

*The
Haunted Cajon*

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By
The Author of "The Haunted Cajon"



THE HAUNTED PAJAMAS.

THE HAUNTED PAJAMAS.







The Haunted Pajamas

BY
FRANCIS PERRY ELLIOTT

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
EDMUND FREDERICK



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TO
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THE HAUNTED PAJAMAS

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CHAPTER I

A PRESENT FROM CHINA

IT was the first thing I saw that night as I swung into my chambers. Fact is, for the moment, it was the only thing I saw. Somehow, its splash of yellow there under the shaded lamp seemed to catch my eye and hold it.

I screwed my glass tight and examined the thing with interest. Nothing remarkable; just a tiny, oblong package, bearing curious foreign markings, its wrapper plainly addressed to me, but—

“By Jove! From China!” I ejaculated.

Somebody in far-off China sending me a present, with duties and charges prepaid evidently.

What the deuce was it? I shook it without getting any revelation; then I weighed it in my hand.

The thing was devilish light! In fact, so light that, allowing for outside wrapper and box, dashed if I could see how there was anything at all.

Then I had an awful thought: Suppose, by Jove,

they had forgotten to inclose the thing—whatever it was! Jolly tiresome, that, if they had. I felt devilish annoyed.

Really, awfully provoking to do that sort of thing, you know; and I was jolly sure now the dashed thing had been wrapped up empty. I wondered what silly ass I knew in China who would be likely to do a thing like that. I couldn't think of any one at all I knew in China, so I rang for Jenkins.

“Anybody I know in China, Jenkins?” I asked. And to help him out, I added: “Fact is, some chap's sent me a package, you know.”

“Name on box, sir, perhaps.” Said it offhand, just like that—no trouble of thinking, dash it all—never even blinked. Just instinct, by Jove!

And there it was, nicely printed in the corner with a pen:

ROLAND MASTERMANN, GOVERNMENT HOUSE,
HONG KONG, CHINA

I read it aloud—can't read anything, you know, unless I read it aloud—and looked at Jenkins inquiringly. But he came right up to the scratch; just seemed to get it from somewhere right out of the wall over my head:

“Beg pardon, sir; but think it's that London gentleman—entertained you at the Carlton when you were over the other side.”

Mastermann! By Jove, so it was—I began to remember him now, because I remembered his dinner,

several of them, in fact, during the three years I had lived over there, acquiring the English accent—manner, you know—and all that sort of thing!

Mastermann—oh, yes, I had him, now! Jolly rum old boy, but entertaining and clever—long hair, pink wart on jaw! And, by Jove, I had promised him—promised him—what the deuce *was* it I had promised him? Let me see: he was something or other in the foreign office; yes, I had that—and tremendously interested in mummies and psychical investigation and rum sort of things like that, and—

“By Jove!” I ejaculated, as it came to me. “And for that reason he wanted them to send him out to China.”

“Beg pardon, sir,” put in Jenkins, “but think you had a letter with a Chinese postmark last week.”

He looked around at my little writing-desk and coughed slightly behind his hand.

“Was just a-wondering, sir, if it might not be among those you haven’t opened—there are several piles. If I might look, sir—”

I nodded. Fact is, I allow Jenkins much privilege, owing to long service. Then, you know—oh, dash it, he’s so original—so refreshing and that sort of thing—so surprising. Just as in this case, he thinks of so many devilishly ingenious, out-of-the-way sort of things!

It was Jenkins’ idea that I find out what was in the box by just *opening* the dashed thing while he looked for the letter.

Clever that, eh? Well, rather!

So I unsheathed my little pocket manicure knife, cut the strings and removed the wrapper. Inside was just a little, straw-covered box with a telescope cover and inside the box, wrapped in tissue, was a tight roll of bright red silk.

That was all—not another thing but this little silk roll. It was a wad as thick as three fingers and perhaps twice as long, tied with a bit of common string, ending in a loose bowknot.

I gripped my glass a bit tighter in my eye and took a long shot at the thing. But dashed if I could make anything out of it at all. You see, the string went around it at least three or four times. Such a devilish secretive way to fix a thing, don't you think?

A queer, sweet, spicy sort of odor swept past me that reminded me of the atmosphere at Santine's and places in the Metropolitan Art Museum. I sat down, the better to think it over, turning the little roll in my hand and trying to think of all the things it might be.

"Looks like it might be a red silk muffler, Jenkins," I exclaimed in disgust. By Jove, I was never so devilish disappointed in my life—never—I'm sure of it! If I had been a girl I should have cried—dash it, I know I should.

I pinched the roll gloomily.

"If it's a red silk muffler, Jenkins, catch me wearing it, that's all!" I burst out indignantly. "Rotter"

'bad form, if you ask *me*. I'd look like an out-and-out bounder!'

Then I had a horrible thought:

"Or—or the Salvation Army, dash it!"

Here Jenkins thrust a letter at me. "Perhaps this may explain it, sir," he suggested.

Sure enough, it was from Hong Kong, and from that chap, Mastermann. Out there on special mission for his government, he said. I don't know what it was—never did know, in fact, for I skipped down to this paragraph, which I read aloud:

"Every puff of those rare cigars you sent me has but reminded me that my debt to you is still unpaid."

I read thus far; then I read it again. But I could make nothing of it.

"Cigars—cigars?" I exclaimed, puzzled.

Then I forgot the letter as I stared at Jenkins.

"And what's the matter with *you*?" I demanded.

For I had caught him with his hand over his mouth, obviously trying to suppress a chuckle. He sobered instantly, but seemed embarrassed for a reply.

"Oh, I say, you know!" I urged him.

He started to speak, then pulled up. His breath went out in a sort of sigh. And he just stood there looking at me, and looking kind of scared.

Fact! Perfectly irreproachable service for five years; and now here, dash it, showing emotion and

that sort of thing, just like—well, like *people*, by Jove! Gad, I don't mind saying I was devilish put out! I screwed my glass rather severely and he made another go:

"I hope, Mr. Lightnut, sir, you'll try to pardon me, sir, but I— Well, indeed, sir, the mistake wasn't mine; it was the dealer's fault, you know, sir."

"Oh!"

I stared, polished my glass and nodded. I even chirped up a smile, but I didn't utter a word. Dash it, what *was* there to say? But you mustn't let *them* know that, you know. So I just waited, and he squirmed a little and went on:

"It was too late after he told me about the mistake; and I was—well, I was afraid to mention it to you, sir."

"Mistake! What mistake?"

He gulped; dashed if I didn't think he was going to choke.

"I—I'm sure, sir, I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for—"

I could stand it no longer.

"Oh, I say! I haven't any idea what you're talking about!"

Jenkins cleared his throat with an effort, his eyes rolling at me apologetically. When he spoke there was a tremble in his utterance, and it was rather husky:

"Why, sir," he began in a low tone, "you told me to have your dealer ship this gentleman, this Mr.

Mastermann, a dozen boxes of Paloma perfectos—your favorite brand, you know, sir—ninety dollars the hundred.”

He paused, his fingers resting tremblingly on the edge of the table.

“I dare say,” I yawned presently. “Well, what of it?” I was getting impatient. By Jove, he was making me downright nervous, don’t you know! Besides, I was so devilish anxious to get on with Mastermann’s letter. I wanted to find out, if possible, what it was the fellow had sent me.

Jenkins breathed hard and leaned toward me. Then he seemed to flunk again and dropped back. Dashed if I didn’t think I heard him groan! But I stared at him through my glass, and he swallowed hard and went on:

“An error, sir, of the shipping clerk. He—”

With a murmured apology, Jenkins paused to wipe his forehead. I saw that the perspiration had gathered in great drops. Then he seemed to gather himself for a resolute effort, his eyes fixing themselves upon me with the most extraordinary expression—kind of half-frightened, half-desperate glare—that sort of thing, don’t you know. I began to feel devilish uncomfortable and edged away.

And he made another plunge: “They sent him—”

And, dash me if he didn’t stick again! It just looked like he couldn’t get past. But I encouraged him—just like you have to do a horse, you know—and this time he got over:

“They sent him a dozen boxes of ‘Hickey’s Pride,’ sir, instead!”

He spoke in a low, choking voice and looked me full in the eye—the kind of look you get when a chap’s boxing with you, you know—that sort of thing.

CHAPTER II

AN OMINOUS DISCOVERY

I WAS puzzled.
“‘Hickey’s Pride?’ ” I repeated thoughtfully.
“I don’t seem to recall that one. Do I smoke it often?”

Jenkins seemed to gasp.

“You? Certainly *not*, sir! *Never!*”

And, by Jove, he turned pale! Anyhow, he looked devilish queer as he put his hands down on the table and bent to whisper:

“Mr. Lightnut, sir—” And the way he dropped his voice and turned his head to peer around into the corners was just creepy! That’s what, creepy! This, with the glow from the green lampshade on his pale face as he leaned across the table—oh, it was something ghastly—awful, you know! It got on my nerves, and I could feel the hair slowly rising on each side of my part. He bent close, whispering behind his hand, and I knew he had been eating radishes for dinner:

“It’s what’s known in the trade, sir, as a ‘twofer.’ ”

“A ‘twofer!’ ” I repeated, puzzled.

“Two for five, sir.” Jenkins spoke faintly. “I’m sure I’m ashamed to mention to a perfect gen—”

“By Jove, *I* know!” I lifted my finger suddenly. “I know now the kind you mean—big, fat, greasy-looking ones—the sort Vanderdecker and Colonel Boylston smoke over at the club.” I shook my head. “Too jolly thick and heavy for me. So they’re two for a ‘V’—eh? Oh, I *see*—‘twofers!’ By Jove!”

A brand new one, this—a ripper! I made up my mind to spring it on the fellows first chance—that is, if I could remember the jolly thing. I just looked at Jenkins’ solemn face and laughed.

“Oh, I say, Jenkins—hang the expense, you know!” I remonstrated in some disgust. For this London chap had given me no end of a good time, you know; and it’s such devilish bad form—rotten, I say—haggling about expense when you want to make a come-back and do the handsome. I was jolly glad the mistake had happened.

Just here I remembered the letter and went at it again, for I was keen to find out, if possible, if it *was* a muffler under the string. So I fixed my glass and read on:

“Realizing what these cigars are, I have given them, from time to time, to friends of mine—and others. Really, I don’t think I ever had such unselfish, unalloyed pleasure from anything in my life. Gave one to a bus driver out Earl’s Court way—chap who had never been known to speak to man, woman or child in years, and, after he lighted it—

well, my word! He opened up and grew so bally eloquacious I had to get off."

"By Jove!" I exclaimed.

I felt real pleased—that kind of fizzy glow—sort of bubbling-champagney-feeling you get, you know, whenever a friend does some clever, unexpected thing—like repaying a loan, for instance. Know about that, because I had it happen to me once. Fact!

"See that, Jenkins?" I said with a little triumph.

I wanted to reassure him, for I could see with half an eye that the poor fellow was devilish plucked about the expense. And Jenkins certainly looked regularly bowled over.

I read on:

"Had been trying to get Jorgins, my chief, to send me out here again to China, but he was ever finding some cold, beastly evasion. But when your package came to the office, the first thing I did after I had tried the cigars was to hand the old iceberg a box with my compliments.

"Five minutes after, he came back, completely thawed out. Fact is, never saw him so warm toward any one. Asked me if the other boxes were to be given away outside. Said no; that his was the only box I could spare; was going to keep 'em all there at the office and smoke 'em myself. Never saw a man so moved—so worked up over a little thing. Next day he sent me out here to China."

"Coals of fire!" I ejaculated admiringly. "Regular out-and-out coals of fire, by Jove!"

“And so I have been looking about since I have been out here, trying to find something as rare, unique and full of surprises for your friends as your cigars have been for mine. I have found it.”

“And devilish handsome of him, Jenkins, eh?” I commented gratefully; and I looked with renewed interest at the little roll in my hand. Jove, how I wished, though, he would come to the point and say what it was!

“You know what a curiously upside-down people the Chinese are. Example, they begin dinner with desert and end with soup; they drink hot, acid beverages in summer instead of iced ones; they write from right to left, vertically, while we write from left to right, horizontally; they mourn in white instead of black, and they are awfully honest and pay their debts.

“But there is one other point of difference still queerer: they wear pajamas all day, while we wear them only at night.”

Here I yawned. Always hate that heavy, historical, instructive stuff, you know. If you have to hear it, gives you headache, unless you can slip off to sleep first.

So I reached the letter up to Jenkins.

“Just run over the rest of it yourself, and see if he says anything about his present,” I said, settling comfortably. Clever idea of mine, don’t you think?

And I was just dropping my head to have a snug little nap—just a little forty, you know—when,

dash me, if I didn't have another idea! Awfully annoying, time like that.

Mind is so devilish alert, dash it! Always doing things like that; can't seem to get over it, you know. And this ripping idea that bobbed up now and got me all roused up was nothing more or less than to untie the string myself and see what the thing was. See?

"I believe, sir," said Jenkins, looking up, "the gentleman has sent you—h'm—has sent you—"

"By Jove, a suit of pajamas!" I exclaimed, holding them up.

It was neck and neck, but I beat Jenkins to it, after all!

"Gentleman says, sir," continued Jenkins, studying the letter, "that his present of a pair of pajamas may seem surprising, but you won't know how surprising until you have worn them."

"Jolly likely," I admitted, feeling the silk. By Jove, it was the finest, yet thinnest stuff I ever saw, soft as rose leaves and as filmy light as a spider's web. Not bad, that, for a comparison, eh? Caught the idea from a vase of full-blown roses that were beginning to shed their petals there on the table. And on one of the blossoms was a little brown spider. Catch the idea? Suggested spider's web, you know.

"They're rather red, sir," Jenkins commented dubiously.

Red? Well, I should say! My! How jolly red

they were! We spread them under the light, and the red seemed to flow all over the table and fall from the edge. Why, they were as red as—

I tried to think of something they were as red as, but somehow I couldn't fetch the idea. I thought of red ink and blood and fireworks, but they didn't seem to be up to them at all. And a big, velvety petal that dropped from one of the crimson roses just seemed brown beside them.

And yet, dash it, I knew they reminded me of something, you know; I knew they *must*.

"They remind me—" I began, and had to pause—idea balked, you know. "They remind me of—of— Jenkins, what do they remind me of?"

"Of *him*, sir," replied Jenkins promptly.

"Eh?"

"Old Memphis Tuffles, sir," explained Jenkins darkly. "I saw him once in a opera, and he was that red."

"By Jove!" I said thoughtfully, and fell to watching the little spider. It was dropping a life-line or something down to the pajamas.

"But they say he ain't always red," Jenkins continued mysteriously. "A lady as is in the palmistry and card-reading line in Forty-second Street told me he turned black whenever he got down to business. Do you suppose that's where they get the idea of what they call black magic, sir?"

I answered absently, for I was wondering whether the little spider was curious about the jolly red color

there below him. And just then Jenkins' hand went out and swept at the little thread. The spider dropped and shot into a fold of the pajamas.

"I say! Look out!" I exclaimed as Jenkins made another clutch. "Don't mash the beast on the silk; you'll ruin it—the silk, I mean!"

"There it goes, sir!" said Jenkins eagerly. "Over by your hand."

"No; by Jove; he's gone into a leg of the pajamas! Here, shake him out—gently now!"

Jenkins lifted the garment gingerly and lightly shook it. But nothing came forth.

"Why don't you look in the leg," I said, "and see if you can see it?"

Jenkins peered down one of the silken tubes and forthwith dropped it with a yell. He jumped back.

"Look out, sir," he cried excitedly; "don't touch 'em! There's a tarantula in there big as a sand crab, and it's alive."

"A tarantula? Nonsense! We don't have tarantulas in New York," I protested.

Jenkins gestured violently. "One's there, sir, anyhow! I saw one once on a bunch of bananas down in South Street. If they jump on you and bite, you might as well just walk around to the undertaker. A dago told me so."

I backed nervously from the crumpled crimson pile on the floor.

Crimson?

Of course, I knew it was crimson; it must be the

shadow of the table there that made the things so dark—*black*, in fact. But my mind was on the tarantula; and I was thinking that it must have been wrapped with the pajamas. Yet I could not understand how this could be, considering how tightly the things had been rolled.

Anyhow, it was there; and Jenkins pointed excitedly.

“Look, sir! You can see it moving under the silk!”

By Jove, so you could! And the thing seemed nearly as big as a rat. It was making for the end of the leg. I climbed upon a chair.

“Get a club,” I exclaimed, “and smash the thing as it comes out!”

Jenkins rushed out and returned with a brassie.

“Careful now,” I warned from the chair. “Don’t go and hit the dashed thing before it gets out, and make a devil of a mess on the silk! There it is—it’s out! No, no—not yet! Wait, until it gets its whole body out! There now; he’s drawing out his last beastly leg. Now—*now* let drive!”

And he did, and seemed to hit the thing squarely.

I knelt on the chair and craned over, while Jenkins still held the stick tightly at the point where the thing had struck.

“Get him?” I queried. “Where is it?”

“That’s it, sir,” said Jenkins in an odd voice. “It ain’t here.”

“Why, dash it, I saw you strike the beast, right where you’re holding that club.”

“Mr. Lightning, sir”—Jenkins spoke a little huskily and glanced around at me queerly—“will you look under the end of this stick and see if you see what I see?”

I climbed down and examined cautiously.

“Why, by Jove, it’s the little spider!” I exclaimed, surprised.

“Exactly, sir; what’s left.” Jenkins took a deep breath.

“Thank you, sir—it’s a great relief,” he sighed.

“Eh?”

“I mean, sir, I’m glad I ain’t the only one who thought he saw that other. It’s *some* comfort.”

Jenkins spoke gloomily.

“*Thought* you saw?” I repeated.

But Jenkins only shook his head as he gathered up the remains of the spider and consigned them to a cuspidor.

“You mean—say, what the devil *do* you mean?” I asked sharply.

Jenkins straightened with air respectful but solemn.

“Mr. Lightning, sir,” he began gravely, “there’s a party lectures on the street corner every night at nine on the fearful consequences of the drink habit, and passes around blank pledges to be signed. I’m going to get one first chance; and if you will accept

it, sir—meaning no offense—I would be proud to get you one, too.”

I stared at him aghast.

“Oh, I say, now,” I murmured faintly, “you don’t think it was that, do you?”

Jenkins’ face was eloquent enough.

“I’m through, sir,” he said sadly. “When it comes to seeing things like that—” He lifted his eyes. “No more for me, sir; my belief is, it’s a warning—yes, sir, that’s what, a warning.”

I collapsed into a chair.

“By Jove!” I gasped uneasily.

I was awfully put out—annoyed, you know. It was the first time anything of the kind had ever happened to me. If I started in with tarantulas, what would I be seeing next?

Jenkins gulped nervously. “Why, sir,” he whispered, leaning toward me, “these pajamas—you see for yourself how red they are—they actually seemed to lose color when that bug was in ’em.”

“Oh, pshaw!” I said contemptuously. “I saw that, too.” And I explained to him about the shadow of the table. He nodded.

“But that only makes it worse, sir,” he commented dubiously. “It shows the ‘mental condition,’ as they say. You know, we were talking about the black art—remember, sir?”

I did remember; and also I remembered then we saw the spider. I recalled that spiders and tarantulas belonged to the same family. Of course Jenkins’

suspicious hit the nail—it must be that—there was no getting around it—but still—

“By Jove, Jenkins!” I said, trying to go a feeble smile. “I never felt so fit for a corking stiff highball in my life—never!”

I took a screw on my glass and studied him curiously.

“And I say, you know—better take one yourself!” I added.

CHAPTER III

I DON THE PAJAMAS

“**B**Y Jove, Jenkins, they fit like a dream!”

I twisted before the glass and surveyed the pajamas with much satisfaction. They looked jolly right from every point. Moreover, with all their easy looseness, there was not an inch too much. They had a comfortable, personal feel.

“Lucky thing they weren’t made originally for some whale like Jack Billings—eh, Jenkins?” I commented musingly.

Behind his hand Jenkins indulged in what is vulgarly known as a snicker.

“Mr. Billings, sir, he couldn’t get one shoulder in ’em, much less a—h’m—leg,” he chuckled. “They’d be in ribbons, sir!”

I yawned sleepily, and Jenkins instantly sobered to attention. He held his finger over the light switch as I punched a pillow and rolled over on the mattress.

“All right,” I said; “push the jolly thing out.” And with a click darkness fell about me.

“Good night, sir,” came Jenkins’ voice softly.

“Night,” I murmured faintly, and I was off.

Sometime, hours later, I awoke, and with a devilish yearning for a smoke. It often takes me that way in the night.

I climbed out in the blackness and found my way into the other room. I remembered exactly where I had dropped my cigarette case when we were fooling with the pajamas by the table, and I found it without difficulty.

In the act of stooping for it, my hand clutched the edge of the table and I felt a spot yield under the pressure of my thumb. It was the button controlling the bell to Jenkins' room.

"Lucky thing he sleeps like a jolly porpoise," I reflected.

I pushed a wicker arm-chair into the moonlight and breeze by a window, and pulling a flame to a cigarette, leaned back, feeling jolly comfy. For the breeze was ripping and delicious, and the delicate silk of the pajamas flowed in little wavelets all the way from my heels to my neck.

And, thinking of the pajamas, I tried to fix my mind on it that I must tell Jenkins to have me write that chap, Mastermann, and send him another lot of those devilish good cigars he liked. I tried to recall what Jenkins had said was the name of the brand—something deuced clever, I remembered that much.

I was just about dropping off, when I heard some one hurrying along the private hall leading from the back. Jenkins himself popped into the room.

“Did you ring, sir?” he inquired, and advanced quickly.

And then, before I could think about it to reply, he halted suddenly, almost pitching forward. Then, with a kind of wheezy howl, he sprang to the wall. Next instant, I was blinking under the dazzling electrolier.

“Here, I say! Shut off that light!” I remonstrated, half blinded.

I heard a swift rush across the rugs, and the next thing I knew I was roughly jerked from out my chair; strong fingers clutched my throat, and I found myself glaring into a frightened but resolute face.

“Jen-Jenkins!” I tried to gasp, but only a gurgle came.

I was so taken unawares, I knew it must be some dashed dream. Perhaps another minute, and I would wake up. But he gripped me tighter and shook me like a rag.

“Say, who are you?” he hissed. “How did you get in here?”

And then, of course, I knew that he was crazy. Whether he was crazy in a dream or crazy with me awake, I couldn't guess. It made very little difference, anyhow, for I knew that in another minute I should be either dream dead or real dead; and dash me if I could see any odds worth tossing for in either, you know.

But I don't belong to the athletic club quite for

nothing, and have managed to pick up a few tricks, you know. So with the decision to chuck the dream theory, I shot my leg forward with a mix-up and twist that made Jenkins loosen his clutch and stagger backward.

"What's the matter with you?" I gasped, advancing toward him. "Are you trying to murder me?" But I was so hoarse, the only word that came out plainly was "murder."

Jenkins uttered a howl. "Help, Mr. Lightnut! Murder!"

"You old fool!" I cried, exasperated. "Come here!"

He was coming. He seized a light chair and swung it behind his head. Then he rushed me with a shout.

"Oh, Mr. Lightnut!"

"Gone clear off his nut!" was my thought. As he swung the chair, I ducked low, and man and chair went crashing to the floor. But he was up again in a jiffy and dancing at me.

"Mr. Lightnut, sir, why don't you help me?"

"Help you—you jolly idiot?" I muttered indignantly. Then my voice raised: "I've a mind to kill you!"

With a yell, he made a kangaroo jump and swung at me again.

"He says he's going to kill me, Mr. Lightnut!" he panted as I dodged again. "Help me—wake up, sir!"

Wake up? Wake up, indeed, when I had never been so devilish wide awake in all my life! I was *sure* now about that. I moved toward him cautiously.

“Stop your row!” I cried angrily; “you’ll have somebody in. Think I want the police up here?”

With a glare at me, Jenkins darted past me to the bedroom I had just left. Its light switch clicked, and then back through the brightened doorway he sprang and dashed for a wall cabinet at the side. He began tugging at its little drawer. And suddenly I remembered the revolver there, an old forty-five from a friend in Denver—and loaded!

My spring to intercept him was quick, but not quick enough. Half-way to him I pulled up under the compelling argument of the long blue barrel pointed at my head.

“Here! Look out, you fool—it’s loaded!” I warned, backing away to the window.

Jenkins advanced. “What have you done with him?” he panted hoarsely. “Where is he?”

“Where’s who?” I asked savagely, for I was getting devilish tired of it all. But for the publicity, I should have yelled from the window.

“Where’s Mr. Lightnut?” he demanded.

“Oh, he’s all right.” I decided to adopt that soothing tone that I had read somewhere was the proper caper with lunatics.

“Where?” Jenkins insisted, pushing nearer.

And dashed if I knew what to answer; for, if I

made a mistake, it might be serious, by Jove! Perhaps some jocular reply would be safest—might divert his attention, you know.

The open window gave me an idea.

“Why, do you know,” I said pleasantly, “I just chucked him down into the street.”

It sounded like a cannon cracker, that gun! The shower of splintered glass from the picture between the windows barely missed me. But I never waited a second—for this last devilish straw was too much, don’t you know, and something had to be done. I leaped for the weapon as it struck the hardwood floor between us, jerked from Jenkins’ hand by the unfamiliar upward kick. Another instant and I was poking the muzzle into his side.

“I’ve just had enough of this, you fool!” I cried impatiently. “Here, take a good look at me!” I pushed my face closer. “Look at me, I tell you!”

By Jove, he shuddered! His eyes, wide distended with terror, rolled to the ceiling.

“I can’t,” he whispered; “I just can’t—anything but that! Only, please—please don’t kill me, too.”

“Kill you?” I said, frowning sternly as he gave a furtive glance. “I certainly will, if you don’t take a good look at me!”

He gave a sort of despairing sigh and closed his eyes so tightly the lashes disappeared. “All right, then,” he said sullenly; “you may kill me!”

The way with these lunatics, I thought. Next thing, he would be begging and insisting that I kill

him. I motioned to the door of my guest-room and gave him a push.

"In there," I said, "and keep perfectly quiet."

And as he shot inside, I closed the door and locked it. I just had to take the chance of his hurting himself against the walls and furniture; I didn't believe he was so crazy he would undertake the six-story leap to the ground. Listening, I heard something like a sob. Then I caught my name.

"Poor Mr. Lightnut," came chokingly; "the kindest, gentlest master!" And then more sobs and gulps.

By Jove, under his insane delusion, the poor beggar was grieving for me; not thinking of himself at all, you know. I felt my eyes grow a bit moist, somehow, and all at once my heart went heavy. Thought how long poor old Jenkins had been with me—ever since I was out of college, you know—five years—and remembered how devilish faithful and attached he had always been. Poor old Jenks! It was awful his going off this way! I recalled how he had taken to seeing things, earlier in the evening, and had made me see them, too, dash it! One thing I determined: whatever had to be done with him, he should have the finest of attention.

I knew that I ought to telephone to somebody or something, but dashed if I had any idea who or where. Oddly enough, not a soul seemed to have been roused by the pistol shot, but I saw by the little clock that it was close to three—the hour in a

bachelor apartment house when everybody is asleep, if they're going to sleep at all.

I decided that the best thing to do first was to get into some clothes. And with this thought I was turning away, when it occurred to me to make an effort to see if poor Jenkins seemed more rational now or had gone to sleep.

I tapped upon the door. "Are you asleep?" I asked softly.

A howl of positive terror came back.

"I'm a-keeping quiet," he cried, "but don't let me hear your voice again, or I'll jump right out of the window."

I shook my head sadly and tiptoed into my room, where I slipped hurriedly out of the pajamas and into some clothes; then back I went to the telephone. It was on my little writing-desk close to the door confining Jenkins.

I lifted the receiver with a sigh.

"Hello, central," I began, responding to the operator. "I say, will you give me 'information?'"

A loud shout suddenly sounded from behind the closed door, and there came a frantic double-pounding of fists.

"Mr. Lightnut—Mr. Lightnut!" screamed Jenkins. "Oh, Mr. Lightnut, you're back—you're alive—I can hear your voice! This is Jenkins, Mr. Lightnut; yes, sir, Jenkins. They've got me locked in!"

I clapped the receiver on the hook and sprang to

the door, unlocking it. Jenkins almost tumbled into my arms. By Jove, for a second I hung in the wind, he acted so crazy still; at least, it seemed so just at first. The fellow threw his arm about my neck and laughed—laughed and cried, dash it—and just wringing my hands and carrying on— Oh, awful! And even when I got him into a chair, he just sat there laughing and crying like a jolly old silly, patting my hand, you know, and wiping his eyes, what time they were not devouring me.

“Has he gone, sir?” he gasped huskily. “Did he jump from the window?” But I waved all questions aside.

“After you’ve had some sleep,” I insisted. “Then I’ll tell you the whole jolly story.” And I just got him to his room myself, despite his distress and protests over my attention.

“Thank you, sir, and good night,” he said as I left him. And he murmured placidly, “I guess we’re all right now.”

But I was not so sure as to *him*, when I viewed the broken chair and scattered fragments of glass—ominous reminders of the scene through which I had passed. And so, though I threw the pistol on top of a bookcase, I spent the rest of the night upon the soft cushions of my big divan.

CHAPTER IV

JENKINS DECLARES FOR THE WATER WAGON

“**B**UT this savage-looking Chinaman that you saw, Jenkins—how was he dressed?” I adopted a careless tone of inquiry.

It was high noon, and I was toying with an after luncheon, or rather after breakfast, cigar.

Jenkins’ head shook dubiously. “I just remember something blackish. My, sir, I didn’t have time to notice nothing like clothes!”

His tone conveyed aggrieved protest. He went on:

“Just as I’m telling you, sir, I saw some one sitting there by the window and walked toward him, thinking it was you. Then, all of a sudden, I see his awful face a-scowling at me there in the moonlight.”

“And he was smoking, you say?”

Jenkins sniffed indignantly. “Free and easy as a lord, sir! He held a long stick to his ugly mouth, and smoke was curling out of a little bowl near the end.”

“Oh, opium pipe, eh?”

“Likely, sir,” agreed Jenkins; “but I never saw one.”

By Jove, I had my own opinion about that! I knew he *must* have seen one before; but I just went on questioning, to gain time, you know, and wondering all the while how I should ever be able to break the truth to the poor fellow.

"Tell me again what he was like," I said. "How did you know he was a Chinaman?"

"Why, by his long black pigtail, sir, and his onery color. But I never saw no Chinaman as ugly as this one—no sir. Oh, he was just too awful horrid to look at, sir. His forehead sloped away back, or maybe the front part of his head being all shaved made it look that way. And the skin about his eyes was painted white with red streaks shooting around like rays of light."

"No beard or mustache, I suppose?" I suggested, feeling my own smooth-shaven face. Jenkins' reply was a surprise.

"Yes, sir; there were long black kind of rat tails that dropped down from the sides of his mouth. And then his neck—ugh—all thick with woolly hair."

"Oh, it was, eh?" I said drily, thinking of the long red stripe that my collar concealed. "I suppose you felt this, eh, when you jumped at his throat?"

Jenkins rubbed his chin with a puzzled air.

"Why, that's uncommon queer, sir; but now that you remind me, I do remember that his neck felt perfectly smooth—and it wasn't so big, either. Why, I should say it felt just about like yours would, sir."



Edmund
Funderburk
1911



I eyed him ruefully.

"By Jove, I don't doubt it a minute!" I commented with some disgust. "See here, Jenkins, I suppose you've been to the Chinese theater down in Doyers Street, eh?"

For I had been down there with slumming parties, and I remembered the hideous sorcerers, fierce warriors and kings the Chinks represent in their interminable plays. And the facial make-up described by Jenkins tallied in a way with some I recalled from these ancient, semi-mythical plays.

But at my question, Jenkins' lip curled a little; dash me, but he looked almost insulted.

"I should say not, sir," he said with a sniff; "you don't catch me going down in them parts!" He added quickly: "Meaning no offense, sir."

"Sure?" I questioned sharply.

"Never, sir!" Jenkins' earnestness was unmistakable. But of course I knew the poor fellow had forgotten all about it.

"One of the jolly rum things that goes along with his affliction," I reflected sadly. "A month from now the poor beggar will be swearing he never saw me in his life." And how the devil was I going to break the truth to him? I sighed perplexedly. "Well, go on with your yarn," I said irresolutely. "You were telling, when I interrupted, about rushing into my bedroom."

"Yes, sir," he resumed with animation. "And when I didn't find you, I was just frantic, for I

didn't know you had gone out, sir—never thought of that; I went for the ugly monster with the big pistol there in the cabinet—which, by the way, sir, the low down villain stole when he locked me up and lit out."

I had an inspiration.

"I see," I broke in carelessly; "and then you demanded to know where I was—that it? Then you backed him to that window, and he told you he had chucked me into the street—whereupon you tried to blow off his head and knocked the jolly daylights out of the lady with the fencing foil."

Jenkins, his mouth agape, viewed me with distended eyes.

"I didn't tell you that, sir," he faltered. "How—"

"And when you dropped the weapon," I went on, "this chap collared it, jabbed the beastly thing into you, and told you to look at him. And by Jove you wouldn't!"

Jenkins groaned slightly. The apologetic cough with which he strove to mantle the sound was dry and spiritless.

"No, sir; it seemed easier to die, sir," he murmured—"what with him grinning like a fiend and his long teeth a-sticking out over his lip—ugh!" Then he added wonderingly: "But what gets me is how you should know, sir."

I looked at him gravely.

"Jenkins," I said gently, "I know, because it so happens I was here all the time."

His eyes bulged incredulously.

"You, sir? You mean in this room?"

I nodded slowly. "I mean right in this room—I was a witness of the whole thing."

Jenkins just gulped. I motioned to a chair.

"You may sit down, Jenkins, my poor fellow," I said compassionately. I poured out some whisky and gave it to him.

"Yes, yes; I want you to drink that," I insisted as he took it hesitatingly. "You will need it. Drink every drop of it."

And I watched him do it. For somehow the poor devil seemed to be growing paler every minute, and I was afraid the shock of what I was going to say would send him into a swoon.

Jenkins replaced the empty glass with a positively trembling hand. By Jove, his face turned a kind of asparagus yellow.

It alarmed me a little, for I felt apprehensive that perhaps it was time for him to have another spell, you know. Of course, I knew that the devilishly adroit, tactful way I was breaking it to him wouldn't disturb the peace of a baby. Some people would have gone about the thing in some deuced abrupt way, don't you know, and alarmed him. I didn't want to do that—in fact, I took pains to tell him so at the start.

"I don't want to frighten you, my poor fellow," I said, leaning toward him and speaking in a low, earnest voice—just that way, you know—no excite-

ment. "You mustn't let anything I say frighten you badly about yourself."

"No, sir. Thank you, sir." But I could hardly hear him.

I waited a moment, eyeing him steadily—just doing it all in that calm way, you know—and then:

"You must brace yourself for a great shock, my poor Jenkins," I said soothingly. And then I thought I had best hurry on, for I could tell by the way his eyes rolled and the blue color of his lips that probably I was just in time to head off another attack. And then I told him all.

"And here," I concluded, "are the marks of your fingers under my collar, and the pistol is on top of the bookcase."

Jenkins just sat there, kind of huddled up, you know, and his face as white as the what-you-call-it snow. Didn't seem able to say a word. By Jove, it was too much for me; my heart just went out to him.

"It's all right, Jenkins," I said kindly, and I patted his knee. "Doesn't make a jolly bit of difference to me, personally. Just told you because I thought you ought to know. You just go right along and continue your duties, so far as I am concerned."

Jenkins' hand slipped along his knee and ventured to touch mine timidly. He rose heavily.

"Mr. Lightning, sir," he said huskily, "if you're not going to need me very much, could I be excused for a while to-night?"

“By Jove, yes, Jenkins! Go out and enjoy the evening; it will do you good. Stay as long as you like, dash it! You know I dine to-night at the club. Go to a roof garden and get some fresh air.”

A toss of the head broke Jenkins' calm; his fist struck his palm.

“It ain't that, sir,” he exclaimed. “I don't want no fresh air, but I do want fresh resolution and a fresh start. I'm going to find *him*.”

“Him!” I was startled. Dash me, I half thought he meant the Chinaman.

“Him, sir; that temperance lecturer, I mean. I'm going to get out a paper against that old enemy there!” And he shook his fist at the whisky decanter.

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL FROM RADCLIFFE

“LONG distance call from Mr. Billings, sir,” said Jenkins, lifting the receiver.

By Jove, he had just caught me as I was about to leave.

“Hello! That you, Lightning?” came his voice. “Say, old chap, you remember you said you wouldn’t mind putting up the kid overnight on the way home from college. Remember? Wants to rest over and come up the river on the day line.”

Yes, I remembered, and said so.

“All right, then; it’s to-night. Be there about nine from Boston. Don’t go to any trouble, now, nor alter any plans. The kid will probably be dead tired and off to bed before you get home from your dinner.”

“That’s all right, old chap; Jenkins will look after the young one.”

I heard Billings chuckle—I remembered that chuckle afterward.

“Not much of the young one there. Eighteen, you know. Never off to school, though, until last year—and by George, it was time! Between my mother and

my sister the kid was being absolutely ruined—petted, mollycoddled, and was getting soft and silly—oh, something to make you sick. Well, so much obliged, Dicky. You know what these hotels are. Good-by.”

I explained to Jenkins. “All right, sir,” he said. “I won’t go out until after nine. It’ll be time enough.”

And so I went off. I returned early, about ten, and sat reading. Jenkins was still away, and the door of my guest room was open.

“Good evening!”

The voice behind me was soft, musical, delicious.

I whirled about, and there, within the door, leaning against the frame, was the most beautiful creature I ever saw in all my life.

A girl! But oh, by Jove, *such* a girl! A lovely, rosy blonde, dash it! Golden-haired angel—long, droopy kind of lashes, don’t you know—eyes like creamy sapphire seas—oh, that sort of thing—a peach!

The leap that brought me to my feet sent my chair thudding backward.

“Why—er—good evening,” I managed to stammer. Just managed, you know, for, give you my word, I never was so bowled over in my life—never! And on the instant I guessed what it meant. The “kid” that Billings referred to wasn’t a kid brother at all, but was a kid sister—girl, by Jove!

“Are you busy?” I saw the flash of her perfect

little teeth as her lips parted in a smile. "If not, may I talk to you a while?"

I mumbled something designed to be pleasant—dash me if I know what—and managed to summon sense enough to lift toward her a wicker arm-chair. Then I dashed into my bedroom to chuck the smoking-jacket and get into a coat. And all the while I was thinking harder than I ever had thought it possible.

Just the thing to have expected of an ass like Billings—a fellow with no sense of the proprieties! His kind of mind had never got any further than the fact that I had a guest-room and a quiet apartment. The further fact that it was in a bachelor apartment house and I a bachelor—and not yet out of my twenties, dash it—would never have presented itself to a chump like Billings as having any bearing on the matter.

"Of course, I must get right over to the club and leave her in possession—it's the only thing left to do." This was my thought as I slipped into my coat and gave my hair a touch—just a touch, don't you know. The thing to do was to carry it off as naturally as possible for a few minutes, and then slip away. Probably she hadn't counted upon my being in town at all—had taken it for granted it was some sort of family apartment—with housekeeper, servant maids, all that sort of thing.

"Never mind," I thought, as I kicked off my half-shoes and jerked on the first things at hand. "Thing

to do now is to keep that child's mind from being distressed. She'll have a good sleep and get off early in the morning on the Albany boat. Don't suppose she'd understand, anyhow—sweet, innocent, unsophisticated thing like that. What a fool Billings is!"

And I jammed in savagely the turquoise matrix pin with which I was replacing the pearl, because it went better with my tie.

"Now, just a few minutes of conversation to put her at her ease," I reflected, "and then I'm off. I'll get the janitor's wife to come up and stay near her."

And I dashed back, murmuring some jolly rubbish of apology. And then I just brought up speechless—almost fell over backward. For as she stood there under the light, I saw that what I had taken for a dress of black silk was not a dress at all, but a suit of pajamas—black, filmy pajamas, whose loose elegance concealed but could not wholly deny the goddess-like figure within.

"I'd have known you anywhere, Mr. Lightnut." And then I found that we were shaking hands, my fingers crushed in a grasp I never could have thought possible from that tiny hand. "From hearing Jack talk, your name is a sort of household word in the Billings family."

I mumbled something jolly idiotic—some acknowledgment. But I was pink about the ears, and I knew it, while she was cool and serene as a lily of the what-you-call-it, don't you know. I was try-

ing not to see the pajamas, trying to pretend not to notice them, but dashed if I didn't only make it worse!

For she looked down at herself with a laugh—rather an embarrassed laugh, I thought; and her little shrug and glance directed attention to her attire.

“I see you're looking at the pajamas,” she said smiling.

And her eyes looked at me through those drooping lashes—oh, such a way!

“Oh, no—I assure—certainly not,” I stammered hastily. Dash it, I never was so rebuked and mortified in all my life. What an ass I had been to seem to notice at all!

She looked troubled. “Say, do you mind my wearing them?” she inquired.

“I? Certainly not—well, I should say not!” I retorted, almost with indignation.

“Sure?” By Jove, what ripping eyes she had!

“Of course not!” emphatically.

Her sunny head nodded satisfaction. “That's all right, then. I was afraid you wouldn't like it—afraid you would think I was acting a little *free*. But your man Jenkins—isn't that his name?—said he thought you would *like* for me to wear them.”

I gasped.

“Jen—what's *that?*” I was amazed, indignant at Jenkins' effrontery. “He—he suggested that you wear—er—these?”

She nodded, her glorious eyes shining wistfully.

"You see, I went to a frat dance last night in Cambridge," she explained; "and in the hurry this morning, somehow, one of my bags—a suit-case—was left behind. And when I got here to-night and began piling the things out of my other bag—well, I saw I was up a tree. Not a thing to slip into, you know—not so much as a dressing-gown or even a bathrobe. Then your man saved my life—suggested these pajamas. See?"

"Oh, I see!"

I said so; but, dash it, I wasn't sure I did, for I knew so devilish little about girls. But I got hold of this much: I understood that this delicately reared creature had missed the restfulness and luxury of a shift to some sort of dressing-robe after her day of travel. Probably one of those ribbony, pinky-white fripperies one sees in the windows of the Avenue shops, rosy, foamy dreams like the—well, like the crest of a soda cocktail, don't you know. And the pajamas had been adopted as a comfortable makeshift.

By Jove! And here she was sitting, calmly telling me all about it—just as she might to Jack—never thinking a thing about it! My, how charming, how innocent she was! But, dash it, that was the reason she was so beautiful—of course, that was it—and I had never seen anybody like her in all the world before. I knew jolly well I never should again, either. But I knew I ought to go—and at once.

"I must cut along now," I thought; "infernally shameful to be taking advantage of her this way!" And then I thought I would just wait a wee minute longer.

Just then she turned toward me, her elbow on the arm of the wicker chair, her dainty, manicured finger-tips supporting her chin.

"You know, Mr. Lightnut, I wasn't sure you would remember me at all," she said. "I was such a kid when you saw me last."

"Oh, yes," I said, trying to recall the rather hoydenish children I had seen on the motor trip to Billings' home five years before. "I remember you were quite a little girl—weren't you?"

I thought her face darkened a little; then her smile flashed through, like sunshine through a cloud. Her laugh came on top, like the mellow ripple of a tiny brook—that sort of thing—oh, you know!

"Oh, I say now, Mr. Lightnut, cut out the josh," she remonstrated; and I thought she grew a little red. "No more for mine those sissy, girlie ways—I've got well over all of that!"

She tossed one knee over the other and threw herself back in the chair. She seemed a little piqued. She went on:

"I just tell you what—there's nothing like a couple of years off at college for toughening you! Gets all those mamma's baby ways out of you, you bet your life, and all the slushiness you get from trying to be like your sisters. Shucks!"

I caught my breath. Of course, she had no idea how it sounded—this sort of talk; it was just her innocent frankness, her—what d'ye call it?—her *ingenuousness*—dash it!

She continued musingly: "Gee, but I was soft when I first went away—a regular pie-faced angel-child!" Her voice had in it a sneer. Then she straightened up, whirled her chair facing me, and gave me a sounding slap on the knee. "Say, maybe the fellows I met didn't educate that out of me mighty quick! Well, I reckon yes!" And she nodded, eyeing me sidewise, her pretty chin in the air.

But, dash me, I was so aghast I couldn't get out a word. Just sat there batting at her and turning hot and cold by turns. Came devilish near losing consciousness, by Jove, that's what!

Of course, I knew she didn't know what she was talking about. Hadn't any sisters myself, don't you know, and never had learned much about other fellows' sisters; but, dash it, I knew something about *faces*, and I would have staked my life on hers. You can nearly always tell, you know. But, anyhow, I thought I had better go now.

I got up. "I say, you want to just make yourself at home," I said. "And if you don't mind, I'll see you at the boat in the morning."

She stood up, too, looking rather surprised. "You're not going away?"

"Oh, no; not out of town." I thought that was

what she meant. I added: "And as I go out, I'll stop down-stairs and have some one come up and stay with you."

She dropped to the arm of the chair, her pretty face showing dismay.

"Oh, but see here! I'm running you off—I know I am. Say, Mr. Lightnut, I don't want to do that. I thought sure you were going to be here. Brother insisted you would be."

Brother! Nice brother, indeed, for her—poor little thing!

"Oh, you'll be all right," I said reassuringly. "I'm just going over to the club, don't you know—not far away."

She came right up to me and placed a hand on each shoulder.

"Honest Injun, now," she said—and her smile was ravishing. "Honest, now, Mr. Lightnut, you're going just because I'm here. Say now, own up!"

And, dash it, there was nothing to do but admit it.

"All right," she said; and I thought her eyes flashed a little. "Then I go to a hotel—that's all!"

"A hotel! Why, you can't do that—oh, I say!"

"Why can't I?" She was downright angry—I could see it; and how distractingly lovely she was with that flame in her cheeks!

But she was just a child—an innocent little child; and how the deuce could I ever make her understand?

I stammered: "Why—er—not in New York, you

know. They won't take a lady in at this time of night. They—"

She snapped her fingers. "Oh, I say, Mr. Lightnut, play easier on that girlie and lady pedal; cook up a fresh gag! I tell you, I've put all that behind me. Say, wait till you've known me a little, and I'll bet a purse you never call *me* a lady again! Lady! Say, that's *funny!*"

And it certainly seemed to strike her sense of humor. She gave me a sudden punch in the side that fairly left me breathless, and her laughter rang out birdlike, joyous. Of a sudden I felt devilish awkward and foolish.

"Oh, *please* stop stringing me, Mr. Lightnut—don't treat me like a kid. I want to get acquainted." Then her bright face sobered. "Say, was that on the level—that about your going to leave me? See here, I'm not bothering you, am I, Mr. Lightnut?"

"Bothering me!" I ejaculated. "Bothering *me?* I should say not!"

I think I must have said it heartily and convincingly, don't you know, for her lovely face looked pleased.

"Because if I am," she said earnestly, "I'll fade away into my own little room there." Her glance ranged toward her door. "It's sure some swell, that room."

"So jolly glad you like it," I said.

"Well, I should say!" Then her beautiful eyes looked at me full.

“You know, I didn’t expect this—I mean having a room all to myself. Never.”

And then, while I gasped, she went on, sweetly and calmly :

“Why, Mr. Lightnut, Brother Jack would throw seventeen thousand fits if I went to a hotel, because—” She laughed deliciously. “Well, I promised him that if he would let me come home by New York I would stay right here with you and behave myself.”

“Behave yourself!” I echoed indignantly. “Why, look here, do you mean to say Jack Billings—your own brother, you know—thought you wouldn’t—er—do that at a hotel?”

“*Thought?*” Her laugh this time was explosive. “No, he never thought it; he *knew* I wouldn’t! He knew I would be tearing around all night with the boys—*that’s* what!”

And dash me, if she didn’t throw herself back with a kind of swagger, by Jove!

“Why, you—you wouldn’t do such a thing!” I uttered faintly.

“Wouldn’t I?” She straightened suddenly, and her lovely blue eyes narrowed at me. “Say, Mr. Lightnut, I don’t want you to get me sized up wrong. I’m none of your little waxy gardenias—not much! When I’m in New York, it’s the bright lights and the Great White Way for mine—yes, sir, every time!”

And she gave me a blow on the shoulder that was

like a stroke from a man's arm. It sent me down into my chair.

"If you don't believe me," she added, her face shining with excitement, "just you ask Jack about last summer when I came through—about that joy ride to Coney with three Columbia fellows, and how we got pinched. Oh, mamma, but didn't Jack swear at me!"

I heard a noise by the door. Jenkins stood there, his eyes sticking out like hard boiled eggs.

"I—I'm back, sir," he said rather falteringly. "Beg pardon, sir; just thought you'd want to know. I didn't know you—h'm!" And with an odd look and a little cough Jenkins slipped away. But I scarcely noticed him at all.

Poor misguided girl!

My brain was buzzing like a devilish hive of bees, don't you know. By Jove, this was something *awful!*

And yet—and yet— Her frank, sweet face met mine with a clear light that there was no mistaking. There was no going behind it—she was a thoroughbred, a queen—a *lady*, dash it! I *knew* it! And I just settled on that, and was ready to die right then and there if anybody dared to dispute it. I didn't care a jolly hang how she talked; it was just nothing—just the demoralizing swagger of a little boarding-school girl trying to show off like her brothers. And her language? Why, just the devilish, natural result of having a coarse, slangy brute

like Billings for a brother. Poor little girl! It was a beastly shame.

She was watching me curiously, smilingly, as she sat there, her devilishly pretty mouth puckered into a cherry as she softly whistled and drummed her shining nails upon the chair arm.

"I'm afraid I've shocked you," she said. "Jack says you're so good."

Dash it, somehow I felt humiliated! She said it in a way that made me feel like a silly ass, you know.

But she wasn't thinking about me any more. Her eye fell on the tabouret, and her little hand stretched toward it.

"May I?" she said with an arch inquiring glance. "Your cigarettes look good to me. I emptied my case an hour ago."

And I proffered them with a show of alacrity. "Pray, pardon me," I said. "I—I never thought of you smoking." A chuckle came through the tiny teeth grasping the cigarette. "Thought I was too goody-goody, eh?"

I stammered something—dashed if I know what—and blinked a little gloomily as she drew a brisk fire from the flame I tendered.

Odd thing, by Jove; here I had been going to dinners, world without end, where fellows' wives and girls and sisters smoked cigarettes, and I never had thought a thing about it. But now, somehow, I didn't like it for *her*. Sort of thing well enough

for other chaps' girls and sisters, you know, but—well, this was *different*, by Jove! Devilish queer thing, that, what a lot of things seem the caper for them that we don't like for "our own," eh?

And yet—oh, I say, she certainly did look fetching about it—downright bewitching, you know! I think maybe it was because she didn't fumble the thing as if she was afraid of it—as if it was just a red hot coal and going to burn her. Most of them do, you know. No, this girl really seemed to enjoy it. Inhaled the whole thing at three draws and reached for another.

"Do—er—you smoke much?" I ventured anxiously. "Cigarettes, you know?"

She pulled a sparkling half-inch as she shook her little head. I felt awfully relieved. "Not for me," she remarked carelessly. "I prefer a pipe."

"*Pipe!*" I repeated feebly.

The golden head inclined. "Bet you! Good old, well-seasoned brier for mine—well-caked and a little strong." Puff-puff. "Oh, damn your patent sanitary pipes, I say!"

And as backward I collapsed upon the cushions, she threw her leg over the arm of her chair and shot two long cones of smoke from her dainty nostrils.

CHAPTER VI

ARCADIAN SIMPLICITY

A MOMENT later I had another shock. "I don't blame you for looking at me so hard," she said, rubbing her chin and looking, I thought, a little confused. "For did you ever see a face like mine?"

"I—I never did!" I said stammeringly, for, by Jove, the question was so unexpected; but I knew I said it earnestly and with conviction in every word.

She nodded. "Never got a chance to shave, you know—caught the train by such a margin—and my kit's in that other bag. Guess I'll have to impose on you in the morning for one of your razors."

I stared at her in horror.

"Shave? You don't shave?" I protested blankly.

"Myself, you mean? Have to; I haven't got a man to do it for me." She seemed to sigh. "Not old enough yet to have a man, Jack says."

And just here her attention seemed to center on my cellarette over in the corner.

"Gee, but it's warm to-night, isn't it?" she remarked absently.

And there was nothing to do but take the hint or leave it; and after all, she was a guest, you know!

"Perhaps you will permit me to offer you some refreshment," I suggested, rising. I knew it sounded devilish stiff; and I knew, moreover, that I looked like a jolly muff, in fact.

"Perhaps I will," she chuckled. "Say, don't urge me too hard, Mr. Lightning; you might embarrass me."

I did not want to embarrass her. "I thought perhaps a lemon soda would refresh you," I explained. "Or, if you will allow me, I will have Jenkins make you one of his famous seltzer lemonades. Perhaps, though, you would prefer just a plain—"

I halted in confusion, for she was laughing at me.

"A plain cup of tea," she gurgled, "or a *crème de menthe!*" And then her laughter burst deliciously. "Say, do you know, honestly, I'm only just getting on to that dry humor of yours. You've had me fooled. You do it with such a serious face, you know. Say, it's *great!*"

I tried to smile, but I knew it was a devilish sickly go—the more so, because just at that moment her slender fingers discarded the remnant of her last cigarette and reached for a cigar. Another instant, and she had deftly clipped and lighted it.

I decided I wouldn't ring for Jenkins.

I felt ashamed as I looked in the cellarette, and wondered what the deuce I should offer her. Couldn't think of anything I had ever heard of boarding-school girls going in for except ice-cream

soda; and, dash it, I didn't have any ice-cream soda. Nearest thing would be a little seltzer and ginger ale. That would do.

"Oh, I say, I'm going to make you a highball." I said, trying to assume a frisky, jocular air.

Her voice lifted in alarm. "Nay, nay, Clarence—not for me!" she urged hastily.

"But it's only—"

"No fizzy adulterations in mine—not on your life." She followed me across the room. "Just give me the straight, pure goods—anything, just so it's whisky."

And before I could say a word—if, indeed, I could have said a word—she had selected a decanter of Scotch, and with cigar tilted upward in her tender mouth, was absorbingly pouring a shining stream of the amber fluid.

To see the slow curving of that delicately molded wrist, the challenging flash of the saucy eyes of blue, by Jove, it made me just forget all about what she was doing till the fluid ran over the brim. And then, before I could intercept her, she had lightly gestured her glass to mine, and in a flash the stuff was gone.

Gone! A full whisky glass; and I recalled with a shiver of horror that it was very high proof liquor—something I seldom touched myself, but kept on hand for certain of my friends.

"I say, you know!" I gasped in consternation.

"I'm awfully afraid that will—er—will—" I gulped wordlessly.

The coral lips curved scornfully.

"Get *me* jingled?" She looked as she might have if I had insulted her. "Maybe so in those girly-girly days you were trying to josh me about, but not since these two years I've been at college." She shook her lovely, bright head, and following a long enjoyable pull at the cigar, projected five perfect rings at a frescoed cherub in the ceiling. The exquisite eyes softened dreamily as under the spell of some pleasing thought—some tender reminiscence.

"Why, do you know," she said, looking at me earnestly, "when I was home for the holidays—" Then she paused. "Don't tell Brother Jack I told you this—will you, Mr. Lightnut? He's so sensitive about it."

"Certainly not," I said feelingly.

I thought the wistful face brightened.

"Well, when I was home, then, I put Brother Jack under the table two nights running; and you know that's going some!"

And smiling proudly, she poured out another! But not any more, for I put away the decanter.

My brain was reeling, as they say in books; dash it, I was almost sick. Poor, poor little girl! And nobody to remonstrate with her. What a shame—what a shame!

By Jove, I wondered if she would listen to me!

I fixed my glass resolutely as we resumed our seats, and bent toward her earnestly.

“May I say something very seriously, Miss Billings?” I began nervously. “Without offense, you know—”

But she was off in a fit of chuckling. Most girls giggled, I had always heard, but she chuckled. Somehow, I liked it less than anything she did; it sounded so devilish ghastly, you know. And then it was so awfully embarrassing—oh, awfully. If you’ve never tried to remonstrate with a girl about her vicious habits and had her chuckle, you just can’t imagine! I felt my cheeks flushing jolly red and looked down, and then I had to look somewhere else quickly, for I seemed to be staring rudely at the ends of the pajamas, where her feet, as the poet chap says, “like little mice, stole in and out—” only, in this case, they were thrust into bedroom slippers, that looked oddly like a pair of my own—but miles and miles smaller.

“Say, do you know,” she was chortling, “the way you do get off that Willie boy sort of talk—oh!” And she placed her hand to her side as she laughed. “I can see how Jack thinks you’re the greatest ever, Mr. Lightnut.”

She leaned forward eagerly.

“Look here, I do *wish* you would let me call you ‘Dicky.’”

“Oh, I say—will you?” exploded from my mouth.

“*Will I?*” Her look made my blood leap. “You just watch me—*Dicky!* Oh, say, this is great; maybe it won’t take a fall out of old Jack—always bragging that you allow only two or three to call you that.”

“I hope you will always call me Dicky,” I said—and said it very softly. By Jove, I could hardly keep from taking her hand!

“You bet I think it’s awfully good of you, Lightnut—I mean, Dicky.” Then her face grew pensive. “Say, do you know, I need a friend like you—just now, I mean—oh, worst kind.”

“Do you?” I said eagerly, and hitched nearer. She proceeded:

“Haven’t you had things sometimes you wanted to talk about to somebody—well, things you couldn’t just tell to your brother or sisters—oh, nor even your room-mate? *You* understand.”

I wasn’t sure that I did, for she was blushing furiously, and in her eyes was an appeal.

By Jove, some jolly love affair, I guessed suddenly. My heart just sank like a lump of what’s-its-name, but my whole soul went out in sympathy for her. I made up my mind, then and there, to put myself aside.

“Devilish glad—I mean delighted to have you tell me anything,” I murmured rather weakly; “but—er—I should think your mother—”

“The mater—tell her!” Her hand lifted. “She’d

guy the life out of me! Besides, she's in Europe." She paced to the window and back.

I protested indignantly: "I don't see how any mother—"

"Aw, forget it!" she broke in, and I winced again at slang from those sweet lips. "No, sir; I'm going to unload the whole thing on *you*, or nobody."

And, by Jove, the next thing I knew she had perched on the broad arm of the Morris chair in which I sat, her arm resting lightly above my shoulders.

"Here's what I want to know about," I heard her sigh. "When you're engaged to one person and meet another you like better, how are you going to—well, chuck it with the first, you know—and still do the square thing? There, that's what's hit me, Dicky; and I'm up against it for fair!" Her hand gently patted my shoulder. "I'm telling you, old chap, because I know you'll understand—because I like you better than any man I ever saw—that's right!"

I was just afraid to move! Afraid she'd stop; afraid she'd go on. And all the while I was feeling happier than I ever had in all my life—happier than I ever knew people could be, you know. I never thought her bold—dash it, no—knew it was just her adorable, delicious, Arcadian simplicity, by Jove! That explained it, just as it explained to me all her other unconventionality.

“So now it’s up to you,” she said, “and I want to know what’s the answer.”

The answer!

And how could I give her any answer? No, by Jove, I knew jolly well I couldn’t take advantage of such circumstances—of her artless confession; knew devilish well it wouldn’t do, you know. Might reproach me in years to come; and then—and then, there was Billings!

So I just contented myself with looking up smilingly, but it was hard—awfully, awfully hard, dash it—and I just felt like a jolly cad—or fool. Couldn’t tell which.

CHAPTER VII

CONFIDENCES

THIS beautiful creature had proposed to me! By Jove, that's what it amounted to practically; and now, as she said, it was up to me. Yet I couldn't say a word!

"Well, what must I do about the other one?" she insisted.

The question reminded me of the entanglement to which her frank simplicity had confessed. And she expected me, of all others, to tell her what to do! I looked up into the radiant, crimsoned face as she bent forward slightly, her lips parted, her eyes eager—expectant. She was hanging upon my reply.

I coughed slightly. "That question is hardly fair, you know," I said meaningly. "You see, it hits me rather personally."

"Oh!" she said.

I nodded and tried to find her hand as I looked down.

"So *that's* where the shoe pinches!" And she whistled thoughtfully.

And just then my upward reaching hand found hers. And yet no, it couldn't be her hand, either; it

felt like the crash cover of the cushion—rough and fibrous. And yet, by Jove, it *was* a hand, for it gave mine a grip that almost broke my fingers and then dropped them. By the time I looked up, I saw only her little palm resting upward on her knee.

It was funny; but I had other things to think about than puzzles.

She sighed. "Well, I'm the one that can feel for you, Dicky." Here the sigh lifted and her laugh pealed like a chime of silver bells. "I guess Brother Jack doesn't know as much about your affairs as he thinks, does he—eh? Why, he told me you were more afraid of a girl than of a mad dog."

And a slapping grip fell on my shoulder that made me tingle from head to toe. And yet I wished she wouldn't do that; if she did it again, I should just lose my head—I knew I should.

But here she rose, stretched her arms, and dropped into the wicker arm-chair. She hitched it nearer to me.

"You see, it's like this," she began, assuming a confidential air. "You know my sister's up at school at Cambridge, too."

"At Radcliffe College—yes." I nodded.

"Why, yes. Well, it's her room-mate!"

"Eh? I don't believe I—" I paused perplexedly.

"That's right—her room-mate, I tell you! And in a day or two she's coming home with Sis for a visit. I want you to come up for a week end—won't you—and look her over—I mean, see her and tell me what

you think of her. You'll go crazy about her—oh, I know you will!"

I entered a protest. "Oh, I say now, you know, there's only one girl I ever saw I would care to look at twice."

She smiled adorably. "Oh, don't I know all about how you feel? But I just want you to see this girl—she's the prettiest and swellest that's been around Boston for many a day; and on Sunday morning she could give the flag to all the Avenue. Why, Dicky, she's from China!"

"China!" I must have looked the scorn I felt. "Oh, come now, you don't think a Chinese girl is—"

"Not Chinese, Dicky." In her eagerness, she moved so near, the silk of her pajamas brushed my hand. "She's English. Her dad's the British Governor General of Hong Kong—Colonel Francis Kirkland, you know—beefy-looking old chap with white mutton chops—I saw his picture."

Hong Kong! I wondered if she knew Mastermann, the chap who had sent me the red pajamas. Why, dash it, of course she would; for this fellow Mastermann was out there on government business, and he and the Governor must be thrown together a good deal.

Her musical laugh broke in on my speculations. "But the funniest thing is, Dicky, her name's the same as mine."

Her name! By Jove, and until this moment, I had not thought—

"Oh, I say," I exclaimed eagerly, "what is your name, anyway?"

The lustrous eyes opened wide. "Why, you mean to say you don't know? Thought you knew I was named after the governor. And she's named after *hers*—Frances, from Francis, you know—just the difference in a letter. See?"

"Frances!" I murmured lingeringly. "So your name's Frances?"

"Yes, and hers is Frances—odd, isn't it?"

I assented, but I wished she would drop the other girl—I wasn't interested there, except just because she was.

Her bosom lifted with a sigh. "Don't you think Frances is a peach of a name?"

"It's heavenly!" I whispered. "And I'm glad to hear about your friend, too."

Her sweet face clouded. "Not much of a friend; she don't lose any sleep over me," she commented gloomily. "Then there's Sis double-crossing me with her influence ever since I got hauled up before Prexy at Easter. Sis is awfully prissy."

Her tone was almost savage. I strained incredulously after her meaning.

"Did I understand you to say you were brought up before the president there at Radcliffe?"

"Radcliffe?" Her head shook. "No—Harvard." And I nodded, recalling the affiliation between the two institutions at Cambridge.

I wondered what silly, tyrannical straining of red

tape discipline on some one's part had subjected this sensitive, refined girl to the humiliating ordeal of having to appear before the president of the college. Probably for plucking some trashy flower, or, at the worst, looking twice at some sappy freshman acquaintance waving his hand from a frat house.

"By Jove, a devilish shame!" I ejaculated.

"I should say!" Her voice was aggrieved. "All for a measly prize fight."

"Prize fight!" I gasped.

She nodded brightly. "Oh, a modest one, you know—not, of course, a Jeffries-Johnson affair, but I tell you we had them going some for a round and a half. Athletics is my long suit—just you feel those biceps." And with sudden movement she swept upward the wide, silken sleeve, showing a limb like the lost arm of the Venus de what's-its-name.

"Go on—just feel it," she commanded, flexing the arm.

"I—I—" And I gulped and balked.

"*Feel* it, I tell you!" And I did.

And then I almost fell over, I received such a shock. For my fingers seemed to be clasping, not the soft, rounded contour I beheld, but a great massed protuberance, hard and unyielding as a bunch of dried putty. My fingers could not half span it.

I jerked them away, bewildered.

"Wonderful," I said faintly, and I batted perplexedly at the exquisite, symmetrical arm.

"Oh, that's nothing," she said indifferently, jerking down her sleeve. "I'm a little undertrained now; been putting in all my time on leg work. That's what counts in foot-ball.

"Foot-ball!" I questioned, astonished. "Why, I didn't know—"

"That I was on the team? Surest thing you know; that's why I've got all this mop of hair—comes below my collar—see?"

Her collar, indeed! It was easy to see that, if unbound, it would reach considerably below her waist. But *foot-ball!* Why, she must mean basket-ball, of course. I opened my mouth to remind her, when she proceeded:

"But I was going to tell you about this prize fight. Well, this fight was just a little one, you know. Purse of eighteen dollars; and we had to chip in afterward with an extra three to get Mug Kelly—that's the Charlestown Pet, you know—to stand the gaff for a second round. Why, he was all in on the count at the end of the first round—what do you think of that?"

"But I say, you know—" I began, but she lifted her hand.

"I know—I know what you're going to say, Dicky; you think we were a bunch of easy marks, that's what you think. But how could we tell what my room-mate was going to do to the Pet—we couldn't, you know."

"Your room-mate!" I exclaimed aghast. "A—an

other young lady—in a pugilistic encounter? Oh, I say!”

She chuckled. “G’long; stop your kidding!” And she kicked playfully at me. Then she assumed a mincing air—finger on chin, lips pursed, and eyes rolling upward, you know.

“Yes, another sweet young peacherino—Miss Bilings’ little room-mate—a beef that hits the beam at about two-sixty—Little Lizzie, you know.”

“Lizzie!” I repeated vaguely.

“Oh, say, Dicky, cut it out; let me finish. Well, another minute, and the Pet would have been put to sleep, but just then the coppers nailed us.” She added gloomily: “And that’s what queered me with Sis. Fierce, ain’t it?”

She sighed and her beautiful lashes drooped sadly. By Jove, I was so jolly floored I couldn’t manage a word. I knew, of course, that my heart was broken, but it didn’t matter. I loved her just the same; I should always love her; and she had tried to let me know she loved me better than any man she had ever met. What the deuce did anything else matter, anyhow? We would marry and go out on a ranch or something of that sort, where the false, polished what-you-call-it of civilization didn’t count, and no rude rebuff or sneer of society would ever chill her warm impulsiveness.

She smiled archly. “See here, Dicky, I thought we were going to tell each other the story of our lives. Your turn now; tell me how she looks to you;

this girl that came at last—there's always the one girl comes at last, they say, if you wait long enough. Go on—tell me—what's she like?"

"Of course, you don't know!" I said significantly.

"Me? Of course I wouldn't know—I want you to tell me. Say, is she really so pretty?"

"Pretty," indeed! It was like this adorable child of nature not to understand that she was the most perfect and faultless creation on earth!

I leaned toward her. "*Is she pretty?*" I repeated reproachfully.

She eyed me slyly.

"Oh, of course I know how *you* feel," she said, "but draw me a *picture* of her."

"A picture!" I laughed. "All right, here goes: Eighteen, 'a daughter of the gods, divinely tall and most divinely fair'—that sort of thing. Features classic—perfect oval, you know, and profile to set an artist mad with joy. Eyes? Blue as Hebe's, but big and true and tender; hair, a great, shining nugget of virgin gold. Form divine—the ideal of a poet's dream—the alluring, the elusive, the unattainable, the despair of the sculptor's chisel."

"My!" said Miss Billings, staring.

But I was not through. "Complexion? Her skin as smooth as the heart of a seashell and as delicately warm as its rosy blush when kissed by the amorous tide."

"Gee!" ejaculated my darling.

I looked at her closely. "And in one matchless

cheek a dimple divine such as might have been left by the barbed arrow of Cupid when it awoke Psyche from her swoon of death. In short, she might be the dainty fairy princess of our childhood fantasies, were she less superb in figure. On the other hand, she might be the sunny-haired daughter of a Viking king, were she not too delicately featured and molded."

That was all I could remember from the description as I had read it in a novel, but I was glad I had stored it up, by Jove, for it suited her to a dot. She didn't say a word for a moment, but just sat there eyeing me kind of sidewise, her little upper lip lifted in an odd way. Then of a sudden she shook her head and swung her knees up over the arm of her chair.

"Well, Dicky, as a describer you sure are the slushy spreader. Say, you've got Eleanor Glynn backed off the boards."

She went on eagerly: "I don't care, though; slushy or not, your picture's just perfect for *her*. Why, your girl must be a ringer for the girl at Radcliffe. Only thing you left out was the freckle on the chin."

Freckle on the chin! By Jove, I left it out on purpose, for I thought she might not like it. I wondered if all girls at Radcliffe had freckles on the chin.

She lay back, regarding me inscrutably. "If she looks like that," she sighed, "you ought to love her very much, Dicky."

I couldn't say anything, for words are so deuced inadequate, you know. But I just made an effort to look it all.

"Of course," sighing, "you ought to feel that way; and, another thing, Dicky: you'll never forget where you first saw her, will you? One of the things one never forgets."

"Right in this room," I murmured; "and in that wicker chair."

"Really?" Her surprised ejaculation was delicious. By Jove, how entrancingly coquettish of her! How jolly clever!

"Go on; tell me how she was dressed—never mind any more picture business; just tell me in four or five words. Bet you can't do it!" She slipped over again to the arm of my chair.

In her eyes was a challenge and I took it up.

"In black silk pajamas," I said daringly.

Her blue eyes opened wide. For a moment I feared she would be offended at my audacity, but her birdlike carol of laughter reassured me.

"Say, *you're* not so slow, *are* you?"

And her hand came down on my back with a force that made me jump.

"Only shows," she gurgled merrily, "how little Jack knows about you. Say, you'd better never tell *him* about those black pajamas!"

She spoke chokingly through a storm of laughter as she rocked there against my shoulder.

"And say—the joke of it!" She banged me on the

back with a clublike blow, incredible from that little hand. "The joke of it is, he thought I'd be so safe with you! Oh, mamma!"

And off she went again.

I shifted uneasily. I did not like it—her merriment over what was perfectly obvious and rational. Of course, Billings knew she would be safe. Why the deuce shouldn't he?

But the matter of the pajamas was another thing. Her receiving me in them was a contingency I could not possibly have anticipated and avoided, and yet a withdrawal because of them or even because of her presence here had been shown to be a course inexplicable to her. She was too innocent, too ingenuous, too *ingénue* to understand that I was invading the sanctuary of her privacy. Yet to have taken any course that would have appeared to make correction of her error come from me would have been appallingly caddish and cruel. No, the best course had seemed to be to go right on—take no notice—and then, as soon as she retired, slip away to the club. That seemed the gentlemanly thing.

Yet now her words implied a certain consciousness that her brother might frown upon her attire, might even visit me with reproach. I was troubled, and her next speech was not calculated to reassure me.

"But I'll—I'll never say a word, Dicky," she said, coming out of her laughter and panting breathlessly.

"Never! And don't *you*, Dicky—don't you ever! Understand? Mum's the word!"

I looked up distressfully to protest, but her little head was shaking earnestly, the long, delicate hair wisps about her forehead wavering like tiny, curling wreaths of golden smoke.

"No, sir," she emphasized soberly; "if you ever let *that* cat out of the bag, it'll be all up with *me*—I mean Jack will never let me come again. You must promise me."

"But—"

"Oh, but me no 'buts'—*promise!*"

"Why, then—er—of course, if you wish it."

"That's right, because I want to come again—that is, if you *want* me. But if Brother Jack was on to you, Dicky, as I am, he would sooner have me at a hotel, that's all."

"But my dear Frances—"

"I tell you I *know*, Dicky; he doesn't approve of young ladies in pajamas." She chuckled. "Not even black ones."

She stood up, looking at herself and performing a graceful pirouette before the long pier glass.

"Now, if they had been crimson," she proceeded, "he might have felt different. Old Jack's great on Harvard, and so am I."

Of course. All Radcliffe girls were, I knew.

By Jove, how I wished I could show her the lovely crimson pajamas Mastermann had sent me

from China! But I would have to summon Jenkins to find them, and besides, it would be of questionable taste to present them to her attention.

“Great idea, this, having pajamas in your college colors,” she said. I thought so, too, as I noted admiringly the rich effect of her golden head above the black silk. But I thought the color a devilish odd one—somber, you know—for colors of a young girl’s school.

“My! my!” she murmured, “wouldn’t I just love *to live* in pajamas—just go about in ’em all the time, you know! Why can’t we, I wonder?” Her face flashed me a ravishing smile; and while I was blinking over her question, she went on: “Funny how the girls even are taking to ’em—even Sis wears ’em!” She chuckled: “Hers are gray flannelette. But the girl I’m telling you about—*she* don’t; Sis told the mater about it. It seems that before she left China, some high muck-a-muck gave her governor a swell pair of silk ones—something like these, I guess, but I don’t know of what color. But, anyhow, they were too delicate and fine to be wasted on an old stiff like that, and he had sense enough to know it. So he passed ’em down the line to her—Frances, you know. Well, sir—” Here she sidled to the table and half leaned, half perched, upon its edge; and I was so distracted watching her graceful poise and gestures, that I lost what she was saying, by Jove.

It was her trill of laughter at something she had

said, and the question: "Wasn't that funny?" that brought me back to what she was telling me.

"Yes, sir—said she just scared her maid—oh, *batty!* Because she looked so ugly in 'em—that's what *she* thinks, but of course—*shucks!* Anyhow, she never wore 'em any more, and a day or two later some coolie stole them—sold 'em probably."

Suddenly she yawned, stretched her arms above her head, and flashed me a dazzling smile. By Jove, in the loose-fitting garments she looked for all the world like an Oriental houri, or some jolly lovely thing like that.

"Gee, but I'm sleepy!" she said behind her little hand. "If you'll excuse me, Dicky, I believe it will be off to the springs—the bed springs, for little Frankie. Good night, then. See you in the morning."

And with another radiant smile, she moved toward her room.

"Good night," I said wistfully.

By Jove, somehow I had hoped she would offer to kiss me, now that we were engaged in a way. But then, of course, it wouldn't do—she knew that. So ought I. Perhaps in the morning at the boat!

And the door closed behind her. I stood blinking after her a moment; then I fixed my attention gloomily upon the cellarette. Poor little girl and her foolish—but adorably foolish—college bravado! Sorrowfully I locked the cellarette and dropped the key in my pocket.

Then I locked the outer doors of the hall and apartment, leaving the keys unmolested on the inside. On the whole I decided I would not have up the janitor's gossipy wife.

Next I sought Jenkins at the back.

"We will lock up back here, Jenkins, and go over to my rooms at the club for the night."

Jenkins stared fixedly over my head. "Certainly, sir."

"And Jenkins—h'm!" I crumpled a bill into his mechanical palm. "You will never allude to having seen that sweet—um—you understand, Jenkins? Never seem to remember, even to me, that you ever saw any one up here to-night."

"Certainly not, sir," indignantly. "I wouldn't, anyhow."

Yet his eyes, rolling back from the ceiling, seemed to hold me oddly for an instant. In them was a touch of sadness.

"But may I speak of that Mr. Billings, sir? You know, if he comes—"

"Jenkins!" sharply.

"Certainly, sir!" Jenkins' mouth closed, traplike.

But all in vain my early rise the next morning, my careful toilet and my dash in a taxi to a florist and then to Tiffany's for a ring. At the pier I dodged about in the crowd, the boy trailing behind me with the big purple box, but not a devilish thing could I see of Frances. By Jove, I almost broke my monocle straining! At last I was sure she must be

left, for the last passengers were passing over the gang-plank.

"Hello, Dicky!"

The voice, coarse and hearty, came from an athletic young man in a hurrah suit. On his head, perched jauntily above a mass of yellow hair, was a straw hat with a crimson band.

I stared at him through my glass, but it was not any one I knew at all. I looked at him coldly, for there's nothing so devilish annoying as familiarities from strangers. I thought I could freeze him off.

But he only grinned. "Looking for Miss Billings?"

"I—I haven't seen her," I answered stiffly. But his question alarmed me.

He chuckled in my face. "Guess you don't know her in her clothes, eh, Dicky?" And I did not need the punch he gave me in the side to make me stagger backward. "A thousand thanks, and good-by, old chap. I see they're hauling in the plank."

He lingered for one bearlike grab at my hand.

"And say, don't forget—for I know Jack Billings better than you do—don't ever let him know about all that Scotch last night."

He called over his shoulder with a grin: "Keep it dark—as dark as those black pajamas, Dicky!"

And as long as I could see, he stood on the deck, waving his hat at me as I stood there with my mouth open, my eyes following him with horror.

By Jove, who was he, and what did he know?

CHAPTER VIII

HER BROTHER JACK

“GOOD night, Dicky!” came up the elevator shaft. And then more “good nights,” growing fainter with their laughter as the car shot down.

“Good night,” I called after them. “Devilish sorry you fellows won’t stay longer!”

“Jolly good lie, Jenkins,” I said, yawning sleepily, as I dropped back into my own apartment.

“Yes, sir,” assented Jenkins demurely. “It’s sleeping on the divan the other night, sir. Eight hours there ain’t nothing like eight hours in bed and in your pajamas.”

“Pajamas!” I ejaculated, startled.

For all day I had been thinking of *her*. I wondered if Billings would happen to think to invite me up for the week end. But he had so many times, and I had never gone.

“By Jove, that reminds me,” I said. “Those red silk pajamas!”

“Yes, sir.” Jenkins’ face hardened in an odd, wooden way.

“I was wondering, Jenkins, if those pajamas were torn any in our little row the other night.”

Poor Jenkins winced a little. "I think not, sir," he muttered humbly—"leastwise, they were all right last night when Mr.—" He seemed to catch himself abruptly. "I mean when I found them this morning, sir."

He returned with the garments I had received from Mastermann, and again we spread them under the lamp on the table. They looked singularly smooth and unwrinkled. There was not a single tear or break, not even with the delicate cords that twisted to form the frogs of the coat.

"My, sir! But ain't they red!" breathed Jenkins. "Them cords look like little red snakes."

I cut an anxious glance at Jenkins, for I did not like his reference to snakes. Seemed ominous, somehow. But his appearance was composed and reassuring. And, by Jove, come to look, the cords did look just like tiny, coiled serpents of glowing fire. Why, they were so jolly red they hurt your eyes. Fact! And thin as the beautiful stuff was, this brighter red ran all over the other, covering every inch of it and forming the closest, finest what-you-call-it embroidery. It was as faint and dainty a pattern as that on a soap bubble! Fact is, I could not trace it, even with my glass.

The only part that wasn't covered with this embroidery business was the stuff used to cover the knots, or little balls, over which the cords were meant to hook. In working with some of these cords, idly fastening and unfastening them, I got a

little impatient with one that seemed tight, you know, and I used my manicure knife to pull the knot through.

"Careful, sir," warned Jenkins. "Likely to cut something."

By Jove! No sooner said, than I did it!

The dashed blade slipped somehow and cut into the threads that tied the covers or caps or whatever-you-call-'ems, over the knots. And when I pulled, the beastly piece of silk came off in my fingers.

And then—oh, but I say! I just gave a sort of yell and dropped the whole thing!

Ever have some silly ass try to scare you by poking a red hot cigar at you in the dark? Know how you jerk back? Well, there you are! For, give you my word, when I peeled off the little cloth cap, regular blazes of crimson fire seemed to shoot from the end of the knot.

Fact is, it wasn't a knot at all, but a button—a devilish glassy button, something bigger than a dime, perhaps, and thick as the end of your little finger. And there it lay against the silk, burning its way through it like a red coal of fire.

Dashed if it didn't look that way, anyhow. I just sat there blinking like a jolly owl, waiting to see the stuff begin to smoke, before I had presence of mind to tell Jenkins to touch it to see if it would burn.

But Jenkins wouldn't. He just stood there with his jaw hanging and his eyes bulging like champagne corks!

And it was just then that Billings rolled in.

I say "rolled in," because it always looks that way. That's the way Billings is built, you know.

"I say, Dicky," he panted, "just missed another infernal express! Plenty more trains, but I had a great inspiration strike me that I'd let you put me up for the night. Hat, Jenkins! Now, don't say a word, Dicky, old chap. Cane, Jenkins! Great pleasure, assure you—won't inconvenience me at all. Gloves, Jenkins! Just give me something to sleep in, and I'll be as comfortable here as I would be at the club—so don't worry any about me, old chap. By the way, want to thank you for taking care of the kid. Got home all right, I understand."

He plunked like a jolly elephant into the largest and most comfortable chair in the room and wheezed for breath.

"And, Jenkins!" He raised one fat finger while he took a gasp. "Don't mind if I do have a package of Dicky's Koroskos and a sloe fizz—not too sweet, you know; and you may—"

He halted, his eyes suddenly riveted to the table, and straightened inquiringly, his big hands poised upon the padded arms of the chair.

"Suffering Thomas cats! What's that?" he exclaimed. "The scream there—flag of Morocco?"

And then, without pausing for reply, he dashed on:

"I say, old chap, if you're picking up those, I can get you a few for nothing. You know Higgins,

cashier-that-was of the Widows' National, eh? Well, Higgins sent the governor a Morocco flag the other day from Tangier. Fact is, he sent one to every director of the bank—and an extra large one to that bank examiner!"

He chuckled wabblingly, like a jolly jellyfish.

"Talk about a red flag to a bull," he exploded, "why, they—"

Billings broke off suddenly. Then he climbed heavily to his feet, and without warning, heaved himself across the room and seized the button I had just uncovered. Dashed if he didn't almost upset me.

"Here, I say!" I protested. "Don't lose that cap." I picked it up from where he had jerked it to the floor. "It's the cover to hide that glass, you know."

"Wh-a-a-t!"

Billings swung round, staring at me with the most curious expression.

"See here, Dicky," he exclaimed rather excitedly, but in a low tone, as he cut a side glance at Jenkins siphoning the fizz over at the cellarette. "What in thunder have you been doing now?"

By Jove, I turned cold for a minute, I was that startled. I thought he was going to use the pajamas as an introduction for reference to last night. But in a minute I saw that he did not mean that.

"Where on earth did *you* get anything like this?" And he held up the button and the garment.

"Oh, I say now!" I remonstrated, alarm changing

to a mild dudgeon. Billings' devilish rude manners are so offensive at times. "What do you mean? It's a present from a friend in China."

"Present!" Billings' eyes bulged queerly. He stooped toward me, whispering: "Did he know what this button was?"

"Why, of course he didn't," I answered indignantly. "Never dreamed of it, of course. I tell you, it was all nicely covered, was what-you-call-it—upholstered, you know—with devilish nice silk. I cut it off accidentally, trying to force the thing through that loop. That left the marble exposed."

Billings took the glass mechanically from the tray tendered by Jenkins and sipped it slowly, eying me curiously over the top. Then he set it back, very deliberately, wiped his mouth with the bit of napery, and without taking his glance from me, waited until Jenkins had left the room. Whereupon, after another searching look at the button, he dropped it with the garment upon the table, and with hands jammed deep in his pockets, faced me with a long-drawn whistle.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed. Just a coarse, vulgar outburst, you know—no sense to it; no point at all, you know—that's Billings.

He caught up the coat again. "And these others—four of them—are they just the same?" he demanded sharply.

"Dash it, how should I know? I suppose so," I answered indifferently. And I closed my eyes and

leaned back, feeling a bit—just a bit—weary. Somehow, Billings is always so exhausting when he gets started on something.

“Oh, cut it out, old chap,” I protested, drowsy-like.

“I will,” I heard him say. Then I guess I must have dropped off a bit, for the next thing I knew he was shaking me.

“Dicky! Dicky! Say, look here! *Look*, I tell you!”

I did look, and—well, I was jolly vexed, that’s all.

“Oh, I say now!” I spoke severely—just that way, you know. I went on, remonstrating: “Devilish silly joke, if you ask me. You’ve gone and ruined the thing, Billings! Flashy buttons like that, you know—too tawdry, too cheap.”

“*Cheap!*” He almost shouted it. Then he leaned over the back of the leather chair and pounded his fat head against the cushions, writhing his big bulk from side to side.

“Quite impossible,” I said firmly. “Not *en règle* at all, you know!” And I fixed my glass and stared gloomily at the things. The five shiny buttons just lay there against the delicate silk like so many fiery crimson cherries. And they reminded me of something—something—what the deuce was it? Something devilish familiar, whatever it was. And then of a sudden I had it!

“By Jove, you know!” And I just fell back in

consternation. "This is awful! I'd look like a—er—dashed human cocktail. Oh, I say!"

Then Billings, who was already gasping like a jolly what's-its-name, dropped upon the arm of the chair and held his side.

"Dicky, you—you'll be the death of me yet," he panted.

I never try to follow Billings. Nobody ever does. So I paid no attention to him. Shaking his head, he lifted the garment again and held it out of the direct rays of the shaded lamp. The five buttons leaped out of the shadow like port lights down the bay on a moonless night.

He leered at me, chuckling. "Look *cheap* to you, eh? What you might call *outré*, so to speak?"

"By Jove, of course," I answered ruefully. "I can't sleep in the things now, you know. What would people say?"

Billings stared at me disagreeably a moment and said something under his breath. Then he caught up the buttons and the silk, and crushing them in his hands, buried his face in the mass.

"Oh you beauties, you darlings!" I heard him murmur.

Then he looked at the buttons again, and dash it, he kissed one. Maudlin—jolly maudlin, I say, if you ask me!

"I say, Dicky," he said carelessly. "You may not care for them, but I've taken rather a shine to these buttons. Mind letting me have one, eh?"

He flashed a quick glance at me and then away.

"Mind? Why, certainly not; take 'em all, old chap, and welcome." Yet I responded gloomily enough, scarcely polite, you know. And I felt too jolly prostrated to be curious as to what he could possibly want with the things. Waistcoat buttons, likely—Billings was given to loud dress and other boulder stunts. But he just sat there looking down after I spoke, and presently stole a queer glance at me.

"Dicky," he said, and paused. Then he fished out that perfectly impossible pipe of his and began to pack it, slowly shaking his head. "Dicky, anybody that would take advantage of you would lift a baby's milk gurgler."

Of course, I saw no more sense in that than you do, you know, but I understood that in his crude, vulgar way he meant some sort of a compliment.

"Dash it, of course," I said offhand, straightening up and recrossing my legs. I always say that and do that way when fellows say stupid things. Such a jolly good way to keep from hurting their feelings, you know, and saves talking and thinking. Got on to it myself.

Billings' eye ranged at me as he lighted his pipe. The smoke seemed to make him cough, and it was this, I suppose, that set him chuckling.

He suddenly held up the row of red buttons again.

"Look here, you blessed dodo," he exclaimed brusquely. "Have you really no idea what these are,

these glass buttons you are yapping about? Of course you haven't, you jolly chowder head, but I'm going to tell you."

He threw the coat into my lap.

"They are rubies, old man, that's all," he said quietly. "Oriental rubies, at that—flawless and perfect—the rarest and most precious things in the world."

CHAPTER IX

AN AMAZING REVELATION

I STARED blankly at Billings. "Rubies!" I gasped.

He nodded. "Genuine pigeon bloods, my son, no less."

"Oh, come now, Billings," I protested. I felt a little miffed, just a little you know. So jolly raw to try it on that way.

"By jove, old chap, you must think me a common ass," I suggested disgustedly.

Billings grinned at the very idea.

"*You* a common ass, Dicky?" he ejaculated. "Nobody who knows you would ever think that, old man."

"But, I say—"

"See here, Dicky boy, I'm in dead earnest," he interrupted eagerly. "Don't you remember my one fad—gems? Got enough tied up in them to build two apartment houses as big as this. Best amateur collection in New York, if I do say it. But I haven't anything like one of these rubies, and neither has any one else—no one else in this country, anyhow. There's nothing like them in all New York, from Tiffany's down to Maiden Lane, and never has been.

I never saw anything like—near like any of them—except the one in the Russian crown of Anna Ivanovana. That's bigger, but it hasn't the same fire."

I just laughed at him. "Why, Billings, these pajamas were sent me by a friend in China, and I assure you—"

"Assure? What can you assure—what do *you* know about it?" said Billings rudely. "What did your friend know, or the one he had these things from—or the one before him—or the one still before that? Pshaw!" And he snapped his fingers.

With his hand he swept up the little caps and the long, wirelike threads that held them and sniffed the handful curiously.

"H'm! Funky sort of aromatic smell—balsam, cedar oil or something like that," he muttered half aloud. "That accounts for the preservation. But still—"

He crossed his legs and puffed thoughtfully.

"Tell you how I figure this out, Dicky," he said finally. "These nighties your friend has sent you are awfully rare and old; and for delicate, dainty elegance and that sort of thing they've got everything else in the silk way shoved off the clothes-line. But as to these jewels, you can just bet all you've got that whoever passed them on was not wise to them being under these covers."

Here he got to looking at one of the buttons and murmuring his admiration—regular trance, you know.

“By Jove!” I remarked, just to stir him up a bit. And he unloaded a great funnel of smoke and continued:

“My theory is that during some danger, some mandarins’ war, likely, somebody got cold feet about these jewels and roped them in with these bits of silk—see how different they are from the rest of the stuff! Then, when the roughhouse came, these pajamas were swept along in the sacking—sort of spoils of pillage, you know. It was a clever method of concealment—clever because simple—a hiding place unlikely to be thought of because right under the eye. You recall Poe’s story of *The Purloined Letter*?”

I tried to remember. “Can’t say I do, dear boy,” I had to admit. “Don’t seem to place that one. Only one I remember hearing him tell is that one he brought back from Paris. Let me see—*The Story of the Lonely Lobster*, I think he called it.” I chortled delightedly as it came back to me. “By Jove, that was devilish neat! Don’t know when I’ve ever heard—”

An offensive remark by Billings interrupted me.

“Here, Dicky, Dicky, what do you think you’re talking about?” he added rudely. Evidently his mind had wandered from the subject. So I replied with dignity—dignity, with just a touch of sarcasm:

“Pogue—‘Mickey’ Pogue of our club. Perhaps you don’t know Mickey Pogue?” And, by Jove, that fetched him! He stared at me a moment, and then,

getting up, he reached over and solemnly shook me by the hand.

"Dicky," he said, wagging his head, "I apologize. You take the *brioche!*" And he turned his back a second.

I asked Billings how much he thought one of the rubies was worth. I had in mind how devilish hungrily he had looked at them. But he sighed, then frowned and answered impatiently:

"That's it! That's the trouble about all the rare and beautiful things of this life! Always some debasing, prohibitive sordid money value, dammit!"

He squinted at the stones again and let the weight of one rest upon his finger. He shook his head, sighing.

"Well, they're over twenty carats each, and therefore, of course, many times the value of first water diamonds. After you get above five carats with real Oriental rubies, diamonds are not in it."

With an abrupt gesture he pushed the things away and rose. His pipe had gone out, but I noticed that he did not relight it. I held the gems full in the rays of the lamp, and Billings paused, holding a hungry gaze over his shoulder.

"I say, Billings, how much did you say one was worth?" I asked carelessly. For a moment he did not reply, but muttered to himself.

"I didn't say," he finally replied, and rather crossly. Then he whirled on me impulsively. "See here, Lightning," he exclaimed, "if you'll let me have

one of those for my collection, I'll give you twenty-five thousand for it—there!"

He gulped and continued:

"I'll have to make some sacrifices, but I don't mind that. I—"

But I shook my head. Really, I could hardly keep from laughing in his face.

"Sorry! Can't see it, old chap," I said. "Wouldn't sell one of them at any price."

Billings gulped again. "I suppose not; don't blame you. Way you're fixed, you don't have to." He walked slowly to the window and back. "Take my advice, Dicky, and get those fire coals into your safe deposit vault first thing in the morning. Hello, you're cutting them off! That's wise."

For with the knife he had left on the table I was cutting away the tough threads that held the rubies. I cut off the second and fourth, leaving the first ruby at the collar and the other two alternates.

"Go on," said Billings, as I laid down the knife. "You've only removed two."

"Don't believe I'll cut off any more," I said. "Want you to help me tie up the others just as they were."

"What!"

I insisted. And though Billings protested and argued and even called me names, we did as I said.

For, by Jove, you know it was perfectly clear that if they had been safe so long under the little covers, the jewels couldn't find any better place. Singular

thing Billings couldn't see it. Besides, the pajamas had to have fastenings, you know.

I held one of the two rubies under the light, and, by Jove, I almost dropped it—did drop my glass. Seeing a red-hot poker-point in your fingers would give you the same turn.

“Rippers, Billings! Simply rippers!” I exclaimed.

I held the other ruby beside its fellow. Then I waited, listening, and I heard Billings' hand strike down on the back of a chair.

“I guess I'll be going, old chap,” he said gruffly. “Think I'd better, after all.” He cleared his throat. “Sure you can't sell me one, Dicky?” Dashed if his voice didn't tremble.

“Quite sure, dear boy,” I murmured, without turning around. “Not mine, you know—these two.”

Billings exploded then. It seemed an opportunity to relieve himself. “Not yours! Why, you dodgasted idiot, you nincompoop, you cuckoo, you chicken head! What notion have you got in that fool's noddle now? If those rubies are not yours, whose do you think they are?”

I whirled about quickly. “Yours,” I said, and laid them in his hand.

“My compliments, old chap,” I added, smiling. By Jove! One time, at least, I put it all over old Billings!

“No!” he gasped, crouching over and gripping my shoulder.

I grinned cheerfully.

He fell into a chair and just sat there mouthing at me and then at the jewels in his hand. Old boy looked devilish silly. Really acted like he had some sort of stroke—that sort of thing.

I laughed at him.

“Don’t you see?” I said, trying to explain. “Wouldn’t have known a dashed thing about the buttons being rubies but for you. So lucky they came to me so I can get a chance to help out your collection. Awfully glad, old chap.”

He clenched the jewels, and looked down.

“Dicky—” He coughed a little huskily as he paused. “Dicky.” His voice was so low I could hardly hear him. “Dicky, you’re off your trolley, and I’m a damned—”

He raised his arm and dropped it.

“Well, never mind what,” he finished with a lift of the shoulders. “But I want to say something. It’s about what I offered you for those stones. The price—the amount I named—wasn’t even a decent gamble; but it was all I could go, and oh, I wanted one so badly, Dicky! And now you’ve made me feel like a dog. And I can’t take your gift, old chap, any more than I could afford to offer you the real value of one of these beautiful stones. Here.” And he passed them back to me.

“I *know* each of them to be worth anywhere from forty to fifty thousand dollars,” he said quietly. “They’re the kind the crowned heads scoop for jewels of state.”

I nodded, and, getting up carelessly, I strolled to a window.

"Devilish lovely night," I said, poking my head out. And it was. Stars overhead and all that sort of thing, and lots of them below, too—I could hear them singing over on Broadway.

"All right, old chap; then here they go into the street," I said. "If my friend can't have 'em, then no jolly crowned heads shall. That's flat!"

Billings started forward with a regular scream.

I waved him back. "Don't come any nearer, old chap," I said, holding my arm out of the window, "or, dash me, I'll drop them instantly. Six stories, you know—stone flagging below."

"But, Dicky—"

"If you don't say you'll take 'em, time I count three, I'll give 'em a toss, by Jove! One!"

"Here, Dicky! Don't be a—"

"Two!" I counted. No bluff, you know; I meant jolly well to do it.

"Just one word—one second, Dicky!" he yelled. "Let me off with one, then. Dicky! Dicky, old chap! Be a good sportsman!"

I hesitated. Dash it, one hates to take an advantage.

Billings stretched out his arm appealingly. "Do, old chap!" he pleaded. "Give me just one—one only!"

His hand shook like a quivering what's-its-name leaf.

I yielded reluctantly: "Oh, well then, call it off with one," I said. And with a sigh I tossed him one of the rubies and dropped the other in the pocket of my smoking-jacket. Billings wiped his forehead, and then he thanked me and wiped his eyes.

"So good of you to give in, old chap," he snuffled. "Never will forget you for it!"

"Oh, I say, chuck it, you know!" I protested.

"Whole family will thank you," he went on in his handkerchief. "Princely magnanimity and all that sort of thing—you'll just *have* to come up for the week end with me this—"

"I *will!*" I reached forward eagerly and insisted on shaking hands. By Jove, what luck!

And Billings looked regularly overcome. All he could do was just shake his head and pump my arm. Why, dash it, this seemed to affect him more even than giving in about the ruby. It was the first time I had ever accepted his invitation, you know.

"Tell you what, old chap," he said, as soon as he could speak. "I'm going to tell you what to do with that other stone. You save that for *her*."

"Her!" By Jove, I was so startled I lost the grip on my monocle. Billings nodded emphatically.

"Yes, sir—for *her*; she'll be along one of these days."

"By Jove, you know!" I was almost dizzy with a sudden idea. I fished out the jewel and held it before my glass, squinting doubtfully at it. I wondered if it was *good* enough for "her."

"I say, Billings," I murmured thoughtfully. "Blondes or brunettes, you know—which wear rubies?"

"Both!" He said it with a kind of jaw snap. "They wear anything in the jewel line they can freeze on to."

"But which—"

"The worst? Blondes, my boy—blondes, every time; especially those going around in black." Billings spoke gloomily. "Let me tell you, my boy—and I *know*—don't you ever have anything to do with a blonde if she's in *black*, especially black silk—hear?"

By Jove, his uplifted finger and fierce way of saying it gave me a regular turn, you know. But then there was the ruby, and I was thinking that—

"Perhaps the four of them in a bracelet," I muttered, "with something else to help out. They *might* do."

"They might," said Billings in a tone of coarse sarcasm. "They might do for a queen!"

I flashed a quick look at him. "Just what *I* was thinking," I answered gently.

"Meantime," said Billings, yawning, "let's go to bed."

And just as I rang for Jenkins I suddenly was seized with a perfectly ripping idea that checked a long yawn right in the middle and almost broke my jaw. For I saw how I could do something handsome that would even up with Billings in a way for the ruby he wouldn't take.

"Tell you what, old chap," I said, slapping him on the shoulder, "*you* are going to have them to-night!"

"Have—have what?" burst from him. "Rubies? I tell you I won't take another—"

"Rubies!" I ejaculated contemptuously. "Rubies nothing! Something better—something worth while, dash it!"

I saw he would never guess it.

"Why, you shall sleep in the pajamas from China," I exclaimed. And gathering them, I placed them in his hands.

"By George, Dicky!" Billings' face showed feeling. "How infernally clever of you, old chap! How thundering timely, too!"

He held them up singly, studying their outlines critically.

"And see here, Dicky—why, great Thomas cats!" His eyes turned on me wonderingly. "Never noticed it before—did you? But I do believe they are just my size!"

His size! By Jove, I had forgotten all about the item of size! I just collapsed into a chair as he said good night, and sat there blinking in a regular stupefaction of horror as his door closed behind him.

For he was devilish sensitive about his bulk, and I dared not say a word.

CHAPTER X

A NOCTURNAL INTRUSION

“OH, but I say, it’s impossible, you know!” And I stared at Jenkins incredulously.

He grinned foolishly. “I know, sir; but he’s in ’em, just the same, and I must say they do fit lovely—just easy-like.”

“By Jove!” I gasped helplessly. “Then the jolly things must be made of rubber, that’s all! Why, look here, he weighs over three hundred pounds, you know!”

Jenkins’ head wagged sagaciously. “I think that’s how it is, sir; it’s wonderful what they do with rubber now; my brother wears a rubber cloth bandage that ain’t no bigger ’round than my arm when it’s off of him, and he—”

“Dare say,” I said sleepily as I fell back upon my pillow. “Good night, Jenkins; hope you’ll get enough sleep to make up for the other night.”

Jenkins sighed as he punched out the light. “Thank you, sir—and good night,” he murmured.

How long I slept I can not tell, as they say in stories, you know; but I was brought jolly wide awake by a light that shone through the bedroom’s

open door. For if there's one thing will wake me quicker than everything else it's a light in the room at night. Fact is, I always want it as black as the what's-its-name cave, or else I can't sleep. And this light came from the small electric stand on the writing-desk. I could tell that by the way it shone.

And just then the little silver gong in there chimed three. Jolly rum hour for anybody to be up unless they were having some fun or were sick. So I raised my head and called softly:

"Jenkins—er—Billings!"

No answer. Reluctantly I swung out and stepped within the next room. Not a soul there, by Jove! Then I moved over to Billings' door, which was wide open for coolness, like my own. I could not see the shadowed alcove in which the bed was placed, and so I stood there hesitating, hating awfully to risk the possibility of disturbing him, don't you know. And just then my eyes, ranging sleepily across the room toward the private hall, were startled by the apparition of an open doorway.

Startled, all right! And yet, by Jove, I was in such a jolly fog, I just stood there, nodding and batting at it for a full minute before I could take it in.

"What I call devilish queer," I decided. I walked over and stuck my head out into the dark hall.

"Billings! Jenkins!" I whispered.

By Jove, not a word! Everything as silent as the tomb!

I didn't like it a bit—so mysterious, you know. Besides, dash it, the thing was getting me all waked up! I just knew if once I got excited and thoroughly awake, it would take me nearly ten minutes to get to sleep again. And, by Jove, just then the excitement came, for I got hold of the fact after I had stared at it a while, that the door of my apartment opening into the outer corridor was standing ajar. Why, dash it, it was not only standing, it was moving. Then suddenly the broad streak of light from the corridor widened under the impulse of a freshening breeze, and the door swung open with a bang.

And then I heard my name spoken.

By Jove, I had been standing there with my mouth open, bobbing my head like a silly dodo; but, give you my word, I was suddenly wide awake as a jolly owl wagon!

Away down the corridor, by the mail chute, a man was standing, reading a framed placard. Nothing particularly remarkable in this, but as the door banged he turned his head sharply and ejaculated:

“Dammit! Now, that will wake Lightnut!”

I was surprised, because I couldn't recall ever having seen him before; yet, standing as he did under the light, I had opportunity for a devilish good view.

He was a heavy set old party, rather baldish, with snowy mutton chops and a beefy complexion that was jolly well tanned below the hatband line, you

know. The kind of old boy you size up as one of the prime feeder sort and fond of looking on the wine when it is Oporto red. Had something of the cut of the retired India colonels one sees about the Service clubs in London—straight as a lamp post still, but out of training and in devilish need of tapping—that sort of duck, you know!

What a respectable-looking old party might be up to, wandering around a bachelor apartment building at three in the morning, was none of my business. What's more, you know, I didn't care a jolly hang. But the thing that dashed me was that just as I moved toward the door to close it, he uttered my name again and came straight toward me as though to speak.

So I had to wait, by Jove, for I couldn't close the door in his face. Awfully rotten thing to do—that, you know.

“Lost his floor and wants to inquire,” I decided.

And then as he toddled across the last yard and stopped before me, I saw that the old chap was in his night things—some darkish sort of pajamas.

His bushy white eyebrows puckered in a frown.

“Hello! Just afraid my moving around was going to get you up—infernal shame!” he said in a thunder growl.

I smiled feebly but politely. “Devilish considerate old cock,” was my thought. “Means well.”

Aloud I said: “Not at all, you know. Up anyhow.”

Then I moved the door just a little—just a wee suggestive inch or two, you know, hoping he would go.

But, by Jove, he just walked right in!

Then he leaned against the wall in the corridor and chuckled.

“By George!” he exclaimed with a leer that showed his almost toothless old gums. “Bet you never would guess what I got up for!”

No, dash it, I didn’t even care to try. I just coughed a little.

“He, he!” he giggled. “Woke up and remembered had promised Flossie Fandango of *The Parisian Broilers* a box of steamer flowers. Gad, she sails at ten; so I piled out and shot off a note to my florist, special delivery. Been trying to find out from that infernal card back there when’s the first collection from the box below. You don’t know, do you?”

By Jove, one of those foot-in-the-grave old stage-door Johnnies! The surprise took my breath.

“Why, the cheesy old sport!” I thought disgustingly. And I answered rather coldly: “Sorry, you know; no idea.” And I opened the door wide.

But the old rascal never moved; just stood there, chuckling horribly.

“Well, she’ll be back in the fall,” he cackled. “And see here, old chap, will introduce you if you like. You need waking up!”

And here I gave a jump and yelled “Ouch!”

For the old fool had dug his thumb into **my ribs**.

Only then did it dawn on me that he was drunk. Of course that was it, and unless I got rid of him the old bore would stand and twaddle the rest of the night. I reached for his hand and shook it.

"We'll have a talk about it some time," I said pleasantly. "Just now, don't you think we'd better each get to bed? So devilish late, you know."

He slapped me on the shoulder with a blow that almost brought me to the floor. Felt like he struck me with a ham, don't you know!

"Right, old chap," he said; "very delicately put; won't keep you up another minute. Believe I'd like a drink first, though, if you don't mind."

Devilish bored as I was, I decided the easiest escape was to humor him.

"All right," I said, leaving the door open and stepping into the room; "I'll get you a glass of water."

"Water!" he exclaimed, following me right in. "Say, don't get funny; it's not becoming to you." He leered at me hideously.

He went right to the corner where stood my celarette. By Jove, give you my word I was so devilish stupefied I couldn't bring out a word. I wasn't sure what was coming, and as I didn't want Billings' rest disturbed, I quietly closed the door of his room.

The old cock in the black pajamas had uncorked a bottle and was smelling its contents. He grimaced over his shoulder.

"That's infernally rotten Scotch, I say!" he ex-

claimed with a sort of snort. "Regular sell, by George!"

I was glad Billings didn't hear him, for it had been a present from him only the week before.

"Suppose I'll have to go the rye," he grumbled; and, grinning at me familiarly, he poured himself a drink. He tossed it off, neat. I reflected that perhaps he would go quietly now.

"Well," I said, advancing, "I expect you're anxious to get to your quarters, so I'll say good night." I extended my hand. "That ought to fetch him," I thought, "if he's a gentleman, no matter how jolly corked he may be."

In my grasp his hand felt like a small boxing glove, but when I glanced at it I saw that it was not unusual.

The old duck pumped my arm solemnly and cast his eyes to the ceiling.

"Fa-are-we-e-ll, old f-friend!" he murmured in a husky tremolo, deflecting the corners of his mouth and wagging his bald pate. "If I don't see you again I'll have the river dragged!"

And then, instead of going, dash me if the old fool didn't flop down into Billings' favorite chair and reach for Billings' cigarettes that he had left on the tabouret.

He waved his hand at me. "Oh, you go on to bed, Lightnut," he said, puffing away with iron nerve. "All the sleep's out of me, dammit! I'll just sit here and read and smoke as long as I like, then I'll go

in there and turn in." A jerk of his doddering head indicated Billings' room.

By Jove, I hardly knew what to do! I was regularly bowled over, don't you know. I was up against a crisis—that's what—a crisis.

"Oh, I say, you know—" I started remonstrating, and just then I gasped with relief at the welcome sight of Jenkins, peeking round the door-frame behind my visitor's back. His finger was on his lips and he beckoned me earnestly.

At the same moment old whiskers shoved his chair up to the table, switched on the reading-lamp and reached for a magazine.

"I'm on, sir," whispered Jenkins, as I joined him and we stepped aside. "Hadn't I better ring up the janitor on my house 'phone?"

"By Jove, the very thing!" I agreed. "For he'll know where this chap belongs. A fiver, tell him, if he gets a move on. Hurry!"

I slipped back into the room as Jenkins disappeared. The jolly old barnacle had discarded his cigarette and was critically selecting a cigar from my humidor.

"I don't see why the devil you don't go to bed," he said, fixing himself comfortably with two chairs and lighting up.

"I—I'm not sleepy," I stammered, perching on the corner of a chair.

"I believe you're lying," he growled, scowling at

me; "but if you're not sleepy, listen to this joke here—it's a chestnut, but it's infernally good."

I never did know what the joke was, for I was listening for other sounds as he read. Suddenly I heard a whistle far down in the street; and I thought it was followed by a patter of running feet.

Then came the quivering rhythm of the elevator rapidly ascending, and while the anecdote was still being droned out between chuckles, I slipped out again into the hall and rejoined Jenkins.

"Janitor says there's no such tenant in this building as I described," Jenkins imparted hurriedly. "Might be a guest, of course; but he doesn't remember ever seeing him. So he whistled for a cop, to be on the safe side, and caught two. Here they are, sir."

Out from the elevator sprang the janitor, half-dressed and looking excited. Close on his heels came two big policemen.

I stepped into the outer corridor and explained the situation. The officers nodded reassuringly.

"'Nough said," one of them commented. "We'll have him out, sir."

The janitor, who had been cautiously sighting through the door within, came running out.

"He shifted around while I was looking, and I got a good look at him," he said with some excitement, "and I never saw him before. I wouldn't forget *that* mug!"

"Suppose you take a squint at him yourself,

O'Keefe," suggested the taller of the coppers. "You've been on this beat so long."

In a minute or two O'Keefe came slipping back hurriedly. He drew his companion aside.

"Tell you what, Tim," I heard him say, "do you know, I'm after thinking it looks like old Braxton, known in the perfesh as 'Foxy Grandpa.' He's a swell con man, but has just finished a stretch at Copper John's for going through a flat in the Bronx. He's done murder once."

The other turned to me.

"May save a muss in your rooms if you'll just kinder call him out, sir," he suggested. "It will be simpler." He grinned significantly and glanced at his night stick.

"By Jove!" I ejaculated, looking at Jenkins. "By Jove, you know!"

Jenkins coughed. "Just say you want to speak to him a minute, sir," he said. "They'll do the rest—h'm!"

They all followed me into the hall, and I stepped to the doorway. And then I almost pitched forward, I was so devilish startled.

For, as a crowning example of his daring and reckless conduct, the hoary old reprobate was emerging from Billings' room, his fingers overhauling the contents of my friend's wallet, even as he waddled along, and so absorbed that he never even saw me.

"Ah!" he breathed in a heavy sigh of satisfaction; and out came his fingers, and in them, poised aloft,

he held the ruby I had given to Billings. His bleary eyes gloated at it.

“Mine!” he whispered. “Mine now to keep forever!”

CHAPTER XI

IRON NERVE

I JUST stood in the doorway, staring. Couldn't say a word, my throat was that paralyzed. First time, you know, I'd ever seen a real burglar or jolly hold-up man, and he looked so different from what I had expected.

But I knew now, of course, that the policeman was right and that the respectable-looking old gentleman was no other than the desperate criminal described as "Foxy Grandpa." But for the intervention of outside assistance doubtless Billings and I might have had our throats cut by the conscienceless old geezer.

He was so absorbed that he did not see me, nor the two helmets piking above my shoulder.

"Up to his old tricks," O'Keefe whispered. "We've got him in the act, Tim!"

"Great!" breathed Tim. "What won't the captain say!"

O'Keefe's breath tickled my ear again and swept my nose. I've never seen beer or sauerkraut since but what I think of it!

"Got your stick ready?" he was saying. "Best not take any chances; Braxton's a quick shooter,

they say. When we jump him, better give him the club right off."

Tim whispered an impatient demur. "That's all right; but I'm for coaxing him out here first. I don't want to tap him on the gentleman's rugs; if I do, I can tell you, it'll ruin 'em, that's all."

He swept his hand across his tongue and gripped his stick tighter.

Jenkins, at one side, bobbed his head up and down and smiled his admiration of this sentiment. He leaned nearer to me.

"Just beckon him out, sir," his whisper advised. "Just tell him you want to show him something in the hall—cat, or anything will do. Just so you get him past the furniture and rugs, sir."

I advanced a step into the room. I expected the old knave to be a bit dashed, don't you know. Not he; it never disquieted him a bit. Just gave me a careless leer and went back to the ruby. Somehow I began to feel riled. I'm not often taken that way, but this old scamp's persistent audacity and impudence went beyond anything I had ever heard of.

"What in thunder's the matter with you, son?" he murmured, squinting hideously at the jewel. "You prowl around like you had a pain." Then he went right on:

"Say, did you ever see anything so corking fine?" He looked up, holding the ruby in the light. "And to think how little I dreamed of scooping anything like that when I came in here to-night!"

By Jove, this was a little too much, even for an easy-going chap like myself! The jolly worm will turn, you know.

Dash me, before I knew what I was doing even, I had moved to his side and jerked the ruby from his hand. My face felt like a hot-water bottle as I did it.

"You haven't got it yet," I said, "and I'll take devilish good care you don't get it."

He fell back as though from a blow.

"Why—why, old chap! Why, Lightnut!" he gasped. "What's the matter—what makes you look at me like that?"

"Your liberties have gone just a bit too far, don't you know," I said, looking steadily in his fishy old eye. "I've had enough of you, by Jove, that's all!"

He stared at me, and I could hear him breathing like a blacksmith's bellows. I would never have thought he had such lungs.

Slowly his hand came out, and dash me if it wasn't shaking like he had the delirium what's-its-name. But for his tan, his face would have been as white as his hypocritical old whiskers.

"Is this some infernal joke?" His face summoned a sickly smile that almost instantly faded. His hand fell back to his side. "Why, old fellow, you don't think that way about me, do you? As for the ruby, I—I don't want it now—I just want you to accept my apology for anything I've done, and—and let me get away."

There was a short laugh from the doorway.

"Likely enough," said Officer O'Keefe, his big figure swinging forward with long strides. "Keep him covered, Tim!"

He planted himself between us with a grin.

"You're 'it' again, Foxy! Jig's up. Will you go quietly?"

It did me good to see how completely the old scoundrel was taken back. His wide distended bleary eyes shifted from O'Keefe to me and back again. It was a perfect surprise.

I motioned to Jenkins to close the door of my friend's bedroom. So far, he had evidently slept serenely through all the trouble, and, if possible, I wanted to avoid arousing him now. For a fat man, Billings had the deuce of a temper when stirred up over anything like an imposition upon him, and it would only add to the confusion for him to appear on the scene and learn about his wallet and his treasured ruby that I had rescued.

Foxy Grandpa's face had been rapidly undergoing a change. From pallor to pink it went; and then from pink to red. Now it was becoming scarlet. He threw his head back and faced me angrily.

"Lightnut, will you tell me what the hell this means?" And his heavy voice thundered.

"Here! Here! That'll be enough o' that," cried Officer O'Keefe sharply. "None of your grandstand play here, or it'll be the worse for you. And no tricks, Braxton, or—"

He clutched his stick menacingly.

“Braxton!” snorted the old fellow. “Why, you born fool, my name’s not Braxton!”

“Not now,” grinned O’Keefe. “Say, what *is* your name now, Foxy?”

“My name—” roared Foxy Grandpa, and paused abruptly. He looked rather blankly from one officer to the other.

“See here; do I understand I’m under arrest?” he inquired.

“You certainly are talking, Foxy,” chuckled O’Keefe.

“Then my name’s Doe—John Doe,” and I thought the fellow’s quick glance at me held an appeal. Of what sort, I had no idea.

“And what, may I ask, is the charge?” he asked again, with what was apparently a great effort at calmness.

“Oh, come now, Braxton,” said the officer in a tone of disgust, “stop your foolery; you’re just using up time. Ain’t it enough that you’re in this building and in this gentleman’s rooms?”

“In his rooms!” exploded Foxy Grandpa. “Why, you lunkhead, this gentleman will tell you I am his guest!” He turned to me with a sort of angry laugh.

“Tell him, Lightning,” he rasped. “I’ve had enough of this!”

The big policeman’s features expanded in a grin, while Tim doubled forward an instant, his blue girth wabbling with internal appreciation of the Foxy one’s facetiousness; and the janitor snickered.

Jenkins looked shocked. As for me, dash it, I never so wished for my monocle, don't you know!

O'Keefe's head angled a little to give me the benefit of a surreptitious wink.

"Oh, certainly," he said, his voice affecting a fine sarcasm; "if the gentleman says you're his *friend*—"

"He's no friend of mine," I proclaimed indignantly. "Never saw him before in my life."

Instead of being confounded, the artful old villain fell back with a great air of astonishment and dismay. By Jove, he managed to turn fairly purple.

"Wha-a-t's that?" he gasped stranglingly and clutching at the collar of his pajamas. "Say that again, Dicky."

I looked at him severely.

"Oh, I say, don't call me 'Dicky,' either," I remonstrated quietly. "It's a name I only like to hear my intimate friends use."

He kind of caught the back of a chair and glared wildly at me from under his bushy wintry eyebrows. The beefy rolls of his lower jaw actually trembled.

"Don't you—haven't you always classed me as that, Dic—er—Lightnut?" he sort of whispered.

By Jove, the effrontery of such acting fairly disgusted me. I looked him over from head to foot with measured contempt. "I don't know you at all," I said coldly, turning away.

"Ye gods!" he wheezed, clutching at his grizzled hair.

CHAPTER XII

I SEND A MAN TO JAIL

THE two policemen shifted impatiently. "That'll about do, Foxy," growled O'Keefe. "It's entertaining, but enough of a thing—"

But the old duffer caught his sleeve.

"Wait!" he panted. "One second—wait—just one second!"

He looked at Jenkins and ducked his neck forward, swallowing hard.

"Jenkins," he said with a sickly smile. "You—you see how it is with Lightnut—poor fellow! None of us ever thought he would go off that bad though. But, as it is, I guess you're the one now who will have to set me right with these people. You'll have to stand for me."

Jenkins looked alarmed. He addressed the officers eagerly:

"S'help me," he cried, his glance impaling the prisoner with scorn, "I never see this party before in the ten years I been in New York!"

Did that settle the fellow? By Jove, not a bit; his jolly nerve seemed inexhaustible!

He blinked a little; and then with a roar he

jumped for Jenkins, but O'Keefe shoved him back. Panting and struggling between the two officers, and fairly at bay at last, the desperate old man seemed to determine one last bluff, don't you know, and with the janitor.

"Here, you," he bellowed, as the man dodged behind Jenkins. "You have seen me come in this building often! Tell 'em so, or I'll kill you!"

The little man turned pale, but came up pluckily.

"If—if I had," he stammered, "you never would have come in again, if I knew as much about you as I do now. I assure you, gents, I never laid eyes on this man before."

"Well, I'll be—"

He broke off and seemed to fall out of the grasp of the men backward into a big chair. Couldn't quit his jolly acting, it was clear to me, even when he had played his last card.

"Is everybody crazy, or am I?" he said, brushing his hand across his forehead; and dashed if the perspiration didn't stand on it in big drops, clear up into his old bald pate.

"See here," he broke out again, addressing O'Keefe, "send for somebody else in this building; send for—" He seemed to deliberate.

The policeman laughed derisively.

"Likely we'll be hauling people out of bed at this hour, isn't it," he sneered, "just to let you keep up this fool's game!" He leveled his stick menacingly. "Now, looky here, Braxton!" he exclaimed sternly.

"I'm being easy with you because you're a gray-headed old man, but—"

By Jove, it was plain he had struck a sensitive point!

"Gray-headed old man!" shouted the fellow, coming out of the chair like a rubber ball, and pointing to his reflection in the long mirror. "Does that look like gray hair—that red topknot? It'll *be* gray, though, if this infernal craziness goes on much longer—I'll say that much!" And back he flopped into the chair.

The two officers exchanged glances, and, by Jove, they looked ugly!

"Call for the wagon, Tim," said O'Keefe shortly, indicating the 'phone. "The fool's going to give trouble. Kahoka Apartments, tell them. Hurry; let's get him to the street."

He made a dive at the figure in the chair and jerked him forward.

But his grip seemed to slip and he only moved his prisoner a few inches. He tried again with about the same result.

"Get a move on, Tim," he said pantingly. "He's bigger, somehow, than he looks, and awful heavy; it'll take both of us. Get up, Braxton, unless you want the club!"

The man settled solidly in the depths of the chair.

"Club and be hanged!" he replied with a snap of his jaw. "I won't go in any dirty police wagon—"

that's flat! You may take me in a hearse first. Get a cab or a taxi, if I have to go with you!"

"Gamey old sport, anyhow, by Jove!" I thought with sudden admiration. Couldn't help it, dash it! Heart just went out to him, somehow.

I gently interposed as O'Keefe prepared to lunge again.

"I'll stand the cab for him, officer," I said with a smile, "if your rules, don't you know, or whatever it is, will allow."

I added in a lowered voice:

"Makes it devilish easier for you, don't you know, and avoids such a jolly row. And—er—I want to ask you and your friend to accept from me a little token of my appreciation."

The policeman exchanged a glance with Tim and considered.

"Well, sir," he said, "as to the cab, of course if you're a mind to want to do that, it's your own affair."

He turned to his companion.

"Just cancel that, Tim," he directed. "Call a four-wheeler."

"Thank you, Lightning," put in the old man gratefully. "You *have* got a grain of decency left, by George, after all!"

Meantime, Jenkins was answering my inquiry.

"I don't believe, sir, you have a bit of cash in the house. You told me so when you were retiring."

By Jove, I remembered now! The poker game in the evening!

I was wondering whether they could use a check, when I spied Billings' wallet on the table.

The very thing, by Jove!

Examination showed, first thing, a wad of yellow-backs, fresh from the bank. I peeled off two and pushed them into the officer's hand.

"This belongs to a friend of mine," I remarked; "but it's just the same as my own, don't you know, and he won't mind. Dash it, we're just like brothers!"

A howl of maniacal laughter from the old fool in the chair startled us both.

"Regular Damon and Pythias, damn it!" he gabbled, grinning with hideous face contortions. "One for all, and all for one! And just help yourself; don't mind me. Why—*hell!*"

O'Keefe prodded him sharply in the shoulder with his night stick.

"Stop your skylarking now, Foxy," he admonished angrily, "and come on. Here the gentleman's gone and put up his money for a cab for you and you ought to want to get out of his way so he can rest."

"He's sure been kind to you," supplemented Tim, whose eye had noted the passing of the yellow boys.

"Kind!" mocked the old geezer, showing his scattered teeth in a horrible grin. "Why, he's a lu-lu, a regular Samaritan!"

"No names!" warned O'Keefe, slightly lifting his night stick. "Come on to the street—you seem to forget you're under arrest."

He added hastily:

"And I ought to have warned you that **anything** you may say, Foxy—"

"Oh, you go to—Brooklyn!" snarled FOX. "For two pins I'd knock your block off, you fat-headed Irish fool! Think I'm going down to the sidewalk without my clothes?"

"Are your clothes somewhere in this building?" I asked with some sympathy.

He whirled on me sneeringly and jeered like a jolly screech owl:

"Oh, no; not exactly *in* the building—they're on the flagpole on the roof, of course! He-he-he! Bloody good joke, isn't it?"

I sat on the edge of the table wearily; and, catching the policeman's eye, shrugged my shoulders significantly.

"You're right, sir," he said apologetically. "We won't fool a second longer. Here, you take that side, Tim. Let's pull!"

And they did pull, but, by Jove, they couldn't raise him.

"Queerest go I ever see," Tim gasped. "He ain't holding on to nothing, is he? And, O'Keefe, he *feels big!*"

"Pshaw, it's not that," the other panted; "it's just the way he's sitting. Why, you can *see* he ain't so

very big." He nodded to Jenkins and the janitor. "Here, you two! Help us, can't you?"

And with one mighty, united heave, they brought the loudly protesting old man to his feet and held him there. O'Keefe faced me.

"Might be well to take a look around, sir, and see if you think of anything else he's stolen, before we take him off."

"Good idea, Lightnut!" Old Braxton stopped struggling and whirled his head toward me, his face almost black with rage. "Ha, ha! Why don't you have me searched? There's not a pocket in these damn pajamas!"

"Anything whatever, sir, we'll have him leave behind," said O'Keefe.

"By Jove!" I don't know how I ever managed to say it. Fact is, things had just suddenly spun round before me like a merry what's-its-name. For I *did* recognize something! The old fellow's unabashed reference to pajamas was what brought it to my attention.

"Ha!" O'Keefe nodded. "There *is* something! Just say the word, sir."

I looked helplessly at Jenkins, and then I saw that of a sudden he recognized them, too. His eyes rolled at me understandingly.

"What is it, sir?" demanded O'Keefe respectfully. "The law requires—"

I swallowed hard. "It—it's the pajamas," I said faintly.

The old rascal uttered a roar and tried to get at me.

"You cold-blooded scoundrel!" he bellowed. "So this is why—"

But here a jab of the night stick took him in the side with a sound like a blow on a punching bag. Words left the old man and he gasped desperately for breath. O'Keefe tried to shake him.

"Did you get those pajamas in here?" he demanded fiercely, and he drew back his stick as though for another jab. But the old geezer nodded quickly, glaring at me and trying to wheeze something.

"That's enough," said the officer. He turned to me. "You recognize them, do you, sir?"

"I—I think so," I stammered, looking at Jenkins, who nodded. "They belong to a friend of mine who—a—must have left them here."

"I see." He fished out a note-book. "Mind giving me the name, sir? Just a matter of form, you know—" He licked his pencil expectantly.

"Oh, I say, you know—" I gasped at Jenkins. "I don't think she—I—"

"Certainly not, sir," affirmed Jenkins, solemnly looking upward.

"She?" The note-book slowly closed, then with the pencil went back into the officer's pocket. "Excuse me, sir. H'm!"

"H'm!" echoed Tim apologetically. Then they both glared at Foxy.

The old man just snarled at them. He was like a dog at bay.

"All right!" he hissed. "You just try to take them off—I'll kill somebody, that's all. Think I'm going to make a spectacle of myself?"

Jenkins whispered to me.

"To be sure," I said aloud. "He might as well wear them now to the station. Just so he returns them when he gets his clothes."

"Very good, sir," said O'Keefe, relieved. "We'll see he does that. Come along now, Braxton—*shut up*, I tell you!"

And with all four of them behind the charge, they managed to rush the loudly protesting old man to the door.

"I *won't* go without my clothes, I tell you," he raged.

But he did. Fighting, swearing and protesting, the jolly old vagabond was roughly bundled into the elevator.

"Good night, sir," called O'Keefe as the four of them dropped downward. "We'll let you know if it seems necessary to trouble you."

Once again inside, Jenkins and I just stared at each other without a word, we were that tired and disgusted. To me, the only dashed crumb of comfort in the whole business was the wonderful fact that Billings seemed to have slept like a jolly Rip through the whole beastly row.

Very softly I opened his door again, so that the

breeze flowed through once more. Jenkins put out the lights, and I stood there listening, but could hear no sound within the room, for the street below was already heralding the clamor of the coming day.

Jenkins' whisper brushed my ear as I moved away :

“Sleeping like a baby, ain't he, sir?”

CHAPTER XIII

FRANCES

BY Jove, it seemed to me I had been asleep about a minute when I saw the sunlight splashing through the blinds.

Jenkins stood beside me with something in his hand.

“Didn’t hear me, did you, sir?” he was asking. “I said I thought the address looked like Mr. Billings’ handwriting. And he’s gone, sir.”

“Gone?”

I sat up, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. I had a befogged notion that Jenkins looked a little queer.

“Yes, sir. He’s not in his room, nor in the apartment anywhere.”

“Eh—how—what’s that?” For Jenkins’ hand extended an envelope.

“Perhaps you would like to read this now, sir.”

It was from Billings—I knew his fist in an instant. It was very short and without heading. In fact, above his name appeared just a half-dozen penciled words, heavily underscored, and without punctuation:

Damn you send me my clothes

"His clothes?" I looked perplexedly at Jenkins.

He was looking a little pale and held his eyes fixedly to the picture molding across the room. He coughed gently.

"Yes, sir," he uttered faintly; "they're in his room, but *he* ain't."

"By Jove!" I remarked helplessly. And just then I remembered something that brought me wide awake in an instant.

I questioned eagerly:

"I say—that desk lamp in there, Jenkins—did you switch it on in the night? And the doors I found open—know anything about them?" And Jenkins' blank expression was the reply.

"By Jove, Jenkins!" I gasped.

Jenkins compressed his lips. "Exactly, sir."

"Er—what were you thinking, Jenkins?" I questioned desperately. And I think Jenkins' stolidity wavered before my anxious face.

"It ain't for me to be thinking anything, sir—besides, the messenger's waiting—but—" His hand sought his pocket.

He stepped back, leaving something on the stand by my bed.

"What's that?" I questioned in alarm. "Another note?"

"No, sir—not exactly, sir. But if I may suggest—without offense, sir—that you fill it out, I will see that it gets to him."

“Him? Who’s him—he, I mean?”

“Doctor Splasher, sir, the temperance party I was speaking of. I’ve already filled out mine, and I’m going to put one in for Mr. Billings when I send the clothes.” From the doorway he turned a woe-begone countenance toward me. “It’s heartrending, sir—if I may be permitted to say so—to think of a nice gentleman like Mr. Billings wandering over to the club with nothing on but red pajamas.”

But when I telephoned they stated that Mr. Billings had not been at the club since last evening. Some one who answered the ‘phone thought Mr. Billings was with his friend, Mr. Lightnut, in the Kahoka Apartments. And, of course, I knew jolly well he was not.

As I turned from the telephone, something in Jenkins’ expression arrested my attention.

“Well?” I said impatiently, for he has so many devilishly clever inspirations, you know; and, dash it, I like to encourage him.

“Pardon, sir, but don’t you think—” Here he looked straight up at the electrolier and coughed. “About Mr. Billings, sir; I was going to suggest that though he isn’t over at the club, he’s *somewhere*, sir.”

Why, dash it, I thought *that* jolly likely, myself! I said so.

“Yes, sir,” said Jenkins darkly. “And Mr. Billings usually knows *where* he is. I guess, sir, he’s in this neighborhood—h’m!”

I just sat staring at him a minute, thinking what a devilish wonderful thing intuition is for the lower classes.

“By Jove, Jenkins!” I said; “then you think—”

“I think Mr. Billings, sir, might prefer to find himself—h’m! Yes, sir.” Jenkins lifted the breakfast tray with deliberation, removed it from the room, and returned, moving about the furniture and busying himself with an air of mystery. Dash it, I knew he had up his sleeve some other devilish clever notion, and so presently I spoke up just to touch him off.

“By Jove!” I remarked.

“Yes, sir.” Jenkins rested the end of the crumb brush on the table and considered me earnestly. “You know, Mr. Lightnut, last night as Mr. Billings was retiring, he says to me: ‘Jenkins, Mr. Lightnut has promised to go up home with me to-morrow for the week end. There’s a tenner coming your way if he doesn’t forget about it. He’s to go *to-morrow*, now, mind you, Jenkins; and it don’t matter *what* comes up. *You* see that he goes up to-morrow.’ ”

“By Jove!” I said as he paused, and I screwed my monocle tighter and nodded. “I see.”

Of course I didn’t see, but I knew the poor fellow was driving at something, and I wanted to give him a run.

“Exactly, sir.” And he stood waiting. “So, shall I pack, sir? You’ll want to take the four-ten express, I suppose?”

By Jove, it was the most amazingly, dashed clever guess I ever knew Jenkins to get off! Fact! I knew that if there was one thing more than another in all the world that I wanted to do, it was to take that four-ten express. To think of seeing Frances again, and *to-day!*

Of course, it was quite clear that Billings must have anticipated the possibility of something unusual, and that was why he had impressed a sort of personal responsibility upon Jenkins—kind of tipping him off, as it were, so he would be sure to see that I got off in case he did not show up himself. It was very easy to see this, especially as Jenkins saw it that way, too, but what made it specially sc awfully jolly easy to see was the fact that I *wanted* to go, you know.

So I let Jenkins shoot a wire up to Billings, stating my train, and I just had to chuckle as in my mind's eye I saw old brazen face Jack coming down to the station to meet me, and just ignoring his going off in the middle of the night in my pajamas. By Jove, perhaps he would bring *her* down to the train in his car, so I would be sure not to ask him any questions!

I left Jenkins to travel by a later train, and a little after four I was whirling above Spuyten Duyvil and looking about the chair-car to see if there was any one I knew. But, by Jove, there was hardly a soul in the car—nobody except just women, you know, and these filled the whole place. And they

were talking about all sorts of dashed silly things. Most of them were devilish pretty as the word goes, but, of course, not a patch on *her*. Oh, well, of course, they *couldn't* be that! Don't know how they were behind me, you know—too much trouble to turn round and fix my glass. So I just took the range in front, looking at the tops of the hats and the chairs and wondering if women would ever become extinct like that bird—the great what's-its-name, you know.

“By Jove, *she* could be spared!” I thought, studying a young woman who stood in the aisle beside me. She was rather heavy set—what you might call egg-shaped. Her face and her heavy glasses seemed to proclaim a mission in life, and the dowdyish cut of her rig and the reckless way it was hurled on made it plain that she was on to the fact that nature had made a blunder in her sex, and she wanted the world to *know* she knew.

She was talking to the lady immediately behind me. At least, I discovered after five minutes that she was talking. By Jove, up to that time, I thought she was canvassing for a book! The other never got in a word, don't you know. And I was getting devilish tired of it and wishing she would move on, when she shifted, preparatory to doing so, and raised her voice:

“Very well, then, if you don't care to come, I think I will go forward again and finish the discussion with Doctor Jennie Newman upon the meta-

morphoses of the primordial protoplasms. Watch out for Tarrytown now, Frances."

Tarrytown! Frances! By Jove, my heart skipped a beat!

The other murmured something.

Her voice! Her blessed, sweet voice, of which every syllable, every shade, was indented in my memory like the record of a what's-its-name! By Jove, my Frances, and right behind me!

All I could do to sit still a minute longer, but I knew jolly well if I turned now I would be introduced to the freak and lose I couldn't tell how many precious moments with my dear one. So I sat low in the chair, polishing my monocle, you know, and noting with satisfaction that my part reflected all right in the little strip of mirror. I tried to get a glimpse of her in it, too, but all I could see was a glorious white hat—a stunning Neapolitan, flanked with a sheaf of wild ostrich plumes.

And then the freak left. I watched her spraddle down the aisle and out through the little corridor before I dared risk the accident of a backward turn of that funny green hat.

Then, when all was safe, I took a deep breath, gripped hard the arms of the chair, and whirled suddenly around.

"Frances!" I whispered. "My darling!"

CHAPTER XIV

"YOU NEVER SAW ME IN BLACK"

"OH!" she gasped faintly.

That was all she said at first, her big blue eyes wide distended, her white-gloved wrists curving above the chair-arms as though to rise. Easy to see she was completely floored at seeing me.

And as it was her move, I just sat kind of grinning, you know, and holding her tight with my monocle.

Then her mouth twitched a bit; next her head went up and I heard again that delicious birdlike carol of a laugh. Her eyes came to rest upon the hat in my hand. I had slipped my Harvard band around it, remembering the admiration she had expressed for our colors.

"Oh!" she said again, and she looked at me hesitatingly. "Mr. Jones, is it not—or is it—"

I chuckled. "Mr. Smith, you know," I said. "Mr. Smith, of course."

And then I just went on chuckling, for I thought it so devilish clever of her, so humorous. And just then I thought of a dashed good repartee:

"Months—so many months, you know, since we

met!" And I thought it delightful the way she puckered her lovely little forehead and looked me over. But she just looked so devilish enticing, I couldn't keep it up myself. I leaned nearer and spoke behind my hat, trying to look the love I felt.

"Didn't expect to see me, did you?"

She looked at me oddly and bit her lip. But her eyes were dancing and the delicious dimple in her cheek twitched on the verge of laughter. She shook her head.

"Indeed I did not." And again came that odd look in her face as though she were studying, kind of balking, don't you know. By Jove, she was perfectly dazzling!

"My dearest!" slipped softly from me as I held the hat.

She stared. Then once more that canary peal of merriment.

"Oh, dear!" Then her face sobered and she almost pouted. "Now you mustn't—please, *really*—it gets so tiresome. Don't you American, or rather, you Harvard men, ever talk anything to a girl but love? Why, it's absurd." She smiled, but her lashes dropped reproof. By Jove, I was taken back a little! Evidently she was piqued with me about something, but what the devil was it? And then I thought I had it.

I slipped nearer—to the edge of the chair.

"I didn't know you were in town to-day—'pon honor, I didn't. Billings never said a word about

it," I explained. "Why, dash it, I would have given *anything* to have known."

She looked at me with a queer little smile, stroked her little lip with the point of one gloved finger and looked across the river at the Palisades. Dash the Palisades! Never could see any sense in them, anyhow!

"Oh, thank you, but Elizabeth and I didn't know ourselves until last evening that we would make the New York trip. She wanted to hear a suffragette lecture at the Carnegie, and I had some shopping to do."

And she just gave me one of those calm, self-contained, thoroughbred sort of smiles that are harder to get past than a six-foot hedge. What the deuce *was* the matter with the girl? Something had changed her; yet I knew that nothing could really change her at heart—never.

But it was certain that she was put out about something. I would just have to play her easy and try to find out what it was. I remembered hearing Pugsley say—and he has had no end of experience with them—that when women are put out they expect you to find out what it is, no matter how devilishly improbable or unreasonable it may be.

And just then I remembered another clever idea of Pugsley's—what he said was a corking good way of diverting their minds.

"I say, you know," I said suddenly—and though I threw a whole lot of enthusiasm into my face in

carrying out his idea, I didn't have to try very hard—"I think that's a ripping gown. White is ever so much more your style than—than—"

By Jove, I swallowed just in time! But it had roused her. I could see her brighten.

"Oh!" she said. "Let me see—what *is* it you remember?" And she kind of muttered, "Perhaps I can tell from that—"

She paused expectantly.

"Oh, I say, you know!" And I twirled the hat, feeling a bit rattled. Why the deuce did she want to rub it in?

"But I want you to tell me." Her beautiful eyes were teasing.

"*You* know—in black." I twirled the hat faster.

"*Black!*" She stared, her exquisite lips standing apart like the two petals of a rose. "Why, I never wore black in my life. *You know* you never saw me in black."

I felt hurt. I couldn't blame her for wanting to appear to forget about it, but still—

She must have seen my face fall, for I know, by Jove, I could just feel it kind of collapse, I was that hurt and disappointed. Her face softened kindly and I took courage, for my devilishly alert mind just then hit upon another explanation. I recalled that she had thoughtlessly left the pajamas in my rooms. I also realized with dismay that Foxy Grandpa had promised, or rather the officers had promised for

him, that they should be returned promptly. And, by Jove, I had forgotten all about them!

"Never mind," I said, thinking aloud, as I frequently do. "I'll telephone about them as soon as we get to Wolhurst." Then a terrible shock struck me. "Oh, I say, you didn't have your name on them, did you?"

"On what?" How kindly, even if quizzically, she was regarding me! The big white hat shifted an inch or two nearer. I realized with joy that she was beginning to forget about being put out with me.

"Why—" I looked about cautiously and dropped my voice, though it was not likely any one could hear above the quiver of the train. "Why, in your black pajamas you left in my rooms."

A kind of little gasp was all I heard, and then she was on her feet and looking—not at me, but above my head—looking away off down the length of the car. Somehow—why, I couldn't understand—I had a wierd, horrible feeling of abasement, as though I had killed a child, or had done some other dashed unreasonable thing like that. Her face had flushed but now was deadly white. And then, by Jove, I saw she was looking for another chair.

I jumped up at once and moved into the aisle.

"I'm so sorry," I said miserably, "so sorry, dear, I hurt you. I didn't mean ever to speak of the pajamas. I knew you wanted to forget about the other night, and I knew you wanted *me* to forget, too—"

“Oh, please—” She shrank back, her beautiful eyes like those of a frightened deer. But it was the last car, and I blocked the aisle. I didn’t realize at the time that I was doing it. It came to me afterward, and was one of the things I kicked myself about for hours, more or less. Just at the moment I was so dashed wild about setting myself right with her. The only other thing I had presence of mind to remember was the nearness about us of a lot of beady-eyed cats, and so I drew nearer and lowered my voice so none could hear. For I had another feeling of inspiration as to what really was the matter with her!

Matter! I should say, rather! She was beginning to look angry—splendidly angry—her eyes just blazing blue fire. I knew I would have to get in my explanation quickly, and what’s more, if what Pugsley thought was true, I would have to hit the jolly nail on the head or else everything was off, you know.

“Why, Frances—sweetheart,” I pleaded softly—just loud enough for her to hear above the train, “I know you are put out with me because you found me gone the next morning, but honestly, dear, I acted for the best—indeed, I did.” And to be on the safe side, I profited by another inspiration: “And, my darling girl, I’ll never mention the pajamas and the other night—never any more—as long as we live, nor the cigarettes nor cigars nor whisky. Why, I don’t care if you—”

"Tarrytown—all out for Tarrytown!" came in a high tenor voice from the end of the car, and something bowled down the aisle and brushed me aside. It was the frump.

"Come on, Frances!" she exclaimed sharply; "our station." Next instant they were streaking it for the door, with me a good second. I saw Frances look behind once with—oh, such a look! Dashed if it didn't shrivel me, you know—that sort. And, by Jove, I knew Pugsley was right, and that I had failed to put the ball over!

I was not six feet behind as they scrambled through the station to the other side where a large car stood panting. I saw Frances clutch the frump's arm and whisper something, and I heard the frump's reply, for her voice was loud and strongly masculine.

"Crazy?" she rasped. "Nonsense! Drunk, more likely. Most of them are half the time."

I didn't have time to see what she referred to, for just then we reached the side of the car. I didn't see a thing of Billings, but the chauffeur jumped to the ground and received the ladies and their bags. He seemed to me devilish familiar, too. By Jove, the way he held my darling's hand was the most infernally audacious, outrageous thing I ever beheld! I should have liked to punch his head. He helped them into the tonneau and was so busy with his silly jackass chatter that he closed the door before he turned and saw me. I was just standing there, lean-

ing a little forward with my cane, you know, and fixing my monocle reproachfully on Frances—trying to get her eye.

And then, by jove, I felt a blow on my shoulder that almost bowled me over, for I had my legs crossed, you know.

“Well, I’ll be hanged—it’s Dicky!” And he was grinning at me like a what’s-its-name cat. And with the grin I recognized him. It was the fresh young fool who had been so devilish familiar at the pier the morning Frances left.

Then he banged me again, dash it, and tried to get my hand, but I put it behind me. But he did get my arm, and he turned toward the car. His voice dropped.

“See here, I want you to meet— Eh?” He broke off, staring at the frump, who was making signs with her eyes, frowning and beckoning him with her green flower-pot. He left me, murmuring something, and stepped to the running-board. I could see the flower-pot bobbing about energetically and twice Frances nodded, it seemed to me reluctantly.

“Crazy—drunk? Pshaw, you’re batty!” he said to the frump rudely. Then I heard another murmur and his harsh voice rose again: “Yes—Lightnut, I tell you—Dicky Lightnut. Yes—Jack Billings’ great friend. You just wait till he’s back from the city, and if he don’t get upon his hind— Eh, what? His name is *Smith*? Rats!”

All this time I was just standing there, trying to

catch Frances' eye. I felt sure if I could catch her eye she would see how devilish sorry I was. I moved back a few feet, for, dash it, without a sign from her, I had no idea now, of course, of considering myself as one of the party. Not finding Billings with the car, and the information I caught that he was still in the city, just left me high and dry, you know.

"All right, Miss Smarty," the yellow-topped chauffeur rasped, addressing the frump, "I'll just show you!"

He turned about and jerked his head.

"Oh, Dicky! Here, just a minute, old chap—will you?"

Of course I took no notice of him whatever. In fact I looked in the other direction.

"Lightnut!" he called. I just stared up at the castle on the hill. I felt devilish annoyed, though. I recalled a conversation the other day at the club in which Van Dyne remarked that the intimacy affected now by chauffeurs was growing insufferable. Declared his man had asked him for a light that morning.

The fellow stared a little; then he came toward me, smirking in a jocular, impertinent way.

"Say, stop your kidding, old man," he muttered; "girls have no sense of humor, you know. Come along—I've just been telling them you are my best friend."

I stole another look at the car, but Frances

avoided me; so I came to a decision. I turned shortly on the driver.

"See here now, my good fellow," I said sharply, "you stop subjecting those ladies to annoyance. Drive on, or I'll report you to my friends."

He stared—seemed to be trying to stare me out of countenance, in fact. Then the grin slowly faded.

"Why, Dicky!" he exclaimed in an aggrieved tone, "don't you remember me—don't you know me?"

"I certainly do not," I answered with decision. I felt my face getting red with vexation. "And what's more, my name is not 'Dicky.' "

His hand slowly swept his chin and he whistled.

"Wha— Well, I'll be jiggered!" He whirled toward the car.

"On me, this time, I guess! You're right!"

Then his face clouded and he moved down upon me.

"Here, you get along now about your business, whoever you are!" His hand waved as though sweeping me away. "I've a mind to kick you for annoying that young lady."

He looked toward Frances and I could see he was showing off. But I thought she looked a bit disgusted. As for the frump, she suddenly opened the door, stepped down and then up again, but this time behind the steering wheel.

"If you don't come on, I'm going," she said quietly.

“Just a minute,” he said, scowling back at her. He faced me.

“Look here, if I hit you once”—he leveled his finger—“well, they’ll have to pick you up with a sponge, that’s all!”

But, except for fixing my glass for a better study of Frances, I never moved. Didn’t occur to me as necessary, you know, until she should drive off. Just stood leaning on my cane and with feet crossed, you know, in the way I had long ago found was the least exhausting, if one has to stand at all. But, by Jove, the fellow was right in my face now, almost! Devilish annoying!

“Did you hear me, you glass-eyed fool?” he barked in my ear. “You masher! By George, *I’ll* mash you!”

And he looked at Frances again and laughed, but she was looking away off up at the big stone castle on the Pocantico Hills behind. And I just reveled in her glorious profile, splashed bright by the golden sunshine reflected from the Tappan Zee opposite. Incidentally, I was trying in my mind the three arm movements that must be made as one, and for which, to learn, I had paid the great master, Galliard of Paris, a thousand francs in gold.

The car began to edge away.

“All right—coming!” he yelled; and then he launched his blow. But so rapid—instantaneous, in fact—are the famous three movements of the great scientist, I don’t remember that my eye even shifted

its grip upon the monocle. Therefore, as I came back into the same position again as his shoulder hit the ground, I was in time to catch my darling's eye at last just as they curved. And, by Jove, she looked amused—and pleased.

As for the frump, she frankly and harshly laughed, and then moved up a speed, just as a south-bound express took the station.

And I swung aboard it, back for little old New York. Didn't see what the chauffeur did. Wasn't interested, you know, about that.

CHAPTER XV

BILLINGS' SYMPTOMS ALARM ME

"MOST infernal outrage of the century, I tell you!" Billings stormed. For an hour I had sat there in my rooms, limp and bewildered under the tempest of his wrath. The wild and incoherent sputter over the 'phone that Jenkins reported upon my return had sent me on a hunt for my friend. I had found him sullenly dining alone over at the club, and as soon as I entered he started to bolt from the room. Only through the greatest pleading had I managed to coax him back to my chambers, hoping I might screw out of him some explanation.

I had received it, by Jove!

Of course, I recognized it all as impossible and crazy, you know, but when I said so to Billings his remarks were so violent, and he turned such a dangerous apoplectic purple, dashed if I didn't renege.

"But then the old man, you know!" I protested weakly.

Billings leveled his big arm at me, mouthing wordlessly for a minute.

"That—that'll do, about that old man!" he choked at last. "Not—not another word about *him!*" And

finally he collapsed into his seat from sheer exhaustion. Just sat there panting and glaring at me like a jolly bulldog.

Gradually he became calmer.

"Tell you what: the only thing that lets you out, Dicky, is the way Van Dyne and Blakesley did, in turn, when I got them there."

He spoke savagely, but I brightened a little.

"Oh!" I said. "Didn't they recognize you, either?"

Billings' snort made me jump.

"Recognize!" he bellowed. "They went back, mad as hell!"

"By Jove!" I said soothingly.

"That's not all," continued Billings grimly. "I was so sure it was a put-up job, some asinine, fool joke, I wrote a cautious note to the governor. After a lot of pleading, I got the fools to send it. He came."

Billings paused dramatically.

"Oh, yes, *he* came!" he went on, fixing me with an excited eye. "And when I staggered forward and did the prodigal son act on his neck, he handed me a punch that jolted off his silk tile. Went straight up in the air with the whole bunch down there and contracted to do things for them that will keep him active for a year. Threatened to have *me* sent up for forgery—this is my own father now, mind you—forgery of my own name! Huh!"

Billings strode to the end of the room and back.

Then he sat down again, beating with his foot upon the floor.

“Say, has everybody gone crazy?” he demanded.

I didn't dare say a word, for I had my own opinions, you know, and I knew it wouldn't do to express them. Only excite him. Best way seemed just to pretend to swallow it all, you know. Best way always, Pugsley says, especially with best friends.

“They were pretty nasty after that,” Billings went on gloomily; “and they wouldn't send for any one else. Just had to sit there in that infernal bastille with nothing on but pajamas and a pair of bedroom slippers. Every once in a while somebody would come and address me as ‘Foxy,’ and want me to send for my clothes or else send out and buy some. Finally, a big brute came and threw me some dirty rags and said I'd *have* to put on those or else buy some others. Buy some, Dicky—did you get that?—*buy* some!”

“Devilish rude, *I* say,” I commented indignantly. “Who wants to wear *bought* clothes? Why, dash it, my tailor says—”

“Pshaw!” Billings whirled his fat head impatiently. “You miss the whole point, Dicky! I didn't have a cent of *money*; and what's more, I couldn't get any.” He paused. “See? Try to get that, Dicky—make an effort, old chap.”

I did, but, dash it, it was such a rum idea—very oddest thing he had said—and silly, you know.

Fancy any one not being able to send out and get money! I just got to thinking what a jolly queer idea it was and lost part of what Billings was saying—something about how he managed to get them to send a note for his clothes. Here is what I *did* hear:

“And I had just got into the togs and stuffed the rubies and pajamas out of sight in my pocket, when the particular brigand who had charge of my coop came back. He almost threw a fit when he saw me. ‘Where’s Twenty-seven?’ he wanted to know. And then, before I could say a word, he blustered up to me with: ‘And say, what business *you* got in here? Clear out!’ And you bet I didn’t lose a single golden minute—I cleared. You should have seen me beat it down that corridor! The fellow followed me a little, grumbling to himself. Then he called to a cop who was just coming in: ‘Say, O’Keefe, run that young fat freak out of here, will you? It’s one of that bunch of visitors that went through just now. Fresh thing—snooping into the cells!’

“And so the same cop that brought me there—the very same—was the one that shoved me out of the door, warning me that I’d best not go poking into the prisoners’ cells again if I knew what was good for me!”

“By Jove!” I ventured sympathetically.

Billings nodded. “Of course, I knew it was a semi-lucid interval with them all, but for all I knew it might pass any instant and some bat discover I was a Dutch scrubwoman escaped from Hoboken.

So I broke for the first taxi and hit it up for the club."

Billings took a deep breath and went on:

"By George," he said, laughing nervously. "I felt like a dog with a can to its tail hunting for a place to hide. Every time a fellow looked at me I had heart failure until he called me by my own name. Bribe Eugene to lie about my whereabouts until his face hurt and then I went to bed. Sneaked out of my hole this evening to get a bite of something, and then you ran me down.

"And Dicky"—Billings finished excitedly—"I was sure you had come to drag me back to my dungeon, and I looked behind you, fully expecting to see those two Irish pirates. If I had, I should have swooned in my soup, that's all!"

I murmured my sympathy. And, by Jove, I certainly did have a heartache about him, but of course I couldn't tell him why. I was getting him quieted—I could see that—and he was so far mollified as to help himself to a cigar. When he had clipped a V from the end with his knife, he leaned over and tapped me impressively on the knee with the blade.

"And just think, Dicky," he said, absently emphasizing with the sharp point of the knife, "there I sat, moneyless—not even a dime, you know—in a suit of pajamas whose three buttons were worth one hundred and fifty thousand dollars!"

He fell back, his fat arms eloquently outspreading.

"Can you beat it?" he demanded.

I rubbed my palm on my knee and considered.

Privately, I thought I *could* beat it—by Jove, I was sure I could! I knew of a pair of pajamas worth a dashed sight more than money. And I wondered gloomily where they were. I had telephoned as soon as I stepped out at the Grand Central Station, and after a bit made them understand who I was and reminded them that the black pajamas had not been returned according to promise. And then they told me Foxy Grandpa had escaped, but as he had nothing else on, they felt sure of rounding him up as soon as he came out of his hiding-place—probably after dark.

“By the way, old chap,” puffed Billings, his poise and good humor improving under the spell of the cigar, “I was sorry to return the pajamas torn and dusty and wrinkled as they were. But you see, on account of the rubies, I was leary about having them pressed or fussed over. So I wrapped and sealed them myself, just as one does a jewel package. Got them, did you?”

I stared at Billings through my glass.

“Didn’t you get them?” he questioned in alarm.

“Yes, yes—it’s all right, old chap,” I said hastily and as pleasantly as I could. “Eugene delivered the box to Jenkins and I opened it myself. Thought it was—h’m—thought it was something else.” Then I proceeded soothingly: “But you’re just a little mistaken about the dust and wrinkles, old chap—and about them being torn. Ha, ha! Good joke!”

But Billings' face was unresponsive.

"Why, you goop," he said with cheerful contempt, "there's a triangular tear in the back of the coat you could stick your head through; and one of the sleeves is in ribbons."

I just opened the drawer of the table and took out the box—glove box, I think it was—containing the pajamas. I had read something somewhere about the clearing effect—the reaction, and that sort of thing, produced sometimes by a shock.

"See for yourself, old chap," I said gently. And I lifted out the gossamer fabrics and again spread their crimson glory under the lamp. Billings examined them eagerly, but just looked confounded.

"Don't understand it," he said, biting his nails. "Why, hang it, they look smooth, too, as though never worn. And the rubies are all right, too."

He rested his chin upon his hands and gloomed at the red sweep.

I caught a few sentences of his mumbling.

"By George, I'm half a mind to think there's something in the pajamas," he muttered—"something uncanny and disagreeable—something they're alive with!"

I sprang up and back, overturning my chair.

"Good heavens—oh, I say!" I exclaimed in consternation, as I fixed my glass on the garments. "It's your jail, then, you know—"

His hand checked my reach to the bell push.

"Don't be any more kinds of an ass than you can

help, Dicky," he said with rude irritability. "I'm talking about something else; and I haven't got any jail, dammit! A station house isn't exactly a jail!"

He reached for another cigar and went off into a brown study, wrapping himself in clouds of smoke. I thought that maybe if I kept quite still he might come to himself all right. Meantime, for want of something to do, and to keep from getting so devilish sleepy, I fell to turning over the pajamas, admiring their beauty and daintiness and kind of half-daringly wondering how *she* would—

And suddenly I made a discovery; and I forgot about keeping still.

"By Jove, Billings!" I exclaimed excitedly. "Here's something inside the collar—some sort of jolly writing!"

"What's that?" said Billings sharply. He jerked the garment from my hand and held it in the light. All round the circle within the collar band ran four or five darker red lines of queer little crisscross characters.

"Chinese laundry marks, you idiot," he commented carelessly. And then he ducked his head closer with a quick intake of breath.

"By George, Dicky!" he cried, his voice tremulous with some excitement. "Can't be that either; it's woven in—awfully fine, neat job, too. Now, what do you suppose—"

He broke off wonderingly.

CHAPTER XVI

AN INSCRIPTION AND A MYSTERY

BILLINGS rubbed his chin perplexedly. "By jigger, now, I wonder what those hen tracks mean?" he uttered musingly. Then he looked up at me with sudden animation in his face.

"Look here, Dicky," he exclaimed, "do you happen to know Doozenberry?"

I tried to remember. I shut one eye and studied the marks closely through my glass, but had to shake my head at last.

"Sorry, old chap; don't seem to remember it at all if I ever did—not a dashed glimmer of it left." I yawned. "Never tried to keep any of those college things, you know."

Billings, who had been staring, uttered a rude comment.

"It's not a language, you cuckoo," he snapped; "it's a man. He's a D.S.—distinguished scientist, you know. What's more, he's one of your neighbors, right in this building."

"Don't know him," I said a little stiffly. "What's his club?"

Billings all but gnashed his teeth.

“Club, thunder!” he jerked out impatiently. “Why, man, he’s a member of all the great societies of the world—bodies whose rank and exclusiveness put the blink on all the clubs you or I ever saw. Got a string of letters after his name like a universal keyboard, and is the main squeeze, the great scream, among all the scientific push over here and in Europe. Lots of dough, but off his trolley with learning.”

“And in this building?” I said wonderingly. “What’s he like?”

For a moment I had a thought of Foxy Grandpa, but the janitor had said he did not belong in the building. Besides, Billings’ next words removed that clue to the lost pajamas. By Jove, how I did long to ask his advice about them! Once I was on the point of doing so—had devilish narrow escape, in fact—but pulled up on the brink. So deuced hard to remember that anything so delicate and sweet and fetching could be Billings’ sister, you know. I had been wondering for an hour whether I had better say anything about my adventure up at Tarrytown—wondered if she would like me to.

“Here, you moon calf, wake up!” Billings’ coarse voice brought me back to the present, and I had to blink and pretend I was listening. “I’m telling you about Doozenberry! I say you surely must have seen him—you couldn’t miss him in a black cave. Queer-looking old skate, tall as a street lamp and as thin;

looks like a long cylinder of black broadcloth. So dignified it hurts him.

I reflected.

“Awfully large head,” continued Billings, elevating his hands some two feet apart, “pear-shaped affair—big end up—bumps on it like halves of grape fruit, porcupine eyebrows, and—”

“Oh, I know,” I said, nodding eagerly; “and a little, shriveled—well, kind of mashed sort of face, eyes beadlike and jolly small. I’ve got him now! I’ve gone down with him in the elevator.”

Billings nodded. “You’ve got him painted,” he said drily. “That’s the professor; only, his eyes are anything but ‘jolly.’ I’ve ridden in the elevator with him myself. Always manages to look like he was traveling with a bad smell!”

“Devilish sensitive, I dare say.”

Billings looked at me suspiciously, but I had got hold of the thing I was trying to recollect and I went on quickly:

“By Jove, you know, I believe Jenkins knows his man—fellow who butlers, and, I believe, cooks, for him. He and Jenkins belong to the same—how do they call it?—same club of gentlemen’s gentlemen.”

Billings brought his fist down. “Let’s have Jenkins in,” he suggested. And we did.

“I say, Jenkins,” I began, “this Professor Doodlebug above us—”

“Doozenberry!” Billings sharply corrected.

“Well, some jolly rum thing about him, don’t you know, Jenkins—something you said his man told you—remember, eh?”

Jenkins’ eyes batted a little.

He cleared his throat. “Why, yes, sir; he told me a lot of funny things one night, sir. Don’t suppose he would have done it, only him and me had an evening off and we—we—”

Jenkins seemed to hesitate.

“And you went on a bat together,” suggested Billings, rubbing his hands pleasantly.

“It was, sir,” Jenkins admitted, looking at me sadly. “Leastways, he sort o’ loosened up as he got—got—”

“Pickled,” Billings helped smoothly.

“Quite so, sir; there’s some is that way always; some is taken other ways.” Jenkins considered Billings moodily. “The power of the demon rum, sir.”

“Ah, true!” sighed Billings, lifting his eyes.

“This here chap, he got to going on and all but crying about his cursed hard fate—them’s his own words, sir—his cursed hard fate in having to drink water all the time and eat cow feed—”

“Eat what?”

“I don’t know, sir—that’s what he called it—something the perfesser has him fix out of cereals and nuts and sour milk. That’s all they have, sir; and they don’t have no cooking, for the perfesser says it breaks the celluloid—”

“Cellular,” corrected Billings.

"Maybe so, sir," demurred Jenkins. "He *said* celluloid—the celluloid tissue papers, *he* called it. And then his having no heat on all winter and the windows kept open all the time and the snow piling up on his bed at night kept him with colds all the year. And then, there was the dampness—"

"*That's* it, the dampness!" I exclaimed. "Tell him."

"Why, sir, he told me that every night he had to turn down the perfesser's bed and go all over it with a two-gallon watering can—"

"Watering can!" gasped Billings.

"I'm telling you what he says, sir. Then he covers it all up again, and in about a half-hour the perfesser turns the covers down; and if it's what he calls 'fine'—that is, damp all over—he climbs in and sleeps like a top."

"Cold-water bug, you know," I explained, but Billings shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all right. Bug or not, he's the goods, all the same. Greatest ever." He spoke with quiet conviction.

He deliberated a moment and turned to me.

"Tell you what, Dicky: I'm going up and ask him down. He's the one to give us the right dope on these crazy letters—Eh, what you say, Jenkins?"

"Beg pardon, sir; I was saying that the perfesser don't visit nobody; and he never sees nobody but the big lit'ry and scientific sharps."

"Oh, he don't eh?" Billings snorted contemptu-

ously. "Well, Jenkins, I haven't been a prize fisherman in my time for nothing; I guess I know how to select my 'fly.' I know what will fetch him: 'Mr. Lightnut's compliments, and will he be pleased to honor him by passing upon an Oriental curio of rare scientific interest?'—that sort of merry rot! Why, you couldn't hold him back with a block and tackle. Oh, you needn't worry; I'll do the proper curves all right." He turned toward the door. "And, Jenkins, you come along and work me into the lodge."

"Oh, but dash it," I protested nervously, "he won't come—he'll be insulted. Why, he'll know as soon as he sees you that you couldn't—"

I checked myself, recalling that the best thing after his recent exhibition was to avoid every contradiction. And then, by Jove, I knew that if he became ill and had to go to a hospital or somewhere, it would be all off with his taking me up to Wolhurst next day.

Billings grinned confidently. "Watch me bring him down here," he said.

And by Jove, he did!

CHAPTER XVII

THE PROFESSOR

BILLINGS ushered in the professor with a flourishing introduction.

The great man never spoke, but gave me the end of one finger, and devilish grudgingly at that. He just came to anchor and stood there very straight and stiff, ignoring the chairs thrust toward him from every point. One hand was stuck in his stiff broadcloth bosom, with elbow pointing outward, and his great topheavy head reared above us impressively.

Billings rubbed his hands and bowed and smirked.

“Lovely weather we are having for summer, don’t you think, Professor? Jenkins, a chair for the professor.”

He was already hedged in by chairs, but he remained standing. Dash it, he was staring hard at me, his beady eyes boring like gimlets, don’t you know, and his little shriveled face all puckered up. By Jove, but he looked sour! Looked like he would bite, or, as Billings said afterward, would like to, if the human race wasn’t poisonous.

“Wonderful stunt, science, isn’t it, Professor?” gushed Billings, still rubbing his hands and grinning

like a wild what's-its-name. "Tracing the orbits of the shooting stars or measuring the animals in the tiny sewer drop. H'm! Fascinating pursuit! And how marvelous it must be to be able to classify instantly any specimen of man's or nature's handiwork—to—a—call the turn, so to speak—right off the bat, as it were. H'm! We have here to-night—er—"

With his hand upon the pajamas, Billings paused, for the professor paid no attention—did not even turn round, in fact. He just stood there staring at me. Billings coughed suggestively.

"H'm! As I was saying, we have with us to-night a specimen," he resumed a little louder, "I may say an example of something that, while apparently commonplace and prosaic, is really a rare and unique—"

"Ha—specimen *genus cypripedium*," came in a squeaky bark from the professor as he held me in his eye. "Linnæus, 1753. Ha! *Species acaule*—proper habitat, bogs. Very common—*very* common, indeed."

He batted at me sourly and seemed disappointed. By Jove, I never felt so devilish mortified in all my life! Never! I nearly dropped my monocle and felt myself getting jolly red about the ears. This only seemed to make it worse.

"Ha—*labellum* somewhat pinker purple than normal," he proceeded. "H'm! Unusually fresh specimen."

I looked appealingly at Billings. "Oh, I say, you know!" I exclaimed in dismay.

Billings had been standing with his mouth agape, but now he made a stride forward and touched the professor on the arm.

"That's Mr. Lightning, Professor," he said blandly. "That's not *the* specimen. H'm! Slight mistake."

Slowly the professor's big head turned on its axis and his little eyes blinked at Billings nastily.

"I was referring to the orchid in the gentleman's coat," he observed quietly, and turned back to me.

"Of course! Of *course!*" stammered Billings with eagerness. "My mistake—one on me. *Stung!*" his lips pantomimed to me.

I addressed the professor hospitably: "Ah! won't you sit down, Professor?"

He drew back, frowning. "Sit down, sir?" he questioned. And, by Jove, by this time he showed his teeth. And devilish white, even teeth they were, too, only they didn't fit.

"I never sit down, sir," he said stiffly; "never!"

"By Jove!" I explained.

"To be sure!" ejaculated Billings, looking extremely silly.

The professor appeared not ungratified with the sensation he had produced and condescended to smile; that is, if you can call a creasing and wrinkling like the cracked end of a hard-boiled egg a smile.

"You say, 'sit down,' sir," he said, addressing me.

"I ask you, in turn: Is not 'sitting down' recrudescence back to the primordial?"

So saying, he took a pinch at my shirt front and stepped back again impressively. Still addressing me, he continued:

"It is such thoughtless indulgence of muscles growing obsolescent that retards the evolution of our species, a species, sir, which I claim is coessential in fundamental attributes with contemporaneous amphibia. Ha! I surprise you, perhaps? Can you note in me a resemblance to a batrachian?"

I didn't know. And, dash it, I was afraid to chance it. Tried my jolly best to think what a batrachian was. It came to me like a flash that it sounded like something in Italy.

"By Jove, you do, though, awfully!" I exclaimed, trying to brighten up over it. "Doesn't he, Billings? Noticed a resemblance right off, don't you know?"

Billings went to nodding with an air of pleased surprise. Dash me if I believed he knew what a batrachian was, though, any more than I did. But Billings never admits anything.

"Sure," he said glibly. "I was half suspecting it; why, look at the skin, you know—and features!"

"By Jove, yes!" I said, feeling encouraged. "Head, mouth, nose, eyes and—" I was going to say "hair," but I remembered in time about the wig.

The professor looked awfully pleased. He gave me a finger again.

“Such perspicacity—ah—is rare in one who looks so—”

He coughed slightly, then resumed:

“How gratifying, indeed, to meet another investigator! A student in zoötomy, no doubt? Ah! Do not deny it; I divined it at once. A delightful recreation, sir—a game, absorbing but elusive.”

“Awfully jolly, you know,” I agreed. “Ripping, I say!”

“Surest thing you know,” chirped Billings. I wondered if it was anything like polo.

And then, by Jove, thinking of polo sent me off again thinking of Frances. Not that she was like polo, dash it, but I wished she could see me play.

The professor took another pinch from my shirt front and favored me with a rusty smile.

“Ah!” he said: “You must take time to look into a little monograph of mine: *Man in Miniature; a Study of the Anthropology of the Frog*. You regard the frog, of course?”

“Oh, I say, yes—fine, you know!” I answered, my mouth watering. By Jove! I thought of the devilish good things they got up in season down at the Café Grenouille.

“My dear sir!” The professor bowed to me. “I can not express to you how gratifying to me this meeting is. I must get a list of your societies and degrees. So few appreciate the frog; so many, even in the scientific world, deride my published claim

that congenious with man is the *rana mugiens* or American bullfrog."

By Jove! they were certainly congenial with me, all right.

"Awfully hard to swallow unless well done, don't you know," I demurred thoughtfully.

"Truly incredible, sir!"

The professor took another pinch and held it in front of him.

"But I have allowed for that," he added, emphasizing with his other hand. "My frog brochure meets that difficulty and whets the appetite of the most mediocre."

"By Jove, Billings!" I exclaimed eagerly, "we must tell Marchand about it over at the club." I was so devilish tired of his eternal *sauce délicateuse*, his *sauce aigre*, his *sauce écossaise* and the rest, don't you know.

The professor inclined his head gravely.

"Ha, French! Then Monsieur Marchand has done something with the frog, has he?" he questioned.

"Twenty-nine different stunts," Billings replied proudly. "I *know* because I'm on the House Committee. Yes, *sir*, frogs are his specialty; that man can get more out of a frog than any other living man."

The professor looked a little nettled.

"Oh, indeed!" he said rather coldly.

"I tell you, Professor, he's got 'em *all* skinned!" Billings enthused.

The remark provoked a contemptuous sniff.

“Undoubtedly, that being the proper condition preliminary to comparative anatomical study,” said the professor loftily. “Then the physical resemblance to a man becomes startling. I have identified every analogy with man except the beautiful phenomenon of the beating of the frog heart twenty-four hours after separation from the body—the living body, sir. Experiment upon the living human specimen is necessary for confirmation of the homologous structure of the two hearts, however. This I have not done—not yet.”

He spoke gloomily. I looked at Billings blankly but I found Billings was looking at me the same way.

Every once in a while he had been lifting the pajamas. He would cough and open his mouth, but just then the professor would start off again. Once Billings, with an awfully savage expression, shook his fist at our visitor's back and danced up and down upon the rug.

“The indifference, not to say prejudice, of the public upon the matter of human vivisection is heart-rending,” went on the professor sadly. “Sir, I have advertised in the ‘help wanted’ columns of the daily press, and have interviewed scores without arousing one spark of ambition or awakening one thrill of gratitude over the opportunity offered to assist me in the investigation of scientific phenomena. I pleaded, sir; I reproached; I even showed them the

demonstration upon the frog. Did I move them? Were they affected, do you think?"

I shook my head sympathetically. Seemed the safe thing to do.

"A lot of pikers, by George!" said Billings with an air of indignation. "Must have been shameless!"

"Deuced indifferent," I ventured. "I should have been regularly cut up."

"Ah! of course you would," cried the professor, lifting another pinch. "There speaks the intelligent devotee of science! But did they see it that way? Not at all, sir; they were only indifferent and ungrateful—they were rude and—ah—boisterous! One savage primate assaulted me with his bare knuckles. A blow, gentlemen, a blow from the boasted family of anthropina!"

"Beastly outrage, Professor," growled Billings. "Leave it to me; I know a chap who's got a pull with the police commissioner, and I'll just tip him off, by George. It's no matter what family they are or how much they boasted. It'll be the hurry wagon and the cooler for them, eh, Dicky?"

He gestured to me wildly, nodding his head like a man with the what's-it-name dance.

"Deuced good idea. Awful rotters, I say," was my comment.

The professor seemed affected by our sympathy. He withdrew from his pocket a folded handkerchief, slowly opened it and pressed it lightly to each eye. Then he carefully refolded and replaced it.

“Strange thing, the persistence of the primitive emotions,” he said, sniffing thoughtfully. “Singular how they affect the lachrymal *apparati*. Peculiarly disagreeable taste, gentlemen, that of tears, despite their simple elementary composition—ninety-nine and six-tenths per cent. water, you remember, and the rest a modicum of chloride of sodium, mucus, soda and phosphates. H’m! Your pardon, gentlemen, for this digression, but to have sustained a stab under this very roof from *genus homo*! It is indeed hard.”

Here Jenkins, who had been lingering and busying himself about the apartment, whispered to me from behind:

“It’s that dago, sir, that delivers fruit every day.”

“Eh?”

“That’s the name. I see him going back every morning.”

Jenkins moved off, nodding mysteriously, as I stared at him through my glass. In his way, Billings was speaking words of comfort and all that sort of thing to the professor.

“Never mind; the law will get ’em for you,” he reassured him.

“Ah! that’s just where you are in error,” sighed our guest. “The law, sir, will not get a single subject for me. In this age of unrestrained liberty of all classes, the law lends no aid whatever to science. It is not as it was in the glorious past when, under imperial patronage, Vesalius, the great father of anat-

omy, was protected when by mistake his scalpel cut the living heart of a Spanish grandee. Times worth while, gentlemen, those great days of supreme imperialism! Ah! there was no lack of material available if one stood in a little at court; one had only to designate a selection and the thing was done. Gracious, gentle times, my friends! Gone, alas, for ever! Such opportunities are impossible under a republic."

The professor shook his head and reached for his handkerchief again. But this time he only blew his nose.

"*Tempora mutantur*," he murmured regretfully, "Eh, gentlemen?"

"True," said Billings, pursing his lips. "Ah, how true!"

"By Jove, ought to be something done, you know," I declared.

"Out of millions, not a single human specimen available," groaned the professor dismally. "And my instruments ready for over a year."

"Cheer up, sir; you'll have a go yet," Billings encouraged.

"Ah!" The professor's little eyes swept Billings' person critically. "Perhaps you, sir, would like the privilege—"

Billings staggered back a step or two precipitately.

"Delighted; nothing'd give me greater pleasure, but so infernally busy," he explained hurriedly. "Just my confounded luck; unfortunately, got to go

to Egypt right away—probably to-morrow morning.”

The professor sighed again in his disappointment.

“No matter; I shall find some one in time,” he said grimly. “But I shall abandon this foolish persuasion and cajolery as unworthy of the scientist. Do we lower ourselves with such devices in securing a butterfly or a grasshopper or a frog or any animate specimen except man? Certainly not; we capture and etherize them.”

He glanced about the room and beckoned us with his finger.

“I have lately had my eye upon the gas man,” he said in a low tone. He closed one eye impressively.

“Ah!” said Billings, his mouth dropping open wide.

“The individual who comes at intervals to take the quarters from the slot meter. H’m, fine subject, gentlemen!”

“Great!” agreed Billings.

“Ripping idea,” I tried as a reply.

The professor clasped his fingers tightly and rubbed his thumbs one over the other. He brightened visibly.

“The party has to go down upon his knees and stoop behind the end of the tub in the bath-room,” he continued. “It was my thought that while in that advantageous position the sudden, quick application of a Turkish bath towel saturated in ether would—Eh? Do you follow me?”

“Devilish clever, you know,” I said. I had already selected this for reply for this time.

Billings failed to come up. He just stared hard, rolled his eyes and ran his finger around under his collar.

The professor, in the act of taking another pinch from my shirt front, paused with a little jerk. Then his great head shot forward in front of his rigid neck—so suddenly, by Jove, that I reached out to try to catch it, don’t you know. He made just two strides to the table, ten feet away, and pounced upon the pajamas with obviously trembling hands.

And behind his back Billings relapsed into an arm-chair and fanned himself with a magazine.

His head dropped back, and upon his fat face was a what-you-call-it smile of peace. He closed his eyes for an instant.

“Suffering Thomas cats! At last!” I heard him murmur.

CHAPTER XVIII

I RECEIVE A SHOCK

THE professor fumblingly sought through his pockets, and producing a pair of spectacles with phenomenally large lenses, adjusted them shakily.

He bent over the pajamas eagerly.

"Impossible! And yet, it is, it is!" he muttered. "I would know the weave among a thousand. It is hers undoubtedly, undoubtedly—the lost silk of Si-Ling-Chi! How comes it here?"

He glared around rather wildly at each of us in turn. Without waiting for a reply, he whisked back to the pajamas, and fishing out a thick magnifying lens, scrutinized the garments closely. It seemed that he would certainly nod his big head off its jolly hinge; and his quick side glances at Billings and myself, together with his growling and muttering, just reminded me of a dog with a bone, by Jove!

I stared at Billings and Billings stared at me, and then he slipped over to the divan upon which I dropped, completely exhausted, dash it, from standing so long.

"*Whose* did he say?" he whispered.

"Celia something," I answered. "Dash it, I didn't

catch her surname. Oh, I say, you know, this is *awful!*"

I felt devilish mortified. Wondered what Frances might think, you know. Billings drew in his lips and wagged his head ominously. He waved me nearer.

"He's on," he breathed behind his hand; "he's looking for her laundry mark. Now, wouldn't that feaze you?"

An exclamation of triumph from the professor, another glance at us, and a hoarser and more prolonged mutter. I shifted uneasily. By Jove, I didn't like it at all!

Billings looked at me in consternation. "I wouldn't be in your shoes, Dicky," he whispered. "You'll be pinched for this, sure."

"Oh, I say, now! I tell you, a friend in China—"

Billings shrugged impatiently. "Just a plant, you chowder head," he said, viewing me pityingly. "I tell you that's how all these blackmailing schemes are worked. You ought to be more careful."

"But, dash it, I don't even know her, this Celia what's-her-name," I protested miserably. If Frances' brother thought that way, what would *she* think?

"Um! Maybe you don't, but they'll expect you to say that, anyhow. You're up against it, old chap; the professor here evidently knows her and he knows her pajamas—relative, probably."

By Jove, I felt a little faint!

"It will be all over New York to-morrow," continued Billings gloomily. "Your picture and hers will be in the extras."

Out of the professor's mutterings we caught a random sentence.

"Found, found again," we heard him say. "Hers beyond peradventure of a doubt. I am *not* mistaken."

Billings rose, and his beckoning finger summoned me to a corner of the room.

"This is going to cost you a pot of money, Dicky," he said with a serious air, "to say nothing of the scandal. My advice is, try buying him off—best thing in the long run. I'll feel him for you."

Nodding solemnly to me he cleared his voice. "H'm! I say, Professor."

The professor, with his eye glued to the lens and the lens to the silk, turned slowly about.

"H'm!" began Billings. "The—h'm—articles you have there—you recognize where they are from—eh?"

"Of course," he snapped, without looking up.

"H'm! And whose did I understand you to say—I—er—did not catch her name."

His glance uplifted and scoured us sourly.

"Si-Ling-Chi. Did you think I did not know? I recognized at sight her wonderful disappearing weave." He bent again with his lens. "Marvelous, indeed, after all these years," he muttered. "So long, so long! Incredible preservation!"

Billings placed his finger against his nose, rolled his eyes upward and emitted the faintest of whistles. He caught my arm sharply.

“Say, how old are you, Dicky?” he whispered excitedly.

“I—er—twenty-seven, I think, old chap,” I replied hesitatingly.

Billings noiselessly slapped his leg. His face brightened.

“Been of age six years,” he calculated to himself. “By George, maybe you can prove an alibi!”

He coughed again at the absorbed figure stooping over the table.

“Ah, Professor—h’m—how long now would you say it might be since—well, she you mention—how long a time since she last saw—er—what you have there—eh?”

“How long?” repeated the professor absently. Then he moved, but his hand only, and he flipped it, don’t you know, as one does to banish a fly or a dashed mosquito—that sort of thing, by Jove!

“Can’t you figure it out yourself?” he questioned irritably. “You remember chronology gives Hwang-Si’s reign as in the twenty-sixth century before Christ; and of course, that of Si-Ling-Chi, his empress, would be the same.”

Billings subsided limply into a chair.

“Great Thomas cats!” he gasped weakly.

“I think I divine the astute purpose of your inquiry,” said the professor, pausing to polish his

glasses and favoring us with a wintry smile. "It does not deceive me. You have in mind, sir, the erroneous chronology that places Si-Ling-Chi thirteen centuries earlier. Ha! Is not my suspicion correct?"

"Regular bull's-eye!" responded Billings. "I mean," he added hastily, "what's the use of denying it?"

"Twenty-six centuries before the Christian era is the best we can give Si-Ling-Chi," said the professor, carefully affixing his glasses and falling once more upon the pajamas.

"By Jove!" I said dazedly. "Then the lady—er—I mean the party—she's rather far back—er—isn't she, don't you know?"

The professor answered abstractedly:

"Two thousand years before Confucius; twenty-four hundred and twenty-nine years before the building of the Great Wall," he murmured mechanically.

Jove, but I was relieved! I looked inquiringly at Billings. He just sat there kind of drooping, and shook his head. "I'm all in," he motioned with his lips; and he wiped his forehead.

"Ah, gentlemen!" exclaimed the professor, coming back again, "what a thing this little Chinese woman did for civilization when she gave the world silk culture and invented the loom! No wonder the Chinese deified her as a goddess."

"Goddess!" Billings swallowed hard. "And did these—h'm—garments belong to the lady?"

The professor frowned at him in surprise. "Garments?"

"Them," said Billings in devilish questionable grammar, pointing to the table. "They are pajamas, you know."

"Ha!" ejaculated the professor, holding them up. "So they are. You are very observing, sir, very. Now, I had not noticed that at all; I was so interested in the material itself—the wonderful silk of Si-Ling-Chi, gentlemen. Ha! Indeed a rare privilege!"

By Jove! He stroked the stuff lightly, tenderly—as one likes to do a little child's hair, don't you know.

"Beautiful, beautiful fabric," he sighed half to himself. "Only once before have I seen a piece of it—but it was enough; I could never, never forget." Something like a groan escaped him.

Billings angled his head toward me and tightly compressed one eye.

"H'm! Something in the petticoat line—eh, Professor?"

The professor's face wrinkled with the most matter-of-fact surprise.

"Petticoat?" he piped querulously. "You are forgetting that the petticoat is a vestment unknown in China."

"Oh, in China! I was thinking of Paree," chuckled Billings, with a gay air and another glance at me. Then his nerve withered under the professor's blank stare, and he added hurriedly:

"H'm! So it was in China you saw the other piece of silk?"

The professor sighed profoundly. His reply came dreamily, regretfully:

"In the Purple Forbidden City; but I was not quick enough."

"Not quick enough?" Billings' echo was solicitous, sympathetic.

"It was among the palace treasures, the imperial properties—things unhappily lost to the world and civilization. Ah, gentlemen, I erred; I committed a fatal mistake; it has been a matter of deep mortification to me often!" His head wagged somberly.

Billings looked a little embarrassed and rubbed his chin. "H'm!" he coughed. "I guess we all slip a cog now and then. I know I've done things myself I've been rather ash—"

"I erred, gentlemen," went on the professor, "in trusting most unscientifically to the false principle that the hand is quicker than the eye. It is *not* true, for one of the guards saw me and my carelessness cost me dearly: I not only lost the silk, but a singularly beautiful gold thread altar cloth and a matchless amulet of *yu-chi jade*, you know—white jade, at that, gentlemen, I assure you—a rare bit of carving of the second century—real Khoton jade, too—no base *fei-tsui*. But, alas! I lost them, my friends; they confiscated them, and no doubt they are still there in their original places from which I had—a—attached them. Do you wonder at my mor-

tification? And then the sacrifice of a whole year of planning, watching, bribing and perfecting of preliminary disguise! All fruitless, fruitless!"

The professor lifted and dropped his palms in eloquent deprecation.

Billings' foot pressed mine. "Now, wouldn't that frost you?" he whispered under his breath. Aloud he exclaimed indignantly:

"Beastly outrage; it must have been painful."

The professor started in the act of lifting the pajamas again.

"Pain? I did not speak of the physical consequences. They were too terrible to discuss. I—"

The pajamas dropped from his hands and his eyes took on that somewhere-else, far-off look, don't you know.

"Sort of 'third degree' work, Professor?" Billings prodded him.

The professor did not reply. His long, slim fingers swept his forehead for an instant and he looked away again, his little eyes dilated. Somehow it made one feel devilish uncomfortable, dash it!

Billings cocked his eye at me and lifted his shoulders in a shrug. Then he deliberately kicked at the tabouret and sent its brass fixture set clattering noisily across the room.

The professor shivered, compressed his lips and blinked at us.

"Your pardon, gentlemen," he observed in some confusion. "Some one was asking me—"

“What they did to you when you lift—I mean when you lost the—er—loot.”

He stared, shivered again and returned to the pajamas, muttering an almost inaudible reply.

We caught a word or two: “Long imprisonment—much physical pain—unspeakable things—do not like to think of it—I—”

His eyes closed. He folded his long, thin arms shudderingly. Billings and I sat very still. The professor’s voice came as from far away:

“I could tell you of some experiences in China and in Tibet,” he murmured. “Perhaps I—some other time—such horrible details, I—”

He leaned heavily upon the table with both hands. His head dropped forward an instant.

“No matter *now*,” he muttered. “It was long, long ago!”

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPELL OF THE PAJAMAS

“GEORGE!” breathed Billings, breaking a curious, tense silence.

The professor suddenly faced us, holding up the pajamas with a gesture of inquiry.

“From a friend of Mr. Lightnut’s in China,” Billings explained.

Aside, he whispered hurriedly: “Don’t say a word about the rubies! You heard him—murder, grand larceny or arson—it’s all one to the old gazabe! Anybody can see that. He doesn’t let little things like those stand in the way of getting what he wants!” He frowned warningly.

“H’m! In the neck, Professor—I mean inside the collar,” he said, approaching the table—“there’s some kind of freak lettering. Looks foolish to me.”

The professor looked perplexed.

“I mean, looks like it was done by some one who was batty—had wheels, you know; probably some chink whose biscuit was drifty,” floundered Billings. “*You* understand!”

The professor didn’t. I knew that jolly well by the way he cocked his head on one side, standing like a puzzled crow, don’t you know.

“Ha! I fear I do not as I should,” he said with an apologetic cough. “Perhaps I do not intelligently and logically follow your deductions because your premises are inscrutable until I have seen the lettering. Ah!”

Out came glasses and lens again and he bent over the collar eagerly.

“H’m! The *Hwuy i*, or ideographic characters, rather than the ideophonic!” He looked up at Billings and myself inquiringly. “Ha! I trust we start together in accord upon that conclusion, eh, gentlemen?”

Billings nodded emphatically.

“Surest thing you know,” he declared firmly, and whispered to me triumphantly. “Didn’t I tell him it was idiotic?”

The professor’s lips moved rapidly and his visage twisted into a horrible frown.

“Why, why—a—what!” With mouth open, and gripping the pajamas tightly, he glared at us each in turn.

“Oh, impossible!” he rasped harshly, seizing the lens and bending again. “Incredible—poof—absurd—tut, tut, what nonsense!”

The glass swept the lines rapidly. Suddenly, with a cry, the professor dropped the lens, a violent start almost lifting him from the floor.

“*Papauhegopoulos!*” he cried explosively, and whirled on us again.

Dash me, if I didn’t fall back a step, his eyes

rolled so wildly. But Billings stood his ground, by Jove!

"I didn't quite catch—" he began hesitatingly, angling his bristly red head forward and smiling pleasantly.

The professor seemed abashed of a sudden.

"H'm! Your pardon, gentlemen! Merely an expletive—h'm—a Greek word I indulge in sometimes when—when excited; a weakness, I might say. H'm!" He seized his lens again.

Billings' eyes yielded admiration.

"Great Scott, Dicky!" he whispered in my ear. "See what a thing education is! Think of being able to swear in Greek—in *Greek*, Dicky!" Billings' voice expressed awe. "Why, he's got an Erie Canal skipper backed clear off the board, and if he wanted to turn loose, I'll bet he could make a certain railway president I know look like a two-spot!"

At this point the professor struck his fist angrily upon the pajamas. The face that he turned was unnaturally flushed and his chin quivered excitedly.

"Ridiculous, I say! Poof!" He snapped his fingers. "Necromancy and thaumaturgy transmitted in pajamas! Absurd!"

"Piffle!" said Billings emphatically. "Don't know what they are," he whispered to me, "but I'll take a hundred-to-one shot on anything he says. The professor's a corker!"

"By Jove!" I remarked. "Perhaps Professor Huckleberry won't mind telling us—"

“What I think, gentlemen? What *could* I think but what I am sure is your own conclusion—though you have generously and considerately left me to form my own opinion—namely, that the claim of supernatural attributes of these garments is preposterous. Enchanted pajamas! Haunted pajamas! Poof! Nursery lore; children’s fairy tales! Ghosts, gentlemen? Tut, tut—nonsense!”

He snorted indignantly.

“Ghosts!” faltered Billings.

“Oh, I say!” I rather gasped. Dash me if it didn’t give me a turn, rather!

The professor shrugged his shoulders.

“What other interpretation is admissible, gentlemen?” he questioned somewhat peevishly, taking up the coat. “Here we have the royal insignia of the cruel emperor, Keë, and we note that these garments were given some one in his court by the alleged sorcerer, Fuh-keen. Perhaps it was revenge—perhaps some court plot in which Fuh-keen, for reasons of his own, was an active participant; it is of no importance, that part of it. So much for the first line; but now we come—”

He paused to polish his spectacles.

“Tell me,” he said more cheerfully, “do our free translations of the ideographs so far agree in essentials—eh?”

“Like as two peas!” Billings declared with manifest enthusiasm.

The professor looked gratified and bowed.

"Of course, the rendition is entirely a free one," he remarked. "You must not expect too much."

"Devilish handsome and clever of him!" I whispered to Billings, as the professor proceeded to adjust his spectacles. "Dash it, I wish he'd let me pay him, though."

"Forget it!" hissed Billings. "Didn't he just say it was free? He's no cheap skate, I tell you."

The professor resumed:

"Now we come to the second line, or, more strictly speaking, column," he said, straightening impressively. "Here we find the astonishing claim made that there will be a change or metamorphosis of any kind of animal life that these habiliments enshroud. Um!"

The great man breathed heavily and batted at us over his glasses.

"*Credat Judæus apella*—eh, gentlemen?" And he winked knowingly. Dashed if he didn't almost catch me swallowing a yawn, too! For I hadn't any idea what he was talking about or driving at, and, by Jove, I *did* know I was getting devilish sleepy.

The professor waved his glasses. "Did you ever read such a childish, ridiculous, extravagant asseveration?" he demanded.

"Ass—eh? I should say so!" I worked this off indignantly.

"Tommyrot!" murmured Billings absently. He seemed thoughtful.

I was thoughtful, too—wondering, by Jove, whether the professor would go soon, so we could turn in and get the earlier start to-morrow up the river. But chiefly I was wondering wistfully if Frances would still be angry with me.

“Moreover,” broke in the professor’s voice as he turned again to the lettering, “to assert further that there will be a semblance—not actual, gentlemen, mind you, but an optical illusion—taking the form of some creature of the same kind that this silken tenement has previously inclosed.

“In other words, gentlemen, if I were to don these garments, I might no longer look like myself, but like some one else who had worn them upon some previous occasion—perhaps last night—perhaps a thousand years ago. Eh? Is that what you understand?”

He ducked again over the letters and came up, looking chagrined.

“Moreover, I am forced to confess, gentlemen, that I fail to find a system—any rule governing these ridiculous transformations. The hypothesis is, therefore, that the alleged materializations merely follow the arbitrary caprice of the magic.” He shook his head. “Well, gentlemen, I—really, I must laugh!”

And he did! I hadn’t caught the drift of what it was he thought he was laughing at—I got the words, but I was too dashed sleepy to get the sense. But I was awfully glad I understood this much—

that what he was attempting now *was* a laugh. I never would have known it. It was more like a shrieking squeak—rusty hinge, you know, that sort of thing.

“First-time-I’ve-laughed-in-twenty-years!” His shrill cackle ran a treble scale that ended in high C. “I know you—you won’t believe it!”

“Believe it?” said Billings drily, “I’d bet a purse on it.” He whispered to me: “Don’t need any affidavit; it *shows*. Sounds like a country wagon on a down grade, brake on, and shrieking like a banshee.”

Behind me the door opened slightly. I turned to see Jenkins, looking devilish chalky and a little wild-eyed. He lifted a coil of stout sash cord questioningly.

“Eh? Why, no!” I whispered through the opening. “He’s just *laughing*. Don’t be a jolly ass!” And I closed the door sharply.

The professor looked up from the pajamas, and folding his arms, eyed Billings with a cunning leer.

“I think I see,” he said, leveling his finger. “You have both demonstrated how nonsensical is the assertion in this inscription. Doubtless you desire an experiment upon my part to confirm your proof of its absurdity. *Reductio ad absurdum*—eh, gentlemen?”

Billings looked at me, but I couldn’t help him. Why, dash it, I didn’t even know yet what the inscription was. And, by Jove, I *didn’t* know what

experiments he wanted to try with the pajamas, but I didn't care. He could boil them, if he wanted to, if he would only let us get to bed.

So at random I just nodded eagerly.

"Excellent!" The professor's chuckle sounded like dice rattling in a metal box. "An excellent jest upon this fellow, Fuh-keen, to furnish a demonstration by twentieth-century scientists of the presumption of his claims of necromancy and thaumaturgy. You have done so—now I will do so, in turn. Eh, gentlemen?"

I hadn't the ghost of an idea what he was talking about. Fact is, I was thinking of my darling and wondering if she was asleep. By Jove, I wished that *I* was!

But a devilish queer look had come into Billings' face. He nodded, gathered the pajamas into the professor's arms and patted him on the shoulder in a way I thought offensively familiar.

"You've got it, Professor!" he said, grinning.

Then he whispered to me aside:

"Not a word, Dicky—great Scott!" But he needn't have said that, even if I had been mind-reader enough to guess what word he meant. It was about all I could do to get out a last word to the professor as he went out the door:

"'Night!"

CHAPTER XX

BILLINGS RAMBLES

TEN minutes later I was almost wide awake, for Billings was talking over long distance—and to *her!*

But I did not like the way he did it.

“Shut up, Francis!” he bellowed. “Now you listen to what I’m telling you—and do *just* as I tell you to, too—if you don’t, I’ll mash your face when I come up there! You hear?”

And he swore at her—yes, by Jove, *swore!*

“Oh, here—I say now!” I remonstrated indignantly.

“It’s all right, Dicky,” and he waved his fat hand indifferently as he hung up the receiver. “Francis wants to drive that car down for us in the morning—Francis, now!” And his hands went out impressively.

And dash it, I *was* impressed—I was delighted.

“By Jove!” I cried. “Fine!” For I knew by that that she had forgiven me.

“Fine!” snorted Billings. “You don’t know what you’re talking about! Francis hasn’t got sense enough to get a road engine ten feet without smashing it, much less a car twenty-five miles.”

"Oh, look here!" I growled protestingly, "I don't like to hear you talking about—er—Frances that way."

Billings grunted and bit a cigar savagely without stopping to clip it. He pulled fiercely at it a moment.

"Kind of you, old chap," he exclaimed, "but you don't know our family as *I* do. If Francis has got a headache *now*, I know that by morning—"

"Headache?" I cried in dismay.

He nodded. "So I understood over the 'phone—been getting at the governor's private stock, I'd bet all I've got." He shook his head gloomily. "No, sir; that car cost five thousand, and when you can't trust people sober, how are you going to trust them drunk?"

I sighed as I remembered the half pint of whisky she had taken—but, dash it, I didn't care! It somehow didn't seem to make any difference in my loving her. The only thing important, really, in the matter of the car was that she might hurt herself. Billings didn't seem to think of that. And yet, by Jove, she *wanted* to come! She *must*!

"See here," I said coaxingly, for Billings seemed to have gone off in a moody, brown study, "you must remember, old chap, your sister has been cooped up there in Radcliffe for months. Why not let her have the run down to the city and back? It will do her good, you know."

"Of course," he said absently. "She's going to drive the car down."

"Eh—what say?" I was sure I had not heard aright.

"I say she's going to bring the car down—my chauffeur's sick, it seems."

I didn't wonder at that, but I *did* wonder at his sudden change.

"Then you're not afraid—"

"Afraid? I should say not! She can drive better than I can—better than anybody in Westchester County!"

"I see—I see!" I said in a low voice. And I *did* see, poor fellow! By Jove, my spirits sank to zero.

"Yes, *there's* somebody you can always rely on!" he enthused under his changing mood. "Good thing in this blankety world there's *somebody* you can rely on—among women, I mean. There's a girl with a purpose in life—yes, sir! Never dances, plays bridge, nor uses slang—no, sir! And what's more, in this cursed age, she's one woman who can go through life and say she never touched a cigarette or a cocktail."

"Of course—of course!" I agreed soothingly. By Jove, it was a devilish sight better to have him talk this way about her. I wouldn't antagonize anything he might say now. And I had turned his mind just by a simple hint—the power of suggestion, you know. Just as I had myself forgotten I was sleepy.

"Of course, you never have met my sister, have you?" he puffed. "I mean the one that's been up at Radcliffe."

"Oh, *never!*" I said promptly.

"You will in the morning," said Billings, flicking his ash. "Not much to look at—I mean not what you would call handsome—"

I interrupted. "Oh, but I say," I exclaimed unguardedly, "how can you say that? I think she's just beautiful."

"Eh?" He stared so hard I was afraid I had got his mind off again. "Thought you said you had never met her."

"No, no, I never did," I stammered. "Mistake, you know."

He went on musingly: "But I understand that her room-mate—who has come home with her, by the way—is a peach. English girl, you know. They tell me Francis is crazy about her beauty."

Dashed if I could see how she could be, for, by Jove, I had seen her myself. It was the frump! Peach? She was a *fright!*

Here Billings' eyes hung on the ceiling as though he would bore through it.

"Say, do you know"—he dropped his voice, still looking up—"I hope the old gazabe up there won't get wise to those rubies. Awfully careless of us—forgot all about them. By George, I've half a mind to go up there and get the pajamas back."

"Oh, dash it, no!" I protested, for I was getting

sleepy again. "It's the silk the old fellow was interested in; he wants to examine it—try some experiments—something. He'll never think of the jolly rubies, you know."

Billings looked at me oddly. "That's so," he agreed. "Still, I know I won't sleep, thinking about those rubies." Then he looked up at the ceiling again and muttered: "Wonder if the old boy *will* have any visitors to-night?"

I yawned. I knew it wasn't likely—not with *him!*

Billings rose. "Well, I'll get along over to the club, old chap. Now mind, the car will call for you about nine. Then you are to pick me up—that is, unless I should come over here. And, oh, say, Dicky!" He turned back from the door where Jenkins waited with his hat and cane. "Speaking of pajamas—er—what do you think of black ones—eh?"

By Jove, I got red—could just feel it, you know!

"Ever see a suit of black silk pajamas?" Billings chuckled.

Now for it! "I—I—never did," I managed to get out.

"Never heard of any myself before," Billings gurgled. "But great idea, don't you think? Good thing, traveling—Pullmans, hotels—that sort of thing—eh? Just got them to-day—ordered two weeks ago."

By Jove, what a relief! I felt myself breathing again.

“Wish you would stay,” I said, for I felt uneasy about him.

“Oh, no,” carelessly; “all my traps are over there, you know.” He smiled. “To say nothing of the new pajamas.”

Standing in the door, he looked upward again, twirling his cane. His head shook dubiously.

“Could kick myself about those rubies,” he grumbled. “Just half a mind to go up there—” He shrugged. “Oh, well, good night, old chap; see you in the morning.”

I murmured some reply as I followed him without. Then I stood a moment looking down the shaft after he had descended.

“Hope he’ll be all right in the morning,” I mused. “And hope his infernal mood won’t shift round again as to Frances!”

CHAPTER XXI

THE COLLAPSE OF BILLINGS

“ARE you *sure*, Mr. Lightnut?”

I stood, cap in hand, one foot on the sidewalk before the Kahoka, the other on the running-board of the car—a big double-tonneau red whale sort of affair. This was as far as I had been admitted to the vehicle.

For the frump was sitting there behind the steering wheel, looking down at me in a nasty, sidewise fashion. Ever have them do you that way? Besides, I somehow felt that she had a feeling toward me as a man, an unvoiced protest against my existence at all. It found expression in her suspicious, sniffy manner. Dash it, I just hated that woman from the start! I felt it was bad enough, her English clumsiness in getting the introductions twisted as I advanced to meet the car, but now I was of half a mind that she had done it purposely. Could see with half an eye that she was determined to make trouble about yesterday.

“Haven’t we met before, Mr. Lightnut?” she had asked.

But it struck me that Frances glanced at me with

a kind of wistful light in her lovely eyes, and I saw that the game was to lie like a gentleman—that sort of thing, you know. And, by Jove, I was getting kind of used to it now, anyhow—I mean since I had broken the ice last night. Not hard at all, though, after a few goes—really!

So I stood out that I had never had the pleasure, you know—all that sort of polite rot. And all the time felt like a jolly cad, too, meeting a girl with that, when *she* remembered! But, by Jove, it was worth sacrificing the frump fifty times over just to see Frances' face brighten and note her faint flush and smile as she looked at me. For, dash it, I knew then I had done the right thing!

“Um!” grunted the frump, compressing her lips and looking at my darling. “There’s one good thing: the experience with Mr. Smith will teach Francis a lesson!”

The cat! Nice sort of host!

But the dear girl just laughed—how I remembered that laugh!

“Poor Francis!” she said lightly. “Do you know,” she added, “I believe I can forgive a Harvard man almost anything, Mr. Lightnut.”

By Jove! The angel! And before I knew what I was doing or thought about the frump, I had stretched out a hand to her, looking her straight in the eye and smiling. She hesitated an instant only, then laughed, and I felt her little fingers just brush my palm—but it was enough.

She flushed a little shyly and addressed the frump.

“Are we going to keep Mr. Lightnut standing like this all day?” she asked.

“Half on earth and half in heaven—like what’s-his-name’s coffin,” I suggested. Devilish good, that, don’t you think? *She* thought so, for she opened the door herself as the frump turned, murmuring some silly thing about China and the open door to America. What did China have to do with it?

And it was just then that Jenkins bolted wildly from the building.

“Mr. Lightnut—quick, sir! Mr. Billings, sir!”

I thought of the telephone right off, but he just caught my arm. First time ever knew Jenkins to take a liberty.

“Come quick, sir!” he exclaimed. “He’s up-stairs and, oh, off his nut, sir—*awful!*”

“By Jove!” I gasped. “Excuse me—will see—come right back and tell you—I feared this last night.” And I rushed to the elevator with Jenkins.

“He’s in them black pajamas he was talking about,” said Jenkins gloomily, “and he’s run the perfesser off. Leastwise, he ain’t there, and his man can’t get Mr. Billings to go. He came down for me, but I couldn’t do a thing with him, either.”

I knew—I understood. It was the dwelling of his mind upon the rubies! He had gone back in the night for them—in his sleep, for all I knew. But I thought most likely awake, for recent ex-

perience with him showed me that he didn't think anything of wandering around the neighborhood in his pajamas.

The janitor's pale face met us at the landing.

"I've sent for the police, sir, and it would be a good idea, don't you think, if you could get him away before they come. I don't want to get Mr. Billings into no trouble."

"Good idea," I agreed. "We'll just rush him to the car—but, h'm!"

I suddenly remembered he was in pajamas. It might be all right to Billings to wander around in public streets and vehicles in his night things, but it certainly wouldn't do under the present circumstances. *He* might not care, but then, there were the feelings of the girls to consider. And besides, dash it, I had some sort of idea it was against the law.

I stood there in the corridor, puzzling.

"We must get his clothes," I said to Jenkins. "No, wait, *wait*—not time! I want to get him away before the police get here. Um—dressing-robe—bath-robe—can't you get something of that sort—quick?"

Jenkins shook his head distractedly.

"Thought of that, sir—no use—nothing anywhere around here would half-way meet on Mr. Billings."

Here the professor's man interposed.

"Please hurry, sir; he's going through the pro-

fessor's papers and things!" I dashed for the apartment, shouting to Jenkins to get a bundle of rugs and blankets to the car.

Billings was standing by the window looking at a glass thermometer that he had just withdrawn from his mouth.

"Um!" he grunted complacently. "Ninety-seven and a quarter—my usual healthy subnormal temperature. Pulse sixty-five—respiration, twenty-four and two-fifths—excellent, excellent! I am myself. Ha!" And he whirled triumphantly.

"Ah!" he said, advancing eagerly and rubbing his hands. "It is you! You have heard, then? Marvelous, isn't it—wholly incredible! But do you know"—here he plucked at my shirt front, took a pinch, as it were, just as he had seen the professor do—"I can not find any transmigration. The materialization appears to be wholly optical."

"Never mind," I said anxiously, for I knew he was talking about the rubies; "*we* don't care." I smiled brightly. "Let's go down and see the car—*nice* car!" And I tried to get hold of his fat side, but missed it.

"Car?" Billings looked puzzled. Then his face broke into a smile. "*Carpe diem*—eh, am I not right? True, true! Whither you say." He looked about on a table. "Um—my notes, now," he muttered; and he caught up a small book and a pencil.

The professor's man protested: "Professor Doozenberry don't like—"

"Oh, dash it, let him have them!" I exclaimed, for Billings was already chuckling happily and writing in the little blank book.

"Come on," I pleaded, catching a fold of the pajamas. "Wouldn't you like to come get some clothes on?"

He drew back in alarm. "No, no—not yet—not until I complete my notes," was his crazy answer. "You know: *sublata causa, tollitur effectus!*" And he looked as though he thought this would finish me.

"But your friend," he exclaimed suddenly, as he allowed me to throw a blanket about his shoulders and we moved out of the door, "the gentleman I met last night—Billings—is not that the name?"

I looked at him miserably as we entered the car to go down.

"Oh, I say, Billings, old chap," I protested earnestly, "don't you know me?" I pointed to the little panel of mirror in the cage. "Don't you know *you* are Billings? Can't you *see*?"

His fat head pecked at the glass for an instant. Then he looked at me with eager, batting eyes. He chuckled hoarsely, gurgingly, and out came the note-book and pencil from his sleeve.

"Better and better," he muttered. "Now, if we could only go to *him!*" He caught my arm. "In the interest of this investigation of scientific phenomena, would he consider a call intrusive—could we not seek your friend, Mr. Billings?"

"It's all right, you know," I gently reassured him. "Yes, we're going to him—going right there. Just a little ride, you know."

By Jove, the way he cackled made my heart ache! I whispered to Jenkins to run ahead and prepare the ladies. But the first thing we saw as the cage hit the bottom was a woman—and, dash it, the frump from China!

She gave a little scream and fell on Billings' neck, almost bearing him to the ground.

"Oh, Jacky, Jacky!" she sobbed.

By Jove, I almost fell myself! So *that* was the way the wind lay! And I had never even so much as suspected. *That* was why he had raved so about her beauty! Beauty! Poor old Jack! If I had been sad about him before, it was a devilish sight worse now—

Worse? Why, dash it, she *kissed* him!

And to see him standing there, kind of batting and rolling his eyes and looking like a girl does when she's trying a strange piece of candy out of the box—oh, it just broke me all up!

No wonder he was crazy! Why, dash it, he would *have* to be crazy!

He was muttering to himself.

"Remarkable!" I heard. "Singularly sensate and exhilarating! Now, I never would have thought—um!"

And then he very deliberately took her head between his hands and—kissed her. Then he looked

upward thoughtfully and did it again—like a chicken drinks water—you know!

And then while we—that is, Jenkins and I—were trying to urge him on, out came the note-book again and he scribbled rapidly, muttering audibly: “Labial osculation—extraordinary stimulation—sensatory ganglia—mucous membrane—”

“Police!” I whispered brutally in the frump’s ear. “Better let’s get him away!” And, by Jove, that woke her out of her trance! In two minutes she had cajoled him to the car and we had him inside on the cushions. We bunched blankets and rugs about him to hide the pajamas.

“Jacky, dear,” gushed the Chinese freak, “wouldn’t you like for me to sit by you and hold your poor hand?”

It looked as if he would.

The frump turned to me. “Can you drive the car, Mr. Lightning?”

Could I? Well, I would show her! Especially as Frances had changed to the front as she saw us bringing out Billings.

“Take the train—get Billings’ things from the club,” I called to Jenkins. “Sharp, now! And here, unhook that number there on the back—give it here!”

Jenkins hesitated. “I think there’s a heavy fine, sir,” he hinted.

I snapped my fingers at him and he jumped to obey.

“Worse things than a jolly fine,” I said, looking at poor Billings smiling crazily over the frump. I threw the number plate into the car.

And just in time!

Around the corner whirled a policeman—and, by Jove, no less than that fat Irishman, O’Keefe! With him was the professor’s man.

“Don’t tell me,” panted the officer; “I know my—”

And then he gave a shout and sprang for the car.

“It’s that fellow that was prowling around the station house!” he yelled. “Here, stop there!”

But I didn’t want to. For one thing, we were a half-block away, and I had badly coasted a towel supply wagon and scattered the wares of a push-cart across three sidewalks.

My cap went flying as we skidded a corner, and I was devilish glad, for the inertia threw Frances’ head almost against mine and I felt the tickling brush of a little hair wisp as it swept my nose.

Her eyes were dancing with excitement. She looked back, waving her hand at the figure of O’Keefe trotting from around the corner, and her laughter pealed joyously, deliciously in my ear.

“Oh, I think American men are great—are *wonderful!*” she cried, striking her little hands together. “Especially Harvard men—and especially—” She stopped with the faintest catch.

“By Jove!” I cried. “Do you *mean* it?”

And for the briefest instant the hands were three;

but her scream brought me back to earth just in time to save the lives of a man and a boy. Devilish ungrateful, too, for I could see the man, three blocks behind, and still shaking his fist. The way with these pedestrians!

At Fifty-ninth Street we caromed with a hansom trotting too leisurely across the plaza, and I listened for nearly a block to the remarks of a bicycle cop before he dropped behind. What dashed me not a little was Billings' indifference to the record I was making for his car—didn't seem to care a jolly hang.

The frump was still hanging on him in a way to make you sick, and cooing and going on in a nervous, half-hysterical way I never would have thought her able to chirp up to. And Billings was holding her hand!

"Hello!" I called to him, just after we clipped Yonkers.

He looked up at me, smiling and nodding.

"Feel all right now, old man?" I inquired cheerily.

Billings looked at me hard, and then, dash it, he *winked!* And I began to wonder, by Jove, if it was just plain drunk.

CHAPTER XXII

MY DARLING IS SLANDERED

THREE miles south of Irvington, Billings jumped wildly in the air and yelled for me to stop.

"A *coleopteran!*" he shrieked excitedly as I throttled down. "A *coleopteran* struck me in the eye—one of the *hydrophilidæ* family!"

And hurling aside rugs and blankets, he twisted open the door and in a moment was in the road running back. It was then I went back to the crazy theory, for it was an open stretch of road and there wasn't a soul in sight. But it was so funny to see his fat figure waddling along there in the pajamas and bedroom slippers that Frances and I just threw back our heads and screamed. Couldn't help it, by Jove!

And the frump, jogging along behind, looked just as funny. I wasn't alarmed, for I knew she could control him. And, dash it, she did it by humoring him! For we saw her twist her veil about the fork of the stick he extended to her, and both of them went to slapping wildly at the air and the ground. Presently they both came waddling back, she with a

butterfly and he with a bug which he was craning at with a lens he had fished from his sleeve somewhere. He was trying to do this and at the same time hold together a great armful of gaudy weeds he had gathered.

Billings got in and then I helped her. "Awfully jolly good of you to humor his crazy whims," I whispered gratefully.

"Crazy!" she ejaculated, one foot on the running-board. "Why, he's just getting sane! He's been a born fool all his life! And now, Jacky, as you were saying of the *antennæ*—" And she flopped eagerly by him and together they bent over the glass.

It was rum, but I was getting along so swimmingly with Frances that I didn't much care what they did. Seemed to be only about a minute more and we were clipping through the curves of the Wolhurst park—Frances pointed the way—and had slowed down under the *porte-cochère*.

The frump whispered to the man who opened the door.

"As quietly as possible, Wilkes," she said, "and without his father seeing him."

"The judge is away, miss," said the man. "He drove down to the village with Senator Soakem, who had to catch a train back to Albany; but I'm looking for him every—"

"Be quick, then," jerked the frump. "You know what to do."

"I guess I do, miss," answered the butler gloom-

ily. "I've *had* to do it often enough—Perkins and me. A good cold souse—that's the thing—and then bed. *I know!*"

Billings waved his hand to the frump as he mounted the stairway inside. And then, dash it, he kissed his fingers.

"*Vale!*" he chirped, leaning over the marble balustrade. "*Vale, sed spero non semper!* I will resume the discussion *in propria persona.*"

And, by Jove, if she didn't come back at him quick as lightning, and with his own gibberish, too:

"*Confido et conquiesco!*" she cooed, waving her handkerchief.

Oh, it was tragical, dash it—that was the word, tragical! And yet the frump looked almost happy. And as for Frances, except for being amused, her brother's condition didn't seem to trouble her spirit at all. But then, dash it, I remembered she was used to him this way. She did not even wait, but with a bright smile and a murmured word to me, left her friend and myself to await Wilkes' report.

The frump kind of glared down the deserted vista of the fine old hall and shrugged her shoulders.

"Everybody loafing, as usual," she muttered sourly, and she hurled her coat at the carved back of a great cathedral chair—and missed it.

It was clear that her type scorned conventionalities and knew how to make themselves thoroughly at home.

"I hope you'll be made comfortable here, Mr.

Lightnut," she said, peeling a glove with a jerk, "but I have my doubts."

And she gave a kind of hollow laugh.

I shifted distressfully. "Oh, really now," I began protestingly, but she marched right over me:

"I can assure you that a guest *here* earns a martyr's crown," she said, lifting her eyebrows. Then she shook her head, her lips compressed.

I coughed. *Couldn't* say the thing I *wanted* to say, you know—seemed too devilish rude. Just have to stand it when they talk that way. Pugsley says best thing to do is to purse up your lips and bob your head—you don't have to mean it.

So I just went through all this and threw in a shrug, too. Thought no use having her mad and working against me with Frances. Catch the idea? Simple thing, you know, just to play her with my *finesse*.

"Awfully tiresome, these country places," I said sympathetically. I screwed my glass at a couple of footmen who came into view at the far end of the hall, and who were whispering and chuckling about something. "Things seem to be run a bit loose, don't you know—that's a fact. Don't mind for myself, but fancy a girl might find it rather trying visiting here."

By Jove, how she opened her eyes at me—surprised, I knew, at finding me such a devilish keen observer. My sympathy touched her, too, for her eyeballs shone moist of a sudden and I saw her lip

tremble as she stared. Then she swallowed hard and slapped her gloves sharply across her palm.

"It's Francis that's to blame for that sort of thing," she rasped, nodding down the hall.

"Frances?" I ejaculated in protest. "Oh, here, I say, now—"

"You don't *know* Francis, Mr. Lightnut!" Her jaw grounded with a snap, and what a look she gave me! "Wait till you do—you just wait!" And eyes and hands lifted to the ceiling.

I coughed again.

The cat! And *this* was my darling's friend!

But her claws raked on: "I tell you you just can't be familiar with grooms and hail-fellow-well-met with footmen without demoralizing them—and that's what Francis does." She jerked this out viciously, and while I gasped, went on: "*You* know very well, Mr. Lightnut, if you play cards and drink and carouse with your men-servants until two or three o'clock in the morning, you can't reasonably look for respect from them." She breathed heavily. "The trouble is, Francis has no self-respect—no *pride!*"

Her uplifted hands fumbled and jerked the hat from her tossing head. "Sometimes," she breathed through her teeth, "when I think of Francis, I feel like I'd like to—" The words died behind her teeth as she ground them—yes, *ground* them. She jabbed the pins into the hat savagely and at random and tossed it after the coat. And this time she put the

ball—in a big Benares jar that stood against the wall.

But I was counting forty-four!

Ever try that when you were angry and wanted to insult somebody? Preacher told us about it once at the old Harvard Union, and *I* thought it devilish good idea. Gives you time, you know, to think up the things to say that otherwise you would be turning over in your mind afterward as the scathing, clever things you *might* have said.

So, by the twenty-eighth count, I had her; and jamming my hands almost through my pockets, I faced her with a withering frown

“By Jove, if I were you, Miss—er—” Dash me if I hadn’t forgotten her name! “If you feel that way, *I* don’t see why the de— H’m! I mean why do you stay on here and—er—*sacrifice* yourself?” I drawled this in the most devilish sarcastic way! “I’d pack my jolly trunk and get as far away as I could.”

I added earnestly—coaxingly: “And *stay* away, you know!”

And I took a deep breath, for I expected to see her wilt or go straight up in the air. I knew it was a toss-up for either.

Not she! She just twisted a sour smile at me.

“Ummh!” she grunted. “Perhaps you don’t know that Francis has suggested that to me several times—frankly and rudely—when I have complained. That may surprise you.”

It did not surprise me—not at all, by Jove! What *did* surprise me was that my Frances had ever allowed this jolly female barnacle to fasten on her in this way. Remembered a remark of Jack Ellsworth's about some boulder visiting at his house that he said "the old man couldn't pry loose with a crowbar." Devilish coarse way to express it, I had thought; but now I understood.

The frump was *this* sort! Poor Frances! Poor Frances!

I was just considering the advisability of tactfully trying to shame this girl into taking the next train, or whatever it is, back to China, when suddenly my devilish active mind hit right on the explanation of her conduct! Bores me, you know, the way things come to me at times when I am not looking for them at all. Still, this time, I was rather glad. Might confound her and put her on the run if she knew that a shrewd, eagle-eyed man of the world had penetrated her mask.

So I coughed significantly in lieu of using her dashed name, and lifted my monocle so I could bore her sidewise through narrowed eyes.

"Dare say you've put up with Frances though for *Jack's* sake!" I let her have it coldly, deliberately. "Brother Jack has been a sort of compensation—*that's* it, eh?"

And I shot her a foxy wink!

That is, I *almost* did—pulled up, though, just on the brink. By Jove, gave me cold marrows for an





instant, thinking how I might have compromised myself, you know. Besides, I could spare her *that*—had rubbed it in so devilish raw, anyhow. That is, you would have thought so; for that sort of thing said to a normal Yankee girl would have stirred her pride or unchained the jolly lightnings from her eyes—you know!

But dashed if this imported freak didn't suddenly nod with a sort of chokey snuffle and reach out her hand for mine.

"How you *do* understand!" she crooned unblushingly, and she leaked a big cold tear down upon my hand and let another splash my cuff—and Jenkins hadn't come with my things yet, dash it! "I *do* try to be patient about Francis for Jacky's sake—he asked me to; and I do try not to mind the way things are run, but oh, Mr. Lightnut, what this place needs is a *head*!" She almost squeezed my hand, and blinked damply at me out of her pasty face. "And then," she snuffled, "I do so want to make a home for my father and my brothers. They have *never* known what it was to have a *home*—think of it!"

I didn't want to think of it—besides, I didn't believe it. I knew people *have* to have homes, dash it—it's the law. If they go in for that sort of thing—not having homes, you know—they're arrested. Still, in a rum country like China, it might be different, of course. However, I didn't take time to give this much thought, for I was so devilish floored—

irritated, you know—at the girl's cold-blooded, brazen effrontery.

By Jove, I wondered if I *could* pink her!

I wasn't sure. I had gone at her in a cunning, subtle way: the hand of steel in the glove of what's-its-name, you know; the curving, velvet thrust of the needle rapier—all that sort of rot—and she had merely given me back a Roland for my what's-its-name. I felt a bit dashed, you know.

Idea seized me that perhaps, though, something more brutally direct would—

“See here,” I said, fixing my monocle sternly and folding my arms—for I had got back my hand under pretense of fixing my part. “You don't mean to say that Jack would ever ask *you* to take charge here!”

Rather plain and direct, that, don't you think? Sort of heavy broadsword stroke, you know. But she took it full and clean—never winced or turned a hair. Just looked thoughtful.

“Yes,” she said slowly. “Jacky says it'll have to come to that some day—*some* arrangement. Neither of us ever want to marry.”

“Oh!”

And my monocle dropped!

Couldn't chirp another word, you know! Just stood there, round-mouthed and staring blankly—kind of fascinated, too, dash it—and wondering what particular freak cult *hers* was. And I felt myself getting redder and redder every second! Then the awful thought came to me that this ad-

vanced and emancipated dowd had been the friend and companion of my darling—that her poisonous influence had been felt for months; was being exerted still. I wondered how she could look me in the face, but she *wasn't*. No, she had switched her head around and was glaring at the servants down the hall. So I just swayed there, trying to think, and boring at the back of her head, till it came to me dully that her hair didn't match her what-you-call-'ems, and my dashed brain just seized on and clung to this like a drowning man does to a what-you-may-call-it.

“*Thom-as!*” the frump exploded.

One of the footmen who was doubled over, red-faced and writhing, in the exercise of some pleasantry with his companion, straightened with an aggrieved air. He ambled toward us.

“Some specimens that Mr. Billings gathered—plants and foliage; he left them in the car,” jerked the frump. “See they are cared for.”

The man nodded indifferently and slouched away.

Her frown gloomed after him and her voice snapped at his laggard heels:

“And Flora—send Flora to me. Is she asleep somewhere?”

She faced me with an acid grimace and shrug.

“You see how it is here, Mr. Lightnut,” she grumbled querulously; “but *you* understand!”

Understand! By Jove, yes—I thought I *did!* I could see that the fellow was just sullen under the

too free and easy assumptions of a guest from whom little had been experienced in the way of an occasional *douceur*. And dashed if I blamed him!

But I murmured some jolly rubbish, hoping every instant that Wilkes would come and lead me away.

"That's the way with them all here, from the housekeeper down," she went on gloomily. "They take advantage of the fact that the mistress of the house is abroad and the master absorbed and busy." Her voice quickened sharply: "Then do you think they care two pins about the authority of a silly girl who has been allowed to grow up untrained and ignorant of the first a b c of anything practical?"

I felt my face tingling.

"See here—Oh, dash it all!" I protested. "That's not *fair*, you know!"

"Fair?" She bit the word out of the air and just glared at me. "Why, they know she's a *fool*!"

I opened my mouth two or three times; then swallowed helplessly and grew red. Somehow, it came back to me—a time when I was a little boy and my nurse had been so shocked when I said "shucks!" I remembered how that night she read to me a tract about swear words and told me how when I grew up to be a big man, I would have to choose whether I was ever going to learn to swear or not. She said that if I didn't choose right, a day would come when I would be—oh, *so* sorry!

And now, dash it, the day had come and I knew that she was right! For I *was* sorry, by Jove!

CHAPTER XXIII

A MESSAGE AND A WARNING

“IT’S all right, miss,” Wilkes reported; “at least, I hope so. Perkins is with him—we’ve been trying to persuade him to have a bath and lie down. But I don’t know—”

He shook his head gloomily, then turned to me.

“If you will come with me, sir—” Then he added, and it seemed a question: “You must have made a quick run, sir. Seems like only a few minutes since we got Mr. Jack’s ’phone message.” His voice dropped: “From the station house, you know.”

“Eh—what’s that?” I paused with my foot on the first tread of the stairway. “Jack’s ’phone message—from the station house?” I repeated blankly. “What are you talking about?”

Wilkes coughed reproachfully. “Why, you know, sir, he told about being arrested in front of the Kahoka Apartments. He mentioned that it was about—h’m!” He stole a furtive backward glance at the frump, but she was enjoying herself berating a fat girl she addressed as “Flora.” He looked at me eloquently and whispered: “About his—h’m—stealing some black silk pajamas.”

My monocle dropped, and I almost did myself.

"By Jove!" I gasped feebly.

"Yes, sir." Wilkes looked up at the paneled ceiling and stroked his chin. "He mentioned that they found them—or *thought* they found them in the bag he had with him."

"But he's got them *on*, and they are his own," I managed to get out.

Wilkes' face lightened understandingly. "Oh-h, I *see*, sir," he said, nodding with his jolly chin hanging; "so *that's* how you got him off—I was a-wondering!" He looked at me, his fishy old eyes twinkling admiration. "Very neat, if I may say, sir—making, as it were, a sort of alibi—*very* neat, indeed! Of course, when they puts 'em on him, they see for themselves they are his'n, and not any lady's what had been stolen— Oh, *I see!*"

Dash me, if *I* did! The only thing I saw was that it must have been Jenkins that had telephoned and the message had been twisted. What he *had said*, of course, was that Billings had *almost* been arrested. But the police finding the pajamas in his bag—I did not like that. Could it be that, after all, Billings *had* found his sister's pajamas in the guest-room and had quietly confiscated them? It looked devilishly, ominously like it! Or perhaps he, himself, had recovered them from Foxy Grandpa, and with more delicacy than I thought him capable of, had kept the whole matter to himself. One thing only was certain: the sleuth hounds of the law, stimulated by the

extravagant reward I had offered over the telephone, *had* run down and recovered *her pajamas*. It was a relief that they were out of his hands, anyhow—I could get them again, but *he* couldn't. By Jove!

Alone in my room, I stood before the mirror, hands in pockets and rocking on my toes—kind of smiling, you know—and thinking what a daredevil, reckless thing it had been—clever, too, dash it—in getting them away from old Jack, and right under his nose. By Jove, I felt a bit proud about it—sort of exultation, don't you know—and I had just got off a wink at myself, when Wilkes appeared again.

“Pardon, sir, for disturbing you, but Mr. Billings is acting so queer, we are afraid to cross him; and he just insisted I take his message to you at once.”

“Message?” I repeated, sobering.

“Yes, sir—something about some pajamas—”

“Pajamas?” I faltered, and I dropped into a chair. “Oh!”

Wilkes looked grave. “Pajamas seem to be the thing with him this time, sir—it's the queerest go! That's a *new* one, *that* is!” He shifted contemptively. “The last time it was lizards and the time before blue dachshunds, but his main stand-by, so to speak, is piebald rattlesnakes—they we're *used* to; but this new turn, pajamas, gets me!” He shook his head dubiously. “And he won't take his off—you can't get him to; he just gets kinder peevish and goes off on the queerest streak of freak talk you ever heard. Perkins tried to coax him to take a

bath, but he said he never had taken a bath in his life—and he called Perkins something awful—some name about a yard long. It squelched Perkins so that he—”

“But the *message*?” I suggested nervously.

“I was just a-coming to that, sir. He asks me if I knew whether you were still on the place; and when I said you were, he says to me kinder excited and impressive like: ‘Well, you go to him at once—*at once*—and tell him I’m on the trail of the mystery of those pajamas, and I’ll soon know as much about ’em as *he* does. Just tell him that—*he’ll* know what I mean.’”

“Oh!” I gasped shortly.

“Yes, sir,” Wilkes nodded, “but that ain’t quite all. He says: ‘Tell Mr. Lightnut that when I first saw those pajamas in his rooms—’” Wilkes paused inquiringly. “Did you say something, sir?”

I had not—I had only groaned!

He went on, repeating as by rote: “‘When I found and took them away, I was curious and amused, but skeptical—firmly skeptical—of there being any dark mystery about them. But now I know I let myself be deceived and I mean to get at the bottom of the whole thing.’”

Wilkes seemed to kind of waver and fade before me, and then go out like a candle. Then he came back into view and I heard his voice again:

“‘And what’s more, you tell him I say—’”

The butler hesitated and seemed embarrassed—

his heavy jowls reddened a little. He looked beyond me and coughed.

"Of course *you* know, sir," he said, shifting uneasily, "Mr. Billings ain't exactly himself, so to speak, so you mustn't mind. Fact is—if I *may* say so—he's got the most considerable case of jimmies I ever see him with, so—"

"Oh, *go on!*" I breathed miserably.

"Yes, sir—h'm!" Wilkes heaved distressfully, then drove doggedly ahead: "Oh, well, sir, what he *says* was that it was his duty, he thought, to tell the family the truth about those pajamas, so that they would know that the man they were harboring under their roof wasn't what he seemed to be." His gaze bored higher over my head, his voice tapering off so faintly I could hardly hear.

But I heard all right! Oh, yes, I got the full devilish force of it; but I couldn't speak. My dry lips touched wordlessly and I hunched deep into the hollow of the big leather rocker. I would have liked to get even deeper, and I studied wistfully a tiny floor-crack under the radiator. I thought I could make it if I were alone!

Wilkes coughed again. I winced—there was evidently more!

"Yes, sir," he murmured, as I cut a quick glance upward. "He *did* say further that if you weren't satisfied, though, and would prefer another trial—"

"Eh?" I bounded out of the chair. "What's that? Oh, dash it, *yes*—I would, by Jove!"

“Very good, sir.” Wilkes looked relieved, himself. “In that case, he said he was willing to experiment again—that was his word—*experiment*. He said he wouldn’t detain you here on *his* account, but he would *have* to ask you to stay another day or two while he made his observations.”

It was a devilish cold shoulder, but I had no choice. Fact was, by Jove, I was so jolly glad for *that* chance, and for being trusted again by Billings, even in this half-hearted way, that I just ground my pride under my heel—why, dash it, I would have ground anything under my heel for *her*! I was as happy as a bird, and life was again one grand, sweet what’s-its-name.

“Tell him certainly, Wilkes, and thank him—don’t forget to thank him.” And I believe I wrung his hand. “And—er—wait, Wilkes—couldn’t you use a tenner?” I checked him on the threshold. “Let’s see—no, that’s a twenty—say, take *that*; take them both—*thank* you, Wilkes!—and there’s a five, too. Oh, yes, you *must* take it all—I have no use for it, you know—never *would* use those particular ones!”

And, by Jove, he took it—just made him, you know. These butlers are not half bad fellows if you go at them right—I can *always* manage them. He sympathized with me—you could see that—dashed if the fellow wasn’t almost weeping as he closed the door.

And then I just flopped down upon a divan and lay there panting like a what’s-its-name—reaction,

you know. So he *had* known! He had known when he let me come to Wolhurst, and had waited for the moment when he would have me under his roof and be able utterly to confound me. This, then, explained his mental condition, his relapse to drink again—his madness on the subject of pajamas. It was *awful!* By Jove, as I lay there thinking of his suspicions and diseased imaginings induced by his monstrous folly of drink—the awful curse of drink—and of what it had almost brought upon two innocent lives, I felt indignant—almost sick. Lay there helpless, wishing Jenkins would come, and wondering if I wasn't getting a bit feverish—mouth dry and craving moisture, you know. But not a thing could I find in the room except a glass—and empty. Carafe beside it, but nothing in it but water, you know, and a large, round ball of ice. So just had to fall back on the couch and try not to think of my throbbing, swollen tongue.

Mind got to wandering then, I think. Thought of Frances and how much I loved her, and of cooling streams—fizzy and gurgling—and of amber fountains, crested with sparkling, pearly sunbursts—you know! I even got to wondering if she really loved me—fact! And then came the disquieting thought of how devilish disappointing and awful it *would* be if Jenkins should forget a stock of my Egyptian Koroskos. What *was* it she had told me that night about being engaged to another and wanting to be free, now that she had met me—the darling! Then,

dash me if I could remember to save me whether Jenkins had or had not said something to me that morning about packing my ashes-of-roses socks and ties—or was it about my lilac silk underwear with the mauve fleur-de-lis? Devilish annoying I couldn't remember. Of course it was this that was making her so reticent and offish about any reference to the other night—I mean it was this thing of being entangled with this other chap. So jolly sensitive and high-minded, don't you know, she didn't want to talk about *our* future until she had dumped the other fellow in the road—that was it.

Struck me suddenly that there was some jolly proverb thing about it: something about the old love and the new—some dashed wise, old, musty rot about *that*. What the deuce was it?

And luckily, just then Jenkins came!

And when he had laid out my things, and I found I was to wear a scarf of Harvard crimson—the color *she* admired—I was so devilish pleased and grateful to Jenkins for the decision that I thought that now I would let him have a try at the proverb.

“I say, Jenkins,” I began carelessly, “there's some jolly saying or proverb—eh, *you* know?”

“Certainly, sir,” responded Jenkins absently, for he was intensely concentrated on the selection of a scarf-pin.

I went on: “It's about—oh, don't you know—about when you've tried being engaged to one person and you don't like it, and you are thinking of being

engaged to another—something of that sort, dash it—oh, *you* know!” And I wondered if it would be the sardonyx or the ruby, and hoped it would be the ruby.

“Mm-m-m,” murmured Jenkins, blinking thoughtfully. “Let’s see, sir—it ain’t that one about the hair of the dog, is it?”

“Hair of the— Certainly *not!*” I exclaimed with indignation. “No, it’s some jolly saw about being off with the old and on with—” I stalled.

“Off and on,” came quickly from Jenkins; then he went back to his jolly pins.

“Maybe,” I said, trying to think, “but there’s something else about being on with the new—or being on to the new— Oh, yes, the devilish thing starts off: ‘’Tis well to be off’—um, off— Dash it, off *what?* You catch the idea, don’t you?”

“Certainly, sir.” He tried the ruby and sardonyx in turn against the silk and rejected both—*he* took a garnet. It wouldn’t have been *my* taste, but then it wasn’t *my* business, you know! His jolly old lips moved as he repeated something to himself; he rolled his eyes to the ceiling and cleared his throat—and *then* I knew he had it!

“I don’t seem to remember it, sir—not *precisely*—h’m—but could it be this: ‘’Tis well to be off—’” He paused with finger on chin, rolling his eyes upward.

“Oh, dash it, yes!” I said disgustedly. “Why, *I* told you—”

He lifted his hand. "'Tis well to be off and on—'" And he stuck again, dash it! Then his lips worked some more and his face cleared. "Oh, *here* it is, sir—*I've* got it now! See if this ain't it!"

And he laid it off with his fingers the way a woman counts the words in a telegram to keep from going over ten:

"'Tis-well-to-be-off-and-on-with-the-old-love, but-don't-let-on-to-the-new'—*there you are, sir!*"

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, batting at him; and the brushes in my hands paused and pulled hard on each side of my pat. "Oh, I say!" And I had him repeat it again.

The thing troubled me! Odd I had not more carefully noticed before the wording of the jolly thing! But then of course my interest in it had not been so dashed personal as now. Kept running in my head now and disturbing me all the while Jenkins was busying himself about me. And *then*, as if I didn't have quite enough already to try me, Jenkins at the last moment chucked the crimson scarf altogether, and slipped through my collar a Persian bat! By Jove, I was so dashed annoyed, I took it from him to tie myself.

"Off and on with the old love!" It kept whispering itself in my ear till I hardly knew what I was doing. *Could* it be that she would—but, oh, dash it, *no!* I knew she wouldn't! And yet another chap might come along and she might find she would rather be engaged to *him!* Oh, but I was sure *she*

was not so variable as that. Still a vague fear kept recurring; a miserable, tiny, pricking doubt—the crumpled what's-its-name in the bed of down, you know—that sort of thing!

What the deuce was the best thing to do?

“Pardon, sir,” came in Jenkins’ voice, and in the glass I saw his head piking anxiously over my shoulder; “but *I* think with them changeable kind, the best thing to try for is a sudden, firm knot!”

“Eh?” I said, staring. And then I whirled upon him, seizing both his hands.

“By Jove, Jenkins!” I exclaimed admiringly. “What a perfectly out-and-out corking idea—a regular ripper, you know! How devilish clever of you, dash it!”

“Certainly, sir!” Jenkins batted a little—always does when I notice these little things—so modest, don’t you know.

But I had the idea now, and I gripped it tight along with my monocle, as, ten minutes later, I sauntered down the stairs.

I would speak to her father at once!

CHAPTER XXIV

I SPEAK TO HER FATHER

“SO glad to see you here, my boy,” the judge was saying. And his little round face beamed at me across the library table. I had encountered him in the hall just as I had descended to rejoin the girls in the living-room. Forthwith, he elbowed me into the library.

“Know from Jack how glad you always are to escape girls,” he remarked cheerily as he produced cigars. “Don’t blame you at all—in fact, do you know it refreshes me to find—”

Don’t know what dashed thing it refreshed him to find, for I never caught it. For just then through the doorway there floated, from across the hall, a bar of music—the laugh of the dearest girl in the world!

I strained for another bar.

“Hah!” ejaculated the judge, pausing with questioning uplift of cigar. “The silly cackle of those girls—it disturbs you. Yes, it does—I can see it—you *look* disturbed.” And, dash it, he insisted upon closing the door. “You mustn’t let *them* bother you while you are here,” he urged pleasantly; “you must just go ahead and do the thing you *want* to do.”

By Jove, there seemed little opportunity for it!

"Thanks awfully," I murmured feebly.

The judge proceeded genially: "Of course we all understand that you just came up to Wolhurst to please Jack." Then his face clouded. "H'm! Sorry to learn that he came home with another—" his eyes rolled through a circle—"er—is not feeling just fit. It's too bad, for I wanted some one to take you over the neighborhood—interesting landmarks, you know, reminiscent of Major André and Washington Irving."

"Charmed, I'm sure," I chirped up. Jolly lie, though, for I wasn't impressed; didn't know *who* the other fellow was, but I had *seen* Irving in London—scores of times. Not a patch on John Drew to *my* thinking!

The judge was murmuring something apologetic:

"So I can't go with you, myself, you see—but I know you will understand. Just so infernally tied up with preparation of rebuttal in suit the attorney-general is bringing against one of my corporations—most unreasonable thing you ever heard of!" The judge crossed his legs with a fling of impatience and pulled savagely at his cigar. "By George, Lightning, we are getting to a pass with politics where party organization is going to the dogs—don't you think so, eh?"

"Oh, dash it, yes—rotten, you know!" I worked off indignantly—her father, don't you see! Sat wondering when I would get to see her—by Jove,

they would *have* to let me see her at luncheon! I just caught back in time to get the end of a sentence:

“Utter defiance of personal obligations!” His hands spread eloquently. “Tell me what is the use of electing men to office, when they time-servingly yield before the clamor of the cursed populistic and revolutionary spirit of the times?” He was leaning toward me now, his jolly face swelling with indignation, his fist beating upon his knee. “What has become, Mr. Lightning,” he pounded, “of the time-honored sanctity of the ‘gentleman’s agreement’—eh? Where now the *pact conventa*?”

“Where?” I shrugged, and I let it go at that, pretending to be busied with a match; for dash me if I knew! Never had seen it even—in fact, didn’t care a jolly hang if I never did, don’t you know.

He went on hammering: “Here I’ve got to go and stultify myself, arguing against my own decision when I was on the bench!” He snorted. “It’s perfectly abominable, sir—outrageous!”

And the judge hurled his little body back into the chair and furiously pumped himself into a cloud of smoke. He glared at me expectantly, and I knew I had to come up.

“Beastly bad form, you know!” I tried, sending a great funnel upward and frowning after it. Fact was, I never took any interest in political questions—dashed bore, you know. Wondered if he would spring them much when Frances and I were—

“Um—well, I should say so!” he grunted; and

my jerk sent ashes all over me. But I saw that he was just mollified because I agreed with him. Best system, Pugsley says, is always to agree with *everybody* in politics—"humor 'em gently, just like children," were his exact words; "you know it really *don't* matter!"

"And now, let's see," resumed the judge, brightening. "I wonder who we *can* get to take you!" His fingers drummed together thoughtfully. "Um, of course, there is Francis—" my heart took a jolly leap—"but Francis is impossible—*quite* impossible!"

"By Jove, no!" I ejaculated eagerly, and I came up in my chair like a galvanized what's-its-name. "Just the thing—be delighted, you know."

He smiled grimly. "Natural *you* should say that, but—" He expectorated with deliberation, glowering at me as he did it. "*No*, sir!" His head shook with decision. "Wouldn't do—I wouldn't think of trusting you with Francis," he finished shortly.

"O!" Just a gasp, you know; and my jolly cheeks stung as from a dash of fiery what's-its-name sauce. So *he* knew about the pajamas, too!

I half rose from my chair.

"I—I assure you, sir—" I began stiffly.

His fussy shrug checked me. "No, no, we'll just have to wait till Jack gets up. The only thing *I'm* anxious about is the scenery and the view points; and I just know if Francis went with you, you would never see any of it."

By Jove, I thought that quite likely enough, but of course it was devilish personal of him to say so. And dash seeing the scenery and view points, anyway—who wanted to see *them*, if they could see *her*? I was just going to suggest this, when he went on:

“The fact is—” He hesitated, then flicked his ashes with a sigh. “Oh, well, since I’ve said as much as I have, I should go further, I suppose. It’s only fair not to leave you in the dark, especially as my daughter was enthusiastically telling me just now”—puff—“that she already looks on you as one of the family.”

“By Jove, did she though?” I hitched to the front of the chair. “How dev—I mean how—”

He nodded. “And so I feel justified in talking to you frankly—not that I want to prejudice you against Francis, you understand, but just because”—his head wagged soberly—“*Francis won’t do!*” And he looked at me steadily.

Something like a sharp pain struck through me. Again—and this time from her own father! I just sat there kind of frozen, you know, except that I could feel the smile slowly loosening in my face. He moved to a seat nearer.

“I don’t like to seem to be disparaging my own flesh and blood, Mr. Lightnut,” he proceeded gravely, “but the truth is Francis is the only one of my children that gives me any anxiety.”

“Oh!” I felt myself shrink together, my knees

slanting away from him. My dashed monocle hung limp.

He angled closer. "Jack's drinking is bad—that I admit, but perhaps—h'm—he comes by it naturally; still Jack has never forgotten that he is a gentleman—the son of a gentleman—and has never been what you would call fast, but—" His chest lifted under a deep breath—"but Francis—*whew!*"

"Fast—Frances?" It faltered tremulously from my lips; my cigar dropped with a soft thud.

His eyes widened. "*Oh, yes—frightfully!*" And he tendered me another cigar, and I had to light it—he made me! "Of course, the mistake was in ever sending Francis away to school—not always a wise thing, Mr. Lightnut, especially when the home life has been too cloistered. I think the reaction was too much for one so green and inexperienced as Francis. And extravagance—my!" He lifted his hands. "I thought Jack was bad enough at Cambridge with a thousand-dollar apartment on the 'Gold Coast,' as you call it—and, by George, you Harvard men have got the right name for it!—but Francis beat that in one term's drain on me for poker losses and—"

"Poker?" I moistened my lips. Then I brightened, for perhaps he meant bridge—and *that* was good form, for there was my Aunt Julia, who lived by it—fact! But his head shook impatiently when I suggested that he meant this.

"Bridge!" he exploded. "Why, Francis doesn't

know bridge from casino! *Poker*, I tell you, and faro—and all the rest. The plucking was done nightly at a certain—er—club, the establishment of a gentleman by the name of McGinty—‘Spot’ McGinty—oh, you *know* the place, then?”

For I had gasped audibly. “Only—only by reputation,” I responded hastily.

“Um, dare say it has got ‘reputation,’ all right. I guess, too, there are more crooked things than streets within a couple of miles of Harvard Square, eh? Why, do you know, Francis and a couple of classmates were caught in a raid there one night and lugged off to the station in a patrol—I had to bail ’em out by wire. That’s how *I* know about the place.” And, discriminatingly, he selected a fresh cigar and lighted it.

“You—you don’t mean they were really arrested?” I faltered.

He nodded grimly through a funnel of smoke. “How could they help being? Why, dammit, they were too drunk to get away!” He settled in his seat with a scowl. “I can tell you it was all I could do to stave off expulsion!”

My jolly head spun. By Jove, Radcliffe girls must have moved on some since my day! Then they were coldly intellectual—went in strong for the earnest life, you know—the serious purpose existence—all that sort of thing. All of us looked on them with more or less awe—that is, except Smithers; he tried some intimate flirtations, one morn-

ing with a bunch in the Botanic Gardens and got stung. *He* said they were "prunes."

But *Frances*—and "Spot" McGinty's! Surely I had not heard aright.

I faced him earnestly. "I—er—Judge Billings, do I understand you—that is, it can't be that you are speaking of—er—*Frances*?" I stammered incredulously. "I mean *your* *Frances*—surely you are not!"

"I just am!" His jaw set with a snap. "Just who I'm talking about and nobody else, young man! I mean, *my* Francis—Francis Leslie Billings—who else could I mean?" He almost groaned. "Oh, you don't *know* Francis!"

Dash it, what they all chorused at me! They seemed pretty positive about it, too, and I was jolly miserable; but looking back now, I somehow think of that moment as being the point where I reached the parting of the what-you-call-'ems. Didn't know what to think, but knew I had to make up my mind right then and there—and for *always*, don't you know. Knew, of course, that it was just pure *luck* that *Frances* cared for me—realized jolly well I wasn't particularly clever and all that, you know; but *she* didn't seem to mind. It was then that it came to me all of a sudden that the only dashed thing in all the world that I could give *her*, that she didn't seem to have already from somebody, was—well just *trust*.

And, by Jove, as soon as I got hold of this per-

fectly corking idea, I knew I had it for life, and—well, nothing else mattered in all the world, you know!

Meantime, her father was studying me a little oddly and smiling.

“I see you don’t quite like what I say about Francis,” he remarked, puffing complacently.

I looked him straight in the eye. “Frankly, I don’t, if you must know,” I blurted. Then I screwed my monocle tight and straightened forward. “By Jove, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself, you know!”

“Wh—what’s that?—*Lightnut!*” He turned a beet color and grasped the arms of his chair.

“Oh, I do.” I stood up and he followed. “I think if that poor child had had a little—er—forbearance and kindness—that sort of thing—oh, dash it, I just think you’ve been infernally harsh always—yes, I do!”

“Well, I’ll be—” He swallowed it, neck forward, and stood panting a bit. “*Harsh, eh?*” he jerked at me. “Um!” He stood there, his feet braced apart, his white brows beetling at the floor. “*Harsh!*” He cocked his head on one side, thrusting out his heavy under-lip. Then came a sniff and a grunt, and oh, he looked black!

I was feeling devilish pale—you can, you know—and a little trembly from excitement. Wasn’t quite sure what I had said, but knew jolly well I must have meant it, whatever it was. Knew, of course,

that in another minute it would be his come-back and he would simply slay me. He would look at me coldly through his glasses, bow with dignity, and leave the room.

And then—

I wondered if Jenkins had a time-table!

And just then came a quick breath, and I caught a murmur: "I wonder now if, after all, that is true! By George, they say children and—" The mutter trailed off. "Here, here, my boy—sit down," he exclaimed suddenly; and he made me.

"I want to thank you, Lightning," he said impressively. "It may be that you are right. Perhaps the better course would be gently to reason with Francis."

"Oh, Judge, I am sure of it," I urged feelingly.

"Well, well, my boy—we'll see." He patted me on the knee. "I'm going to try your way—by George, I'll do it to-night!" His eyes seemed to hold me with a more kindly and personal interest. "Do you know I can't tell you how glad I am that you find so much in Francis to like; indeed, I am *delighted*." Still studying me attentively, he musingly reached for a fresh light. "In point of fact, Lightning, I am free to say I hope the intimacy begun between you two will grow closer. It would be a thundering good thing for Francis and a great comfort to me."

And, by Jove, he smiled at me—a devilish pleasant smile!

I sat up straight, uncrossed my legs and tried it over the other way. Awfully helpful dodge, you know, when you are under some mental agitation.

He was looking at me through his lashes as he drew the flame to his cigar, and I knew that now was the time for me to speak. He *expected* it—had deliberately given me an opening, and a prime one, and now—was waiting! Of course he couldn't know that I was so dashed inexperienced—unpractised, you know—in speaking to a girl's father and that I didn't even know the correct forms and usages. An out-and-out man of the world like Judge Billings just *couldn't* understand this, don't you know, and to have him suspect the truth—oh, it would have been too mortifying—too *humiliating*, dash it!

So I just leaned forward and made a go:

"Thanks awfully; and—er—by the way—" Then I stuck, boggled wildly an instant and went on: "That is to say, this intimacy, you know—has it been too short to justify—" I gulped. "Er—would you be willing to trust—" And I lost the dashed idea again, floundered a bit and took another shy: "Oh, I say, you know, have I your permission to speak to Frances—er—you know?"

"You speak to Francis?"—he just leaped toward me— "Why, my *boy!*" And he was wringing my arm with one hand while the other clasped my shoulder. "My *de-e-ear* boy—why, Lightning!" By Jove, he almost gushed! "You're not joking now, are you?" He peered anxiously into my face. "No, by

George, I believe you really mean it!" And he went to pumping like mad. "How awfully good of you—*self-sacrificing* is the word! Are you quite sure you don't mind?"

"*Mind?*" By Jove, I think I looked what I felt at such a dashed silly question.

"Well! well! *well!* My dear young friend!" And oh, he went on in the most disgusting way—why, dash it, you would have thought I was doing him some favor! I guessed, though, that it was the usual custom, but it seemed rum—for *I* should have thought that in giving your daughter away, you put the thanks up to the other fellow. But Pugsley says the rule varies—quite often varies! Anyhow, I felt so gratified that I had taken the honorable course and spoken to her father—understand so many do not at all, you know. As it was, it gave me quite a comfortable glow of pride, and I reflected how much better it always is to follow the wise dictates of your what's-its-name!

"By Jove!" I thought, as I nodded and smiled back, "I wonder what he would say if he knew that Frances and I are *already* engaged!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE FAMILY BLACK SHEEP

PRESENTLY I got in a word:

“Then, Judge, I have your permission to speak to Frances?”

“Permission?” He lifted his hands and eyes. “You certainly have, my boy—don’t I make it clear? Why, I’m simply delighted—and grateful—oh, so *grateful* to you!”

And, by Jove, he meant it—there was no mistaking his fervency! But it made me feel like a silly ass, you know. Custom or no custom, it just made me a bit nifty to think *her* father would speak this way. Might be good form, but it appeared rotten taste—lots of things seem that way, dash it! Suggested this to Pugsley once, but he was so devilish shocked couldn’t eat his luncheon—wasn’t able to fetch a dashed word for four hours!

“Why, Lightning,” he dropped to a chair, leaning forward, with shining eyes, “you can’t possibly know what this means just at this time! Why, if you hadn’t offered to speak to Francis, it’s not likely that any one else *ever* would!”

“Judge!” I ejaculated, shocked.

"Who would want to?" And he grimaced horribly.

"Oh, I say now!" I protested warmly.

"My boy, I tell you I know—you *don't!*" He lifted his hand eloquently, deflecting the corners of his mouth—oh, such a way! "No, siree, I tell you there's not another living man would dare chance it!" He threw himself backward, puffing his cheeks at me and walling his eyes frightfully. "In fact, hereabouts—where Francis is known, there have been two men—only just two—who ever had the temerity to do it."

"Oh!" I commented. Wondered if one of these was the other chap she was engaged to.

He proceeded impressively: "One of these, my dear sir, was our rector—a most charming and venerable old man, now nearly eighty-three and partially paralyzed and deaf; lives a sweet, patient life all alone, you know, with no one in the world to care for him. *Well, sir,*" he stiffened dramatically, leveling one finger at me, "do you think that Francis would even listen to him?"

Did I? Well, dash it, *did* I?

But I tried to mumble something polite.

"And then—" he puffed as he relighted his cigar, "there's Jack's chauffeur, you know."

"Eh, Jack's—*what's* that?" I gripped the arms of my chair.

"Yes," he nodded, "Jack's chauffeur. Oh, I was *so* disappointed at the result of his effort!" The old

gentleman slipped back in his chair with a sigh. "Francis just swore at him, you know!"

"By Jove!" I managed to get out—and yet, somehow, I was devilish pleased about it.

"You see?" And he spread out his hands. "Absolutely no sense of appreciation, you observe; and it had seemed such a splendid chance! You see they had been so intimate—oh, are still, for that matter."

I caught my breath. "In—intimate!" I stammered. "You don't mean Frances and this chauffeur?"

"Oh, yes," carelessly, "Scoggins is all right; very superior young man for his position—fond of Francis, you know, and I really think has great influence." He puffed complacently an instant. "Fact is, they are always together when Francis is home"—puff—"motoring, boating, or else off somewhere camping together."

"Wha-at—what's that—not *camping*?" I looked at him aghast. "Oh, come now, Judge—really you don't mean *that*, do you—not camping together?"

I spoke excitedly, but he just stared at me with an expression of blank surprise.

"Eh? Why, certainly, my dear boy—for weeks at a time—and why not?" His shift manifested some impatience. "Pshaw, Lightnut," he growled, flicking his ash, "what's the odds—why be so particular? *I* don't mind!" He jammed his hands into his trousers pockets till it seemed he would go

through them. "I tell you, I'm glad I'm democratic!"

"Oh!" I uttered, seeing a light.

So *that* was it! Well, in any case, I knew now that I was a republican, by Jove! Never did know before what I was and it was a devilish relief to find out. Half made up my mind, then and there, I would vote next election—never had, you know; few of our set ever did. Pugsley, for one, held it to be doubtful form.

"Bright, self-made young man," I caught as I came back. By Jove, he was still talking about that beastly chauffeur! "Such fine morals, you know."

"Oh, dash it, *yes!*" And I think this must have been when I broke the corner out of a filling.

"That was why I was so sorry he failed with Francis," he continued regretfully, "but *you* may succeed better—oh, I don't know but what it will do just as well!"

"Thanks—er—awfully!" I murmured weakly.

"Oh, I think so—*oh, yes!*" He bobbed his head as though he were quite resigned to it—then went on thoughtfully:

"And anyhow, if Francis finds *you* are in deadly earnest, why it—" His voice dropped off musingly: "Well, I believe *that* would make it easier—oh, lots easier for Scoggins."

I blinked a little with my free eye.

Wasn't sure, you know, but somehow it seemed to me a rum thing to say—almost offensive, dash

it? But then, for that matter, everything was rum of late—so *that* counted for nothing. Fact was, it just seemed to me like there was something in the air—everybody seemed so queer—well, jolly muddled, I should call it! Idea had been gradually coming to me that I was the only one who appeared to have any clear understanding of things; and somehow the realization just made me devilish nervous—the responsibility, don't you know!

And just then the judge looked suddenly at his watch, muttered something, and hitched up to the table strewn with papers. He bent over these with a frown, coughed oddly, glanced at me—and bent again with a mutter. Of course, I saw he was annoyed over sudden consciousness of the break he had made, and was striving to cover his embarrassment.

And, by Jove, it seemed to me he *ought* to *feel* embarrassed, for the very rummest thing yet was this crazy infatuation for this infernal chauffeur. It was pitiful—oh, disgusting, if you ask *me*—and the more so because it was something she did not share. I *knew* she didn't, you know! No, it was plain enough, dash it, that between her father and this mucker of a chauffeur, my poor darling was being crowded to the what's-its-name. *This* was what she had meant—had hinted at—and, by Jove, I was ready to wager anything on it; eager to put up all I was worth, you know!

Didn't know, dash it, how much I *was* worth

Went down in Wall Street one day and asked old Morley, my man of affairs, but forgot what he said. Never could remember afterward whether it was one million or ten and always hated to ask again.

Truth was he had stared at me so and seemed so oddly surprised, I just worked off some jolly apologetic rubbish and got out. Pugsley thought I must have violated some rotten, silly law of commercial ethics—that sort of thing, you know; declared that his attorney had had the dashed impertinence once to ask him about some investments, so he got another man and gave him a power of what's-its-name. Never was bothered now, he said, by checks or reports or any boring distractions of that sort; *this* man just kept him supplied with money, and once in a while he scrawled his name on something—all he had to do. Devilish simple, you see, but then Pugsley is so ingenious, so—oh, *clever*, you know.

“H’m!” coughed the judge, “Er—h’m!” And I stopped snapping the cover of my cigarette case, thinking he was about to say something, but he did not look up. By Jove, how I wished that he were *really* busy, so I might slip out without danger of offending him! But I was afraid to chance it—did so want to rub him right, don’t you know, on account of Frances. Knew he was still feeling a bit plucked over his slip of the tongue—showed plainly he was bothered, you know; you could tell by his puckered brows and the way he kept clearing his

throat. So meantime, knowing that the best thing was to appear unconscious—just give him time, you know—I fell carelessly to jingling some coins in my pocket and tapping my foot upon the hardwood, as I hummed a devilish neat little air from *La Juive* that I almost knew by heart:

*“Qu’il, l’apprenne de vous?
Hélas, je vous implore, bénissez mon époux—”*

By Jove, I had just got that far, when he shook his head with a kind of snort, threw down his pen, and got to his feet, facing me with a sickly smile.

“I am going to ask you to excuse me, my dear Lightnut”—came right out frankly like that, you know! “But the fact is—” he opened and shut his watch—nervously, you know—“I have just realized how—”

But I stopped him—couldn’t let him go on, of course: “Oh, I say, you know! Not another word, my dear Judge—I don’t care a jolly hang, dash it!” And to show him, I smiled, got out a cigarette, and perched kind of sidewise on the edge of the table. “I’m not a bit sensitive, don’t you know!”

He stared. “Indeed, no—I see you are not!” he said warmly.

I drew a light a bit airily. “Of course,” I puffed, “what you are thinking of is your servant, but I”—I shot him a light wink—“I’ve got to think a little about my own affair, don’t you—”

“*Lightnut!*” He caught me by the arms, his face

reddened almost black. "My *dear* boy, ten thousand pardons! I assure you—"

"That's just all right, Judge," I reassured him soothingly. "All I am holding out for is just to be sure we understand each other about Frances—that I may be sure I have your authority—"

"So *that's* it!" He relaxed with a deep breath. Then quietly: "My dear boy, you make me ashamed of myself—I *was* rude!" And he shook my hand. "Yes, indeed—you just go right ahead; almost anything is preferable to the vicious life Francis is leading—*anything!*" He sighed and his voice dropped confidentially: "I'm afraid even you would be discouraged if I told you of one or two disgraceful episodes at Cambridge—I *know* Scoggins would be!"

Scoggins again—always Scoggins! *Dash* Scoggins! Of course he would be discouraged, but I should not. Devilish simple reason, you know—wouldn't believe it, by Jove!

"Yes, I learned all about it from my daughter when she came home," he proceeded gloomily; "she feels that in a measure it has marred Miss Kirkland's visit with her."

Miss Kirkland! I recalled now that that was the name of the girl from China. By Jove, I preferred to think of her as the frump!

"For Miss Kirkland heard the gossip at Cambridge—seems she has friends there among the residents; and they were kind enough to tell her of these things of the year before as soon as they no—

ticed how devoted Francis was to her. At least this is what my daughter suspects—Miss Kirkland is not the kind to talk, you know.”

Oh, *wasn't* she! By Jove, I wondered what he would think if he had heard our conversation in the hall! But it wasn't for *me* to tell him he was warming a what's-its-name to his bosom, so I just mumbled a reply.

“Nevertheless,” he shrugged, “it is easy to see that she can't stand the sight of Francis.” He shook his head dismally. “Charming girl, Mr. Lightnut—a rare and perfect type of the English beauty at her best.”

Oh, *was* she! Not if I knew anything about it, and I had seen three seasons in London. By Jove, I was so terribly shocked I could just feel it in my face!

He seemed surprised. “Don't you think so?” he insisted.

“Well, I rather *don't*, you know!” It just blurted out of itself. “Oh, I say—now, you're not really in earnest?” And I screwed my glass so hard in my embarrassment, I hurt my eye—“You know she's a freak! Why, dash it—” I pulled up, for after all, she was a fellow guest.

He stared, jammed his hands deep in his pockets and bent toward me. “Now, look here, my boy, *do* you mean to say you don't think Miss Kirkland a beautiful and winning girl?”—I guess he did see I meant it, for he slowly emitted an expressive whis-

tle—"Well, you *are* hopeless then—utterly hopeless!" and dash it, he just groaned!

"But now, my dear young friend," he went on, and with a glance at the littered table, "I want you to go out and get some fresh air before the bloom of the morning is past—if you go out this way, you will avoid encountering those girls"—his hand gently but firmly urged me. "It has been just abominably selfish of me to have kept you stuffed in here; I know I have bored you to death with all this about the family black sheep—I feel that now I must let you escape."

"Oh, no—not at all!" I protested hastily and pulling back. Never would do to let him feel that way, you know! "Really, 'pon honor now, thing I want to do is just stay here and talk to you about Frances."

"Oh, *damn* Fran—h'm—I mean Francis will keep!" He caught himself hastily before the stare of my glass, fumbling with the papers to cover his confusion. Then he clapped me on the shoulder, pressing me again toward the door. "You just go ahead and do whatever you can with Francis, yourself—you are my only hope! Or wait, and I'll prepare the way for you to-night—that's it; that's best!"—and he went to nodding. Then he halted my progress and eyed me intently. "There's another thing:"—his voice dropped—"I think it's just as well Jack shouldn't know of your intentions about Francis; he would never approve—oh, *never!*"

He pursed his lips to just a thin curve as he shook his head positively. His eyes bored at me over his glasses. I moistened my lips.

"I know *he* feels you have already concerned yourself enough about Francis," he said deliberately. "The other night at your rooms—er, *you* know! Jack is so particular in those little things. Ah, there's a model for you!"

He looked upward and wagged his head as he laid his hand upon the door-knob. By Jove, how I wished he would open it, for the room was getting devilish warm!

"And as for things I deplore in Francis—oh, no, never any of that with Jack!"—he stiffened proudly—"he may, as I have said, imbibe a little too much, now and then; but when it comes to *scandal*—well, I have yet to hear the slightest breath—"

A sharp knock cut in abruptly.

"Come in!" And he swung the door open.

CHAPTER XXVI

FLORA

IN the doorway stood the butler, looking rather pale. With him was a woman—one of the angular sort, you know, and whom I judged to be the housekeeper.

She wasn't pale! No, by Jove, she was fiery red, even to her hair; and red, too, the anvil sparks that were snapping from her eyes. She marched right in, followed by Wilkes, who carefully closed the door—then stood discreetly aloof. Pantingly, she faced the judge, who was staring at her in amazement.

“Why, Miss Warfield,” he began, “what—”

“Judge Billings!” she exploded. And, by Jove, it was like the blast from a mighty bellows! “It's about Mr. Jack!”

The judge's face flushed apprehensively.

“Jack—about Jack?” he repeated. “Is he—er—worse?”

“*Worse?*” The bellows inflated sharply. “Worse is just it—it's the shock of finding out things I never even suspected!” She whirled upon the butler.

"*You* tell him!" she snapped sharply.

Wilkes shivered as under a sudden cold what's-its-name. He looked at her protestingly, his eye cutting a suggestive hint of my presence.

"Oh, go on!"—the judge nodded to him with some impatience. "It's all right—Mr. Lightnut is like one of us. Out with it, whatever it is!"

"Yes, sir." Wilkes coughed acquiescence, but shot a glance, half-reproachful, half-apprehensive, at the housekeeper.

She straightened, bristlingly.

"*Are* you going to tell him or not—and you a man?—or will you put it on me?" And she began to inflate again.

The poor devil took the plunge:

"The fact is, sir, Mr. Jack—h'm!"—he fidgeted through an instant's misery, then let it come: "It's about him and one of the maids, sir!"

"*Wh-a-a-t?*"

In the jaw-twisting roar, the judge all but lost his plate—his hand came up just in time to save it. As for Wilkes, his portly figure seemed to lift, balloon-like, from the floor for an instant, then settled back.

"It's Flora, sir," he uttered faintly.

"Flora?"

"Yes, sir." And Wilkes quailed before the judge's brows.

Miss Warfield sniffed.

The judge scowled at her. "Are you both crazy?" he demanded. "What is all this—what is it you

have to tell? Say it all in a word—one or the other of you—and have done!” His jaw settled with a snap.

The housekeeper assumed an injured air. “Well, sir,” she said with a toss, “it just means this: either I or Flora go at the end of this week—I give notice now!”

“All right,” said the judge with a sort of bland ugliness, “then that’s settled—you go! That is, unless you can get right down to brass tacks this instant and say what you’ve got to say.”

And, black as thunder, the old boy laid his hand upon the knob. By Jove, it did me good to see her crinkle up!

“I’m sure I beg your pardon, Judge,” she said, her voice modifying to a snuffling twang, “but this has so upset my nerves—Mr. Jack, of all men!” She fumbled for her handkerchief before she found it—Pugsley says they *always* do! “Such talk, sir! I *never*—” With a kind of gurgle, she suddenly flopped into the nearest chair and lay there, wriggling like a jolly auto freshly cranked, and snorting like its horn.

The judge, with head down, glared at her through his glasses.

“Talk? *That’s* nothing!”—he uttered a snort. “Why, hang it, madam, he’s *drunk*! Can’t you have a little Christian charity and put yourself in his place? The poor boy doesn’t know what he’s saying!”

She looked up with a head jerk. "That's *it*—that's just what makes it so awful," she sniveled; "the revelations, you know!"

"Revelations, fiddlesticks!" champed the judge, and he jerked his head to the butler. "Go on, Wilkes! What has Mr. Billings said that's queerer than—er—usual?"

Wilkes rubbed his neck. "Well, sir, to *my* thinking, it ain't so much what he's said that's queer—leastwise, it wasn't at first—as what he *did*. First off, there was his stalling about taking his bath, which was *on*-usual, for Perkins says, generally speaking, he's right keen for it—more 'specially when he's rather well soused—" Wilkes coughed. "H'm! I beg your pardon, sir! Anyhow, this time he wouldn't have it at all; *no*, sir! He was very excited about it—kinder out of his head, I may say—and buttonholed me and Perkins and went on a whole lot about only the under man being—no, let me see, *lower* man was what he said—the lower man being an—an"—Wilkes' brows contracted as he strained for it—"an am—h'm—funny I can't remember that word—a *amfibby* something—Well, anyhow, he said he never used water *ex*-ternally."

A penetrating moan from the handkerchief startled us.

"Then—then he never uses it at—*at all!*" came in a muffled wail.

The judge's teeth glittered at her in one united

row; then he jerked a nod to Wilkes. "Go on!" he commanded shortly.

But the butler was glooming sullenly at the fiery head that topped the bundle of black.

"He does, too!" he protested. "'Cause Perkins asked him if he wouldn't like some ice-water and he said he would if he might drink it his own way."

"His own way—um—well?"

"And when Perkins brought it, he poured it down his neck—yes, sir, every drop—"

The master cut in irritably: "His neck—confound it, man, tell your story without slang—or leave off! You know I detest—"

"*Not* slang, sir"—hastily—"his neck—outside, I mean—"

"Oh, stuff!"—incredulously—"mean to tell me—"

"He *did*, sir—I'll swear it!" The butler was respectful, but firm as the rock of what's-its-name. "Perkins tried to stop him and says: 'Wait a minute, Mr. Jack—you're making a mistake—it ain't 'round there; it's in *front*, you know!' And he turned on Perkins with a scowl something awful, and his langwige—well, it wasn't langwige at *all*! Perkins thought—" He paused.

"Um!" The judge had drawn me aside. "The alienation is unusual—what do you think, Lightnut?"—he looked grave—"it doesn't seem the ordinary hiatus—the passing alcoholic dementia, you know—there seems in it something hydrophobic—eh?"

“Oh, dash it, yes—*that’s* all!” I said offhand—just took a chance, don’t you know!

“Um!” He blinked at me; then faced square about. “I guess I’d better go up; perhaps when he sees me—”

He halted, leveling a stern glance at Wilkes.

“What the dev—what are you grinning about?” he rasped.

“I’m not, sir!” And the butler’s hand came down, revealing a sobered countenance. “I was just a-wondering if he would try to get you to put on the pajamas—he did all the rest of us, even—” His eye angled cautiously at the housekeeper, then batted at us significantly as her red head wriggled deeper. “Fact is, I think he’s kinder gone off about pajamas—just as I told you, sir.” His glance appealed to me. “Yes, sir, when I took you his message—you know—and brought back yours, it was even more so then.”

I felt myself get devilish red, then pale, for the judge’s eyes were on me.

“Yes,” he muttered, still looking at me, “he *was* telling me something the other day about some silk pajamas.”

And then I knew he *knew*!

“Yes, sir,” continued Wilkes, “when I got back with *your* message, Mr. Lightnut, he seemed to get more excited about them—about pajamas, I mean. He talked to me and Perkins through the door crack and wanted one of us to put ’em on—‘in the

interests of science,' *he* called it—and offered to pass 'em out."

"Poor fellow—*poor* fellow!"—and the judge looked pitiful—"well, why didn't you humor him?"

"I—I don't know, sir!" The butler looked embarrassed. "And, anyhow, it was just then Mrs. Warfield came, and he tried to get—"

"Oo-o-o-o!" from the black bundle.

"And then—" Wilkes hesitated, looking uneasy. "Go on, man!"

The butler coughed faintly. "Well, sir, when she—h'm—refused—it was then he asked for Flora. 'All right, then you bring me my Flora,' was what he said, and he sounded irritated like. 'Beg pardon, sir?' says Perkins, putting his head to the crack kinder inquiringly. 'My Flora, man!' he comes back sharp; 'just find and bring my Flora—and some *pins*;'—he seemed particular about the pins—'if I've got to stay alone, I want something to divert me—I want my Flora!' " And the butler mopped his forehead.

The bundle erected itself. "His '*wild* Flora,' was what he said," Miss Warfield corrected sharply; "he said he wanted to embrace—"

"Press," Wilkes corrected in turn.

She inflated with one drive of the piston. "If there's any difference, *I* don't know it!" came in a blow-out. And, dash me, if I believe she *did*. She looked it, by Jove!

She faced the judge, who was leaning back

against the table, looking kind of punctured, don't you know. By Jove, it seemed to me he had grown five years older in as many minutes!

This seemed to brighten her. "Wanted to *press* his 'wild Flora'—his very words!" her voice rasped.

My, but that woman looked vicious! She blew her nose, crossed her hands, and propped herself on one foot with an air of ladylike resignation.

"I was so shocked you might have knocked me over with a feather, but I managed to speak to him—I don't know how I ever did it!—and I said: 'You don't mean Flora, sir—you can't treat Flora that way!' And if you could have seen the way he flew to pieces! 'Why can't I?' he yelled at me. 'Do you think I haven't done it before?' Exactly what he said and I could hardly believe my ears; and then"—here she began to wobble and the handkerchief came up—"then he—he called me a wo-woman!"

And, by Jove, she was off the road!

But it seemed to give the judge new interest in life! He just needed some jolly thing, you know; and now he flared up sudden and went up in the air like a freshly touched-off what's-its-name:

"A woman?" His cheeks blew out like little red balloons. "Well, dammit, madam, what are you—*aren't* you a woman?"—hands on hips he just howled it at her—"what do you *think* you are?"

For an instant she quailed before him like the

stricken what-you-call-it—but *only* for an instant! Then her long neck coiled back and her eyes glittered beady and snake-like; I heard a sort of rattle in her throat, and then, of course, I knew she was going to strike—and she did!

“Very good, Judge!” She sniffed it. “Still it’s my duty to tell you—or any one that asks me, for that matter—exactly what Mr. Jack said!” She moistened her lips with the end of a red tongue, and clucked in a sad, pitying sort of way. “Your son looked straight at me through the door-crack and laughed in the most contemptuous way, and he said: ‘You just leave my Flora to me, woman! This time you’re talking of something you know nothing about and never did know—why, I’ve pressed Flora a thousand times!’—yes, sir, just what he said!”—she whirled on Wilkes—“you heard him say it, too!”

The butler’s sullen eye-droop admitted it.

“Huh!” And she tossed her head back with a nasty smile.

By Jove, she had got the judge full and square—you could see it as he stood there looking down, his face jolly gray and drawn and his under-lip kind of dragging through his teeth. He was a gamey old boy, but he had had a devilish hard knock where he lived you know—Jack!

“George!”—just a deep breath, you know—then he faced me. “You will excuse me, Lightnut? I

must see to this." And he walked out, followed by Wilkes.

Somehow, dash it, it just bowled me over to see his gray hairs humbled in this way to the what-you-call-it—he had such a devilish few of 'em left, too, you know! So, before I knew it, I had walked right up to the old mountain cat and took a hand myself.

"I say, you know!" I said, screwing my monocle down on her. "Too devilish bad you've got yourself in such a pickle—"

"*Me* in a pickle?" she snorted. "Huh!"—and her rosy neck went up again, but I struck first:

"You've played smash, don't you know," I went on, tightening my glass. "Awfully sorry—just wanted to give you a hint. You know this sort of thing's against the law—something or other criminal—malicious libel or malfeasance or—er—felonious assault or some dashed thing of that sort"—her eyes began to widen—"Oh, yes," I drawled, "you're in for the very deuce of a scrape unless you keep quiet!"

"Who says so?" she tried to bridle.

"*I* do!" I said, boring her steadily. "Witness, you know! So is Wilkes—both of us—to whatever dashed thing it is the judge decides you've done—I don't know, you know!"—I shrugged carelessly. "But *he* knows—he's a lawyer—and of course he'll explain it to Wilkes and me as witnesses. That's

what witnesses are for, don't you know! Better go to your room and await arrest quietly."

"Oh!" She kind of caught her breath, turning green and dropping her skinny hand upon a chair-back. And I was going on explaining to her, when I looked up and there was Jenkins.

"Pardon, sir," he said, looking at me oddly, "but there's a caller waiting, and he was so urgent and particular, I came—"

"Card!" I suggested, extending a couple of fingers.

Jenkins looked shocked and his arms remained rigidly down.

"Oh," I said, polishing my glass, "the gentleman—is he one of my—"

"It ain't a gentleman, sir,"—Jenkins got it out with difficulty; "it's only just—er—a person!"

"Eh? Oh, I say, now, Jenkins!" I protested.

"A person from the—" Jenkins blinked. "In fact, a police person—" his chin went up and he so far forgot himself as to indulge in a sniff—"come to see you about—" his eyebrows angled a lofty protest at the housekeeper's strained poise—"h'm—to see you about—*you* know!"

I was dashed if I knew—but not so Miss Warfield! She gave a sudden gasp and whirled herself in front of me, hands up and clasped like the other woman in a jolly play you know.

"Oh, sir!" she tremuloed, "Please—*please*—"

“Eh?” I said in alarm and stepping back, for, dash it, *I* didn’t know what she wanted; and for a moment I had an awful thought she wanted me to—*you* know! But the next second, I had her right.

“Um!” I said, tightening my lips. “Well, I’ll see!” And she looked so white—white as the driven what’s-its-name, you know—that I felt my devilish heart go out to her a bit. “All right,” I added soothingly, “you just go on about your duties and sit tight, you know, and I’ll see if I can—er—fix things!”

And, by Jove, I got past just in time to keep her from catching my hand and wringing herself over it.

“What the deuce—” I began outside, as Jenkins steered me toward the *porte-cochère*.

He looked warily at the footman waiting to serve us at the door—dashed if he didn’t almost lay his hand on my arm!

Then, behind his hand: “It’s about the pajamas, sir!”

“Eh?” I gasped, falling back.

He stooped after me and his breath tickled my ear:

“*Hers*, sir! *You* know, that night—h’m!”

“Oh!” I said faintly. And this time he *did* catch my arm, and I was devilish glad, by Jove!

CHAPTER XXVII

I RECOVER THE PAJAMAS

OUTSIDE, swinging his club and kicking his heel in the macadam, I found a fat policeman—from New York, I knew by his helmet.

He turned and I saw—O'Keefe!

“Oh, there you are, sir!” And with a careless duck and a wave, he ambled forward and placed in my hands a parcel.

“It's them, all right!” he said with a fat wink. “The black silk pajamas—we got 'em, you see!”

“Jove!” I ejaculated, staring. Then suddenly I got the jolly idea full and strong, you know, and I was just so dashed relieved and delighted, I shook hands with him—fact!

“Oh, I say, Jenkins,” I remarked, twisting my glass at him, “by Jove, you know—eh?”

“Certainly, sir!” Jenkins admitted calmly. “I knew in a minute soon as he told me!”

And, by Jove, I believed him! Had to, you know; it was only just one instance of the devilish clever, intuitive way Jenkins had of boring into things!

“Yes, sir,”—O'Keefe thoughtfully transferred a big wad to the other cheek—“the captain gave me a

little lay off so's I could bring 'em up,"—he studied with interest the top of one of the pillars of the *porte-cochère* and shrugged lightly—"of course it wasn't just because of the reward, though of course five hundred bucks is five hundred bucks, but we thought you might like to have 'em—*thank you, sir!*" For out of my folder I peeled five crisp centuries and laid them in his palm.

This done, Jenkins glanced at me and turned suggestively toward the entrance, but O'Keefe didn't make a move to go and no more did I. Fact was, I had a devilish keen notion that the old cat up-stairs would be watching for the policeman's departure through the grounds, and it came to me that to play him a little longer wouldn't do any harm, but might seal her jolly mouth the tighter.

O'Keefe thanked me again. "You're sure solid with the force, sir," he assured, nodding earnestly. "Just remember my number and the name of Captain Clutchem if any time in town you get rounded up in any of our little—er, *you know!*"—he dropped a cheerful wink at me and glanced again at the bills. "Expect maybe you're anxious to know if Tim gets a divy outer this," he proceeded; and I murmured some jolly something. Of course, I *wasn't* anxious, you know; fact is, I didn't care a dash—didn't even remember who Tim was. "Yes, siree, he'll get ten of this!" he finished impressively.

Meantime, he had been hunching himself up until now he succeeded in wrenching from somewhere be-

hind, a ragged and shiny old wallet, bulging with worn and greasy papers. Within this, with a flourish, he laid the bills.

Then he faced us with an air of increased cheerfulness.

“So much all for the velvet!” he remarked with another wink.

Of course it was of no importance to set him right about the material; as for that, I didn't care a jolly hang if he thought they were made of linoleum! But it gave me the idea of just peeking into a corner of the parcel to satisfy myself that its contents were of filmy black silk—and they were! I went no further; not for all the gold of what's-its-name would I have profaned the package with further investigation.

“Why, sir, I don't think you need be worrying but what they're all right,” and the big policeman nodded confidently; “in fact there don't seem to be no damage at all.” He added meditatively: “Which is some wonder, considering how we had to rough-house Foxy Grandpa before we softened him down in his cell th' other night.” Here his cheeks swelled and he sent a long sheaf of brown liquid at a grasshopper on the freshly whitened door-stones—and got it, too, neatly missing the polished toe of Jenkins' boot. “No, sir!”—emphatically—“I don't think you'll be hearing any holler from your lady friend when she goes to—*eh*, what?”—he stared at Jenkins blankly, for Jenkins had coughed—“Oh,

excuse *me!*”—and his big hand lifted apologetically to his mouth, while his eyes rolled upward—“What I just meant was that I know they’re all to the good; I went *all* over ’em!”

“*Oh!*” I muttered, turning rather faint. I dropped the parcel and Jenkins picked it up. By Jove, for a moment, he came jolly near having to pick *me* up, too, I was that shocked and prostrated!

“The *only* thing—the only thing ’tall—” I had to wait through an agonizing moment while his tongue gathered his wad and peremptorily expelled it, this time enlivening the cold, dead monotony of the silver-gray macadam—“was her—I mean, was the pants.”

“Ah-h!” I put my hand to my side and looked at Jenkins appealingly, but he was looking upward, his eyes kind of cast over like a bird’s; the lines of his mouth tightened to an arch—and I knew *he* was suffering too! But we *must* try to stand it a little longer—just a little!

Through one instant’s respite, Mr. O’Keefe’s thick tongue was occupied in striving to glutenize the entire wrapper of a much crushed and awfully yellow cigar. Then he separated a mouthful from the end and proceeded:

“I did notice with the legs, that one of ’em was just a bit longer than th’ other, and down at the station we was a wondering if—” the brown head of a crackling match drew a long, curving what-you-call-it on the smooth, creamy masonry, and he

paused to pump madly, striving to coax a draft of smoke—"we wondered if 'twas—*intentional*." His eyes sought mine inquiringly.

By Jove, I was so frozen with horror, I couldn't even look away; just stood there, helpless, you know, and my jolly monocle hanging limp—couldn't have lifted it to have saved my life! Felt my senses just growing numb all the while with the tragedy of the thing, the thought of this coarse monster's touch defiling the dainty, gossamer garment that had shrouded her sacred what-you-call-'ems—Oh, it was *awful!*

I wondered if the housekeeper could be looking still from her tower, like Sister Anne in the story of what's-his-name! Perhaps, if I could, I would better hold out just—

"Um—*ah*, I see! It *was*, then!"—he was nodding with an air of understanding, pausing in the struggle with the refractory cigar. His strained and reddened face shaped sympathetically. "Just what I thought and told 'em!" he bobbed with satisfaction. "*I understand! You ain't got no need to make no explanations to me!*" and he lifted his fat hand to restrain them. "Why, my wife's own grandmother had a club foot, and to her last day if she got outer bed on the wrong side, the old lady went a header sure—oh, *I know!*"

A moment before, I had thought that so far as the mere matter of jolly misery was concerned, I had sounded the what-you-call-'ems; but now my

dashed brain was reeling before this new horror! To think that *she* was—but oh, it *couldn't* be! And yet I recalled ominously that most of the time I had known her, I had only seen her sitting!

Mr. O'Keefe exerted another vain pull at his cigar and poised it critically between his fingers. "I don't seem to make this piece of rope go," he remarked superfluously, and I thought his eye cut me with a mild reproach. There was nothing to do but take the hint and produce my case—just refilled in my room with Paloma perfectos. Oh, I was glad to do it, by Jove!—glad to be able to do it—devilish glad to find I wasn't paralyzed, I mean!

"Why, thanks!" His fingers only removed three cigars, but I just made him take them all! *Oh*, yes, for the case would *have* to be refilled now, anyhow, dash it!

"By-y-y the way, sir!" He closed one eye at me as he carved from the brown beauty a half inch of its waxy bud, using for the maltreatment a perfectly brutal knife. "That was a neat try-on you made to copper the thief yourself—a *leetle* irregular, you know," he shook his head at me, "but, as the captain said, we ain't making no point about that with a gent like *you*—sure not!"—another imperishable line of beauty upon the receptive stone, and he puffed inhalations of joy. "But I knew you never could get him to the station—I could have told you."

"Oh!" I remarked, puzzled. By Jove, I had a

dashed awful thought for a moment that I must be losing my intelligence! I looked at Jenkins again, but he had not yet come back to the ground.

"Oh, I'm on, sir!" Another one of those awful winks as his club scratched his helmet sideways. "You know I saw everything—I was right there at the Kahoka, you know!"

"Oh, *that!*" I said, understanding. For I knew then that he was talking about Foxy Grandpa in my rooms. I had almost forgotten the jolly old vagabond, but it occurred to me that perhaps I ought to show some interest as they must have recaptured him along with the pajamas. "I say!" I chirped up, "did you have much trouble about it—getting him again, you know?"

"Trouble?" O'Keefe's lip doubled contemptuously. "It was easy as butter!" His hand spread, palm downward, in an expressive gesture. "Why, he doubled right back to the Kahoka!"

"By Jove, you know!" I exclaimed, startled.

"Surest thing you know! I collared him right in front and with the goods!" Mr. O'Keefe expectorated eloquently. "My, but he did put up an awful holler—said the pajamas were his own and he had just had 'em made. And bluff—*well!*"—he fanned the air for a moment in the effort to find an appropriate gesture—"I'm used to these swell con men, but that gun was the limit—pulled out a card case, mind you, and letters, and wanted me to go with him to his club—his *club!*" the big fellow doubled

over in a spasm of mirth that all but choked him. "I told him I'd *give* him the club if he didn't go quietly—for you see I recognized him in a minute; you can't lose them freak kind! Besides, he give himself away: told me he'd overlook my conduct on this occasion *and the other*, if I would release him. Well, that was enough! I beckoned Jimmy Dwyer across and we run him down the line to the station. Oh, we got him there, but it wasn't easy—for *him!* And there he'll stay a while!"

He had to pause and pump air, he was so winded.

"Jove!" I said absently. Fact is, I was getting jolly tired standing so long—never had stood so long that I could remember. Wondered if the house-keeper wasn't getting tired, too, wherever she was watching from! Better give her a few minutes more, though; so I shifted to the other leg, but yawned comfortably and openly. As for Jenkins, he had just frozen up like a jolly image, his eyes getting filmier and duller as O'Keefe proceeded, his chin gradually working higher and his mouth corners lower, until now they almost pointed to the ground. He was impressive and devilish correct, but somehow the whole dashed thing seemed lost on O'Keefe.

He even asked Jenkins for a match—but of course received no attention. "Gone off in a trance!" he said to me, with a vulgar jerk of his fat thumb. And then he touched Jenkins with his stick—fact; touched him!—and winked!

"But it *woulder* tickled you," he resumed, using

one of the vestas I extended and puffing the cigar until it almost flamed, "if you coulder seen the grand-stand play this guy put up before the sergeant! But the old man just let him blow it all off; just sat there calm behind the desk, chewing away and jabbing a pen through the blotter, while this stiff fumed and spouted—oh, something scandalous—bringing in the names of mighty near all the important people in New York; his *friends*, he said! Oh, yes, he mentioned *you* in particular, sir!"—and his face expanded in a relishing grin.

"Dashed impudence!" I murmured feebly.

"*Oh, yes,*" carelessly, "but the sarge quieted him—just purty near soothed him to sleep before he got *through*, you know—it's one of his ways!"—his glance lifted solemnly.

"Fine, you know!" I murmured admiringly. I reflected approvingly upon what a dashed good thing it was to have a man in that position—whatever it was—who was of such a devilish mild and gentle temperament: the quiet word—the soft answer—the kindly remonstrance—all that sort of thing, you know.

"We're a leetle crowded now," the big cop pursued, reflectively gouging into the mortar with the long blade of his knife, "and we had to put him in the cell with a gorilla what's always wandering back to the jungle for too much strong-arm work—maybe you read about him? He scragged a whole family th' other night and threw 'em down the fire-escape."

“Oh!” I said uneasily. “But isn’t he—er—rather dangerous?”

“*Naw!*” A careless but vigorous head shake. “*Only* in his sleep, you know—it’s his dreams leads him off—*or* unless some one touches or crowds him; then he gets peevish and—oh, well he *might*, of course—” Mr. O’Keefe’s expressive shrug finished out the idea. But I wouldn’t have heard it anyhow, I was in such a yawn.

By Jove, I was sure the housekeeper would have chucked it by now, or else worked herself up into a swoon! Why, *my* jolly foot was asleep! It was safe to let him go. I looked at my watch and coughed, and Jenkins came to and backed up to the door, sidling for me to pass within. The policeman straightened his helmet and murmured words of adieu.

“But, if no offense, there’s just one question I’d like to ask you, sir.” He swung his club with a smiling, genial air.

“Oh, dash it, no!” I responded absently.

My eye had been suddenly attracted by a feathery gleam of white through the trees. It was slowly moving up the slope to a pavilion overlooking the Tappan Zee.

He drew nearer with a confidential air. “Just a little argument I had with the old woman, you know, about them pajamas. Would you mind telling me—*as* man to man, y’understand—if them garments is”—his voice dropped—“is like her real

shape—figger, I mean—h'm?" And he tapped the parcel lightly with his stick.

Jenkins cleared his throat loudly and shifted the pajamas to his other side. As for myself, I just winced as under the stroke of a what-you-call-it, but one end of my dashed brain was being pulled by the flashing play of the dappling sunlight there upon—

"By Jove, her figure exactly!" I ejaculated, staring.

For it *was* her—no, dash it, *she*, I mean! I had a perfectly clear view of her now as she paused on a little point and hung there looking out over the Hudson. In her hand was a full-blown, ripened rose, and her lips were shaping in ravishing little pouts as musingly she blew the petals from her. But go they would not, but hugged back in the arms of the light breeze, circling and fluttering about her glorious sunny head like a swarm of rosy butterflies. It made a pretty picture!

"And what's more, they're just her color, too!" I murmured tenderly, forgetful of everything but her, unmindful that I was not alone. For under my hand I could feel my jolly heart quivering like a champagne cork, freshly unfettered and thrilling eagerly under the impulse of the mad, dancing, joyous spirit within.

"The one lovely woman in all the world!" I breathed aloud, and I felt my eyes grow oddly moist.

And for a minute I went off in a jolly trance.

“Good-by, sir!”

It was O’Keefe’s voice—oddly constrained.

“Eh?” I ejaculated, blinking at him as I came back. Then I remembered—but what was it he had been asking? Something—

“Just, good-by!” he repeated with elaborated gentleness. Then, straightening: “No offense, I hope, if we let it go at that—I mean, I guess you won’t miss it if we *don’t* shake hands?”

I glanced at the gloves he was drawing on.

“Oh, dash it, no!” I responded absently, and my eyes coasted up the slope again—then dropped back disappointedly, for she had disappeared within the pavilion.

“Of course, rich people has got privileges,” Mr. O’Keefe was ruminating somberly; “and I ain’t saying a word, not a word, mind you!”—the glove that lightly emphasized this displayed all fingers widely and generously spread. “The captain’ll tell you he ain’t having to tell me, like some of ’em, to be careful about keeping off the grass”—he shrugged—“oh, well, perhaps enough said!”—and he turned away.

Then he turned back. “Of course, that other part of it”—it would seem that his club, extended pistol-like, was not leveled at Jenkins so much as at the pajamas—“of course, nobody can’t *help* that—that’s Nature—I’m some that way myself, though nothing like *so* much, and nothing like *so* heavy as I was. We’ll leave that part out of it—I’m willing

—but, *gentlemen*”—Jenkins paled, and swayed so horribly, I was almost sure he would go—“when it comes to—comes to—” With a helpless head-shake, he gave it up and contented himself with expectorating violently upon the ground. Then he moved slowly away.

His helmet tossed as he looked back. “I guess we *all*’ve got our little prejudices,” he remarked sententiously; “I know *I* have! I’m from the South!”

And without another word, Mr. O’Keefe presented his broad back to us, and swinging his stick carelessly, sauntered down the drive.

“What the deuce!” I exclaimed, looking after him. “I say, Jenkins, what did he mean?”

Jenkins’ face expressed mild reproach and surprise.

“Can it possibly matter, sir?” he questioned wearily. “Persons of—er—that sort, you know, sir?”

“Jove!” I uttered, relieved.

Jenkins’ coldly elevated brows dismissed the matter from further consideration. He lifted the parcel with a slight gesture of inquiry.

I had already come to a decision about it: I would send it to Billings! Perhaps the retrieving of the pajamas would have a soothing effect upon his poor mind!

I gave Jenkins instructions. “H’m! Of course, manage to speak with him alone,” I cautioned, hav-

ing thought of Judge Billings; "and don't forget the message."

"Certainly, sir," said Jenkins attentively. "I'm just to say: 'Mr. Lightnut's compliments, sir, and he says *you'll* know what to do with these.'"

I nodded. "Exactly, and I'll wait here—but, oh, hurry, dash it!" And I looked longingly at the pavilion and tried to feel if my part was right.

He *did* hurry! By Jove, he was back almost immediately and looking a bit rattled.

"Yes, sir!"—he coughed as I screwed my glass inquiringly—"I got there just as the judge went into his room across the corridor, and Mr. Billings opened the door the minute I said I was from you. I gave him the package and the message and he took it over in a corner; and then in about a minute I heard him chuck it somewhere and say some long word. He came back to me, looking kinder irritated and with his eyes snapping."

"Oh!" I uttered nervously. "Er, what did he say, Jenkins?"

Jenkins sighed. "Oh, well, sir, nothing as you might say was anything, *really*; he jerks out kinder crossly: 'Tell Mr. Lightnut, I say one thing at a time, and give him this!'"

On the scrap of paper I clutched out of Jenkins' hand was a crazy scrawl of just a half-dozen words:

I'm a biped, not a centipede!

I squinted through the dashed thing twice, but

could make nothing of it—I even tried it backward!

“Jove!” I muttered perplexedly. “It’s rum, Jenkins!”

Jenkins’ mouth tightened and relaxed. “H’m, what *I* thought, sir,” he responded soberly. “The demon rum, sir!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

“IF EVER I FIND A MAN!”

“I TRUST you’ve not been getting into trouble, Mr. Lightnut!”

Her lovely eyes were dancing with mischief as they hung there below mine—eyes, bluer than the Hudson at our feet; yet between the jolly ripples that played across those pools of truth I could glimpse far down into depths that were the most devilishly entrancing, darkly, deeply, beautifully—oh, *you* know!

Why, by Jove, I almost took a cropper right into them! Only caught just in time, you know; straightened right on the verge, as it were—and came up with a gasp, monocle dangling.

Had almost forgotten the dashed windows—and the two cats that might be looking out!

I murmured some jolly apology, adding:

“Oh, yes—quite so; certainly! I *mean*—eh, what?”

She was smiling, her rose-petal lip dragging through her teeth.

“The ‘bobby,’ you know, just now”—she nodded toward the *porte-cochère*—“I was positive he had

come to drag you away to your loathsome dungeon. And when he retired, I was—oh, *so* relieved!" And she clasped her hands, her eyes lifting upward.

"Oh, I say now—were you, though?" I grinned delightedly and slipping to a rustic chair beside her, looked her affectionately in the eye. For all her air of chaffing, I knew that under it was a current of anxiety for me—the darling!

I screwed my glass at her tenderly.

"What would you have done," I said softly, "if he had—er—lugged me off, you know?"

"*Can* you ask?" What a reproachful side-glance she shot me through the meshes of her silken what-you-call-'ems! "Why, of course, I should have drawn my good *excalibar* and run him thr-r-rough and thr-r-r-ough!"

By Jove, how she said it! And she illustrated with the stemless rose—dash it, no; the roseless stem! She was *superb*—looked like the jolly fencing girl; only a dashed sight more stunning, don't you know! And her *excalibar*, too! Didn't know what a jolly *excalibar* was, but guessed it was some delightfully mysterious but deadly feminine thing—some kind of submerged hat-pin-sort-of-thing, you know—*that* sort, dash it! Yet she would have drawn it—and her *good* one, too, she said!

"Jove!" I said feelingly. "Would you, *really*?" And I almost took her hand—and again remembered the windows! So I just shot her a look.

Her glorious eyes sparkled. "That is, I would if I had one," she said smiling; "but I'm afraid poor Arthur lost the last and only one. Sad, isn't it?"

"Oh!"

I just felt my jolly heart sink like what's-its-name. Who the deuce was "poor Arthur?" This must be another—some other thundering chap who had been engaged to her. And what a rotten, careless beggar, too, to have lost it—that is, if he *really* had! Of course, he would say so, anyhow. And how the deuce did he get it, in the first place—did she give it to him, or did he—

By Jove, how I should have liked to punch Arthur's head! Always did hate a chap with that name! I flushed guiltily, but she did not see. For the moment, she was looking off dreamily across the valley.

"I wonder," she said pensively, "why it is one can never find another man like Arthur. Do you suppose it is because he was the ideal?"

For an instant, I swallowed hard—then I plucked up bravely, or tried to, don't you know.

"Jolly likely!" I chirped. Then gloomily: "Oh, I say, you know, was he *your* ideal?"

"Always!"—the blue eyes lighted wistfully—"I suppose it's because he was my first love; I found him so brave, so noble-mannered, you know—so simple!"

Simple! Dash simple people—never could stand

them! Thing *I* admired was brains! Aloud I said gently—almost humbly:

“So glad you like him, don’t you know—*did* like, I mean!”

“*Did* like? I do still!”—her tone lifted in earnest protest—“I love to think of brave, dear Arthur and his knights—so few, and yet so full of love, of gallantry and daring!”

So *his* nights were like that! By Jove, I was devilish glad then that they had been *so few*—that was some comfort, dash it! I wondered if the beggar was dead. But what difference did it make now, after all? She was mine now and she knew I knew it; that was why this sweet, ingenuous child was laying bare to me her past—the darling!

Really, I ought not to let her go on.

“Never mind them now,” I urged soothingly. And heedless of the windows, I hitched a wee bit closer. “That’s all past and gone and you and I will yet see as good nights as they *ever* were.” I spoke with assurance. “Don’t *you* think so?” I added softly.

She sighed. “I don’t know—I hope so!”—she lingered dubiously over it, looking away again, the while her hand put back the fleecy, golden what-you-call-it that was snuggling to her eyes. I looked at the goddess-like forearm, bared to above the elbow, where it slipped from sight under the roll of sleeve, and thought of that night in my apartment when she had made me feel of her biceps, don’t you know.

How deliciously shy she was! Remembered hearing Pugsley say they are often that way with the development of love. Told me he thought he'd get married once—looked over the girls of his set and picked out one; then he went to see her. She was devilish cordial at first and until Pugsley began to tell her about it, then she began to grow agitated—finally went out of the room and had hysterics. *Next* time he saw her she hardly was able to speak to him! Said that ended it and he passed her up—too dashed much bother trying to follow 'em, he decided; they were too high-strung, too emotional, too uncertain of themselves, *he* thought.

I gave her five seconds, and then—

“You don't *know*?” I repeated with gentle reproach. “Oh, I say, you know! You know you *know* you know!” By Jove, that sounded rather rum, but I knew she knew I *knew* she knew—see?

She looked at me sidewise, her slender forefinger pressing the half-parted lips slowly shaping in a curve. Then her little teeth flashed, jewel-like—regular jolly pearl setting in the frankest, sweetest smile!—and then her glorious arm and wrist arched suddenly toward me.

“Yes!” she said contritely, and with the most delightful, kindest inflection and laugh—such a laugh!—a laugh gurglingly melodious—oh, dash it, yes; I mean just that!—like the flute notes in the overture to what's-his-name—*that* sort!

“That's the way I love to hear a man talk!” she

said warmly. "I think it takes an American to stand up for his own place, his own times—*please!*"

And gently, but with a lovely smile, she withdrew her hand that I had folded close in mine. I let it go, for I saw her look toward the house, and, of course, *I* understood—jolly careless of me not to have remembered—but she would know from my nod and shrug that I comprehended.

And really, by Jove, it was almost as pleasant as holding her hand, just to watch her leaning back against the iron pillar about which curved the dark-leaved tendrils of some purple-flowering vine. By Jove, she just looked like a stunning, white, Easter-card angel—that's what!—even to the golden hair they always have and the jolly wings; for her gleaming arms, spread behind her head, made you think of that. But *that* was as near as one of them could come to her, for no golden-haired angel in white flowing nightgown was ever a patch on her for *style!*

Never a one could look so *chic* as she did in her smart linen suit, with its blue flannel collar, caught low with a flowing, breezy tie; and no jolly angel *I* ever saw pictured could sport a waist like that, so dainty, so modish, so jolly snug and—er—squeezable, don't you know—*never!* And I was devilish sure that no barefooted or sandaled angel would ever dare to put a foot beside one of those little white Oxfords or that arching instep, just blushing faintly through the silken mesh that

held it—well, I guess not! And where the angel, I should like to know, that could match her glorious, fluffy pompadour or the distracting little golden smoke wisps that whirled and pulled and tangled and tossed and twisted and tugged, trying to lift her in their feeble arms into the current of the wandering breeze?

I sighed, and my deep breath brought her gaze back to me and her flashing smile as well.

“And so,” she said, lifting her little chin, “you think there are just as many knights now as there used to be?”

I almost laughed at the child-like question—but I didn’t! Dash it, no, I wouldn’t have done so for the world. Just looked at her seriously and answered her in kind:

“Perfectly sure of it, don’t you know!”

And, by Jove, I was! Knew if there had been any change, some newspaper-reading chap at the club would have mentioned it—*that* was safe; especially one silly ass who was always reading of some jolly comet that was coming. *He* would know about the nights.

“Yes—oh, yes, there are just as many,” I affirmed positively, and added quickly: “*More*, you know!” For suddenly I remembered it was leap-year, and I knew there was some jolly rhyme about leap-year gives us one day more—so, of course, there’d be another *night!*

“You don’t know how glad I am to hear you say

that," she said musingly. "There are just as many knights, you mean, but the conditions have changed—the *man* is changed—is that it?"

I should say the man was changed! "Oh, dash it, yes!" I blurted. By Jove, I hoped there wouldn't be another change.

"You mean"—with a little, challenging, puzzled smile, she leaned forward, her elbow resting upon her knee like a sculptured, Grecian pillar; her flower-like curving fingers supporting her chin like a Corinthian what's-its-name, you know, the sort of thing the ancient what-you-call-'ems always added to top off their stunning marble columns—you know!—well, like that—"you mean we may find knights, not only in the field, but in the shops, upon the streets—even in the slums; or in the hospitals, in the church or even on the bench—that is your idea?"

It *wasn't* my idea at all—I should say not! Who wanted to spend nights prowling around *that* way? Why—why, it wasn't respectable, dash it! Besides, that sort of thing—excursioning about seeing things—was devilish tiresome, if you asked me. I never did do it, even abroad, where you meet Americans, jolly bored and tired, doing all sorts of rum places no one else ever thinks of, don't you know.

And as for a *bench*! Well, it was like her, in her innocence of the world, not to know how downright vulgar that would be. I had seen couples sitting evenings in the park—and I *knew*!

But I answered tactfully :

“I don’t mean those places so much, don’t you know—I think we can find lots jollier and better nights elsewhere.” And I closed my free eye and beamed at her through my glass. “Don’t have to go so far, you know ; under one’s own roof, or—er—some one else’s roof, for instance—why not *here*?” I jerked my head toward the old stone pile behind us.

“Oh!”—her eyebrows lifted at me—“so you’ve thought of that, too?”—she nodded gravely—“you mean in the library there?”

I winked assent.

The library suited *me* all right!

“Just now,” she said in an oddly sobered voice, “I looked in as I passed through, and he was looking so crushed, so worn and tired, you know—he had just come from up-stairs ; and yet he faced me so bravely and smilingly”—she shook her head—“poor fellow!”

I stared—puzzled, don’t you know. Offhand, dash me if I could see what the judge had to do with our evenings together—why, I had his own approval of my suit. Then I remembered that she, of course, didn’t know that—*yet*. Probably what she had in her dear little mind was that he might be holding the library—and he *would*, if he continued to think he was busy ; for I had heard him say he expected to work all night. But then, there

were dozens and dozens of others places we could go—well, I should just *say!*

I had just bent forward to suggest this to her when I saw she was going to speak. So I waited, smiling at her tenderly.

“And about Arthur—” she began, and I cut myself a painful stab with my nails—right in the palm—“now there is a case where I think you find”—she nodded toward the house again—“where you find one of his superb qualities, the one quality that, of all, I admire in a man the most.”

“By Jove!” I said, leaning forward. I wondered what it was—and then, dash it, I asked her.

“Just *trust!*” she said simply, and her face grew luminous. “Faith, perhaps I should say. *My* father has it larger than any man I ever knew; it is something that goes out from him with his friendship, with his love, making a dual gift”—her voice dropped thoughtfully—“I have studied it in him all my life, and it has always seemed so beautiful to me—so wonderful—the unquestioning peace he has”—her blue eyes widened, shining—“has ever in return for the perfect, abiding trust that he gives to the thing he calls his own. I *know*, for he has made *me* feel it from the time I was a tiny little girl!” The last word was almost a whisper, so tense, so vibrant with feeling was it—she *seemed* to have forgotten my existence. “And if ever I find a man—” she breathed.

I coughed slightly and she started, stared at me—and then the dimple deepened in her cheek, lost in a bed of jolly roses. Her laughter pealed forth, bird-like—delicious!

“I *beg* your pardon!” she said. “But when I think of papa and of how he believes in his children, especially poor little *me*, I think I must get—” Her roguish, puzzled smile searched my face. “*How* is it you say it?—oh, I know—‘I think I must be getting *dippy!*’”

And it was the first slang I had heard from those sweet lips since the night she was in my rooms!

CHAPTER XXIX

“BECAUSE YOU—ARE YOU”

POOR, brave-hearted girl! How pitiful and heartrending to a keen-eyed man of the world, seemed her poor, little sham about her father's trust in her! For *I* knew the facts, you know!

What a little thoroughbred she was! By Jove, I just sat there for a full two minutes, bending toward her worshipfully, but with such a lump choking my devilish throat that dash me if I could chirp a single word. Just sat there—that's all—blinking damply at her with my free eye, studying with growing wonder the light she managed to summon to her face; heartsick for the care-free mockery of the cherry lips, shaping seemingly in a meditative whistle; all my jolly heart beating time to the lithe-some tapping of her smart little boot upon the wooden floor. And she? She, brave heart, leaning back watching me through her long, fringing lashes—forcing a quizzical smile to her face, the while the jolly worm was gnawing at her what-you-call-'ems!

And suddenly it came to me that I just couldn't and wouldn't let her go on this way, without the

sympathy of the man she loved; without the precious consolation of knowing that he knew! She was being badgered and rough-shouldered and put upon and distrusted and maligned by every one she knew, and she had *no* one in all the world to turn to but me—and—

Oh, I wanted her to know what *I* thought, don't you know!

I slipped to the seat beside her.

"Er, Miss Billings—" I began, thinking absent-mindedly of what I should say, and forgetting that we were quite alone.

"'Miss Billings!' *Why* do you call me that?" Her lovely brows puckered. "I remember, now, that's twice you—"

"*Frances*, then!" I corrected softly.

She straightened, her bosom lifting with a quick intake. By Jove, that was what she wanted!

"Oh!" Then she leaned slowly back, looking at me thoughtfully through half-closed eyes, her lips parted in the oddest smile.

And I screwed my monocle tight and let her have smile for smile, determined to chirp her up and make her feel our oneness—that sort of thing, you know. And I succeeded! For of a sudden her head went back and the joyous peal of her canary laugh started off the jolly birds in the trees above us.

"Oh, you—" A stare, and then another burst as she bent forward, face buried in her hands. Then it lifted sharply, flame-dyed—her lips tremulous,

her eyes shining like sapphire stars. "Oh!" she gasped, and how I envied the little hand she pressed against her waist; but the windows—dash the windows! "That's — that's *it* — Frances — just that much! But, do you know, I don't—don't believe you really know my full name. I remember now several th—" She bent toward me witchingly, her wide blue eyes challenging my candor. "*Honestly, now—do—you?*"

So it was *that* thought that was tickling her! Well, by Jove, I had her there, for I had heard the judge mention her name in full. I would surprise her!

"Oh, *don't* I?" I exclaimed, winking as I polished my glass. "Well, how about Frances Leslie Billings?" I let her have it slowly, distinctly, and with yet a note of triumph I could not altogether hide. And then remorseful for her amazed expression, I explained frankly: "Got it from your father this morning, don't you know, during our long talk about you in the library."

"Wh—"

Then she swallowed and her face fell perfectly blank. By Jove, I could have kicked myself for a jolly ass for breaking it to her so raw! Of course, she would know that if her father talked of her, it would be nothing for me to hear that was true or kind—nothing she could wish might be said to the man she loved.

I hastened to reassure her:

“But I don’t believe a dashed word of anything he said about you”—I spoke hotly—“and I don’t care a jolly hang for what the others said, either—so there you are!”

“Oh, you *don’t?*” Could tell how I had touched her by her expression, don’t you know; and she fell to looking at me the queerest way. “And would you mind telling me who the ‘others’ are?”

I eyed her gloomily, sympathetically. As *if* she didn’t know already!

“Well—oh, dash it, my mind has been filled with—er—just anything!” I began cautiously.

“I know,”—she murmured it as if to herself—“one can *see* that!” And she bit her lip.

“In the first place, you know”—and there I pulled up. No, dash it, I wasn’t going to say a jolly word about poor Jack—no, *sir!* But then, about the other one—well, *she* was just a treacherous snake in the what’s-its-name, and she ought to be exposed. By Jove, she should be!

“It’s the frump, you know,” I said indignantly.

“The—the *what?*”

Her pretty teeth flashed like the keyboards of a tiny organ—you could even hear a little gurgly, musical quiver somewhere behind. And then I remembered that, of course, she wouldn’t know whom I meant.

“Oh, your guest, you know—your friend from school,” I went on, trying to tread cautiously and

yet feeling myself growing red. "Oh, see here now, I don't like to say things, but—er—"

"Oh, *go on!*" she trilled, her sweet face shining wistful.

"Well, I mean this—er—Miss Kirkland; came out with us this morning, don't you know. I think of her as *the frump*—little idea—er—nickname of mine, you know, she's so *awful!*" And I screwed my glass with a chuckle.

For an instant I thought she wouldn't catch it, she stared at me so blankly. *Then* the joke of it—the jolly aptness, so to speak—got her full and square, and she just lifted a scream, hugging her knee and rocking back and forth, her face suffused, her laughter pealing like a chime of bells.

And I just rocked, too, keeping her company. Really, I don't think I ever laughed so much since some chap plunked down on the hard crown of my new tile last winter. At least I *wanted* to laugh—in church, you know, and it's so awful how you feel there when something—oh, *you* know! And if you could have seen that poor fellow's face!

By Jove, how glad I was for her jolly sense of humor that could see the point of things so quickly, and think them *clever*. Always had so dashed little patience with stupid people, don't you know. And just here another little thing came to me and I let her have it:

"Oh, I say!"—I leaned nearer, chuckling—"your

father pretends to think her a most beautiful and winning girl—*fancy!*” And my face stretched itself in such a jolly grin that I could hardly hold my glass.

She bent toward me, smiling adorably. “You mean this—er—‘Miss Kirkland’?”

I nodded chortlingly.

She peered at me through her long what-you-call-'ems—oh, *such* a way!

“But *you* don't think so, *do* you?” How sweetly, how fetchingly she said it!

“Me?” I gasped. By Jove, in my horror, I lost my grip upon my jolly grammar. “Oh, I say now! I think the frump—this Miss Kirkland, you know—is a fright—regular freak, dash it! I told the judge so!”

“You—you—”

“Of *course!*” And I shrugged disgustedly, making the ugliest grimace I possibly could. “Why, dash it, if I were a woman and had a face like hers, I never would have left China, or England—or wherever her jolly home was—*no, sir!*”

She caught her breath with a little gasp—then she was off again! This time she rested her arms upon the rail behind and buried her head in them, her lovely shoulders jiggling up and down, her sobbing laughter sending her off at last into a spell of coughing.

“Oh!” she breathed, lifting at last her gloriously blushing face and dabbing at it with her ridiculous

little handkerchief, "oh, you'll *kill* me—I know you will!"

I certainly had stirred her up, and I was delighted. It *was* funny to think of any one calling the frump beautiful—it must seem funnier still to her, of course—to Frances, I mean. Why, dash it, *she* seemed to find a funny side to it that I didn't, don't you know!

"Tell me, now"—she clasped her knee, lifting her lovely face coaxingly—"tell me all that she said about me—*everything!*"

And I did—every word, by Jove!

And no one could look into that sweet, ingenuous face as I proceeded, and doubt that the slanders were new to her. Never a jolly one touched her—only you could see their absurdity amused her. Several times I had to pause as she bent under a gale of laughter.

Only once was she brought up, shocked.

"Oh!" she uttered faintly, as I came to the intimation about her being hail-fellow-well-met with the footmen and her drinking and carousing with them and other men-servants until three in the morning. I realized that it wasn't the matter of the drinking that feazed her and drew from her little gasps as I came to this—knew *that* didn't bother her, don't you know, for I knew she did drink—*could* drink, I mean to say; for I had not forgotten the two full whisky glasses of high-proof Scotch she had tossed off that night in my rooms.

Why, no, dash it, she was *able* to drink—it went in the family! I could never forget with what pride she had told me of putting her brother Jack under the table two nights running. *That* was all right—it was the other part of the frump's scandal that brought her up, standing, so to speak.

For *now* she really looked embarrassed, despite another lapse to laughter. Her face and neck were dyed a lovely crimson.

"Oh, dear!" she said finally; and she wiped her eyes. "*What* you must think of me!"—and she looked away, a pretty frown contracting her face; then the jolly dimple deepened once again and she choked into her handkerchief. "Oh, *dear!*" she repeated, biting her lip to hold her quivering mouth corners. "Oh, it's a shame," I heard her mutter; "I *mustn't* let him—it's too—" She wheeled upon me, her lips tightened. "Oh!" she ejaculated sharply, almost petulantly, and her foot struck smartly on the boards. "I wonder how much you think—think—"

"Think *lots*," I said simply, watching her little toe as it tapped.

"Well, *I* should think as much!" And this time her laugh was short—oddly constrained. She looked away off down the slope to the river. "*Oh!*" This time it was a tiny gasp as of dismay. And the toe tapped like an electric what's-its-name.

"Yes," I said, watching it musingly, "I suppose it's because you're the only girl, don't you know,

that I ever *did* think of before—oh, ever at all, dash it!”

The toe stopped. I could *feel* her looking at me sidewise, but I did not glance up, that I remember; was looking down, trying to get hold of a dashed idea I wanted to express.

“Don’t know,” I continued, boring away at her toe, yet hardly seeing it, “but suppose that’s the reason I knew all the time she was *lying*; but still, somehow that doesn’t seem to be the *real* reason I knew. I think the real reason I knew it couldn’t be and wasn’t true was”—I sighed heavily—“oh, dash it, it’s *so* hard to get hold of the jolly thing!”

And there was a pause.

“The real reason?” her voice coaxed gently.

“Was because—” Then she moved the toe and it put me out—“I think just because—oh, yes, I *know* now!” And I looked up eagerly. “Just because I knew that you—*are you!*” I finished beamingly.

“Oh, I see!” She said it musingly, her finger lightly pressing upon her lips, her beautiful eyes studying me with the oddest, keenest side-glance.

A pause; and then: “And *how* long have you known me, pray? Just a—”

“A thousand years!” I said promptly and earnestly. “A thousand years and all my life, don’t you know! Never will know you any better.”

“I wonder,” she murmured, nodding slowly. And then for a moment she didn’t say a word, just

sat there looking me over curiously, her expression half shy, half quizzical, don't you know.

Then her smile flashed again—a radiant, dazzling brightness that brought her nearer, like the effect of the sunlight's sudden gleam there at times upon the blue line of the "West Shore" away across the broad, three-mile span of the old Tappan Zee.

"And now"—again her splendid young arms were clasped, wing-like, behind her head; and its golden glory hung like a picture against the dark vine leaves, bossed with the clustered purple flowers—"now," she repeated, settling comfortably, "you must just go on and tell me the rest—I can bear it! What did my"—her big blue eyes twinkled as she smiled—"my father say about me?"

I shifted uncomfortably. "Oh, I can't, you know!" I demurred. "I say, what's the use, dash it?" Poor old boy, somehow I just hated to round on him—he was so jolly hard hit already; Jack, don't you know! Besides—

"Please!" Jove, how she said it!

"Oh, dash it, I'm afraid it will hurt you," I protested uneasily; "and I don't think the judge really—"

"I just don't care *that*"—a snap from her little fingers and her arm went back—"for anything *he* ever said about me that was *mean*! So, please go on—I must go dress for luncheon."

And so I just took a deep breath, a long running leap, and cleared the bar—told her all, you know!

Oddly, this time she didn't laugh—and I knew why: it was her father, and it had cut her to the heart. This was what I had feared. As I proceeded, narrating the interview in the library, she just grew rosier and rosier red, but sat looking at me wide-eyed and unflinching. The pulsation of her bosom quickened a little, but her dear face remained unchanged, save for her little trick of dragging her under-lip through her white teeth.

“And, by Jove, that's all!” I finished with relief as I mopped my face. “But who cares, don't you know, or believes any bit of it? Anyhow, *we* don't—for we know!”

“Are you *sure?*” She spoke gravely, yet in her eyes were the dancing star-motes of a laugh. “The extravagance, the gambling, and the—oh, all of it? I must tell you *I* heard some sad things myself about Francis Billings while I was at Cambridge—”

I grunted scornfully. “*I* know: from that two-faced cat, Miss Kirkland! Say, how I wish, by Jove, that woman would pack up and go back to China—the *sponge!*” And I screwed my glass indignantly.

“Oh, now!” she remonstrated sweetly, “you mustn't say *that!* You might be sorry!” She smiled archly.

I grunted contemptuously.

Again she rested her little chin upon her hand, eyeing me thoughtfully, earnestly.

“And so you don't believe any of it?”

I chuckled at the idea. “Oh, I say now, Frances,

you *know* I don't!" And I shoved a bit nearer, looking into her eyes. But just then I saw Wilkes come out and look around.

And *she* must have glanced about quickly and have seen him, too, for as I shifted my eyes to her again she was blushing furiously and had moved a bit.

"I'm afraid," she said measuredly, her chin lifting a little, "you do believe—*part* of it!" And in her eyes was a glint of fire.

And then as my face fell blankly, a slow little smile came creeping back to hers. Her eyes softened.

"Forgive me," she said gently; "I misunderstood!"

The darling! And, dash it, if they were going to have vines to a pavilion, why didn't they *have* vines?

"Do you know," she said, "I don't believe you *do* believe any of these awful things could be true about me,"—her voice quickened here—"and do you know I just think it's lovely of you! I *do*!" And her dear voice dropped like the softer notes of a what's-its-name. Her hands lay in her lap and she was studying me in the kindest, sweetest way! And I wanted to tell her how good she was and how much I loved her, don't you know, but just then, behind the pavilion, came the gardener. He was talking to one of his assistants about slugs—*dash* slugs!

And then her face lighted again as though she would speak and I leaned eagerly toward her—waiting, expectant.

“When Arthur made his court at—” she began, and, by Jove, my jolly heart sank. If she would only drop Arthur and give me a chance to make *my* court, dash it! “Camelot, you know,” she went on, and I almost groaned. What did *I* care that he came a lot? Perhaps, now, if I could divert her mind—

“Oh, I say, you know,” I broke in interestedly, “what was it you were—er—humming—just now, don’t you know.”

“Vivian’s song—don’t you remember it?”

I tried to think, but I couldn’t seem to place her, though I knew the whole line of ’em back to Lottie Gilson.

I finally had to shake my head.

She smiled. “Don’t you know,” she said:

“‘I think you hardly know the tender rhyme
Of “trust me not at all or all in all.”’”

She was right! I didn’t know the jolly thing, that was a fact, but somehow I liked the swing of it. She went on, and struck me with another remark. By Jove, she seemed to have forgotten about the jolly song and I was devilish glad, for *I* had rather hear her *talk*, don’t you know.

“‘In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours—’”

"If?" I ejaculated reproachfully, hitching nearer. But she only smiled, and continued her remark:

"Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers;
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all."

"Oh!" I uttered. For, by Jove, she had said it—the thing I had felt all the time and couldn't express; the something that had been with me all along in connection with herself. And here *she* had the jolly idea pat upon her tongue! I just blinked at her admiringly—didn't dare speak, you know; afraid I'd break the thread of what's-its-name.

She went on telling me something about a lover's lute, and it was hard not to speak *then*, for I did so want to ask what a jolly lute was. And then some remark about specks in garnered fruit—here her line of thought had been changed, I knew, by some remark of the gardener outside: something about worms and the orchard. However, I just chirped up a nod and listened as attentively as though she had gone right on. She was busy with her hair now, but with her mind still on the worm, murmured abstractedly:

"That rotting inward slowly moulders all."

And just here, with a little clatter, her back comb struck the floor, bounding to the other side of the pavilion. As I scrambled to get it, her voice lifted through a choke of laughter:

"It is not worth the keeping; let it go!"

The idea!

I laughed as I caught the thing up and whirled, my hand outstretched to lay it in her own. She was on her feet, pulling down her belt, and paused to lift away a leaf that clung to her snowy skirt. And just here, the gardener's voice lifted startlingly across the park to some one distant and invisible:

"Better bring paris green, Jud; it's the only way we'll ever get rid of 'em," he bawled. "I see they're going after the leaves now, and they can live on them and air. Pizen'll fix 'em, though!"

The comb outstretched, I stood staring at Frances, doubled over and writhing. And then, with a long-drawn gasp that was half a screech, her lithe-some figure straightened, her head went back, and from her throat there trilled the very joy of health and youth and happy days.

"Oh!" she gasped, her hand pressing to her side. And while I looked at her anxiously, she went on pantingly, her eyes bright with tears:

"'But shall it? Answer, darling, answer no,
And trust me not at all or all in all.'"

"Jove!" I said delightedly, placing the comb in her outstretched hand and pressing it—the hand, I mean, dash it! "I *do*, don't you know! I trust you all in all!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE JUDGE FIXES "FOXY GRANDPA"

"BUT I tell you, sir, he is *not* my son!"

The judge was bending over the desk 'phone as I looked in a half hour later. His voice rose in a crescendo of rage: "Wha—what's *that*? Do I want to speak with him? Certainly *not*, sir—and I *won't!* . . . Um, yes—John W. Billings—yes, that's his name. . . . Stuff and nonsense, sir! He's up-stairs now in his room. . . . Says what?"—the judge's eyes rolled frowningly upward as he listened; then he licked his lips and bent again, speaking with passionate incisiveness: "Why, dammit, man, I've just this minute been talking to him—just left him, y'understand. . . . *Certainly* your man's an impostor—you ought to know that! . . . Yes, this is Judge Billings, himself. . . . Eh? Oh, that's all *right*, but now let me tell you something"—he cleared his throat and gathered his voice in cold, deliberate accents: "You let me be annoyed again from your precinct, and I can promise *you* that . . . Um, well that's all right then . . . 'Bye!"

He banged the receiver to the hook and faced about, muttering things to himself.

"Well, upon my word! Of all the—excuse me, Lightning!" He wiped his forehead, his glance abstracted and scowling. "Somebody is putting this fool up to this—somebody trying to annoy me!" He uttered a short laugh that was more of a snort. "There's some fool lunatic down in New York that they've arrested and he's got a bug that he's my son! This is the second offense. Caused me to lose two hours from my office yesterday in the city and upset me for the whole day! And me so busy! busy!"—his hands lifted toward the papers on the table—"so busy I can hardly"—another snort, and he relighted his cigar, puffing savagely—"looks like there's just one fool thing after another interrupting me or absorbing my time!"

"Jolly shame, you know!" I responded, dropping sympathetically into a chair. I pushed the papers to one side so I could rest my elbow on the table edge; besides, I saw they were fretting him—could tell by his glances, you know.

For another thing, I had got hold of a devilish shrewd idea I wanted to break to him—about this chap who was pretending to be his son. I remembered that the old rascal who had invaded my rooms had tried to make me believe that *I* was his bosom friend.

"Oh, I say, you know," I began, declining a cigar and selecting a cigarette from my case, "I've an idea!"

And I faced him impressively.

“You’ve *what?*”—he straightened forward, with a kind of twisted smile—interested, you know—“whatever makes you think *that*, my boy?”

I waited, sending a long, thin smoke funnel upward. Kept him expectant, you see, and gave me time to get hold of the corners of the jolly thing myself. Catch the point? So devilish important when you have to lift an idea, don’t you know.

“Rather fancy your chap’s the same one I know of,” I drawled, “an oldish duffer—white mutton-chops—beefy sort of face—sunburn line and baldish—all that sort of thing!”

“Well, by-y-y George!”—he slapped his hand down—“I should say that *was* a real idea! And you say you know this crazy fool?”

“Crazy? He’s not crazy!” I exclaimed indignantly, thinking of her pajamas. “And he’s no more *fool* than I am!”

He fell back with a grunt. “Oh, well, I *know*—but—”

He coughed. By Jove, he seemed disappointed, somehow!

I proceeded calmly: “Real truth is, the beggar’s a notorious criminal, known to the police as Foxy Grandpa—pretends all sorts of things about people, don’t you know.”

“My dear Lightnut,”—he was staring at me, mouth distended—“why—how the devil do *you* know this?”

I inhaled deliberately. “Awfully simple, don’t

you know," I responded quietly; and I let him wait till I had blown six rings. "Fact is, *I'm* the one sent him to jail!"

"You!"—his laugh was frankly amused, incredulous.

"Oh, yes!"—carelessly—"found the fellow thieving in my rooms the other night and called in police—oh, they recognized him in a minute!"

He looked floored. "Well, what do you think of that?" he murmured slowly. Then his face flushed and he sat erect. "And so *that's* all the crazier the ruffian is—*that's* the kind of smart Alex that's been trying to get gay with me—with *me!*" He started up, snorting like a war-horse—"Huh! Well, *two* can play at that game, and"—his eyes twinkled wrathfully—"I'll show him who's got the best hand! I'll just—"

The rest trailed off in a mutter. He had dropped beside the telephone again, his cigar crushed firmly in the corner of his mouth, his gray mustache bristling aggressively. I tried to trace the family resemblance to Frances, but dashed if I could see a single point. And while I was thinking of this, he got his number.

"Yes, yes," I heard, "I *do* want to speak to him personally—this is Judge Billings!"—a moment, and then: "Morning, Commissioner—this is Billings. . . . Fine, thank you! . . . Oh, no! No bad effects at all—takes more than that to throw a seasoned old diner like my— . . . What say?"

—a cackling chuckle—“yes, I knew the dinner would loosen *him* up! Had his promise before we left the table; Soakem heard him—so did Benedict. . . . Yes—*oh*, yes; he’s got it—had it with me, you know, *in case!* . . . No-o-o, of course not; not a single line or scrap!”—a lower drop of tone—“just in a plain, blank envelope—best way always, you know. . . . Yes, that gives us a safe margin in the Senate now, not even counting upon what they do in committee—and Soakem’ll take care of that end. . . . Yes, he went back to Albany this morning—he says the bill’s safely deader’n Hector *now*. . . . Er, by the way, Commissioner,”—the judge cleared his throat and his voice sobered: “Little favor I want to ask—h’m! I’m being greatly annoyed by some low vagabond confined at one of the stations. . . . *Yes*, I really mean it!—Captain Clutchem’s precinct, you know—and this ruffian insists to them that he’s my son. . . . No, *indeed*, I’m not joking at all. . . . All right, you may laugh, but I fail to appreciate the funny side, myself—especially now, you know, when I’m up to my neck in this merger case. . . . How’s that? What do I want *done?* Oh, I wouldn’t venture to say as to *that!* I leave that to *you!* . . . *I* know. . . . Yes, I understand all that, but . . . wait—wait just a minute! Now you listen—”

The judge concentrated more intensely over the instrument.

“You know what you asked me to do when I saw

you last night—and I refused”—another voice drop —“with the mayor, you know? Well—now listen—you make assurance that this scoundrel will not bother me for thirty days and—well, I give you my word that I’ll do all I can to bring things the way you want. . . . Good! . . . What’ll you do with him? Why, what in Sam Hill do I care what you do with him? . . . Oh, but say, Commissioner—yes, I do care, too!”—a laugh here like a jolly fiend—“I *shouldn’t* like for him to be put away off in some nice, damp, dark cell to cool off—he! he! he!—y’understand?”

He got so mixed up in his chuckling and coughing that he couldn’t get out another word for a moment. Then—

“Oh, no! *Cer*-tainly not; nor one too hot and airless, as you say—he! he! he! And don’t put him—don’t put him—” the judge was gasping for air now—“don’t put him on bread and water, or anything of that kind, nor in a cell with rude, rough men who would tame his playful spirit—he! he! he!—oh, *don’t* do that! . . . What say? I didn’t quite catch—” And then, dash it, it seemed he *did* catch it, for he began waving his arm and pounding the desk. “Oh—oh, no, that would be *too* bad—really! . . . Eh? Oh, well, you know best—it’s up to you now! . . . ’Bye, and many thanks, Commissioner! Eh? All right, to-morrow then at one at the Lawyers’ Club—you can go over again the points of what you want with the mayor. ’Bye!”

And with good humor perfectly restored, he faced me, wabbling like a jolly jellyfish.

“’S greatest joke ever heard of in my life!” he chortled.

“Oh, I say, how did you find Jack?” I asked, for that was the thing I had begun to think of.

His face collapsed so dashed sudden, I was afraid it would break. And from being a peppery red, he changed to a devilish sickly yellow.

“Awful!” he said jerkily. “Something awful!” And he groaned like a jolly horse in pain. “Went up there, you know, but—” his hands lifted and dropped; he shook his head—“didn’t seem to know me at all—was sitting there in his pajamas examining with a magnifying glass some leaves he had pulled at the window. Seems obsessed with some crazy patter of talk I couldn’t understand—poor fellow!” The judge sighed. “Only thing he seemed to want me to do for him was to promise to wear his pajamas to-night—pajamas seem to be the focus of his malady this time.”

I swallowed pretty hard and looked down.

“I promised,” continued the judge gloomily. “And I’ll do it—oh, yes, anything to humor him! He’s to put them outside his door to-night—it’s his own whim, you know.” He went on moodily: “He won’t allow any luncheon sent up; says if not too much trouble, would be grateful for two and one-half ounces of unleavened bread and clabber—what the devil’s *clabber?*”

I had never heard of it—knew, of course, no one had!

“Well,” he said with a deep breath, “we’ll just have to do the best we can. Of course, under the circumstances, it’s best for him to keep his apartment—Oh, say, would you like to go up?”

“Oh—er—think not!” I stammered. “Don’t believe I—”

“You’re right! You’re right!” He pursed his lips: “Too pitiful a sight—only sadden you!” He began gathering up the papers behind my arm, though I murmured that they were not in my way at all. The cathedral chimes in the hall had played the half hour. The judge strolled over to the French windows that opened upon the loggia.

“I say, Lightnut, have you ever noticed the view from out here?” he asked briskly. “Fine, you know! Nice to sit here and watch the boats—have you your cigarettes? *Oh, yes!* Try *this* chair! Now, if you’ll excuse me I’ll be with you in—”

“Luncheon is served!” intoned a human machine.

“Ah-h!” The judge’s tone evinced satisfaction. “My dear Lightnut,” his hand upon my arm, “do you know I look upon you as so nearly one of us—”

“Thank you, judge!” I said feelingly. By Jove, it was devilish comfy to have her father so jolly friendly about it!

“That I’m just going to ask you to excuse me from lunching with you—know you’ll understand, my boy!—so infernally busy, you see!”

I *didn't* see, though he had been *saying* this all morning. But as he seemed to think he was busy, I wasn't going to make any dashed break contradicting him, you know. So I pretended I *did* see.

"Thank you—thank you, my boy!" He patted me on the back. "And as you'll have an opportunity of seeing a little more of that charming girl, Miss Kirkland—" Charming girl, indeed! I wondered what he would think, if he knew of her designs on poor Jack! "I want you to go in for her a bit—cultivate her a little; you may change your opinion—eh?" He laughed softly and paused in our progress through the library to dig me sharply in the side. "Go ahead—*flirt* with her, my boy! She will like it—all girls do—and it will do you good; do both of you good!" The old boy beamed at me over his glasses as he vented a horrible chuckle; didn't seem to notice how painfully shocked I was.

A flirtation, indeed! And with the frump, of all others! Of course he was just having his little joke, and didn't seem to realize what devilish poor taste he exhibited as the father of my darling.

"Thank you," I said rather coldly, "but I don't think that—er—sort of thing would show much consideration for Frances and—"

"Rubbish!" And, by Jove, how he laughed! "Do you think Francis would show any consideration for *you*?"—he snapped his fingers. "I think you're a bit too quixotic, young man!"

I didn't know—don't know now; never was up on

any of those legal terms. *He* knew what he meant!

"Pshaw, now!" he went on, "if *that's* what's restraining you, you must drop it! I want you to have a pleasant time while you are here with Miss Kirkland—get along with you!"—then he pulled me back again—"You needn't be thinking about the slightest obligation so far as Francis is concerned. Why should you when the affair is all one-sided?"

"One—one-sided?" I repeated falteringly.

"Why, yes; the girl doesn't care for anybody in the whole word except her old father—and he idolizes her!"

Oh, *did* he!

"So you go on in there and loosen up—have a good time—and make her have one; and keep it up this afternoon. I'm so anxious for you to find something to interest and *occupy* you—" His glance dropped an instant to the papers and law books as though wishing he had something better with which to occupy himself. "Besides," he added carelessly, "Francis won't be here to see what you do—gone off with Scoggins up somewhere in the hills—big dog-fight up there and Francis took four curs, Scoggins two—they won't be back till night—so go ahead!"

But I had caught the back of a chair.

"Dog-fight?" I said faintly. "Frances up in the hills—and—and with Scoggins?" And she had only left me a half-hour ago!

"Why, *certainly!*" he said wearily, almost testily. "What of it? I tell you you've got to get your ideas

all readjusted about Francis. What's the matter with the dog-fight?"

"So—so surprised," I faltered; "so unexpected, you know!"

"Poof!"—and he pushed me out through the doorway—"I never face anything unexpected in that quarter!"

But I think he would have, if he had followed me across into the dining-room and had faced, as I did—

Frances!

"So glad you didn't go to the dog-fight!" I said presently, beaming across at her delightedly.

Her sweet lips glowed at me as her dainty fingers poised the tiny trident before her lips. Jove, how I envied that jolly oyster! Then she smiled witchingly, teasingly.

"It wasn't because I didn't have an invitation," she responded archly. *I* knew! That beast, Scoggins!

"Umph;" grunted the frump, seated on the curve between us. "I verily believe Francis would go to anything!"

I scowled—couldn't help it, dash it! And Frances saw, and ducked her head, biting her lip and blushing. I could have choked the frump for so embarrassing her!

Yet the woman *did* try to be pleasant to me.

"Did you ever find a pearl in an oyster, Mr. Lightning?" she asked.

"By Jove, no!" I said, staring at her for the fool question. For *who* could ever lose a pearl in a jolly oyster, don't you know? And yet, the next instant:

"I have!" said my darling, glancing up at me the oddest way.

"Have you, Frances?"—the frump faced her interestedly. "You should examine with a microscope the interstratifications of calcareous matter and animal membrane."

My beauty looked down at her plate.

"I *am* examining it," she said gravely, "and microscopically. Probably shall this afternoon."

But she *didn't!* No, by Jove, we were together almost all the afternoon, though we never could get away from the frump—dash it, she just took charge of us. And it was the same again in the evening. By Jove, it was disgusting—really, that's the only word to use—the way that woman assumed toward everybody the air of expect-to-be-mistress-here-some-day-and-might-as-well-begin-now!

Once she did break away from us for fifteen minutes while she went up to see how Jack was. She came back much relieved.

"He was *so* glad to see me," she said, "and he kissed me twice. We had such an interesting discussion about the *amæbæ*."

"The *what?*" asked Frances.

"The *amæbæ*—tiny animalcules, don't you know, that have the power of changing their form and appearance. Jacky thinks that perhaps man, too, in

the process of time and evolution might scientifically acquire this—”

“How silly!” laughed my darling. And I thought so too. Of course if a man looked like himself once, he would *always* look like himself. Any fool knew that!

Later, the judge came to my room, accompanied by Wilkes with some Heidelberg punch, *frappé*.

“Couldn’t leave you out of this,” he said genially; “besides, wanted to toast your first night under the roof of Wolhurst!”

“Hope they’re making you comfortable,” he went on. “Infernal shame, Lightning, that I’ve had to neglect you so; so absurdly busy, you know—you understand?”

I pretended to, for I knew he wanted me *to think* that, but I had heard the butler tell the frump that the judge was *reading*.

“Don’t expect to retire at all,” he continued; “and then there’s my promise to my poor boy—I *must* keep that somehow; never failed on a promise in my life—I mean, you know, about wearing his new pajamas.” He shook his head sadly.

“T’ be sure!”—and I swallowed hard—Jove, but the very word, “pajamas,” gave me cold marrows!

“And, my boy, I haven’t forgotten my promise to *you*, either,” he continued, smiling kindly and replenishing my glass to the brim. “I’m still going to have a word with Francis to-night—that is, if they

ever get back from that infernal dog-fight—I want to pave the way for you, you know.”

“Thanks awfully!” I murmured nervously.

Somehow, I felt mean—always hate to feel mean, dash it—felt almost like a jolly cad, in fact. *Couldn't* tell him how far Frances and I had progressed already; he might take it out on her, you know. And *then*, to find out that he didn't know she hadn't gone to the dog-fight after all!

“Well,” he sighed, “I will manage it all somehow, even about the pajamas. Perhaps, when the house is quiet, I may—*here*, have another—oh, yes, you must!—won't hurt you; only a pint or so of rum in the whole mixture. Fine, isn't it? Yes, I think Wilkes is certainly an artist when it comes to a nightcap. Now, let me fill yours again—*oh*, yes!”—and he did it—“Won't hurt a baby—make you sleep tight, you know!”

And, by Jove, I had to go it!

“Well—” he shifted as if to go, and sent me a smile over his glass's rim, “pleasant dreams!”

And then the door closed behind our “good nights.”

Jenkins was studying me somberly.

“Yes, sir,” he said presently, when I had made comment about the bully punch. And that was about all I could get out of him, until he was ready to push out the light.

Then he addressed me gloomily:

“Good night, sir,” he said with a sickly, feeble smile, “I hope you’ll sleep well; and—” he coughed faintly—“and—er—wake up—h’m—all right!”

“Frisky as a—” I bunched my head sleepily into the pillow—“as a jolly—” But the idea wouldn’t come!

“Night!” I murmured; and let it go at that!

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DEMON RUM

I *DIDN'T* feel frisky when I awoke!

No, dash it, I had a devilish headache and my mouth had that gummy, warm-varnish taste—you know! The sunlight lay across the floor, and outside I could hear the jolly birds twittering among their what's-its-names. Jenkins stood by the foot of the bed and somehow had a gloomy look. He cleared his throat, and I had a feeling that he had already done it several times. I raised to my elbow, mouthing at him heavily.

“Morning, sir!” He said it very gently—I thought solicitously. “*How* do you feel, sir?” This last in the kind of tone you use when the chap's going to die to-morrow, don't you know, and doesn't know it yet himself.

I mumbled reply, gulping down the glass of ice-water he tendered.

He rubbed his hands one over the other and stooped above me anxiously.

“I *hope*, sir, you're not in much pain—from last night, sir, I mean?”

“Pain?” I ejaculated crossly. “Why should I be in pain? Don't be a silly ass!”

"Yes, sir!"—very softly, and with a deep sigh as he dropped back. By Jove, he looked as cheerful as a jolly tombstone!

"What the deuce—" I began.

"Noth—nothing, sir!"—hastily—"I was just a-thinking of the—h'm—may I say scrimmage, sir?"

I waited till I had taken from his hand the second glass of ice-water and swallowed it, thinking maybe I would get hold of it—the dashed idea, I mean.

I batted at him perplexedly.

"What was that? *Scrimmage?* I don't remember hearing anything—*what's* that?"

And I reached for another glass.

"Pardon, sir—" Jenkins' eye shifted unhappily; "but may I ask, sir, what *is* the last thing you do remember?"

"Eh?"

I sat up a bit straighter, rubbing my head and devilish annoyed at being made to try to think at all. Then I remembered: We were in a jolly blue aëroplane drawn by golden humming-birds and she was just telling me—*no*, dash it, that was a dream—just a dashed dream! I groaned, dropping my head upon my knees. "Why, the last thing I remember was the punch—punch—"

"Punch—yes, sir!" And Jenkins sighed.

"*Your* punch to put out the light," I finished. Then I looked at him, startled. "Oh, I say, now, it wasn't burglars, was it?"

You see, I thought at once of Foxy Grandpa and my darling's pajamas.

"*Not* precisely, sir." Jenkins hesitated; then moved a little nearer. "I—I hope you'll pardon me, Mr. Lightnut, sir; but I can't help a feeling that you ought to know everything before—h'm—I was going to say, sir, before you see the family. I *hope* you'll pardon me, sir!"—he heaved desperately—"I mean about all that happened last night."

I stared. "Oh, I say, Jenkins," I said, with an anxious thought, "*you* didn't—er—*you* know—I mean you and Wilkes didn't drink the rest of the punch—after he took it away, you know—eh?"

"*Me?*" Jenkins' hand clutched the heavy brass curve at the foot of the bed. "No, *sir!*"—and he added sadly: "Besides, sir, there *wasn't* any rest of it! Mr. Wil—I mean Wilkes, was a-commenting on it. That was how I come to find I didn't have any more of the blank pledges. So I just walked across the park to get some extra ones I had given the gardener, and he said I could have 'em *all*, if I'd just let him get a little sleep; and he chucked 'em all out of his window. Seemed irritated like because I woke him up. And then, sir, I don't know whether it was because of the splashing of the fountains, but I had an idea."

"*That's* nothing," I said contemptuously, "I often do at night when I hear water splashing. I *often* get up and get something."

Jenkins' face sobered. "I *know* it, sir—pardon,

sir, I mean I frequently know you have—h'm—know by the glasses—you understand, sir!" Then he went on: "The idea that came to me was a great liberty—I know that, sir, and I'm sorry—but I guess I was thinking that about the end justifies—you know it, sir?"

I didn't know, but I did wish *he* would make an end!

"The library windows was open on the loggia, sir, and when I looked in, I didn't see anybody and I thought—" Jenkins coughed and looked devilish rattled—"thought I would just slip in and lay a few of the temperance pledges between the papers the judge had been working on." Jenkins reddened, looking at me in an appealing way.

"Jove!" I ejaculated, staring. "Oh, I say, now!"

"Yes, sir,"—faintly—"I knew how you would feel—I ain't excusing myself, sir; and when I heard your voice I tried to get out, but there wasn't time, so I—" Jenkins touched his hands in front, then behind him, and shifted distressfully, "I—I hid behind the alcove curtains—h'm—and just then—"

"Here!" I broke in, "*Wait*, dash it! *Whose* voice did you hear?"

Jenkins' eyes ducked.

"Yours, sir," he said faintly. "And then you came in."

I stared, trying to take it in. Couldn't chirp a word, don't you know, for *to think* I had taken to sleep-walking—and *here!*

Jenkins proceeded rapidly: "You was cording a dressing-robe about you as you came in and I see a glimpse of one of your dark suits underneath. And following right behind you was that young Mr. Bi—h'm—pardon, sir, I remember you said I wasn't to mention any one connected with that ni—h'm! *You* know who I mean, sir?"—he paused anxiously—"Young man, sir—freckled face—and the big lot of"—his spreading fingers curved above his head—"awfully yellow hair—um, *you* know, sir?"

"Oh, *that!*" I said with contempt, for I knew he meant that mucker, Scoggins. Then incredulously: "Oh, I say, you don't mean I was talking to *him?* And asleep?"

Jenkins eyed me reproachfully. "Not asleep, sir," he remonstrated gently.

"But I tell you—"

"Mr. Lightnut, sir, it was the *punch!*" He shook his head. "If you'll excuse me for mentioning—"

"Oh!" I remarked weakly, falling back upon my pillow. "Jove, Jenkins!" And I just looked at him stupidly—fact!

Jenkins stroked his chin, his eyes fixed somberly above my head. "The demon rum, sir," he said slowly, and using the deep, heavy chest tones like the high-up politicians and expensive lecturers, "is rampant in our fair land—that's what I heard Doctor Splasher remark—and the insid'jus monster is slowly—"

And he went on, but I didn't hear. I was trying

to think. So I hadn't been sleep-walking, but had been just plain drunk—and *in her home!*—so jolly well corked, in fact, I hadn't even a dashed glimmer of memory of it. Had been making a spectacle of myself, going all about the house in the wee what-you-call-'em hours of the night and probably—oh, good heavens, probably *singing!*

I dropped my head back upon the pillow.

“Go on,” I said. “Tell me *all!*”

“Yes, sir,” resumed Jenkins, “as I was saying, you came in with—you know—er—the young fellow. He kinder slouched in, looking a bit sulky.

“‘I've been watching for you to get back from the dog-fight,’ you says to him; ‘sit down, I want to talk to you.’ But the young fellow just stood square in the middle of the floor and just kinder scowled black.

“Then you says, pleasant-like: ‘I've been talking with a friend of yours, my son, who thinks I haven't treated you quite fair.’

“‘O!’ says this young fellow, and seems kinder surprised. Then he got red.

“‘And so, my boy,’ you went on, tightening your glass as you looked at him, ‘if I've been harsh I'm sorry—suppose we start all over again—what do you say? I don't want to cross you in anything if I can help it—I want to *help* you.’”

My abrupt ejaculation halted Jenkins an instant, then he proceeded:

“‘I say, do you mean that?’ asks young Mr. Bi—

I *mean*, this young fellow"—Jenkins stirred nervously—"and you says, kinder laughing: 'there's my hand on it!' and then you both shook.

"'One minute,' says the boy, still looking kinder puzzled and uncertain, 'I want to know what about Frances. How do we stand about *that*?'

"You just laughed sorter and went up and clapped him right on the shoulder and you says: 'Why, if you can, my son, just go in and win her. I don't care!'—and you said it hearty-like. You went on: 'I haven't a word to say—in fact, I'd be only too *glad* to see you succeed.' "

Here I straightened with almost a screech:

"*What?* I said that? Oh, now, Jenkins, you—oh, you're mistaken!"

Jenkins eyed me sorrowfully.

"Your words, sir, exactly, and then you went on, kinder persuadingly: 'Why, I haven't meant to stand in your way at all!'"

I groaned.

"Go on!" I breathed through my teeth. Then I straightened forward. "*What* did the judge call that punch—what kind?"

"Heidelberg punch, sir,"—a sympathetic pause as I swept my hand through my hair. "Yes, sir, it certainly must be something high—oh, *awful*, sir!"

He went on as I dipped my head at him. "Then this young chap catches you by the hand and he says, 'Why, you're a brick, after 'all!' And you says: 'Yes, we'll get along better now, my boy, and *you*

want to be mighty grateful to Dicky Lightnut for it.' And this young fellow says, kinder smiling: 'Indeed, I am!' And then him and you just shook hands again all over."

Jenkins stopped for breath, but I didn't say a word. By Jove, it all made me a bit sick, don't you know. Oh, I must have been maudlin, that's what—*maudlin*. I managed to wag my head to start him off again; couldn't speak, you know!

"Yes, sir." Then you says: 'That's all right, now, my boy; so you run along, because I'm awfully busy. To-morrow we'll talk some more.'

"'Bully!' says the chap. 'Good night, old man!' Then he turns back, kinder smiling sidewise. 'It's sure on the level, is it, that you're going to let me have a clear road with Frances?'

"'Oh, bother Frances!' you says laughing. 'Yes, yes, and when you win her, she'll be to me as my *own* girl. And I know I'll have her love, too.'

"'What's that?' says the young fellow, kinder frowning. And you says, easy-like, 'Why, we'll just be one happy family.' Then you chuckled like you was mighty pleased and says: 'And I think she is learning to like me pretty well already. Why, do you know what she did to-night? She came right up to me and in the sweetest way kissed me good night.'"

"Oh!" I said, digging my fingers into the bed-clothes, "Oh!"

"Yes, sir!" said Jenkins chokily. He went on:

“This young fellow just marches right close up to you and says, speaking kinder quiet and his eyes shining, ‘You say Frances kissed you?’ And you sorter gave a laugh and dug him in the side and you says, ‘I do believe the boy is jealous! Why, yes, you rascal, she certainly did—she kissed me!’

“‘Well, it’s a lie!’ he says back, pointing at you with his finger. ‘Because it ain’t like her.’ And he got closer.

“‘See here,’ he says, ‘have you just been trying to get gay with me to-night? Huh!—well, I’m just going to box your jaws for luck!’

“‘What?’ you gasps—‘what’s that?’—and you storms up to him—‘Why, you young puppy, do you know who you’re talking to?’ you says.

“‘Bah!’ he says, and he just goes up and snaps his fingers in your face. You chokes kinder, and then you yells at him: ‘Why, you young ruffian, I’ve spanked you before, and I can do it again—’

“‘Yah!’ he says, making faces at you. ‘*You* spanked! You hit me when I wasn’t looking. My foot slipped.’

“‘Foot slipped, you blanked fool!’ you shouts at him, and then—” Jenkins wiped his forehead—“Then the next thing I see, you mixed.”

“Ah!” I breathed with relief. “That’s *better!*”

I chuckled. Then suddenly I felt remorseful.

“Where did I hit him this time, Jenkins—did you notice? Was he hurt much?”

Jenkins looked down, avoiding my eyes. “Um,

not exactly, sir," he said; "in fact, it was—er—kinder the other way."

I stared, aghast.

"You don't mean, Jenkins—"

Jenkins evidently did! His eyes expressed both pity and embarrassment.

"What he did to you,"—he rolled his glance upward, trying to shape the idea—"I believe, sir, it's what you might call"—his voice dropped—"I believe it's what they *do* call wiping up the floor with."

I closed my eyes an instant.

"Finish!" I whispered, feebly flipping my hand at him.

"He left then, sir, but the noise brought Wilkes and we helped you up-stairs. You wouldn't go any farther than the door of the judge's bedroom—wanted to tell him, we supposed. When we got that far, I noticed Mr. Jack Billings' door—it's right opposite, you remember, sir—was standing just a little open. He called out very anxious and shrill: 'Oh, *do* be very careful of the pajamas! My! my! I hope the pajamas are not hurt!'

"And at that, you just bangs inside the judge's room and in about two minutes, *he* stuck his head out, looking kinder trowsled and mad like he'd been waked from a sound sleep, and he fires a wrapped-up parcel at the door opposite and yells:

"There are your pajamas, you unnatural, heartless prodigal! Pajamas, indeed, at such a time!"

And then I see Mr. Jack's arm come out and fish the package inside.

"Then the judge turns on me and Wilkes and ordered us to clear out and to go to bed. And Wilkes said we'd best do it because the judge would take care of you and get you to your room quietly. And the last thing I heard before he slammed inside his room was:

"'There's one thing; I've got a daughter!'"

I looked at Jenkins miserably. He was *right*; he did have a daughter, and I wanted her. But just now, I wished with all heart that she was somebody's—anybody else's daughter—than that of the man who had witnessed my humiliation.

And afterwards—

How had he managed to get me to my room? And had she seen or heard me? Oh, she must have!

Well, nothing mattered now—nothing could ever matter any more. It was some miserable comfort to feel, and *know*, that nothing worse could ever happen!

Why, there was nothing *worse* left in all the world. By Jove, I was sure of *that* much!

And just then a knock sounded.

CHAPTER XXXII

I TOUCH BOTTOM

“PARDON, sir, for not waiting till you came down,” the butler was saying, “but Mr. Billings was just so set on me bringing this to you, I *had* to.”

He had entered, responding to Jenkins’ invitation, bearing in his hand a gray paper parcel.

“For me?” I questioned, as he laid it on the table, and I eyed it ominously. Yet it could not be the same I had sent Billings myself—I could see that—for it was smaller, more compact, and in a different wrapper. But I was *afraid* to examine it.

“Yes, sir—he’s very bad this morning, sir; the—er—that is, something last night seems to have excited him.”

His eye roved eloquently between Jenkins and myself. He continued soberly:

“He’s locked me and Perkins out of his rooms again, and wouldn’t open the door only wide enough to stick this through. And his message”—hesitatingly—“he said just tell you you had better get these pajamas back where they came from just as

quickly as you could—you would *if you were wise*, he said.”

“Oh!” I uttered, dazed by this new blow. So it *was* her pajamas.

But there was more of the message—I could see it in Wilkes’ eye.

“Yes, sir,” he went on as I gave him a nod. “Mr. Billings called through the door-crack—and his voice was particularly shrill—screechy-like—very unnatural, sir—and he said: ‘You tell him I say he’ll find it very dangerous to keep them by him a moment; tell him my advice is to return them *immediately!*’ ”

Here the butler hesitated an instant and added: “And he said for me to try to remember three letters I was to mention—said you would understand.”

“Three letters?” I repeated dully.

“Yes, sir, three letters—I did remember ’em, too, because they happened to be the initials of a young woman I—h’m! Q. E. D., sir.”

“Q. E. D.?” I said, puzzled and miserable. “What’s Q. E. D.?” And then an idea startled me.

“Oh I *say*, you mean—er—P. D. Q.—eh, Wilkes?” It sounded like Jack!

But he seemed sure he didn’t; insisted on Q. E. D. When he had withdrawn, I sat there a moment, swallowing hard. By Jove, when a chap has had the hardest blow of his life, and that, too, from his best friend, it’s devilish hard to come up smiling. I took a deep breath and tried to pull myself together. I knew, of course, it was all over—everything; it was

all over, just as everything was beginning with me. For I knew my life never had been worth a whoop before. Why, by Jove, I never even noticed how beautiful were the trees and the sunshine through the leaves until the last two days! But I *had* seen it, because *she* had seen it! And now—now it was all dull and flat and dead again, and all the world was gray! Ever been there—eh?

I climbed heavily to my feet, for I knew, after all, he was acting devilish considerably as *he* saw things, and I must just have the decency to do as he said—and then go. I couldn't explain, of course. Mustn't try to do that—so dashed clumsy, I would only complicate it for her. No, I— By Jove, I suddenly felt sick. Sat there, doubled forward, my head between my hands, as the butler retired, softly closing the door behind him.

Presently I pulled myself together. Jenkins, as he helped me dress, eyed me in a frightened way, his face kind of pale and greenish. Neither of us said a word, but I knew I had *his* sympathy, poor fellow—and it helped! Then, with the parcel in my hand, I marched slowly down the stairs, forgetting even some instructions I should have given Jenkins.

She was there in the living-room—she and the frump. And when I saw her dear face and realized what disaster had come between us, I felt things whirling around me like a jolly what's-its-name and dropped my hand on a chair-back hard, until I could stiffen and smile up. But, by Jove, she was on!

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Lightnut?" she asked, coming toward me—and how kindly, almost tenderly, her sweet face softened!

"Is it anything about Jacky?" snapped the frump.

I shook my head and just gently placed the little wrapped parcel in Frances' hands. My hand shook so I almost dropped it.

"Some—something of yours that was lost," I said, and I knew my voice shook a little, too. "I was fortunate in recovering it." I looked at her—for the last time, I knew—and it was just my devilish luck that she got misty and dim. I whispered hoarsely: "Open when you are alone."

And then I walked straight out of the house!

A gardener directed me to the park gates, but there were so many dashed curves and terraces I got hopelessly twisted, and pretty soon didn't know whether I was leaving or coming, don't you know. I sat down on an iron bench to think it over, and, by Jove, I must have dozed off, for the first thing I knew some one yelled my name, and I looked up to see—Billings!

He was looking a bit soiled and disheveled, and his eyes had a hunted look.

"What the devil are you doing, sitting here?" he demanded.

"I—I'm going," I said, hurriedly getting to my feet. "Just resting—I—"

"They told me I would find you here," he said. "Here you are, sitting out here in the hot sun with-

out any hat! Good thing, Dicky, you haven't got any—h'm!" Then he panted at me: "Say, nice way you and my sister treated me—I don't *think!* But I'll forgive you this time." Here he linked his arm in mine. "I'll forgive you, if you never say anything at the club about those damned black pajamas—nor in the family, either. Great Scott! I wouldn't have this get out!"

"I wouldn't think of such a thing!" I exclaimed, immeasurably relieved, but indignant, as well. He led me across the turf.

"Oh, I've had an awful time, Dicky! Awful!"—he lifted his hands—"Oh, I don't want to tell you about it—I don't want even to think about it myself!"

I murmured something sympathetic, for I *felt* sympathetic with anything; besides, there still lingered a bit of headache from the Heidelberg punch and I could imagine from that what *his* feelings must have been.

"By George, Dicky," he burst out again, "the way I've been shut up and treated just seems like some infernal conspiracy. Good thing Jack Ellsworth's dad had a pull with the mayor—tell you all the whole rotten business when I can talk about it quietly."

"That's right! that's right!" I said soothingly, "wouldn't think about it at all now, old chap!" No use reminding him, you know, that he had shut *himself* up. Besides, the wandering of the mind

to Jack Ellsworth and his father showed me that even yet he was not quite himself.

Billings mopped his forehead. "My, but it was hot in that hole!" he exclaimed. "And that reminds me—have you seen the governor this morning? No? Well, talk about hot! *George*, but the old man was hot under the collar when I saw him just now! And he looks like he had been dropped from a shot tower! It's this case he's working on, I guess, or else it's about Francis. He's found out what *I* knew."

"Do—do you think so?" I questioned nervously.

"Pretty sure," said Billings carelessly. "Fact is, he's already fixing up to send Francis to some kind of reformatory—heard him making the arrangements over the 'phone"—I was glad he didn't look at me as he rattled on—"and, by the way, the governor told me to tell *you* not to say a *word* to Francis—I suppose you'll understand."

Understand? Oh, yes, *I* understood!"

"And he said he wanted to see you."

"Is—is he here?" I stammered, pulling back.

"Thank goodness, no. Gone to meet Colonel Francis Kirkland—say, don't say anything about it—wants to surprise his daughter, you know. On his way to London via San Francisco—arrived at Washington a few days ago."

Oh, the frump's father! Much I cared! But knowing how interested *he* was in her, I tried to show an interest.

"Colonel Francis—er— isn't his daughter named after him?" And I felt myself grow jolly red, for I remembered that *she* had told me that about her friend as she sat on the arm of the Morris chair and in the black pajamas.

"Hanged if *I* know," said Billings carelessly. "I don't know what her name is—don't remember that I ever heard." He whistled. "Say, but did you ever see anything as stunningly pretty in your life?"

I balked. By Jove, I had been doing some mild lying within the past twenty-four hours, but this was asking *too* much! Dash me if I just could go it, that's all. But he didn't seem to notice.

He slapped me on the back. "By George, Dicky, there's just the girl cut out for you, old chap—take my tip. I think she likes you, too—could see it just now when I was talking about you."

So that was it, I reflected gloomily. The frump now was to be worked off on me, and I was expected to stand for it. I was to be a sort of what-you-call-it offering on the altar of friendship. *That* was the condition upon which he was patching up things!

Billings laughed suddenly. "But, oh, I tell you it would be hard on Francis—a regular knockout, by George!"

Devilish brutal for him to say so, I thought.

"Do you think so?" I questioned dismally. "Would Frances really care?"

"Oh, yes," he said lightly. "Soon get over it, though—puppy love, you know."

Puppy love, indeed! By Jove, how I hated Billings!

He went on: "Suppose you never heard anything of the professor and the pajamas?"

I had not, and I was devilish sick of pajamas, anyway.

"And say, Dicky, I don't remember that I ever thanked you properly, old man, for putting up my kid brother the other night. He says you treated him like a brick and that you and he got to be great pals. So much obliged, old chap, because he wanted to go running around, you know."

"Your brother?" I questioned, astonished, and I guess my face must have showed it, for Billings' eyes, first opening wide, narrowed, and his countenance began to gather an angry red. He stopped short.

"*Didn't* he stay with you?" he snapped.

I stared blankly. "Why, Billings—I didn't know—I didn't remember you had a brother. I never have seen him."

Billings' face swelled redder, and he struck his fist down with an oath. He looked angrily toward the house. Then he stepped hurriedly in advance of me.

"Excuse me, old chap, will you?" he said, his voice hardened. "Will see you at luncheon—make yourself at home, won't you?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

UNDER THE PERGOLA

MAKE myself at home! I sneaked under the quiet shade in a convenient pergola, and, dropping upon a bench, gazed gloomily at the sunlight patches at my feet.

“Oh, *here* you are, eh?” broke harshly upon me.

I looked up, startled from my mood. There, hands upon his hips and scowling, stood—the chauffeur!

I frowned, but the fellow just moved nearer.

“I guess mamma’s baby don’t feel so spry this morning!” he jeered. “Does its little heady-cums ache-ums—eh?”

I grunted rather wearily. “If it does, my good fellow, it’s none of your business. Don’t bother me!” I shifted the other way.

“Oh, isn’t it?”—his tone quickened truculently—“Well, maybe I’ll make it my business!” He jerked his arm at me, continuing sharply: “Look here, you glass-eyed monkey-jack, don’t you get *flip* with me this morning”—he laughed coarsely—“or I’ll think you want some more! *Do* you?”

I turned my head and, polishing my monocle carefully, gave it a tight screw and took him in slowly,

beginning with his yellow mop of hair and ending with the toes of his soiled canvas shoes. By Jove, I was *sure* they'd never been whitened since he bought them.

I seemed to anger him. He uttered a sort of snort with a mutter uncomplimentary and strode forward, towering above me where I sat.

"*Answer*, when I'm talking to you, you sap-headed fool," he bellowed, "or I'll wring your neck! I asked if you wanted some more."

I stretched my arms, trying their muscle room in a lengthy yawn, and blinked at him with my free eye, wondering where the deuce he got the crimson hat band. By Jove, *that* was the most dashed impertinent thing of all!

"More what?" I drawled indifferently.

"More—of *that!*"—viciously—and *thwack* his knuckles struck against the iron back of the jolly bench. For I wasn't there, don't you know.

"Huh! Think you're some smart, don't you?" he sneered, hitching his trousers band. "Now, look here"—he leveled his finger—"you're a guest here and I know I oughtn't to do it, and I *hate* it for Jack's sake, but I'm feeling I'll just *have* to give you another trimming this lovely morning!" He chuckled, rolling his lips and spreading them till I could see every tooth. He moved toward me leisurely, slipping up his sleeves. "What you got last night, sonny, was for your own sake, but *this* time it's going to be for Frances'—you *fishworm!*"

“Guess we’ll leave Miss Frances out of it, don’t you know,” I remonstrated. *Dash* the fellow’s impudence! Then, remembering I was wearing a coat of dark cheviot that was the very devil for showing every speck of dust, I slipped out of it and looked about for somewhere to hang it. Not a dashed place, of course; not a thing, you know, except nails here and there in the wooden uprights of the pergola, and of course *nails* wouldn’t do to hang a coat on. So I just folded the jolly thing carefully—very carefully, just as I had seen Jenkins do—and then I held it on my arm.

The chap had been shifting about me in a curve, clucking his tongue contemptuously and muttering, and getting more jolly red-eyed and abusive every minute.

“Be a man!” he snarled. “You blame tailor’s dummy, be a *man!*” And he struck his chest a blow to show me what he meant.

And just then I remembered to smooth my hair-part.

“Oh, *you—*” With a growl like a bear, he swept both his hands to his head and whirled them through his great yellow pile, leaving each hair standing on end like the quills on the fretful what’s-its-name. Then he danced toward me, pausing irregularly to double over with a chuckle.

“Oh, this is *too* good!” he yelped. “But I can’t help it; I jest can’t refuse the money, Lizzie! I

know they'll send me away for this, but—Oh, mamma!"

And over he'd double again.

Oddest thing, isn't it, how your jolly active mind *will* wander at the rummest times; and I had a thought then of how, when I was a delicate boy, bully old Doctor Dake and Doctor Madden had prescribed a punching-bag, and later boxing-gloves. And I thought with a pang of what ripping times the governor and I had, scrapping, and of what knocks he gradually began to give me until he forced me to learn to come back harder. Jove, what corking hours we had! And then when Chugsey, the retired English light-weight champion, came to butler—*oh*, what smashing three-handed rounds we used to have! Bully old governor, who was never so busy on his sermons but what he could take a walk or a ride with me; or talk with me, or *fight* with me! Why, he—

By Jove, my dashed monocle got so cloudy of a sudden, I almost missed the chauffeur's move—*almost*, don't you know!

And then—

"I say, you know!" I said disgustedly, as I screwed my monocle at him there, his big yellow mat sticking out of sight through the jolly vines. "Awfully raw thing to strike at a man and leave your guard open like that—I *could* have put it over your heart, don't you know!"

I heard a little sound behind me and there was she!

"Oh!" I gasped as I slipped into my coat. And now I *was* miserable, for I remembered how kind this chauffeur, Scoggins, had been to her. And for her to have seen me in this vulgar row!

"Yes, I saw it all," she said, as I moved toward her, murmuring some jolly effort at apology. Her eyes were shining. "I saw it all, sir—and *heard*. And just when I had hunted you up with *these!*"—and then I saw that her arms were burgeoning with roses. "See what I've been doing for you, sir!"

"For me?" By Jove, it was all I could say as I took them!

"And you ran off!" She pouted adorably—naturally, too, dash it. I've seen them put it on when they looked like they had toothache. "How am I ever going to thank you about the pajamas?" By Jove, her big blue eyes looked me frankly in the face. There was never a quiver of embarrassment. "It's wonderful—and to find them *here!*"

"I'd—I'd have got 'em to you sooner," I faltered, swallowing, "but they've been lost a day or two—thief stole them from my rooms, you know."

"How on earth *did* you ever get hold of them? I never expected to see those pajamas again. Oh, you must tell me all about how you managed it!"—and we moved away—"I just *wish* father were here!"

I didn't! Dash it, it made me squirm to think of his return.

As we left the pergola behind, I looked backward through its arch, and there was the chauffeur, standing in the shadows, looking after us. And long after, as we turned from the straight avenue leading through the pergola, I descried his figure, still looking after us, unchanged, immovable.

It was rum!

But I had other things to think of as we sat out in the loggia—chiefly of her, herself; withal, wondering gloomily what her father would say when he found I had disobeyed his injunction about not speaking to her. Presently the summons to luncheon came, and we went in.

From up-stairs came sounds indicating great hilarity on Billings' part. In fact, we could hear him slapping his knee and screaming. The frump looked at me anxiously.

"Why, I understood he was all right again," she said aside.

I shook my head dubiously. I had seen in the past day or two how rapidly Billings' moods shifted. Twenty minutes since he had looked enraged.

"Oh, this is too good—but keep it mum!" we heard. "Come on, Professor!"

"Professor?" The frump looked at Frances, then at Wilkes inquiringly.

"I didn't know, miss," he murmured contritely. "'S why I didn't mention it."

We were crossing the great hall in the direction of the beautiful dining-room beyond—Elizabethan, I

think Frances said it was. We all paused expectantly as Billings rolled down the stairs in his usual jolly, elephantine way. And then on the landing appeared an apparition—not only an apparition, but, by Jove, a scarecrow, as well!

Professor Doozenberry, blandly smiling—his rail-like figure shrouded flabbily in one of Billings' largest and loudest suits! Billings went through the form of introductions, chuckling idiotically the while. But the professor scarcely noticed any one but the frump.

"Don't wait, Wilkes," Billings directed. His nod beckoned me aside.

"Gentleman sulking in his tent over here I want you to meet," he said. And I followed him to the library. A figure pacing the floor turned sharply. By Jove, it was the chauffeur, and how he did scowl at me!

"Now, young man," said Billings sternly, "perhaps you'll have the nerve to tell me before Mr. Lightnut himself that you were his guest on your way home from Harvard."

"I certainly was!" He made the statement, chin up and eyes blazing. "I was his guest at the Kahoka Wednesday night, and he knows it."

Billings looked at me and shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't bother denying it, old man," he said. "It's all right."

"Oh, but I say—it isn't!" I exclaimed in disgusted amaze. "Dashed impertinence, you know—

never saw this fellow before the morning at the—er—boat, and day before yesterday when I—” I halted, remembering.

But the fellow was shaking his finger at me.

“A-a-a!” he jeered like a school-boy. “Why don’t you finish? Bet you don’t know, Jack, that this paragon friend of yours was up here on the train day before yesterday.” Billings stared, for he did not know.

The chap grew more impudent. “Yah, see him turn red!”

“By Jove!” I exclaimed, warming up, you know. “Say, Billings, who the devil is this fellow?” And I advanced angrily—dashed annoyed, you know.

Billings interposed. “My brother,” he said quietly.

“Yes, his brother,” almost shouted the other. Then he lowered his voice at Billings’ command: “And I say, you didn’t tell Jack you were on the train yesterday, posing as a ‘Mr. Smith,’ and that you insulted Frances.” He shook off his brother’s hand angrily. “Oh, yes he did—sister told me about it! I knew it was you when I got to thinking about it this morning!” He panted for breath. “I can’t call you a liar, Lightning, when you say I wasn’t at your rooms, because you’re a quicker hitter than I am, and—” He looked around and shrugged. “And because we are in this house. But you’re an infernal hypocrite, and I want Jack to know it.” He laughed mockingly and faced his

brother. "Ask your friend, Mr. Lightnut, about that girl in black pajamas in his rooms!"

And he flung himself from the room with a Parthian shot: "Ask him to tell you about her as he did me. Ask him who it *was!*"

Billings seemed to groan. "More black pajamas!" he muttered.

I faced him eagerly. "I never told him about her—I'll swear I didn't," I pleaded miserably. "You know all there is to know, Jack. I wouldn't tell anybody in the world a thing like that. I—love her too well. Much less would I go and tell her own brother."

"Wha-a-a-t?" Billings' fat body almost leaped into the air. "What the devil—say, old chap, *what* are you talking about?"

"And, besides, she's forgiven me," I persisted gloomily. "And I love her—and—and we're going to be married—or I hope so, dash it!"

Billings stared at me with popping eyes for an instant. Then he lifted my chin and looked at me anxiously. "Are you quite well, old man?" he asked. "Headache, or anything like that? By George, it's from sitting out in that sun without a hat. Marry my sister?" He wagged his head lugubriously. "What—Elizabeth? Oh, good heavens!"

"No—Frances," I explained anxiously.

He stared. "Francis?" Then his arm led me out. "Come along, old chap," he said with an air of concern. "We'll get a little ice—"

There was a bustle near the hall entrance, and I heard a commanding voice I recognized as that of Judge Billings:

“Come right in, Colonel, and we will try to make you forget that little exasperation—do you know I just can’t get over the idea that I’ve seen you somewhere and *recently*— Hello, Jack! Colonel Kirkland, my eldest boy, Jack—named after his mother, Johanna. Look here, Jack, has everybody on the blithering police force gone crazy about *pajamas*? Most infernal outrage—pardon me, Colonel Kirkland—three policemen wanted to arrest him on description—dragnet order, they said—for stealing a pair of black silk pajamas. Ever hear the like of that?”

Billings’ voice murmured something, and then I was dully conscious of my name being passed and of the fact that I was limply shaking a hand. But I don’t remember uttering a word—couldn’t, by Jove, for my jolly tongue was paralyzed. Didn’t know what to do; didn’t know what to say, you know, for there before my eyes, recognizable and unmistakable, despite frock coat and white choker tie, was the figure of “Foxy Grandpa.”

The beefy face, white mutton chop whiskers and bald head were as indelibly imprinted on my memory as the sunburn line that fenced his fiery face.

And *this* was the frump’s father, and it was for him she was scheming to make a home!

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CUB

I DIDN'T go in to luncheon. Instead, I lay down up in my room, wondering what Jenkins would think when he saw Foxy Grandpa a guest with me under this roof, and wondering also what I ought to do, or if I should do anything. I came to the conclusion finally that I wouldn't say anything for the present, for I had about all the complications I could carry.

Presently I went down to the living-room, where they were all assembled, and my heart leaped as I thought I detected a brightening in Frances' face as I entered.

Billings was waving the frump away with his fat hand. "Take it away," he said. "I hate bugs."

"But, Jacky," said the frump pleadingly, "I think it's a *phusiotus gloriosa*."

"I don't care if it's a giraffe," said Billings rudely.

But the professor was already across the room to the rescue.

"Ha! not a *gloriosa*," he said animatedly, as he snooped over the little greenish thing in the frump's

hand. "Observe the shortened *prothorax* and *mesothorax* and—"

"And *metathorax*," chimed in the frump, her head close to his. "Hence—"

"It is a *phanaeus carnifex*," said the professor positively.

By Jove, it looked to me like what we used to call a dung beetle!

And then the two cranks went out in the sun with butterfly nets, and Frances and I drifted out to our pavilion overlooking the broad sweep of the Tappan Zee. As yet, her father had said nothing to me, but I knew that the blow might fall any moment. Only the arrival of the frump's father had so far saved me. And though I had gone right ahead violating his jolly injunction about Frances, I kept a sort of parole with him by avoiding any discussion of things that I knew would have interested my darling the most—that is, our love and our future. Later we took a drive through Sleepy Hollow and the Pocantico Hills. But though we grew better and better acquainted every minute, I couldn't help feeling devilish disappointed, for never once did she ever call me "Dicky." I wondered moodily whether her brother had told her yet of his plans for me.

In the evening, the younger brother showed up at dinner, but sulked, which I thought under the circumstances was about the most considerate thing he could have done.

Once during the evening, Billings, who had been talking with the professor, turned to me. "By the way, Dicky—those pajamas, you know—what did you do with them this morning?" He and the professor whispered again; then Billings turned back. "Gray paper parcel—um—you know?"

Know? Dash it, of course I knew, but I—

"Why, *I* have them now," came quietly from my companion, "thanks to Mr. Lightnut. He gave them to me this morning."

"*Gave* them to you!" gasped Billings. He whispered to me: "But the rubies, you cuckoo—you didn't give her *those*?"

Rubies? Dash it, I had to think hard to remember what had become of the rubies. But I got the idea.

"Why, the professor has those," I reminded him. "The red pajamas, you know—don't you remember?" I drew him aside.

Billings stared. "But he says he returned them," he exclaimed, cutting an odd sidewise look at the professor, who was talking to Frances and the frump. Billings frowned.

"Haven't seen them," I said carelessly, for I wanted to talk to *her*. "Oh, dash the rubies—wait till morning!"

Billings looked sourly at the professor and went off and sat alone. He seemed put out about the old boy not returning the garments. Never seemed to occur to him that the professor was a devilish busy,

and absent-minded old chap. Might not return them for a month. *I* knew that.

"Oh, really, Frances?" the frump was saying, "How exceedingly nice of you, dear!" The professor was occupied for the moment with a moth. "I hope I won't frighten you in them as you say your maid was frightened at you. If pajamas are unbecoming to you, why just imagine me in them!"

By Jove, I was devilish glad I was not supposed to hear, for I didn't want to be required to imagine it. But as for them being unbecoming to my darling—well, I knew she knew what I thought!

Later, when the evening had shaded off and the ladies had left us, we sat in the smoking-room talking till late. I was astonished to find Foxy Grandpa devilish entertaining and clever—not a bad sort at all. He seemed to have no recollection of me at all, and therefore no grudges. I had made up my mind by this time I wasn't going to marry the frump, no matter what came or what Billings wanted, and I would tell him so in the morning. But whoever did marry her—and it looked like it was going to be the professor—would have some sort of compensation in Foxy Grandpa's entertaining stories of Eastern scandal.

Billings' cub brother smoked in a corner of the room by himself and drank innumerable slugs of whisky straight. Once I saw his father go over to him and seem to remonstrate, but without effect.

Billings wanted his father to try my special im-

port of cigarettes, so I sent for Jenkins, who had arrived, to bring some down. And when he saw Foxy Grandpa calmly sitting there by me, pulling at a straw, he almost lost his balance. But I shook my head with covert warning.

“Ever see me before—eh?” asked the cub harshly, as he waved aside the cigarettes Jenkins extended. “Last Wednesday night—remember?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Jenkins, hesitatingly. Then he rolled an eye at me and corrected himself hastily but firmly:

“No, sir; I don’t recall *ever* seeing you before, sir.”

Of course, I knew he had not, but the cub got up with a sour laugh. Then with a murmured gruff apology, he withdrew, saying he had a headache and was going to bed. And, by Jove, what a look he gave me from the door!

“Midnight!” ejaculated some one at length, just as the professor finished a jolly rum but interesting yarn of adventures in Tibet. We all rose and I was answering a challenge of Billings’ for a Sunday morning game of billiards, when all of a sudden a scream rang out from somewhere above. Then came a greater commotion—two voices raised in rapid and excited colloquy. On top of this another scream, louder and more piercing—a woman’s call for help.

“One of the maids,” Billings hazarded. “A mouse—”

"That was Frances!" I answered him excitedly, and we all piled out into the hall and peered down its long vista.

Down one of the dimly illumined angles of the great stairway a white figure darted, then paused, abashed, crouching back against the wall at sight of us advancing. Above her sounded a man's voice, and even as she screamed again, he overtook her, clasping her arm.

"Frances—dear, dear Frances!" he cried. "Are you afraid of *me*?"

And he threw his arms around her. "Come on back, dearest!" he pleaded. "You have been dreaming."

And under the light of a great red cluster of grapes, pendent from the mouth of a grinning Bacchus, I recognized with horror the yellow mat of hair and freckled face of Billings' cub brother. On the instant, with a bull-like roar, Billings sprang forward, but I was quicker still. But fleeter than either of us to reach the scene were the two elderly men, together with Miss Warfield, the housekeeper, and a couple of the maids. Frances darted like a bird to Foxy Grandpa, and then the figures of the women shut her from view.

Billings and I had paused, half-way to the landing. It looked as though the elder Billings was amply capable of handling the occasion now. He had backed the youth against the wall behind, and his language was of a kind I hated to have my darling

hear. Every time the other offered to expostulate, his father broke out again.

"You are a disgrace to an honored name!" he roared. "And the only explanation left for me to offer our guests is that you are drunk and don't know where you are!"

"Oh, father!" faltered the boy. And then he turned his black shrouded figure to the pale marble against which he leaned, and it seemed to me his very heart would sob away.

"What's the matter, dad?" came a voice from the head of the stairway. "What in thunder is all the row about?"

"By George!" gasped Billings. Everybody looked upward—one of the women screamed. For there, slowly advancing down the angle leading to the landing, his yellow mop of hair shining above the dark collar of a dressing-robe, was the duplicate of the youth cowering under the elder Billings' wrath.

And out of a dead, tense silence, came his voice again:

"Can't any of you speak?" He touched the figure on the shoulder. "Who are you?" he asked in an odd, strained voice.

The black figure turned toward him a face agonized in grief.

"I—I don't know," came a voice pitifully—his voice, it seemed.

The cub just stood like a statue for a moment—stood as we all stood. Then slowly his hand went

out and touched the hand of his double. Slowly his fingers swept the face, the hair; gradually his eyes closed, as though he were sensing by touch alone.

Suddenly a loud cry leaped from his throat.

"Sister!" he shouted. And he swept the black figure to him.

Then, tossing back his head, the youth faced us with blazing, angry eyes, looking as David must have, when he faced old what's-his-name.

"If there's a man among you, I'd like to know what this means?" he cried.

There was a blank silence for an instant, and then—

"Perhaps I can explain," said a voice.

And up the stairway advanced Professor Doozenberry.

CHAPTER XXXV

IN THE GLOW OF THE RUBIES

EVENING had come again. In fact, it was almost bedtime. Frances and I sat before the hearth in the library, looking silently into the red heart of the dying embers of fragrant pine cones. For in the heights of the Pocantico Hills it often is chilly on summer nights.

My darling sat on a low *fauteuil*, her chin resting upon her hand, her beautiful eyes fixed dreamily, inscrutably, upon the fading coals. In her lap lay the spread of the crimson pajamas.

She was thinking—thinking—I wondered what! And I was thinking how jolly rum it all was; that Francis wasn't Frances, that the professor wasn't Billings, Colonel Francis Kirkland wasn't Foxy Grandpa and wasn't the frump's father after all; and that the frump, herself—bless her, her name was Elizabeth—wasn't Frances, and wasn't a frump at all, but just a jolly, nice, homely old dear, you know. And I was trying to catch and hold some of the deuced queer things the professor had discoursed upon about ancient Oriental what's-its-name, and astral bodies, obsession, psychical research and all





that sort of thing. Somehow, dash it, it had all seemed devilish unreasonable and improbable to *me*—couldn't get hold of it, you know; but as everybody else had said "Ah-h-h!" and had wagged their heads as though they understood, I just said: "Dash it, of course, you know!" and recrossed my legs and took a fresher grip on my monocle.

The most devilish hard thing to get hold of had been that Frances had never sat on the arm of my Morris chair, had never told me she liked me better than any man she had ever met, and had never called me "Dicky" at any time or anywhere. I wondered if she ever would, and how the deuce fellows went about it when they proposed to the girl they madly loved. I was devilish put out, you know, that I had never tried it so I *could* know.

From across the hall droned the voices from the smoking-room—Colonel Kirkland and the judge debating something about treaty ports and the Manchurian railway. Through the French windows from the open loggia came the eager, pitched tones of the professor and the frump—no, Elizabeth, I mean—discussing Aldeberan and Betelguese, dead suns, star clusters and the nebular hypothesis.

Within the room Billings had snapped out the lights, to bring out the blazing fire of his treasured ruby, and from the tray in the dark corner where he was closing it in his collection vault, it gleamed like the end of a bright cigar. The other four were absently clutched in my darling's hand and the crim-

son shine gleamed bravely through her finger bars. "Carbuncles—ancient carbuncles," the professor had called them, "that the Chinese believed their dragons carried in their mouths, in their black caves in days of old, to furnish light whereby they could see to devour their victims." And *that* I believed, for I could see some practical sense about it!

"What *I* should like to know," said the dear, precious cub, hugging his knee by the mantel, "is where *I* come in!"

"You don't come in," said Billings, lifting him playfully by the ear; "you come *out*!" And out they went.

And my dear girl and I were like what's-his-name's picture—alone at last, you know. She stirred softly and her sigh came like the wind through the trees at night.

"I suppose we will have to burn them," she said dolefully; "the professor says it is the only thing to do."

"Jolly shame, I say!" I murmured indignantly.

"It seems a crime," she said softly, and there was a little choke in her voice. She slipped to the soft-fibered rug before the fire. I gently brought my chair closer to her.

For a moment she pressed her cheek against the crimson mass, then kneeling forward, laid it gently on the glowing coals. There was a flash, a lightning blaze of red that almost blinded us, and then for a brief space a field of shining ash. Against this the

tiny serpent frogs writhed and twisted and turned at last to leaden gray. Over the spread of all, swept wave after wave of golden, crimsoned pictures—temples and pagodas—dragons that licked fiery tongues at us—strange faces that came and went, leering hideously into our own.

And then of a sudden it was all faded—gone! The breeze from the open window stirred the ashes to the side. She dropped back with a deep sigh.

“They’re gone,” she breathed mournfully.

“Never mind,” I said; “you’ve these left.” And daringly I laid my hand upon the one that clasped the rubies. And I thrilled as it lay still beneath my own.

“Good-by, you dear old, wicked, enchanted pajamas,” she said. “I don’t care—I just love you, because—” She paused.

“Because they brought us together?” By Jove, I didn’t know I had said it, till it came out!

An instant, and then I caught it—just a little whisper, you know:

“Yes—Dicky!”

By Jove! And then, dash it, my monocle dropped! But I let it go.

Presently she looked at the glowing rubies in her hand.

“They are from India, you know, Dicky—from Mandalay, the professor said.” And she murmured: “‘On the road to Mandalay, where the old flotilla lay’—don’t you remember? I’ve been there, Dicky.”

“By Jove!” I said. “Have you, though? Is it jolly?”

“The poet seemed to think so—” She laughed. “Do you know Kipling, Dicky?” I tried to think, but dashed if I could remember.

I wondered if it would be a good place to take a trip to!

I hitched closer. “What does—er—this poet chap say about it? What’s it like, you know?”

She laughed. “I’m afraid it’s wicked, Dicky, a good deal like the haunted pajamas.” She leaned forward, chin upon her hand again, looking into the fading coals. “I’ll tell you what he says.”

Then her voice went on:

“Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the best is
like the worst,
Where there aren’t no Ten Commandments an’ a
man can raise a thirst.”

“By Jove!” I said, interested.

“For the temple bells are callin’, and it’s there that I
would be—
By the old Moulmein pagoda, lookin’ lazy at the
sea.”

I brought my hand down on my knee.

“Oh, I say, you know—er—Frances,” I exclaimed with enthusiasm, “we’ll go there for our honeymoon, by Jove! Shall we—eh?”

And then the jolly rubies rolled unheeded to the floor. And nothing stirred but the ashes of the haunted pajamas!

And then— Oh, but Frances says that's *all!*

THE END

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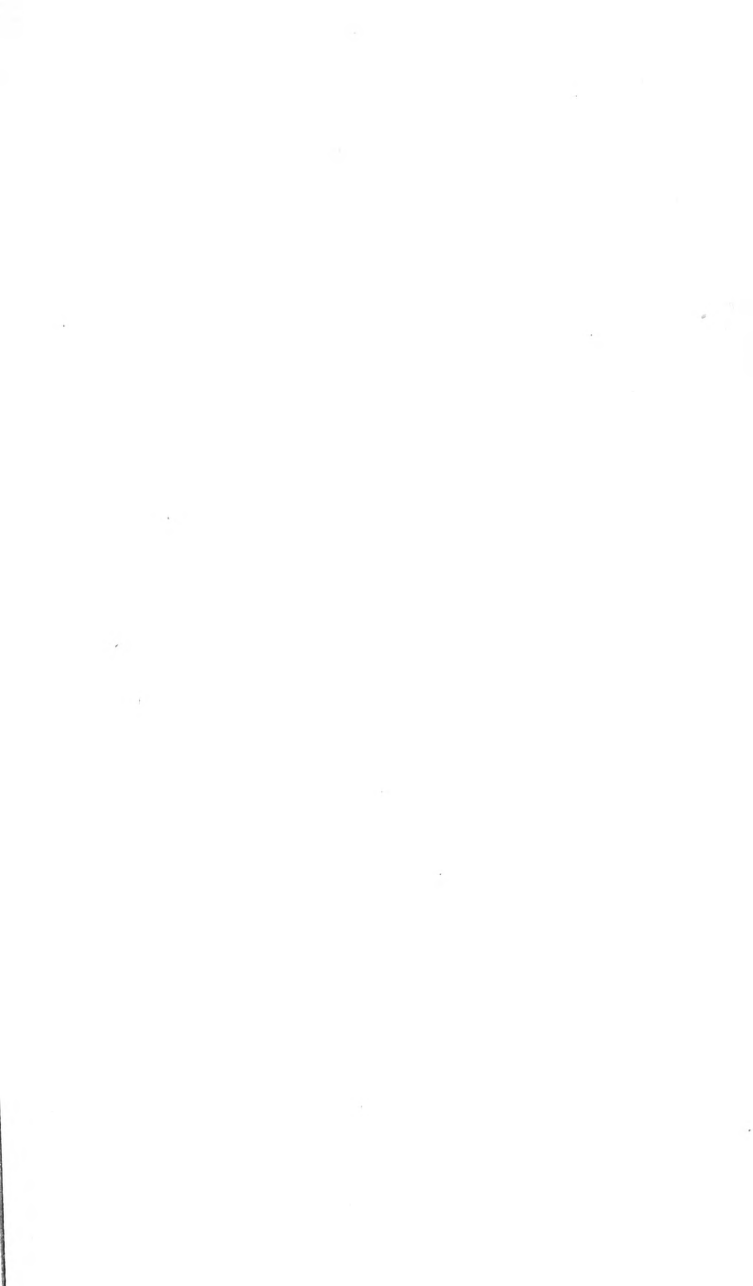
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