and egg-yolk had dried upon his shins, and he had brushed some of the dirt from his coat—but there was excuse enough for mirth.

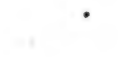
"He looks like a bum Highland scavenger," was the chauffeur's comment.

Fenton invoked the muse of comedy, and rose to his feet. "Of course that yarn about the stolen millions was all a bluff. I wanted to get away quick, and when you hear my lively tale, you'll understand why I didn't care to explain just how many different kinds of a fool I was to our friend, the aged pigeon-charmer, here. It was bad enough as it was. But I see you're all good fellows, and perhaps if I throw myself wide open, you may be moved to help me out. The fact is, also, that the cabby's story is just enough like mine to encourage me to go ahead and tell the truth."



"Fenton rose to his feet"





He was proud of himself. Already he had made an impression. From the looks of the men he knew he had his audience, and it inspired him. He gave free rein to imagination, therefore, and warming gradually to his lie, he began the story.

## THE THREE WEDDINGS

I am going to be married to-night—if you fellows will help me out. That will explain why I touch lightly on parts of the narrative. I haven't much time to lose, if I'm to capture my blushing bride, the pride of Harlem—a lady you'll excuse me for denominating Miss Daisy Peach. The name don't matter, for I expect it to be Howich by twelve-one to-morrow morning. My name's Claude Kensington Van Proul Howich. Age, twenty-one. All right. Skip the love-at-first-sight stuff, skip the coy proposal and lovers' quarrels, skip the violets and confectionery. Most all men make love alike. Every chap thinks his chicken is a bird of paradise. The only difference is, I know mine is.

The story, therefore, boils down to a question of too much mother-in-law before marriage. By too much, I merely insinuate that she was too much for

me. Why? She wanted Daisy to marry six foot of blonde Englishman with a decorated name. Call him the Honorable Algernon Mudde. That'll do fine. Daisy, being foolish about me, said nay, nay; and set the date for our nuptials. In fact, she named the day three times. Let's take 'em chronologically; which, being interpreted, oh grave and reverend signiors, means each by one.

Wedding Number One: Parson ready, four million guests of the bride arrived, presents set out, labeled and guarded by detectives in the billiard-room. House decorated. Floral arch, orange blossoms galore, potted plants, orchids. Little sisters in silk voile, carrying baskets of rose leaves to walk on. In short, everything but the happy groom, which was me, who was fighting his way into an elephant's dress suit, many miles away. No wedding bells for her. Puzzle. Here's the answer.

Wedding was to be at nine. My best man, thinking me sane, sober and responsible, had promised to call at eight, with a taxi. At six-thirty (as I thought) I began to dress for the execution. Now, though I may not look it in my present war-paint, I keep a valet—or rather I share him with four other chaps. Up to date that valet had been an ex-



pert, but at seven o'clock he began to go crazy.

1. Spilt a bottle of mucilage inside my union suit—you know no man wants to wear another kind of skin. 2. Couldn't find a clean suit; valet had to hike out and buy one. Red flannels was all he could find, and me to be married at nine! 3. Upset the ink all over my "King of Broadway" dress shirt. Found every other white shirt was three sizes too small. Never had been before. Again to the haberdasher's. Haberdasher closed, had to put on a soft silk arrangement, like the leading man in a musical comedy. 4. Laid down my dress coat on some sticky fly-paper we had there to catch early crop of mosquitoes. 5. Went to telephone and found the thing was struck deaf and dumb. I was furious by this time, paranoiac, ready to chew glass and split blood.

You may wonder why I didn't tumble before this, and suspect my valet. I suppose it was because I was dreaming of my beauteous bride. Anyway, it wasn't till I sent him out to a friend to borrow a black suit that I began to think anything. Then I went out to the elevator boy and asked the time. It was nine twenty-five! That blasted menial had put back my watch and all the clocks an hour and a half.

Well, by that time I was seeing red. I went down

the hall and pounded at every door, begging for a dress suit. Nobody at home, or only shocked females, who barricaded the entrance. At last I found a Dutchman who let me in, and offered me a suit he had owned for thirteen years. I took it to my place and got into it—I wrapped it around me, so to speak—I got lost in it. Fit? It would have fitted a Dinosaur better. It flapped and waved about me. I looked like the last potato in the sack. But it was my last hope, and in that mass of black broadcloth I made my appearance at the Mansion de Peach, to find every guest gone, the old man swearing mad, mother-in-law-to-be calm as an iceberg, and my Daisy in tears. How I squared myself I don't know. I sent Miss Peach all the violets in the world, and we postponed the wedding for a week. I promised to be careful.

When I got back I found my valet waiting as cool as a marble-top table. I promised not to murder him if he'd tell me exactly why he did it. What d'you think! Honorable Mudde had tipped him one hundred dollars to queer me for the festivity. Well, it was worth knowing. Somewhere around the conspiracy, I smelled my mother-in-law but I couldn't follow up the trail.

Wedding Number Two: No valet this time, you bet. My best man on guard, buttoning me up and giving good advice, telephoning to Central for the time every ten minutes. I was all ready to start at eight o'clock when the bell rang like an alarm clock. We didn't hurry, and *bing*, the door was nearly blown in. Best man opens the door. Enter a hoity-toity-chorus girl made up for leading ingenue, and one big, big, bull-necked policeman.

"That's him," says Tootsy Footlights, and the cop lays a fist like a ham on my shoulder. What d'you think? Tootsy sprang a song about my having stolen six hundred dollars and banged her eye at Jack's two nights before, said we were engaged, but it was all off, and "Arrest him, Mr. Officer, he's handsome, but he's false!" Protests from Yours Affectionately, heap big talk from best man. No go.

Officer McUgly shows a warrant for my arrest. I'm properly identified and if I want to go to the station in a taxi I can—otherwise, he'll call for the patrol. I tried to coax him with a fifty, but it wouldn't work. My best man flew loose on a search for bail, and I made the journey to jail. The sergeant winked when I told the marriage story.

I telephoned I'd arrive at the Peach palace in a

minute, but before we raised the hundred dollars bail the wedding was a fizzle. Simultaneously, Tootsy Footlights wired in that she'd found the ring inside one of her rats, and she wouldn't prosecute. Who was Tootsy? Hired by Honorable Mudde, of course, like the valet. She came round afterward and told me all about it, giggling, and tried to get me to take her out to dinner! She had a nerve like a frog. No? Yes? Well, such are the petted favorites of the mimic world.

The next day I got a session of live-wire talk from Daisy Peach that gave me the shivers. "See here, Claude," she says, "I'm getting tired of getting married on the instalment plan. I know that ma and Mr. Mudde are trying to queer you, but if you can't beat a pink Englishman out on a game like this, I'll be darned if I don't marry the Briton, for he's the cleverest man of the two. I like you, Claude, and in times of peace you seem to make good. But the war is on, and I'm going to marry the victor. We'll get married on the thirtieth of April, and I'll give you this last chance. I am aware that Mr. Mudde may have cooked up a good one this time to put you out of business, but if you can't defend yourself after being warned, you're no good

to me as a husband. I can't use that kind. So I'll give you till midnight to show up. When the clock strikes twelve, if you're not visible to the naked eye, I'll become Mrs. Mudde, and begin to train for high society in Surrey and that town house in Park Lane. Good-by, boyo—I'll always be a sister, if he wins. But I do hope you won't be lost in the shuffle again!"

Wedding Number Three: All goes well till six p. m. of the fatal day—to-day. I had laid in three dress suits, a small gent's furnishing shop, a couple of welter-weight thugs from Casey's, and my best man and I each had a magazine pistol ready. At six the telephone bell rings and Ma Peach croons out her siren song. Daisy, she said, had cold toes over something. Would I come right over to see her, or else the match would be off. She had sent the limousine. See the game? Yes? No?

What could I do? Disobey the summons of the queen of the solar system, my brave, sweet Daisykins? Not so! I fell for it. Out I walked through my barricades, jumped into the limousine. The minute I was in, two large, adult men jumped in after me. One on each side. I had no time to put up a fight before they got to my nose with chloroform—and—well, I woke up in our friend's pigeon ranch,

with my trousers gone. A quick finish? By Juno! Yes!

Now, gents, I put it to you! Are you going to allow me to lose a twenty-six carat bride at the last moment for want of five cents and a pair of trousers? Seriously, my friends, I'm in a hole. I ask you, man to man, help me out! I can make it yet. Are you willing to stand for me or not? If you ever were married, you know how nervous a man is—I believe, honest, I've a temperature of a hundred and four this blessed minute. For Cupid's sake, give me a lift! If I had a hat, I'd pass it around. I only need pants and a taxi. What do you say?

Fenton paused, and looked anxiously around at the members of the Liars' Club.

## V

### THE REPORTER OF "THE ITEM"

HOW JOHN FENTON ACHIEVED A PAIR OF TROUSERS  
AND ATTEMPTED ASSAULT AND BATTERY UN-  
SUCCESSFULLY, BUT WAS RESCUED BY A  
CHUBBY SCRIBBLER

**T**HERE was an instant's hush when Fenton finished. His charm and personality had carried his hearers along with absorbed attention; but he had little practice in impromptu romances, and his tale could scarcely convince the crowd of men before him, who were used to all manner of picturesque narratives. So, as Fenton sat down, a gust of laughter applauded him. They had been well entertained by his freak of fancy, but not enough to contribute the funds he had hoped might be his reward. He made another tentative appeal, but a cynical laugh was his only answer, and the company began to break. Men rose and yawned, started to look for their hats, and began talking with one another. The president came forward and laid his massive hand on Fenton's shoulder.

“Very good, lad. You nearly got us going and that’s no joke for a beginner. We’ll have to have you round again. Nothing like new blood. Well, good night, kid. Come round whenever you feel like hitting the pipe.”

“But how the devil am I to get out of here?” Fenton asked anxiously. “I can’t go this way. If I can’t borrow any money I might at least get a pair of trousers.”

“Oh, I guess Gerrish will fix you up all right,” said the president, easily, and he turned away and began to turn out the lamps.

The cab driver had already come and joined them. “I got an old pair of overalls, if that’ll do you any good,” he suggested.

Fenton jumped at the proposal, for, indeed, it would enable him to kill two birds with one stone. If he could once get the cab-driver alone he was determined to gain the locket, and, when he might, restore it to its owner—and then discover, if possible, the secret of his old memories of the trinket. He accepted Gerrish’s offer, therefore, and after farewells to those of the club who had not already gone, he left and went down a flight of stairs with the cabby.



He had already measured his man with his eye. Gerrish was a gin-soaked obese wreck, and Fenton felt sure of being able to overcome him in a fair fight. He watched carefully, and knew that the driver had slipped the locket into a lower vest pocket. It should be easy to gain possession of it. First, however, the overalls must be secured.

They went down into a stable next door, now tenanted only by a few sorry nags and two disreputable looking cabs. It was lit by an oil lamp on a bracket. Gerrish went to a locker in the rear, beside a small door in the wall, and drew out the garment. The overalls were of brown denim, streaked with oil and spotted with dirt, but they would at least cover his bare shins. Fenton drew them on, watching his man sharply. When he was clad he manœvered toward a wagon stave that was lying on the floor, seized it, and whirled suddenly upon the cab-driver.

"Now then," he exclaimed harshly, "give me that locket! It's mine."

Gerrish looked up at him through bleary eyes. "Well, you son of a plumber!" he ejaculated, and then, with remarkable agility and force, his foot shot out, caught his opponent in the diaphragm and

Fenton dropped doubled up, with the wind knocked out of him. Before he could recover the cabby had fallen on him, and was throttling him. He began to punch with fervor. Fenton saw stars, then everything went black.

\* \* \* \* \*

He opened his eyes to find Richmond, the chubby reporter who had been ejected from the club, sitting on a keg, watching him curiously. Fenton sat up on the floor and looked groggily about. The cabman was lying a few feet from him, supine, with his eyes shut, evidently knocked out.

The reporter smiled. "*Coup de savatte*," he said. "That cabby must have come from Paris. Dirty low trick. How d'you feel?"

Fenton rose, stretched his arms and legs, and then, recollecting his object, turned to the cabman and felt quickly in his greasy vest pockets. In one was a large nickel watch, the other was empty.

"I've got it," remarked the reporter.

Fenton sized him up, and took a step forward.

"Give it to me!"

"What?"

"The locket, of course. You say you've got it."

Fenton realized now how foolish he had been ever

to speak of the robbery. He resolved to humor the reporter till he could get rid of him. "That story about the stolen jewels was all a joke," he added.

"It was no joke, son. I'm not a fool. But what about the locket?"

"That locket," said Fenton, "has something queer to do with me—I don't know just what. There's something mysterious about it, and I want it. I don't know who it belongs to, but I know I have a better right to it than you have. As for the robbery, if you want to believe in it you may, but I won't tell you anything about it."

"In which case I keep the locket," said the reporter. "And now what are you going to do in that rig?"

"I'm going to borrow a quarter from you to get up town with."

"Right, all right; but you'll have to earn it. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. I've got to fool around for a half hour or so, looking for a girl a few blocks from here. Now I don't care to hang round in the slums alone, and if you'll stay with me I'll give you a dollar for car fare and the locket to boot when the deed is did. All I want is your name and address. Otherwise I follow you till I find out for myself."

"All right. My name is John Fenton, and I live at 69 West a Hundred and Twenty-seventh Street."

"We'll see. If you don't mind, I'll corroborate that. Have you anything to prove it?"

Fenton pulled a letter from his pocket which showed the truth of his confession.

"Looks all right to me," said Richmond, and he wrote it down on his cuff. Then, he looked at the cabby. "I see our cross-eyed friend is stirring in his sleep. Let's get out of here *pronto*, and go where we can talk. Don't do anything foolish like running away, though; and remember that I used to be the feather-weight champeen of the Rosebud Social and Outing Club."

By this time they were walking rapidly away from the stable, proceeding toward Canal Street. To emphasize his warning, the reporter had taken Fenton by the arm.

"Now see here, son," he went on, "you're already somewhat in my debt. That pirate would have gouged your eyes out in another minute if I hadn't been in ambush. You've got a story, and I want it. Give up what you know, and I'll return the jewelry. Or else there's nothing doing." He stopped under a lamp post, and looked Fenton over deliberately. His

words were coercive, but his eyes twinkled with good nature.

"You'll have to keep it, then, unless I can get it away from you," said Fenton gloomily. "I don't see that the story's any of your business."

"All news is my business. I represent the people of New York, who have a right to know what's going on—especially when it's as queer as you hinted at. When I saw you up there they all thought that yarn about a jewel robbery was a bluff. I knew well enough it wasn't. I don't know what story you told, finally, but I'll bet it wasn't the right one. So when they bounced me, I hung around to see what you'd do. Murder was the last thing I expected. And even now, if you've lost seven millions worth of diamonds, more or less, I fail to see how it is worth your while to jump this cabby just to get back one gold locket set with rhinestones. To the casual debutante, it doesn't seem to be worth the risk. Hence, this request. Put me onto the story. At present I'm out on another assignment, but I may be able to work 'em both. What are you afraid of? If you want honestly to get your fortune back, I may be able to help you. If you know anything, you know that a good reporter can beat any detective in the

central office. And I'm the star of the "Morning Item."

"The fact is," said Fenton, "I've given my word of honor not to tell."

"Ah," said the reporter, "compounding a felony? All right, then, I'll tell you what I'll do. One last proposition; going, going, gone! I've got to hang round Eldridge Street to catch a girl who ought to be due there pretty soon, according to my tip. My paper wants her, and also I have some important news to give her—I've got to break a sad tale. We reporters get queer jobs. Now if you'll come along with me decent, while I wait for her, I'll stake you to a cab afterward, and you can get up town for your pants. Meanwhile, I keep this locket as an evidence of good faith. It's your bail, till I get ready to go after you professionally. That's the best I can do. While we wait, I'll enliven the vigil by as pretty a little tale of middle-class life as you ever heard in the papers."

Fenton reluctantly consented. He was not anxious to become conspicuous by attacking the reporter, much as he wanted the locket—and Richmond's proposition seemed the easiest way of getting up town. They walked along Canal Street, therefore,



THE  
LIFE OF  
A  
GENTLEMAN

“I’m going to tell you why I need you”





and turned into Eldredge Street. In the middle of the block Richmond turned Fenton up to a pair of tenement-house steps that commanded a view of both sidewalks.

They sat down, perched a little above the dirty pavement where the submerged tenth traded, played or promenaded in front of them. Keeping his quick eye alert upon the passers-by, Richmond produced a roll of Havana cigarettes and, lighting one from the other, smoked them in a chain as he narrated his tale.

#### THE MIDDLE-CLASS GIRL

Take it from me, Old Top, the bromidic center of New York City is situated at the corner of Broadway and Ninetieth Street. That's where Mr. Middle Class lives; call him a bromide, a philistine, or a man-in-the-street, he's bound to have his nine-room apartment and bath somewhere thereabouts. Mr. Average Man is a broker. He owns an eighteen hundred dollar motor car and hunts in the Adirondacks or up in Maine two weeks every fall. His wife is a good looking, middle-aged woman in black satin, with the gray spots in her hair modestly

touched up. She plays bridge and has a manicure-masseuse come in every Friday or so. There's one son who seldom leaves Broadway at night, and who is putting up margins during his lunch hour, and always getting stung. Such was the Baker *ménage*—business and theaters and bridge and an occasional dance. But Miss Baker—Bessie Baker—was the lovely duckling in this family of male and female hens.

At thirteen Bessie changed her name to Elizabeth, did up her hair, lengthened her skirts and began to open her eyes to the fact that she was hopelessly middle-class, and doomed to marry an insurance agent if she didn't look sharp—thence to a small flat on a Hundred and twenty-sixth street, a baby and a gossiping life across the dumb waiter of the next apartment. Elizabeth had aspirations, and began to make plans for Bryn Mawr. She went through the high school (pa was strong for the public schools and no nonsense about swell seminary life), and was just about to try for the entrance examinations when a flurry in P. D. & Q. put father Baker in a hole, and zip! the university education was out of the game for poor Elizabeth.

Did the old man care? Not so; he never took

much to the idea of making high-brow of Bessie. He thought it would spoil her chances for matrimony—you know the old idea. But the girl was really terribly cut up. Middle-class society was beginning to get on her nerves. All she heard talked was bridge and business, theaters and teas, from morning till night. In her world romance was unknown. Nobody ever eloped, nobody ever did anything great or criminal. Girls grew up, had children and died without ever knowing an adventure. Men had mysterious vices—she knew of them as shameful, sordid acts that could never attract her—but to her vision gents were always well dressed, gloved and caned, paying silly compliments, talking bosh and sending violets. What was over the other side of the wall which surrounded her?—that was what she wanted to know. She knew no millionaires and no paupers. Not even a suffragette. No friend of hers ever got into the papers. No girl had a secret she could not and did not babble to all her friends. In her world the fairyland of science was unknown, the charm of philosophy unheard of. Literature was confined to the fifteen-cent magazines and art to the thirty-five. And there was a great big world outside her door—a world brilliant with blood, bru-

tality, crime, poverty, suffering, private yachts, divorces and luxury. She had never been south of Twenty-third Street. She had never seen the water except from Riverside Drive. Oh, for a man who could explain Nietzsche to her! Oh, for a man who knew the difference between De Maupassant and Balzac! Can *you* tell why Mendel has superseded Darwin? No more could Bessie. What was Pragmatism? Who were these new post-impressionists she read of in skimpy paragraphs in Scribner's? How could intelligent men and women perceive charm in Debussy's discords? Yes, she had been abroad with her mother and Baedeker—but they had to stay indoors every night in Paris. They had never seen an anarchist or a slum, or a tea-taster or a live poet.

Now a girl who had something to do with the Delancy Street settlement house happened to meet Bessie at a toy tea one day, and when the two got together for four minutes Bessie's horizon moved north, south, east and west ten degrees. The little middle class girl discovered that while she and her ilk wandered through the desert of culture far from both the upper and the lower strata of society, the prince and the pauper foregathered at wonderful

houses in the purlieus and communed with each other at close range. She heard of university extension courses, of celebrated men who lectured to shop girls, of artists who made music, of socialist millionaires who married working girls—exhibitions of paintings and books and classes and clubs and political economy and sometimes W. and Y. And Bessie dreamed a dream.

How she made the break and got away I don't know. She didn't tell me, but from what I saw of her I knew that her will was stronger than the old man's—and her mother merely fainted away when Bessie packed her suit case. Was it the socialist millionaire story which reconciled them, finally? All I know is that Bessie Baker moved down to Rivington Street and got a job rolling cigars in a little tobacco factory at six dollars a week. She roomed with two Jew girls, over a delicatessen shop and spent every night making hay with the social advantages presented by the Delancy Street Social Settlement. Nobody knew that she wasn't a poor girl, and so she was allowed to mix with millionaires and philosophers and high society ladies and visiting "Who's-Whos" to her heart's content.

Perhaps you think I'm exaggerating; but if I

could describe one week of her new existence you'd see how much fussier her life was on the east side than in Philistia. There were automobile rides to the residences of wealthy patrons on Long Island. There were boxes at the opera for the sweat-shop girls; they were even taken to the horse show. That first week Bessie met Paderewski; she held the basin when he dipped his \$25,000 hands into warm water before doing his stunt, and her eyes were within four feet of his facile fingers when he played his own minuet! Henry James? When he called and gave a talk on the "Metaphysics of Rhetoric" she almost ate him alive! She was one of thirteen women wage workers who dined with the Prince of Bulgaria, then studying American Sociology; and she got to know the Swami Gecchachavanda so well he told her his real name! Say, you ought to have seen Bessie dancing with President Roosevelt at a shirt-waist ball! And meanwhile she was learning to speak in double negatives and rubbing burnt matches into her finger nails for local color, building out her pompadour and wearing brass rings so as not to be caught as a middle-class impostor in that ineffable mixture of extremes. Nobody ever suspected that she worked because she liked it. By means of a few

choice solecisms she had butted into the most exclusive circles of brains and fashion and wealth. She was clever, all right. I'm for Bessie, strong!

Meanwhile she was working, and working plenty. She made cigars so much faster than the Yiddish girls in the factory that she got into trouble and the foreman had to rescue her. For the first time in her life she saw a man knocked down—the foreman did it to a chap who called her a scab—and then she realized that her blood was as red as a squaw's. The foreman took a fancy to her after that, and used to sit on the steps of the tenement where she lived and talk to her till midnight. He was a Russian, and had been in the fighting organization of the Revolutionists all through the campaign of '05. He explained the theory of the Terror, he told of shooting behind barricades, of the manufacture of bombs, of plots, conspiracies, heroes and martyrs of fifteen, spies and assassinations and gore till she gripped his wrist and gasped for breath. He had killed men—he had seen men hanged, he had worked in the Siberian mines, and had had five escapes from prison. Life was opening up big for poor little Elizabeth of West Ninetieth Street.

Meanwhile she rolled stogies by day, and by night

she put on a hand-washed shirtwaist and did high society at the settlement. Celebrities came and went, lectures and musicales exemplified to her all that was finest and best in modern culture. Just watch Elizabeth, the president of a club of eighty women who did things! They fought for a public playground and got it, they shut up thirteen saloons, they established a self-supporting day nursery, they gave a fair and Mrs. Ralph Waldo Billion was on the same committee as Elizabeth Baker. Didn't this beat life as lived at the corner of Ninetieth and Broadway? Elizabeth drank the intellectual life to the dregs—and listened spellbound to the foreman's prophecies of the great Social Revolution.

Then, just like in the yellow papers, came the Millionaire Socialist. He lectured, he spent his money on Braun photographs, Barye lions and trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he started equality leagues and co-operative consumers' federations, he contributed to the Settlement Magazine, fraternized with the working class—and, at last he met Bessie Baker. Fate rang the bell—her time had come! When Mrs. Baker, up at Ninetieth Street, anxiously waiting for news from the front, heard of it she was measured for a new forty dollar tailor-



made corset and an acreage hat, and began to make a study how the mother-in-law of a millionaire ought to eat asparagus. She cut a few old outworn friends and began to study restaurant French. She at last realized that Bessie had made good.

The socialist millionaire was a rather effeminate youth who wore soft collars and black Windsor ties, glib spoken and so frightfully anxious to be a working man that he laid bricks in overalls on his country place. The wall had to be pulled down and rebuilt, but Tolstoi's precepts had been obeyed. From the moment he set eyes on Elizabeth Baker, any woman could have seen what was coming. He haunted her, discussed propaganda, the materialistic conception of history, the child-labor law and the adulteration of milk. He made love, sterilized with philosophy, and for a month or so they engineered a precarious courtship, in the committee rooms of the Settlement House, in the subway and in chilly art galleries. And then he proposed. I'd like to have heard it. The man was dead in earnest—he was quite fond of Bessie, but marriage was mainly an opportunity for co-operatively managing a higher life for the welfare of the race. He believed in eugenics.

Well, Bessie had about forgotten her high-school English by this time. She made a wild effort to atavize back to the idiom of Ninetieth Street, but her fascinating life in a cigar shop had accustomed her to the speech of those who really live. She was actually human at last.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Seymour," she said. "It's tough on you to throw you down, but when I marry my husband he's got to be something more than a mere theory. I've seen all kinds, now—rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, Indian chief—and I know what's good. Me and the foreman Petrovsky's going to hitch up and have a cigar factory of our own, after Christmas. Take it from me, he's the only white man in the world!"

The reporter rose, yawned, and pulled out his watch. "Ten fifteen. Yes, fate moves in a mysterious way her wonders to perform, et cetera, et cetera. It just shows that water will reach its own level. Elizabeth Petrovsky is going to be the Joan of Arc of the Labor Movement. No, Mrs. Baker didn't show up at the wedding—I hear the family has moved to Philadelphia to live down the disgrace. But you ought to have seen Bessie, the pride of the



THE  
STREET

“By Jove! I believe that's her now,” he whispered

7 3 5 4 6 2 1 8  
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 8 1 2 5 7 9 3 6  
 9 4 3 6 2 1 8 7

Ghetto—in cotton lace and silkolene, as happy as a queen, last night. It was she gave me the tip about this Belle Charmion affair.”

“Belle Charmion?” Fenton was on his feet at a bound. “Would you mind telling me who the devil Belle Charmion is? I’ve been hearing about her all the evening.”

“You have?” It was the reporter, now, who was eager. “What have you heard about her?”

There was little enough for Fenton to tell, except that the name had come to him, repeated time after time, often enough to arouse his curiosity. He mentioned the fortune teller’s prediction, the chauffeur’s story and the magazine mention he had found. The reporter was disappointed.

“I thought I told you she was the girl I was trailing,” he explained. “There’s a big story broken tonight, and she’s wanted, bad.”

“But what is Belle Charmion doing down in this part of town?” Fenton asked puzzled.

“Oh, she’s got the sociological bug or something, too. Why, it was Miss Charmion told Elizabeth Baker about How the Other Half Lives and all that. I knew she was interested in settlements and so on, and so I hiked down here, and chased up the Social

Uplifters. I got a tip that she was living along here somewhere under an assumed name, and gets home about half past ten. That's why I wanted to wait. If she doesn't show up by eleven you can have my best breeches." He suddenly darted back into the doorway, pulling Fenton with him. "By Jove, I believe that's her, now!" he whispered.

Fenton saw a young lady approaching, walking briskly toward them. She was quietly clad in gray, and neither her carriage nor her costume were those of a working girl. There was a street lamp in front of the entrance to the tenement house, and as she approached it she was more and more clearly illuminated. Something about her face struck him clearly—as if he half recognized it—then, just before the shadow of the lamp blotted it out, his heart suddenly stopped beating. It was the girl of the photograph—it was the girl of his dream—it was the girl with the level eyebrows, the whimsical smile—

"It is Miss Charmion, by jimminy!" the reporter exclaimed, and he advanced toward her.

The girl appeared to catch the words, for she turned with a quick glance at the two young men. Her eyes fell upon Fenton, and rested there for a

moment, with an expression of surprised interest. Her glance met his, and in that instant a flash almost of recognition seemed to pass between them. Then Richmond approached and accosted her. She answered without stopping, and, still speaking to her, he walked along by her side. In another minute the two, conversing with animation, Miss Charmion showing eager interest, had turned the corner and were gone.

## VI

### THE SUITE AT THE PLAZA

HOW JOHN FENTON ENCOUNTERED A FRIENDLY GENTLEMAN AND WAS GIVEN THE POSSESSION OF HIS HOME—AND OF THE LADY WHO APPEARED THERE IN TEARS

**T**HERE he was, therefore, alone, without a cent in his pockets, without a hat, without anything to pawn for his fare up town—in dirty brown overalls. He had not even the locket to gain which he had taken so desperate a risk. But worse, far worse than all that, he had lost his only chance of finding the girl whose picture had for four months exercised so potent an effect upon his heart. He knew, now, from that one glance at her face that he was in love with her. All that he had read into her features, during his lonely hours of communion with the portrait, he had seen, living and charming and piquant and kissable, as she paused under the lamp. And now she was gone again into the night, into the mystery. . . . Their paths had crossed once—would they cross again? When?



He wandered along with this thought, up to the Bowery, where at the curb beside a taxicab he saw a large well-dressed man in a shaggy overcoat and silk hat lighting a cigar. Instantly Fenton awoke to his mission, and the necessity for getting up town. The octoroon and the care-taker should be notified as soon as possible of the loss of the diamonds.

He walked up and touched the gentleman's arm just as he was about to enter the cab. Before Fenton could speak the man threw him an angry look.

"See here," said Fenton, "I'm not a beggar. I've just had an accident, that's all, and I want to get up town. I haven't a cent on me."

The man looked him up and down, through his eye-glasses, then began to laugh. "Well," he said, "that's a new story on me. What's the little game?"

"As I said," Fenton insisted, "I've got to get up to Harlem, where I can get some money and a hat and a pair of trousers. Will you give me a lift or not?"

Again the gentleman looked him over, pulling his long black mustache the while. His face was handsome and genial, a type of the affable, experienced man about town. Finally he laughed and said: "Well, I'll take a chance. I'm only going up as far

as the Plaza, but you can come along if you want to. Jump in."

They entered the cab and it started off up town. The stranger still eyed Fenton interestedly. "Buncoed?" he asked finally.

By this time Fenton had learned discretion. "Oh, no—a rather poor practical joke, that's all. A lot of my fool friends got me drunk. My wedding day, you know. That's why I'm in a joyous hurry."

The explanation went as it had gone before, and again the stranger laughed. "Oh, if that's the case," he said, "I guess I can fix you up. Come up to my place and I'll give you a hat and a pair of trousers, anyway. Make it a whole suit, if you like. That coat of yours is hardly fit for a marriage ceremony."

Fenton played his part, thanked the man effusively, and the trip was made up town with considerable friendly conversation. The man's name, he learned, was Sproule. He was married, but his wife was out of town and not expected home till to-morrow. Sproule had just finished up a big business deal, and was off for a three months' trip on another as soon as he could pack his grip at the Plaza and get away. He had an easy good nature, a facile manner, and had evidently seen much of the

world. But, in spite of his jokes and glib stories, Fenton noticed that Mr. Sproule had something serious on his mind. Was it his intended trip to South America on business? Why, then, should he keep such a sharp lookout to right and left, as the cab drove rapidly up Fifth Avenue? Once, when the cab was forced to stop because of a block near Thirty-fourth Street, Sproule grew visibly nervous, and cursed under his breath.

At the Plaza Hotel he jumped out, gave a quick look around, told the chauffeur to wait, and motioned to Fenton to follow. As he entered the elevator Fenton caught in the tail of his eye a man coming into the hotel—where had he seen him before? As the elevator stopped at the tenth floor he placed him—the man in the shepherd's plaid suit he had noticed at Scheffel Hall! It was queer. On the Fifth Avenue side Sproule opened a door with a key he took from his pocket. Fenton entered with him.

They found themselves in the private hall of the suite, already lighted, and Sproule led the way to a small bedroom, opened a closet and took out a suit of gray tweeds and a derby hat.

"Here you are," he said. "Get into these, and

you can return them when you have time. No hurry about it. They belong to my man, and I think they'll fit you well enough. Not much of a wedding suit, but I guess the blushing bride won't care. Now, excuse me a minute; that confounded telephone bell's ringing."

He left Fenton and walked to the end of the hall, and into a parlor. Here his voice could be heard speaking, though the words could not be distinguished. Fenton began to take off his overalls, looking about the room with curiosity. It seemed to have been used by Sproule's valet. A few flashy pictures had been pinned to the walls, photographs of race horses, actresses and flying machines were stuck about the mirror. Fenton, getting into the tweed trousers, walked to the glass. Upon the dresser was a business card reading "Nallery Mining and Investment Company, St. Paul Building, New York."

He was half dressed when Sproule came in, looking anxious.

"See here," he said, "I've had an important call, and I've got to get down town in a hurry. D'you mind if I leave you here? You can just shut the door when you're dressed. I guess I can trust you."

Fenton stared at him in amazement. "What! Leave me here all alone in your apartment—a stranger?"

"Sure!" said Sproule. "You're all right. I know faces pretty well, and I'll take a chance that you're honest. Anyway, I got to go right away."

"I can be ready in a minute," said Fenton.

"I can't wait a minute. It'll be all right. Good by!"

And cramming on his top hat and lighting a cigar, Sproule waved his hand and disappeared. Fenton, left alone, stood for a while in wonder, then slowly finished dressing, and finally looked about. As he had entered the private hall the suite showed by its furnishings evidences of wealth, luxury, taste. How could the proprietor trust him there alone? It was too much for him. At any rate, he would leave as soon as possible, before anything happened. Perhaps it was some clever trick—to accuse him of theft—or worse. It looked bad. . . .

He had just opened the door of the chamber to make his exit, when he heard a key turn in the door to the corridor. Instantly he drew back, almost closed the door, and listened. Somebody came in. Then he heard sobbing—a woman's heart-broken

voice. She passed into the parlor, at the end of the hall; the electric lights were turned on. The weeping kept on continuously, now rising in hysterical bursts of agony, now falling into low convulsive sobs. What was he to do? Leave silently, unperceived? But he might be caught in the act. For a while he hesitated, then he sat down on a chair to think.

Suddenly he sprang up; steps were coming down the hall—he heard the clack of heels upon the parquetry. Then, before he could think what to do, his door was slowly opened and a woman came in, still weeping, caught sight of him, and stood still, staring, her lips parted, her blue eyes dewy with tears.

She was a lady of some thirty years, tall and beautiful—blond, with masses of fluffy yellow hair under an enormous white beaver hat, picturesque with white plumes. Her mouth was curved in a tremulous bow, and little white teeth sparkled deliciously. As she stood there, framed in the opening of the door, all in white broadcloth, touched at the neck and wrists with white fur, she looked like some sudden delightful apparition come to haunt him. But great as was his surprise, hers was evidently greater—forbidding, for a moment, her speech. She

stood with a smallish black leather case in her hand, looking at him.

"I beg your pardon," Fenton began, in embarrassment, "but Mr. Sproule left me here to put on these clothes he lent me."

"Who?" she stammered.

"Why, Mr. Sproule—your husband, I presume—is he not?"

"My name is Mrs. Elkhurst—I don't see what you're doing here—I don't understand." And she backed into the hall, still staring as if frightened of him.

"He said he lived here. A large gentleman with a black mustache and a red face—he wore glasses—"

"Oh!" She gave a little cry and covered her face with her hands. The package she had been holding dropped to the floor.

"He lent me this suit—as by an accident I had—injured mine."

She was sobbing again.

"He said his wife wouldn't be back till to-morrow."

"Where has he gone?" she demanded, turning to him, her face suddenly set, hard and stern.

"He was called away on urgent business. He had a telephone call. I don't know from whom."

Without replying, the lady turned, ran into an adjoining chamber, and Fenton could hear her pulling open drawers, opening and shutting doors, searching here and there. He waited a few minutes, uncertain what to do, when, looking down, he saw on the floor the package she had dropped. The case had opened, and half in and half out of it lay a string of brilliant red stones shining like hot coals of fire. He bent down and was picking up the necklace when she burst out of the room.

Disregarding Fenton, she walked unsteadily to the end of the hall and into the parlor. He followed her, awkwardly enough, the necklace dangling from his hand, to find her with her head on her arms, sitting at a boule secretary. Fenton approached her with misgivings.

"Here's something you dropped," he said, and placed the jewels upon the table. Then, distressed at her emotion, he added: "Can't you tell me what the matter is? Of course I am a stranger to you, but Fate seems to have led me here, and perhaps it was that I might help you. I wish I might do something—if you could trust me."



She threw up her head and dashed away the tears, then looked at him with her brows knitted. Fenton saw that she held, crushed between her fingers, a letter. "Who are you?" she asked.

For a moment Fenton hesitated. At first his impulse was to confide in her, but the events of the night had made him cautious. He told her, therefore, only his name and business, and of his meeting with Sproule on the Bowery. The mention of the man renewed her distress. She rose, walked up and down a moment, then returned to him as if decided upon something.

"It is good of you to offer to help me," she said, "but I am afraid my trouble is past mending. You look kind and honest. I believe that you have told me the truth. You must believe the same of me, for I am going to tell you my story. You will see that I have good enough cause for tears."

She took the ruby necklace and sat down on a huge couch. As she told her story she fingered the jewels nervously, pausing to control herself from time to time as her emotions swept over her like a storm.

## THE TWENTY-SEVEN DROPS OF BLOOD

We have to pay for everything, in this world, everything. Even when we think we've paid, there's more, and still more. I thought I had paid for this necklace, paid in blood and tears; but I've had to pay again and again. And still it isn't paid for. I wonder when it will be over and the score crossed off!

You have heard of kleptomania? No doubt you've often smiled and thought it a polite name for common theft. It isn't! Oh, believe me it isn't. It isn't a mere habit, either—it's a disease; it's one of the hardest things in the world to cure. Ask any alienist. All the same, I have cured myself. But, God! what a fight; night and day, day and night for years—before I won. It cost me years of struggle; my sufferings have been indescribable, but I persisted against all kinds of temptation. But even then I knew I would never have won but for my love for a man. And now—but let me begin at the beginning. I want you to understand.

My family is one of the best known and most highly respected in Philadelphia. I have had everything—youth, beauty, wealth, education, social po-

sition. You wouldn't think it possible for such a girl to go wrong, would you? And yet, somehow, it is usually just such persons who have this disease. Why is it? I don't know—some subtle perversity in human nature, some complex reaction to environment—well, it doesn't matter. Psychologists seem to know little about this abnormal condition. I've talked to all the authorities on nervous disorders. Dr. Mitchell, Dr. Prince—everybody of any fame. I've tried Moll and the English authorities, the Salpêtrière people in Paris—hypnotists, even Theosophists and Christian Scientists. They simply don't know anything about it. My own theory is that it's a form of dissociated personality—a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde duality struggling in one for the mastery. Perhaps it's a form of insanity. I don't know. Nobody knows.

It's a curious thing, kleptomania. Oh, it's interesting enough to one outside of it! I can talk about it, now. One of its peculiar features is that one becomes so extraordinarily sly—there seems to be a sympathetic intellectual stimulus that sharpens one's faculties wonderfully. One's mind has, while one has the obsession, a touch of genius. It is like degeneracy—we can scarcely tell cause from effect.

There's a "vicious circle"—one can't tell whether mental keenness produces the desire to steal, or the desire to steal educates one's wits. The point is, one becomes clever at it.

I know now, positively, how great criminals think—how they plot and contrive—how they stake their brains against law and order. I know how they develop, how they progress. Their first, amateurish schemes are intricate and complicated. It isn't till later in life that they achieve the more daringly simple crimes which succeed by their very audacity. Have you read Poe's "Purloined Letter"? You know—the man who hid a valuable letter in plain sight? That's the sort of acumen we have, the best of us—those who have developed a special sense for it, a craft, a refined cunning. You hear of the arrest of ordinary shoplifters every day, but my kind is seldom caught. They can't be detected. They are inspired by something too sapient, shrewd, acute.

Well, the first time—let's see . . . I was about eighteen. I was visiting an old school friend in the South. She had a Scotch cairngorm, one of those common brooches with colored stones you can buy in any shop in Edinburgh for ten shillings. Somehow it attracted my fancy. You see, it seems to be

characteristic of our mania to be fascinated by objects without regard to their intrinsic value. I've stolen things I'd never think of using—burnt matches, old newspapers, tooth brushes, even. When the fatal impulse comes, one *has* to steal, that's all. I've risked my reputation for a birch-bark napkin ring! That's the way we are.

The cairngorm lay on Ethel's dressing table. She and I were in the room, with a colored maid. When neither was looking I took the brooch and hid it in my dress; I waited till the maid had gone, and then I asked for it. The maid was accused, and, when she denied all knowledge of it, poor girl, was dismissed. She had been with the family all her life. Wasn't it awful? But it was curious how little it affected me. There's some sort of moral opium it distills. One doesn't care what wretchedness or injustice one inflicts. Oh, it's hideous!

So it went on, year after year, the stealing. Sometimes in shops, sometimes in the houses of my friends, in public buildings—anywhere the fit seized me. I took everything my mania fancied. Often I threw the things away as soon as I had secured them. Sometimes I replaced them. You have no idea what queer vagaries one has, how one will

wait for days, weeks, for a chance to act. The obsession is, for the time being, the most important thing in one's life.

But there's one thing you must understand, and believe. It was only one particular detail that was wrong with my moral sense, not a general perversion. It's like paranoia; it seems to have nothing to do with other parts of one's morality. One can be kind, pure, temperate, unselfish in everything else—in everything that doesn't bear on this special act. You're a man, and you must perceive how such a thing can be. Haven't you known dissipated men who are generous and loyal? If a man is selfish, he's usually bad all over, but if he is a drunkard, he can still be affectionate. So, I hope you won't think of me then as wholly vile. I stole in this freakish way because I was irresistibly impelled to; but otherwise I think I was as good as any woman could be. Indeed, knowing my fault, I tried the harder to make my life better in other ways.

Have you ever heard that sometimes, when a man's shot, they don't remove the bullet? If it lodges in a part where there's no danger or inconvenience, they let it stay, and a cyst is formed around it so that it is completely surrounded and it

can't poison the system. Well, this thing seemed like that, with me. It seemed to be apart from my normal moral sense. But a moral sore can't really heal like that, I suppose. It's always malignant. It has to be cut out, or it grows.

Well, this trait did grow. I took more and more. I became more cunning. I have never been caught or even suspected to this day. I grew bolder with every success; bolder, but never reckless. Every move was thought out like a game of chess. Then came the necklace affair. That was the climax.

A year ago I was in Paris with my mother. We had many acquaintances in the best circles, in the Sorbonne, in the Academy, in the Deputies, in the old *noblesse* of the Faubourg Saint Germain. One of my best friends was the Contessa da Scarpi, a Roman lady of an old Italian family. She had a little necklace of rubies. . . . Here it is. Pretty, isn't it? Yet I always think of it as twenty-seven drops of blood.

That necklace I had to have! I knew I should try for it, knew I should get it, knew I should not be discovered in the theft. I did succeed. Here it is! Have you examined it? The stones are small, but flawless. It is exquisitely designed—seven-

teenth century workmanship; it is worth, I should say, about forty thousand dollars. But I have never worn it, scarcely even looked at it, since I got it. All my pleasure was in the winning of it.

It cost me nothing, I thought. Nothing? God! The cost was terrific! Listen: Because of my theft two sisters became estranged. An ambitious and talented young naval lieutenant shot himself. Oh, he was so handsome, so splendid! A half dozen family servants lost their places and could never find other employment. All this I knew, but I didn't care. Can you imagine it? I didn't care! It was as if I were drugged. All I thought was, "The necklace is mine!"

You must loathe me, now, but you must hear me out. I want you to know to what degradation I had fallen—how lost I was, how hopeless, how pitiful. I want you to see what I had to climb out of.

I got out of the country with it—all sorts of rewards were offered for it, numberless detectives put on the search—and I sailed for home. When I passed through the custom-house I hid it in my hair. You should have seen me look that young inspector in the eye! I had a sort of insolence, I was so sure of myself. I'm sure all great criminals must feel



that sense of power. It's wonderful, exhilarating! It's like the courage of a brave soldier under fire. Nothing could possibly harm me, I was sure. It was as if I dealt in potent magic. So I got home with my mother. Poor mother!—if she only knew! Strange, one can never tell the most important things in our lives to one's best friends! One lies only to those one loves. . . .

Then, I met a man—the man of all the world for me—the only human being who could ever change me. Love has a strange alchemy one can't explain. Why try to explain it? One is attracted, or one is repelled in spite of one's self. Schopenhauer calls it the Spirit of the Race, seeking reincarnation. . . . I prefer the poetic interpretation . . . “for me, Romance!” . . . never mind! . . . Anyway, I fell in love immediately, desperately. Love is a terrible thing . . . it took hold of me. . . .

To me Herbert was perfect—all that was best and finest of manhood. I thought of him almost as one thinks of the great heroes of history—Washington, Goethe, Alexander—he was my Bonnie Prince Charlie; my king could do no wrong. And so, as soon as I found my heart was gone, I got my first real sight of my mania—I saw the horrible

thing it had become. I felt as if I were a leper. If he had found me out I would have died of shame. And later, when I saw that he actually loved me, . . . it was wonderful! . . . I spent night after night weeping at the impossibility of my ever marrying him. For to me he was as spotlessly pure and honorable as a god; and I was unworthy to be his wife. So when he proposed, I refused him. When he wanted to know my reason I couldn't tell. Then he began to make love to me so ardently that I was alternately delirious with joy and tortured with horrible remorse. It was unbearable.

One night he swept me off my feet and I accepted him. Oh, in my heart, I promised myself, at the same time, that I would never marry him till I had cast out the devil that was possessing me. It seemed so easy at the time! His strength seemed to make me strong. I felt that the inspiration of his love and trust would exalt my will. Wait!—can you imagine a young man who has sown his wild oats, converted, and taking holy orders, and feeling sure that nothing could ever tempt him again? That was how I felt. I thought that my love would change my whole character in a single day. Things aren't so easy as that, in this world. We have to

pay, always we have to pay! We have to pay again and again!

I suppose you have never taken morphine, or opium, or cocaine? I hope not. But you must have heard what a fight it is, how terribly difficult it is to stop the habit. It isn't impossible, though. Why! one time I took cocaine steadily, every day, for two months—I just had to see if my will was diseased, too, if I had any strength at all left in me. Pshaw! I stopped in a day. I laughed at it. It was nothing. But this thing was different. It had grown like a monster in me—I was so in its power that, to keep my fingers from anything I craved—well, can you refrain from drinking when you're thirsty? It was like that—worse, a thousand times worse! I fought it night and day, though. I was determined to win—for his sake. I fought it as one fights a terrible nightmare. For a long time I made no headway. I stole things even while I was with him! Can you imagine anything more horrible? Remember how I loved him. It was damnable. . . .

Then, one day, I was nearly caught. I had slipped a red morocco-bound book into my muff, at a house where I was calling for the first time. I dropped my muff—by a queer chance it fell on end,

and stood on the floor, curiously upright. He bent down to pick it up for me—I was just a second too quick for him. How my heart beat! He would certainly have seen the book—I couldn't have explained it, possibly. It would have ended everything. So I redoubled my efforts to cure myself by sheer will. I went scarcely anywhere, and never alone. I had pockets put in my coat, and kept my hands in them. I schooled myself to think every minute, to be on my guard incessantly.

Well, I improved rapidly after that. When I had taken nothing for six months I set the day for the wedding. That was a happy time. . . . My only bugbear was the necklace. You've been wondering why I had not already returned it? It was impossible.

Even had I been able to go abroad I knew of no safe way of returning it. Had I sent it, it would surely have been traced. Think it over (as I did through many a sleepless night) and you'll see how difficult it would have been. There were the customs again—the post-office authorities to suspect and examine any package—the express company's invoice—there was the danger of theft. But the Scarpis were traveling in the Far East; I didn't

even know their address. The only thing I could do was to wait for my chance. I had no one to trust, no one I dared tell.

After we were married I kept the necklace hidden in a secret compartment of my jewel chest. I dreamed of it, all through my honeymoon—the most delicious honeymoon any bride ever spent—except for that.

That was six months ago . . . now it seems six years. Ah, well! . . . When I first met Herbert I thought he was a broker. Every one thinks that now—except those few that know. But after I was married he confessed to me that he was a detective. He told me he was employed by several big corporations at a large salary to work on especially difficult or delicate cases. His value depended upon people not knowing his real occupation. Passing as a broker, he could go into the best society and no one suspected him.

It was a shock to me at first, but I got used to it. Now that I had recovered from my mania, my spirits went up sky high. It was like getting my youth back again. I was like a young girl. How Herbert used to laugh at my spirits! I was free, now, to love him freely, as wildly as I wished. I let myself

go. No woman was ever so proud of her husband. And I was proud of myself, too. Why shouldn't I be? I had conquered as desperate an evil as any woman ever fought. But—there was still the necklace—twenty-seven drops of blood. . . . A detective is a dangerous person to attempt to hide a thing from. I was mortally afraid he would discover my secret.

We went everywhere—I had a wide acquaintance—Baltimore, Washington, New York. Herbert went with me. He seemed to like the dinners, the musicales, dances, teas, bridge parties. I was proud of him. Everybody liked him. He was a social success. He never refused an invitation unless his duties called him away. Sometimes he had to be absent for a week or so at a time; and, of course, owing to the nature of his profession he could tell me nothing of his affairs. Occasionally he was unexpectedly out all night. Except for these absences—and the necklace—I was gloriously happy. Herbert was still a lover more than a husband. He gave me presents often.

A week ago an old Vassar friend of mine came to me with such a pathetic story! It's her private affair, and I can't tell it to you. It doesn't matter,

anyway, except that, for a particular reason, she was most anxious to make an impression at a dance in New Haven. Her whole future was at stake. She was awfully hard up—she had nothing—and asked me to help her. So I lent her a gown, gloves, and a few things like that. She was so pathetically grateful and happy that, just before she left, I thought of the necklace, and, carried away by my sympathy, I offered it to her for the dance. At first she didn't want the responsibility of it; she refused; but I could see that she was crazy to wear it. It was the finishing touch to her costume. So I insisted and she took it away. I was glad, after all. The necklace had caused so much suffering that it seemed to me it was right to use it, for once, to make some one happy.

Last night, when my husband came home, I felt something was wrong. You know a woman gets things—I didn't feel "right" near him—I can't express it in any other way. There was some constraint about him I had never felt before. I simply "got" something near him, and it made me fearfully nervous, depressed. But outwardly he was the same as ever, and my first impression wore off a little. Then, when he said he had a present for me

I was all right again, and hated myself for thinking anything sinister. The reaction carried me into high spirits; I loved him more than ever; I thought him the purest and the best. Oh, how I tried to make up for my momentary injustice! A present! He had such an adorable way of presenting things—it made them vastly more valuable. I buzzed round him like a humming-bird in my delight.

He took a package out of his pocket and handed it to me, after I had paid him in kisses. I was as happily impatient as a child. I snapped the string, laughing, tore off the paper, opened the little leather case . . . this necklace was inside! . . . my necklace, which I had lent my friend a few days before . . . twenty-seven drops of blood!

I suppose I must have thanked him, somehow. I may have kissed him again, with that horrible thing in my hand. Women are strange creatures. . . . The most ignorant woman can become a great actress, under the stress of emotion. . . . The ages have taught us to defend ourselves . . . some maternal instinct inspires us. . . .

But what I did, or what I said, I don't know. It seems so long ago—and it was only last night! I think he suspected nothing. I remember that I



pleaded a headache, and got off to my room, somehow, locked the door, and went to bed. He knocked later and said "Good night, girlie!" It comes back to me now, but at the time I hardly realized it.

The ruby necklace! My brain whirled with it! It was the most horrible night I had ever spent. What did it mean? Oh, I went over and over it till I thought I should go mad. Had he discovered my secret? Had he had a similar necklace made? I thought of every explanation except the right one.

This morning I found I couldn't stand it unless I learned the truth immediately. When he left I told him I was going to visit a friend in Poughkeepsie over night. He said he might be gone himself when I returned. We parted as we had never parted before—something horrible was between us—I thought at the time that he felt it too. Now I know he did.

I took the first train to New Haven. On the way there a fearful thought came to me. You know I told you we used to visit together? Well, I recalled that soon after my marriage we spent a week-end with some friends in Wilmington. A few days afterward burglars entered the house and stole considerable jewelry and silverware. Nobody thought

anything of it till another house was robbed in Richmond, shortly after we had been there. Then they began to call me a hoodoo, and laugh at me. It was a good joke for a while, especially as it happened once or twice later. I thought of it only as a queer coincidence. Now, as I recalled the facts, the idea grew like wildfire—it burned me up! I couldn't stand the suspense. It seemed as if I pushed the train all the way to New Haven.

I found my little friend in tears. Oh, I suppose you have guessed what I never suspected. Her house had been robbed the day after the dance, and the necklace was gone. I was the wife of a burglar, or at least my husband was the associate of burglars. The man for whom I had fought my fight, for whom I had won, the man whose love inspired me, was a criminal!

You can imagine my situation. I had to comfort my friend, who was almost distracted at the loss of the necklace—and I had it in my purse all the time! I had to tell her I was sure it would be found—I had to leave her with that burden on her conscience—knowing that she would probably work her fingers off trying to make up the loss to me. How could I tell her the truth! What could I say! I

could only hope some time to arrange it so that the thing might seem to be recovered. I left her with a broken heart. Well, mine was breaking, too!

Then, on the way back to New York, I began to see things more plainly. My love pleaded for him. After all, was he much worse than I? He was a thief; but had not I been a thief myself for ten years? I had fought for my own salvation and won. Couldn't I fight for his and win, also? My love came back in a great flood. I determined to save him. I almost rejoiced at the opportunity it would give me of showing how much I loved him. Wasn't it my duty—what a wife should do? The thought uplifted me.

None the less, when I entered the door, here, and saw all the old, familiar sights, the place where I had been so happy, I couldn't help breaking down and crying. I thought it was all over for ever, the secrecy, the pain, the struggle, the danger. But I nerved myself, and determined to go on through with that, and worse, if necessary, for Herbert's sake. And, God willing, I would win him back as I had won myself.

Well, you must have heard me crying. Do you know what stopped my tears, what was too deep,

oh, far too deep for tears? On my dressing table I found a note saying that he had left me for ever.

John Fenton, confronted a second time that night with a woman's broken heart, knew not what to say. Mrs. Elkhurst arose deliberately, with a hard, set face, and replaced the ruby necklace in the case. Then she shrugged her shoulders and turned to him.

"You understand, now, why I think of those stones as drops of blood! Well, what shall I do? That's the question. Of course, I can arrange to have the necklace found, to say it is, without publicity, or else my friend's life will be ruined also. But what about my husband?"

"I can't think of him as a burglar," Fenton said. "It seems impossible. He was so good-natured, so refined. He had so much charm."

"Oh, it was precisely that which made him useful," said Mrs. Elkhurst. "Of course he did none of the actual work himself—he didn't have that kind of skill. I've been thinking it over, and I have come to the conclusion that he must have merely located the jewels or whatever they were after. Don't you see? That's why he was so willing to visit at my friends' houses. I can remember, now,

that he used sometimes to excuse himself, when we were all down-stairs, and run up for a handkerchief, or something like that for an excuse. He was looking about. I have no doubt that he watched outside, too, while the house was being entered."

"Do you know any others of the gang?" Fenton asked.

"I suspect only one, an Irishman. He came once or twice here to see Herbert, but my husband always managed to keep me away from him."

"An Irishman?" Fenton immediately thought of Mangus O'Shea.

"A rough, ugly-looking man, with little reddish eyes, and black, broken teeth. I think his name was Nallery."

Fenton jumped up and ran back to the room where he had changed his clothes, returning with the business card he had seen on the valet's bureau. He handed it to Mrs. Elkhurst.

"Do you know anything about that?" he asked.

She looked at it and knit her brows. "Look in the telephone book," she said finally, "and see what the number is. I think it's—let's see—a queer number—something like Wall nine, nine, nine, one. I've heard my husband call it up."

Fenton picked up the telephone directory and found it. "Wall nine, one, nine, one," he read.

"Yes, I think that's it. And now I remember overhearing Herbert talking about some diamonds, once or twice."

"Perhaps it is the headquarters of his gang. I believe it will pay investigating, at any rate." Fenton arose as if to go.

"Investigating! What d'you mean?" said Mrs. Elkhurst. "Are you—you're not a detective?" She grew pale.

Fenton narrated the incidents that had made that night for him one long, extravagant adventure. The tale was so incredible that he was almost ashamed to tell it, but the lady's interest was keen and deep. When he came to the Mangus O'Shea part of his story she frowned and nodded. "Ah," she said when he had finished, "that settles it. I can see now what happened. Herbert and Nallery, or O'Shea, as you call him, have undoubtedly been on the track of the jewels, watching their chance. How they ever suspected the octoroon had them I can't see, but the rest is easy. Once having followed her, and seen you, they suspected that she had given them to you for safe keeping. I would eliminate the cross-

eyed cabman entirely—he probably stumbled on to a part of the thing accidentally, and was only trying for blackmail. Still, the gang may have got hold of him, too. When they took you to the pigeon loft Herbert stayed outside on the watch, and perhaps he was given a few of the smaller stones to raise ready money upon at some pawn shop. It's the more likely, because of late my husband has been complaining of being hard up—I remember he said he had bought the ruby necklace on credit. At the time I was too excited to wonder at that. What can we do? If I can not reform my husband, I can at least try to prevent his crime from being successful. It seems to me I must do that."

"There is nothing you can do, that I see," said Fenton. "But as for me, I am determined to follow them up right away. I doubt if I can do anything against them, for the gang must be clever and desperate. But I can at least try. Now I am into this plot, I am going to do what I can. The first thing is to get hold of the octoroon and report."

He took up the telephone and called up the King William Hotel. No Miss Green was registered there. That puzzled and worried him, but he got, after much talk with "Information," the number of

the Flint Flat at One Hundred and Forty-sixth Street, though there was no answer to the 'phone. He hung up the receiver in disgust.

"Well," he said, "I must get down-town immediately. What shall you do?"

"I am going to my mother in Philadelphia, the first thing in the morning," she said. "I am going to tell her everything. I hope it will not break her heart, but, oh, I am so lonely!"

After Fenton had pressed her hand, bid her good-by and walked to the door, he turned back to look at her. She was sitting at the table with her head bowed in her hands, sobbing.



## VII

### THE CAXTON DINING ROOM

HOW FENTON MET BELLE CHARMION A SECOND TIME,  
WAS ENTERTAINED BY TWO PROFESSIONAL  
BEAUTIES, BECAME A HERO, AND SE-  
CURED HIS CARFARE

**J**OHAN FENTON did not forbear casting a glance at himself in the narrow mirror as he descended the elevator. The gray tweed suit fitted him miraculously—and it bore the cut of a good tailor. The change of costume excited him deliciously—he felt ready, now, for a new adventure, ready to play a courageous part. He fingered the fine, soft wool with surreptitious delight. He set the brown derby hat at a careless angle on the back of his head. He flattered himself that he knew how to wear clothes, and was not averse to showing himself in this spotless, well-pressed costume in the lobby of the hotel. Mrs. Elkhurst's narrative had steadied him, but he was still young and full of the joy of life. The touch of vanity in him only gave him a trace of boyishness.

He plunged into the aromatic maze of feathers, silks and furs that thronged the lobby, with his head erect. He was as good as anybody. He wove jauntily in and out between the ladies and gentlemen in evening dress that crowded the corridors, caught glimpses of merry diners, kindled to the strains of an orchestra, drinking in the atmosphere of wealth and pleasure. Then, round a corner came Belle Charmion! It was as sudden as that.

She gave him a quick look and paused. He got as an impression of her, only two soft hazel eyes glancing humorously at him, and the smooth shadows of black lynx furs. He came to a stop to gaze at her, and she suddenly turned.

"I beg pardon," she said, "but aren't you—" Then she blushed vividly. "Oh, I beg your pardon," she added hastily, "I thought you were—someone else." She cast down her eyes, confused, and walked hurriedly away. John Fenton turned and stared after her, his heart beating. What new mystery was this that brought his dream-girl to him, face to face; that made her pause, speak, only to hasten away? For a moment he was inclined to start after her—but already she was lost in the crowd. He had, a second time, let his opportunity

slip away from him. Who was she? For whom had she taken him? What had she wished to say? Belle Charmion!

Too much excited by the encounter to enjoy the scene any longer, he went out the revolving door, and turned west at Fifty-ninth Street toward Columbus Circle, making for the subway. He was half-way across Seventh Avenue before his mind, wandering from Belle Charmion for an instant, lit upon the subject of carfare. Eagerly he went through the pockets of the gray tweed suit. Not a dime, nickel or penny did he find. Nothing save a quill toothpick and a leaf from the wrapper of a Wheeling stogie! He had dallied too long at the Plaza; already the lady of the ruby necklace must have left for the train to Philadelphia.

From Fifty-ninth Street to Wall Street is five hard, weary miles. To walk it would take an hour and a half, at least. If he could not think of some way to raise at least five cents his adventure would conclude in nothing more exciting than a midnight tramp to a lonely bed, there to vanish in misty dreams of what might have been.

He turned down Seventh Avenue, therefore, his wits working at the problem, keeping his eyes open,

the while, for any possible answer to it which might casually approach him. But Seventh Avenue was almost free of wayfarers. A policeman regarded him with an icy eye. He passed a flushed youth saying good-by to a pretty girl with an eighty-five-dollar hat. He passed a small horde of waiting conductors and motormen at the car barns. In none of these did he find the answer to his riddle. Past the blinking electric signs heralding the glad fact that "H. & L. Corsets make the Female Form Divine," past theaters just ready to belch forth their victims, John Fenton, betweeded and anxious, strolled. He was thinking, thinking. Not of Belle Charmion or Mrs. Elkhurst, now, not of the octoroon or the Liars, but of the one elusive nickel he needed for carfare to carry him further on this Arabian Night's Entertainment.

He came to the Hotel Caxton and paused. Here he was at the center of New York's night life, the half-way station of gay rounders, one of the light-houses of Longacre Square, one of the many palaces of oysters, lobsters and champagne. Fenton was a sober enough youth—he knew this aspect of the metropolis mainly through the newspapers, but he was stimulated by feeling that he was now in the

locus of lively things. In a minute a rush of theater-goers was upon him and he was swept along. Hardly knowing why, he entered the Caxton and stood in the lobby to devise some plan. He wondered how confidence men worked their games. He knew that in this part of the city clever wits were as good as ready money. How could he work it? But there was little need for Fenton's solicitude. Fate had him in hand that night and there in the lobby of the hotel two lovely ladies had already marked him for their own.

They might have posed as "Night and Day," so brilliantly were they contrasted. One was a sparkling brunette, black of hair and eye, red of cheek, vivacious, radiant, most gorgeously alive. The other was a super-blonde. Her hair, sportive in ringlets, charmingly careless, was shaded from gold to silver, her eyes were violets. She was the sunny-languorous type, passive, yet more compelling than she of the dark, darting eye. Fenton, at his first glance at her, knew that hundreds of men must have been inflamed by her beauty. In it there was little subtlety; it was a highwayman beauty, it cried: "Hands up!" The other, the brunette, was, however, something more than pretty—one looked

twice, and found something new to admire. Her attraction had depths one longed to penetrate.

They stood, these two, attired in furs and feathers, silks and lace, waiting by the door of the dining-room and looked at him. Fenton felt something extraordinary in their glance—it was suspiciously friendly. When they smiled and nodded at him he felt uncomfortable; their beauty was something too dangerous, and he walked uneasily away. In a moment, however, a hall-boy overtook him. Fenton was informed that the two ladies wished to speak with him. So, amazed at the honor, and wondering what new trick was now to be turned, he walked over to them, and lifted the brown derby.

The brunette's black eyes sparkled and she showed her pretty teeth as she held out a white-gloved hand.

"Say, kid, you ain't going to cut an old friend, are you? Don't do anything like that!"

Fenton mumbled a kind of blurred apology.

"Why, I believe you don't remember me!" she complained. The blonde's lip curled in a faint smile; she shrugged her fur-clad shoulders and looked away.

"Where was it I saw you?" said Fenton puzzled.

fishing for some hint that would give him his cue.

The brunette laughed merrily. "The last time I see you, you was hanging to the ropes when Jack Ketchell was given the decision. No wonder you forgot me!" The blonde looked dreamily off toward the theater office desk. She seemed to be in a world of her own.

Fenton realized that the mistake was sincere. He had evidently been taken for some pugilist with whom the brunette had had a passing acquaintance. The question was, who was he? He searched his memory for the name of Jack Ketchell's unfortunate opponent. No answer. The only knowledge Fenton had of current fistic events was derived from the smart talk of a precocious office boy at the drafting-room. Still, any port was good in a storm, and Fenton thought he might turn the mistake to his advantage in some way. Perhaps these two beauties would pilot him out of his straits. He grinned his best, therefore, and shifted his feet.

"So you was at the fight?" he asked. Then it occurred to him that the part of pugilist needed more color. He emulated the tough office boy and his talk. "Say," he said, getting into the swing of it,

“say, was you wise to the fact that I fit them last t’ree rounds with a broke thumb? Look at there!” He held out his right hand and wiggled the thumb trickily. The brunette felt of it daintily. “Wot you expect I could do with a pin like that?” he asked triumphantly.

“I *thought* you was a little off your feed,” the brunette said.

“I was overtrained. Too fine,” said Fenton. “Next time I’ll get him, and I’ll get him good!”

Then, hoping to discover his name by the ruse, he added, “Say, give me a knock-down to your friend, Miss Peach-à-la Melba.”

The blonde so designated turned her head, and seemed to approach slowly, from miles away. Her smile was but a shadow, as she looked at him, as if for the first time conscious of his presence.

“Miss Diamond,” said the brunette, “shake hands with Whack Harrison, ex-middle-weight champion of the U. S.” She turned to Fenton. “Is that right, Whack?”

Fenton was thus much relieved. He at least knew his name. How long he could maintain the impersonation was another matter. It was a par-lous rôle. The blonde named Diamond extended



her fingers. Fenton thought it not out of character to squeeze them with a nut-cracker grip. It might at least bring the yellow-haired girl to life. It did.

"Gee!" she exclaimed, shaking her hand in pain, "you must think you're shaking with Kilgore before a fight. That ain't no way to shake hands with a lady!" She tossed up her head in scorn.

"That's right," said Fenton, "but you see when I do make connections with a wonder-worker like you, it's hard work breaking away from the clinch. I guessed you hypnotized me for fair. I ain't used to gold queens, much. Sort of takes my breath away and I act foolish."

The blonde could not help smiling, and the ice was broken. Fenton began to wonder what the brunette's name was, and how to find out, when Miss Diamond herself supplied the information. She elevated her golden eyebrows and said, "Say, Millie, how about the eats? I'm all in!"

"That's right," said the brunette. "Whack, we was just going in to dissect a lobster and do a little drown in the fizz. Won't you be among them present?" Her black eyes tore through him.

Fenton was conscious that every one in the hotel lobby was staring at them. "Sure thing," he said,

and then added, commandingly, "That is, if you eat on me."

"Nothing like that in *my* family," said Millie gayly. "I just drew my alimony. I'm just padded with greenbacks."

"None of that suffragette stuff!" said Fenton sternly, keenly conscious that he could not pay for a postage stamp.

"Don't you get gay, boyo! Don't you know I invited you? Be good, now, and come on in!"

"Well, we'll settle it later," said Fenton, and threw all responsibility to the winds, leading the way to a table. He threw out his chest and his elbows as he walked, strutting as nearly like the pictures he had seen in "Puck" as he could do it. Oh, if he had only listened more carefully to that office boy!

As they sat down, every one in the restaurant turned to look at the party. Was it on account of the miraculous blonde? She would have attracted attention in a herd of angels. Was it on account of the saucily pretty brunette, the dainty devil in petticoats, with her flashing eyes? No. Fenton realized, with a sudden pang of alarm, that they had turned to stare at Whack Harrison, the ex-welter-weight

champion of America. The responsibility of his rôle almost overcame him. If he were to act the pugilist there might be deeds as well as words required. Who could tell what turn of the wheel might force him to make good with his fists? Such hero-worship as that with which the two ladies flattered him might be a bit too dangerous. He had never had a real, out-and-out fight in his life! Lo, he had swaggered into the hotel full of cheek and confidence! Already the admiration he had so vicariously received had made him three parts a coward. Would he have to make his exit in an ambulance?

“Say, Whack,” said Millie, leaning to him confidentially, “D’you know why I wanted to see you so bad? I’ll put you wise. There’s a fresh little crab out there in the lobby that’s been getting too gay with us girls altogether. D’you mind going out there a minute and stroking him just one jab for luck?”

Fenton’s stomach flattened with fear. Miss Diamond turned her violet eyes upon him. He could scarcely bear to look at her. “Hand him one for me, Mr. Harrison,” she said dreamily, and smiled a bewitching smile. “I won’t have no appetite till I know he’s good and lame.”

"Who is he?" Fenton inquired, trying to keep his knees from knocking together.

"That's him, now!" Millie pointed to a man standing in the narrow doorway. He had an evil face. Fenton estimated his weight at over two hundred pounds. "It's Billy Presto, you know, Whack,—'Lightning' O'Donnell's sparring partner. Lord, you can eat him up! Don't be long!" and she sped him to his doom with a flashing smile.

Fenton rose and walked out, trembling all over. His only coherent idea was to make a quick escape. The cloakroom boy had taken his hat, but he would forego that. He would escape out the side entrance. He had, indeed, already hurriedly started that way, when Mr. Presto approached him, and slapped a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"Hello, Whack," he said. "How goes it? Have a cigar!"

Fenton's wits buzzed. "Say, I was just looking for you, Presto," he said. "They was a couple of swell skirts round here looking for you a half an hour ago."

"Oh, is that so? Who were they?" Presto was immediately intrigued.

"In a limousine car, they were. A little one and

a bigger one. Nectarines!" Fenton improvised. "Crazy to find you. But wouldn't tell their names. Said if I see you to say they'd wait for you at the Café Martin. Important!" Fenton gazed, with a fine air of candor, at Billy Presto, but ready to jump away from his fist at the first sign of incredulity.

The scheme worked. "Thanks, old man, bye-bye, I'll skip right down there!" and Mr. Presto had gone.

Fenton returned to the dining-room a little faint and wobbly. "Well, I threw a good scare into him," he explained, as he sat down. "I guess he won't try to do no more goo-goo work round here for one while. What d'you want to eat, Millie?"

"Oh, we've ordered." Millie looked at him admiringly. "Say, you're a wiz," she commented. "Now, if that guy over at that table there don't try any cute business on me, we can have supper."

"Where is he?" Fenton demanded.

"Now, Millie, we don't want no fuss here," said Miss Diamond.

Millie subsided, but was pleased. Fenton's appetite was gone. With every fond look his companions lavished upon him he became more craven.

Well, he must at least put on a "front." He cudgelled his brain for memories of the office boy's talk.

"When are you going to meet Jake Kilgore again?" Millie asked him.

"Next month, I guess. Say, you leave it to me this time! I'm going to train on nitric acid and iron filings and live rats. Take it from me, girl, I'll make him think of home and mother before the first round is over. When I unhook my right and connect with his dial, he'll act like a ferry boat with a boy captain in a smoky fog. Say, did you ever see a Mogul locomotive run over a pin? That's me and Kilgore. I'm the choo-choo, see? Why, he'll be a Royal Stuart plaid all over when I finish."

At this moment the waiter, pouring Millie's champagne, hit the chair with his elbow, and the wine spilled in Millie's lap. She gave a cry of anger and began to mop her skirt with her napkin. Fenton turned pale. Must he kill the waiter? He jumped up and looked wildly about him for an escape. Miss Diamond put a fairy hand upon his arm.

"Oh, don't make a fuss, Mr. Harrison!" she besought.

"I'll smash him into a *biscuit* Tortoni!" he roared.

Millie laughed. "Oh, Whack, really it was my fault! Don't hurt him!"

Fenton heaved a sigh of relief, sat down, glowering, and the waiter made bold to approach and tender his apologetic services. It was a narrow escape.

"If I'd unloosed that lariat wallop of mine," said Fenton deliberately, glowering at the unfortunate waiter, "I'd have cut his head off just like slicing an apple. But, good Lord, what's the use of mutilating a Swede? It would muss me all up." He turned modestly to his oysters.

"My, but you're savage!" murmured the blonde, and she looked at him in a dreamy rhapsody that made Fenton turn his eyes away for fear of being hypnotized. Yes, she was too beautiful; she made him feel weak. A dozen admiring sentences rose to his lips—but he knew so well she had heard them all before that he would not speak them. He turned to Millie, better able to compete with her sprightly smile. It stimulated him. She plied him with questions. She was curious as to everything connected with his supposititious profession. Between her catechism and Miss Diamond's ravishing smiles Fenton found it hard to keep his head. His fictions

grew wilder; he narrated impossible battles in the squared ring. He professed to know every one they mentioned, and indulged in fanciful flights of biography. But, all the while, he was waiting for his bluff to be called. His exposure was momentarily imminent.

He was aroused from these forebodings by the sight of a colossal man standing in the doorway, looking over the throng. He was a human mastodon, with a sour and ugly look that made Fenton's flesh creep on his bones. The man's face was battered and crooked, he had the jaw of a bulldog. To Fenton's horror, he looked over at the ladies and scowled meaningly.

"My God," said Millie, "it's Jim! What'll we do? He'll be terrible jealous. Oh, Whack, you *will* protect me, won't you?" She laid her hand on Fenton's with a quick, convulsive grasp.

Even Miss Diamond awakened from her dreamy pose. "He'll make a fuss, sure! Oh, Mr. Harrison, don't hit him! We'd better get away quick!" Her eyes shot blue sparks, now; she was wide awake and without coquetry. Fenton trembled. He half arose to fly, but was held by Millie's eager hand. The man stalked sullenly over to the table.



"See here; what the devil does this mean, Millie? I thought you was a-goin' to eat with me?" His voice thundered. All eyes in the room turned to him. Millie was too frightened to speak. So, for that matter, was Fenton.

"Who is this little shrimp, anyway?" the stranger demanded. "Say, young fellow, you better light out before I kick you out."

Fenton jumped up and looked about, ready to dodge the first blow.

"What's that you called me?" he demanded, with what belligerency he could muster. His heart was in his mouth.

"For God's sake, Whack, don't hit him! Don't make a scene." It was the violet-eyed blonde who screamed.

"Hit me!" the big man ejaculated. "Why, I'll make mashed potatoes of him in three minutes, if he don't get out of here!"

Millie shrieked. "Don't you touch him, Jim! He'll kill you, if he turns himself loose. Why, it's Whack Harrison, you fool!"

The big man stared. At that minute a waiter came by with an armful of dishes, looking the other way.—*Smash!* he charged full tilt into Fenton's

back. Fenton fell forward toward Jim, and put out his hands to save himself. At the same instant, a fat German with a napkin tucked into his collar, who was stolidly cutting a dill pickle at the next table, punctured the rind, and the juice gushed forth. The two accidents were exactly timed. Fenton's outstretched hands fell hard on the big man's chest, and a stream of brine hit Jim in the right eye. He stumbled, fell backward, wildly waving his hands. All over the room spectators shouted and rose to their feet to witness the fray. The head waiter came running up. Fenton, too, had fallen, and fallen upon his prostrate foe. His companions mingled their shrieks with those of the crowd.

"Don't let him get at him! He'll murder him!" the girls entreated. "If he gets mad, he'll beat him to pieces! He's Whack Harrison!"

Fenton hardly knew what had happened before three waiters pulled him off Jim's supine body. They raised him respectfully, however, anxiously protecting themselves from his rage. The head waiter came up to him and tried to calm Fenton down, apologized, promised no further annoyance, protested his own regrets, and then majestically ordered the stranger to be removed from the room.

Angry as a trapped gorilla, shouting out hideous oaths, Jim struggled against some seven or eight waiters and guests. The war raged all the way to the door of the dining-room, where the porters took a hand. There the house detective had already telephoned for the police. The lobby was filled with strugglers and profanity till the law arrived and two stalwart officers hustled the unfortunate man into the patrol wagon. Then the guests who had left their tables to watch the riot returned, gossiping and laughing, to the café. Men stared at Fenton in awe. Ladies gazed at him and talked under their breaths. It took some time for the confusion to simmer down and order to be restored.

All this while Fenton sat, proudly, staring at vacancy with a forced smile upon his lips. The talk around him buzzed of upper cuts and hooks, punches, wallops and knockouts. The blonde timidly put the question that was agitating the whole room.

“What was that punch you gave him, Mr. Harrison?” she inquired with the lovelight in her melting violet eyes.

Fenton considered it at leisure. “Oh, that smash? That was a new one—my own invention. I call

it the straight-arm double dill jab. It's got the corkscrew to the solar plexus beaten to a whisper. You work it like this." And Fenton illustrated a complicated evolution with his left fist directed against a champagne bottle.

"What are you doing now?" Fenton asked, as the supper proceeded. So far he knew little of his companions, and, if he was to get help from them, he must make haste.

"The Girl in Red," said Millie. "Ain't you been to see the show yet?"

Fenton confessed his ignorance of the play.

"I'm wearing twelve thousand dollars' worth of costumes," said Miss Diamond. "Four changes. You ought to come."

It was then Fenton disclosed the full depths of his innocence. "What part do you play?" he asked.

The ladies screamed with mirth. "Play a part! That's good! Say, Whack, do we look foolish enough to spend our time learning lines, with *our* shape? What's the use of being a 'perfect thirty-six?' Forget it. You can always get girls to work for a living. We're clothes-horses. Why, kid, d'you really think we could keep motor cars and wear gen-

uine blue fox, if we had to bark, mew and bray when a dub stage manager told us? Not on your mezzotint!"

"Oh," said Fenton, edified. "Then you're show-girls?"

"Professional beauties," murmured Miss Diamond. "We're what men buy opera-glasses for."

"But I had no idea showgirls got such good salaries!"

The girls looked at each other, shook their heads, and then smiled at their interlocutor. Millie patted Fenton's hand. "Say, kid, you may be all right with your ring tactics, but you never ought to be caught thinking in public when they's ladies present. Eighteen a week is our regular pay. The rest is perquisites."

"Oh, I got a trade, too. Ever traveled on the subway?" Miss Diamond added. "I'm the lady with 'After-Dinner Gumdrops'—on a three-sheet. That's right. Also the 'P. D. Slick Overshoes' and the 'O-I-Wansum Beer.'"

She yawned and tapped her red lips the while, as if she were playing a tune. "I say, Millie, did you read in the paper where Janey Davis had made a horrible punch in London?"

“Sure. She’s starring—what d’you think of that! Why, I knew her when she was an extra girl, too! She was a freak, for fair. Did I ever tell you about her and Mansfield?”

Miss Diamond shook her head disinterestedly, but as Fenton politely professed a desire to hear, Millie took a final sip of champagne and began the story:

#### THE GIRL WHO KNEW MANSFIELD

Yes, her real name was Jane Davis. Ain’t that a scream? For Heaven’s sake, what’s the use of going on the stage if you can’t beat the label you had when you lived back in Baraboo? When I asked her about it she only said: “Why, that’s my mother’s name; and I guess if it’s good enough for her it’s good enough for me.” Then she looked at me with her big, hungry, brown eyes, like a little kid on the corner watching a hokey-pokey cart.

She certainly was a queer one. Never had no use for men—and not much for women, either, at least not them in the company. She used to sit around in corners watching the rehearsals while the bunch was carrying on and having fun. She used to talk

queer, too. Never was up-to-date at all; couldn't jolly up for a cent. Remember how we used to guy her for saying "not having had" and "were it not that?" Why, she couldn't understand our slang half the time. Sort of country, you know. Talked like a reading-book.

That was when we was in the "Sinfire" company—my name then was Gloria Moyle and I was just one of the bunch in the chorus trying to get solid with the stage manager. Jane Davis was drawing twelve a week. She had one line in the third act. She lived with her mother in one room way over on East Nineteenth Street.

Well, say, she was hard up, all right. Believe me, she used to walk all over New York barefoot. D'you know what I mean? She had what looked like shoes, but they wan't nothing really but a pair of uppers. The soles were wore clear through, and so was her stockings. I give her an old pair of rubbers one day, and she wore 'em regular after that. The girls used to guy her about it something fierce.

Hard up? You bet! Didn't I tell you her mother had rheumatic fever? That's right! The landlady put her out of the house once, she groaned so loud

when she was took bad. O' course it cost Jane about all she could hold out for doctors and medicines and all that. Twelve dollars don't go far.

Nobody in the company ever thought Jane was anything more than a fool. You see, she was so queer, and she'd never make up to men or anything. She wasn't pretty, but Lord, she could have grafted all the free eggs she wanted if she'd just thrown a grin or two round—plenty of the boys would have staked her to an eat. But no, nothing doing with Janey. Strictly on the prim. She had straight black hair that she wore funny—not a blessed rat in it—a freak style of her own; say, it was a scream! She did have pretty hands, though; and that was a funny thing, too; she could almost talk with 'em. Her mouth was just like a baby's—sort of trembly and changing all the time, always different—you know how a kid's face works—no repose. All the same, when Janey Davis got mad—believe me, then she was a devil! She could just make the chills crawl up and down your back. But you'd never believe it, to see her sitting in a corner reading a book. You could almost tell what the story was about just by watching her face.

Now, what was I going to tell you? Oh, yes!



About Mansfield. Why, a gentleman friend of mine, Dusty McIntyre, it was, him and me was pretty thick that year, he gave me a couple of seats for Mansfield at the New Amsterdam one day. He got 'em off one of the stage managers—you know how Mansfield used to carry around about twenty-seven different varieties of 'em? Of course, I naturally didn't go much on that high-brow stuff like "Peer Gynt," and I was sore the pass wasn't for the "Follies of 1907." But Janey was in the dressing-room when I got a piece of a burnt match in my eye, and she took it out for me after everybody else wouldn't do it, and so I asked her did she want to go. Say, you ought to seen that girl! She was as excited as if Rockefeller had asked her to get married. So we went. Believe me, I near went to sleep in the theater. The show didn't have no ginger in it. Slow.

Well, you take it from me, if that girl had just come into town from southwestern Missouri, she couldn't have acted more like a fool. She didn't hardly speak only just twice in the whole show. In the first act, you know, where Peer Gynt comes on like a fourteen-year-old boy and lays down on the stage and kicks up his heels, Janey turned round

and looks at me with her big brown eyes, and she whispers, "Who's that?" I says, "Why, that's Mansfield, you little jay!" "Oh," she says, "I thought he was a *man!*" Lord, how she stared! Then in a minute what does she do but begin to cry. Can you beat it? There he was, as funny as a kitten with a catnip ball, doing kid stunts so you'd split laughing, and Janey blubbering away for fair. Didn't I tell you she was queer? I never got another word out of the girl till the last act. You know where they have that auction scene and Mansfield comes on as an old man. Then Janey asked me again just like before. She says, "Who's that?" I says, "Ain't you got a program, or what? That's Mansfield, o' course! Who else would it be—Clyde Fitch?" And then she begins to cry again, soft, to herself. I sat and watched the tears drip down her face like a leaky hot water bag. She certainly was a fool.

Well, we blew into Riker's to have a pistache soda after the show and I just asked her what she was crying at. She says, "Oh, he made me see all sorts of things that wan't on the stage, at all. I thought I was somewheres else," she says. What d'you think of that! What's a theater for, any-

way? It's to show the act the author wants showed, and that's all. Ain't that right? But I couldn't make Janey see it that way. Would you think a yap like her could ever act?

Well, next noon I run down to her room to get her to put a touch on a hat I'd just bought. I'd paid eighteen dollars for it, but it wan't quite right. Janey had a way of pulling ribbons round so you'd swear a hat was just imported. Clever, she was, too, in a way. Ought really to have been a milliner. Her mother was in bed as usual, groaning away something fierce, and Janey was writing on an old brown paper bag, ironed out flat. I offered to give her some paper, but no, she wouldn't never take nothing from nobody. I asked her what it was, and she looked up kind of queer and she said she was writing a letter to Mr. Mansfield. Can you beat it? Mashed! And him getting his thousands a week!

"What are you writing to him?" I says.

She smiled awful queer, and she says, "I'm telling him something I'll bet nobody has ever told him before," she says. "I know a lot of things about him nobody knows," she says. Well, that got me mad. Didn't she have a nerve? Nothing but an

extra girl, practically, at twelve a week, and him a star! I was paralyzed.

"If you know all that," I says, "it's a wonder you ain't starrin' yourself!" And she says, "there's another day coming," she says, "and I'll have my chance yet!" She made me sick. Just one line was all she had in the production. Why, she never even had her name on the program! Mine was in with the Butterflies and Patagonian Peasants and the Merry-Marys,—three times in all!

You may not believe it, but about a week after that she come into our dressing-room and says, "See here, I want to show you something!" What d'you think? She sure had a photograph of Richard Mansfield, with his name, and some writing on it, too. "What is it, Latin?" I says. "No," says Janey, "it's French." I asked her what did it say, and she smiled and said, "You wouldn't understand, Moyle, but it's something like—'*Look inside!*'" Well, I certainly *didn't* understand, all right, nor I don't yet; and I doubt if she did. I s'pose Mansfield only sent it to her just for a cod.

Say, it *was* funny, though, when you come to think of it, wan't it? Why, Mansfield was a holy horror—everybody knows that. Nobody could ever

get along with him, women or men. Why, his people used to leave him every week. He used to fire about twenty every night—and then take 'em back. What in the world d'you figure he sent Janey that photo for? It beats me!

Anyway, Janey was tickled to death with it. You'd think it was a doll; she used to carry it round with her all the time. One time Floradora Billingsgate found it and drewed a mustache on it with grease paint, and say, wasn't Janey mad? She snatched up a pair of scissors and went at Flo like a Rocky Mountain wildcat, and the girls had to pull her off. That was just before Janey was put into the caste.

We never knew how she made that jump. Some said she had money left her, and bought the part; but I know better,—Janey never had a cent in them days. I expect she wasn't quite as country as she looked, after all, and worked the manager. She couldn't act, anyway! Lord, didn't I know her when she was an extra woman? The idea! I guess I know *something* about the stage. Why, Janey actually had an idea that it didn't matter where you put your feet or your hands. Now, anybody who's ever been to a dramatic school knows when you put

out your right hand you have to put out your right foot, and a lot of rules like that. And Janey couldn't read a line right to save herself. It sounded just like ordinary talking—it wasn't acting at all. And she knew no more about how to use her eye-brows than a cat. Oh, she paid for her promotion some way, you bet! That's always the way. Talent ain't no use whatever, compared to influence.

The day she was given the part of Alfalfa, in "Sinfire," I came across her back near the property-room. She had Mansfield's photo in her hand, and she was a-kissing it. Ain't that the limit? I was kind of mad to see a gawk like her put ahead and I says to her, "If you got to kiss him, why the devil don't you kiss him on the mouth?" She just give me one scared look, and she says, "Oh, Moyle," she says, "he's *married!*" *What* d'you know about that! Didn't I tell you she was a fool? She made me sick.

"What, are you stuck on him?" I says. She says, "If it hadn't been for him, I'd never have been promoted." Now you couldn't make me believe he had anything to do with it—I ain't so easy as all that. So I asked her what she meant. She was half laughing and half crying, and sort of silly.

She says, "I've learned how to 'look inside!'" she said. Can you beat it? She was foolish. Just naturally foolish! Hadn't never seen him off the stage!

Well, it was about three weeks after that Janey's mother died. Janey was all broke up. Anybody'd expect she'd be glad to have it over with. Wouldn't you think it would have got on her nerves to have the old lady mewling like a tomcat every time her shoulder-blade ached? She sure was an awful bother. I didn't see Janey—a stage hand we called "Violets" told me. He had blue eyes and a broad grin. He must have been kind of stuck on her—he used to claim she could act. You know how them stage hands are, they think they know a lot. He had an awful nerve. But wait.

He told me the funeral was going to be Sunday, but I'd just made a date with Dusty McIntyre to motor down to Luna Park, and so of course I couldn't go. At least I had no idea I could, at the time. Dusty looked too good to me. So I just dropped Janey a post-card telling her I was sorry, and all that, and if I could do anything to let me know.

That was on a Friday. After the matinee next aft-

ernoon, Janey come round to see me, and she asked me would I lend her a quarter to pay for a telegram. Of course I told her I'd send it for her. I felt kind of sorry for the little mouse, and she handed it over. Oh—her mother was at a little cheap undertaker's over on the East Side.

Well, when I read that wire, I nearly had a fit. Who d'you think it was to? Richard Mansfield! He was down at his country place in New London. It only said: "*Mother died yesterday.* JANE DAVIS." Wasn't she the crazy thing? She'd got just one photo out of him, and on the strength of that she'd gone to work and took him right into the family! O' course I never sent it. I knew it wouldn't do at all. He'd have been wild. I told "Violets" about it, though, and he said it was a nervy thing to do. I've often wondered since if he didn't send it himself, though, after all.

We started out on Sunday, Dusty and me, about ten o'clock, in his Panhard. I had one o' them two-toned violet auto veils and a yellow silk coat on. Just as we was half-way over the Williamsburgh bridge something happened to the car and Dusty got out. I looked back and I seen a funeral coming and I got awful nervous, You know it's bad luck



to have one overtake you. But I looked round. First come an open barouche, just crammed with flowers. I give you my word, if they was one dollar's worth, they was five hundred. They was fairly spilling into the road. After that was the tackiest hearse I ever see. Then come one solitary hack—that's all. Gee! It was the bummiest funeral procession I ever seen. Just as the hack passed I saw Janey through the window, with a man setting side of her; I couldn't catch his face. Then they went by and Dusty fixed his machine and got in. I told him about it, and I says to him, "Dusty, you got to follow that funeral wherever they go. We can run down to Luna Park later. They's certainly something doing when Jane Davis has a hack-load of flowers for her mother's funeral, and I want to see who's putting up for it!" So we run along easy behind 'em.

I thought, of course, it would be the potter's field for hers, 'cause Janey hadn't got any relations at all only her mother. But no, where did they go but out to Greenwood Cemetery, and turned in up to a lot under a big elm tree.

Of course we couldn't take the car in, but we stopped where we could see who was there. First

a man got out of the hack with a silk hat on; I couldn't make him out, at first. Then come Janey. Will you believe it, she didn't wear black—and it was her own mother's funeral, too! She had on the bum little blue suit she always wore. Wan't that disgraceful? She might have shown *some* respect, even if her mother *had* led her a life. Then the man turned round, and my God, I see it was Richard Mansfield! Say, can you beat it? Richard Mansfield in a Prince Albert coat and a top hat with his arm round Janey Davis like she was his own daughter! And I give you my word he'd never seen her before that day!

Well, I just sat there and gasped! Wouldn't you think that a man like Mansfield would be above being there at a little, miserable two-cent funeral—with a girl nobody had ever heard of, too? I should think he'd have been ashamed of himself! If a man don't respect himself, who *is* going to respect him, anyway?

Well, that was queer enough, but when I see they didn't have no minister I nearly died. And, what d'you think? When they had the coffin on the ground, side of the grave, I couldn't see that Janey was crying a *bit*—Mansfield took a little black book

out of his pocket and stood up straight at the head of the coffin and begun to read. His voice was so loud and clear we could almost hear it from where we were. I was almost ashamed of the profession by that time. But then, I always did think Mansfield was a good deal of a bluff.

Then Dusty says to me, "Glo, I ain't never seen Mansfield act. I'm going to sneak up near there and get a good look at him and hear him. This is where I get an orchestra seat free!" Well, I let him go, and I waited there in the car.

Well, Dusty walked up near the lot. I could see him standing there, listening, and after a while he drew up nearer. When they begun to lower the coffin into the grave Dusty come walking back slow. I called out to him to hurry, for I was terrible afraid Janey'd spot me rubbering. In that yellow coat, too! When he got a little nearer I see the tears was just rolling down his cheeks. Dusty McIntyre was crying like a kid! Ain't that the limit? I asked him what in the world he was crying about, and he said it was something about his voice—Mansfield's voice. It got to him, some way, I dunno. I guyed him about it all the way to Luna Park, but somehow Dusty wan't like himself all day.

That was in nineteen seven. You know Mansfield died about six months after that; in September, it was.

Well, I met Jane Davis at an agency the week after he died, and what d'you think! She was all in black! When I said something to her about Mansfield she broke right down and cried. Now, what d'you know about that! A girl who wouldn't put on mourning nor shed a tear for her own mother, had the nerve to rig out in black for the swellest star in the business! I call her a thoroughbred snob!

Fenton looked at the girl, now, with a revulsion of feeling. She no longer amused him, and Miss Diamond seemed less beautiful. Already he had stayed too long. And yet his object had not been accomplished.

Miss Diamond yawned again. "Say, Millie, I got to get home," she said. "Let's go."

At that, Millie called the waiter hovering near, and asked for the check. He handed it to her. Fenton made a feeble protest, but she waved it aside, and tossed him a gold-linked purse across the tablecloth. Fenton glanced at the bill, found it was

\$9.40, and took out a crisp, new ten-dollar bill. The waiter fled.

There would be sixty cents change, thought Fenton. Part of that he must have—and make his escape. He watched the waiter to the cashier's desk and saw him returning. He calculated the time to a second, and, just as the man was within six feet of him, he called out, pointing to the door:

“Gosh! there's your friend back already!”

The girls turned and gazed. Fenton took the dime from the proffered plate, slipped it into his pocket, and handed Millie her purse. It was a victory. The waiter stood and stared contemptuously. What did Fenton care? Not a whit! Now, to get away!

The cloak room boy brought him his hat, and, as he waited for a tip, Fenton eagerly colloqued the blonde. The three walked to the hotel lobby. Obsequious head waiters gazed at them in admiration. A buzz went through the corridor when Fenton, *alias* Whack Harrison, appeared. He was the hero of the place. He glanced at the clock. Both hands stood at eleven. He must hurry.

“Say, you can take us home, if you want, Whack!” Millie's fond eyes shot sparks at him.

“All right,” he said, “just wait till I get some cigarettes.”

He turned, walked to the cigar counter and beyond. Once out of sight, he ran for the side door.

## VIII

### THE SUBWAY EXPRESS

CONCERNING THE PHILOSOPHIC THEORY OF PROEAN-  
ITY AS AN ART, AND ITS PRACTICAL APPLICA-  
TION AS A SCIENCE; AND THE DOINGS OF  
FENTON'S EX-MASTER

**W**ITH a grim smile upon his lips and a great strain off his mind, John Fenton emerged stealthily from the side entrance of the Hotel Caxton and walked rapidly toward Times Square. His adventure had been like a dream—like a dream it had been silly, but splendid. What he had been through that evening, since first he approached Times Square, as he was approaching now! He had a dime in his pocket as he walked into the lobby of the Hotel Knickerbocker to collect his thoughts and lay his plans.

Should he try again to get the octoroon on the telephone and leave it to chance to get back from down-town? He sat down at a table and looked at his dime thoughtfully, then grimly decided to leave

it to Fate. Fate evidently had him in mind, that night, so let come what would. Heads for precaution, and the saving of five cents for his return; tails for communication with the octoroon and luck. He tossed up the coin, and it fell tails up. So mote it be! He walked to a drug store and rang up the King William Hotel. Miss Green had registered, said the clerk, but did not answer. Selah! The fates would provide, and, with a smile on his lips, like a desperate traveler who casts himself into a stream without a ford, hoping to get to the other side safely, Fenton plunged into the subway and took a local train to the Grand Central Station, where he transferred to a down-town express.

He must get to the St. Paul Building. What he could accomplish there, how he could possibly recover the jewels, he had no idea. But, once launched upon this adventurous emprise, he was determined to see it through and make what fight he could. It worried him that he had to work in the dark, with no help or guidance, but he had no choice.

There were only two passengers in the car he entered. One was a stout man-o'-war jackie considerably under the influence of a joyous shore-leave, the other a globular, puffy gentleman with a pirat-



ical mustache which he seemed to be continually eating. Fenton sank into a reverie, and his thoughts wandered like a homing dove to Belle Charmion. Who was she?—what had she intended to say to him?—what mysterious fate was bringing them continually together?

Suddenly, he awoke from his musing to find the train had stopped. He waited for several minutes and it did not start. Local after local passed them by, with the exasperating way that locals have of beating the express when the track is blocked. He went forward to speak to the guard, and found the door locked. There was some trouble ahead.

The sailor began to swear. His impatience grew more and more profane. He would lose his ship, he would be rebuked, he didn't care so much for the money, but to think that he had to be at the mercy of a landlubber's hole-in-the-ground. All this embellished with horrid adjectives.

Fenton smiled and returned to his seat. The puffy gentleman came over and asked what was the matter. Fenton didn't know. Well, they had to make the best of it. The man-o'-war's man became more and more abusive.

Again the man with the fierce whiskers remarked

that one had to make the best of it. Nobody could hurry a subway train. One couldn't put a burr under its tail to make it jump, you know. When he was not chewing his mustache he was wiping it off with the flat of his hand.

"That jackie can sure swear some," said Fenton, finally.

"Swear? Nonsense! Profanity is a fine art! That illiterate chap knows only the merest rudiments."

"Well, they're good Anglo-Saxon rudiments, anyway," Fenton said, smiling at his friend's serious tone.

"H'm! Anglo-Saxon! It takes an Arab to really swear. You can get a real sensation in Semetic—we're afraid to really use English to its greatest effect. Queer, isn't it, how we are the domination of language? We have certain words that are arbitrarily considered vulgar. And we so-called civilized people have come to the point when the only way we know to emphasize our sentiments is by spicing them with impropriety. If that is the correct method, why the Spanish have done the best of all. The English come next, perhaps—especially the Elizabethan literature—great power of invective

they had—look at John Webster!—but Lord! think of the French and the Germans! Child's play, sir! Mere child's play! How can an intelligent man consider he gains force by mentioning a pot of thunder or a sacred color? Or calling upon the thunder and lightning."

"Oh, the secret of it is sacrilege, I fancy," said Fenton, willing to humor him. "Men like to defy higher powers—it shows courage."

"Is Thousand Pots a higher power?" the stranger replied. "No, sir. The basis of all profanity is sound. The appeal is not to the mind, but to the ear. I defy you to name a single oath, modern or ancient, that is not euphonious—that doesn't have an oral magnificence. Wait a minute. We will probably have to stay here a while. I'll tell you a story to prove what I mean. There's one man in Brooklyn who has perfected profanity and made a science of it."

"Here we go, now," said Fenton. "I guess that was only a fuse blown out. I once knew a man—" he began.

The train had started, but the little man had already started also, and, as station after station was slowly passed, he narrated his story.

## THE AFFILIATED NON-CURSER'S PARADE

D'you know, Brooklyn is one of the queerest places in the whole world! All sorts of strange, uncanny things happen; when you once cross the bridge, you're in a new world. Your brain changes—you begin to see things pink. I live in Brooklyn myself—in some ways it's as good as living abroad. I imagine Mars, when they have an election on, is something like the Borough of Brooklyn.

They call it the City of Churches. Huh! I call it the City of Brainkinks. Nobody really knows anything definite about the town. Ask a cop how to get to Flatbush Park Terrace, and he doesn't know. Nobody knows. If you get there, you'll never find the way back.

You wouldn't believe half the things that are true about Brooklyn. Ever hear of the "King's County Croquet Club" that meets at Prospect Park? I thought not. What did I tell you? What sane person would believe that there was a city in the United States that played croquet nowadays? Championship games, too. Ain't it awful?

Why, there's a chess club that you can see working at the job in full daylight from the Brooklyn

“L”! Believe *me* some of these games last for years at a stretch—like a Chinese drama. Men grow old during a single gambit. Then there’s the “Flatbush Brides’ Cooking Class.” Can you beat that? Think of the biscuits like-your-wife used to make!

Why, mister, I know human beings, over there, that sleep under violet glass all night to cure sore eyes. The banks fail regularly every year. They have a children’s procession in May—nobody knows what for. They sell real estate that’s under water, and you have to get a glass-bottomed boat to find your front yard.

No, if you’re a Brooklynite, when you come back from work at night you have no idea what your wife’s been elected to, during the day. It’s all one co-operative, co-educational madhouse; but the one craziest thing of all is the Affiliated Non-Cursers. Ever heard of it? No? I thought not!

Well, a lot of religious high-brows, a few years ago, formed this society to suppress swearing. Every member is pledged never to use a cuss-word, and to frown on all blasphemy and sundry. Oh, when the executive committee gets into a good, fat row, it’s worth being present. They have to mix Volapük and Esperanto!

Well, the president of the society, this year, is old Dr. Hopbottom. What's the matter? Every heard of him? An old, yellow-skinned, goat-bearded quack doctor, one of these psalm-singing skinflints—you know! This year he proposed a parade of the Affiliated Non-Cursers; and the idea caught on great. It was a big show, but Brooklyn thought nothing of it. Why, over there, when the circus comes to town, they have to paint the elephants in Scotch plaids and put side whiskers on the zebras before any one will turn round and look. People in Brooklyn see too much woozly stuff every day to be surprised at anything. So the parade didn't attract much attention—at first.

They had all the school children out—little girls in white muslin and blue ribbons, boys in pink sailor suits with little white flags. P. D. Q. Y. M., the Social Uplifters, the Sons of Jehu, the Ethical Army, the Ancient Order of Goheevians, the Mystic Livers, the Anti-Dope Fiends, the Shu'pm-pu-pm and everything. Dr. Hopbottom certainly rounded up a good big bunch of non-cursers. He had 'em in platoons, with banners and badges and brass bands and decorated drays and marshals with batons, just like a regular procession of the Native

Sons of the Golden West. He was at the head of the parade on a white horse, with a tall hat tied round with white ribbons, like Napoleon crossing the Delaware, solemn as the Archangel Gabriel. Pleased? Why, the doctor was one broad, voluptuous grin! He took off his hat right and left regular, every block.

So far, so good. The parade was a great success till it got to a given point down by the Borough Hall. Then came the big wind.

There was an ex-sailor named Gilhooligan driving up a side street on a dray loaded with railroad iron — bingety-bang-slam-smash-rumble-rattle-*sip-clattery-ding!* You know how a load of steel rails can yelp, when they're properly loaded on a truck. Gilhooligan had four big black Percherons, and he had an idea he was operating an ancient Roman chariot and the whole world had to get out of his way. He tried to drive smack through the middle of the procession, but the non-swearing enthusiasts wouldn't have it; they sat tight.

Then for a few minutes, there was a sprightly duel of verbiage and diction. Gilhooligan went at them with a thousand frantic figures of speech, and the white-ribbon purists came back with a lot

of sterilized and highly perfumed talk on the other side of the question. Gilhooligan got rather the best of it—"Fiddlesticks!" and "Oh, bother" and "Mercy me!" had no show at all with the way he handled English. Why, he swung eighteen-syllabled oaths round by the tail, hitting right and left. But still, they didn't let him through. The little boys yelled "Oh, pickles!" and the ladies attacked him with "Ain't he *horrid!*" Of course they couldn't go farther—though for a little while, several resignations from the society were momentarily expected. Gilhooligan talked to them the way an army driver pets a mule. Yes, the gift of tongues certainly descended upon Gilhooligan, till the air was a deep, exquisite magenta for miles around. You could actually smell his language.

At last the news traveled from one Sunday school to another, clear up to the head of the procession where Dr. Hopbottom was straddling his stately steed. When he found out what was doing, he turned that white horse, and came back toward Borough Hall at a wild-bull gallop, the white ribbons streaming out from his top hat and his whiskers flying. It was like General Sheridan twenty



miles away. It was like Paul Revere—it was like the ride from Ghent to Aix.

You say you've heard of Dr. Hopbottom? Well, then, you know what an ingenious old crank he is. Of course he doesn't swear—it's wicked! But he had long ago figured it out, like I told you, what was the psychological motive for curses. Brain storms have just got to happen, sometimes, and what a man needs at such times is a good, satisfactory bunch of exclamations to hurl into the mess. Being a scientific man he knew not only the cause, but the remedy. So it was easy; he invented his own innocuous expletives whenever the time came.

Well, he came galloping down toward the row. Gilhooligan's profanity carried for about thirteen city blocks, so that by the time the doctor got within range, he had his fires lighted and steam up. He reined up, and let out a stream of talk, something like this:

“What the hypo-fenyltry-brom-propionic-hiatus is the purple matter here, anyway? Why the syn-copated, Senegambian high-ball don't you move on, *what?*”

A thousand voices answered; a thousand trem-

bling hands pointed angrily to Gilhooligan. The doctor two-stepped his horse up to the Irishman.

“You get the deoxidized Dalmation way out of here, you epigrammatic blastoderm, d’you hear?”

Gilhooligan broke loose again. I can’t really quote his speech aright. Shorn of its linguistic splendors it read something like: “Move your blankety-blank-dashed line of unquotable objects open, and let me get through, you blanked dash of an indescribable animal, I want to get by!”

The doctor then proceeded to get mad. He shook his fist at Gilhooligan and yelled: “See here, you clavodeltoid compresbyterial galravaging Gonopteryx, do you think I’ll take any of your panspermatic post-eocene retromorphosed labefaction? You inebriant heliometric hallan-shaker, you; you giscoderm, you green-gilled sesquipedalian, if you give me any more of your cognominate gargaristic fumentatious benzaldehyde, I’ll have you pragmatically arrested.”

I wish I could give Gilhooligan’s answer, but I daren’t. If it were printed for use in the public schools, it would have to be printed almost exclusively in dashes and asterisks.

But it made the doctor really angry. The mem-

bers of the league held their breaths, and gathered round in a circle now, knowing that the event of the evening was about to take place. A hush. The Hop-bottom mouth got ready to act. The doctor shook his fist again and started in earnest. His voice began with calmness and deliberation, but soon rose high—it swept forth in a majestic declamation full of all sorts of *forte*, *staccato* and *crescendo* effects to the noble climax.

“See here, you slack-salted transubstantiated interdigital germarium, you rantipole sacrosciatic rock-barnacle you, if you give me any of your cap-rantipolene paragastrular megalopterick jacitation, I’ll make a lamellibranchiate gymnomixine parabolic lepidopteroid out of you! What diacritical right has a binominal oxypendactile advoutrous holoblastic rhizopod like you got with your trinoczial ustilaginous Westphalian holocaust blocking up the teleostean way for, anyway! If you give me any more of your lunarian, snortomaniac hyperbolic pylorotomy, I’ll skive you into a megalopterick diatomeriferous auxospore! You queasy Zoroastrian son of a heli-copterick hypotrachelium, you, shut your logarithmic epicycloidal mouth! You let this monopolitan macrocosmic helciform procession go by and wait right

here in the anagogical street. And no more of your hedonistic primordial supervirescence, you rectangular quillet-eating, vice-presidential amoeboid, either!"

Mr. Gilhooligan slowly descended from his dray, approached Dr. Hopbottom, and took off his hat. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, weakly, "but would you mind repeating them last three remarks? I didn't rightly hear."

The doctor, with sweat dripping from his yellow cheeks, did it again, and then some. By the time he had finished the dictionary was pretty well disemboweled. The crowd cheered.

"I beg your humble pardon," said Gilhooligan, when the doctor had finished. "I had no idea it was as bad as that. I take off my hat to you. Man and boy, I have followed the sea for forty years. I have been a Mississippi River pilot, I have run a whaler. I have been the mate of a cockroach schooner and I've blackbirded all along the west coast of Africa. I know mules and I know niggers, and how to coax 'em. But I see a plain, sea-faring man has no show with a doctor when it comes to exhibiting language in public. I'll say this for you; they ain't your beat for square-rigged, black-and-tan cursing in the seven

seas. And I think that if this here society what's running this here procession can turn out graduates of the noble art of profanity like you are, I want to say this: Give me the pledge, and I'll sign it. I need some of your talk in my business!"

The doctor led the way, amidst awed thousands, to a great white dray, decorated with lilies. There, upon a black walnut reading desk was exhibited the pledge book, a huge brass-bound tome, covered with white vellum. Gilhooligan mounted the dray, and, with great effort, and much chewing of his tongue, he signed his name. A chorus of hurrahs was given, followed by the Chautauqua salute of waving handkerchiefs.

Then, after tying white ribbons to the tails of Gilhooligan's black horses, and pinning a pink satin badge two feet long on the breast of Gilhooligan's jumper, the procession parted in the middle. He drove his clanking truck-load of railroad iron into the space and Dr. Hopbottom, victorious, galloped proudly back to the head of the line.

Twenty little blue-eyed girls in white muslin were lifted up beside Gilhooligan the convert, and, as the procession slowly started they set up, in their childish treble, their marching song:

“Angry words! Oh let them never  
From the tongue, unbridled slip!  
May the heart’s best impulse ever  
Check them ere they soil the lip!”

Fenton laughed freely, for the first time that eventful evening. His memory of Dr. Hopbottom was still fresh enough in his mind for him to picture the scene. “What’s the doctor up to, lately?” he inquired.

“Why, the last time I saw him, he told me he had some great scheme to make a thousand dollars easy,” was the reply. “It seems he’s doing a little detective work, on the side.”

The train now began to slow down, approaching a station. Fenton glanced out, saw the sign “Wall Street” and rose to go. “Detective work?” he inquired, hurriedly, “what did he mean?”

“He’s looking after some lost boy, I believe. There’s a big reward offered for him, and—”

The train had already stopped. Fenton had no time to hear more, and the words bore no meaning for him. After he had run out, however, and had begun to ascend the stairs of the subway exit, the words came back like a retarded echo—“a lost boy—a big reward,” and he stopped suddenly and be-

gan to think. Dr. Hopbottom after a lost boy? Perhaps it was he himself, Fenton! The reappearance of Mangus O'Shea into his life had already stirred up conjectures. If it *were* himself—what could it mean? Well, there seemed to be no answer—of all the strange questions he had put to himself concerning this night's adventures nothing as yet had any answer for him. He seemed destined to go from one mystery to another blindfold. Of one thing, however, he was sure; the one mystery he most desired to have solved was the riddle: "Who is Belle Charmion?"

## IX

### THE ST. PAUL BUILDING

WHEREIN JOHN FENTON DISCOVERS A DEAD BODY,  
REGAINS POSSESSION OF CERTAIN JEWELS, AND  
IS BESOUGHT TO TAKE THE PLACE OF A  
TITLED IMPOSTOR

**H**IS mind was busy with her, as he walked down Broadway. Belle Charmion! Surely she was worth conjecture. Belle Charmion! The two glimpses he had had of her, the few words they had exchanged, had fanned the flame of fancy which her portrait had first ignited. Her whimsical face, her graceful, expressive hands, her lithe, slim figure—something in the quality of her warm, fresh, olive skin made him feel actually weak when he thought of her. He confessed to himself that he was pretty far gone. Belle Charmion! Belle Charmion! He wanted her more than anything on earth! But, meanwhile, he had to go through what he had planned to do. A wild-goose chase, no doubt, but he would follow it to a finish.

He finally reached the entrance of the St. Paul



building, a twenty-one story pile of granite carved into Romanesque shapes, and had turned in to enter, when he saw a man waiting in a doorway he had just passed. Fenton stopped and took a second look at him—a muscular man in a brown derby hat, and a shepherd's plaid suit. There was no possible doubt of it; it was the same man he had first seen in Schefel Hall with the outline of a revolver bulging from his hip pocket—it was the same man he had caught a quick glimpse of in the lobby of the Hotel Plaza. Here was another puzzle! Was he being followed, and if so, why? A mad night, indeed! How would it end?

He went in, struggling with this new problem, looked at the directory table on the wall, and found the name of "Nallery & Co." Opposite was the number of the firm's office, 1376. Only one of the three elevators was running. In the car a negro boy was sitting on a stool, reading "Middlemarch." Fenton entered.

"Thirteenth floor," he said, and the boy reluctantly closed his book, slammed the door and pulled back the controller. The elevator shot up.

"Round on the left," said the boy, as Fenton emerged, and the car descended.

Fenton walked round a corner of the corridor and came point-blank to a door painted with the name of "Nallery & Co., Mining Brokers." There he knocked. He had no idea what he should do when the door was opened; he had made no plan. He would make up his mind what part to play as soon as the situation was found. Meanwhile, as he waited, he thought he heard a hurried sound of feet . . . the soft click of a closed door. . . . He listened now, more carefully. Still there was no answer. He knocked again, louder. All was silence. Then, angry at the delay, wishing to bring matters to a crisis, he turned the handle, opened the door and walked in.

He found himself in a small office, part of which was shut off by a wooden railing. Behind this were a couple of roll-top desks, a letter press, a typewriter, a filing cabinet, and other ordinary pieces of cheap office furniture. There was nobody there, however, and so, seeing a door in one wall marked "Private" Fenton went through the gate, strode up to it and knocked with determination.

Still no answer. He hesitated for a moment. It was carrying things rather far to force himself in, this way, but he wanted to come to an end of the adventure as soon as possible. He knocked again,

then, impatient at the silence, boldly opened the door.

He saw a carpeted room with a single roll-top desk and several chairs. Two of these were overturned and, between them, supine upon the floor was the body of a man, lying in a puddle of blood.

Fenton stood, for a moment, in the doorway, fascinated by the awfulness of it—he was unable to move. It seemed unreal, impossible, like a wild dream. His first impulse was to stifle his exclamation of alarm, shut the door and make his escape as quietly and quickly as possible. Next, despite his sick feeling of horror, despite a dominant fancy that this thing was not, could not be true, came the realization that he should go to the rescue of the man, and give him aid, if it was not already too late. He forced his will to move his body, stepped forward and knelt beside the form. One look into those open, staring eyeballs told him that the man was dead.

But, as he looked at the pale face more deliberately, the horror gave way to pathos. The dead man was wonderfully beautiful, picturesque, even poetic. By his crisp, curling hair, the finely molded features, the width of his forehead, the small delicate

mustache, the body might have been that of Edgar Allan Poe. The skin was as fair as a child's, the lips sensitively parted, showed perfect teeth; the slender hands were like a woman's gracefully expressive in their relaxed gesture. All this would have prevented the corpse seeming dreadful, had not that oozing red spot upon the shirt front told a tale of murder. Fenton drew down the lids over the glassy eyeballs with scarcely a feeling of revulsion, and then slowly arose, still held by the potent fascination of death. Then his eyes wandered about the room, and stopped at a gray ooze-leather bag some little distance away from the body. He walked over to it and picked it up. He pulled it open and received a new sensation.

The bag was crammed with jewels! For the second time, that night he was in possession of the Brewster collection. That fact decided him. Whatever had happened in this dreadful office, it was his plain duty to take the jewels, and deliver them as he had promised. His own safety and theirs, demanded that he make his escape without delay—there was no knowing when some one might come—it would be dangerous, disastrous to be discovered there with the corpse.

Buttoning the bag under his coat, therefore, he gave one swift look at the dead man, and went into the outer office. Here he paused a moment to consider. It was improbable that any other exit than the front door of the building would, at this time of night, be open. The safest way, if indeed, not the only way, would be to go boldly down the elevator, as he had come up. He must take his chance, at any rate. A glimpse into a mirror showed his face a deathly white. He took a towel from the washbowl and rubbed his cheeks violently, till the color had returned. If he could only efface the horror in his heart as easily! The image in his eyes had faded so that, now the door was closed, he could hardly believe that what he had seen was true, but a feeling of faintness warned him that the shock had gone deep. He waited a moment for his weakness to pass, then summoning all his resolution, left the office and rang the elevator bell.

He scarcely dared look at the elevator boy as the car descended. The air seemed close and stifling. Without a glance to right or left he walked unsteadily out the great doorway. On the sidewalk the night breeze revived him, and he started to walk briskly north along Broadway. At each step his courage

and his relief increased. He shook off his obsession, pacified his conscience with the thought that there was nothing he could have done, and turned his thoughts to planning his next move in the curious game of chance which he seemed destined to play that night.

Here he was again with the Brewster treasure, but again without a cent in his pocket and now still farther away than ever from his destination. As he walked along the canyon of high buildings the clocks rang midnight. How was he to get up-town?

He had not gone many blocks deliberating this question, when he heard a motor-car coming his way, behind him. It was proceeding slowly, a chauffeur driving, and a gentleman muffled up in a pepper-and-salt coat in the tonneau. He was a little blonde man of forty with a patient, resigned look, a man with a pale, careworn face and a lizard's chin. His mouth was slightly open; he had white eyebrows; altogether, his face betokened no great strength of will. He looked at Fenton anxiously, as he passed, and turned to look again almost as if he intended to speak, but didn't quite dare.

Fenton grasped the possibility and hailed the car. "Give me a lift up-town?" he asked.

The man looked him up and down. "How far d'you want to go?" he asked, almost whining.

"Harlem," said Fenton.

For some moments the man in the car stared, without speaking. Fenton grew embarrassed; he wondered if the bag, concealed under his coat, showed too plainly. But the man finally changed his expression. A wan smile spread over his face, followed by an expression of timid resolution.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said. "If you'll do me a small favor—it won't take more than half an hour—I'll send you up to Harlem in this car afterward—anywhere you want to go."

"What is the favor?" asked Fenton.

"Get in here, and I'll tell you."

Fenton opened the door and entered. The man who had invited him was so mild that there could be no great danger to the jewels.

"Go on home, Karl," said the stranger, "but go slowly; I want time to talk to this gentleman." Then he turned to Fenton, stared at him anxiously for a few moments, and then asked, "Can you act?"

"What d'you mean? I'm not an actor, of course!"

"What I want you to do, is to impersonate a Hungarian count for about ten minutes,"

Fenton gasped. "Me? A count?" In spite of the tremor he was still in, he laughed.

"Count Capricorni," the stranger explained. "I've got to produce him at my house this night, and oh, if you *would* do it! I'll fit you out with a dress suit and a red ribbon, and introduce you to a few guests. As soon as that's over, you can be taken sick—cholera infantum, gout, epilepsy or housemaid's knee—anything you like—and then you can go up to Harlem. What d'you say? Will you, *please!*"

"Are you talking in your sleep, or what?" Fenton inquired.

"I'm trying to save my sister's reputation, that's all. Perhaps, if you're incredulous, I'd better give you a few details." The gentleman sighed.

"I think so, too," Fenton replied, "this seems to be my night in Arabia, and I might as well do it good. I've already crowded about sixty ordinary years' experiences into six hours of this evening. Romance seems to have it in for me to-night. Well, I guess I can stand a little more of it. What's *your* line, comedy, tragedy, farce, musical drama or burlesque?"

"Say, you're not crazy, are you?" The stranger seemed anxious.



"No, are you?"

"Well, sometimes I think I am. I'm a fool, anyway. Perhaps I'd better tell you my story and let you decide."

"All right," said Fenton, leaning back in the cushions.

The stranger folded his arms, scowling ludicrously, and began: "My name is Stillwell Morgan."

Fenton sat up and looked at him eagerly. "Not *the* Stillwell Morgan? Not the nephew of James Pierpont?"

"No, not that one!" the stranger replied, sadly. "And that's the whole story!"

"It's a mighty short one!" Fenton grunted.

"Oh, what I mean," said Morgan, "is that that very natural mistake of yours is what's just got me into trouble. Everybody makes that mistake. And thereat he proceeded to tell his tale.

#### COUNT CAPRICORNI

I have a sister named Marguerite Maganel Morgan. She's part angel, part Vassar, and part darned fool. Being her only brother, of course I adore her

on six days of the week, and swear at her on the seventh. If you've ever had that kind of a sister you know. Sisters either run you, or you run them. I'm not ashamed of admitting that Marg runs me. It saves a lot of trouble.

Everybody seems to think I'm rich, because my name is Morgan, but I'm not. Oh, well, I make a fair income. Real estate. Wait—I'll give you my card. We live a plain, self-respecting life—up-town in an \$85 apartment—that is, we did, till a month ago. Ah, well! I wish we lived there now! We had a pretty good sized bath-room where I could do my pulley-weights, and we had a view of the Hudson—only about one inch of it, but I was satisfied. We had a Swedish maid, too, and on Thursdays Marg made a Welsh rabbit, we're Welsh, you know, and I opened the beer. I never drink anything stronger than that. Doesn't agree with me. We were happy and contented. I was, anyway. All I want is to go to a good musical show once in a while, and wear slippers when I'm home. I never had much use for style; I hate those stiff stand-up collars, for instance. I believe in comfort and bath robes and things—you know, good American habits with no nonsense about them. Marg goes in for the latest thing. But then

she's ambitious. So she made me a velvet smoking jacket—I smoke three cigars a day, one after each meal.

'Well, last month Marg began to fret. She wasn't a bit interested in real estate or musical shows. I'm reading Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" this winter, and even that seemed to bore her. You see, she's higher spirited than I am, somehow. She likes a crowd. So, to please her, I said we'd spend a week at Atlantic City—at a real swell hotel. She brightened up right away. I was glad of a week off, too—it would give me a chance to finish up the "Decline and Fall" and perhaps I could start in on "The Anatomy of Melancholy." I've never had time to read that.

I took a small suite. At first they thought we were a bridal couple and I nearly died of mortification. But it was worse than that when I found the bell-boys thought that we were *the* Stillwell Morgans—the rich ones. I gave only dime tips, but that didn't seem to convince them. I suppose some rich people are stingy sometimes. Of course I told the clerk all about myself, but people stared at us so I dreaded to go into the dining-room.

The second day after we arrived at the Bucking-

ham Hotel I met a nice looking fellow in the billiard-room, while I was watching a game of pool. I don't often speak to strangers, but I was so lonesome with no business to do, that I offered him a ten cent cigar, and afterwards we played a game of pool. Oh, not the regular game—I never tried that—it's a bit hard for a beginner—this was that game where you roll the balls from one corner. I beat the stranger two games. Nice fellow, I thought. Affable, you know. Interested in things. I didn't care much for women, neither did he. We got on beautifully.

After he left I asked the clerk who he was, and the clerk switched round the visitor's book and pointed to a name. Well, I nearly fainted. "Count Capricorni and valet, Buda-Pesth." There I had been laughing and joking with a real, live count!

When I told Marg about it she got awfully excited—sent for the manicure girl and asked her all about the count—then she interviewed the telephone girl and the chambermaid. Marg has a way of getting right at things. She's resourceful, by Jove! She told me I must invite the count to dinner, but I said I'd never dare in the world, now I knew who he was.

I'd never seen Marg with men much. I usually

go into my room and read when they come, they're so silly. She was a revelation to me now, the way she went at it. She got into my lap and began to fool with my hair and teased me to introduce her to the count. I told her how the count had made fun of American women, and I guess that made her mad. When Marg gets her blood up, she's great. She said that I'd simply *have* to have him to dinner. I tried to get out of it, and then she began to cry. What can you do when a woman cries? I agreed to let her have her own way.

Not that I blamed Marg much. If you'd seen the count you'd have been impressed. Any one would. He looked just like a count—sort of distinguished looking, poetical kind of chap, he was. Wide forehead, crisp black curly hair, and a little bit of a mustache—say, I'll tell you! He looked for all the world like Edgar Allan Poe, at twenty-five. What's the matter? He did, really! Slender hands, like a woman's and he used them in a foreign sort of way when he talked. Then he wore a black soft tie with his evening dress, and a broad ribbon on his glasses, and some kind of a little red button in his button hole. I liked him when I got better acquainted. I don't mind admitting it, I really did.

Marg had only twenty-four hours to get up a costume. She sent six or seven telegrams to Faustine, on Fifth Avenue, and had a hair dresser from Philadelphia. I had to buy a lot of orchids, and we got mother's pearls out of the safe deposit. It cost about four hundred dollars in all, but Marg was happy. The only thing was I didn't have a dress suit. Marg wanted me to hire one of a waiter, but I drew the line. I can be firm when I want to! I hate those hard shirts.

The count came up to our sitting-room and Marg came in smelling of some kind of cologne she bought for four dollars a bottle. That was the first time she had ever had her hand kissed, in the European fashion—except in private theatricals, of course—but it didn't embarrass her one bit. She acted just as if they did it to her every day. Ain't women wonderful? We went down to dinner, with me behind, and when we walked into the dining-room there was a buzz that you could have heard to the board-walk. You see, every girl in the hotel had been hot after the count for a week, and he never had paid any attention to any of them. I was proud of Marg, then. Every woman there was hating her like mischief; and you know how that improves a woman's looks

—the one they hate, I mean. The count was languid and aristocratic and talked to Marg all the time. I didn't have a chance to say much. Marg was awfully animated, though.

When we went up-stairs somehow I felt in the way, so I took my "Decline and Fall" and went into my room to read. I heard them laughing afterward, for an hour and a half. Then, when he left, Marg came in to see me. She told me she was dead in love with Count Capricorni, and what were we going to do? If he ever discovered we weren't *the* Stillwell Morgans she was afraid he'd cut us, and she'd pine away and die.

That was how the trouble began. You see, Marg wanted to entertain him in New York, but how could we invite him to our little flat? He'd scorn it. Marg said we'd have to move, and move quick. When Marg decides on a thing I give up the fight.

Just then Aunt Jane died, and we knew that she'd surely leave us some money. Marg figured on a hundred thousand or so, but I doubted it. On the strength of it, however, Marg began to make her plans. She went up to the city next day and rented a suite at Wycherley Court.

Ever seen Wycherley Court? It's on Riverside

Drive—a French Renaissance pile, Marg calls it—with an entrance hall that looks as if it was carved out of different kinds of colored soaps. There is a lot of plush and hall boys and bronze tables and fountains and things when you go in, and a *marquise* in front. You know the kind. Our suite cost \$15,000 a year. Marg spent a day in those antique furniture dens on Fourth Avenue, and got in a lot of Sheraton stuff and Turkish rugs to take the *nouveau riche* look off.

I didn't mind the expense so much, although I was sailing pretty close to the wind by this time. It was the style we had put on that I hated. Of course, it wouldn't do for the Count Capricorni to find us living the *bourgeois* way we always had, so she got a lot of gowns—I thought they were awfully low-necked—and she made me get into a dress suit when the clock struck six every night, whether we had company or not. I tried to learn to drink Burgundy—but it's no use—I hate it!

Then she got a butler. Ever tried to act natural with an English butler looking at you? You can't do it, unless you're a woman. Women love it—it really seems to stiffen 'em up—but I always felt shriveled when he was in the room.



The count didn't like ordinary American cooking, so Marg got a *chef* and I never had any appetite after that. That Swedish girl we used to have could make grand griddle cakes—but that was all over! We only had stewed-up stuff in little casseroles, and everything tasted of onions. Marg said she loved his cooking, but I noticed she didn't eat much. But then, she was in love, I admit.

The count came several times a week. He seemed to like the place, though I thought by the way he talked it was nothing compared to his castles in Hungary. He used to sit and smoke cigarettes out of a mouth-piece six inches long and tell us about his family. He told us that he was going to come into a whole lot of money when he married. He showed us a little miniature of his mother and another of a young countess his mother was trying to make him marry. That picture got Marg furious; she used to go and order a new hat and two or three new gowns after every time he showed it to her.

Well, at the pace we were going, I didn't see how we could last. It was all I could do to pay running expenses, and I had to work down town almost every night figuring on new deals to put us through. What with wages and tips and things at Wycherley

Court, I was at my wit's end. Marg said it didn't matter if she only married the count; because then we'd all have plenty of money. But all the same it worried me.

Of course Marg talked to folks about her count, and naturally all our friends got pretty curious to see him. She gave several teas, but somehow he never managed to come to any of them. The first time he sent word he was ill, the second he had to go out of town, the third time he promised to come but didn't—and so it went. Her girl friends began to laugh at her, and then they got nasty. They said she was awfully stingy with her old count, probably afraid that some of them would catch him. Some of them even said they didn't believe she had any count at all. I was kept busy explaining about him, and apologizing and everything. Marg felt dreadfully upset about it.

Well, one night she came into my room half crying and half laughing, and said that the count had proposed to her and she was going to marry him and be a countess and wear a coronet and live in a ruined castle just like in a story book. Of course, then, I knew I was in for it. Her picture would be in the Sunday papers, and perhaps mine, and there'd be

reporters and all sorts of things. It made me groan to think of it. Marg just loved it.

She decided that she'd have to give a big reception to announce the engagement and introduce the count. That would stop all gossip, and people would see that we were just as good as the Vanderbilts and Goulds and Astors, and wasn't I proud of my little sister? Well, I was proud enough of her, but I shuddered when I thought of the expense and the publicity and the style we'd have to put on. I only hoped that after it was all over, I could get a big sunny room somewhere near Forty-second Street, and wear my bath-robe and slippers every evening I didn't go to a show.

So I went in for it. I sold my mother's pearls and got an automobile because the count said trolley cars and subways were vulgar. I mortgaged a little farm in Connecticut that had belonged to the family for a hundred years and Marg hired a footman and a lady's maid and a valet for me. I used to send him on errands all the time to get rid of him, but her maid worked hard. The count began to call me Stillwell and said Americans weren't so bad after you knew them well. He also began to talk about my investing in Hungarian mines, and I con-

sidered it favorably until Aunt Jane's will was filed for probate. Marg and I were left two hundred and fifty dollars apiece, which I spent for garage expenses, and a portrait of her third husband, which Marg insisted on hanging up in the dining-room. It was our ancestral portrait. The count said he had 'em by dozens in his castles

We set to-day for the reception, and the count promised on his honor he'd be there on time to meet all our friends. We invited about three hundred people, but all the week folks have been telephoning to Marg to ask couldn't they bring a friend or two, so that this afternoon, to be on the safe side, I telephoned the caterer to provide for seven hundred guests. Marg insisted on my hiring an empty suite below us for dancing, and got an orchestra and a whole lot of gilt chairs. I figured it out to-day that I was about \$37,000 in a hole up to date. The count had come high, but Marg had to have him, and so long as she was happy and I could keep out of jail I didn't care. Knowing that it was a love match, and the count wasn't after Marg's money, it didn't matter. I could stand it.

That's the way it stood this morning, when I went

down town to my grind. Florists all over the house, men nailing down canvas on the floors, footmen in everybody's way, a lot of extra maids and servants fussing about, and the caterers stewing things in the kitchen. I was glad to clear out and get down to my office where I could be quiet. Worked like a Chinaman all day, and tried to forget we were marrying into the nobility.

I was so nervous and excited, though, that I couldn't stand eating lunch in a restaurant where I would be likely to meet any of my friends, so I dropped into one of those little cheap quick lunch ham-and-egg places under the Brooklyn Bridge. I ordered some weak tea and milk toast, and was trying to read the paper when I heard a voice that simply paralyzed me. It was behind a flimsy wooden partition—in the kitchen—and it was yelling "draw one!" or something like that. Perhaps it was "ham and over!"

Then a waiter in a dirty duck suit came out of the doorway, with about sixteen dishes balanced along his arm, and an apron on. It was the Count Capricorni. Yes, that's right! That miserable waiter was the man that about eighteen servants and

six hundred guests were preparing for up at Wycherley Court. And I had spent something like \$37,000 so that he wouldn't be ashamed of Marguerite!

Morgan stopped and smiled sadly. "I don't think he saw me at all. He turned to put some things on a table, and I bolted without waiting for my lunch. You see how I'm fixed, don't you? I thought that if he did show up to-night, so that we would get the reception over with, I could get rid of him to-morrow, forever. But he didn't appear."

Fenton shook his head. "No," he answered, "and I don't think you'll ever see him again. I guess he's done for, poor fellow."

Morgan construed the remark according to his own lights, probably thinking that the count had suspected that his real identity had been discovered. Fenton did not explain; he dared not say that he was virtually sure that the bogus Count Capricorni lay dead in an office on the thirteenth story of the St. Paul building. He wanted to forget what he had seen—at least until he had performed his duty. The reverie it threw him into was broken by Morgan.

"You see what I was up against."

"Must have been embarrassing," said Fenton.

“Embarrassing? Well, I guess! When eleven o’clock came, and he hadn’t come, I told Marg all about it, and she near went crazy. ‘What are we going to *do*?’ she said—as if I knew! There we were again without the guest of honor. Hamlet, with the prince left out. The place was beginning to fill up and everybody was asking questions.”

“Well, what *did* you do?” said Fenton, beginning to be amused.

“Marg was splendid; she took right hold of it. She told me that I’d simply *got* to get somebody to impersonate the count, or she would be disgraced forever, and meanwhile she’d tell everybody that the count had been delayed in Washington, and would arrive at midnight. That would give me an hour to work it out. I confess I was frightened to death. I didn’t like to deceive people, but what else could I do? Marg would be insane if I didn’t save her reputation.

“Well, the only person I could think of was Harold Ringrose, a college mate of mine. We often played bezique together. He’s a manufacturing chemist, down on Vesey Street. I rung up his house, but they said he was down town. I tried his office; no answer. There was nothing for me to do but go

down there and find him, and try to get him to play the part. I thought I could play the old friendship and family honor strong enough to induce him. He knows hardly anybody, and no one would ever suspect him. So I drove down there. There was a light in the sixth story window, but I couldn't get any answer to the bell; and after I'd shouted as loud as I dared, a policeman told me to move on. So I drove back, not knowing what to do, till I met you."

Morgan suddenly turned and grasped Fenton's arm with both his hands. "Do this for me, for Heaven's sake," he exclaimed, and weakly burst into tears. "God knows I never wanted all this fluff and feathers," he sobbed. "I'm a simple man with simple ways. I don't like fashion and footmen and things—I want to be let alone—only, Marguer—ite!"

"Oh, brace up, old man," Fenton cried heartily. "I'll save your face for you. Depend on me. It'll be a good joke on all these snobs. Is everything ready?"

"Yes. Here, we're almost home, now. *Home!* God, I wish I'd never seen Wycherley Court."



## X

### WYCHERLEY COURT

IN WHICH JOHN FENTON ASSISTS AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION IN HIGH LIFE, WEARS EVENING DRESS FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND AGAIN SEES BELLE CHARMION

**T**HEY had been going up Riverside Drive, and, as Morgan spoke, they approached a tall marble apartment house from which an awning stretched, across the sidewalk, to the curb. Here a line of carriages and automobiles were in line waiting to discharge their passengers.

Morgan leaned forward and tapped his chauffeur on the shoulder. "Round to the side entrance!" he commanded.

Here he and Fenton got out, and made their way rapidly in, and along a corridor to the back stairs. They climbed ten stories and arrived panting at the back door of the Morgan apartment, were let in by a staring servant, and conducted rapidly along the hall. As they passed, Fenton heard the continuous

sound of gabble—the intermingled talk and laughter of many guests, inarticulate, confused, an unsteady murmur of voices. It sounded to him as if it might come from some monstrous, horrid beast with innumerable mouths. Servants of all kinds skeltered past him as he made his way—waiters loaded with dishes, maids with ladies' wraps, men servants, gossiping, loafing, gaping. A high, clear laugh rose over all this subdued tumult.

“Marg's holding the fort!” said Morgan, admiringly, and led the way in to his own chamber. “Now, for heaven's sake, hurry!” he exclaimed.

Fenton had but time to see a wide white bed laid out with a complete outfit, evening dress clothes, shirt, tie—when two man-servants fell upon him and tore off his coat, vest and trousers with the fury of maniacs. As they held the dress trousers for him, a young lady put her head through the door, excitedly.

“Has he come?” she cried. And then, “Oh, there you are! Thank goodness!”

Fenton took a leap into the black trousers and turned his back just as she burst into the room.

“Is he ready?” she cried, eagerly. “For heaven's sake hurry, you idiots! I can't wait a minute longer.



“For heaven’s sake, hurry!”

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Stillwell, put on his shoes, quick! Here, you crazy loon, you've got that collar upside down! For heaven's sake, let me do it, if you're all half-witted!" And Fenton found himself suddenly confronted by a tall, pretty, blue-eyed girl with flushed cheeks, all in white, with three ostrich feathers nodding in her hair.

"Hold 'your head still!" she commanded. "I can't do anything if you move that way! Here, you, put his gloves on *quick!*" A man attacked each hand. Stillwell Morgan still fussed at the bows of Fenton's shoes. Marguerite Maganel Morgan, in white gloves, with orchids on her breast, her flushed face within an inch of his, worked over Fenton like a window dresser with a wax figure. Her sweet breath was in his face, her curls brushed his cheeks as she patted and pulled at his tie. He saw her pretty mouth working with nervousness. Then she stepped back and looked at him.

"Mercy!" she shrieked, "this isn't Mr. Ringrose! Who is it?" She stared at him with big eyes, and turned scarlet.

"I believe I have the honor of being Count Capricorni," said Fenton, bowing low.

A maid tapped at the door, and entered half way.

"Mrs. Grahamson-Davis wants to see you, Miss Morgan," she said. "She has to go home. Says she can't wait any longer."

Miss Morgan grabbed Fenton by one arm. "Come!" she commanded, savagely, "I don't care who you are—you'll do! If I can only satisfy that old Mrs. Grahamson-Davis, I'm safe!" and she dragged him out of the room into the hall. Here he asserted himself, offered his other arm, tossed his head erect, and stepped off with her. If he were to play a part he decided it would be that of a man, not a puppet. Miss Morgan looked up at him with admiration.

"It was awfully good of you to come!" she breathed.

"It's about time for something like that to be said," he replied, haughtily. "You treat me right, or I'll spoil the show."

"Oh, I'll do anything—anything!" she exclaimed, then, dropping her voice she added, "I wish you *were* the Count Capricorni!"

With this exquisite compliment pleasantly ringing in his ears, he navigated his way through staring, whispering groups of guests and entered the reception room. A buzz of comments greeted them.

Everybody stared; they were immediately surrounded, innumerable introductions began.

Fenton, for the first time in his life in evening dress, with a foolish wild longing that Belle Charmion might see him, played his part like a veteran. As one eager, curious person after another was presented, he bowed, shook hands, uttered a pleasantry, laughed and gestured and shrugged his shoulders as if he had been the petted hero of society all his life.

Of all the remarkable situations he had found himself in that mad night, this was perhaps the most dangerous. The very peril of it, however, inspired him. The gayety of the scene went to his head like a cocktail; his mind worked like an exquisitely adjusted high-speed machine. The crowd, elaborately dressed, wove about him, smiling, pretty women and attentive men, the lights of electroliers and cut glass and precious stones flashed in his eyes, the perfume of *frangipanni* and *peau d'Espagne* mingled with the wafted odors, from the dining room, of oysters and terrapin. The clink of glasses tinkled with laughter-laden voices. The music of an orchestra sobbed and swelled, with the voices of heart-broken strings and twittered with love-lorn wood instruments.

It all stimulated his imagination to the boiling point. He talked as he had never talked before—of things he knew nothing of, things he didn't believe, things as far outside of his life as Chimborazo or Cambodia. It was the more easy when he perceived that nobody listened—every one was hysterical, hypnotized, eager to add his or her nonsense to the general babel. He talked wildly of bridge and golf, of plays he had never seen, of countries he had never visited. But he might as well have said anything—that he was dead and buried—that he had forgotten to wear a shirt, that his mother had whiskers. No one would have noticed. He gossiped of kings and princesses, he mentioned at least seven new wonders of the world. The ladies giggled, the men said "Really!" and no one knew but that he had been speaking commonplaces.

"You're doing fine—fine!" Miss Morgan whispered to him at the first respite. "I'm proud of you!" She looked up under her lashes coquettishly, "What a pity we're not *really* engaged! The poor Count!"

At that there came to him, suddenly, a flash of remembrance of the adventurer, dead in the St. Paul building. The memory swept like a chill wind



over his soul—and awakened him to his almost forgotten duty. The jewels! He had forgotten all about them. At this minute he should be speeding up-town to Harlem, to keep his promise. What right had he here, in this absurd disguise! The charm of the adventure had gone to his head. Now he must be about his business without delay.

Just as he was casting about for a pretext to go, his ears caught the sound of a name—"Miss Belle Charmion," and he turned, shocked and trembling, to see before him the girl of his dreams. There she was, olive skin and soft hazel eyes, whimsical mouth—the pretty, slender girl he had already seen twice that evening. She was staring at him, and her brows were knitted.

"Haven't we—met before?" she asked, hesitatingly, as she held out her hand.

What could he say? Surely he could not disclaim her acquaintance, neither could he stultify his hostess. For a moment everything seemed to go black in front of him, then that very feeling suggested an excuse for not answering. He put his hand to his heart and dropped upon a chair.

"I feel faint!" he murmured. "Will you pardon me, Miss Morgan, if I—"

"You'd better go into Still's room for a moment," she suggested. She beckoned to her brother, who came crowding up. "Take him out, he's fainting!" she commanded. "This crush is too much for him—you know he hasn't recovered from that attack of yesterday, yet."

Fenton staggered out on Morgan's arm, and, as the crowd made way for him, he saw Miss Charmion's eyes still upon him, with a puzzled, questioning expression. He felt base and mean.

"I must get out of here right away!" he exclaimed, as soon as they were alone in Morgan's chamber. "I've spent too much time already—I've neglected a terribly important errand."

"You've saved my life, old man," said Stillwell Morgan, effusively. "I don't know what we ever would have done. You've made an awful hit. People are crazy about you! Why, Marguerite says—"

"Damn Marguerite! Where's that bag I brought?" Fenton looked eagerly about the room.

"I don't know who you are, but I'd be glad to have you consider me your friend, and if I can do—"

"Find that bag!" Fenton exclaimed excitedly. "Lord, man, if you knew what was in it—" He groped under the bed.

"Why, isn't it here? Say, I'll call one of the men." Morgan went to the door.

"If that isn't found I'm ruined!" cried Fenton. "Haven't you any detectives here?"

Morgan's valet came running up. "A bag, sir? What kind of a bag?"

"A soft bag—gray ooze-leather! Hurry—find it right away. What did you do with it? By heavens, I'll send for the police!"

"Perhaps it was taken into the ladies' room, sir; I'll see!"

While he left to inquire, Fenton fumed. Morgan fussed about, anxious and embarrassed. "Was it really valuable?" he asked, weakly.

Fenton did not answer, but opened drawers, looked in closets, overturned piles of overcoats, looked in hats, in frantic haste. Every instant he grew more excited. At last, as he stood, flushed and tumbled, trying to think what to do—whether to call for the police, ask that everyone be searched, or appeal to Miss Morgan—the valet returned with the lost bag. Fenton grabbed it from him, and tremblingly looked inside. A blaze of color flashed up from its dark interior.

"Miss Charmion had it, sir," the valet explained.

"They thought, of course, it belonged to one of the ladies, and she was there getting ready to go home."

"Did she look into it?" Fenton demanded with anxiety.

"Oh, no sir, she just took it, looked at it, and said it wasn't hers. She was too worried to pay much attention. Some one had just telephoned to her, and she was rather upset over it, sir."

Fenton heaved a sigh of relief, and turned to Morgan. "Is your automobile ready?" he asked.

The valet interposed. "Ready at the door, sir."

"I've got to get away in a hurry, then."

Morgan laid a hand on his arm. "If you don't wish to wait to change your clothes, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Fenton. John Fenton."

"Mr. Fenton, you can send back the suit you have on when you find it convenient. It's no importance, really, and I'll give you a silk hat and an overcoat—"

Even in the whirl of his excited haste, even with the memory of the dead man always in the back of his mind, even with the responsibility of the jewels keeping him in a fever of unrest, even with the thrill of Belle Charmion's near presence disturbing him, the offer tingled a pleasant fancy. He had

never worn a silk hat in his life—how he had longed to!—now, in evening clothes, it would be a satisfaction to go forth, robed as a gentleman, clad, *cap-à-pie* in formal garb! He grinned, blushing, accepted the hat, and gazed at it. He smoothed the nap against his sleeve. Perhaps he might catch a glimpse of Belle Charmion again—but no, how disappointing! He had, of course, to exit by way of the servants' staircase. It was too bad.

In two minutes he had slipped out and was running down-stairs with Morgan's valet. The motor car was not at the side entrance; they went round to the front of the building in search of it. They found it, drawn up in the line of waiting vehicles, and Fenton was just about to enter when, turning, he saw Belle Charmion coming out under the awning. He paused in surprise; she looked eagerly to right and left. Catching sight of him, she smiled faintly, and walked rapidly up.

"Could you take me up-town?" she asked. "I've ordered a taxicab, but it hasn't come, and I'm in a great hurry. I've had an important message—a relative is dangerously ill—I must get up there immediately. I'm awfully worried about it!"

"Why, I shall be delighted!" said Fenton. He

was trembling in every limb. The idea of being alone with her at last sent him into a fever of excitement. He turned to lead the way. "Right over here," he said.

As he turned suddenly the bag he was holding in one hand struck sharply against one of the iron stanchions of the awning. It fell to the sidewalk. He looked down; to his horror some half dozen pieces of jewelry had fallen out—a ring or two, a brooch, a bracelet, and, half in, half out, a confused pile of precious stones, sparkling under the light. He looked up to see Miss Charmion staring pale-faced at the revelation. The next minute a uniformed porter ran up to her and touched his cap.

"Your taxi, Miss Charmion," he said, and, bowing, pointed the way to where a green car waited at the curb.

Fenton was too embarrassed to speak. He stood foolishly staring as she looked at him coldly, and said: "Then I shall not need to impose on you, Count. But thank you just the same." And, drawing herself up, she walked proudly to the taxicab, turned and gazed at him, then got in and drove away.

Not till her car skived the corner and disappeared did Fenton take his eyes from her. Then, with a sigh, he stooped, scraped the jewels into the bag as the porter stared, and walked to the Morgan's touring car.

"Where shall I drive, sir?" the chauffeur inquired.

It was some moments before Fenton could collect his senses enough to recall the address the octo-roon had given him. Where was it? The stirring events of the night had all but obliterated her words. Somewhere in Harlem. . . . Oh, yes, The Norcross, 505, no, 555 West One Hundred and Forty-sixth Street. That was it. He gave the address, got into the car beside Karl, the chauffeur, and they whirled away.

He crammed his silk hat down hard over his ears and leaned back in the car to enjoy the ride. The brisk, mild wind ran merrily past him. The winking lights on the Jersey shore flashed brightly across the Hudson. His brain cleared. Surely he had much to think of; much had happened since he left his Harlem home a careless, thoughtless boy. But there was only one thing he could think of now—he put all other things aside, and revelled in his

dream. He thought of nothing but Belle Charmion. He wanted no one but Belle Charmion. Belle Charmion, in low cut, pale blue voile, Belle Charmion of the olive skin and whimsical smile—who was Belle Charmion? What fate had led him continually in crossing and recrossing paths towards Belle Charmion? Did she know, or care, what destiny allied them in this mysterious way—John Fenton and Belle Charmion? He loved Belle Charmion; could Belle Charmion love him? When would they meet in peace, in joy? When would they talk and tell what he so longed to hear, he and Belle Charmion? Oh, the smooth, soft contour of her cheek, the exquisite gesture of her hand! So he dreamed, fancy-free in joyous abandon of Belle Charmion! Belle Charmion! Belle Charmion!

“Say, this is one great night, ain’t it?”

Fenton came down with a thud from the clouds of romance to the chauffeur’s commonplace. He gave the remark a mumbling reply: “Fine!”

“Yes; ‘it’s the wrong kind of a night to go home in,’ as Ruby Diamond used to say.”

“‘Diamond?’” Fenton queried, remembering the phenomenal blonde of the Caxton, “do you happen to know Miss Diamond? That’s queer.”



The chauffeur laughed. "Know her? I drove the front cab with her and young Framingham when they busted up the Yale funeral!"

"D'you know a girl she runs with named Millie something—a little black-eyed devil?"

"Millie St. Valentine? Well, I guess yes! She's the one that drove the hearse with John Adams Quincy, 3d."

"The hearse! What the deuce *was* the Yale funeral, anyway? Say, I guess you'd better tell me about it—if it isn't too long a story."

The chauffeur chuckled to himself. "It was lucky for Quincy it wasn't a longer story," he said. "It was short, but it certainly was lively. I'll tell you about it." And, as he gave the steering wheel a sharp turn and turned the car into Ninety-fourth Street, he began:

#### THE GREAT YALE FUNERAL

Why, this was Thanksgiving Day—a year ago—you remember the football game when Harvard trimmed Yale for the first time in nine years? Six to four the score was, and every Cambridge man in New Haven went crazy. I wasn't there, but I

hear it was like a matinee in an ancient Roman amphitheater. After the preliminary orgies the Harvard rioters went to Boston to celebrate. The pride and chivalry of Yale was due in New York to drown their sorrows in a theater party at the "Marrying Mary" show.

Well, there was one Harvard rooter who was so spifflicated by the triumph that he couldn't box the compass any more. That was John Adams Quincy 3d. He was genially kidnapped by some of the speedy Sons of Eli with no hard feelings, and the first thing he knew they had him in the Yale train pulling out for New York. When he began to look out the window for New London he suspected that something was wrong, but it was too late to do anything by that time. He would have to miss the crimson fire and the gilding of John Harvard and the Cambridge police after all. The Yale men gave him the "ha-ha" and told him little old New York would have to do. So he made the best of it and went, reminding them of the score and the snake-dance every time he opened a bottle, which was plenty often.

He was a thoroughbred, that Quincy 3d. He was a spender, and he had money to spend. He

was fairly poisonous with greenbacks. Old man Quincy was a triple-dyed billionaire, in the first place; and in the second, young Quincy had backed the Harvard eleven for about \$5,000 at 2 to 5. He had something like \$16,000 in his pants when he got off the train at the Grand Central Station. By that time almost every Yale man in his car was down and out, but John Adams Quincy 3d was walking on the atmosphere, shedding \$10 bills at the slightest provocation.

I was running a taxicab then, and of course I never knew anything about his start till afterwards when Millie told me all about it. My first sight of the fun come when I was standing in front of the Abbots', on Forty-fifth street, waiting for a fare, and young Quincy blew round the corner from "Jack's."

Now I wouldn't want to say Quincy was soused, exactly. That's an ugly word for a gent like him. But you might say he was—well—glorified, like. Exhilarated—transmogrified—I don't know what you'd call it. I never had \$15,000 between me and working-for-a-living, and I ain't sure how it feels—but Quincy was happy, there was no doubt about that. His hat was dented in and his collar was

marked all over "6 to 4," and he was singing his Harvard lay to the tune of "Three Blind Mice."

"Yale is dead, Yale is dead, Yale is dead,  
Eli said, Eli said, Eli said,  
'They might grow crimson, but we'd grow blue!  
They gobbled our money at five to two;  
We let them have it, then WHAT DID WE DO?  
Yale is dead!"

You know the Abbots'? It's mostly a press agents' club—theatrical men, anyway. Well, Johnny Hobbs of the Hippodrome was just coming out the door with Nat Goodwin and a bunch of actors. Quincy recognized the big chap, so he come up and slapped him on the back and said:

"Hello, Nat; how are you?"

Goodwin beamed. "Why, I'm a hygienic dream!" he said.

"Yale's dead!" says Quincy.

"Then you ought to give her a first-class funeral," says Nat Goodwin. He took Quincy's arm and spoke confidentially. "None of these cloth-covered pine boxes with two hacks at \$85—you ought to have at least twenty-seven carriages and a band!"

"By the jumping John Harvard, I will!" says

Quincy. "But not twenty-seven hacks—twenty-seven hearses—and then some!"

Nat walked away with his bunch, laughing; Quincy stood thinking it out. Johnny Hobbs looked him over thoughtfully.

"D'you mean it?" he asked. "If you do, I got an idea."

"Do I *mean* it! Ain't I alone in a great city after the first time we've busted into Yale in nine years? I'm certainly going to celebrate if it costs me my inheritance!" And Quincy pulls a roll of yellow-backs out of his hip pocket and shows enough money to make Johnny Hobbs fairly sick to his stomach.

"You come right in here," says Johnny. "I'll fix you, for fair! Wait till I get to the telephone and I'll have all the dead wagons in New York here in half an hour. You won't have to celebrate alone neither. I'll present you to the smashingest little brunette in town, and if she don't drive that Yale hearse for you, she'll never get another engagement on the stage while *I'm* alive!"

With that he pulls Quincy into the Abbots'. My fare come out just then, and I clocked him to the Astor Hotel.

Well, just as I was pocketing my tip, this young Framingham chap come by, with a bunch of men with Yale flags, all as sizzly as sky-rockets.

Ever heard of Montrose Framingham? Why, old President Framingham's son, you know; the N. Y. & Penn. R. R. man—the man they used to call "Gold Socks" Framingham after he cornered that western timber pool. The old man had money enough to wrap up the Metropolitan tower in and tie it with a gold string; and he never was stingy with Montrose. It was him give Yale that big Ancient History building in his freshman year. That's why he never got fired, although he certainly was some lively round about New Haven.

Well, as I was saying, young Framingham come up to me (I'd driven him all over town—once I took him to Richmond, Va., in my cab on a bet), and he says—

"Hello, Squash" (the fellows call me that because I like squash pie with a layer of red pepper on top of it)—"What the name of Eli are you driving a red taxi for? I thought you was a good Yale man."

"I hear Yale's dead!" says I, grinning.

"You yellow-eyed clockwork crook," he says,

“for two cents I’d drown you in cylinder oil! Who told you that?”

“I got it from John Adams Quincy 3d,” I says “and what’s more, he’s going to give Eli a funeral in New York right away to-night!”

“Is that right?” he says; “Honest?”

I told him what I’d heard in front of the Abbots’ and he called after his gang to come back and hear. When I gave them the tale they yelled like Comanches.

“Get into here,” says Framingham, and he gets up side of me and the rest pile into the back, and I took ’em round to the front of the Astor.

There Framingham got out and ran up to the cab starter.

“Order all the taxicabs you can get!” he says.

The starter was staggered. “What d’you mean, sir?” he says. “How many do you need?”

“Anything up to a hundred—and have ’em here in half an hour round the corner!” says Framingham.

Then he comes up to me and asks me who is the press agent for the Metropolis Theater. I told him it was Abey Moonstone, and we started to look him up.

"What are you going to do?" I asked Framingham.

"I'm going to bust up that funeral," he says, "if it costs me my degree!" And I knew he meant it.

Well, it didn't take us long to find Abey at the Knickerbocker bar, and it didn't take Abey long to see what they was in it for him and the Metropolis Theater. He hurried out and rung up Ruby Diamond, his first prize show girl, and by the time we got round to the Woodstock Hotel, where she lived, she was ready for us in a pale blue slippery skin-tight dress and a millionaire hat. The rest was jewelry and ermine. Say, you've seen Ruby Diamond—no man can look on her and live! She's the ultimate peach! Abey introduced the two principals of the anti-funeral crusade and we proceeded to get out and look for a band.

Well, there wasn't a blessed band we could get—Quincy had caught the only one for sale, coming home from a Schützenverein hullabaloo, and we was up against it good.

"Say," says Ruby, "what's the matter with a Salvation Army band? They make a whole lot of noise, and they wear blue."

"You can't get 'em," I says.



"I'll endow a hospital!" says Framingham. "I'll give 'em a million new uniforms—I'll put up for the Christmas dinner for all the bums east of the Alleghenies! You drive down to the headquarters and I'll fix the commander-in-chief if I have to deposit my gold-bearing bonds! I'm going to have a female band in blue, or I'll eat it! 'Rah for Yale!"

So we clocks down to see the general. I never heard what it cost young Framingham. They must have taxed him something savage, but he got three bands. They was on their way to the big Thanksgiving Day free feed, and was ordered to meet us at the Flatiron Building.

When we got back to the Astor we found a procession of taxicabs about three-quarters of a mile long, waiting. There was red, green, yellow and black cars, and a Yale man in each. Moreover, about every one of 'em had a chorus girl out of the Metropolis—"The Curly Girlies" was running then—and the crowd was beginning to gather some plenty—the traffic cops was near crazy.

I took the head of the line and led the string down Eighth avenue and across Twenty-second to where the three bands was waiting—then we set

out looking for Quincy's funeral and trouble. Our scouts had come in and located a line of about thirty-three hearses forming on Second avenue and Thirty-fourth street. Anyone who had any sense could be sure that that procession would head straight for Times Square. John Adams Quincy 3d was no yap, and we were sure he'd calculate to hit the middle of New York City good and hard—before he got pulled. So Montrose Framingham give the word to steer up Broadway. The Salvation lassies struck up

“Are you washed,  
Are you washed,  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”

and off we went.

There was some good yelling when we struck the Great White Way, and you needn't think we didn't draw a crowd! It was about half past seven by this time and the Tenderloin was beginning to get busy. At Thirty-fourth street we formed in line two abreast, and the cornets switched to “Onward, Christian Soldiers!” It was going fine. The cops couldn't stop the Salvation Army because they had

permits—and as for the taxis—ain't they got a right to the street?

It was smooth sailing till we got to Forty-second Street and we sighted the funeral. There it was, held up east of Broadway with the Schützen band playing the "Dead March" in Saul and a row of hearses as far as the eye could reach, and a crowd running up and growing bigger every minute.

And what d'you think? Driving every hearse was a Hippodrome chorus girl in evening dress! Johnny Hobbs had certainly done it well. Abey Moonstone was wild.

Our fares give the Yale yell and it was answered by Harvard "Raahs!" from the Hippodrome girls—Quincy stood up and begun to sing "Yale is Dead!"—and then they got the traffic cop's whistle to cross Broadway.

On they come. It was so funny you wanted to cry. By this time they was a million people spilled around there—and some fool pulled the fire alarm just to help it along.

Now, whether the traffic cop at the corner got rattled and really did blow his "come on" whistle, or whether it was a riot-call or something, I never

knew. The cop denied it. Anyway we all heard a whistle, and young Framingham yells to me:

“By the seven pink Salamanders of Shiraz, Squash, go at 'em! If you'll bust that Harvard guy's hearse I'll give you a hundred dollars and go bail!”

I turned back and waved to the line—“Come on!” I says, and on we went. There was a yell from the mob you could have heard to the Flatiron, and I charged for Quincy. I caught his nigh hind wheel and busted it right to smithereens. Then a mounted cop galloped up and got me.

Well, it sure was funny! The hearse keeled over on the hubs and spilled out Quincy and Millie St. Valentine. They jumped just in time and landed on their feet. And in less than two minutes the place was so tangled up with hearses and taxicabs and Schützenvereins and Salvationists that you couldn't tell which was which. The crowd swarmed into the mess like flies and then come the fire engines—two steamers from each point of the compass, and after them the ladder trucks and the water tower and then two patrol wagons full of reserves. Then the police got busy.

Well, I was taken to the station about that time,

and so I missed it. But I got the story from Millie St. Valentine.

The minute John Adams Quincy 3d struck the ground he seemed to come to, and wake up to the fact that he'd got in bad.

"By Jupiter!" he says to Millie, "this is going to cost me about four million dollars!"

"Oh, it ain't so bad as all that!" says Millie. "It'll probably be only 'ten dollars or ten days.'"

"Don't you believe it!" says Quincy. "I know better. Why, I'm ruined. We've got to beat it!"

Millie said she thought he was a piker for fair, then; she didn't have any idea that he'd more'n just got cold feet. He took her hand and ducked through the crowd with her and rushed her into Rector's. Then she found out what he was worrying about.

It seems young Quincy had been in hot water before and his folks was sore. He'd been featured in the police news in Boston papers so often, in fact, that his old man had give it to him straight that if it ever happened again he'd disinherit him.

See how it was? Quincy had already kicked up a row that would make more talk on Broadway than anything that had happened since the Dewey parade. The morning's papers would be full of it

—he could just see the scare-heads “Young Millionaire Plays Ghastly Joke on the Rialto”—and all like that.

Millie kind of felt for him. Quincy was a nice boy and she liked him. So she said, “Well, the only thing to do is to fix the papers—but it’ll cost a lot!”

“I don’t care if it costs two hundred thousand,” says Quincy. “It’ll be cheap at the price. Will you come with me, O Queen?”

She said she would.

Well, if you know anything about city editors you can imagine what happened. The minute they see the girl it was all off, and the more money Quincy offered, the more stubborn they got. What! kill a story like that—son of a millionaire and the prettiest brunette in N. Y. C.? Not much. Look at the pictures! Look at the society slush they could throw in! Think of the “well-known clubman” stuff and the “strikingly beautiful brunette.” It was too good to keep back. Quincy was no sooner out of the office with his grouch than the city editor was telephoning to the police stations, ordering photographs and sending for his star reporter. That was the tale all over town. Quincy was perfectly sick.

Well, he took Millie home and she tried to jolly him up but it was no use. He figured that he was out three millions at least by his folly, and he left her reception-room talking a lot about suicide. Millie allows she was pretty badly scared.

Well, of course all this time Johnny Hobbs had been good and busy. He 'phoned in the story as a "friend of the paper" to every city editor, he sent about a thousand photographs of Millie down-town by messengers, and then he waylaid the "Ten O'Clock Club"—the theater details from the papers. He tipped them off with all sorts of fancy details he'd doped up, and then he went to bed happy; so did Abey Moonstone, who'd been on the same job with three stenographers.

Of course that was what saved Quincy—them press agents done it too well. Every city editor in town smelled a "plant" and give orders at midnight to "kill" the story.

So when John Adams Quincy 3d got up at five o'clock next morning at the Plaza and sent down for the papers, expecting to see his name in a three-column scare-head—he spent two hours going through them with a fine-tooth comb to find that the funniest thing that happened on Broadway within

the memory of man hadn't been so much as mentioned in a single paper! All the same it didn't save him his money. Millie married him three weeks afterward and got most of it after all.



## XI

### THE NORCROSS APARTMENTS

HOW JOHN FENTON HELPS OUT A CRIMINAL SCHEME,  
WITNESSES AN ARREST AND AN ESCAPE, WAITS  
IN A DESERTED FLAT AND GETS A NEW  
NAME.

**T**HE chauffeur had hardly finished his story before the car drew up to the curb in front of a brick apartment house on One Hundred and Seventy-fifth Street, and stopped. Fenton descended, felt in his pockets in vain for a tip, and bade the chauffeur an apologetic good-night. He went into the vestibule and looked along the row of letter-boxes for the name of "Flint," and pressed the electric button above. A muffled "hello" came, diminished and faint, through the speaking tube. He replied.

"What the devil is it?" the invisible speaker asked.

"I've got the jewels," Fenton shouted through the mouthpiece.

A spasmodic clicking of the electric latch came in answer. By its nervous rapidity Fenton could easily imagine that his information had caused some excitement. He pushed open the front door and ran up-stairs. The halls were dimly lighted, and he looked in vain for any indications of a greeting. Up to the second, up to the third floor, and then, looking higher, he heard a man's gruff voice calling stealthily, "One flight more!" Up Fenton went with his bag.

At the top a man, unrecognizable in the semi-darkness, seized his arm and hurried him toward a lighted hallway, spun him round and looked at him eagerly.

"Who are you, anyway?"

"My name doesn't matter," said Fenton. "I've got the stuff right here."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he ejaculated, and then he looked at Fenton again. "Where in the devil did you get 'em?"

Fenton had, by this time, learned discretion, and replied only by a question. "Is Flint here?"

The man stared; his expression changed, then he controlled himself. "Yes, I'm Flint," he said finally.

Fenton breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, then, I suppose it's all right. You'll take 'em right back to the Brewster house, I suppose? You'll lose no time?"

"Oh, that's all right, I'll get 'em back, the first thing in the morning."

Fenton handed him the bag somewhat reluctantly. There seemed to be nothing else to do, but it seemed a mild ending to his night of adventure. There was no doubt that it was Flint, by the octoroon's description. He grabbed the bag fiercely and looked inside, then snapped it shut. Fenton became uneasy.

"Then I can tell Miss—you know, the girl, that it's all right?" he said.

"Yes, it's all right, son." Flint held the bag behind his back. "They'll be in the safe by nine o'clock, before the coroner comes. But you'd better skip, now. There's no need of exciting suspicion. Go home and go to bed. You've done well." He crowded Fenton to the doorway nervously and stood guarding it.

Fenton turned hesitatingly. "I hope I can find her," he said. "She was awfully worried about this—but I've done all I can, I suppose."

"Good night!" said the man abruptly, and suddenly slammed the door. Fenton heard the lock click.

Then, for the first time, he grew actively suspicious. Flint was a tall, gaunt, grizzled creature, wrinkled and weatherbeaten, with deep-set gray eyes. As he turned for his final word, he showed a great, misshapen ear. The lower lobe was split half in two. Suddenly, as if spoken by an audible voice, came the fortune-teller's words—"beware of a man with a split ear!" Fenton's suspicions grew blacker. But he had done exactly what he had been asked to do—if there were any mistake it was surely not his. He turned slowly to the staircase, and walked down, thinking. Well, it was too late, now. Perhaps it was all right. Why should he worry? So thinking he went down-stairs and out to the street.

Should he go home? He smiled at his costume—his dress clothes and top hat seemed to demand another adventure. He felt abstractedly in his pockets for a cigarette, and noticed for the first time that again his pockets were absolutely empty. What a night! He yawned, and walked up One Hundred and Forty-sixth Street thinking of Belle Charmion.

Just as he turned the corner two men, walking rapidly, passed him. He caught but a momentary look, but that sight made him turn eagerly and gaze at them again. There was something familiar about both of them—by Jove! It was O'Shea and Elkhurst—or, as it appeared both had *aliases*, Nallery and Sproule. Neither had recognized him, fortunately. He stopped, in a trance of wonder. What did this encounter mean?

He could still see them walking rapidly toward the Norcross Apartments. As Fenton stood there, gaping at the sight, they turned up the steps and entered the building. Then, in a flash he began to suspect them. Of course both were after the jewels—and, if they were going up to the apartment, either they would attack Flint—or wait! Now he had it! Flint was probably a member of the same gang! It was as plain as a photograph, at last.

Evidently Flint had been notified of the capture of the gems. Well, no wonder he had been surprised when Fenton had handed them back to one of the gang itself! Fenton cursed himself for his stupidity.

But all this was surmise. He wanted to make sure, and hurried back to the entrance of the Nor-

cross Apartments, and found that, by some accident, the outer door had not latched. He crept up four flights, approached the door of Flint's apartment, put his ear to the keyhole and listened.

A hoarse burst of laughter greeted his ears. There was no doubt of it. Even now, no doubt, with blood on their hands, they were dividing the spoil.

What could he do? Nothing, it seemed; and yet he would not leave the place. He walked downstairs trying to think of some plan to retrieve his blunder. On the floor below he looked about, saw a door without a nameplate, tried it, and found it was unlocked. He opened it and walked in—there was no carpet on the floor. It was evident the flat was vacant.

He groped his way along the inner hall, a long, straight passage toward the rear; and emerged, finally, after bumping into several corners, into a small kitchen faintly illuminated by the moon. Through the windows he saw a fire-escape. He left his precious silk hat upon the washtubs, lifted the sash, crawled out, and cautiously ascended the iron ladder. The windows of the kitchen above, however, were dark, and they were fastened. There could be nothing done that way, and he returned.

Cruising about on a little voyage of discovery, he found a candle end and a few matches on the kitchen shelf. He struck a light and sat down on the top of the tubs to think. He had not waited long before he heard footsteps on the floor above; then there was a rattle in the shaft, and he heard the dumb waiter descending.

Holding his lighted candle in one hand, Fenton opened the sheet-iron door and saw the rope running. He held the candle nearer and looked up. The dumb waiter was now visible, slowly descending. He watched it, with his heart in his mouth. It came to the level of his eyes, and he saw that both shelves were empty. The next moment he was surprised to see two feet, patent leathered, shining in the candle-light, standing on top of the apparatus. Slowly the waiter moved down, creaking. Pantaloon appeared, a coat, then hands carefully working at the rope. Another minute and the lower half of the body had disappeared in the hole and he was confronted by the astonished eyes of Elkhurst, *alias* Sproule. The little car stopped. Sproule looked as queer as an actor in a Punch and Judy show,—like some curious Jack-in-the-pulpit, though too amazed, too fearful, apparently, to speak. Fenton

stood with the lighted candle dripping grease upon his evening coat, with his tall hat rakishly ajar upon his head. The moment was dramatic; there was an instant of fine sustained suspense, and then the gentleman who had seen the more of the world spoke.

“By Jove! it’s the chap I gave that tweed suit to! For Heaven’s sake help me out, and be quick about it.”

There was indeed need of haste, for above were now heard cries of rage and anger, hurrying footsteps, and finally a bang at the door of the shaft in the kitchen overhead. Sproule made a quick dive from his perch and landed in Fenton’s arms. This extinguished the little light.

The cries, meanwhile, had increased in vigor, and some one began violently pulling up the dumb waiter. Sproule landed with stocking feet upon the kitchen floor. He released himself from Fenton’s arms, then silently shut the door of the shaft. There was a riot overhead.

“Wait till I lock the front door! Are the windows bolted? Fasten them and we’ll wait in the passage-way. Is there a key to this confounded door? Yes, all right. Now then, come on, quick!”



Fenton fastened the kitchen windows and joined Sproule in the hallway. The kitchen door was locked, then Sproule went to the door to the stairway and saw that it was also fastened. The clamor up-stairs had ceased, or at least it could not be heard from where they stood. But, in another moment they heard men rushing up the stairs, a pounding at the hall door above, then a smash as it was broken in.

"What's that?" Fenton asked, anxiously.

"By Jove, I believe they're pulled!" said Sproule. "I got out just in time."

"The police?" Fenton inquired breathlessly.

"There has been a plain-clothes man following me all the evening. I thought we had thrown him off the scent at the Knickerbocker, before we came up here. But he must be up there with the cops. Wait till they come down."

They waited for ten minutes without speaking, listening to the excitement up-stairs, and finally the clumping of footsteps was heard on the stairs as a half-dozen men came down. As soon as they had passed Sproule opened the door a crack and looked out, then, seeing that they were almost down the next flight, ran to the banisters and

looked over. Fenton joined him, and saw the last of the group go round the corner. It was the man in the shepherd's-plaid suit whom he had already seen that evening, at Scheffel Hall, at the Plaza, and at the St. Paul building entrance.

"Jove, that was a narrow squeak—if they don't search the house! Let's come into the front room and look." He led the way to a small front parlor, and up to the window, where they saw a patrol wagon standing. O'Shea and Flint were being helped in, and the man in the shepherd's-plaid suit was talking to a policeman on the sidewalk. As Fenton watched, these two also got into the wagon—and it drove off.

"He's been watching me for a week, trying to locate the rest of the gang," said Sproule in a low voice. By Jove, if I could only get out of here—they wouldn't see me in New York for one while! Say, boy," he took Fenton by the arm, "it may be hard for you to believe that I'm straight, but I can prove it. O'Shea knows it by this time, but luckily he daren't revenge himself on me for trying to queer this job with the Brewster jewels. For a week I've been trying to give him the double cross."

Fenton drew back suspiciously, but, despite the

evidence against the man, his manner had candor. It was hard to believe **him** a murderer, yet it was hard, too, to believe his last assertion. "A week!—I don't see how that can be," he said. "Why, the jewels were stolen only yesterday!"

"Yes, but they might have gone at any minute. Flint and O'Shea have been planning to blow that safe at the Brewster house for a long while. Before they had things ready, Brewster got away with the stuff himself. As he left the safe door partly open, of course Flint discovered it, and when that girl brought home Brewster's body he suspected where the jewels must be. He was sure when she 'phoned him about them, and promised to bring them up to-night. But O'Shea was suspicious of her—he judged every one by himself—they were too valuable to trust to her care, at any rate. So he watched her. She acted so queerly that I doubted her honesty myself, and was soon convinced that she was trying to get away with the stuff.

"Well, we shadowed her to the fortune-teller's house, and saw you go into the same place. After the raid you came out of another house, so I followed you, leaving O'Shea to chase the girl.

When we found you two together at Scheffel Hall we were sure that you had fixed up some game; in fact, we could see easily enough by the look of you—you were pretty scared—that you had the jewels. So we didn't take any chances; O'Shea and Phillipsborn went after you. I was half a block behind, watching for the police, when they got you."

"Phillipsborn?" Fenton queried.

"Why, yes. He was a waiter O'Shea had known for some time. Queer chap, and clever, too. He had just about pulled off a queer game with a young chap named Morgan. He made up to Miss Morgan, posing as a foreign count, and got engaged to her. He was after a batch of pearls they had. O'Shea got him to help us follow the girl we suspected this evening, and as soon as that was finished, Phillipsborn was going back to the Morgans as Count Capricorni and close up that job."

"But he's dead!" said Fenton. "He must be the man I saw on the floor of Nallery's office in the St. Paul building!" He drew away from Sproule with renewed suspicion.

"That's right," said Sproule soberly. "And it was a pretty bad piece of business, too. Do you wonder I'm anxious to get away? But it was

O'Shea that murdered him, and O'Shea will go to the chair for it, safe enough. You see, as soon as we had the jewels, I took a couple of stones and pawned them for ready money—as we were terribly short of cash—arranging to meet them and Flint at the Bartholdi to divide up the loot. Flint was to wait up at the Norcross, here, in case we missed you. Well, after I got up to the Plaza for my grip, so as to be all ready to leave town, O'Shea telephoned me that he was afraid that he was followed, and asked me to meet him in the St. Paul building, where he had his fake office, as Nallery & Co. I went down there, hoping to get some chance to get away with the stuff myself; at any rate, I was determined that this would be my last job with O'Shea. Phillipsborn stood out for a full quarter, as his share, but O'Shea wouldn't have it. Phillipsborn pulled a gun—and then O'Shea went at him with a dirk, like a butcher. Phillipsborn went down with O'Shea's knife between his ribs. It was horrible; he was gasping and bleeding on the rug when O'Shea and I were terrified by a knock at the office door."

"It was I," said Fenton breathlessly.

"Well, we had to decide everything in a few seconds. We hadn't money enough to get away with;

the only thing to do was to get up to Flint's and get him to give us some. I couldn't escape from O'Shea, anyway. He was frightened white, and he clung like a leech. I knew that there was a detective after me; he had followed me from Scheffel Hall to the Plaza, and was probably in the St. Paul building. But I had to take a chance that he wouldn't arrest me till I had led him to the rest of the gang he was after. He was running down a New Haven burglary, I was sure—something we had pulled off a few days before. I could only hope that we could get up to Flint's, where I could get away from O'Shea before the place was pulled.

Well, I saw that plain-clothes man out of the tail of my eye as we left, and we led him a chase, dodging up one street and down another, in and out of saloons, into hotels, even into one theater. He kept on our trail like grim death for an hour, then I thought I had thrown him off the scent. By this time O'Shea was a pulp of fear and suspense. When we got to Flint's, though, and when Flint told of how you had handed over the jewels, O'Shea laughed like a fool. Flint didn't laugh, though, when he saw O'Shea in the light. The man's coat was streaked with blood, and his hands

were red with it. Flint took the Irishman into the bathroom to clean up a little, leaving me in the kitchen. That's when I grabbed the bag and jumped into the dumb-waiter."

He paused, rose and looked out of the window anxiously.

"They'll want you as a witness, anyway, won't they?" Fenton asked.

"I expect they will, but they won't have me. They've got evidence enough. They'll convict O'Shea easily. This isn't the first thing they've got on him. Why, they're after him now for that Courtenay kidnapping business, and that was seventeen years ago!"

Seventeen years ago! Fenton's mind had, more than once that night gone back to O'Shea's part in his own childhood. He knew he must have been about four years old when he first knew O'Shea and the house in South Boston. Fenton was now twenty-one; he made a rapid subtraction, and trembled at a sudden thought. He had begun to suspect that O'Shea was not his uncle—what if the mystery were at last to be explained! He tried to speak calmly, but his mind was whirling as he asked:

"What was that case? I never heard of it."

"I'll tell you about it while we wait," said Spröule-Elkhurst. "It was certainly a curious affair. The story of a 'biter bit,' you know." So, taking a position where he could look out of the window, he began.

#### THE COURTENAY KIDNAPING CASE

Seventeen years ago, Mangus O'Shea was a petty crook who was ready for any odd job that would bring him in a few dollars. He had begun life as a plumber, but gradually drifted into evil ways and had already done a two years' "stretch" in San Quentin, California, for sneak-thieving. After leaving the "pen" he came east where his face was not so well known to the police, and worked, off and on, at his trade, trying to keep straight. You see, he was one of those uncertain, half-way characters whom you can respect neither as an honest man nor as an out-and-out crook courageously pitting his wits against the police. His face was ugly, red eyes and little black teeth—a mongrel with a mongrel's temper. He was pretty generally disliked in South Boston, where he lived.

Well, he picked up an acquaintance with a bunch



of crooks that frequented the "Nucleus" saloon, on the Point, and they soon had him back in the game. He was quick-witted enough; cunning, rather than clever, though; a good man to do their dirty work.

It was about this time—let's see, in '94, it must have been—that he met Pye. "Lemon" Pye they used to call him, on account of his red hair. "Lemon" was a Nova Scotian, and he was a genius. Bold and clever and versatile he was, a big man every way. He had a big body, a big voice and a big laugh—with a mind that could bore through things like a gimlet. "Lemon" was one of the finest confidence men in the business, and he put over some sensational jobs in his time. He had absolutely no moral sense—he believed the world was his oyster and he opened it. He would have made a great general, if he had had the chance.

Well, Pye, "Lemon" Pye, tolerated O'Shea, because the Irishman could be so easily teased. "Lemon" would sit drinking with him, chuckling at O'Shea's temper, and every little while landing a jab that would make O'Shea writhe. I never saw two men who were not friends fraternize so. It seemed as if O'Shea sought "Lemon's" company all the time, always hoping to get even with the big

man. But try as O'Shea would, "Lemon" always won, and O'Shea grew surlier and surlier; which pleased Pye immensely.

One night O'Shea read in his paper that a millionaire named J. O'H. Courtenay, down in Jersey, had made a couple of millions on a big deal in copper, and mentioned it to the big fellow who was with him.

Pye remarked that he'd like to get a slice of that profit; then he rolled his cigar over to the other corner of his mouth calmly and added that he intended to get it, too.

"Why, you fool," said O'Shea, "you don't expect he carries it around with him, or keeps it in the dining-room silver safe, do you?"

"Oh, something like that," Pye answered, confidently. "I happen to know where he does keep one prize piece of portable property." And "Lemon" rose and yawned like a menagerie lion.

"I suppose you think you can con him out of his money," snarled O'Shea. "You'll find these big chaps know that game themselves."

"Well, if I start anything, I'll have a pretty good argument to make him come across, O'Shea. You ought to study psychology. But you can't teach a

rat mathematics." He grinned down into O'Shea's angry little red eyes, chuckled, and walked out.

O'Shea forgot all about the conversation till one day, about two months later, he picked up a paper and stared, fascinated, at a three-column scare-head. Courtenay's little four-year-old son Bruce had been kidnapped and there was the devil to pay about it.

Of course you're too young to remember the affair, but it was the talk of the country. The story ran on the front pages of the newspapers for three weeks, and inside for at least two months more. Every sheriff and policeman in the country was trying to get the reward. Old man Courtenay nearly beggared himself paying for detectives and the thousand expenses of the search.

Now, as soon as O'Shea read the news he made up his mind that Pye had the child. So, having inside information, and a few hundred dollars laid up against a rainy day, O'Shea decided to have a try for the reward. So far, so good; but what had become of "Lemon?" O'Shea started to find out.

First he located Mrs. Pye in a lodging house on Tremont street, Boston, and took a room there. Then he began to watch her mail. Three days after

he moved in, he noticed a letter addressed to her, on the hall stand. He sneaked it up into his room, opened it with a knitting needle, and read this:

“Am holding the goods for a rise. Expect to make a good sale. Add. H. C. Stevens, 325 Duluth Place, Chicago.”

O’Shea grinned and patted himself on the back for getting ahead of Pye at last. He considered his fortune as good as made. He resealed the envelope, put the letter back on the stand and jumped on to the first train for Chicago. No police assistance for him. He knew that if he tipped them off they would collect the reward themselves and give him the laugh. What he had to do was to locate the kid, and then wire Courtenay to come on.

As matters stood then there was a reward of five thousand dollars for the return of the child. Mr. Courtenay had offered three thousand, the City of Orange a thousand, and the police a thousand more. It was well worth working for. O’Shea was jubilant.

He found that the address given in Pye’s note was that of a small family hotel. O’Shea took a front room and interviewed the chambermaid who

corroborated the note. Mr. Stevens and a young boy with black hair—not red, mind you—had a two-room suite on the floor below. O'Shea spent three hours at the window watching the street. At about four o'clock he saw "Lemon" coming in with the boy, and he was sure of his quarry. He ran out and wired Courtenay to come on immediately. When he returned from the telegraph office he found, from the chambermaid, that Mr. Stevens and his pseudo son had already left.

O'Shea was wild. Not only had the boy slipped through his fingers, but he had given Courtenay evidence against himself, and he might be followed. There was nothing to do but get away and start on a new search. He cursed his indiscretion with the chambermaid, packed up his valise and came back to Boston, determined, next time he located "Lemon," to steal the child himself. Meanwhile, Mr. Courtenay had raised his reward to five thousand dollars, making seven thousand in all.

Mrs. Pye had moved. It cost O'Shea fifty-odd dollars, two weeks' time and a lot of trouble to discover her. She was found, finally, in Plymouth, where she was living alone in the Samoset House, as Mrs. Stevens. O'Shea made the acquaintance of

the clerk, posing as a federal secret service agent, and finally got possession of a letter from Pye, giving his address in Detroit. O'Shea was off again, mad and tired and anxious.

This time, when he got to the address, he ran bang into Pye, who was coming out the door alone. O'Shea had tried to disguise himself with a red wig, some court-plaster patches and a bandage, but his little red eyes and his little black teeth gave him away. "Lemon" gave one look at him—"Lemon's" eyes bored in like a corkscrew—and he chuckled.

"Well," he said good-naturedly, "was you looking for me, Mr. O'Shea?" He was no more afraid of O'Shea than a bull would be of a puppy, and it made O'Shea furious.

"I'm looking for that Courtenay kid," said the Irishman, "and you'd better let me in on the deal, or I'll make it hot for you!"

Pye looked him over. Pye laughed till he shook. "Oh, you can have the kid when I'm through with him," he said. "I didn't know you wanted him so bad. I'll let you know when it's your turn." And Pye walked off as cool as a snowball.

O'Shea nosed about a bit; found "Lemon" was living alone in the house. No trace of Bruce Cour-

tenay. Next day he got a clue that led him post-haste to Minneapolis. Nothing doing. It was hard work. No chance for him to get his linen washed, economizing with his food, his money giving out, hot, tired, mad—fighting mad—but more and more determined to get that boy. From Minneapolis to Charleston, in a smoking-car—he couldn't afford a sleeper now—and there the trail fizzled out. And meanwhile he was reading in the papers that the reward was raised to fifteen thousand. Sometimes he almost had his fingers on the kid; next day he was miles off the scent. Why, Pye just played with him; it was a game of hare and hounds.

After a month of this sort of thing, O'Shea stumbled against a woman named Lily Dean, Pye used to know. Lily said he had gone back on her, and told O'Shea, weeping into a lace handkerchief, that Pye was in Washington up against it, and out of cash. O'Shea followed up the tip, and found it was straight. Pye was hiding with a little boy with red hair, in the negro quarter of town.

O'Shea pawned his vest, his watch and his revolver, and went after the kid. He watched his chance till Pye left the house, then broke into his room and found a little boy crying in a rocking chair.

O'Shea went wild. He not only had the kid, but he found forty dollars in bills in the top bureau drawer. With these he got to Wilmington, took a room in a hotel, and wired a red hot message to Mr. Courtenay again. Then it occurred to him to search the child for marks of identification. The kid began to talk about "Lily" and O'Shea had a panic. Finally, he found a note in the little boy's trousers' pocket. It read, "*Not yet, but soon.*" O'Shea caved in, and cried. It wasn't the Courtenay kid at all, but some boy Pye had borrowed for the purpose of throwing O'Shea off the track. Well, that broke up what was left of O'Shea's enthusiasm for the reward. He left the kid in the hotel, and went home stone broke. His wife was away in Fitchburg with her sister, who was ill, and O'Shea sulked about the house, hungry, cold, and disappointed, till, in despair, he got a job at his trade and tried to forget the reward.

Meanwhile the reward had been increased again till it stood at twenty thousand dollars. O'Shea, knowing Pye had the child, was, of course, crazy to use that information, but his telegrams to Mr. Courtenay, and his stealing of the other child prevented his daring to use what he knew.



Well, as I said, Pye was a genius. The way he collected ransom for Bruce Courtenay has never been beaten. Of course Mr. Courtenay was nearly insane by this time, and ready to do anything to get his son back. The police seemed able to do nothing. One day he received a letter accurately describing Bruce and offering to give him up for five thousand dollars. With the advice of his detectives Mr. Courtenay decided to accept the bargain, pay over the money and arrest the one who received it.

The letter directed him to leave the money, in thousand dollar bills, tucked into the cushion of a certain easy chair in the public parlor of a New York hotel, at a certain time. This was done, and the chair was watched. A stylishly dressed young lady—Pye's friend Lily Dean, it was—sat down in the chair, took a letter from her bag, read it calmly, then rose, and walked to another chair and sat awhile. The detectives watched her till she left the parlor. Then they nabbed her. Of course she protested her innocence, but in spite of her anger she was taken to a room and searched. No money was found on her, and, after some delay, in the hope of identifying her, she was discharged from custody. D'you see how the trick was done? She had

removed the money from the first chair, gone over to the second and hidden it there, in a similar place. Then, during the excitement of her arrest, another person had gone to chair number two, got the bills, and made off. It was a daringly simple plan and succeeded perfectly. The girl's confederates were never traced. The money was obtained, but the kidnapers did not return the child. No doubt they were afraid of the risk. It made a tremendous amount of talk when the facts were published; the whole subject became prominent in the papers again.

O'Shea read of it, of course; and his opinion of "Lemon's" cleverness went up. He was considerably afraid, too, that his own part in the business might be traced, and kept pretty quiet. He was desperately hard up now, and kept his eyes open for a means of raising money more easily than by working for it.

His wife's sister, meanwhile, had died. He had to pay the funeral expenses and send his nephew to an orphan asylum. O'Shea was not happy, these days.

One day he was riding in a Columbus Avenue car, in Boston, when two men came in and sat down beside him. They were discussing something ear-

nestly, and O'Shea, always with his ears open for news, listened. For a while he couldn't make out what they were talking about, but finally it developed that one was telling of a basket of silverware. A large basket, it appeared, fitted up in compartments, containing a complete assortment of solid silver dining plate. This sounded good to O'Shea. He listened more closely. The house, one said, was vacant, the family being away in the country.

"Seems to me it's kind of dangerous leaving that silver there alone all night," said one of the men.

"Oh, it's all right; you get it early in the morning and ship it down to Marblehead. I can't bother to stay out there all night," said the other.

"Pretty handy for burglars, though. Easy to get away with. All packed up like that."

"Oh, they never have burglars out Brighton way. It's a small house and don't look like they'd ever be anything worth stealing there."

"On Harvard Street, is it? How'll I know which house it is?"

"Why, it's just the other side of the Brighton road, toward Allston village. Don't you remember that little yellow house with the stable on a rise of land at the turn of the road?"

"Oh, I expect I can find it all right. I'll call about seven o'clock. Where is it, in the dining-room?"

"Yep." The first speaker handed over a house key. "You can't miss it. Be sure and have it insured. It's all sealed up and addressed."

The two men got off the car and O'Shea grinned. He decided to go after that silver himself that night, get it home and melt it up as soon as he could get a furnace. He could easily sell it at one of the "fences" he knew.

That evening he hired an old covered wagon, and drove out over the milldam, and out the Brighton road to Harvard Street. The house was easily found. O'Shea left his wagon outside, slipped round to the back of the house and jimmied the dining-room window. It was nothing at all to do. He got in, found a huge wicker basket tied up, sealed and addressed, as had been described, and lifted it. It was heavier than he expected, but he opened the front door and got it out that way, though it was a hard job. He watched till he was sure there was no one passing, hoisted the basket into his cart and drove back home in a high good humor. It was two o'clock when he reached the little side street where he lived, and got the basket into his house,

and called his wife. She was anxious as he was, to see the swag. They cut the ropes and threw up the lid.

There, resting on old bed quilts, carefully arranged so that he could not be harmed, was a child of four years of age apparently dead. O'Shea stared in horror; his wife nearly fainted. One look at the child told the story. It was Bruce Courtenay—the boy O'Shea had spent three months and his last dollar trying to capture. His hair, at first sight, seemed black, but at the roots it showed reddish, proving that it had been dyed. Around his neck was a gold locket set with a star in diamonds, pictures of which had appeared in all the newspapers. If there had been any doubt about the boy's identity, the note pinned to his breast would have settled it. It was from "Lemon" Pye and said: "*You can have him, now. I'm through with him. L. P.*"

You can imagine O'Shea's feelings. With the hue-and-cry after Bruce Courtenay, it was like receiving a present of a stick of dynamite with the fuse lighted. Despite the fact that twenty thousand dollars' reward had been offered for the boy, his presence was the most dangerous thing possible.

How could O'Shea ever explain how he had found him? He could not confess to a burglary—he was already in none too good repute with the police—and his movements where the boy had undoubtedly been could probably be traced if he disclosed the information. But, worse than this, what if the boy were dead? It would be almost impossible to dispose of the corpse. The case was desperate. O'Shea summoned his nerve, took up the boy, and found that he was still breathing, but in a deep stupor. At all hazards he must be revived if it were possible.

While O'Shea hurried out for a doctor, Mrs. O'Shea undressed the child, put him to bed and disposed of the basket. It was two in the morning when the doctor arrived. He looked at the boy, and looked again. Then he turned to O'Shea.

“Is this your child?” he asked sharply.

Mrs. O'Shea answered, quickly, as women will in an emergency. “It's my sister's boy, Doctor. She died last week and we're going to adopt the poor little fellow. Will he live, d'you think?” She burst into tears.

Well, that settled it. Luckily she had talked with her neighbors of her sister's death, and they all knew of the boy. The O'Sheas took the bull by the

horns and made the best of a pretty bad bargain. Bruce Courtenay became Michael O'Shea. He recovered from the drugs, had his head shaved, and, in a week was in a fair way to grow into a South Boston tough.

But when the reward was again raised for the return of Courtenay's son, O'Shea looked at his wife and sighed.

"He's worth twenty-five thousand dollars as he stands," he groaned, "and I dassent claim one cent of it. This kidnapping business ain't what it's cracked up to be. You can't get no money easy, in this world. We'll have to put the boy to work; he's a bad investment for them what can't afford him."

This thought was rubbed into him well by "Lemon" Pye who, fat and complacent at the end of his victorious campaign, one day met O'Shea as he was going to work with his soldering iron and lead pipes.

"You was in too much of a hurry for that silver, O'Shea," he said. "We had bare time to feed the poor kiddie the knock-out drops before you was in at the window. I would have come down-stairs and helped you with the basket, only I was laughing that hard I couldn't move. I hated to part with the lad for I was growing fond of him, but the detec-

tives was getting too lively for me—and, besides, you wanted him so bad I thought it was a shame not to let you have him.”

Long before Sproule-Elkhurst had finished his story, Fenton, or, as he undoubtedly must begin to call himself, Bruce Courtenay, had gone off into a reverie. *Was* he Bruce Courtenay? There could be no doubt of it. Everything tallied with what he knew of his own history—and the evidence of the golden locket was alone sufficiently convincing. What it could mean to him, in the future, he could not guess; but it kindled his imagination and his pride. If this could be proved he would be no longer the obscure, unknown architectural draftsman. He would have a legal name, relatives, and perhaps money. It came to him in a flash that, above all, this might give him a position which would enable him to meet Belle Charmion more easily. He dared not trust himself to speak, however; he was not yet sure of Sproule. There were the Brewster jewels, too, to be accounted for. What had become of them? Should he still have to fight for them.

Sproule, who had given another long, careful



look out of the window, now returned and interrupted Fenton's day-dream, by a light touch on the shoulder.

"Do you believe I'm straight?" he asked seriously.

It was hard for Fenton to reply. He knew Sproule for a pal of O'Shea's, a crook—and perhaps worse. Might he not, in spite of what he had told, be an accomplice to the murder, as he was undoubtedly an accessory after the fact? And yet, the man also had candor that could scarce be doubted. There was something Fenton liked about him; he had charm.

"Oh, I don't know!" Fenton stammered. "How do I know you're telling me the truth? You say you tried to queer O'Shea's job, but here I find you with him right in the game all through!"

"I think I can prove it," said Sproule, calmly. He unbuttoned his coat, drew forth a soft leather bag, and poured from it a glittering collection of jewelry, sparkling with precious stones, upon the floor.

Fenton stared. For the third time that night he had come strangely across the Brewster jewels! It seemed impossible. Despite the seriousness of the

occasion, he had to smile, as at some grotesque joke. It seemed that, despite all his blunders, he could not lose this mysterious treasure. He looked up at Sproule in wonder.

“Will you take this stuff back to the Brewster house?” Sproule asked quietly.

Fenton nodded, still staring with wonder. Then he added, “I’ll try it again; but for heaven’s sake explain your part in all this!”

“All right,” said Sproule. “I will. I admit that I have been a crook. For five years I have been a member of one of the cleverest and most desperate gangs in the country. But I’ve broken away—or tried to. To-night, if I succeeded, was to end it all. Maybe I can do it yet. I hardly know how to make you believe what I want to say. If you only knew my wife I think you might understand.”

“I do know your wife,” said Fenton. “She came into your apartment at the Plaza before I left. I had a long talk with her.”

“You did?” Sproule’s voice trembled with excitement. “Did she—but of course you couldn’t know—she’d never tell if she suspected—”

“She knows that you’re a crook,” said Fenton quietly.

"Oh God!" Sproule buried his face in his hands.

Fenton put his hand on the man's shoulder. "See here, old man," he said kindly. "If you're honest, if you want to be straight, the best thing you can do is to go right to her—if you can possibly get away. She's going to take the first train to Philadelphia to-morrow. You'd better meet her there."

"Oh, I can't face her! I daren't!"

"You must. You'll find she'll forgive you—she'll do more than that—she'll help you to turn over a new leaf. I know, for she has said so to me."

Sproule spoke between gritted teeth. "If you knew how I love her, you'd believe me. My love for her has kept me in hell for a year trying to break away from this gang. You don't know what a fight it has been. O'Shea is a devil—he has it on me for so many things I've done—in the past—that she doesn't know about. Oh, I'd have done my time and been happy enough in jail to get away from O'Shea, but I couldn't disgrace her; she loved me so—trusted me so. I've tried and tried to break with him, but each time he's pulled me back into the net, threatening to expose me. It was no use. So, yesterday, I decided to leave her. If I was caught, at least it wouldn't drag her name into it. I had an

idea she had already begun to suspect me, so I decided never to come back to her, and let her think what she would. Do you really think that she'd give me a chance?"

"If you'd explain a matter of a ruby necklace, I think she would."

"Oh God! Did she tell you that? That was something I've almost died about, since. It was a horrible thing to do, but I was distracted. I didn't know what I was doing, really. I knew I had to leave her, and I wanted to give her something in remembrance of me. We had cleaned up a house in New Haven—I got hold of this necklace out of the swag, without O'Shea's knowing it—and I gave it to her. It was a crazy, horrible thing to do, I see it now—it might be discovered on her any time—but I was distracted, I tell you. I didn't think. I only knew I loved her, and I had lost her for ever. I had to do something."

"That necklace has been her curse, but you can make it her blessing if you want to," said Fenton. "Go to her and she will tell you something about it—and something that should make you two love each other more than ever."

"I'll try!" said Sproule. "If I get out of this

safe, I'll take her abroad somewhere and begin all over again!"

It was nearly four o'clock by this time. Fenton, cramped and stiff, rose and walked about the room and looked out for the first signs of dawn, while Sproule-Elkhurst reconnoitered from the hall door. After fifteen minutes he came back.

"Well, I'm going to try it," he said. "Good-by! And,—if they get me—I want you to do one thing for me."

"I know," said Fenton. "You want me to tell your wife that you had tried to be straight?"

"For love of her," Sproule added. Then he wrung Fenton's hand and slipped down the stairs.

Fenton watched from the window, saw him walk with an apparently careless, leisurely stride along the street toward Broadway, and disappear round the corner. Then Fenton brushed his silk hat lovingly, put it on, buttoned the bag of jewels inside his waistcoat and walked down-stairs.

## XII

### A HARLEM LODGING HOUSE

DESCRIBING FENTON'S RETURN HOME IN A TOP HAT  
AND HOW HE WAS WELCOMED BY A FRIEND AND  
A LETTER, AND HOW HE PROFITED BY EACH  
OF THEM

THE sky was streaked red with the flush of dawn when John Fenton emerged from the Norcross Apartments and set out at last for his home. There was no hurry now, he had no further fear of pursuit. O'Shea and Flint were in custody, and Sproule had proved his honesty. So, with the leather bag of jewels buttoned snugly under his waistcoat, Fenton decided to walk.

He had much to think over. The events of the past night passed before his eyes like a dazzling, incredible moving-picture show, but ever in and out of its fantastic scenes appeared and disappeared a mysterious, fascinating heroine, Belle Charmion. Would she ever re-enter his melodrama? Some intuition told him that she would—that, in some

strange way their lives were entangled, and the threads of their destinies must meet again.

The fresh, cool air revived him and he strode along with as much spirit as if he had but just awakened from a restful night. As the sun rose, it grew warmer; there was a touch of spring in the air. It sent his spirits several degrees higher. He grew more boyish, and swung along, whistling a lively march. So down Broadway boulevard all the way to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, and then eastward.

As he approached his boarding house, one of a row of dreary looking wooden buildings with high stoops, painted each one a separate color, lead, and molasses yellow, and brown, he saw, with surprise, that some one was sitting on the front steps, drinking from a milk bottle. Who was it? The figure was familiar, and something about the jaunty, audacious attitude still more so. Fenton stopped to watch. The man rose and waved a newspaper. It was Jack Richmond, the star reporter of the *Item*.

Fenton's heart sank. For a moment he was inclined to turn and escape rather than encounter this persistent news-gatherer. He feared the reporter's inquisition. Once on the scent of a story, Fen-

ton knew well enough that the man would not soon let go. But Richmond could not easily be evaded; Fenton knew that well enough, too. He could run and he could fight as well as he could question. Fenton's momentary indecision settled the question, at any rate, for Richmond came running up before Fenton could flee.

"Well, by Jove, you've decided to show up at last, have you?" Richmond called jovially. "I've been waiting two solid hours for you, and I'm nearly frozen stiff. If a milkman hadn't happened past I'd have been starved as well. Say, you seem to have gone up in the world some, old man! Some different from that Highlander costume with broken eggshells for stockings!" And he tapped Fenton's white tie. "Where in the devil have you been, I'd like to know?" He took Fenton's arm familiarly and walked toward the boarding house.

"Where have *you* been?" Fenton asked. "I have as good a right to ask as you." He tried to shake himself loose, but Richmond held him close. "What are you chasing me for, anyway?" he demanded sullenly.

"Because I want that story," said the reporter. "The jewel robbery, you know."



"Oh, that was all a fake," Fenton began.

"Bosh! But how about that locket?"

Fenton stopped suddenly. "Well, so far as that goes, how about Belle Charmion? Who is she? Where is she? What do you know about her? Where *is* the locket? What have you found out? Where did you go? Where can I find her?"

Richmond laughed and laughed. "Say, you ought to be a reporter, not me! You could beat Li Hung Chang for questions! See here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll swap you story for story. You tell me what you've been up to, and I'll tell you where I've been!"

Fenton hesitated. "I'm afraid I can't, Richmond. You see, it isn't my story—it mustn't get into the papers—it's a question of honor."

"See here, old man!" Richmond drew him down on the doorsteps. "You don't seem to be onto this newspaper game. I'm as keen for news as any one in the business, but I'm a gentleman as well, and when I give a promise, I'll keep it. Not a word will be published that you don't consent to. If you know anything about the ethics of the profession, you ought to know that any information is safer with a good newspaper man than with any one else

in the world. Why, the president of the United States tells things to correspondents in Washington that politicians would give their heads to know! And that confidence has never been violated in the history of journalism. I'll just remark that I'm straight."

The reporter's manner put Fenton's mind at rest. After all, it would be a great relief to get such a man's help and advice. "All right," he said. "Go ahead first, though. Tell me about Belle Charmion."

"Good. It isn't too much, old man, but here goes. It's this way. Early this forenoon we got the tip from police headquarters that a man named Gordon Brewster had committed suicide in his house on West Seventy-second Street. There was something funny about it, and I was sent out on the story. The coroner had viewed the remains, and he had had the body removed to an undertaker's place on Broadway because there was nobody there in the house. That's the first queer thing. The caretaker had skipped out while the cops were there. The only relative was his half-sister—your beautiful friend, Belle Charmion. What's the matter?"

"Belle Charmion is Gordon Brewster's half-sister?" Fenton cried.

“Why not? Didn’t you know it? Why shouldn’t she be?”

Like an electric shock the thought swept through Fenton’s mind—the jewels then were perhaps Belle Charmion’s, stolen from her by her half-brother. But he dared not speak yet. “Go on!” he said, but he was almost too dazed, too occupied with this new light on the mystery to listen to Richmond.

“Well,” said the reporter, “Miss Charmion was missing. Why? At first I scented some mystery, but it was simple enough. She and Brewster never did get on very well together, and they quarreled about two months ago, and Miss Charmion went with her maid to the Hotel Plaza and took a suite there. I found this out from a Harry Hay, who was Brewster’s most intimate friend. Hay had heard that Miss Charmion was interested in settlement work, down on the East Side, and so I hiked down to see my friend, the ‘middle-class’ girl I told you about, Mrs. Petrovsky (formerly Miss Bessie Baker), for a tip as to Miss Charmion’s probable whereabouts. Mrs. P. knows the whole East Side, especially the ‘uplifters’ connected with the settlement, and I finally caught Miss Charmion, as you saw. Now comes the funny part. You saw me

meet her. I began to speak of her half-brother, but before I had a chance to tell her what had happened, and what I wanted, she asked me who you were!"

"She wanted to know who I was?" Fenton could scarcely believe it.

"Yes, and she took your address as well! I walked along with her and we talked as we went. She said she was in a great hurry, going up-town, but all the same she had time to pump me about you. Well, I knew very little but your interest in the locket, which I showed her. She got excited when she saw it. I couldn't understand why, but I had no time to figure it out. I told her that her half-brother had sent me down to find her, and he wanted to see her immediately. She said that was impossible; she had an engagement that night—going up to a reception at the Morgans', she said. Lucky I caught the name. Well, I didn't want to blurt it out that her half-brother was lying dead in an undertaker's shop on upper Broadway, so I thought I'd break it to her easy, you know, let it out a little at a time. So I walked along, and she kept asking about you. We went down the subway entrance, and I bought two tickets just as a train came along. We ran for it; she had just time to

slip in, and I was following right behind her, when a big fellow came along behind me like he was shot out of a thirteen-inch gun. Bing! He bowled me over and my hat fell off. Bing again, the door was shut by the guard, and the train pulled out. What d'you know about that? Pretty lumpy work for a star reporter, eh?"

"She got away?"

"With the locket!"

Fenton stared at the reporter thoughtfully. "And she wanted to know about me?"

"Do you wonder I wanted to find you again?"

"So you haven't seen Miss Charmion since?" Fenton inquired, ignoring the remark.

"You wait. I telephoned to the office that I had fallen down on the story, and there was some rough talk from the city editor. He said he'd try to locate her somehow, and meanwhile he ordered me to look up a girl Gordon Brewster was supposed to be engaged to. One of our hotel men had 'phoned in that he had seen her in the King William Hotel, where she had registered as Miss Green. That looked funny, too, so I went after it. Say, I'd like to have omitted that." He passed his hand across his forehead.

Fenton's heart sank with foreboding. He remembered the last glance the doctor had given him—it was tragic in its despair. It could mean but one thing, he knew, and the question leaped to his lips.

“Suicide?”

“For Heaven's sake, how should you guess that?” Richmond demanded.

“Oh, I knew her. Tell me about it.”

“I asked for her, and the girl 'phoned up. No answer. Well, I had to see her. They rang again and again, and then I went up on the elevator with a cabdriver who said ‘Miss Green’ had cheated him out of his fare. The minute I reached the door I smelled gas, and suspected what had happened. I went down, got the hotel detective, we went back with one of the clerks, and they smashed the transom and put a boy through. Well, I've seen dead bodies enough; I ought to be used to it. But she got me, some way. You say you knew her?”

“Yes,” said Fenton quietly. “She was a wonderful woman, I think.”

“Yes. I wonder if Brewster knew.”

“You mean—that she—was not white?”

“For God's sake, did *you* know?” Richmond de-

manded. "Nobody else ever did, so far as I can find out, in the wide world!"

"She told me that she had negro blood," Fenton replied.

"Yes. Well, some people might have thought it merely ridiculous,—the hotel clerk did—but somehow—she did have a fine face—you know—and the expression was beautiful—exquisite—somehow—I don't know—it made me feel like a kid—the old story—no color line in Heaven, and all that sort of thing—rich and poor alike in His sight—confound it, I tell you, I couldn't think of anything but that, thank God, it was all over for her—the contempt, and the scorn and the—oh, well, everything! No, I couldn't laugh when I saw that pretty blonde wig twisted off her head, showing the nigger kinky wool underneath. I don't know—it was a piece of symbolism, I suppose." And the star reporter of the *Item*, in his embarrassment at such sentimental confession, delved in his pocket for a cigarette.

Fenton himself had too much to think about to speak. Richmond lighted his cigarette and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Well, I wrote the story and sent it down to the office—there wasn't much that could be said, and

as we couldn't find out anything from her about Brewster it became absolutely necessary to get hold of Miss Charmion. Luckily I remembered that she said she was going to some reception at the Morgans'. But what Morgans? D'you know that there are exactly thirty-five Morgans with residence telephones, not to speak of those in apartment houses whose names are not in the book? Well, I eliminated about twenty, and then began ringing up the other fifteen. It was after twelve that I found the right one, and had a talk with Miss Charmion. I had to tell her, right out, what was up. You can't mince matters much over a wire. Of course she was terribly agitated to hear her half-brother was dead while she was at a reception, and she hung up before I could ask her when I could see her. I didn't have the nerve to call her up again and I decided to wait till this morning to interview her. Now, Mr. Fenton, I'm ready to listen to your yarn."

"Let's come up to my room first," said Fenton, and he opened the front door and led the way up two flights of narrow stairs, past alcoves decorated with dusty plaster casts, along smelly, shabby little halls where they could hear lodgers still snoring, to a



small bedroom on the third floor. As he threw open the door he noticed a note on the floor that had been pushed under the crack. He stooped and picked it up, read it, then handed it to the reporter. "Well, *what* d'you think of that!" he said in surprise.

Richmond read it aloud:

"Will Mr. John Fenton be kind enough to call at No. 300 West Seventy-second Street at his very earliest opportunity, and greatly oblige Miss Belle Charmion?"

"Well," he said, "I thought she seemed remarkably interested. I suppose she wants to return the locket."

Fenton shook his head. "I'm afraid it's more serious than that," he said. "By Jove, I can imagine what she thinks of me this time! See here, Richmond, I've got to tell you the whole thing now, anyway. And you've got to help me out. She wants to see me because she thinks I've stolen the Brewster family jewels!"

Richmond jumped off the bed in triumph. "Aha, then that tale of yours *wasn't* a fake, after all!" he said. "Well, *did* you steal them, old man?"

For a moment Fenton hesitated, studying the re-

porter's face. In it he saw, with all its sharpness and eagerness, a rare kindness and sympathy. He felt confidence in the man; and he needed a friend. With a quick gesture, he took the leather bag from its hiding place, and emptied the contents upon his table. Out rolled the jewels, and spread in a glittering mass before the reporter's eyes.

"There," said Fenton calmly, "how's that for circumstantial evidence?"

Richmond gasped. "But I thought you said they had been stolen from you?"

"Richmond, you may not believe it, I can hardly believe it myself, but I've found these jewels three times, this night, and lost them twice!" Then, as the reporter's brown eyes drew together in an expression of incredulity, Fenton began with the story of the eventful evening. He told of his visit to the fortune-teller's, and of the raid, his discovery of the octoroon and how she had confided the jewels to his care, his escape to Scheffel Hall, and the story she had told him there, of Gordon Brewster's death, how she and Harry Hay had carried the dead body to West Seventy-second Street, and of their subsequent discovery of Brewster's theft of the jewels. Then he narrated his own promise and attempt to

deliver them, and his failure. The description of how he was chloroformed, robbed, and left in the pigeon-loft brought him to the Liars' Club, where he had first met Richmond.

"Ah," said Richmond, "that restores my faith in my own powers of observation. I was sure that first tale of yours was true."

"You see why this story can never be printed, though?" Fenton asked anxiously.

"I'm not a cad," Richmond replied simply. "But go on. That's a pretty lively start; see if you can keep up the pace."

Fenton smiled. "Keep it up!" he said, "it isn't over yet! I won't wake up, probably, till I see Belle Charmion." He went on to tell of his visit with Elkhurst, *alias* Sproule, to the Hotel Astor, and of Mrs. Elkhurst's appearance and story, proving her husband to be one of the gang that was on the trail of the jewels. Her information had led him downtown to the St. Paul building, where he discovered the jewels with the murdered body of the bogus Count Capricorni.

"By Jove!" Richmond cried, "there's a story, anyway! I'll wire that in immediately over the 'phone; there's a good chance we can get a scoop on

that murder for the first afternoon edition!" and he was off down-stairs to the telephone while Fenton restored the Brewster jewels to the velvet bag, and pored over Belle Charmion's note.

At Richmond's return Fenton completed the night's adventures with an account of his meeting Miss Charmion at the Morgans' reception, and his afterward innocently handing over the jewels to the very gang that had been after them. Sproule-Elkhurst's escape and his confiding of the jewels again to Fenton's care, finished the narrative.

"And now," he concluded, "what am I to do? I must return the jewels to Miss Charmion, immediately, of course. But she will have to know that her half-brother stole them. I wish I could spare her that, for the sake of that poor girl who has just committed suicide."

Richmond thought it over. "Let's see," he began. "You say that the caretaker, Flint, discovered the safe door open. Did he lock it?—that's the question. He may have just shut it, without locking the combination, and so it's possible for us to open the door. I don't say it's probable, but it's worth trying. See here. Suppose I go with you to see Miss Charmion—I've got to talk with her

anyway, and I'll see what I can do about it. We'll just wait our chance. It may come, or it may not! At any rate, you can trust me!" He grasped Fenton's hand and shook it warmly.

"But if Miss Charmion should know the jewels are gone? She may have looked in the safe already," said Fenton.

"That's unlikely. Why should she suspect anything? She's too much disturbed, probably."

Fenton pointed to the note; "She's not too disturbed to write to me, at any rate! What else would she want to see me for?"

"The locket, of course!" said Richmond. "There's some mystery there. You'd better tell me something more about it."

Fenton briefly sketched his own remarkable biography—his life with the O'Sheas, and later with Dr. Hopbottom. Finally he mentioned Sproule's story of the Courtenay kidnapping and his own memory of the little girl on the ferry-boat.

"That's it! You are Bruce Courtenay, and that little girl was Belle Charmion, of course—and she suspects, somehow, who you really are! By Jove, let's hurry—it's eight o'clock. She'll surely be up by this time. I want to see the dénouement!"

Fifteen minutes afterward, Fenton having plunged into a cold bath and changed his evening clothes for his own modest business suit, the two young men set out, blithe and enthusiastic, for West Seventy-second Street. Richmond discoursed upon the events of the night, and the material he would find therein for stories for the *Item* without violating the confidence of the dead octoroon.

Fenton did not listen. His thoughts were only of Belle Charmion, whom fate, after having tossed across his path so many times, was perhaps now preparing to link still more closely to his life. He had gone far with his emotions that night, and now he found himself thinking of her as actually his. What else could mean that mysterious attraction he had felt when he first saw her portrait?—at the thrill the first sight of her gave him?—his agitation at the first sound of her voice? Belle Charmion! The name rang in his ears like a bell. Why, it seemed as if he had known her always! It seemed as if, when he saw her, words would be unnecessary—as if she, too, must know that they two were made for one another! And so he walked as if on air. Richmond's talk had turned to base-ball and theaters. Fenton heard not a word.

### XIII

## THE BREWSTER MANSION

IN WHICH IS EXPLAINED, AT LAST, HOW AND WHY  
BELLE CHARMION WAS SO UBIQUITOUS AND THE  
REASON SHE OFFERED A REWARD FOR A  
MISSING FIANCÉ

**T**HEY reached the house and rang the bell. Fenton, expecting a maid to answer, was composing his mind to wait in excited suspense the ten or fifteen minutes that would probably elapse before Miss Charmion should appear, looked up suddenly, to find her—the very girl of his dreams—at the opened door. He turned white. Belle Charmion blushed vividly. The two might have stood there staring at each other indefinitely, had not the reporter, smiling at their embarrassment, taken off his hat, and introduced John Fenton.

She looked at him—how she looked at him!—as if he were a ghost—but recovering her equanimity before he did, she graciously invited the two men into the back parlor.

"You'll pardon my surprise, Mr. Fenton," she explained, "but I hadn't expected to see you so soon. Indeed, I had sent my maid for you, only just now!"

Richmond spoke before Fenton could answer. "I'm sure you must want to see Mr. Fenton alone," he said. "Suppose I wait—in the dining-room." He gave a glance at Fenton, for the reporter had the bag of jewels ready under his overcoat.

"Oh, I have nothing I'm not willing for you to hear, Mr. Richmond," she said. "Indeed, if I'm not mistaken, it may give you a good story!"

Mr. Richmond reluctantly sat down, and Fenton, still beauty-struck, and dumb, still feasting his eyes on Belle Charmion, followed his example.

She turned to him gravely. "Mr. Fenton," she said, "you have no doubt wondered why, at such a time as this, with my half-brother lying dead, I should ask you, a perfect stranger, to come here to see me."

Fenton tried to speak. The words "a perfect stranger" hurt him keenly. But she went on.

"The fact is, that if what I suspect is true, finding you is almost as important to me as losing my half-brother. As to him, I need only say that there was



never much love lost between us. I could never either like or respect him. But he is dead—I need not enlarge on my reasons. When my mother married Mr. Brewster it was a great blow to me, and I have never reconciled myself to it. After she died, a year ago, I knew that it would not be possible for me to keep even the semblance of a friendship with Gordon for long. As you may know, two months ago I left this house to live at the Plaza Hotel, and I have scarcely seen Gordon Brewster since.”

“Miss Charmion,” Fenton said, at last finding his tongue, “before you go on I ought, I’m sure, explain why, the last time I saw you, I was pretending to be some one else. Really, it was with the best intentions—”

She laughed. “Oh, I rang up Marguerite Morgan and asked about you. She explained all that, and I understand. What I want more to understand is what you know about this little ornament.”

She handed him the golden heart-shaped locket set with the diamond star which he had tried to get from the cab-driver. “When I met you at the Hotel Astor,” she said, “I was going to ask you then; but I feared I had made a mistake. You see, you were dressed in gray tweed, while, only an hour before,

I had seen you in a brown coat and—overalls.” Her eyes twinkled. “I would have asked you at the Morgans’, in spite of your having been introduced to me as the Count Capricorni—but that telephone message left me no time. It was lucky that Mr. Richmond had given me your address, earlier in the evening. Now, that locket has a history. I scarcely dare ask you what you know of it, whether it is yours or not—but if it is,—I have much to tell you.”

“Miss Charmion, I believe that is my locket,” said Fenton, examining it excitedly. “At least, I remember seeing it when I was about eight years old, in the possession of a man named O’Shea, whom, I have reason to believe, kidnapped me. And, if that is true, my real name is Bruce Courtenay!”

Miss Charmion gazed at him with heightened color, her lips parted, her face strangely expressive. She had stretched out her hand to him, and was just about to speak when she was interrupted by a long ring at the front door bell, and hurriedly excusing herself, saying that it must be her maid returning, she left and went into the hall.

“Now’s my time, Fenton!” cried Richmond,

jumping up. "I've located the dining-room, back there. I'm going to have a look at that safe!" And he darted to the doorway, gave a look down the hall, and disappeared toward the rear of the house.

Fenton, for a few minutes paced up and down nervously. It was annoying to have the conversation interrupted just at the moment when, apparently, he was to find out whether his suspicions about his own identity were correct, when he was to find, too, what secret connected him with Belle Charmion. But, if Richmond could succeed in replacing the jewels in the safe without her knowing it, the accident was well-timed. Then, as he listened for her return, he heard a strangely familiar voice, which rose steadily higher. He went to the door to hear more clearly.

"Do you mean to say that I have made an incipient octagon of myself running around this holo-gastric town for nothing?" some one thundered, and Fenton was amazed to recognize it as Doctor Hopbottom.

"I'm very sorry," said Miss Charmion.

"But, by the pancyclic septuagint, wasn't it on your business?"

"It's too bad you were forestalled."

"Forestalled! D'you mean you'd take the word of a seventeen-cent hypercorrosive blastoderm like that brompropionic reporter rather than mine?"

Miss Charmion burst out laughing. "You're a day late, Doctor. But I'm very busy at present, and I'll have to say good morning!"

"Well, by Zarathrustra, you'll have to give me that superhyphenated locket, or pay for it, then!"

"I think I shall have no trouble in proving that it is my property—or that of Mr. Fenton," said Miss Charmion calmly. "And so, unless you wish me to call him, or his friend, I really think you had not better stay."

Fenton appeared in the hall at the same moment. Doctor Hopbottom took one look at him and put on his hat. Then he opened the front door and shook his bony finger at his former ward.

"You'll come to a helciform end, sir!" he declaimed; "you see if you don't! I knew you were nothing but a semi-colonial anthropoid anacoluthon when I first saw you! Good day, Miss Charmion. Good day! The next time I spend my time looking up a post-impressionistic, Pliocene friend of yours I'll jimpriculately well know it!" And he stalked out of the door and slammed it.

At that moment Richmond touched Fenton on the shoulder. "Great!" he whispered. "Just as I thought—the door of the safe was shut but not locked. The jewels are safe."

"At last!" Fenton replied. "I only hope I'll never have to see them again." They moved back from the doorway just as Miss Charmion returned.

"Well, it seems that wasn't your locket after all!" she cried, smiling. "Look at this!" And she held out one exactly similar. "Where in the world did that extraordinary old doctor get it, do you suppose?"

"I see," said Fenton. "He must have got it, somehow, from O'Shea. But how in the world should he look it up?"

"Oh, that's simple," Miss Charmion volunteered. "Don't you know that for a year I have offered a thousand dollars reward for you?" She blushed prettily, and gave him her hand.

Richmond groaned whimsically. "I wish I'd known that!" he said.

Miss Charmion turned to him. "Oh, it doesn't matter. You are the one who brought him, and the money is yours. I can never be grateful enough for what you've done, Mr. Richmond. Isn't it strange

that when I first saw Mr. Fenton—or, of course, I must say Mr. Courtenay now—I had an intuition that he was the man I wanted to find? Then, when I saw the locket and heard what you told me of it, Mr. Richmond, I was sure.”

“But,” interrupted Fenton, “would you mind telling me why you were so anxious to find me? I’m dazed. I know well enough why I wanted to find *you*, but—”

“Do sit down, and I’ll begin at the beginning,” said Miss Charmion. “I don’t mind Mr. Richmond’s hearing it, for there’s no reason why this shouldn’t be known.”

They took chairs near her and she began: “My mother, then Mrs. Charmion, and yours, Mrs. Courtenay, were great friends. Well, you and I were born on the same day. Twins, so to speak. We were brought up together as near neighbors and friends, that is, till we were four years old. That scene you have described on the ferry boat I recall perfectly. You see, we each had a locket like these; and it was mine you snatched away from me. Indeed, you had it when you were kidnapped, the same day; and that is the one Dr. Hopbottom has so miraculously restored just now. You see, there seems

to have been some queer fate all through it—we couldn't be separated, in spite of everything. Well, your disappearance was a terrible thing. Your mother became ill, and she really died as a consequence of the shock and the horror of it. Your father spent almost every cent he had in trying to find you—but from the day you were lost nothing was ever heard by which any one could trace you. You simply disappeared off the face of the earth. Your father died a few years afterward, a broken down old man, entrusting the search to my father and mother. Until my own father died the search was never abandoned. Then my mother married Mr. Brewster, and the thing was given up as an insoluble mystery. But I year ago I determined to try again, and I offered the reward in hopes that, by this time, some one might be willing to give information."

"But, Miss Charmion," Fenton interrupted, "it was fine of you to do that; but what, really, did it matter whether I was found or not, at this late day? I don't quite see!"

"Ah!" she said, smiling. "I haven't told you the main point. Will you come into the dining-room for a moment?" She rose and led the way.

Fenton and Richmond exchanged a glance of surprise, and followed her, wondering what was to come next. Miss Charmion went to the safe and began to turn the combination. In a moment she threw open the door and looked in.

"Why, how funny!" she exclaimed, as she drew out the leather bag. "Oh, I suppose Gordon was intending to take it to the safe deposit vaults. He probably wanted to economize room here. But how extraordinarily careless!" She rose and handed the bag of jewels to Fenton.

For the fourth time within twelve hours then, he received this astonishing collection of precious stones. Each time had been sensational, each time had been unlooked-for, each time had been more dramatic than the last. This time capped the climax. Amazed and dazed, he found no words to express his wonder. He stood, holding the bag, looking at Miss Charmion stupidly.

"They are yours!" said Belle Charmion.

He could only repeat, "*Mine?*"

"Yes," she replied. "I told you that your father spent almost his last cent on the attempt to trace you, but these jewels were your mother's, and she wished them kept in case you should be found. But,



despairing of that, she directed in her will that, if you should not be found by the time I (and of course you) was twenty-one years old, that they should become mine. Well, I am twenty-one to-day—and so are you. It is our birthday!” She looked at him with laughter in her eyes.

“But do you mean to say,” Fenton cried, “that you offered a thousand dollars’ reward for me, so that you might *not* come into possession of these jewels?”

She nodded gravely. “Why not?”

It was all he could do to prevent himself rushing to her and taking her in his arms. He knew now, though he had always felt intuitively what sort of woman she was, how fine and how loyal. To discover, also, what old bond connected them thrilled him. It gave him a claim on her affection, a right to her. It explained and justified the romantic attraction she had had for him; it made reasonable and sound what might otherwise be distrusted as a too picturesque love-at-first-sight. But did she feel that, also? He must find out. Richmond’s presence embarrassed him. He gave the reporter an appealing glance. Richmond was no fool. He arose immediately.

"If you don't mind my having this story, Miss Charmion," he said; "it's really news, you know, and mighty romantic."

"I don't mind," she replied.

"Then, if you'll excuse me, I'll go into your library and begin it. I can get any details I want later," and with a wink to Fenton he left the room.

Fenton could not realize that the wealth represented by the jewels was now his. He dared not estimate their value; he only knew that he was now rich, that his future was assured. Even this, however, did not excite him. There was something far more important, far more precious, far more romantic, agitating him. His mind, as well as his eyes, were too full of Belle Charmion. She seemed melting—as if she herself could not longer resist the power which had for so long been drawing them together. He glanced at her, and she answered without a word. It made him tremble, but he dared not quite believe. It seemed audacious to risk his happiness upon so subtle a sign, yet in his heart he knew, as well as if she had spoken aloud, that she was his, that it would be grotesquely impossible for her to be any other's. So, trepid, nervous, his courage growing momentarily, he watched her beautiful expressive face, saw it soften as she looked at him.

It was Belle Charmion who first broke the silence. "I haven't told you of one strange thing," she said softly, as if afraid to speak aloud. "Last night I felt queerly. I had a sort of intuition that something was about to happen. It was the eve of my birthday, and I knew that to-morrow, if you were not found, the jewels would be mine. I didn't want them; it was hateful to me to take them. Well, I went—I wonder if you can understand just why—to a fortune teller. She told me some strange things about myself—and about you—" She paused and blushed.

"Was it Madame Oswald?" Fenton asked impetuously.

Miss Charmion nodded, astonished that he should know.

The fortune teller's prediction leaped into Fenton's mind. He was, she had said, to marry a girl with the initials "B. C."—and marry with money, and now— "Did she know your name?" he asked suddenly.

She looked up, a little pale with emotion. "No. But I remembered afterward that I had a shopping bag with my monogram on it—perhaps that's how she got my initials so mysteriously."

Fenton smiled, reached over and now boldly took

her hand. "I think I know what she said of me," he said. "She said it to me, too. And I hope it will come true. So, now that I have found the answer to the question that has been in my mind so persistently for twelve hours—"

"What question?" she asked wonderingly. She did not withdraw her hand.

"The question, 'Who is Belle Charmion?'"

She drew away her hand and jumped to her feet. "Oh," she cried, "I haven't told you the strangest part of it all yet! I didn't want to speak of it before your friend, Mr. Richmond. But you can never answer *that* question till I have told you!"

"What?" he exclaimed. "Surely you *are* Belle Charmion, aren't you?" He looked at her in amazement.

"Sit down," she answered. "I want to tell you a story—a story that you ought to know." And, re-seating herself, she began the tale.

#### REASON VERSUS INSTINCT

I don't know exactly how it happened—the mix-up of two babies that led to the queerest year two mothers ever had, your mother and mine. I

know only that they were at the same hospital, and that we were born at the same time, almost the same minute, and that the place caught fire before we were well into the world. The patients were bundled out in blankets, and there was a tremendous excitement everywhere. When the two babies were brought out to the two mothers, lying in cots on the lawn, that May night, it occurred for the first time to the nurse who brought them that she had no idea which child belonged to which.

You can't imagine anything funnier, or anything at the same time more tragic as well. One baby was a boy and one a girl; but which was Mrs. Courtenay's child and which was Mrs. Charmion's nobody there could tell.

If that nurse had realized the importance of the situation, or had thought of it a moment sooner, she would undoubtedly have decided the question for herself, taken the babies and delivered them as chance would have it, and no one would ever have known. But she hesitated just a moment too long. Both the women were nearly distracted and waiting in nervous suspense to know whether or not their children had been saved. Ill as they were, nothing could satisfy them till they had seen their own chil-

dren safe. So, waiting there in the midst of all that horror, they were quite able to notice the nurse's perplexity.

There was nothing for the nurse to do, therefore, but to acknowledge her dilemma. The infants were safe—that was all she could say. It was enough at least to reassure both mothers' minds for the time being, and both of them collapsed and were taken away to the nearest house, after being assured that the problem would be settled satisfactorily as soon as those who knew the facts could be questioned.

The next day, however, it was found that the only ones who knew the answer to the riddle, one of the house physicians and two nurses who had stayed in the burning building caring for the patients, had been burned to death or had died from the effects of their injuries. There was, therefore, absolutely no knowing how to assign the children. It was a question for the mothers to decide between themselves. That's how the trouble began; and it wasn't soon over.

In the first place the boy baby had red hair—not much, but enough to serve as possible hereditary evidence. Now, Mrs. Courtenay had auburn hair; but, on the other hand, so did Mr. Charmion. Mrs.

Courtenay argued that a child usually resembles, physically, its parent of the opposite sex—that is, a boy resembles his mother, and a girl her father. But Mrs. Charmion found plenty of evidence to disprove that theory. Mr. Charmion's father, for instance, had had red hair, as well as Mr. Charmion himself.

This discussion was kept up for a week, while the two women stayed at the house that had been rented as a temporary hospital ward. Mrs. Courtenay and Mrs. Charmion had beds in the same room, and the children were cared for in one adjoining. Night and day that argument was kept up, sometimes excitedly, as the two women grew nervous from their suspense, and sometimes amicably weeping with laughter at the comedy of the situation. Both mothers were college women, and could discuss the subject scientifically. Of course that was in 1890, before Mendel's law had been re-discovered, or else, I suppose there would have been a great deal of evidence as to whether red hair was a dominant or a recessive factor. As it was, they quoted Darwin, Lamarcke and Weissman on heredity and mutation, and they must have got a good deal over their heads. Mrs. Courtenay would exploit a theory over one

baby, and then exclaim, "Now let me see the other one!" Mrs. Charmion would send for books and encyclopedias, and then cry, "Give me that child quick!" And so it went.

Meanwhile the two fathers were fighting it out together in the same way. Mr. Courtenay would talk it over with his wife. He would talk it over with Mr. Charmion. He would talk it over with Mrs. Charmion. You'll easily see that there were six combinations of pairs possible, and each pair had it out.

Well, both the mothers and the babies thrived, despite the uncertainty of parentage. The parents declared an armed truce on the red-hair question, and turned from specific to general traits. Which set of parents did each child most resemble? That was the question. You can foresee the difficulties of identification. If the boy had Mr. Courtenay's eyes and Mrs. Charmion's nose, he was sure to have Mrs. Courtenay's hands and Mr. Charmion's ears—and so on. Neither of the children's resemblance to either of the parents was pronounced enough to determine the question for the four adults involved. Family pictures were produced, old photographs, daguerreotypes, oil portraits, even tintypes. Some seemed to show a marked resemblance in a possible ancestor,



but as soon as one child appeared to be proved a descendant, the other one evidenced proof of a claim to the same line.

The two babies had, to all intents and purposes, during the first fortnight, four parents apiece.

Mrs. Courtenay, as she convalesced, studied the boy for hours, while Mrs. Charmion inspected the girl. Then the two women would compare notes, exchange babies, and the trouble would begin all over again. Of course, there was no envy; it was not a question of each woman wanting the best, or handsomest or healthiest or brightest child. Each woman wanted her own, that was all—but that was enough to keep each mother uncertain.

This, of course, couldn't go on for ever. The women wanted to go to their homes, and each wanted to take a baby. But, naturally, it was necessary to decide which child each should take. The fathers grew impatient and jocosely proposed that they should draw lots for the babies. The mothers couldn't see the joke, and wept when it was suggested. It was a serious matter. The fathers next offered to move into a double house and wait for time to decide the question by developing the children's characteristic differences. The mothers

wouldn't agree to that, either. And so, for a few days, the matter was at a deadlock, with the women in tears and the men surly. But by this time the mothers had come to an agreement upon one important question. They decided that, whatever were their last names, the boy should be called Bruce and the girl Belle. No girl ever yet liked her given name, and I don't like mine—but Belle Courtenay or Belle Charmion, one or the other, I had to be.

Well, this sort of thing finally became intolerable and the two women grew desperate. It was working on their nerves so badly that the question had to be decided some way. Now Mrs. Courtenay had wanted a son tremendously; her husband had, also, although a father's influence isn't supposed to mean much. On the other hands, Mrs. Charmion and Mr. Charmion had both hoped for a little daughter. So, on the basis of these two strong desires, and their prenatal influence, the matter was settled. The Courtenays took Bruce home to East Orange; and the Charmions took Belle to their house in Orange Centre. This was when the children were three weeks old.

Neither of the women was really satisfied. There was a horrible doubt in each mother's mind that per-

haps she was nursing some other woman's baby, and this kept both of them so worried that neither recovered rapidly. It occurred first to Mrs. Charmion to watch for peculiar inherited traits and see if the ancestry couldn't be traced along that line. A baby of three weeks old, however, is little more than a breathing automaton. All its acts are instinctive, or mere physiological reflexes. It is rehearsing, in its development, the history of the race. Babies are really more like apes than human beings. At the same time, family traits are deeply seated and will come out. This was Mrs. Charmion's view.

About two days after the families had separated, the Courtenay house bell was rung loud and long, at about three o'clock in the morning. Mr. Courtenay got up, threw on his bath robe and came down to the front door, to find Mr. Charmion shivering on the stoop.

"Say, do you like to have the soles of your feet tickled?" was the first thing Mr. Charmion said.

"D'you mean to say you've got me up in the middle of the night to ask that?" Mr. Courtenay exclaimed. "Good heavens, no! I can't bear it."

Mr. Charmion persisted. "Does your wife like it?" he demanded.

"I don't know that it's any of your business," Mr. Courtenay replied. "It seems to me to be a rather personal question. But as you seem to be serious, I'll tell you that she could be tortured to death that way, or else she'd go insane in about three minutes."

"Thank God!" Mr. Charmion answered, and started off, when Mr. Courtenay called him back.

"Say, for heaven's sake, Charmion, what in thunder does all this mean?" he asked.

"Why," said Mr. Charmion, "I enjoy having the soles of my feet tickled, and so does Mrs. Charmion. She adores it. It's fine. Confound it, it's restful. It eases the nerves, you know. It makes you relax."

Well, Mr. Courtenay just stood there and stared at Mr. Charmion, too angry for words. "Well," he said at last, sarcastically, "now this important question is settled, I suppose I may go to bed?"

"Wait a minute till I get Belle! Then you can wake up Bruce and tickle his feet and we'll know."

"What in the devil d'you mean? Are you crazy, or what?" cried Mr. Courtenay.

Then Mr. Charmion explained. Mrs. Charmion, it seemed, had awakened in the middle of the night

thinking of the fact that she liked to have the soles of her feet tickled, and so did her husband. It was a rare trait; most people can't bear it. Perhaps it would do for a test. She called the nurse and had little Belle brought in, and they carefully, anxiously, solemnly tickled her little soles. She coughed, sneezed, cried, and, more important than all that, she contracted the muscles of her toes and curled them up like little fists.

"This is no child of mine!" Mrs. Charmion announced to her husband, "nor of yours either. Take her over to the Courtenays' immediately and try Bruce!" Mr. Charmion obeyed.

Well, Mrs. Courtenay got up and put on a wrapper; the nurse was awakened, and little Bruce was brought in and tickled in state. He smiled, relaxed his toes and opened them as wide apart as possible. Could anything be more convincing? The babies were swapped, and Mr. Charmion drove home with Bruce. So Belle Charmion became Belle Courtenay.

Mrs. Courtenay couldn't deny the force of this test, yet she was so worried about it that she nearly made herself ill thinking over it. The result was that one afternoon she took Belle and drove over to

the Charmions in great excitement. Mrs. Charmion began to tremble at sight of her. "Mercy, Mrs. Courtenay, what is it?" she asked. "Have you discovered anything?"

"We've got to get both children asleep immediately," said Mrs. Courtenay. "Belle simply won't sleep on her back, and the Courtenays as a family are noted for that. My husband always sleeps on his back; so did his father and grandfather. I don't, but my father and all my brothers do. Do you, Mrs. Charmion?" she asked anxiously.

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Charmion. "It makes one snore."

"Oh, that's nothing! The Courtenays, without exception, all snore," said Mrs. Courtenay. "My husband is simply dreadful. I always have to sleep two rooms away. Of course, Belle is too little to snore, but she won't sleep unless I lay her on her side."

"That is funny," said Mrs. Charmion. "I've had lots of trouble getting Bruce to sleep; I never tried to put him on his back. Some doctors do say it's more healthful, though, that way. We'll try it immediately."

The two children were rocked and cuddled and

sung to, and finally deposited on a double bed, both on their sides. Belle went to sleep instantly; Bruce would not close his eyes. Both babies were then laid upon their backs. Bruce went instantly to sleep, Belle wailed. Bruce was then made comfortable, and when both children were in Dreamland the two mothers cried it out together.

"Isn't it awful, to have to decide such an important question on such a little thing as that?" said Mrs. Courtenay, gazing at the babes.

"Look at Belle's hand!" cried Mrs. Charmion, suddenly. "Now *that* settles it! I'm positive you're right! See, she holds the thumb inside her fist, just like all the Charmions! Bruce keeps his thumb outside. Don't the Courtenays and your people clench the thumb outside their fists?"

"Of course they do!" said Mrs. Courtenay. "It's a sign of a weak will to keep the thumb inside."

"Pshaw! No one ever accused a Charmion of having a weak will; and I'm sure that thumb doesn't mean anything of the kind. But, at any rate, it proves pretty conclusively that your inference was right from her sleeping posture. When they get old enough to roll over of themselves there'll be no possible doubt of it. You'd better take Bruce right

back with you, Mrs. Courtenay, and I'll take my girl!" So Bruce Charmion became a Courtenay again.

Well, I can't begin to tell you all the curious ins and outs of that ridiculous case. Bruce was taken back from the Courtenays. Early one morning he was seen to wiggle his ears—an immemorial Charmion characteristic, and Belle was proved to be a true Charmion, after that, upsetting all previous evidences on account of her fear of cats—a trait for which the family had always been noted.

Of course, if the ladies had not been well educated enough to know that the doctrine of transmission of acquired characteristics had been exploded, there would have been many more complications; as, for instance, in Belle's delight when the piano was played, and Bruce's aversion to blue. These things, of course, came later, when the babies had begun to manifest intellectual powers, but there was quite enough else to keep the two families busy. The two children had scarcely time to get used to their mothers before they were whisked back. Soon every aunt and uncle, not to speak of the grandparents of the two babies were brought into the controversy. Family councils were held and both



babies were hurriedly sent for, inspected, analyzed, and judgment passed. Maiden aunts and interested cousins would insist that resemblances were unmistakable on one side, and immediately sisters-in-law and step-children on the other side would veto the verdict.

The two families naturally got pretty well acquainted. In spite of the occasional quarrels and jealousies, the two sets of fathers and mothers became great friends. Mrs. Courtenay and Mrs. Charmion met often to sew on the babies' layouts; for, since it was never certain who was to do the dressing of either the boy or the girl, it was advisable that both mothers' tastes should be consulted. So they embroidered and stitched and folded and tucked as they talked the matter over. The fathers discussed the same subject from a different point of view, on board the train, every morning on the way to their business in New York. So, finally, it was decided, half in jest and half in earnest, that the boy and girl should be formally engaged to each other, in the ancient royal style. Two similar gold lockets were bought, each with a diamond star on the front, and each child received one as a troth-plight token. If the two children should marry as

planned, when they reached the age of twenty-one, it would settle all property rights, at least; although whether the two contracting parties themselves would ever consent to this arrangement was, of course, another matter.

This was the way matters stood when the two children were thirteen months old. The Courtenays and the Charmions had gone away to the Maine coast for their summer vacation, taking one large cottage for the two families. The children slept up-stairs in a large nursery.

One night, as the two women were sitting sewing, discussing the inevitable topic, Mrs. Courtenay smelled smoke. She spoke of it to Mrs. Charmion, who confirmed her suspicion, and the two went out into the hall together to investigate. An overturned lamp lay on the floor under the stairs, the oil had spread over the carpet, and was burning fiercely. The inside of the closet under the stairs was all afire.

With simultaneous screams, the two women started running up-stairs for the children. They were almost out of their heads with terror, and they fought their way, crowding one another like maniacs up to the top, equally anxious to rescue the

children. More correctly, I suppose, each mother was anxious to rescue her own child. By the time they reached the door of the nursery the smoke filled the hall, and the women were frantic. They were beyond reason; they acted automatically. They burst through the door together.

The children's cots stood side by side, and the way was clear to both. The mothers knew perfectly well which baby was in each cot. There was not a word spoken after they entered the room, but, as if by a prearranged plan, the mothers each took a different cot, ran and grabbed the child it contained, then rushed down-stairs through the smoke and flames till they were safe upon the lawn.

Then they turned and looked at each other in wonder. At this time Belle had been with the Courtenays for some months, and Bruce with the Charmions. The affair had been virtually decided forever. But, when the two women came to their senses they found that, without reason or will, without conscious intent that they could remember, acting merely upon blind impulse, Mrs. Courtenay had saved Bruce, and Mrs. Charmion had rescued Belle. And, without even discussing it, understanding each other and themselves without words, each

mother knew that she had acted upon instinct, and that her instinct had been true. The fathers were never so sure, but, from that day, neither Mrs. Courtenay nor Mrs. Charmion doubted that she had her own child.

“And so,” Miss Charmion concluded, “there will never be an answer to your question ‘Who is Belle Charmion?’ for no one will ever know.”

Fenton arose and put his arm about her. With a little shiver of delicious excitement she put up her face to his without fear.

“It doesn’t matter, anyway, my dear,” said he, smiling down at her, “because her name is going to be Belle Courtenay again as soon as I can get a marriage license! Haven’t we been engaged for twenty years?”

Her reply was smothered in his kiss; but whatever she said it is safe to believe that it was not “No.”

THE END



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