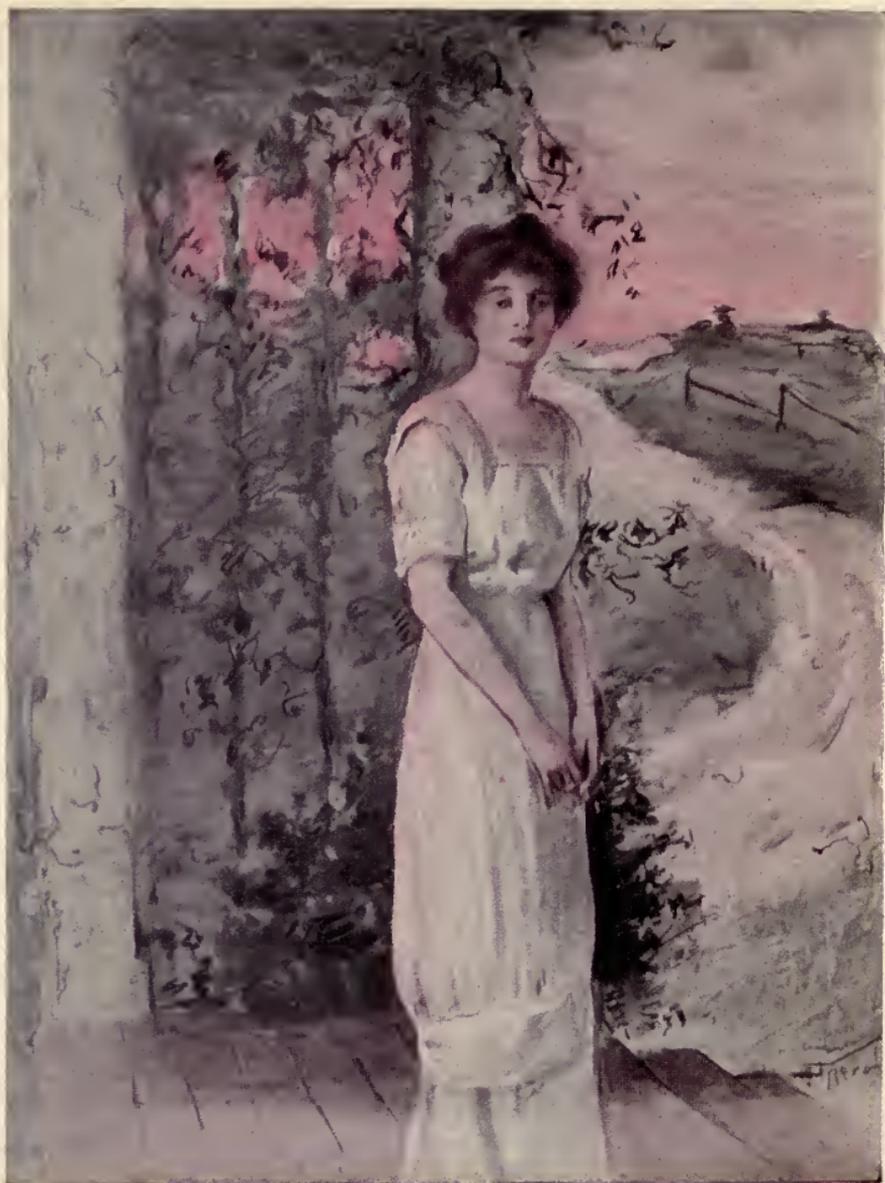


# THE RED BUTTON

WILL  
IRWIN







Constance stood waiting.

# THE RED BUTTON

*By*

WILL IRWIN

AUTHOR OF

The City that Was, Etc.

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MAX J. SPERO

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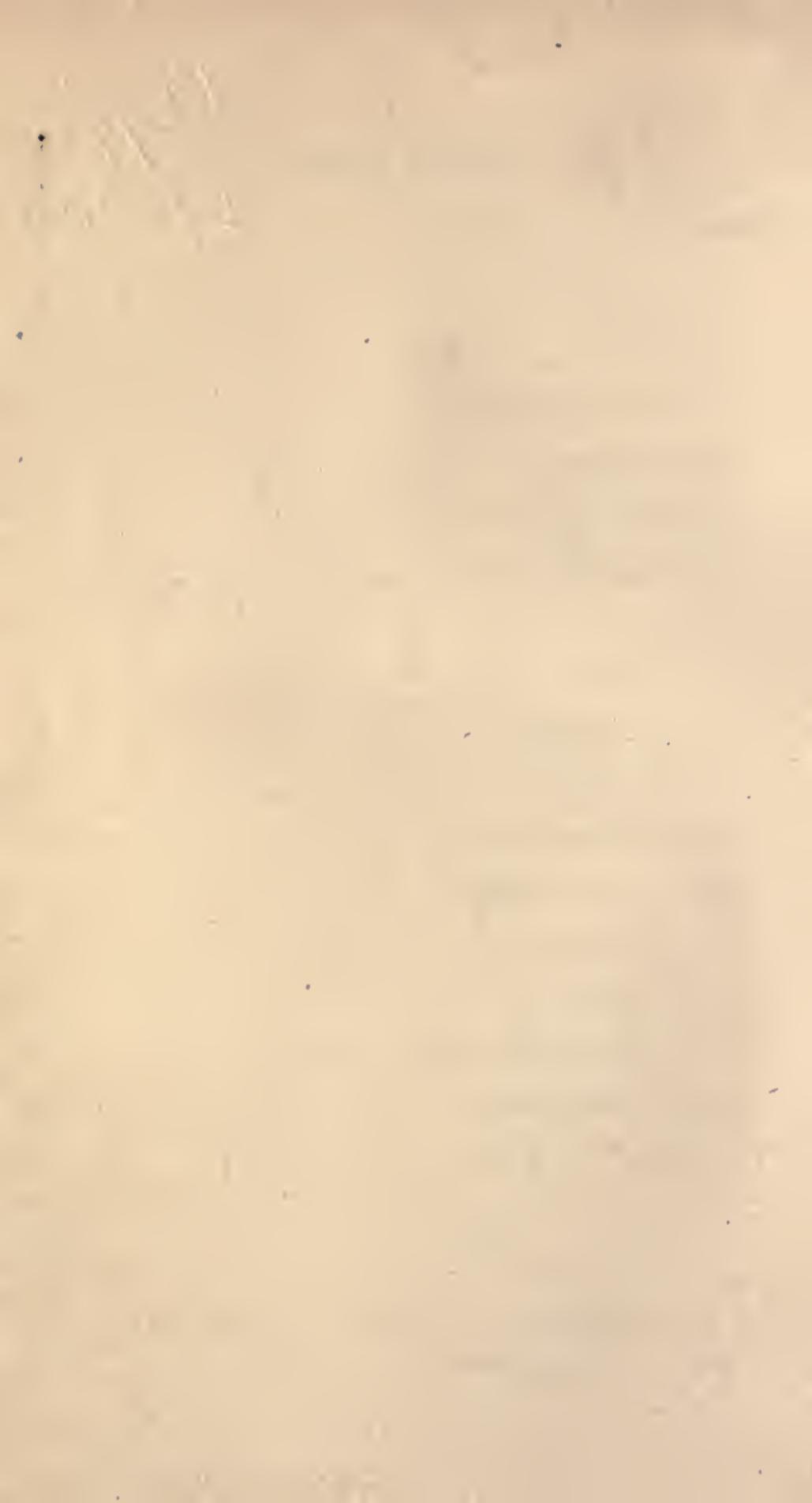
LONDON

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# THE RED BUTTON

## CHAPTER I

### THE BOARDERS

**R**EGARDING the events of that rainy autumn evening at Mrs. Moore's boarding-house in the far West Twenties of New York, accounts differ somewhat—although not enough, after all, but that we may piece together a connected story. Until the great event, they were trivial. It was the reflected light of the tragedy which gave them their importance.

Most of the boarders remained indoors, since it was too wet in the early evening for faring out-of-doors with comfort. After dinner, Miss Harding and Miss Jones, stenographers, who shared a room-and-alcove on the second floor, entertained "company" in the parlor on the ground floor—two young office-mates who

figure but dimly in this tale. These callers came at eight o'clock. A few minutes later Professor Noll joined them. Professor Noll was a diet delusionist, the assistant editor of a health-food magazine. He lived on the third floor, across the hall from Captain Hanska, in a room furnished (as the Captain himself remarked during one of his genial moments) with all the horrors of home. For Professor Noll had traveled widely, gathering experience and junk; and in every port of the world he had bought freely of gilt-and-trash curios. He was as proud of that bizarre apartment as though it had been the Louvre. A charming old man was Professor Noll when he dismounted from his hobby—and occasionally when he rode it, too. A thick tangle of silver-silk hair and a little pair of china-blue eyes accented a personality all innocence, gaiety, and old-age prattle.

Miss Harding and Miss Jones had not arrived at that point with their young men where they wanted to visit alone. When Professor Noll entered and suggested music, they welcomed him. He sat down to the piano, therefore, and they all sang the foolish ephemeral

songs of the picture-shows. Mrs. Moore stood in the hall for a time, listening. Miss Jones spied her and invited her in. She was a landlady of the lugubrious type; she wept silently over the sentimental passages with rhymes on "posey," "cosey" and "proposey"; and eventually she joined her voice with the singing. Once or twice she left momentarily to look after towels, furnace-heat and other housewifely cares. One of these tours took her to the top of the house, where Miss Estrilla, the lady sick with weak eyes, lived in a half-darkened rear room. She was a newcomer, this Miss Estrilla, and not yet well enough to take her meals in the dining-room. Miss Estrilla's brother, a slim, mercurial little Latin with an entertaining trick of the tongue, was reading to her by a shaded lamp, as he often did of evenings. When Mrs. Moore rejoined the others, they were singing full-voice.

On the stairs Mrs. Moore met Captain Hanska passing up from his late and solitary dinner. He was a little irregular about meals; and this evening he had come in, demanding dinner, after everything was cleared away. Half the boarding-house liked Captain Han-

ska, and half disliked him. Rather (and more accurately) all half-liked and half-hated him. A large man, of forty-five or so, he looked at first sight rather bloated, and at second only gross and big through the accumulation of middle-aged muscle and the thicker flow of middle-aged blood. He was bull-necked, broad-shouldered, wide of waist and heavy of leg. Everything about him denoted old strength gone stale. In face he showed the traces of what must have been great youthful comeliness. Even now, he had an eye which could be both keen and kind when his mood was gentle. Those moods of his puzzled every one. No man could be more irritable at times; yet, none, as all the feminine part of the house testified, could be more charming, more understanding of women. There was a curious quality beneath all that, a quality which none of Mrs. Moore's boarders had the discernment to formulate. It was as though some inner driving energy sought an outlet, and found no way through that accumulation of flesh and blood and muscle.

Before he started up the stairs, he paused an

instant at the parlor door and looked upon the singers.

“Come on in—the water’s fine!” called Miss Harding jocularly.

Captain Hanska returned no answer. Apparently one of his sardonic gibes was on his lips, but he let it die there. And he turned away.

“He can certainly be a grouch when he wants to,” said Miss Harding, as though apologizing to the young men.

“Fierce!” exclaimed Miss Jones. And they resumed their singing. As Captain Hanska passed Mrs. Moore on the lower flight of stairs, his head was bent and he gave no sign of recognition.

Mrs. Moore did not leave the parlor, she testified afterward, until Mr. Lawrence Wade called, asking for Captain Hanska. As on previous occasions, he gave her his card, which read: “Mr. Lawrence Wade, Curfew Club.” He had called before; whether two or three times, Mrs. Moore’s memory would never serve to tell. But she recognized him perfectly—she would have known him anywhere, she said.

“Gee, who’s your swell friend—he certainly could lead me up blushing to the altar,” had been Miss Harding’s tribute the first time she saw him. For he was very comely—a comeliness that was a perfect blend of caste and character. And that night she flashed a languishing roll of her big eyes after the tall figure as it disappeared. “That fellow would do for a clothing house ad—‘our collars fit round the neck!’” she whispered to the company; whereupon every one giggled.

Mrs. Moore carried the card to Captain Hanska’s room on the third floor.

“What is it?” he growled, as she knocked.

“Mr. Wade to see you,” she replied.

She remembered afterward that he paused for an instant before he answered; also she heard a rustling as though some one were moving about.

“I’ve gone to bed,” he said after the pause.

“Where is he? Down-stairs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then show him up,” said the Captain, “but say I’ve gone to bed.”

Mrs. Moore turned back to summon Mr.

Wade; as she did so, Mr. Estrilla came down from the floor above.

“Oh, good evening, Mr. Estrilla!” said Mrs. Moore. “Did your sister—”

Just then the voice of Captain Hanska broke in from behind the door.

“Wait a minute. Ask Mr. Wade if he minds my not getting up. I’ve a cold and I’ve taken some medicine.”

“Very well, Captain,” replied Mrs. Moore. Estrilla, seeing that she was engaged, went on down-stairs to the front door.

This narrative has gone, so far, from the point of view of Mrs. Moore. We will shift now to Miss Harding; for a time let her mind be the crystal of our thought. We shall find it a scattering and superficial mind, but furnished forth with good memory, the trick of observation, and an instinct for concrete expression. A moment before Mrs. Moore came back and told Mr. Wade that Captain Hanska would see him, Mr. Estrilla appeared at the door of the parlor. Although they had seen but little of him at Mrs. Moore’s, he was popular for a Latin lightness of temperament, a

cheerful and winning smile, a nimble wit which lost nothing because of his quaint accent, and various, winsome, actor tricks which Mrs. Moore called "capers." At that moment they were singing *Yip-hi-addy-hi-ay*, then in its first run. Mr. Estrilla, bundled up in hat and mackintosh, cut a curvet in the hall, kicked out one of his small Andalusian feet, joined a note of the chorus in a pleasant, light, tenor voice, changed to a falsetto tone which was plainly an imitation of Miss Harding's singing, and whirled toward the outer door. Miss Harding called:

"Come in and sing!" But Mr. Estrilla only pivoted through the door, calling:

*"Buenas noches—yip-hi-addy-hi-ay!"*

Perhaps five minutes later, Miss Harding went up-stairs for a handkerchief. For a moment she was absent-minded—a rare thing with her—so that instead of turning on the second floor, where her room was situated, she continued another flight and brought up, suddenly aware of her mistake, at the third-floor landing. Something held her there for a moment—the sound of high words from Captain Hanska's room. Miss Harding paused longer than nec-

essary. She was an honorable girl enough, but the most honorable of us pay instinctive tribute to our curiosity.

"I tell you both I won't," came Captain Hanska's rather harsh voice.

"Oh, I think perhaps I can make you change your mind," came other accents which, Miss Harding reflected, went perfectly with the personality of Mr. Lawrence Wade.

"Some sort of a rumpus going on up there," said Miss Harding as she regained the parlor. Then remembering that she must account to Miss Jones for her presence on the third floor—the bachelor quarters of the establishment—she added vaguely, "You can hear it just as plain!"

They had all stopped singing from very weariness of voice, and Mrs. Moore and Professor Noll had retired to leave the young couples alone with their devices, when Mr. Wade appeared again in the hall—this time on his way out. Every one saw him plainly, especially Miss Harding, who sat facing the door.

"Look, who's here, Essie!" she whispered in an undertone to Miss Jones. As she recalled it afterward, he seemed a little pale. He cast

no more than one quick absent glance at the group by the piano; and the door closed behind him.

Mrs. Moore had gone to bed on the ground floor. But Professor Noll did not retire immediately. A basic principle of the Noll Scientific Plan of Diet was light alimentation before retiring. By his special arrangement with Mrs. Moore, the maid, after cleaning up from dinner, always left a glass of hygienic buttermilk and two protose biscuits on the sideboard. Professor Noll ate slowly, glancing at his watch now and then that he might assure himself as to the proper timing on each mouthful. So he did not go up-stairs until just before the company left. Captain Hanska, as I have said, lived just across the hall from him. The light was out in the Captain's room, he remembered, and everything seemed quiet. Nothing, he testified afterward, happened to disturb his sleep; "however,"—he managed to throw in—"scientific diet makes sound slumber." Within ten minutes, the "company" left and the young women went to their room. There was silence in the house.

Silence until half past two o'clock—and then

Tommy North, who occupied the third floor front, came home from a stag smoker drunk.

He stood at a parlous cross-road of his life, this Tommy North. He was an attractive young man—stubby, bright-eyed, red-headed, quick-tongued, and twenty-eight. His business of writing and selling advertising gave him all kinds of contact with all kinds of attractive people who liked him for his flashes of wit and his genuine warmth of heart. They were the kind of people, unfortunately, who conduct their social life before gilded bars, or about luxurious café tables. So it happened that Tommy was sowing wild oats and irrigating them with good liquor; and they had begun to sprout in his system. This was not the first time that he had returned, uncertain of tongue and foot, in the hours of vice. On the last occasion, he made so much noise that Miss Harding refused him her countenance for a week and Mrs. Moore gave him warning. That warning rested at the bottom of his maudlin psychology as he crept up to the front door, unlocked it, and stole within.

“Must avoid disgrace,” he muttered to himself; “awful brand on young manhood. Fair

women avoid me. Pestilence." At this thought, he dropped a tear. Suddenly, his mind turned full revolution and the situation occurred to him as ridiculous. Whereat he laughed—beneath his breath, as he thought. The vigilant Mrs. Moore, who woke at every night entrance of lodgers, heard that raucous laughter. She leaped out of bed, opened her door a crack, and observed Tommy as he stood balancing himself under the dim point of the gas-jet. Oblivious to the open door and the watchful eye, he made a turn about the newel-post and began putting one foot cautiously before the other, saying over and over a drunken refrain which ran:

"Hay foot—straw foot—one goes up and the other goes down." So he vanished from the vision of Mrs. Moore. By similar devices he negotiated the stretch of hall carpet on the second floor, and took the next flight. He was near his haven now—his own room, third floor front. In the dim hall light, he balanced himself and let his tongue play again.

"Energy and perseverance—victory almost won," he said. "Just talk to your feet and let 'em do your work." But the muscular ef-

fort of climbing two flights had sent his liquor surging to his head, so that he dizzied and staggered. He caught the banister for support. Then something, real or fancied, caught his eye—something which held his drunken attention. He stooped and clutched at it. The effort overbalanced him and sent him sprawling on his hands into some wet sticky substance.

“Fearful careless housekeeping,” he said as he regained his feet, “forces me to extreme measure wiping hands on shirt. No other place to wipe hands. Renewed necessity arises”— he stopped and repeated the phrase with inordinate delight— “renewed necessity for reaching own room.” He took the last three yards in a series of staggering bounds which landed him with a thump against his door. He caught the knob as he fell, and the barrier opened, letting him tumble on his own motion to the floor. He kicked the door shut as he lay prostrate, and then managed to pull himself upright and reach the electric-light button—for Mrs. Moore burned gas in the halls for economy, but electric lights in the rooms. The two tumbles had thrown him into another state of consciousness; his head began to clear

and his motions to steady. So he turned, his predicament still in his mind, to the wash-stand in the corner.

Above it hung a mirror. In passing, Tommy's gaze swept the glass, leaped back, caught on what blanched his face to a sickly white, what steadied his unsteady figure until it stood straight and stiff, what cleared his head so violently that he could think with all the swiftness of terror.

On his dress shirt-front was the imprint of a huge red hand.

"Whose?" Tommy asked himself one instant. The next, his gaze bounded from the mirror to his own hands.

Blood mired his fingers. On his coat was blood, on his sleeve was blood, on his knees was blood, on his very shoes. He looked at the mirror again. Across his chin zigzagged a dark red line—blood also.

His first sane thought was that he had cut himself, and was bleeding to death. He looked again at his hands, but saw no wound. Then, drunken memories lingering a little in his sober mind, he remembered the fall and the process of wiping his hands. He ran back to the hall-

way, turned up the pin-point of light on the gas-jet. There it was, a thin stream of blood, spotted a little where he had fallen in it. And it was widest where it began its flow—at the threshold of Captain Hanska's door. In a weak access of real terror, he fell to pounding on the wall and shouting:

“Murder! Murder!”

Suddenly mastering himself, he seized the knob of Captain Hanska's door. The latch gave way—it was not locked. But it opened no more than a foot or two—scarcely enough to give a man passage—when something blocked it from behind. In the temporary weakness of his will, Tommy North shrank back from entering such a place of veritable horror. He shouted again; and now Professor Noll, looking in his bathrobe like a strange priest of a strange Eastern rite, rushed from his room gasping:

“What's the matter?”

The blood, the pale, gibbering, dabbled young man, were explanation enough. He himself opened the door as far as it could go, and edged into the room.

“Matches, quick!” he called from within.

Tommy North found his match-case; and the mastery of another mind, with the example of better courage, drew him after Professor Noll. He lighted a match, held it up. It flared and blazed until it burned his fingers. In that flickering transitory light they saw all that it was necessary to see.

Captain Hanska's body blocked the door. He lay dressed in his pajamas, the shrunken relic of what had been a portly man—lay on his back with his hands lifted over his head as though he were clutching at the air. From his breast stuck the haft of a great knife; and from the wound the pool of blood flowed to the threshold. The match went out; and with a common impulse Tommy North and Professor Noll struggled to see who would be first to get back through that door.

There followed alarms, screams, the running of women, hysterics on the part of Mrs. Moore, who had started from bed at Tommy's first cry. Tommy North, albeit ordinarily a brave and resourceful young man enough, was of no use in this crisis, what with the compression of ten emotional years into ten minutes of life. Worse for him, the hen-minded Mrs. Moore,

seeing the blood, cried, "You murderer!" clutched at his coat, and fell into a faint. Upon Professor Noll devolved the masculine guidance of this affair. And he thought first, not of the police, but of a doctor. By this time, Miss Harding and Miss Jones were weeping breast to breast; Mrs. Moore had recovered to say that she always expected it of Mr. North, and Miss Estrilla, the invalid lady on the top floor, had called from the head of the stairs, "What is it?" With the brutality which impels us in crises to confide unpalliated horrors, some one shrieked, "Hanska's murdered!" There came from above some Spanish ejaculations to which no one paid much attention, and then a rattling of the hook of the telephone, which hung on a door-post in that fourth-floor hall.

Professor Noll, his mind still on the necessity for calling a doctor, slipped into ulster and bedshoes and rushed across the street to rouse the house physician in the apartment-hotel. He was some time making himself known and understood. As he neared his own door again, he saw Mr. Estrilla entering almost on the run.

“There’s been a murder! Captain Hanska’s killed!” Professor Noll called after him.

“I know—my seester telephone—she is frighten’,” Estrilla called back shrilly over his shoulder. And he hurried up the stairs.

By this time, the open door, the fluttering lights, the screams and hysterics, had begun to attract the attention of this and that late pedestrian. A milkman pulled up, hitched, and entered; and then a night-faring printer. Presently the little knot in the street and the parlors was augmented by a woman, fully and rather over-luxuriously dressed, as though for the theater—a big picture hat and a black satin, fur-edged evening coat over a light gown which showed here and there the glitter of sequins. She was a large but shapely woman of uncertain age; yet so pleasing withal that the gathering loafers, even in the excitement of a murder, spared a few admiring glances at her face. Her expression changed momentarily with each sound from above; and with these changes the ghost of a line of dimples played about her generous mobile mouth. The mouth, the dimples, the peaked chin, the rather small straight nose, all appeared in strange contrast to her

large light eyes, which arrested attention at once through a curious appearance of looking far away.

The printer and the milkman hastened to tell her their news. Some row was on up there; they'd overheard something about a murder. At that word, the strange woman with quick efficient gestures, drew off her long evening gloves, straightened out the fingers, rolled them into a neat ball, and put them away in her muff.

"I'm goin' up," she confided to her fellows. "I belong there—they need a sensible woman, from the way they're screechin'. You better not follow—you'll do no good an' it might git you involved." With surprising lightness, considering her bulk, she mounted the stairs.

The noise guided her to the focus of interest; she pushed her way into the room of the late Captain Hanska, and stood looking about with a pair of large serious eyes which took in every detail. She bent her gaze on the dead man, stooped, made quick examination, first of the wound and then of his face. Both Mrs. Moore and Miss Harding were about to ask this stranger to account for herself, when the doc-

tor, half-dressed but carrying his bag, edged past the door. All turned to him. He looked but an instant on the face.

“He’s dead,” he said calmly and briefly.

At this confirmation of what every one already knew, Mrs. Moore fainted again—tumbled into the arms of Miss Harding. Miss Jones, with a feeling that she must do the right thing now that the doctor was looking, rushed over and opened both windows. If Mrs. Moore expected attention from the doctor, she was balked. He was making a more careful examination and that lady gradually revived of her own motion.

“He has been dead for some time—not long enough for rigor mortis to set in, but he’s cold and the blood has begun to congeal,” he said at length. “Has any one notified the police? Has any one called up a Coroner?”

“I’ll attend to that,” volunteered the strange woman, with an air of perfect competence and command; “where’s the phone—ground floor and top floor hall? All right; I’ll use the top floor; that’s nearer. Any particular Coroner, Doctor? Lipschutz? All right.”

The doctor gave a look of inquiry at her rai-

ment, so grotesquely mismatched with such a scene. Tommy North, already perceiving what might happen to a young man caught all blood-smeared in proximity to a murder, threw a quick appealing glance of his own. The woman seemed to catch the inquiry and the appeal.

“Don’t you worry, young man. I’ve got no connection with the police, an’ if you didn’t do this thing you’re all right,” and then to the doctor: “My name is Madame Le Grange, I own the house at 442—across the street. Never mind, my dear—” this to Miss Harding, who showed signs of coming out of her stupor and following. With a businesslike air, she bustled up-stairs, called police headquarters, informed them there had been a murder at 445 and the doctor wanted Coroner Lipschutz—also, they had better send some policemen. This done, she spent a moment in thought before she descended.

In the hall, she met the regular patrolman, who had received the news at last. The limb of the law had forbidden the augmented crowd at the door to follow him; he was ascending alone. The sight of this woman in her fash-

ionable clothes—or was it her compelling look of command—stopped him.

“Listen,” she said, “there’s only a second. Never mind who I am. Look at this.” She produced the old and worn piece of paper which she had drawn from her bag a minute before.

“To the police,” it read. “Any matter that concerns the bearer, Mrs. Rosalie Le Grange, is to be referred to me. I request you to give her the greatest discretion.

“INSPECTOR MARTIN MCGEE.”

“Not a word,” pursued Rosalie Le Grange. “Now mind I didn’t see this thing, an’ I don’t know as much about it as you. But it’s your job to tip me off to the reserves as soon as they come—make them understand that they ain’t to stop me whatever I do. And remember”—now the woman smiled in a meaning way—“you got here just as quick as you could—not a second later—I’ll stick to that. Now get inside.” She waited a moment, before she followed him.

Tommy North, fairly green now, was sitting

on a couch in his ghastly raiment. At that moment, Señor Estrilla came down the stairs from his sister's room. He had opened his raincoat, but it was still wet. He had turned up his hat brim, but an occasional drop fell.

"My seester is better," he said. "Oh, can I assist?" And while he helped the men to cover the body, he listened to scattered explanations from the women.

Now the reserves had come; and after them, the Coroner and the detectives. They cleared out the house, holding only those who seemed to them pertinent witnesses. At a signal from Rosalie Le Grange they detained her for a time, on the ground that she had arrived suspiciously early. The first unorganized search for the criminal simmered down to Tommy North, although even Mrs. Moore admitted that he had entered only a minute before the body was discovered. In the midst of the investigation, a new quandary presented itself. The house was to be sealed while the police investigated. The innocent would have to find some other dwelling-place. That suited her, Miss Harding remarked; she wouldn't sleep *there* again; whereupon Mrs. Moore, declaring

she was ruined, fell again to weeping. And suddenly she who called herself Madame Le Grange stepped forward into the huddled distressed group.

“I haven’t introduced myself,” she said, with easy masterful calm, “but I’ve just opened the house at 442 as a boarding-house. You ain’t going to hold me, of course”—this to the police—“and, anyhow, you know where to find me in case you want me. There’s room to-night in my house for you all.” She turned, with her eternal air of mistress in any situation, to Miss Harding. “Come, dress and pack up your night things, my dear. We can move your trunks to-morrow.” Mechanically, Miss Harding obeyed, and then Miss Jones. Suddenly Mr. Estrilla, who had been ministering to Mrs. Moore by the door, spoke up and asked:

“My seester, too?”

“She’s sick, ain’t she?” inquired Mrs. Le Grange, as if for an instant that gave her pause. “Then the poor thing needs it worst of all!” she answered her own argument. “Come on!” She dashed away, lightly in spite of her bulk, Estrilla following.

While Rosalie Le Grange was preparing to

move the invalid on the top floor, the police and the Coroner straightened out affairs a little. There was much man in Tommy North. If he had played the craven in the first rush of his gruesome discovery, it was because he had wakened to that state of tense depression which comes with the sudden departure of drunkenness. He became defiant now; whereupon the police began to bully. While they were trying to make Mrs. Moore admit that she had not seen Tommy North come up the stairs, a detective sergeant put a sneering question to her—

“Well, who else could have done it? Who else has been here?”

And the inrush of memory brought a little shriek from Mrs. Moore.

“Mr. Wade—the gentleman who called to-night!” she cried. All at once her suspicions left the branded Mr. North. Mr. Wade had come late in the evening—and that, in the doctor’s opinion, was just about the time when Captain Hanska must have died. Mr. Wade had called two or three times before, always at night. Trembling, she found his card, “Lawrence Wade, Curfew Club,” in the plated tray

at the hall door. Suddenly Miss Harding, who had been refusing all light on the events of the evening, gave a little shriek.

“Why, they were quarreling when I went—” she cried. Then she stopped, as though fearful of her own words. The police turned on her. In a tumble of words and emotions, she told what she knew. Mr. Wade’s late call, the high words, the fact that none had heard a sound from Captain Hanska’s room after Wade left the house—that was enough for the Coroner and the detectives. They packed Tommy North—sober, pale, but now thoroughly collected—into the patrol wagon, sent the hue and cry to the Curfew Club after Mr. Wade, put the house under guard, and called their day’s work done.

And the rest of the Moore establishment, having first received dreadful warning concerning the fate of absconding witnesses, finished that uneasy night under the ministrations of Rosalie Le Grange at 442.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CHIEF

**I**NSPECTOR MARTIN M'GEE, the middle-aged solid executive of the New York detectives, sat in his businesslike office running over the reports on the Hanska murder, now less than a calendar day old but already the subject of those innumerable extras which the newsboys were shouting under his windows. Nothing in the formal documents before him served to give him any new light. Thomas North, advertising agent, at present locked up to await examination, had announced discovery of the murder. When he made the announcement, he was spotted and daubed with blood. Captain Hanska had then been dead at least an hour. For the period in which Hanska must have died, North proved a perfect alibi—unless the landlady, or North's companions at the annual smoker of the Carekillers, had lied to the detectives. Lawrence Wade—

that looked like the man. Wade was missing from the Curfew Club when the police arrived; however, through the good memories of a taxicab driver and a ticket seller, he had been traced to Boston and there arrested in the very act of engaging European passage.

Wade had visited Hanska at about the time of the murder—"as shown by the condition of the body." Wade admitted that fact. "I was there on business for a friend," he said. Pressed to explain why he had made such a sudden trip out of town, he declined to answer. He knew his legal rights—he was a lawyer it appeared—and he would give no further explanation. Lawrence Wade it must be—unless this proved an "inside job." The windows of Captain Hanska's room were both fastened when North discovered the murder, but his outer door, leading into the hall, was unlocked. There were no signs of any entrance by the front door or the basement door. By night, Wade and North must go on the carpet for a little touch of the Third Degree. Inspector McGee was a firm believer in that same Third Degree. Lecoq tactics he distrusted, with the

distrust of a narrow man for the other man's weapons.

But the formal documents in the Hanska case interested Inspector McGee less, a great deal less, than an informal verbal report made that morning by the sergeant in command of the reserves.

"We didn't know nothing about her, Chief," he said, "except that she had an order from you telling us to keep our hooks off her. Forgot the name—something French with a L— e behind it. It was all right, wasn't it?"

Inspector McGee understood at once; and the information brought a little thrill. He had given only two such papers in his career; and the other was held by a man. So Rosalie Le Grange had bobbed up again—Rosalie Le Grange, trance, test and clairvoyant medium, follower of a small half-criminal trade but friend of society against larger criminals. How curiously that woman had glanced in and out of his life, and what luck she had brought! His first success, for example—the solution of the Heywood murder, which had raised him from plain detective to detective sergeant.

None but him and her knew how Rosalie Le Grange had cleared up that important case by her knowledge and shrewdness, and had slipped out of it in the dramatic moment, leaving to him the credit. Then the Martin case, which had helped make him a captain—the McGregor diamond case—half a dozen smaller cases, all successes and all redounding greatly to his reputation. For three years now she had been completely out of his world. Once a vague rumor that she was very prosperous had set him wondering with a little regret whether she had fallen to tricking big dupes. In old years, she always affected to despise that process.

Here she was again, mysterious and dramatic, still, at the very focus of another big case. The heavy lips of Martin McGee relaxed in a smile of unaccustomed sweetness as he thought on her, and less on her talents and her beneficent influence over his career than on her look and move and joy in life. He recalled her as she stepped into his career ten years ago—plump but shapely; dimpled, brown-haired, marvelous in the compelling expression of her gray eyes. He recalled the Rosalie of three

years ago—still shapely but now touched with age and powdered with gray. From among the half-forgotten memories of a busy and rather brutal life, she stirred into full vision. Inspector McGee was forty-eight years old; and that period is the Indian summer of romance. He found himself looking forward to their next meeting.

And as he bent over his desk in unaccustomed meditation, the hour of that meeting was come. The doorman brought a card—"Mme. Rosalie Le Grange"—and behind him she appeared.

Any woman who had known the Rosalie Le Grange of Inspector McGee's recollections would have read new prosperity into her at first glance. Then, her shirt-waists, always immaculately neat, were of cheap lawn; now, her modest waist was chiffon and Cluny hung over a figured silk. Her suit had that perfect tailored simplicity which only genius achieves. Her hat was unobtrusive, but any discriminating feminine eye would have seen that Verré made it; and Verré comes high. These signs of wealth escaped Martin McGee. The proof to him was more tangible—the diamond pendant at her throat, the rings on her fingers.

He noted these little brothers of prosperity before he perceived how much younger she appeared in face and figure than when he saw her last. Being mere male man, he could not understand that this false youth was born and bred of the modiste, the milliner and the mas-seuse.

“Well, well!” exclaimed Martin McGee, rising as though to some great personage, “back again! Say, you just couldn’t keep out of big doings, could you? And how pretty you look—prettier and prettier all the time! What hauled you into the Hanska case?”

“I ain’t in the Hanska case at all,” responded Rosalie Le Grange, answering his second question first, “at least not deep, Martin McGee.” She flashed upon him her dimples, snapped at him her great gray eyes. “When a person is comin’ home late from a supper with an actress friend an’ sees a door open and hears people talking on the inside with remarks about murder and police, she investigates. Which I done. An’ when she finds a lot of human hens runnin’ around like their heads was cut off, she helps straighten things out. I was never right up close to a murder before.” She paused a

minute, her dimples faded and the lines of her face fell. "Ugh!" she shuddered with the memory.

"That," said Martin McGee, "is what I'd call a coincidence."

"Coincidence!" repeated Rosalie Le Grange with fine scorn, "now you look here, Inspector McGee, there ain't any such thing as coincidences—any more than there's such a thing as luck. No, Martin McGee. Nearly everybody that's lived long enough in New York has had a murder or a burglary or something in the same block. It was *bound* to happen to me in time. It happened; and instead of minding my own business like the rest, I butted straight in. When the reasons for a thing get too tangled-up for you and me to follow, we stick a label on it an' call it luck. But there," she checked herself, "this is just one of my platform inspirational talks like I used to give the sitters in my test séances. Only then I laid it to the spirits. Now I lay it to Rosalie Le Grange."

"Used to?" echoed Inspector McGee. "Does that mean you've cut it out?"

"Well, do these clothes and this five-dollar-

an-hour massage on my poor old face look like I got 'em from sitters at two dollars a throw?" inquired Rosalie Le Grange. "Say, ask me about it, please. I'm dying to tell."

"All right; I've asked," responded Martin McGee, a kind of dull fire illuminating his clean-shaven jowly police countenance.

"Now," said Rosalie Le Grange, "I'm going to astonish you, Marty McGee. I got it from Robert H. Norcross—the railroad king."

McGee's face fell. This mascot of his, this curious good fairy who had skipped in and out of his career, scattering golden successes, was a kind of an ideal. That she should "work" a doddering millionaire—as Norcross had been in his last years—for the tainted coin of aged folly, was a blow to what idealism an Inspector of detectives may hope still to cherish. Rosalie, skilled from youth to catch and interpret the unconsidered expression of the human countenance, read his emotion at once.

"Now, I don't mean at all what *you* mean, Martin McGee," she said. "Listen. It don't matter what I did, or how I did it—but I saved this Robert H. Norcross from makin' about the biggest kind of a fool out of himself.

There's more things get by the police than get to 'em, Inspector Martin McGee. Especially in the medium game. Norcross was *caught*, I tell you. Ever hear of Mrs. Paula Markham?"

"The woman who skipped to Paris after the Warfield affair?" asked McGee. Rosalie nodded.

"And a great medium, too," she said, "but also a great crook. Well she *had* Robert Norcross, I tell you." Rosalie extended one of her creamed-and-polished hands. She closed the fingers gradually, into one pink, adorable, tight fist. "Just like that," she said. "He was the right age to be worked by a medium. And think of the stake! The newspapers said when he died that his estate was smaller than anybody thought. But it was seventy-five millions. Mrs. Markham had him—and them. An' I broke that grip. It ain't necessary for me to say how. Funny thing was I didn't do it for Norcross at all, but just for a little blue-eyed fool of a girl in love. Well, anyhow, when he woke up and realized the narrow shave he had, Mr. Norcross began to investigate, an' found what I'd done. Do you remember," she

asked suddenly, "that they probated the Norcross will secret? Nobody ever knew exactly what he did with his money, except his nephew got most of it."

"I remember," said Inspector McGee. And then, on a sudden burst of laughter, "Gee! Wouldn't the newspapers give a heap to get this story you're going to tell!"

"They would," responded Rosalie Le Grange, "and that's why you'll never breathe a word to a soul. But there! I always knew who I could trust—an' you're one of 'em. The reason was a codicil or whatever you call it. He left me—in token of service and friendship,' it said—an old house he owned over by North River, an' stocks—well six thousand a year to make one bite of it!"

"Good lord! He did?" cried Martin McGee.

Rosalie nodded solemnly, but her eyes shone.

"Now I played that medium game on the square, you understand," she said, "again and again. I passed up chances to hook just such old dopes as Norcross. My rule was always straight sittings at two dollars a head, an' no extras. I faked 'em, of course. But I heart-

ened 'em up. I handed 'em good advice. I kept silly fool girls from goin' to the bad. I gave weepy old widows the only real recreation they ever had. An' here, right at the end, comes an honest piece of money so big that I could have played crooked all my life, an' never even got a chance at anythin' like it. Makes me wonder," she added, "if the goody-goody stuff I used to line out in my inspirational platform talks wasn't true, after all."

"And never a noise from the lawyers?" inquired Martin McGee. "Didn't they squeal?"

"Like stuck pigs!" replied Rosalie, "but they didn't bother *me*. I was my own lawyer. 'All right,' says I, 'sue and get it into the papers that Robert H. Norcross was runnin' to mediums. Do a lot for your railroad system. Look nice in red head-lines.' That fixed 'em. An' last March, I come into my money. I closed up shop an' sold my test books an' stopped this medium business, an' started to be a lady. Six thousand a year ain't too much to do that job in New York, even when you don't have to pay house rent.

"There was six months' income waiting for me when the lawyers settled everything up, an'

I put that into things that I wanted all my life. I bought some stuff that I *needed* too, but I bought the things that I wanted *first*—a Duchess-lace handkerchief that put me back fifty dollars, a gold chair, an' some diamond rings an' a gold-mesh bag—but I guess this is neither here nor there. I spread myself on clothes, had my face overhauled and renovated until I hardly knew it myself, and then I fixed up the house. And that house—you can believe me—is some house—it's got chintz bedrooms, an' a conservatory an' a smoking den an' a cozy corner an' a sun parlor.

“After that I started out to be a lady. I went to the opera an' the theater an' tea at the Deidrich. I hired a landau from a livery-stable, an' every day I drove up Fifth Avenue. The rest of the time, I shopped. An', Inspector Martin McGee, believe *me*, I begun to feel wrong, somehow.”

Rosalie stopped for breath and Inspector McGee jerked out a quick laugh of anticipation.

“It wasn't till last week that I looked myself over an' found I wasn't happy. To make no bones of it, bein' a real lady—which I'd wanted

to be all my life—jest bored me to death. It wasn't as though I'd had somebody to do it with. That was the trouble, I guess. I never did associate with mediums much—I always was on to *them*. Two or three of 'em crawled around an' tried to graft on me. I fixed 'em. They don't know nothing on me except I used to be in the business, but I know everything on *them*. With other rich people, like me, I wasn't makin' no headway at all. That wasn't the whole of it, either. Here I'd been twenty years takin' care of other people's troubles, getting fun out of jest listening to 'em, an' excitement out of wondering what they'd do next. An' I missed it."

"I bet you did," said Martin McGee admiringly.

"Well, last week I set down and had a good long dispute with myself. 'You can't go back to the business,' says I. 'Rosalie Le Grange, you've got jest what you've always wanted, an' yet you ain't happy. What you need is a compromise,' said I. An' next morning it come to me. Maybe the spirits sent it. You can laugh, Inspector McGee, but there's something *in* this spirit thing. I used to think there

was, an' then again I'd think there wasn't—even in my own clairvoyance. But the more you know about this clairvoyant thing the more you don't know, an' that stands whether you're a psychic researcher or a clairvoyant yourself.

“Well, anyhow, it came to me like a flash—boarders! I could run my house just the way I wanted, because I needn't look out for profits. An' I could take jest who I wanted and shut out whoever I didn't want. The thought chirked me a lot. Thinks I: ‘I've got a smoking-room and a cozy corner an' a sun parlor, and they ain't many folks that board get them comforts.’ So I fixed all the bedrooms up sensible with good white and gold beds and adult-size towels an' gave them all little fixy touches that made them homelike.”

Again Madame Le Grange ran down. She panted softly a moment.

Inspector McGee dropped a heavy fist on his mahogany desk. “It would take you to look upon a boarding-house as fun!” he chuckled.

“An' I was jest ready to begin to look around an' advertise when—this happened. The idea struck me as soon as I saw the state of the people in that house. The police would put it

under guard, an' the boarders would be out of a home. So I moved 'em over bodily, all but the one you pinched—the sick little dago woman from up-stairs, an' the two girls, and that funny old Professor Noll. An' I'm even putting up with the landlady—if it was other people's troubles I was lookin' for, I got 'em all right!"

"Gee!" ejaculated Martin McGee. "I can use you—"

"Yes, you can," interrupted Rosalie, "but you won't. I know what you want. You want me to go to work an' help cinch this case. Well, I won't. I'm out of *that* business, too. What I'm here for, Martin McGee—beyond the pleasure I always took in your society"—here Rosalie let her dimples play and flash—"is to tell all I know or saw, so's you won't be callin' me at the inquest an' gettin' me a feature in the papers."

"How about this man North?" asked the Inspector.

"Well, in the first place, I like him," said Rosalie; "I like that boy."

"You're no different from every other lady that's looked into that terrier face of his," re-

sponded Martin McGee, smiling heavily. "I've been having his record trailed all day. Seems he knows everybody, except the swells, on his beat,—the two cops, the paper-boy, the bartenders—he's strong there—the bootblacks, the wops on the fruit stand, the kike tailor, the cabmen, the expressmen and the postman, even the chink laundrymen. He was best man last week at the postman's wedding, and they do say—every one who knows him sticks to just one thing—whoever done it, 'twasn't Tommy North. That may seem in his favor, but there's two things against him; one"—Martin McGee lifted a heavy purple finger—"he does most of his sleeping between the hours of half past two and half past seven in the morning; and two"—another purple finger popped up to join the first—"he spends most of his extra money at pool parlors, Austrian villages and cabaret shows, where he has *some* reputation as a turkey trotter. For a boy that just come down from the country three years ago, I must say he's been going some, and the only wonder to me is that Tammany ain't got hold of him long ago. Do you think he had anything to do with it?"

“I ain’t committin’ myself as to who done it—did it—I don’t have to think about that any more now I’ve stopped bein’ a lady,” said Rosalie, sweeping into digression. “You’ll never know the fight I had with this grammar thing after talkin’ for forty years jest like I wanted to. Thank the lord, that’s over. Well, anyhow, I ain’t committin’ myself. Looks like an alibi for Mr. North when the landlady says he come up the stairs only a minute before he hollered, an’ the doctor says that this Hanska had been dead two or three hours. Appeared to me like he was jest jarred out of a drunk, too. How about this Lawrence Wade or whatever his name was—the man who called with the bag? Got him?”

“He was arrested this morning in Boston.”

“Skippin’? Looks bad. Has it occurred to you to investigate that young man’s athletic record?”

Inspector McGee jumped and turned on her. Rosalie was always letting slip some of these extraordinary bits of knowledge.

“How did you know,” inquired Inspector McGee, “that he was an athlete?”

Rosalie looked very grave. But she answered his question by another.

“He wasn’t a fencer?”

For answer, McGee picked up a red-bound college annual from his desk.

“We’ve been following him up, you see.” And in the tabulated records he pointed out one line, “President fencing club, 1898–99.”

“Looks bad,” commented Rosalie.

“Why?”

“How would you stab a man if you were stabbing in a hurry?” asked Rosalie. “Try. Here’s a penholder. The point of the pen is the point of the knife. Now!”

Inspector McGee grasped the penholder so that the point protruded from under his little finger. So holding it, he made a downward sweep through the air.

“Of course, that’s how I’d go at it,” said McGee, “but a regular knife man—”

“Exactly,” interrupted Rosalie. “And your knife would go in from above, now wouldn’t it? The wound would point down. Now try it this way—” Rosalie arranged the weapon which is mightier than the sword in such manner that the point extended from un-

der her forefinger. "Or this"—now she held the fencer's grip, the shaft, lying obliquely along the palm, controlled and guided by the sensitive finger-points. "Now. He was stabbed in the heart, but from beneath. The wound pointed upward. With your grip, you couldn't stab a standing man *upward*, not if he let you. With my grip, I couldn't stab downward to save my life."

Martin McGee went into heavy thought while he struggled for objections.

"Suppose he *was* lying down?" he asked, at last.

"On the floor? Beggin' to be stabbed?" jabbed Rosalie.

"Maybe he was stabbed in bed and got out and died on the floor."

"An' never made any disturbance or left any blood behind? Besides, the bed wasn't mussed at all. It was just thrown back as though he'd got up quiet and natural."

"You saw all that—in two minutes!" exclaimed McGee. "I never could understand how you did it."

"If you'd spent your whole life," replied Rosalie, "sizin' up sitters with past, present an'

future in the two minutes that you was fakin' trance, you'd see things in a hurry, too!"

"Well, how on earth did you know that about fencers?"

"Easy as lyin' an' simple as women," replied Rosalie. "I used to room with a little actress that fenced—the one I was havin' supper with last night. But now, Inspector, just to close things up, I'm out of this case. I've given you all I know. Your police will be botherin' my boarders a lot with questions; an' so will the reporters. Just trust me to steer that. You keep me out."

Martin McGee sighed.

"All right, Rosalie; but I'd like your help. Still, I owe you lots of good turns, and the case don't look as mysterious, after all. I guess it's that fellow Wade."

"Don't get too sudden with your guesses," replied Rosalie. "How does your dope go, anyway? Have you looked up everybody that slept in the house last night? I'd like to know pretty well if I'm cherishin' a murderer in my midst."

"They're being looked up," replied McGee. "I've taken personal charge of this, but the

Captain commanding the precinct detectives is helping with the leg-work. The house wasn't entered. Wade, or maybe North, did this—unless it was an inside job. There's the landlady—well, it might have been her as well as anybody, of course—except she's a kind of an old fool. She just don't look likely—”

Rosalie nodded.

“You can count her out.”

“That Professor Noll is a harmless old crank. Still they're the people that do such things sometimes. Now you've brought up that point about fencers—he was educated in a German university. Heid—well, whatever you call it. They practise some kind of Dutch sword game over there, don't they? There wasn't any servant in the house. Mrs. Moore's maids and furnace man were niggers, and niggers sometimes use knives. The furnace man is named Tremont Taylor. He gambles; and when a coon gambles he's likely to do worse. That gets us down to the women. Miss Estrilla is up here from Caracas, which is in Venezuela, for her eyes. Her brother's here with her. He's the agent in New York for an independent asphalt company of Caracas.

He lives in some apartment-hotel over on Thirty-seventh Street—I've forgotten the name. He called last night, but he was out of the house before this Wade came—before they heard Wade and Hanska quarreling—and he didn't come in again until they'd discovered the body. He was in his rooms all that time, too—we've talked to the elevator man in his apartment-hotel. Getting back to the women; except Mrs. Moore, who's big and husky, there's not one of 'em has the strength to hit a blow like that—and women don't use knives, anyhow. Miss Estrilla's weak as a cat. Those two stenographers"—he referred to his notes—"Miss Harding and Miss Jones, are just little city girls, with no great muscle. Besides, where's the motive? I can't get a line yet on Hanska—the body hasn't been claimed. He's boarded there three weeks. Nobody liked him much, but I can't find that any of the other boarders knew him well enough to hate him. I forgot to say we've looked over everybody and everything for blood, and can't find a drop—"

"You don't have to tell me that," responded Rosalie with some asperity, "a set of your bull-

headed detectives has been ransackin' the suit cases in my house all mornin'. Nearly scared the life out of Miss Harding, by tryin' to prove to her that the fruit stains on her shirt-waist were blood."

"Well, I guess they were fruit stains, all right," replied McGee. "Can't find any blood on Wade's things, either."

"Which is natural. A wound like that don't begin to bleed right off. No necessity for gettin' bloody if the murderer only kept his head, which generally they don't. Of course, you've tried to find where the knife came from?"

McGee smiled on her.

"Have I caught you asleep at last?" he asked.

"Nope," replied Rosalie promptly and cheerfully, "since you put it that way. I saw the pile of junk on the table—an' there was another knife in it. What do you find about that stuff?"

"Nothing yet. But I bet I'll find more when I put Lawrence Wade through the Third Degree. I guess it's Wade."

"I guess probably," admitted Rosalie.

“Most mysteries ain’t mysteries at all after the first day. Well, now, I’m botherin’ a busy man in office hours an’ I must run along. Let’s see—five minutes to four, an’ it’s bad luck to go before the hour. Suppose you tell me about yourself an’ how the world’s usin’ you?”

Inspector McGee sat back in his office chair and waxed eloquent. However, his narrative of pulls and promotions and Tammany influence was never finished. For before the hour struck, the silent attentive doorman entered and laid on his desk a card. Inspector McGee took it up, glanced at it perfunctorily, and suddenly let out an exclamation which had all the power and verve of an oath.

“By the great cats!” he exclaimed, “look at that—‘Mrs. John H. Hanska.’”

Rosalie took the card and fingered it.

“The widow, I bet.”

“Thought he was single,” remarked the Inspector. “Though, after all, I’d just been taking it for granted.”

“Well,” said Rosalie, rising, “that’s come-again-soon for me.”

But the Inspector was observing her with eyes which held quizzical invitation.

“Honest now,” he said, “wouldn’t you like to sit in on this interview?”

Rosalie flashed her dimples and contemplated him for a second. Then, with the unexpected lightness which marked all her movements, she sat down.

“See here, Martin McGee,” she said, “you ain’t goin’ to make a fool of me, draggin’ me into this case—but I’m dying to listen just the same.”

“Show them in,” said the Inspector on the instant, and as though fearing that she would pull back her permission.

“But not unless she’s willing,” said Rosalie, as they waited.

And then through the door came two women.

“Good lord!” commented Rosalie under her breath.

## CHAPTER III

### MRS. HANSKA'S STORY

**T**HE first was tall and big. But her height was mainly the superb carriage of her shoulders, her size but the ripe roundness of a goddess figure. She was dark; she was young; she was beautiful. At that moment, her face hinted tragedy in every line and color; but at any moment she must have been serious. It could smile only in flashes, that face—with its broad serene brow which held its own only by force against floods of dark hair, with its regular line of profile, with its large rippled mouth parting slowly even on her speech. But mainly it was the eyes which gave gravity to her beauty. They were clear and big; they had the rare lift at the inner curve which lends an appearance of frankness and ingenuousness. Beyond their beauty, however, they had an arresting quality so strong, when she regarded you full-face, as to be poig-

nant. It all lay in her expression of innocence triumphant over experience, of sincerity triumphant over many lies. Rosalie Le Grange, connoisseur of her sex, sat regarding her spellbound.

The second woman—in fact she was little more than a girl—had everything which the other had not; she seemed but the illuminated shadow of her who called herself Mrs. Hanska. She was slender, blonde and fragile—her quality was elfin. Rosalie could spare her but a glance.

“I am Mrs. Hanska, widow of the man who was killed last night,” said the taller woman; and she hesitated.

It was not the custom of Inspector Martin McGee to rise when women entered his office in the rôle of the accused or of witnesses. A little brutality of attitude, he felt, put them in a meek and humble mood for the subsequent Third Degree proceedings. But this woman—or was it the respected presence of Rosalie Le Grange?—drew him to his feet.

“Won’t you sit down?” he said.

“Thank you. May I introduce Miss Elizabeth Lane? She is here to verify what I have

to say." All this with perfect simplicity. Her eyes traveled then, with a quick glance of inquiry, to Rosalie Le Grange.

"This," said the Inspector, taking his cue at a quick prod from Rosalie's foot, "is Mrs. Le Grange. She is the lady who came into the house right after the—accident—and took the boarders over to her place for the night. She's kept them there ever since. She was just telling me what she knew. Maybe you'd like to hear it."

With her beautiful seriousness, Mrs. Hanska considered Inspector McGee's words, considered the situation, considered Rosalie Le Grange. Never had Rosalie presented more convincingly the appearance of simple, placid, bourgeois respectability. Not the quiver of an eyelash, not the flash of a dimple—quiet-eyed she gave Mrs. Hanska glance for glance.

"I should like very much to hear it," said Mrs. Hanska earnestly.

"But maybe you want to be alone just at first," interposed Rosalie, making a pretense of rising.

"No—there is nothing secret," replied Mrs. Hanska. "I see no reason why you should

not stay. Indeed you may be able to help us." She trained her look steadily upon Rosalie Le Grange. Rosalie, with all the gravity of this world in her brows, looked back. Something unseen of Martin McGee passed between them. Women have with women their own ways, unperceived, unweighted, unvalued, by you or me or Martin McGee or any other man who ever lived. In that glance, two currents of fine subconscious emotion had met and fused. Rosalie Le Grange's mind had said: "You marvel, you beauty!" And Constance Hanska's mind had said: "I trust this woman whoever she is."

Now Martin McGee summoned the police stenographer and ordered him to stay within call. Gone from him was the heavy humor of his half-hour with Rosalie. He was the Chief—suspicious and brutal.

"I must warn you," he said, "that if you are implicated in this case, anything you say will be used against you at the trial." Generally that sudden statement made women tremble, drew from them a flood of words out of which McGee picked the flotsam and the jetsam of evidence. But Mrs. Hanska did

not give even the preliminary frightened start. She only transferred her limpid level gaze from Rosalie's face to Inspector McGee's.

"Oh, of course," she said simply; "I know enough about law to understand that."

But the little blonde spoke now for the first time; and for the first time Rosalie turned her attention from the greater luminary to its satellite. She was a child of whimsy and the sun. Her face ran to tiny points and peaks, her coloring to twinkles of light. Her blue eyes were snapping now as she exclaimed:

"Implicated! You'll have a hard time doing that!" And she gazed truculently at Inspector McGee.

"Please don't, Betsy-Barbara," said Mrs. Hanska with no irritation—merely a plain statement of her desires; "it's this gentleman's duty to warn me, you know."

("Betsy-Barbara—that's a cute name—I bet Mrs. Hanska gave it to her!" said the mind of Rosalie Le Grange.)

"It would be impossible to implicate me," pursued Mrs. Hanska. "Dozens of people can testify that I was in Arden, a hundred miles north, last night—that I have not left Arden

for more than a month. Perhaps," she continued, checking an unformed sentence on the lips of Inspector McGee, "I had better start at the beginning and tell you all about it."

She was talking "fine," Inspector McGee reflected. Having got her started, his best course was to mollify her until she began to run down.

"That's always best," he said.

"So I should think," replied Mrs. Hanska, "but will they use it all at the trial?"

"Not necessarily," replied Inspector McGee; "we must judge of that." Mrs. Hanska mused another space.

"And the newspapers—"

"They'll get," said McGee, "just what you tell them—no more."

Mrs. Hanska sighed as though one great load, at least, had lifted from her shoulders. And quite simply she began her talk.

"I married Captain Hanska ten years ago—when I was nineteen. He was nearly thirty-five then, although he said that he was younger; and he had just come back from Alaska. He said that he got his title in the Bolivian army. I have since had reason to

doubt that. He was an engineer by profession. I realize now how little mother and I knew about him. But he was the kind of person who carried everything before him—you deferred to him in those days in spite of your better judgment. And my mother was very trusting. Then, too, Captain Hanska was a very charming man. Afterward, he changed—perhaps I need not say anything more—”

During this statement, Betsy-Barbara Lane had been wriggling and bouncing in her chair. “Then I will!” she burst out indignantly. “He was dreadful. He was horrid. He was bad and he always had been bad. And he treated her shamefully. Everybody knows that!”

Martin McGee, reflecting that he was making great progress toward establishing a motive, forebore to check Betsy-Barbara. But Mrs. Hanska interposed a firm, “My dear, you must not interrupt!” Then she took up the thread with her extraordinary composure.

“Miss Lane is a little inaccurate. Captain Hanska never really maltreated me. He was kind enough. Perhaps he was too kind. But, you see, I found out after a time how he lived.

That, for me, was the beginning of the end. He was a brilliant man. He might have made a good living in any one of a variety of ways. But he simply would not work. He preferred to live by his wits. Cards mainly. It was long before I realized that. He was very clever at concealment, and it never occurred to me to doubt his word. In fact, I did not realize it all until after our marriage. We were in New York—" she hesitated again. "Shall I tell you the details?" Then, "I mean, of course, is all this pertinent?"

"I've advised you to tell everything," replied the Inspector.

And now Rosalie Le Grange, who had been sitting in unaccustomed silence, spoke for the first time.

"You'll excuse me, Inspector," she said with an asperity so well assumed that Martin McGee wondered for a moment whether she was really offended, "but Mrs. Hanska don't seem to know her rights. She hasn't seen any lawyer. A person don't knock around this world for forty years without gettin' a line on what her rights are. I've learned. An' I'm goin' to be your lawyer here, Mrs. Hanska.

Now as long as you tell the truth, which of course you will, it don't matter about details. What the Inspector is after is who done this murder, an' anythin' touchin' on the facts. It don't matter how you learned it, but you did learn that Captain Hanska was a crook."

Mrs. Hanska winced visibly at the ugly word which finished Rosalie's charge. But she managed a nod of assent.

"Thank you, Mrs. Le Grange. Yes, I learned that he was a—not entirely honorable. But I stayed with him—"

"Tryin' to lift and elevate his moral nature," said Rosalie Le Grange. "I've seen it tried before on that kind."

"Of course I believed that I could change him," admitted Mrs. Hanska. "But I began in time to suspect that for one doubtful transaction I knew about, there were a dozen he was keeping from me. It grew worse than that," her voice fell as though she made this last admission very reluctantly; "in time I realized that he was using me as a lure for his operations in cards—and other things. We were on our way around the world. Wherever we went, he made me entertain men that

they might play cards afterward—and be swindled. The end came at Shanghai”—she stopped here and made a little effort before she went on,—“it was a young Australian—foolish, and with a great deal of money. Shall I go into that?” she paused here, and her gaze traveled with another appeal to the face of Rosalie Le Grange.

“Now, Inspector,” said Rosalie, “I don’t see why this lady has to tell all that. It’s enough that the game was crooked. You left him, of course.”

“I had to,” replied Mrs. Hanska. “It came to the point where I must leave him or turn criminal myself. I got funds from home and sailed for America as soon as I could. I went straight to my mother in Boston. After that, I taught in a private school to support myself. I stayed there until he found me out and followed me. He wanted me to return to him.”

“And, of course, he would have put her through the same thing again,” exploded Betsy-Barbara; “he hadn’t changed any.”

“And what did you do next?” Rosalie slipped in her question before Mrs. Hanska could rebuke Betsy-Barbara again. By this time,

Martin McGee was sitting back in his chair with a feeling that the Third Degree had got clean out of his hands. He was a helpless male thing in a session of three women—a piece of furniture. Wise man that he was, he let it take its course. Constance was talking straight to Rosalie now.

“I resumed my maiden name. I called myself Mrs. Wharton—and I got a situation at the seminary at Arden—where Miss Lane teaches also. Then my mother died. At the end she made me promise that I would never go back to Captain Hanska as long as he led that—that kind of life. Somehow he learned, though, that I was in Arden. I told my troubles to Miss Lane, and she saw Captain Hanska for me the first time he came—”

“I told him,” said Betsy-Barbara, satisfaction surging in her voice, “if ever he came around again I’d fix him—I told him I’d have him arrested for a whole lot of things I knew he had done. Oh, I frightened him, I tell you!”

The ferocity of Betsy-Barbara’s voice, taken with her fairy fragility, brought into the situation its first hint of humor. Rosalie dimpled.

Even Constance let a ghost of a smile play about her lips. As for Inspector McGee, he nearly strangled.

"I wanted," Constance proceeded, "a separation. I needed it for my own protection. You see, there was the property—mother had left a little money. Captain Hanska wouldn't consent to a divorce."

"No," said Betsy-Barbara in a tone of superhuman sapience, "of course not! He wanted that money."

"And there were no real grounds that I knew"—Mrs. Hanska had by this time given up the struggle with Betsy-Barbara's wilfulness—"I had deserted him, not he me. Afterward he went away—to Holland, I think. At least he was in Antwerp three months ago. Then he returned to New York. He sent me a letter. He said that he would never give me up. Then I put the whole matter into the hands of Mr. Wade—Mr. Lawrence Wade."

"Ah!" The exclamation broke from the immobility of Inspector Martin McGee. For the first time since Rosalie took the reins, Constance Hanska seemed aware of his existence.

“Yes,” she said, “the young man whom you have arrested for this murder. I know, Inspector McGee, that my opinion will carry little weight with you. But I must say this—” she paused, and seemed to struggle with an emotion which, hitherto carefully repressed, now beat itself to the surface—“Lawrence Wade did not commit that murder. He couldn’t have done it. He isn’t that kind of a man.”

Meeting with no sympathetic response from Inspector McGee’s look of cunning gravity, Mrs. Hanska turned to Rosalie.

“Mrs. Le Grange, you understand, don’t you?”—and here her voice became deep and bell-like with her conviction. “Sometimes women know things without having to be told, and I know that Mr. Wade is innocent. I would stake my life and my honor—everything I have—on that. And yet I am perfectly helpless about proving it. He is innocent, though.”

Rosalie did not commit herself here. But eyes and dimples flashed their sympathy. And it was the Inspector who spoke first.

“Well, that’s what we’re here to settle, and

if he didn't do it, the best way out is to tell the truth."

"As if," interpolated Rosalie, "you wasn't going to do that! Now tell the Inspector about this Mr. Wade—"

"He is my friend and attorney," replied Mrs. Hanska. "He lives in Arden. I have known him ever since I went there. He visited New York three times to attempt some legal settlement with Captain Hanska. He wanted me to get a divorce. I wasn't quite ready to do that, even if I could have found grounds. But I was willing to have a legal separation—something which would have rid me of Captain Hanska and let me go my own way. I authorized Mr. Wade to offer part of my mother's property, if that would do any good. The Captain was living in a boarding-house. I knew his ways well enough to realize that this meant extreme poverty. He refused everything. He told Mr. Wade that as soon as he had arranged something—he didn't say what—he would find me and compel me to go with him. I realized that I must get farther from New York. I had a few possessions of Captain Hanska's. I wanted to return them

and close with him forever. Mr. Wade had an idea of making one last appeal; and I asked him if he would deliver those things at the same time. Yesterday morning Mr. Wade came down to New York. That's all I know—until I saw the newspapers—” She stopped here. Her color faded; her hands fell apart with a gesture of despair.

“And I brought her straight to you,” said Betsy-Barbara with a triumphant air, as though her extraordinary cunning had settled the case for all time.

Now the Inspector took up the examination again, for Rosalie sat musing, her eyes on Constance Hanska.

“What were the things you sent?” he asked.

“Let me see—what were they? Betsy-Barbara, you helped pack them. An old miniature of the Captain—”

“And some family photographs—” Betsy-Barbara put in briskly.

“And an old mahogany shaving-mirror which had belonged to his father—”

“And a Mexican hat-band and two knives and an Irish blackthorn stick and a silver cigarette case—”

A stethoscope upon Inspector McGee's pulse would have jumped an inch as Betsy-Barbara pronounced the word "knives." But his downturned face betrayed no emotion. He checked his interruption, in fact, through two more items; and when he returned to the subject he worked backward like a good attorney, concealing his pertinent question in a fog of impertinent ones.

"What kind of a cigarette case?"

"Chased silver and turquoises—a Russian design."

"What was the stick like?"

"Very heavy, and dark brown as I remember. And I think the ferrule was loose."

Here Rosalie, sitting impassive, quite out of the conversation, saw the corners of the Inspector's mouth twitch. She sat holding herself very tight, lest she betray the psychological moment.

"And the knives?" said the Inspector.

"Let me see—one was a little dagger that he used for a paper-knife and the other was a Malay kris with a long, sharp, wavy blade. He got it in the Philippines."

"Yes!" exclaimed the Inspector. And then

with the sudden brutality which was a part of his Third Degree method, "And it was with that knife Lawrence Wade stabbed your husband."

Inspector McGee might have thrown that very knife instead of his words, so sudden was the effect upon Constance Hanska. The color left her face. Her eyes grew big and wild. She flashed to her feet, trembling violently.

"Oh, no!" she pleaded, "oh, no! Oh, that will hurt him so! He couldn't have used it—some one used it after he left—Lawrence Wade could no more have stabbed an unarmed man—" She stopped, wrestled herself back to some semblance of composure. "Don't you understand he was a gentleman?" She turned from McGee's triumphant state to Rosalie's softened face. "Why, Mrs. Le Grange, gentlemen don't do such things. He was an athlete—he played every game honorably—do you think he would have put me in such a position, even if he thought of nothing else—he would have had to break every instinct—he—he—"

"Look here, Mrs. Hanska," said Inspector McGee, pouncing upon his advantage as ex-

perience had taught him to do, "there was what you call an affair between you and this Mr. Wade, wasn't there?"

Here Rosalie swung in again.

"Inspector," she said, "if you go that way, I'll advise this young woman to get a real lawyer before she talks to you any more. Now, my dear, you just answer what you please."

"Well, I should *say so!*" put in Betsy-Barbara. "Constance, why don't you leave this place at once? You didn't come here to be insulted."

But Constance was mistress of herself again.

"All this will come out in the trial, Betsy-Barbara. I might as well tell everything now. When he put himself in this position he was trying to help me. There was no affair, as you call it. But when he first met me he thought I was a widow. And before he knew my circumstances, he proposed marriage. He never spoke of it after I told him. He was a gentleman. He only tried to serve me as a gentleman would under the circumstances."

"Has it struck you," asked the Inspector, "that this might be used as a motive?"

"This is perfectly dreadful!" cried Betsy-Barbara. "Constance, you shall not stay here another minute. You come with me to a lawyer!"

"That's right," said Rosalie Le Grange shortly, "Inspector McGee, you can excuse us!"

"Not for a while," said Inspector McGee shortly. "Madame, I must have your official statement as to what you have just told me—before I let you leave."

Now Constance had risen; and Betsy-Barbara, in a state of suppressed fury, stood beside her, flashing sparks from her golden hair and her blue eyes and her little white teeth. Inspector McGee stepped to the door to summon a stenographer. And Rosalie, quick as thought, slipped up beside Constance.

"Not a word more than you can help about this proposing to you—not a word!" she whispered.

"Step into this room, ladies," said McGee. "I'll join you in a moment. We won't need you, Mrs. Le Grange."

Alone with the Inspector, Rosalie Le Grange stood regarding him from top to toe. He

faced her in a little embarrassment, which he covered with bluff.

"Well, you carried your pretend off nicely," he said; "anybody'd have thought you were sore on me."

For answer, Rosalie drew up a corner of her fine, firm, upper lip. "Sometimes," she said, "I hate a cop!"

Martin McGee laughed uneasily.

"Well, we got the goods," he said; "motive's established, all right."

"*You* got the goods, not *we*," replied Rosalie; "don't you count me in on that game. Third Degree! On the likes of her!"

But Inspector McGee, more interested just then in his professional problem than in what any woman thought of him, was pursuing his own train of reflection.

"In love with Hanska's wife—and Hanska'd mistreated her—and she wanted a divorce and couldn't get it. Wade and Hanska had quarreled. Wade goes up there with his curio shop and lays it down on the table. They quarrel again. Wade's a fencer. He picks up that knife and lets him have it just by instinct. Then he walks out of the door and gets

rattled and beats it. Of course, it would be hard to establish first-degree murder on what we've got now—but we'll get it."

"You think so, do you?" replied Rosalie. "My, don't promotion make a smart man of a pavement-pounding cop!"

"Guess you don't know," replied McGee, "what this man Wade said when we pinched him in Boston and told him what it was for?"

"No."

"He said: 'I didn't kill him, but by God I'd like to shake hands with the man who did!'" In the Inspector's voice there was an air of finality and triumph.

"Did he say that?" asked Rosalie; "did he say that?" She mused for a moment, revolving many principles of human conduct drawn from her large experience.

"Martin McGee," she said at length, "I told you a while ago I wasn't going to monkey with this thing. But I'm an old fool—and I'm in it—my own way, as I always worked."

McGee laughed.

"I thought you couldn't keep out," he said, "but you'll run against Lawrence Wade at the end."

As the two strange women came through the door, they found Rosalie Le Grange waiting. Constance looked her full in the eye; and suddenly her hands went up to her own face and she surrendered herself to her misery. And oddly enough, she turned in her distress not to her friend and companion Betsy-Barbara, but to this strange woman. As a bruised child runs to its mother, she ran to Rosalie Le Grange and bowed a weary head upon her shoulder. Rosalie took her to the bosom on which—in her own queer way—she had borne the burdens of thousands for thirty years long.

“You poor lamb!” she exclaimed; “you poor lamb! Now it’s going to be all right, dearie—and you’re comin’ home with me!”

“And that!” said Rosalie Le Grange as she retold this tale to the only person who ever enjoyed her full confidence, “was the queerest way that ever I saw of solicitin’ custom for a boardin’-house.”

## CHAPTER IV

### A MAN WHO LAUGHS

“WHAT will become of me?” wailed Mrs. Moore to Rosalie Le Grange. And Rosalie forebore at first to answer, for the ultimate destiny of Mrs. Moore appeared, indeed, black and uncertain.

Not that undulation and gnashing of teeth meant anything in her case. Weeping, for her, was the oil on the wheels of life. She wept when the butcher failed to bring the lamb chops, when she was moved by song, when she compared the luxuries of Madame Le Grange's house to the bare necessities of her own. Still, in this instance, she had cause for grief. The police, having ransacked, measured, and photographed the Moore boarding-house to the limit of their imagination, announced after four days that Mrs. Moore might bring her establishment back. But when Mrs. Moore notified the boarders, she met—the expected. Miss Hard-

ing, for example, declared that she was going to let well enough alone. After what had happened she could never sleep in that place again. When Mrs. Moore melted to tears, Miss Harding grew peppery. If Mrs. Moore wanted to know, it was *towels*, more than anything else, which kept her at Mrs. Le Grange's. She had boarded in ten separate and distinct places in New York, and never before did she see a place where you couldn't use the towels for a pocket-handkerchief. Miss Jones, her echo in everything, indorsed her sentiments, adding that Mrs. Le Grange's coffee was *coffee*.

Professor Noll was more courteous, but just as firm. He had already indicated his intentions by getting permission from the police to move his collection. When Mrs. Moore interviewed him, he was tacking on the wall a six-foot Japanese kakemono. He was sorry, but the greater variety of menu at Mrs. Le Grange's helped him to practise the principles of scientific alimentation. If Mrs. Moore would listen to his former advice and reorganize her catering on the scientific plan, he could guarantee her a houseful of his disciples. Otherwise, he preferred to stay where he was.

Mr. North, just out of jail, had not put in an appearance. Mrs. Moore did not even attempt to see Miss Estrilla. That lady was worse, a great deal worse. Besides the old trouble with her optic nerve, she had a kind of nervous prostration due to the shock. There had been talk of a trained nurse; but Rosalie Le Grange waved that proposal aside. She herself carried up the invalid's meals, attended to bandages and medicines, kept order in her room. Mrs. Moore had no offering to counterbalance that.

Instead—floppy and humble old person that she was—Mrs. Moore sought her successful rival, begging quarter.

“What can I do—what is going to become of me?” she repeated.

Rosalie Le Grange pulled out a chair and gently pushed Mrs. Moore into it.

“Now let's talk this over sensible,” she said. “It certainly does look as if I'd played it low on you, gettin' your boarders away. You can't blame me for offerin' my place that night. Neither can you blame me if they want to stay. I haven't asked them to.”

Here Mrs. Moore showed a shade of mushy resentment.

“You set a better table than I can set at the price they pay,” she said. “You can’t keep that up. If that ain’t getting them away from me—”

“You rent your house, don’t you?” inquired Rosalie Le Grange.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Moore, dabbing her eyes.

“Rent it furnished?”

“Yes.”

“Has it been full lately?”

“No. I’ve had room for four more all spring and summer. Times are dreadful hard—” Mrs. Moore ceased to weep for herself and dropped a tear over the whole state of the body politic.

“You haven’t made much money then?”

“Money!” sobbed Mrs. Moore, breaking out afresh on her own account, “I scarcely keep soul and body together—I barely hold a roof over my head.”

“It hasn’t occurred to you, I guess,” said Rosalie Le Grange, “that I own this house and furniture. I haven’t got any rent to pay. Moreover, with this Mrs. Hanska and Miss Lane, who came in unexpected, an’ some partic-

ular personal friends that are comin' next week, I'll be full up. Guess you can see how I make it pay. Guess you can afford to take back what you said—about my keeping up a grade of victuals that I couldn't afford regular, just to git custom away from you."

Outmaneuvered, Mrs. Moore flopped.

"What will become of me!" she wailed.

"Now, Mrs. Moore," said Rosalie, "with the high rent they charged you for the old place, there was no future for you. You were bound to fail. I've got a better way. I'm busy, an' I'm goin' to be busier. You see this house—well, it ain't my only interest. An' jest at present I'm rushed to death. Goodness knows, standin' off reporters the way I've had to do this last week, is one woman's job. I've got to hire a housekeeper to look after things an' tend front door an' help out with the cleaning. How would you like that? Over there, you were carryin' the whole thing an' workin' for your board. Here, you'll git thirty-five a month, an' I'll do the worryin'."

"Oh, Mrs. Le Grange!" wailed Mrs. Moore; and this time the moving emotion was gratitude.

So, at the end of a mighty anxious and perturbing week, the old Moore household settled down on Rosalie Le Grange, shook itself together again, and returned to the dull routine of its days. Professor Noll rode his hobby as gaily as ever. Miss Harding resumed her vocation of typing and her avocation of studying man for her uses. Miss Jones continued to imitate her roommate in her own shadowy and futile way. Miss Estrilla grew no better; still she remained in her room, visited daily by the doctor, nightly by her brother and hourly by Rosalie.

The two new boarders—they were longest naturally in settling to the routine. Indeed, two or three days passed before the others grew acclimated to their thrilling and somewhat perturbing presence. But Constance and Betsy-Barbara behaved through a soul-racking week in such manner as to secure Rosalie's growing affections and to win the respect of the rest. Until after the harrowing funeral and the more harrowing Coroner's inquest, Constance kept to her room. There was special need for that; in spite of all Rosalie's tact, she was a woman besieged. The newspapers kept her under fire.

First came the police reporters. Constance saw them once. The interview was very little garbled, on the whole, even though one yellow evening newspaper did make her say, in type three inches high, "I loved Lawrence Wade—is not that enough?" Then, when she refused any more interviews, came the feminine sympathy writers. One of them pushed past the guard in a moment when Rosalie was away and got an interview which won her a bonus from the city editor. Others pecked at her during her passage from the house to the funeral or the inquest, supplying with imagination and description what they lacked of information. "She is like a Venus with a convent education," wrote one. That, perhaps, describes Constance Hanska better than I can.

When she went abroad, she faced batteries of clicking camera shutters. Her photograph, together with impressionist drawings more or less accurate, blazoned the front page of every afternoon extra. Parenthetically, let me mention that to Miss Harding these pictures formed the most thrilling feature of the whole affair. On the day after the inquest, an afternoon yellow, being short of news and imagination, made

an extra of the "Three Beautiful Women in the Hanska Case." They were Constance, Betsy-Barbara and Miss Katherine Harding. Publicly, Miss Harding affected to be injured in all her finer feelings; secretly, she bought ten copies. As for Lawrence Wade, his breeding, his athletic career, his personal comeliness—but Lawrence Wade will enter in his proper place.

The newspapers were not the only extra irritation. Mrs. Hanska's mail grew until the postman approached the Le Grange boarding-house looking like Christmas and departed looking like Monday morning. Clipping bureaus, private-detective agencies, young men who wanted to be detectives, unknown but cordial friends—their letters came by dozens, by scores, by hundreds. Ill-spelled notes from Mills Hotels hinted at mysterious knowledge. A man wrote from a sanatorium in New Jersey to say that he himself committed the murder because Captain Hanska had assisted Napoleon and Mary Queen of Scots to pester the author's astral body. There were two offers to star in vaudeville, three to pose for moving-pictures and proposals enough to accommodate all

New England. After the first day, Constance never saw these letters. Betsy-Barbara, her consoler and amanuensis, read them—and destroyed them unanswered. She discussed them with Rosalie alone.

On the morning after the inquest, Constance quietly took her place at the common table in the dining-room. The rest of the boarders stilled their tongues for embarrassment. And not only embarrassment; undoubtedly there was prejudice. Rosalie, presiding at the head of the table, did not make the mistake of trying to lull this feeling immediately. She let matters take their course for two meals. At the third, she tactfully drew Constance into an argument over the distance to Paris. That served for an opening. Little by little, the sweetness of Constance, as exploited by Rosalie Le Grange, made its own way. What had been a kind of horror of a woman in her situation, became pity and sympathy.

As for Betsy-Barbara, that sprightly young person was popular from the first. She took hold of the Hanska-Wade case as though its settlement devolved upon her alone. Within three days she had interviewed every one in the

house, from Mrs. Moore to Miss Estrilla, and had formed a half-dozen theories, all proving the innocence of Lawrence Wade. It mattered not that Rosalie, already her confidant, shattered all these bubbles. Betsy-Barbara would simply interview her witness again, and blow another. Constance was her daily and hourly care.

“She’s bearing it,” said Betsy-Barbara, reporting to Rosalie Le Grange, “as I expected she would. Me—I’d be crying on everybody’s shoulder. She does her crying alone—but it’s telling on her. As for him—he’s splendid. Just bully! That’s the only way to put it.”

I leave to the newspapers the official events—“the developments” of that week. Indeed, they reported few essentials which we do not already know. The inquest was over; the body of Captain Hanska had traveled the road of flesh to the crematory; Lawrence Wade was held in the Tombs without bail, to await action of the Grand Jury. The evidence against him was circumstantial but strong. He had proposed marriage to Mrs. Hanska. Both he and his attorney tried to keep that out when Constance went on the stand; they lost, and she

told the fact with a simplicity which filled columns and columns of space next morning. She insisted that he never mentioned marriage after she told him her story. Lawrence Wade, naturally, wanted a divorce. Captain Hanska had refused. There was the motive, perfect, comprehensible. Wade and Hanska had met twice before and quarreled both times. On the night of the tragedy, Lawrence Wade, carrying a hand-bag, had gone to Captain Hanska's room at about ten o'clock. The bag contained, among other things, two knives.

Lawrence Wade admitted this; and admitted also that he had left all the débris which littered Captain Hanska's table. "That was part of my errand," he said. He had gone from Mrs. Moore's to the Curfew Club, had found from the desk clerk that there was a one o'clock train to Boston, had telephoned for a berth, had taken the train, had been arrested in Boston while engaging passage for Liverpool. At half past two, Captain Hanska had been found dead—stabbed in the heart with a clean thrust by one of the very knives which Wade admitted bringing from Arden. The Coroner's physician testified that Hanska had been dead an

hour, and probably much longer. The knife traveled an upward course. Nothing about the bed indicated any struggle; moreover, the experts said, it was nearly impossible for a man so large and so heavy to regain his feet after such a stroke. He must have been stabbed standing. If so, the thrust came from the "front" of the murderer's hand—a fencer's blow. And there was no doubt that Wade was a fencer. At this point in the proceedings, Rosalie Le Grange, sitting in the family group with Constance and Lawrence Wade's venerable father, might have seemed visibly depressed—had any reporter taken the trouble to watch this mere landlady.

Indeed—and the newspapers made significant comment on this—the putative defendant, although a lawyer himself, admitted all these facts except touching upon his relations with Mrs. Hanska. He admitted his feeling against Hanska. He volunteered the opinion that such a man deserved killing. On the night of the murder, he said, they had quarreled again. Hanska had refused all proposals. Thereupon he had taken that consignment of small possessions out of the bag, and had de-

parted. On one point alone was he vague. He did not tell fully why he had started so suddenly for Europe. "I was afraid to stay," he said once. His attorneys intimated that he would explain this, also, if there were further proceedings. On this point, Constance committed her only indiscretion. It was that very afternoon when the feminine "sympathy writer" succeeded in reaching her. "I know why he did that," Constance told her, "and I'll tell you, if he won't. He could do me no further good and he was afraid of what he might do to Captain Hanska. He said before he left for New York that if he failed I might not see him for a long time."

And so the Coroner's jury found that John H. Hanska came to his death from a knife wound at the hands of Lawrence Wade or persons unknown, and recommended that the said Lawrence Wade be held to await action of the Grand Jury. He went back to the Tombs under guard—a straight, clean, stalwart figure of a young man, seeming, in contrast with the court-room lawyers, the shysters, the followers of sensation, like an eagle who has been captured by sparrow-hawks and buz-

zards. He did not look at Constance as he marched away, nor she at him, and the reporters must needs conjecture what happened between them in their two interviews through the bars of the Tombs. They could not know how bravely and humanly simple were the talks between this man and this woman.

Here and now, the corporeal presence of Lawrence Wade shall fade for a time from this story. He is like every *jeune premier* in every tale of crime and mystery. Although the matters related concern him most of all, he is still the least active character involved; he has least to do with the final solution of events. By devices which I consider unfair to the reader, I might keep Lawrence Wade in the foreground; I might even play intruder at some of his bravely pathetic meetings with Constance Hanska. But all this would have nothing to do with my story. His hands are strong, his heart is firm, his judgment clear; yet his fate lies in weaker hands and hearts and judgments.

You have, of course, concluded by this time that he is innocent. Perhaps you are right; the unfolding of this tale will tell. Leave him now in the Tombs, to play his own native reso-

lution against the forces of darkness and to gather what consolation he may from the visits of his Lady of Sorrows and of her little golden girl-comrade.

The next day, an aviator accomplished something new in the advertising annals of the air. He eloped by aeroplane. It is true that he had no need of eloping, the family-in-law being as willing as his actress-bride. The young couple merely chose that method as a way of starting prosperously on the road of life. But the newspapers, in view of this dazzling picture-story, inquired not too closely regarding motives. And scarcely had news of this event given way to impressions of special writers, when a train went over a trestle in Connecticut. By the time the papers had finished with this, the Hanska Case had dwindled to two-inch items, single head. The District Attorney delayed, the Grand Jury delayed, the police delayed, while the forces of Martin McGee combed New York and New England for evidence bearing upon the life and career of Lawrence Wade.

But one more glimpse of Lawrence before

we leave him; and here let me quote Inspector McGee. Entering his private office in a state of suppressed irritation bordering on fury, the Inspector met his doorman. Long contact had given this inferior the privilege of familiarity with the truly great.

“How are your Third Degree proceedings getting on, Chief?” he asked.

“Damn him!” cried Martin McGee heartily; “damn him! What are you going to do with a man when he laughs at you?”

## CHAPTER V

### TOMMY NORTH

**T**OMMY NORTH, after the first day, was a pawn in this game—a captured pawn, laid to one side of the board. The police held him, it is true, until after the Coroner's verdict; then, without apology, the turnkey cast him loose. His first concern was for his mother in the village of White Horse, Connecticut. Only by false assurances and by the assistance of an aunt, who hid the newspapers from her, did he succeed in keeping her away from New York. He hurried to her, and in two days mollified her anger—not at his being accused of murder, but at his being drunk. He returned to find his job gone. Tommy North took such catastrophies more philosophically than most. He had filled and lost a dozen jobs in three years of New York. "Easy come, easy go," was his motto—as he told Rosalie Le Grange when he called to take away

his possessions, removed by her from the Moore house.

"I'd like to stay," he told her, "but I want to get the taste of this thing out of my mouth." He sat down on his trunk and looked depression. And depression, somehow, rested ill upon that frank freckled countenance with its shock of unruly red hair. "Wouldn't seem so bad if you didn't have all the murder company here. But I'm sensitive, I guess. I've lost my job on account of this. I'm a marked man."

"Now look a-here, Mr. North," said Rosalie, carefully folding one of his coats. "You don't never want to say that. People ain't marked unless they mark themselves. I've seen the littlest things in the world just hammer people through the floor, and I've seen the biggest scandals lived clean down. It's all in the way you face it. If you're afraid, and act like you're afraid, then you're gone. Just treat it like it hadn't happened. That's the way."

"It wouldn't have ruined my young reputation entirely," pursued Tommy North, giving way to his depression now that he had a sympathetic listener, "if I hadn't indulged in a little extra illumination that night. And take

it from me, on the word of a volunteer fireman, from Alpine, Mich., Pioneer Hose, Number Three, every single burner was going when I got home. People would sympathize with me for being arrested, now that it's proved that I had nothing to do with the case. But being drunk is different—oh, very different.”

“Tell me,” said Rosalie pausing from folding coats and regarding him, arms akimbo, “do you really like the stuff?”

Tommy North, unaccustomed to self-analysis, turned this over in his mind for several seconds.

“Well, no,” he said at length, “can't say I do. I suppose everybody loathes the Demon when he's going down. Course, I always say, ‘Smooth!’ with the rest of them, even when it tears my diaphragm like a disk harrow. No, I don't like the taste of it. Anyhow, I've got so that no one suspects my maiden emotions. I don't make a face or choke any longer.”

“Was this the first time you were ever drunk then?”

“The first!” said Tommy. “The *first!* Nearer the hundred and seventy-seventh—and a few jaglets beside.”

"I've got your number," said Rosalie Le Grange. "There's a small million like you. Let me tell you about yourself. You're young. You've got neither family nor girl here in New York. There's nothing for you to do nights but to meet the boys. An' you begin to pour it down. The next thing you know, or don't know, you're drunk an' uncomfortable. Ain't that so?"

"Uncomfortable!" exclaimed Tommy North; "when I'm drunk? Woman, I own New York! I have an option on the Hudson Terminal and a mortgage on the Singer Building. Of course, the next morning when I'm undrunk, there's a pale Jerseyish cast over the face of things." This was the first time in his life that Tommy North had ever admitted a "hangover." He used to tell his companions that hard liquor was his beefsteak.

"Well, then I suppose there's no use askin'," went on Rosalie, "why you do it. It's because there's nothing else to do. Your play is to find something just as absorbin' and as excitin' as liquor, but not quite so foolish."

"Sure!" said Tommy. "The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, or Captain Kidd's

treasure. Anyhow, I'm going away from *here*."

"Now, Mr. North," said Rosalie, "there's two ways of facing a thing down—stay, an' go. Which is better, I don't know. Which is braver, I do. Here's a room for you. Board here the rest of this week—on me—while you look around—an' if you think then that goin's the best way, then go."

Tommy North, inured to an atmosphere wherein none gives something for nothing, regarded Rosalie Le Grange with a look in which gratitude struggled with suspicion.

"You're thinkin'," responded Rosalie, reaching out to seize his thought, "that this is just my play to fill my boardin'-house. Think it if you want to. But this is my proposition: you keep this room free until Monday, an' if you want, you can have it permanent at twelve a week, which is what you paid Mrs. Moore."

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," said Tommy, suspicion departing. "I'll stay the week out, and make up my mind."

"Sensible," replied Rosalie. "I'll send up towels—and dinner's at six-thirty."

Now it happened that just before Tommy

North left his room for dinner that evening, an hour of solitary thought had brought him to the nadir of his existence. Position gone—reputation (as he thought) gone—a charity guest in a boarding-house. For so, in his young melancholy, he translated the kindness of Rosalie Le Grange. Their conversation, reinforcing his bad two days with his mother, had piled remorse on his other miseries. He *did* drink too much. He was branded a drunkard; and no one wanted a drunkard. Vague ideas of beginning again in a new land floated through his mind. The life was out of him; and when life has gone out of the soul in this fashion, the Lord of Life is ever waiting to enter and take possession. Which is by way of introducing Betsy-Barbara.

We have taken little time to consider Betsy-Barbara. Let us view her now, as she stands, dressed in a blue frock for dinner, tapping at Constance's door. Betsy-Barbara's flesh and spirit were twenty-four; her heart was eighteen; her purpose was forty. In complexion, in such accessories of complexion as eyes and hair, in the hidden soul, she was a white creature, light-shot. Whenever even the darkest ray touched

her hair, it flickered with gold. In full sunshine, even her brows and lashes glittered and twinkled. Her mouth was large and generously irregular; her nose was small and whimsically irregular; her violet-blue eyes were as clear as pools. Why the regularity of a Greek statue may go with absolute ugliness, and why features which fail to match may produce real beauty, is a question too hard for you or me or any other connoisseur of beauty. Now Betsy-Barbara, with a mouth all too large and a nose all too small and a pair of eyes which could not be classified for size, was ravishingly pretty. Of course, expression entered into the equation with Betsy-Barbara. She was eternally assuming a schoolmistress sternness which made a piquant contrast with the fresh skin of her, the blue eyes of her, the little pop-corn teeth that made her half elf, half butterfly. And when, in her schoolmistress solicitude over her listener—as over a bad boy—she laughed, the world's whole merriment was in her laughter. Betsy-Barbara had not really laughed for many days now. But she was young; the tides of life were flowing back. And as she stood there, waiting for Constance to rise and open

the door, her merriment took flame from some sleepy remark. In that precise psychological moment, all planted by the fates, Tommy North came down the hall on his way to dinner. The laugh arrested him dead. The gaslight was on her hair so that it tumbled over her head—"like a heap of pulled molasses candy," he told himself. The door opened then. She vanished like a golden fairy caught in a mist of vapor.

A minute later, Tommy North was sitting in the dining-room at Rosalie's right—waiting for something. He found himself in a state of embarrassment uncommon with him. What was he that he should talk to a decent girl? And would she know that he was—the branded? But when, a moment later, she trailed in behind Constance like a luminous shadow, when Rosalie introduced them both by name, and when he recognized them as the women in the Hanska affair, one part of his embarrassment floated away.

Indeed, Constance herself did the simply tactful thing by referring to the matter at once. The other boarders had not yet come; they were alone with Rosalie.

“I am so glad,” she said, “that they have finally let you off, Mr. North. Nobody could have had any idea that you were guilty. It must have been a horrible experience.” She stopped, and her eyes fixed on something across the room. “Horrible,” she repeated.

“But everybody’s going to get off easily, just as Mr. North did—you wait!” said Betsy-Barbara, touching her hand with a consoling little pat. Now the others were come. Miss Harding acknowledged Tommy’s presence with a lift of her eyes which said: “Well, you’re out of your latest scrape, aren’t you?” Miss Jones was plainly thrilled by the proximity of this now famous personage; Professor Noll, lost in the metrical mastication of a new wheat-and-oats compound prepared by Rosalie, showed plainly his ignorance of the fact that Mr. North had been away at all.

What they thought had now become a matter of entire indifference to Tommy North. The rest of the boarders put down his rapt silence to embarrassment over his late experience; and they left him out of the conversation. It was just as well. When Miss Harding re-

marked, "Wasn't that a terrible accident up in the Bronx?" he would have answered, had he been required to answer, "They are just the blue of periwinkles." When Professor Noll said in his heavy and formal way, "Yes, indeed—oh, yes, indeed!" he would have said that the question—as a matter of fact it referred to the weather—had run, "Hasn't she a wonderful mouth?" Twice he laughed uproariously, causing Miss Harding to remark that he was getting back his spirits, anyhow. This was when Betsy-Barbara ventured a mild joke. Twice again she included him in the conversation. Once she asked for the butter, which impelled him to reach frantically for the salt, and once she referred to him the question whether one could reach City Hall, Brooklyn, sooner by trolley or by subway, whereat he got temporary reputation as a joker by answering "both." He sat dazed through the soup, ecstatic through the roast, and rapt through the dessert. Only when Betsy-Barbara and Constance rose together, did he remember that he had finished long ago. And then something happened which scattered the mists about him

and brought him full into sunlight. Betsy-Barbara had turned at the door—turned back to him.

“Mr. North,” she said, “would it be possible for me to speak to you alone this evening? You see,” she went on before he got tongue to reply, “both Mrs. Hanska and I are working as hard as we can on this case. Mrs. Hanska is almost prostrated by the dreadfulness of it all. I’m trying to spare her as much as possible. I heard you testify, of course. But I thought I’d like to talk to you myself. Perhaps there’s something—some tiny, *tiny* little thing that you’d never thought of before, which would make all the difference in the world. It might be the means of saving Lawrence—Mr. Wade—for, of course, he’s innocent. I do hope you realize that, Mr. North. And I hope you’ll help us in any way you can.”

Now as to Mr. Wade, Tommy North held his own theories—or had up to this moment. Of course it was Wade. In his lonely and hysterical apprehensions at the Tombs, he had been forced to nail the crime to some other suspect in order to save his own reason. His mind had fastened like a leech on Wade. For Mrs.

Hanska he had felt vaguely sorry, especially after his one sight of her. But this blue-and-gold elf had pronounced edict. To Tommy North, henceforth, Lawrence Wade was as innocent as the traditional babe unborn.

"Of course he didn't do it," Tommy asserted valiantly. "I'll help all I can, I'm sure," he added. Then eagerly, "Now?"

"The drawing-room is empty if you want to talk," said Rosalie from the door. She turned away with a smile on her lips and a glint in her eye. And Tommy sat down before his inquisitor. It was little he added to the evidence, prolong this pleasant Third Degree as he might. He could but retell the story. Only one thing he evaded, dodged, eluded. It was his condition on that night. And suddenly Betsy-Barbara, in her best schoolmistress manner, came out with it.

"Now one other thing," she said. "I beg your pardon for being so personal, but weren't you—a little—a little—" She floundered for a word, and suddenly the whole face of her became a rose petal. "Only *slightly* I mean, of course—but weren't you?"

"I wasn't a 'little' or even 'slightly,'" said

Tommy, writhing in an agony of shame, "I was entirely."

For a second time that day, a woman looked on him with eyes of rebuke. Momentarily, Betsy-Barbara left the main track.

"And why did you do it?" she inquired. "Not that it's my business, perhaps. I only wondered."

"I don't know," said Tommy, "I just kept on drinking until this was all my world. I guess," he added suddenly, "there was nothing else to do." This came to him as a bright and perfect answer. He was totally unconscious that he had quoted Rosalie Le Grange.

Betsy-Barbara smiled and wagged her head, so that the shaft of golden light across her hair shifted from left to right and from right to left.

"In New York?" she said. "Nothing else in New York?"

Unaccountably Tommy North's tongue unlocked itself, what with the necessity of defending himself; and he talked.

"Well, that's all a woman knows about it. I can't spend my time riding on the Rubberneck Wagon, can I? When the whistle blows, a

man feels like doing something. I don't always want to feed in a joint like this. Sometimes I want to get some fancy eats. So I percolate through Lobster Lane—"

"Oh," exclaimed Betsy-Barbara, "what a *quaint* name!"

"I mean Broadway," explained Tommy. "Well, I get a cocktail or two or maybe three, according to whom I meet. Then I eat—and drink—and when we beat it out on to Benzine Byway—"

"What a *weird* name!" commented Betsy-Barbara.

"Broadway - again," said Tommy North, pausing only an instant. "And by that time, it's all lighted up—and my friends are all lighted up—and I'm all lighted up, and we proceed down the Twinkling Trail—"

"Broadway, I suppose," interpolated Betsy-Barbara.

"Yes," said Tommy, "the Riotous Route is another of its aliases. And the first thing I know it's two-thirty A. M. and I'm in my room admiring my own imitation of a young gentleman of Gotham going to bed, a knock-about act seldom equaled on any stage. But you

needn't deliver that James B. Gough oration I see trembling on your lips. I don't need it. I've got mine all right. I've lost my job to-day on account of being 'entirely.'"

To Betsy-Barbara, herself engaged in the economic struggle, this fact seemed more important than to Tommy.

"You have?" she exclaimed. "Oh, I'm so sorry! I've given up my position in Arden in order to be with Constance and I don't know how I shall live after three months. But something will turn up, I'm sure. Had you held your place long?"

"Six months or so," replied Tommy. "That's all right. I can find another I guess—or could if this hadn't got into the papers."

"Well, I'm awfully sorry," said Betsy-Barbara, rising, "but such wonderful things happen to people in New York. Everybody's a Dick Whittington here. Only if I were you I wouldn't—" She paused and looked at him very seriously.

"No," replied Tommy, docilely, "I won't." And his heart added, "Not while you're around." But his lips—"Remember, if there is anything I can do."

“Oh, thank you!” replied Betsy-Barbara; “good night!”

At the door of the dining-room next morning, Rosalie Le Grange met Mr. North.

“Thought my proposition over?” she asked.

“Yes. I guess I’ll stay,” replied Tommy, shortly.

“Thought you would,” replied Rosalie. And as she entered before him, she was smiling into the air. Decidedly, she was enriching her life in these days with vicarious troubles, but also with vicarious joys.

## CHAPTER VI

### TWIN STARS

**A**NOTHER week has passed, and the police still report "no progress" on the Wade-Hanska murder case, now a back number with the newspapers—a story laid aside. Wade, scorning, he says, all lawyer-tricks, waits in the Tombs until the police shall have finished and turned the matter over to the mercies of the Grand Jury. The week has been equally quiet at the select boarding-house maintained by Rosalie Le Grange—a quiet overlain with gloom and yet illuminated with human sympathy and even gaiety. Gradually the household has become a body of Wade partisans. That, although they know it not, is due to Constance. Her somber sweetness, which persisted even in her desperate situation, has moved them; and emotion has persuaded reason and opinion, as it always will until we become intellectual machines.

Out of the shadows twinkle two stars—Betsy-Barbara and Tommy North. Rosalie in jest, and Professor Noll in earnest, call Betsy-Barbara “the little household fairy.” Engaged though she is in a tragic guardianship, she is also young and sprightly and a village girl fresh to the wonder of New York. Rosalie is the quiet force, but Betsy-Barbara the visible focus, which draws them all together. She brings to their consideration of Manhattan all the small-town intimacy of interest. She brings to their intercourse the country habit of asking help, and accepting kindness, as a matter of course. She asks counsel of Miss Harding and Miss Jones on her autumn clothes. In her spare moments she sews industriously with Rosalie Le Grange—dropping meantime those confidences which flow at sewing-bees. The orphan of a country clergyman and a schoolmistress, she has at her finger-tips all the arts of play. Whenever the household stays in of nights, she gathers them together over hearts or bridge; when cards grow stale, she is capable of getting contagious fun out of charades or anagrams. She even starts experimenting with table-tipping

—and wonders vaguely why Rosalie Le Grange seems uninterested in that one of their sports alone and manages to break it up on the first excuse.

As for Tommy North, he—assists. He is jester-in-chief to this elfin princess. Also, he makes the Welsh rabbits with which, at her suggestion, they finish off the card-parties.

“I appoint myself all-night chef to this establishment,” said Tommy North, as he rolled up his sleeves on the first evening. “Is it possible that there is a hamlet in this happy country so remote that the fame of my Welsh rabbits has not reached it? I learned through toil and suffering—other people’s. The first one I made is still hanging on the wall of the old farmhouse. After that, an automobile-man saw one of ’em. Great excitement! He thought the problem of the rubber substitute was solved. But he little recked. The tires they made of ’em were all right as long as the auto kept running. But when it stopped out in the country, the field-mice used to come in flocks and risk their lives to nibble those tires. No chemical combination they could ever discover made my Welsh-rabbit tires dis-

tasteful to the little creatures. I kept on with my art, till now—I'm too modest to show you the letter I got from the St. Regis the other day."

More and more the boarders take to staying at home. This charming life domestic is a novelty in New York, it seems; they revel in the fad. Professor Noll enters into everything with the simple gaiety of a child. The two stenographers go out of evenings but rarely now. Their young men (Messrs. Dayne and Murphy) entreat Rosalie daily to furnish the attic rooms for them. "Your waiting-list is going to make the Metropolitan Club look like the Ludlow Street jail," remarks Tommy North.

Mr. Estrilla has developed a way of joining them after his evening visits to his sister; and he brings such a spirit of Latin gaiety that they quit their formal games, and take always to music and conversation when he enters. Rosalie especially delights in him. He has a quick turn of the tongue which matches her own; and they fence with good-natured repartee. Whenever Estrilla enters the room his eyes travel to Betsy-Barbara and they two

play in a boy-and-girl spirit very charming and amusing—to every one but Tommy North. All speak well of Estrilla. “I guess he’s a regular man all right, if he is a wop,” says even Tommy.

Through all the sprightly atmosphere Constance drifts, a figure quiet and dignified and beautiful and gentle—“the tragic Venus.” Generally, she joins the parties in the Le Grange parlor. Betsy-Barbara sees to that. Acceding to every desire, making no suggestions of her own, asking nothing—she is slipping visibly toward melancholy. Days come when she smiles a little, when faint stars gleam in her great eyes; then Betsy-Barbara knows, and the rest conjecture, that some will-o’-the-wisp clue has lifted her to a little hope. Nights come when midway in the game her eyes lose their hold on tangible things and fix on some vision mid-air; then Betsy-Barbara knows, and the rest conjecture, that she has been visiting the Tombs. They set themselves to exorcise her demon, each after his own fashion. Betsy-Barbara is sweetly cajoling, Rosalie subtly encouraging, Miss Harding heavy-handed but

contagious, Tommy North jocular, Professor Noll fatherly—but all are kind.

Miss Estrilla alone never joins the group down-stairs. Though her eyes are better, though she can bear some light, she shows a state of debility puzzling to her physician and alarming to her watcher and attendant, Rosalie Le Grange. The doctor advises her to return to a warmer climate before the New York winter sets in—like all transplanted Latins, she is a very shivery person. She answers that she can not; her brother's business lies in New York, and she would be unhappy away from him. Once, Rosalie Le Grange suggests a hospital; whereupon Miss Estrilla weeps and begs to remain. Go she will not, though Rosalie once discovers Estrilla arguing the question with her in his perfect English with its pleasant Spanish roll.

The time came when Rosalie Le Grange determined to visit Inspector McGee; she wished to unload some theories of her own concerning the Hanska case. Such visits must be made with all due precaution of secrecy. She chose

an evening when, as happened seldom nowadays, nearly all the boarders had engagements elsewhere. Mr. Murphy and Mr. Dayne had invited the "girls" to the theater; Mr. North was to dine with a man who might give him a job. As a step preliminary to her diplomacies, she telephoned to McGee and made with him an appointment far from the office. Then she approached Betsy-Barbara.

"It's asking a lot of you, my dear," she said, "but I've been so busy gettin' this place shook together that I haven't had time to mind my own affairs. I've a cousin in town an' I jest haven't had time to pay her any attention. It's been simply scandalous the way I've neglected her. Miss Estrilla is kind of nervous to-night, an' I hate to leave her alone until her brother comes—anyhow, he misses some evenings. Just sit by her—an' if he shows up you don't have to do even that. Goodness knows, I wish I'd got her a nurse at the start instead of tryin' to boss the thing myself."

Betsy-Barbara accepted the new responsibility.

"I'd love it," she said almost cheerfully. "Constance is going to try to get some sleep

to-night, and I'll put her to bed right after dinner. And I've been dying to meet Miss Estrilla."

Miss Estrilla's appearance appealed at once to Betsy-Barbara's quick sympathies. Her eyes were shaded; further she wore heavy colored glasses. She was a rather tall and slender woman, Betsy-Barbara decided. Her face, bold in the bony structure, seemed hawk-like with the wasting of illness. There was a kind of exquisite shyness about her which blended perfectly with a punctilious Spanish courtesy. She was Spanish in manner alone, however. She spoke English without a trace of her brother's amusing roll.

Betsy-Barbara, when the ice was broken, chattered girl-fashion on the events of the day in the boarding-house, avoiding always the subject of the tragedy which had drawn them together. Miss Estrilla, though she listened with interest, did not avail herself of openings to respond with chatter of her own. Betsy-Barbara was running down, when she be-thought herself of a new resource.

"I've brought up the evening paper," she said, "wouldn't you like to have me read it to

you? There's a splendid elopement in high life."

"I should like it very much," replied Miss Estrilla, after a pause at which Betsy-Barbara wondered.

"I'm just crazy about the New York papers," resumed Betsy-Barbara, as she perched herself on a table to get at the dim point of light. "The *Arabian Nights* things that happen in this town will drive me crazy yet. Wait just a minute. I must see if they've found the Hollister baby. I'm nearly dead over her!"

Curiosity satisfied, Betsy-Barbara read the head-lines and rendered in full the stories which Miss Estrilla indicated. She was absorbed in the account of a splendid burglary, when a knock sounded at the door. And Estrilla entered.

As he recognized her with a bow of inimitable attention and courtesy, as he crossed the room and tenderly kissed his sister, Betsy-Barbara had, somehow, the feeling that she was meeting a stranger. For the first time, at any rate, she expressed him to herself. "Handsome" was her first mental comment. That

marked against him in her books. She distrusted the handsome male. A man, according to Betsy-Barbara's perfectly clean-cut set of opinions, should be like a bull-terrier—ugly, a little rough and awkward, faithful, kind. "But nice in spite of it," was her second thought. She formulated another thing about him in the minute while she watched. His quality was—caressing—that was the word. The glances of his eye, the attitude of his body, the gestures of his hands, all reminded one of a love-tap.

Betsy-Barbara took in other details as he faced about and addressed her. He was small—but she had always noticed that obvious fact. Looking at the figure on the bed, one would have called the sister the taller of the two. He was nevertheless perfectly formed. He had a plume of black hair which glimmered in the gaslight with a dusky reflection of Betsy-Barbara's native gold-and-satin turban.

"I have been taking care of your sister, you see," said Betsy-Barbara.

"Ah! Then what need of me?" replied Estrilla.

"She has been kind enough to read me the

newspapers," rolled the rich contralto of the invalid from the bed.

"I think you and your sister are wonderfully alike—and yet wonderfully different," said Betsy-Barbara, carefully ignoring the personal note in Estrilla's remark.

"The resemblance is a compliment to me—the difference what you call—a slam," replied Estrilla.

"I—I must be going now," said Betsy-Barbara in her best schoolmistress manner.

"I beg you not to deprive us of yourself so soon," replied Estrilla, and, "Please stay," echoed his sister.

Betsy-Barbara remembered what she had heard of Spanish politeness—its over-elaboration and over-insistence. But her Anglo-Saxon mind could discover no way to parry with equal politeness. Also she told herself that when one has dwelt too long with tragedy, one wants to be amused. She sat for five minutes, while brother and sister made her the focus of their conversation. But she was not amused. In the presence of his sister, Estrilla appeared a different man from the light fencer with words of their evenings down-stairs. He

was grave; he was formal. Infinitely tender toward Miss Estrilla, he was also attentive toward Betsy-Barbara, but he did not play with her as usual. It was puzzling, but a little fascinating, this change.

In five minutes more, Betsy-Barbara summoned tact to the aid of manners and maiden modesty. She invented an excuse to shield herself against Spanish politeness, and left Estrilla bowing gravely at the threshold.

Betsy-Barbara thought first of her responsibility. Silently she opened Constance's door and tiptoed to the bed. Her Lady of Troubles was asleep. By the night lamp which Constance kept burning against the demons of her night thoughts, Betsy-Barbara noted the growth of lines in the relaxed face. She sighed and crept back into the hall. There she hesitated a moment. The house seemed deserted. It was too late for venturing forth alone; yet, somehow, she must exorcise the vague black visions which began to surround her—she who must keep courage for two. Also, something which she could not analyze was stirring disquiet in her soul.

“If I only had some work!” she said to her-

self, and sighed again. So meditating, she wandered aimlessly down-stairs. The doors of the parlor were open; the lights were on; the baby-grand piano stood open, inviting.

“Only merry tunes, though,” she warned herself as she sat down. And she started the liveliest jig she knew. Presently, she began to sing in her pleasant untrained voice, which wobbled entrancingly whenever she got out of the middle register. But music is the slave of moods. And before she was aware, her voice was following the strings in old and melancholy love-songs. Now it was *Loch Lomond*—

“By yon bonnie banks,  
And by yon bonnie braes,  
Where the sun shines bright on Loch Lomond—”

At this point, Betsy-Barbara dropped her hands from the keys, and the music stopped abruptly. She was just aware that a fine floating tenor had been humming the part from the doorway. Señor Estrilla stood looking down on her.

“My seester has gone to sleep,” he said. And then, “That is a Scotch song, is it not?”

Please go on." Betsy-Barbara smiled, nodded, resumed her keys; and they sang together—

“Where me and my true love  
Were ever wont to gae  
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.”

When the song was finished, Estrilla leaned on the piano and looked down at Betsy-Barbara. His mood seemingly had changed; it was his whim to talk.

“They are a little cold on the surface, those Scotch love-songs,” he said, “though warm beneath, like a volcano. Now we who speak Spanish—we can throw our emotions to the surface.”

“Don’t you think,” responded Betsy-Barbara, “that to conceal it—but to show it’s there—is the more wonderful way after all?”

The blood of the MacGregors in Betsy-Barbara was calling her to the defense of her own.

“Do you happen to know any of our Spanish songs?” pursued Estrilla.

“Only *Juanita*, I think—and *La Paloma*.”

Estrilla looked as though he might have laughed but for Spanish politeness.

“Those are Spanish for outside consumption, as when the English call your cheap—oil-cloth is it not—‘American cloth.’ Let me sing to you—but a Spanish song does not go well with the piano—”

“There’s a guitar over in the alcove,” announced Betsy-Barbara.

“Far-seeing maiden!” exclaimed Estrilla with such a delicious Spanish roll on the vowels that Betsy-Barbara laughed a little; and he, as though understanding, laughed with her.

So he tuned the guitar, Betsy-Barbara finding the key for him on the piano. And while he tweaked the strings, he made comment on them, as:

“This—you hear—is the angel-string. It is for celestial harmonies. One can not go wrong on this string; but it is too fine and high to make all our music. This is the man-string. You can go very right or very wrong on this one.” “Thees one,” he pronounced it; and he drew out the vowels as though lingering on the thought. “This is the woman-string. Listen—how discordant now! I tune it to the

man-string, for I am God of this little world—and now how beautiful!”

“You are talking poetry!” said Betsy-Barbara; and thought of the phrase as somewhat awkward.

“Ah, but I am inspired!” replied Estrilla.

(“He surely doesn’t mean me,” thought Betsy-Barbara, “that would be too delicious!” However, he was looking not at her but at the guitar.)

“Listen!” he resumed, giving the strings one final caressing stroke. And in his light floating tenor, he began:

“*Alma pura de luz y alegria—*”

“What does it mean?” asked Betsy-Barbara when he had finished.

He translated:

“‘White spirit of joy and light—if the clouds should cross you—it is I who would blow them away with the wind of my love—I, *Cholita mia!*’—That *Cholita mia* I can not translate. You have nothing in English which carries so much endearment,” he added.

Betsy-Barbara, her golden head on one side, meditated his words.

“It’s pretty—very pretty. But has it the deep feeling of ours?” Although Betsy-Barbara taught English literature and composition to the middle class of Arden Seminary, she floundered a little in this attempt at literary criticism. “Now this for example.” She fled to song for expression, and began:

“Ye banks an’ braes—”

“Tender,” he admitted, “but gloomy. And why should there be gloom in expressing love? You do not know our depth of passion. We live our passion and our gloom—and when we sing we make our thought tender so that we may forget. Listen!” Now he struck a deeper key:

“*Perro al abrirse la rosa—*”

“I have made that into English verse,” he concluded—

“But the rose unfolds in the dawning  
At the touch of the sun and the dew,  
And the sun and the rain and the summer of  
life,  
Is the touch and the thought of you.”

“You are really a poet!” exclaimed Betsy-Barbara. She was about to say more; but his eyes rested upon her as he started another song:

“*Angel divino que tu es!*”

“That,” he concluded, “is in praise of the *mantilla blanca*. The song is old and the custom nearly dead. Now and then we have a woman colored not like the rest of us—dark—but white and gold like the angels. In some countries she had the privilege of wearing a white mantilla; and wherever she went, she was a queen. This is how it runs: ‘A divine angel wore thee, white mantilla. The warp was goodness and the woof beauty. Thy bosom is the white rose, thine eye the blue heaven, and thy soul the void above heaven.’”

He strummed little shimmering chords as he spoke. He fell to silence, but still the languorous music quivered from the guitar. Betsy-Barbara turned about on the piano-stool, her hands folded lightly in her lap, her eyes cast down. He was speaking again; and this time it was not what he said which moved and disturbed her—it was his tone.

"*Mantilla blanca!*" he was saying over and over again; "*mantilla blanca!*"

It was many years before Betsy-Barbara, looking back over everything, could analyze the feeling of that moment, could put it in its true relation to herself and her life. At the time, she knew only that she sat there impassive, embarrassed, but inert, that she felt shame yet also a furtive pleasure at the steady look of those caressing eyes. It lasted only a moment.

The outer door slammed violently.

Betsy-Barbara started as though caught in something guilty. She hesitated a moment for fear of showing her feelings to Estrilla. Then she walked out into the hall. There was no one in sight. That seemed curious, since the hall stairs were not carpeted, and one could hear footsteps. It was as though some one had opened the front door and then quickly closed it again without entering. When she turned back, puzzled, she felt the necessity for explanation.

"I thought it might be Miss Harding," she said, falsely—"I wanted to see her."

He only smiled the same caressing smile.

But the spell was cracked; and Betsy-Barbara herself completed the break.

“Well, anyway,” she said, pulling herself together, “the Spanish have no martial music like ours.” And she struck up *Scots Wha Hae*. Nor did music and conversation turn again to love-songs. In fact, half an hour later Betsy-Barbara winged a hint, which he caught mid-course, as he seemed to catch every delicate shaft of meaning. He rose and bade her a formal good night. “I hope I may sing with you again,” he said at parting.

Betsy-Barbara went to her own room. She dawdled over her preparations for undressing, making a dozen starts and stops. She was not sleepy; a hundred currents of thought were crossing and recrossing in her mind. So at last she threw a kimono over her evening gown and sat down at the window, maiden-fashion, and thought.

To make no further mystery, the person who opened the front door and disturbed the tête-à-tête between Estrilla and Betsy-Barbara, was only Tommy North. He had been searching strenuously for a job. No mystery about that,

either. The reason was Betsy-Barbara. The night's quest had failed. The fluid mercury of his disposition had fallen almost to absolute zero. In this mood, he unlocked the front door. The parlor was open; he heard the soft thrum of a guitar. Hungry for companionship, he crossed the thick hall carpet to the parlor door. He looked in and beheld Betsy-Barbara sitting with flushed cheeks and folded hands. It was the attitude of a woman who yields. Beside her sat the Estrilla person, strumming gently on a guitar and looking a million languors. With a movement that was an explosion, Tommy rushed out, slamming the front door behind him.

His feet, rather than his will, carried him away. There was a saloon at the corner. As by instinct, Tommy rushed into it and ordered a glass of whisky—his first since the night of the Hanska murder. He shivered slightly when he drank it, as he always did at the new taste of raw whisky. A cab-driver whom he knew rose up from the corner and greeted him respectfully. Tommy invited him to have a drink. The cab-driver introduced him to the bartender. Tommy invited them both to have

another drink. The bartender introduced a paper-hanger. Tommy included him in a fourth drink. The bartender asked them to have one on the house. By this time, all was over with Tommy North's sobriety. In a period incredibly short, he fulfilled the tragic purpose for which he left the boarding-house.

Now nearly every drunkard—and especially an amateur like Mr. Thomas North—has one latent peculiarity which comes out with intoxication. His was the homing instinct. He always sought his own bed when drunk, no matter how embarrassing the circumstances might be. An hour and a half after he stood treat to the cabman, Tommy North, muttering over and over to himself, "New life in new clime—wond'ful plan of genius—" was weaving toward the select boarding-house of Madame Rosalie Le Grange. Laboriously he unlocked the door; painfully, and with occasional mutterings about a blasted life, he reached the first landing. And on that landing a door opened. Betsy-Barbara stood looking at him.

Yet curiously, as the gaslight caught her full, it was not upon Betsy-Barbara's shocked wide-open eyes that he fixed his gaze. He

looked at her feet. Betsy-Barbara was wearing high-heeled velvet shoes with paste buckles. In the full light, they sparkled like real diamonds. Betsy-Barbara stepped back with woman's instinctive fear of a drunken man. So one of those slippers moved. Tommy, his eyes still toward the ground, clutched at it. The motion almost tumbled him over—did make him reel against the door-post.

“Get it an’ hold it,” he said—“then discover murder.”

“Mr. North—Mr. North!” exclaimed Betsy-Barbara and stood helpless, staring at this weird performance. His mind seemed to shift; he became aware of her as a person; and he struggled for articulation.

“Drunk!” he said. “Final disgrace—everything gone now!”

“Mr. North,” said Betsy-Barbara, gathering her courage, “listen to me. If you wake people up to-night, they’ll never forgive you. Now I’m going to lead you to your room. But you are to be perfectly silent. Do you understand?”

“I promise,” said Tommy. “There! I spoke an’ broke promise. Vista shattered promises.”

“No, you didn’t, but you will if you speak again.”

Tommy solemnly closed his mouth with finger and thumb. She caught him under the arm as though to support him. He waved her away and started to make his own course up the stairs. Betsy-Barbara followed, her hands extended to give help in case of need. Though he sought aid of the banisters here and there, he navigated very well. At his own landing, Betsy-Barbara ran ahead, opened his door, switched on the electric light. Then returning, she pushed him in with a final:

“Good night—and please try to be quiet.”

Betsy-Barbara returned to her floor. Mechanically, she turned into Constance’s room to make her customary last tour of inspection. Constance had gone to bed—her breathing was deep and regular. Betsy-Barbara turned up the light, tiptoed over to her side. Constance lay utterly relaxed—a Guinevere in sleep; her two heavy dark braids streaming over the counterpane. Her deep breathing seemed to indicate serenity of mind; but her mouth drooped, one cheek showed faint marks, and her eyelashes still glittered.

Betsy-Barbara had endured a day filled with as many varied emotions as it is generally given woman to endure. She applied the best remedy that woman knows for surfeit of feeling. She took down her hair, undressed, and cried herself to sleep.

## CHAPTER VII

### FACING THE MUSIC

**T**OMMY woke next morning to the appropriate mental and physical tortures. When Memory had finished with her rack, the Future applied thumb-screws. If he went down to breakfast, he must meet—Her. Remorse and jealousy struggled in him with a perverse pride. At any rate, he would not run away. No, he would face her. He would look into her eyes, which would be shocked and hurt. The last embers of a ruined existence would shine through his own. Then, after she had seen and realized, he would go away forever and send her just one letter—no, just one flower with his card—to let her know what he had felt and what he had cast aside.

Then—since the human spirit is never static—having touched the lowest depths, his thoughts began to rise toward hope. Just how had he behaved last night? What had she

seen him do? From the haze of confused memories, a clear fact appeared in this place and that. He had got up the first flight somehow; that part of it was dim. He had been aware of her standing at the landing. How had she looked? Somehow, he could not remember her face. Why? Because he had been looking at her shoe-buckles—at something which glittered—why—

The tragic night of the Hanska murder flashed in upon him, and with it a fact which he had told neither the police in the Third Degree process nor yet the Coroner at the inquest, for the simple reason that he had forgotten it. Now, he remembered it clearly, perfectly. A freak of drunken consciousness had brought back something which he might never have remembered again.

“Gee whiz!” he cried, leaping out of bed, headache and all. “She’s looking for evidence—this will fix her!” A cold dip and a dash of bromide restored him wonderfully, for the tissues of Tommy North were resilient and young. As he entered the dining-room for breakfast, only a slight pallor and a little languor indicated the crisis of the night before.

Betsy-Barbara and Constance were already seated. Betsy-Barbara looked him full in the eye.

“Good morning, Mr. North,” she said evenly. Nothing whatever gave a clue to her inner emotions.

“Good morning,” replied Tommy shortly; and he slid into his chair and attacked his grapefruit.

The breakfast went on. Betsy-Barbara talked freely; she appeared animated even. She included Mr. North in the conversation, throwing him a question now and then. He noticed, however, that these questions came only at regular intervals, as though she were remembering to be very careful. That might be a good sign or it might be a bad one, he could not decide which.

Betsy-Barbara and Constance had risen now. Tommy North, with an effort of the will, rose and followed.

“Miss Lane,” he said in the hall; and then, since she did not seem to hear him, he spoke louder, “Miss Lane.”

Betsy-Barbara turned. Alone with him now—since Constance had gone on—her eyes

showed the emotions which she had suppressed in public.

“What is it?” she said icily.

“I wanted,” said Tommy— “I wanted to tell you something.”

“I think,” responded Betsy-Barbara, “that you needn’t make any more explanations—thank you!”

She was turning away when Tommy recovered himself.

“Oh, it isn’t *that*,” he said. “I can’t explain *that*, of course. I’m not trying to explain *that*, Miss Lane. It’s just something—something new in the line of evidence—about the Hanska case—I think it may help.”

Betsy-Barbara turned again—and this time quickly. Her look was startled—but—heaven be praised—friendly.

“Something new?” she said, breathlessly. “Oh, you angel fresh from Heaven! Shall I send for Constance?”

This was the point where Tommy North became a strategist.

“It has to do,” he said humbly, “with the way I was last night. You saw me—I shouldn’t like to tell her.”

"Let's take a walk," proposed Betsy-Barbara, with her wonderful practicality.

"If you wish," said Tommy North humbly, and yet thrilled with a sense of renewed companionship. Indeed, by the time they reached the street, he had recovered his spirits so much as to propose because the street was so noisy, that they take a cross-town car and walk up Fifth Avenue. The car was crowded; they must stand; so they did not approach the subject of the moment until they were treading the street of the spenders.

"Well, what is it? I'm dying to know!" said Betsy-Barbara, the instant they reached the Avenue.

"It may mean something or it may not," said Tommy. "Of course, on the night of the murder I was—and last night I was—"

"Completely, irrevocably, *entirely*, I should say," replied Betsy-Barbara, with emphasis.

"Did I do anything strange," inquired Tommy, "when I first saw you?"

"You nearly tumbled at my feet, for one thing," replied Betsy-Barbara.

"What—what were you wearing on your feet?"

Betsy-Barbara thought a second on this peculiar question.

“My velvet slippers with the rhinestone buckles,” she said.

Tommy nodded solemnly.

“That was it—I was reaching for them last night—just as I was reaching for something the night I fell at Captain Hanska’s door. And it brought everything back.”

“Oh, what *do* you mean?” begged Betsy-Barbara. “Go on! Please go on.”

“I had got to the head of the stairs on the night of the murder,” said Tommy. “The gas was lighted in the hall. I was pickled. You know how your mind gets on one little thing when you’re pickled—”

“I don’t,” put in Betsy-Barbara, in spite of her interest in the story—“but please go on.”

“And I saw something bright in the hallway, close to Captain Hanska’s door. I braced against a post and looked at it. It was a cluster of diamonds—the more I think of it, the more it seems like that shoe-buckle of yours. I was as sure of it as a man can be sure of anything when he’s drunk. I reached out to get

it. Then I tumbled and hit—the stuff. The tumble and the sticky feeling put diamonds out of my mind. Then it's curtains for mine until I'm in my own room—well, you know.

“And the funny thing,” concluded Tommy, “is that I never remembered one thing about it, not even when the police were combing my very soul, until—what happened last night. *You* can't be certain, of course. I was pickled. But I'm sure, just the same, that I saw a bunch of diamonds or something beside that door. You've asked me to tell you anything I might find about the Hanska case. And I'm telling, that's all.”

Betsy-Barbara considered.

“It may not mean anything,” she said, “and it may mean a good deal.” She considered again. “Even if the diamonds were there, maybe it had nothing to do with our case. If anybody had been robbed that night, if there had been any signs of a burglar, this evidence would be very important. But the police say that the house wasn't entered. Then again, what became of the diamonds? It seems no one else noticed them.”

“Well,” remarked Tommy North cynically,

“there were a great many policemen in the house.”

Betsy-Barbara walked on, still thinking. “Maybe. I’m afraid, though, that it might be only an aberration,” she said finally.

“Perhaps,” echoed Tommy North. And now, having finished his introduction, he approached the subject nearest his heart.

“Of course, that’s all,” he said, “except that I owe you an apology for—for my condition last night.”

“It is yourself,” said Betsy-Barbara, “that you owe the apology. Mr. North, why did you do it—again?”

Now it was in Tommy North’s impulses to tell exactly why he did it—to come out with the truth, accompanied by his opinion of philandering Spaniards. But that would have amounted to a declaration; and to declare his feelings for Betsy-Barbara was leagues beyond his present courage.

“Oh,” he said, carelessly, desperately, “I got a jolt. That’s all. And I took it out in booze.”

“You’ve told me,” said Betsy-Barbara, “that you don’t like the taste of the stuff. That’s

why you drink, then—to console yourself when you're in trouble? Doesn't that show rather poor courage?"

"Perhaps."

"Now, I'm in trouble. And Constance—Mrs. Hanska—is in deep, deep trouble. Suppose we drank every time it hurt! I don't believe you know what real trouble is—even if you were arrested unjustly."

"Well, it isn't always that."

"No; you told me the other night it was because you hadn't anything better to do. Mr. North," she added, suddenly lifting her blue eyes to his, "your need is something else to do. You're out of a job. How many jobs have you had since you came to New York?"

By now they had crossed Twenty-eighth Street, and reached the whirl and glitter of morning on Fifth Avenue. Already the morning crowd of shoppers, women of the exclusive class who scorn the gayer but cheaper afternoon parade, debated before shop-windows or held social intercourse at corners. On the pavement the procession of coaches and motors was beginning. Already the stalwart, soldierly, traffic squad policemen were opening

lanes for pedestrians with waves of their white-gloved hands. The windows, each an artistic creation, blossomed with the richest goods of the five continents. It was all alive, beautiful, and—most of all to the country observation of Betsy-Barbara—smart. It was made for the temptation of woman. As Tommy North talked, Betsy-Barbara's eye traveled to this lovely frock, that alluring window. Still, after the universal habit of her sex, she kept her mind on the main subject, in spite of these distractions of the eye. The inner part of her was listening and following. Yet the gay parade, the autumn touch in the air, obviously raised her spirits, obviously put her in a mood to regard Tommy's derelictions tenderly, even humorously.

“I came here to found a great commercial career—as bill-clerk in a produce house,” he said. “That job lasted three months—as long as the concern did. Then I accepted a slight weekly emolument from a banker. At least, that was what he called himself. When I found that he was getting three hundred per cent. from advances on salary, I separated myself from that position just in time to keep out of

the Tombs. Then I consented to lend my trained financial mind to the operations of the Silver Chain Mining Company. We had an office that looked like Buckingham Palace—rich but not gaudy. There was an Andrea del Sarto effect in wall-paper over my desk, and at my right hand an onyx mantel containing a bull in pure coin silver, which was a hint of what we intended to do to the market. There, when I was not composing great works of imaginative fiction for country investors, I used to sit and dream of great projects for the betterment of the human race—all from my profits. But one day while I was writing a letter—we were short of stenographers—in comes a coarse, piratical country employee and snakes the typewriter from under my fingers and the desk from under the typewriter and the rug from under the desk, and wraps them all around the cashier's cage and goes away. Then I went into a broker's office, selling bonds. I was there four months—" He hesitated.

"And what was the trouble there?" inquired Betsy-Barbara, turning from a Parisian hobble to regard him severely.

"Well," answered Tommy, "you see, three

or four of us went to dinner one night at a place where the turkey-trot is danced between courses. When we came out it pleased us to ride to Rector's in a butcher-wagon. Highly original—oh, yes—and pleased every one except our boss, who was entering from his own machine at the same moment. Next morning they passed me my pay on the end of a curtain pole. About that time a cabaret offered me a regular job to turkey-trot, but I passed that up. I believe in remaining an amateur, in keeping my art separate from vulgar commerce. So I became chauffeur to an elevator. The starter found, after two weeks, that I was temperamental. Sterling personal reliability is more useful in running an elevator than temperament. So when they chased me from the front door, I wandered past an advertising agency. I didn't know anything about that business, which is why I got the job. I made good, too."

"How many places in the advertising business?" inquired his relentless inquisitor.

"Four."

"The same story with them all?"

"Pretty nearly the same."

“And you never lost a place for incompetence?”

“No. It’s the only thing I can say for myself.”

“Let’s hear more details,” said Betsy-Barbara.

By the time Tommy had expanded to her satisfaction, they were past Forty-fifth Street. The shops were beginning to give way to old residences, left behind stranded by the up-town movement of fashion. Two women—bearing in their move, their elegant simplicity of dress, their exquisite length of line, the brand of the American Barbarian—had stopped to chat in the soft, clipped, affected accents of their class. Betsy-Barbara regarded them as she turned over in her mind the case of this troublesome pupil.

“Mr. North,” she said at length, “I’m going to ask a very personal question. I’m not asking it for curiosity. I’ve a reason, which I’ll state later—have you saved any money?”

“Brace yourself for the shock,” replied Tommy, “but I really have. I inherited three hundred dollars a while ago. And my mother made me promise one thing—that I’d save a

little every week. I have five hundred dollars in the bank."

Betsy-Barbara nodded her wise and golden head.

"That will do beautifully for a start," she said.

"A start at what?" inquired Tommy.

"At the Thomas W. North Advertising Agency."

"At—"

"The Thomas W. North Advertising Agency. It's founded now, 10:15 A. M. October sixteenth, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-sixth Street, New York!"

"This is so sudden!" exclaimed Tommy. But his heart leaped and danced.

"Now, see, Mr. North," resumed Betsy-Barbara, "I've diagnosed your case. The trouble with you is that you've drifted. Isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Tommy.

"And it has been the whole trouble, I think." Betsy-Barbara announced this gravely from the superior height of twenty-four years. "You need responsibility. You don't want to grow into the kind of young man Mr. Dayne and Mr. Murphy are. They're professional

drifters now. When you're boss, you won't be loafing on the job. You'd discharge an employee who did that—and you can't discharge yourself. Some day you'll wish you had a business of your own. Then you'll look back and be sorry you didn't start it when you were young. You can get business, can't you?"

"I ought to," said Tommy.

"And I think you ought," she checked herself here. She wanted to say that any one with Tommy North's personality should be able to drag business out of a rock. What she did add was another question.

"And you can—fix up—the business when you get it?"

"I suppose I can. I never lost a place for incompetence—except the elevator job."

"Then there's really nothing more to be said," responded Betsy-Barbara. "Just get an office, and hang out your shingle, and go to work. You may fail, of course. But you'll be doing it for yourself, and that, Thomas W. North, is what you need."

Tommy North had been looking at her as one who sees visions and hears voices. "Why,

that's the way I used to think. That's the way I used to talk," he said. "I didn't realize until I heard it from you, how I'd got over it. I guess I don't think that way any more. It's this town, Miss Lane. New York's a queer place. It fills up every year with young men and young girls. It makes a few, but it breaks more. Some go right straight up to the top, but most just drift along at the bottom, until they give up and go home. I guess that was happening to me—I was drifting at the bottom."

"You're nearer to it than you ever were," said Betsy-Barbara. "You see I'm new here and I haven't lost that feeling that you get in New York the minute you come—that you can move mountains. And while I still feel that way, I'm going to make you work."

"All right," commanded Tommy North, "fire away! I'll do anything you tell me to and go anywhere you say." He did not add what his heart said, "Even to the end of the world."

"The first thing to do when you're starting in business is to find an office," said Betsy-Barbara practically.

“There are lots of good cheap little places in lower Fifth Avenue,” said Tommy North.

“Let’s look at them right now!” exclaimed Betsy-Barbara. And the newly-formed Thomas W. North Advertising Agency wheeled and started southward.

That afternoon, Betsy-Barbara and Rosalie Le Grange were sewing together in the sun parlor. Rosalie, guider and compeller of destinies, had seemed for a fortnight the least considerable factor in the events now gathering about the Hanska case. She moved quietly among the enactors of the drama, performing her duty of shaking together a new household. The invalid on the top floor took a great deal of her time, and her quiet motherly watch over Constance almost as much. Toward Constance she maintained an attitude of distant affection. With Betsy-Barbara, on the other hand, she grew familiar and big-sisterly. Spite of wide surface differences in breeding and grammar, there was some natural bond between these two—perhaps their common taste for controlling destinies. Rosalie never let her affections film the main chance, however. In their chats over the muslin and

the tea-cups, she drew Betsy-Barbara, through subtle attack and retreat, to full discussion of the Hanska case. Yet so careful was her method, that Betsy-Barbara never dreamed she had broken any confidences.

As they pulled bastings, Betsy-Barbara slipped in a remark which she tried artfully to conceal in general chatter.

“Mr. North tells me,” said Betsy-Barbara, “that he is going to start in business for himself.”

Rosalie’s eyes, their motion hidden by her long lashes, observed now that Betsy-Barbara’s fingers, which had been fluttering busily, stopped still for a moment as she dropped this simple observation.

“That so!” exclaimed Rosalie; “well he’s a nice, smart young man an’ it will be the very best thing for him.” She pulled bastings for ten seconds before she resumed:

“It will keep him straight. He won’t have to be helped up to his room for some time, I hope.”

Betsy-Barbara stared and flushed.

“Oh! Did you see it?”

“Now, my dear, I think it was brave an’

nice of you. It's what any girl should have done, an' it's what most good girls wouldn't have the decency to do. No woman's a real lady when she's too much of a lady. Yes—I heard him stumble, an' I come out an' looked."

"I—I just opened his door and pushed him in," said Betsy-Barbara, blushing furiously.

"An' quite enough—I saw that, too." Rosalie pulled bastings for a quarter of a minute more. Then she added, "I suppose you called him down all he needed when you took that walk this morning."

"Oh, that wasn't the reason!" cried Betsy-Barbara, driven back on her maiden defenses. "It wasn't *that*. I really didn't want to see him. But he had something new to tell me about—the case—or thought he had."

"Um-hum!" responded Rosalie. "Well, I've always wondered if that young man didn't know a great deal more than he was lettin' on."

"Oh, indeed, I think he told all he remembered!" replied Betsy-Barbara with some warmth; "this was just something he'd forgotten—something which came back to him

last night when he was—well, you saw.” And detail by detail she repeated Tommy North’s story about the diamond cluster. Rosalie, as she listened with downcast look, used all her will to keep her head steady and her fingers busy.

“That’s interesting,” she remarked, in a matter-of-fact tone, when Betsy-Barbara had finished. “But I don’t know’s it’s important. They think they see funny things when they’re drunk an’ they’re ready to swear to ’em when they sober up. Intend to tell Mrs. Hanska or the lawyers about it?”

“I thought I might—I’m doing every least thing to help.”

“Well, the evidence of a drunk wouldn’t go at all in a court of law,” pursued Rosalie, her eyes still on her work. “Just as soon as they find he was drunk, they put him right off the witness-stand.”

“Do they?” asked Betsy-Barbara innocently.

“Always. And of course—well, Mr. North is pretty humiliated already, an’ he’s a nice young man, an’ he’ll probably cut out drink now he’s in business for himself. Still, if you think it’s your duty—”

"Oh, I hope you think it isn't," said Betsy-Barbara. "I don't want to put Mr. North in that position again."

"Can't see where it's the least bit of use, an' 'twould only do Mr. North harm," replied Rosalie. "If you was me, would you french this seam? Yes, I guess it looks more tasty that way." Rosalie turned the conversation to a discussion of autumn fashions. She sewed and chatted for ten minutes. Then she looked ostentatiously at the clock.

"Gracious! A quarter to four an' I must be down-town quarrelin' with that laundry at a quarter past!"

She rose, gathered coat, hat and gloves, and hurried to the corner drug store, from which she made by telephone an immediate appointment with Inspector McGee. They met in Abingdon Square, a rendezvous half-way between her house and headquarters. She proceeded to business at once.

"I've been jest settin' on this Hanska case, Inspector," she said. "Knew if I waited long enough, somethin' would hatch. It has, but I can't say yet whether it's a rooster or a duck."

“What have you got?” inquired McGee.

“Don’t know, I tell you. Didn’t I say in the first place that I was workin’ alone as I always do?”

“All right, Rosalie,” replied McGee, indulgently, “then what can I do for you?”

“In the first place, when’s the Grand Jury goin’ to get to the Wade indictment?”

“Pretty soon, I guess. I’ve been holding them off until I get more evidence.”

“Well, keep holdin’ ’em off.”

“It looks to me,” put in the Inspector, “as if you still thought Wade didn’t do it.”

“Well, honest, are you sure yourself? Play square now.”

The Inspector meditated until he achieved a miracle of self-analysis.

“I’d be able to judge that better,” he said, “if I didn’t feel I’d like to knock his block off every time I see him. He won’t say a thing one way or another. Whenever I try to put on the screws, he just sits off and laughs. Once they begin to talk, they’re gone. And confound him, I can’t make him say a word—except, ‘I told the Coroner all I knew about the case.’”

"Well, you stop askin' him until you hear from me," said Rosalie.

"Honest, what have you got?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Here Rosalie broke out all her dimples, so that Inspector McGee smiled on her. "Call it a hunch from the spirits."

"You can't come that on me," said the Inspector, half playfully, "I know your kind of spirits."

"Well, call it a woman's notion then, if you like that any better. The Grand Jury's the first thing. Next, that old house of Mrs. Moore's is still vacant, isn't it? I want to go through it with you from top to bottom—an' I've got to do it so I won't be seen. If anybody around my house suspects I'm mixed in the case, I'm no more use to you."

"That's easy. We can enter the block from the other side and go in by the back door."

"All right. How's two o'clock to-morrow?"

"Fine."

"Now I'd better run along. I don't want to take any chances of being seen with you. For a big place, New York's the smallest place ever I saw."

“Honest, what have you found?”

“Honest, I don’t know myself!” said Rosalie Le Grange, dimpling over her shoulder as she walked away. McGee stood following her with his eyes.

## CHAPTER VIII

### COQUETTISH MC GEE

**T**HE Moore boarding-house, scene of the Hanska murder, remained closed, a plain-clothes man from the precinct detective force keeping it under watch and ward. By routine, the police should have turned it back to its regular occupants as soon as the Coroner's jury had viewed it and the photographers had finished with recording the evidence. But since Mrs. Moore's boarders had transferred themselves in a body to the more desirable establishment of Madame Rosalie Le Grange, the place lay vacant, displaying the sign, "To Rent Furnished; Desirable for Boarding-house." New York is short-minded and cold-hearted, too noisy for ghosts and too busy for brooding. It was not memory of the tragedy which kept tenants away, but the fact that the murder happened early in the month, and most boarding-houses are let "from the first to the

first." Since the place, for the time being, was of no use to any one else, Inspector McGee took the precaution of setting a guard over it. As another precaution for remote contingencies, he left Captain Hanska's room undisturbed.

To this house—a plain four-story building of worn brick near its turn for destruction in the next transformation of impermanent New York—came Captain McGee and Rosalie Le Grange. They approached with all the caution of forethought, entering the block through an office building on the next street, opening the area door with a pass-key, going into the house by the basement door at the rear.

"Ugh! I hate to touch it," said Rosalie, drawing her skirts away from the wreckage of the cellar. "I'm glad I wore my old clothes. Guess Mrs. Moore never kept this place any too well—an' with this dust an' your untidy cops, Martin McGee, it's just scandalous now. Well, come on!" And so she dragged her police escort through floor after floor, room after room—at first a superficial survey and then a minute search.

"It's huntin' for a needle in a haystack when

you don't know for sure whether you dropped it in the barnyard or the pasture," said Rosalie as she settled down to the more careful stages of her search.

"What is the needle, anyway?" asked McGee.

"I ain't sure it is a needle—it may be a pin," replied Rosalie with her best air of mystery.

This was a house of four stories. In Mrs. Moore's reign it had a dozen occupants, what with boarders and servants. Each room held a score of those impedimenta, large and small, which the complexity of modern life has lain upon the simplest of us. Not an article but might be the mark which would set Rosalie upon the trail. The preliminary search—reinforced by old questioning among her boarders—had given Rosalie the lay of the land. The kitchen was in the basement. The parlor, the dining-room and Mrs. Moore's room were on the ground floor. Miss Harding and Miss Jones lived in the second story. On that floor also, were two vacant rooms—for Mrs. Moore's house had fallen on unprosperous days. The third floor, where the men lived, had been fully occupied by Mr. North, Professor Noll, and

Captain Hanska. Tommy North had the front room. Noll and Hanska lived opposite each other at the rear. Captain Hanska's room, the main objective of Rosalie's search, was to the right of the passage. The top floor, again, had only one occupant—Miss Estrilla. She lived at the rear of the house, where the lights were lower. Her room was directly above Professor Noll's. Across from Miss Estrilla's and above Captain Hanska's apartment of accursed memory, lay a lumber-room, the catch-all for trunks and odd furniture.

As they came to Captain Hanska's room, Inspector McGee stopped and made oration.

"You can see," he said, "that it was an inside job. Beginning on the roof, there's no way to enter except by the hatch which goes down into the lumber-room. On account of the fire regulations, the hatch couldn't be locked, but it was closed inside by a bolt. That hadn't been monkeyed with. In fact, the dirt around the edges showed that the hatch hadn't been opened for a long time."

"And the fire-escape?" asked Rosalie, pursing her brows with concentration.

"Runs from the lumber-room straight down.

Passes at the third floor the windows of Captain Hanska's room. The corresponding room on the second floor is vacant. That fire-escape violated the fire ordinances—some one should have been pinched. In the first place, you couldn't possibly reach it from the roof, on account of the overhang of the eaves. Then it stopped short at the second floor—and there was no ladder below. Fine little way to break bones in case of fire! To reach it from the ground, a man would have had to jump sixteen feet in the air. A professional acrobat couldn't have done it—unless they teach 'em in the circus to shinny up a smooth brick wall. No one entered by the basement, either. Windows and doors all bolted inside and showed no signs of being tampered with. You see, it was this Wade fellow, or an inside job. And while we're talking about locks"—here Martin McGee opened Captain Hanska's door and stood with a foot on either side of the threshold—"this is a little piece of evidence I've figured out myself. Notice, he had a spring-lock. Mrs. Moore says he put it on himself. That indicates he was afraid of somebody—Wade, probably. Him being so particular on

that point, it was only natural he should keep it locked when he was asleep. Now, look here."

This was an "inside" spring-lock of the ordinary pattern. It could be controlled from without only by the key. Within, however, was a knob and a button by which one could turn back the catch and render it temporarily useless as a lock. "Well, now," said McGee, "the catch was back when they found the body, and the door wasn't locked at all. If he'd been alive after Wade left him, he wouldn't have gone to sleep without seeing that his door was locked. My idea is, he turned the knob and shut the catch back when he let Wade in—the way a person does with a spring-lock. Anyhow," concluded McGee, "it's a suspicious fact."

"Very," said Rosalie; and McGee did not catch the flatness in her tone. "But any one who got on to that fire-escape, one way or another, could have entered Hanska's room by the window, couldn't he?"

"Yes," said Inspector McGee, "if Hanska's window was open. But the windows were closed when they found the body. Most of the witnesses say that. They remember because

when this Mrs. Moore fainted those girls opened both windows to give her air. They say they had to open the catches to get the sashes up."

"Stuffy muggy night, an' both windows closed—an' him an American!"

"Well, there's nothing particularly strange about that, is there?" said Inspector McGee.

"Not to you!" replied Rosalie Le Grange, dimpling on him. "I guess—well, I guess before we do anything else we'll go over everything in that room."

They entered.

Except that the blood had been scrubbed away, except that the floor bore the marks of muddy foot-heels, souvenirs of the police and the Coroner's jury, the room stood as Captain Hanska left it for his long journey. Dust, which was smut in the corners and an impalpable film on the furniture, lay over everything. The neat and fastidious Rosalie made gestures of displeasure with her fingers and drew away her skirts. On the table lay outspread the photographs, the souvenirs of five oceans, the extra knife, which Lawrence Wade admitted that he delivered to Captain

Hanska. The bed was as Rosalie had seen it on the night of the tragedy—the sheets and quilts turned back as though one had risen quietly and naturally. It was to the bed that Rosalie turned her first attention. It stood against the wall. Its head escaped the swing of the door by a few inches; its foot was near that south window which opened on the fire-escape. Rosalie went over it minutely, observing everything. At the foot of the white counterpane, her eyes stopped—stopped and rested.

“It’s spotted,” she said almost under her breath.

Inspector McGee looked also.

“Nothing special,” he replied. “This Mrs. Moore wasn’t a good housekeeper.”

“Rest of it’s clean enough, barrin’ the dust,” said Rosalie Le Grange, “and those spots is water, not dirt—water on starched stuff always looks that way—just crinkly—like it needed ironing.”

Martin McGee considered.

“That’s easy,” said he. “They opened the window. It was raining, wasn’t it? Well, the rain came in and stained it.”

“I suppose so,” said Rosalie. But she made

a minute examination. Let us violate for a second the privacy of her mind. "Dear old dope!" it was saying, "he hasn't thought to look into the weather that night. He don't know it had cleared up and stopped raining for good when I came into the house; and I saw them open the windows myself."

"Well," she said aloud, "that's all for the bed. Now let's see the furniture an' his clothes an' everything."

It was half an hour before Rosalie finished her search of the room. She went over it inch by inch, her lips pursed, her hands making quick flutters of disgust over the dirt and disorder. She spoke little, and then as though to herself. Inspector McGee, finally, gave up following her swift movements, mental and physical, and rested himself in a Morris chair. His was a life of grim hard things; these surroundings, depressing even to Rosalie, were to him part of the day's work. And so he fell to watching not the search for evidence but the figure of Rosalie Le Grange. Martin McGee, untutored in esthetics, did not know that there is one beauty of youth and another of maturity; that there is one glory of ruddy

young skin, bright with new blood, and another of faded skin; that the soul which shines out through mature flesh may be more disturbing to the thoughts of man than young flesh itself. Had you asked him, he would have limited all beauty in women to the twenties, or at least to the early thirties. He was unaccustomed to self-analysis, to psychological musings of any kind; and the mood which blew in upon him was strange to his nature.

There was something pleasing, and more than pleasing, about this woman here. He remembered how she had appeared to him ten years ago, when she began flashing in and out of his life. He had been sitting in another house of murder, and he had seen her cross the street. He had marked her then as "a peach"—a little too plump for his idea of beauty, but pretty nevertheless. She had brown hair then; she had a neat figure, a smooth pleasing face, and those big gray eyes. The eyes remained as they were, but there was a foam of white across her hair. The face had fallen into a delicate ridge here and there, though massage had taken care of the wrinkles, which showed not as yet. Her figure had broadened a little

—yet she still bore it wonderfully. The skin of her long plump hands had begun to gather about the knuckles. And still—she appealed to him as she had never appealed in those first days. He had no great amount of imagination; but what he had soared and took flight. Suppose—then—when they were both young—

The flight stopped there; the bird of imagination fluttered to earth, killed by an arrow of memory. This was—had always been—a medium, a professional faker. In their early acquaintance she had duped even him. She was next door to a crook; and he dwelt so close to crooks as to have his tolerations, but also his prejudices. No, she wasn't the kind for a man. But it was a pity. The broad, sturdy police bosom of Martin McGee heaved with a sigh. A pity! How pretty she was there, knitting her brows and letting her dimples play soberly with her thought as she turned and returned an old coat! And what a mind she had! Lord, what a mind!

The sigh did not escape Rosalie Le Grange; little in her surroundings ever escaped her. She appeared to come out of her thoughtful mood, and her dimples flashed.

“Getting tired?” she asked.

“No,” he said. And then suddenly: “Rose, why did you ever start it?”

“Being a medium, you mean?”

“Yes.” The word was out of his lips before wonder entered his mind.

“Now, how did you get that—what I was thinking of? You make me wonder if there ain’t something in your mediumship.”

“Well,” said Rosalie, “reachin’ out and gettin’ things that way is on the edge of the spirit, I guess. Told you before, the more you know about this thing the more you don’t know.” She mounted a chair to peer along the closet shelf. “In this case; when a gentleman sits still lookin’ at a lady like he really saw her, he’s thinkin’ of the past among other things. An’ when he sighs like that, it’s probably because she ain’t what he’d like her to be—if he’s got any respect for her, which I hope you have, Inspector Martin McGee!”

“Yes, I have that,” responded the Inspector.

“I kinder guessed you had,” replied Rosalie, smelling of two old bottles which she had found on the shelf. “How did I come to take

it up? Well, when you're left an orphan at twelve—there ain't much choice. Professor Vango adopted me—my mother was in his circle. Old fake! But he had mediumship, too; an' he thought, an' I thought, he brought somethin' out of me. Anyhow, I saw things. So I became a medium, like you became a cop—because it happened that way. If it had happened another way you might have been a boss bricklayer and contractor—you wouldn't 'a' stayed a journeyman, I'll say that for you. Sometimes," added Rosalie, drawing all sting from her words by a flash of her dimples, "I think you're awful stupid, Martin McGee, an' sometimes I think you're a wonder. It's generally according to whether or no you agree with me. As you mostly do, I generally call you a wonder. An' you've got get-there besides. Slow, but you do get there."

This bit of conversation fulfilled Rosalie's purpose. It turned the subject from herself to Inspector McGee's self; and she knew from a life of experience that no man lives who can resist that lure.

"How do you feel about me to-day?" he asked with heavy male coquetry.

"I haven't made up my mind to-day," she said, "but it's veerin' toward the stupid." She crossed the room and fumbled with the catch of the south window. He rose heavily to help her.

"No, thank you!" she said. "No, thank you. I want to look over this fire-escape. I'm that old I can't go up modest-like. It's enough to have the stenographers rubberin' from those windows, without you."

However, she managed with surpassing lightness the step from the window to the iron stairway, with astonishing grace the ascent. She threaded it to its top, viewing it all in a general way. Then she stopped, making a picture of herself as she balanced on the landing, and pulled out a wire hairpin. This universal implement of the sex she twisted to suit her purpose, and began a slow descent, picking at the interstices of the iron. Nothing but dust, with here and there a straw, a bit of cloth, or a scrap of paper blown thither by the wind.

"Unpromisin'," she said to herself sotto voce, "but I'll try everythin'—ugh! it's a sweeper's job."

So she worked downward nearly one flight before she came to a cake of dirt in a corner of the iron steps. She brushed it away and discovered a little irregularity in the metal. She picked at this with her twisted hairpin. It proved to be a loop of steel, somewhat spotted, but still bright. She hooked the pin into the loop, and pulled. Something gave way. Out of a very small hollow in the iron step, which seemed like a bubble left in the process of casting, came a little hard ball. She rubbed it with her hands, and polished it with her handkerchief.

It was a red shoe-button.

Rosalie fingered it, and glanced upward, musing. Above, the iron stairway ran straight to the windows of the lumber-room. And that was the only window from which it could have fallen in such fashion as to strike the fire-escape. She knew from Mrs. Moore that this room had been used for storage during all of the last year. If a previous tenant dropped it, the lacquer would be gone or tarnished by now. The other windows on the fourth floor were cut off from view of the fire-escape by an irregularity of the wall. From those windows,

one could scarcely have thrown the button and hit that spot on the fire-escape—"let alone droppin' it," thought Rosalie.

Rosalie wrapped the button in her handkerchief and continued her search. Nothing heavier than straws and scraps of paper.

"Well, you never can tell," she said to herself as she straightened up on the landing before Captain Hanska's window; "let's see—who in my house ever wears—"

She stopped all motion here; and since there was no need for concealment, her face showed the shock which she felt. Her eyes widened; her jaw dropped.

"Um-hum!" she buzzed with the tone of one who gathers the straws of suspicion into a sheaf of fact. "Um-hum!"

And just then the voice of Inspector McGee boomed from within.

"Pretty near through?" he asked.

"Much 'as I want," replied Rosalie, voice and face falling at once into indifference. "Is there a place to wash in this house? Water ain't turned off yet? All right. No, never mind—I'm still young enough to crawl through a window by myself. When I get home, if

I don't scrub myself off! This'll do for one day."

When, ten minutes later, she returned from the lavatory, marvelously freshened in appearance, the Inspector awaited her in the lower hall.

"I may be wanting to come again," she said. "Will you let the cops know?"

"Well, how do I stack to-day," asked Martin McGee, "smart or stupid?"

"Kind of between," jabbed Rosalie, "but edgin' toward stupid still." She smiled again over her shoulder; a dimple played and then another; a lock of hair fell from its fastening over her cheek.

And suddenly something happened; something which Martin McGee, blushing over it later in silence and secrecy, could not himself account for. With the motion of a dancing bear, so awkward was it and yet so quick, he had caught her in his arms and kissed her heavily on the face.

Rosalie did not seem to struggle; yet somehow, without haste, without disarranging herself in one little item, she was free of him. The surge in Martin McGee receded as rapidly as

it had risen. He stood blank, his color thickening.

“Martin McGee,” said Rosalie Le Grange, “you jest cut that out!”

When Rosalie returned to her house late that afternoon, a murmur of voices greeted her from the front parlor. Ordinarily, the house did not wake up until six o'clock, when Miss Harding and Miss Jones brought a pair of high-pitched voices into its quiet. Rosalie parted the portières and looked in.

Twilight had come. Constance sat at one end of the room, reading.

Rosalie's quick glance noted that although she held her book upright her eyes had lifted from its pages, had settled on a spot in mid-air half-way across the room. Betsy-Barbara and Tommy North were sitting together in the low, much-draped, much-cushioned seat of the cozy corner. Before them was a little table, furnished with a pad of paper, two pencils sharpened to needle-point fineness, and the catalogue of a furniture store. Over the table glimmered two blobs of light—the yellow-gold that was Betsy-Barbara's head and the red-brown that was Tommy North's. And these

shimmering patches were close together—very close.

Involuntarily, Rosalie listened.

“I want it to be very simple, but elegant, too,” Betsy-Barbara was saying. “Mission would be my choice. Two desks—a big, solid, important-looking one for you and a small, modest, utilitarian-looking one for me—four chairs, a card-catalogue, a few pictures, simply-framed but dignified, and perhaps a rug.”

“Sounds like a fairy tale to me,” said Tommy North. “I tell you what we’ll do—to-morrow morning we’ll draw two hundred and fifty of my five hundred and circulate around among the furniture places and do the thing up brown.”

“*Two hundred and fifty!*” cried Betsy-Barbara; “two hundred and fifty! If that isn’t like a man! Seventy-five at the outside! We’re going around to auction rooms and pick up second-hand stuff. We’ll get better things, and they’ll look just as good as new when I’ve rubbed them up with oil.”

“Well, of course, you’re boss,” said Tommy North, “but don’t you think—”

But here—

“Hadn’t you better light up, children?” Rosalie asked.

“Oh, thank you, Mrs. Le Grange,” said Betsy-Barbara. “Now as for the big desk; should you want—”

As Rosalie continued her weary way upstairs, she heard the click of the electric light and the distant babble of voices going on and on.

“Lord!” she sighed heavily to herself; “lord, lord, how great it is to begin life sweet and pure like that!”

## CHAPTER IX

### MOVING THE PAWNS

**A**T breakfast next morning, Rosalie opened her game—opened it like a master of human chessmen, with a trifling move or two of the pawns.

“Don’t any of you people be astonished,” she said, “if your clothes look strange and orderly when you get home to-night. This is my day for cleaning closets. I announce now that if I find anything isn’t hung where it ought to be, I’m going to set it right.”

“Please be so good as to cover that box of Bran-O biscuits on the top shelf of my closet, before you begin dusting,” requested Professor Noll.

“I guess it’s all right,” remarked Tommy North importantly, “but generally I don’t let any one but my valley or his assistant meddle with my wardrobe. Remember, please, to fold them on the same creases upon replacing them.

While you are about it, you might give some of the *passée* suits to any deserving person who comes to your attention. For instance, there is my third-best evening suit—you will recognize it at once because it is cut in last year's style. Why not the furnace man? Then there are a dozen sets of English flannels which I've re-ahly never had a chance to wear, and they're getting a little faded from hanging in the closet. My man tells me that clothes must be worn now and then to preserve their appearance. Perhaps the ash man could find use for them. The point is, use your judgment, my good woman. I rely on your honesty to keep for me any bonds or securities which you may find in the pockets of my lounge suits." And Tommy, remarking in a feminine tone, "O blab!" flecked an imaginary speck from the somewhat threadbare sleeve of the only business suit he owned.

When they were gone, Rosalie Le Grange, refusing assistance from Mrs. Moore, put on dust-cap and long apron and made good her word. But she did more than clean. From Miss Harding's apartment on the ground floor to Miss Estrilla's on the top, she examined mi-

nutely every garment and every pair of shoes. When she had finished, when she stood in her own room dressing for the street, she looked very serious. Before she put away her house-dress, she took from its pocket the red shoe-button. She inspected it again, and locked it away in the deepest compartment of her jewel-case.

Rosalie walked briskly to a bookstore in the heart of the foreign district, held short consultation with the clerk, journeyed another block, and stood at length before a sign lettered in many tongues. She hesitated and began talking to herself.

“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” she remarked.

“But sometimes you can brush up the old tricks he used to know,” she added. “It’ll take time—well, anyway, I’m here!” and she entered.

When she emerged, it lacked but half an hour of lunch-time. At the table, she made subtle inquiry about the plans of her boarders for the day. Mr. North, already busy with his agency, had not come home to lunch at all. Betsy-Barbara had an engagement to help him

select furniture. Constance must spend the afternoon with her lawyers. Professor Noll intended to read a paper at the Health Food Conference. Miss Harding and Miss Jones never came home between breakfast and dinner-time.

“Now’s my chance—while the house is empty an’ my nerve’s good,” she said to herself as the boarders departed one by one. She reflected a moment before she sought the kitchen and addressed Mrs. Moore.

“My dear,” she said, “the cop who’s on guard at your old place tells me he thinks the owners have found a tenant. We moved you in a great hurry, an’ I’m sure there must have been a lot of stuff overlooked. Don’t you think you better go over the whole place this afternoon? The cop will let you in—I spoke to him about it.” When Mrs. Moore had gone her lugubrious way, Rosalie turned to Molly, the maid.

“You’d best clean the silver this afternoon, Molly,” she said. “Look out for the front door; I’m goin’ to be busy up-stairs, an’ if anybody calls, nobody’s at home. Remember what I say.”

Forthwith, Rosalie moved a major piece.

She mounted the stairs toward Miss Estrilla's room. She was behaving strangely. Her eyes looked far away. Her manner seemed remote to the things of this world. As she knocked and entered, she passed her hand over her eyes, gave a little convulsive jerk, dropped her hand to her side, and shook herself.

Miss Estrilla lay back among the cushions in half-light. She had taken off her dark glasses, but the green shade was low over her eyes. She seemed to catch the strange new manner of Rosalie.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

Rosalie did not answer at once. She gave a little stagger, sank down in a chair, and began to murmur inarticulate syllables in a low and rather husky voice.

"What has happened?" asked Miss Estrilla again; and she spoke in real alarm.

Rosalie sat upright as with great effort. Once or twice her hands clasped and unclasped.

"Give me that glass of water," she said in a half-whisper. She drank; she wet her fingers and dabbed her temples.

"Are you ill? Shall I send for some one?" repeated Miss Estrilla.

“I’m better now,” replied Rosalie in a firm but rather sleepy voice. “It’s cruel to frighten you. But listen. I’m in trouble in a way”—at this, Miss Estrilla settled back as though relieved, somehow—“an’ I’ve just got to ask for your help. Now please don’t be scared. It’s really nothin’—only—well, I’ve got to tell about it, I guess.” All the weariness of the world was in that last phrase. “I git took this way sometimes. There’s nothin’ dreadful about it when folks understand. Don’t call anybody, please don’t. Jest stay where you are. In a minute, I’ll be goin’ out of myself—unconscious, you know. I’ll talk, probably. I may thrash around a little. By an’ by, I’ll stop talkin’ an’ be perfectly quiet—” Here Rosalie shuddered three or four times again, impersonated an effort of the will, and went on: “Don’t do anything to me while I’m talkin’. But after I’m done an’ lay quiet, wait five minutes. Then if I don’t come to, sprinkle water in my face, shake me—anything an’—don’t—tell—anybody—” These last words died away in a crooning undertone. Rosalie sank deeper into the chair. Her eyes fixed on the distance. Gradually, her lids fell. So she

rested for some time, immobile. The room became so quiet that the rattle of traffic, the gongs of the electric cars, the roar of the Ninth Avenue elevated, struck the ear with a distinctness almost painful. Miss Estrilla, sitting up on her couch, watched Rosalie intently. Now and then, Rosalie noted, her breathing came in irregular little catches. From the cover of her long eyelashes, best instrument of her trade, Rosalie stole a glance which took in this constrained attitude. She let her lids droop to a full close.

“Ugh—oh—ugh!” went Rosalie’s voice finally; and at the deep tone, so unlike Rosalie’s accustomed silvern accents, Miss Estrilla started.

“Doctor Carver”—it was a deep male voice which proceeded from Rosalie’s entranced lips; this male voice of her had been the envy of her old contemporaries—“a—ah! Doctor Carver. I come to speak of a young man. I see him near this place. I see a struggle about him. I see a glass of liquor on one side of him and a woman’s hand on the other. He is drawing toward the woman’s hands. I see her more clearly now. She has golden hair. I see him

working far into the night. His hand is writing—ugh—” This was a kind of shuddering groan. “I am going!” Another silence. Then a light flute-like voice—the accustomed tone of Laughing-Eyes, Rosalie’s famous child control, and the most artistic thing she did. The characteristics of Laughing-Eyes varied greatly with various “sitters.” For the ignorant, who like their marvels highly-colored, Rosalie made Laughing-Eyes a babbling child of four or five. For the refined and critical, like Miss Estrilla, Laughing-Eyes was older, subtler, and less whimsically playful.

“Flowers for a pretty lady!” came the voice of Laughing-Eyes. “Pretty lady is sick. Pretty lady is crying. It’s bright here. And the spirits talk to me. One, two, three spirits talk to me. One, two, three spirits talk to Laughing-Eyes. One of them wants the pretty lady—oh, he’s gone! He is weak. I am weak—good-by—pretty—” Rosalie’s lips closed, and she settled down as though into deeper sleep. She waited through a space which seemed eternity. Presently she heard a rustling from the bed. Miss Estrilla had moved. Rosalie braced herself within for the

shock of cold water. But Miss Estrilla only shook her. Rosalie made a sleepy motion and became still. Miss Estrilla shook her again, and called into her ear.

“Madame Le Grange—wake up!”

This time, Rosalie permitted her eyes to open. She stared a moment as at things remote, fetched another shudder, sat bolt upright. Her first expression was bewildered; her second startled. There followed every appearance of embarrassment and chagrin.

“Oh, what has happened?” she said.

“Don’t you know?” asked Miss Estrilla, regarding her narrowly.

“I remember coming in here,” said Rosalie, “an’ I remember telling you that I might go out—fall asleep.” She arose at this and began nervously to pace the room.

“I’ve got to apologize,” she went on, “I am—well, the last time I was took this way, I went to my own room. When I came to, it was dark—the servants thought I’d gone away an’ forgot to come home to dinner. I made up my mind I wouldn’t let it happen again like that—an’ you were the only person in the house. Was I out—asleep—long?”

"About six or seven minutes, I think," said Miss Estrilla. Suddenly she covered her eyes with their green shade.

"What does it mean, all this?" she asked.

"Poor dear, I believe I must have bothered you with my talking—if I *did* talk." She approached the bed, and sat down.

"Now I'm goin' to tell you all about it," pursued Rosalie; "I must, of course. It ain't right not to explain, now I've made this scene. But you'll be the only livin' soul around the house that knows a thing, an' you'll understand what I mean when I'm through. Comin' right out with it, I've been a medium—a spirit medium—all my life. You know what that is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Didn't know but you mightn't. Some folks don't, an' some hold a low opinion of 'em. I do myself." Rosalie paused. "That was why I cut it out, maybe—that and the feelin' that my powers was goin'. It's a dreadfully tryin' occupation, an' the associations are bad—quacks an' fakes an' things. I never faked, but there was a temptation to do it all the time. Well, one day comes a legacy—money I'd

never counted on or expected. An' that happened jest when it seemed like my power had grown weak an' I had to quit or be a fake—because when people come an' pay you two dollars you have to deliver answers or you'll git no more custom. So I jest determined to drop it all an' go to keepin' boarders with my money."

Rosalie made the proper dramatic pause here, and let her voice fall.

"You can't do a thing all your life, though, an' stop it right away. I hadn't counted on that. I never could control my trances exactly. They had a way of comin' when they wanted to. Why, once at a whist party—but never mind that. An' I hadn't been keepin' boarders two weeks, before I begun to have the feelin'. It's queer. I can't describe it to you unless you're mediumistic yourself, but it takes you right here—" she touched her ample bosom with one hand. "You can hold it off for a while, an' then—it's like holdin' off sleep. Twice before this week it's happened—I've told you what I did the second time, an' how it scared me. An' jest now, standin' in the hall, I felt it comin' on—strong. You know the

rest. An' I hope you'll excuse me—an' you won't say a thing, will you?" Rosalie's voice held all the pleading in the world.

Miss Estrilla, expressionless behind her green shade, spoke in an even and unemotional voice.

"And what do your spirits say to you?"

"To me?" replied Rosalie; "goodness, I don't know. I wish I did. That was always a curious thing about my mediumship. You see, there's every kind. Some folks are clairaudient. They hear things while they're wide awake. Some are clairvoyant in half trance. That means they see, an' they know all the time what they've seen and what they're sayin'. I'm the worst kind. I never could get a thing except in full trance—jest like I was asleep. I have to find afterwards from other people what I said or did. Well, I'm as sorry as can be that I bothered you, an' won't do it again, if I can help it. Did I talk much?"

"Not a great deal. Something about a young man and a young woman."

"Anybody in the house? Sometimes—they tell me—my spirits talk about folks a thousand

miles away an' sometimes about folks that are right here."

Miss Estrilla seemed to be considering this. When she spoke, her voice was still even and perfectly controlled; but she did not answer the question.

"You have been very kind," she said, "and I don't see why you should tell any one else. You may come here whenever you feel that way. It would be a pleasure to return your kindness."

Rosalie sighed as in relief.

"My! That's good. I didn't want to *ask*—it's a lot to ask of anybody—but now you've offered, I'll take it. I've been thinkin' lately it would be a good thing to let go of myself when I feel it comin', an' get it off my system. Was that the bell? Excuse me—I ain't sure that lazy Molly will answer it.—An' thank you, my dear."

The bell was only a pedler. When Rosalie had disposed of him, she consulted her watch. Much remained of the afternoon; and the house was still deserted.

"Good time to git in an hour's session with

that darned phonograph," she said; and she took refuge in her own big clothes-closet—which, experiment had shown, was sound-proof.

## CHAPTER X

### A LONE HAND

**M**ARTIN MCGEE waited to keep his latest appointment with Rosalie Le Grange on a bench in Stuyvesant Fish Park, dead center for the Hebrew population in New York. Before and behind him a regiment of children swarmed over horizontal bars or made loud play with park swings. On the benches to right and left sat a crowd of squalid loafers, most of whom would have shuffled away into the dives and alleys of the East Side had they known that this florid stalwart gentleman in the plain gray suit was a high policeman. On the fringes of his vision, Yiddish housewives bargained with push-cart pedlers. It was all very lively, very alien—and very odorous. Martin McGee speculated lazily and with some amusement upon the habits of Rosalie Le Grange—so much her own, yet so well conceived for her purposes. For example, this

method of holding business conferences on secret affairs—for she always set her appointments in Stuyvesant Fish Park, or some other out-of-the-way open space. It was a highly original, highly effective plan. One could enter without attracting attention; one could watch the approaches; a meeting in a public park—grant that it were discovered in such a remote part of the city—could be passed off as an accidental encounter, not a conference. That was one of the thousand ways in which her mind thought faster and further than his. He felt even a shade of jealousy as he dwelt upon her. With that ripple in the pool of his thoughts came another disturbed feeling. How was he to meet her after what had happened three days ago in the hallway of Mrs. Moore's old house? The thing had been an explosion of emotion, beyond control of will. Martin McGee did not put it so. "It got away with me" was how he expressed it to himself.

Martin McGee was approaching fifty, the second period of sentiment in man. In the lusty summer of his days, he had wooed—and lost. She had chosen the other arm of municipal warfare and married a fireman. Since

then woman had cut but a shadowy figure in his bachelor life. And here, in his middle age, the face and figure, the form and move of a woman was playing hide-and-seek among his thoughts of police duty and police privilege. He recognized even a certain embarrassment over the coming meeting like that of a youth who has been slapped by a perky girl. Only one fact gave him satisfaction. Her cold withdrawal from him, her genuine indignation, settled finally—to his enchanted mind—certain surmises concerning one element in the character of Rosalie Le Grange. This, however, raised up a regiment of disturbing thoughts. She had been a professional medium; and a medium was a half-crook; it wasn't respectable. With the perverse yearning of one who has passed his life among disreputabilities, Martin McGee loved respectability in woman. And—

“How do you do?” said a voice beside him; and Rosalie's self settled down on the park bench.

He looked at her without rising, his first thought to read in those eyes of hers, which mirrored so many emotions, her attitude toward him. The eyes were laughing!

"How do you do?" he repeated after her. And then, as though he must be out with it:

"Say, I guess there's an apology coming from me."

"If there is," said Rosalie, "there's one coming from about every man I ever knew. It's the way of the animal. It's a kind of a left-handed compliment to the lady though."

Martin McGee, a little unaccustomed since his philandering days to the slender arrows of feminine attack, winced at this subtle variation of the common, "you're-just-like-all-the-rest." It stuck full to the shaft; and in a tender and uninured spot.

"This was different," said he.

"So they all say!" said she. But she was smiling, and her expression, while it held amusement, was warm and mellow. "Now let's overlook little things. I've come to talk business. I'm busting with it." She glanced to right and left, taking in a faded "black hood" of a woman, a sodden "panhandler" of a man. "I guess we'd better walk," she said. They rose and threaded the push-carts, the crowds, the confusion and smells, toward the river.

"Now I'm playing a lone hand," she began.

"If things go wrong, I've only myself to blame; an' if they go right, you get all the credit—as usual. I want help an' no questions asked. This Black-hand outfit of dago detectives—what have you got, that you can lend me?"

"You want—"

"A detective from the dago squad. I want him straight an' I want him quick an' I want him for my own—he reports to me, not to you."

"What for?"

"That wouldn't be playin' a lone hand. Do I get him?"

"I suppose you do."

"Well, who's available?"

"Let's see—there's Anzini."

"What's he like?"

"Italian Swiss. Big fat fellow. Little slow, but straight."

"Next?"

"Cuccoli. Born in New York. A dago light-weight fighter. Works on the quiet as a stool-pigeon. Likely to get into trouble but keen. Then there's Grimaldi. He's a scholar—used to be a schoolmaster—and I keep him on classy dago jobs. He talks Spanish and French like a native—taught school once in

Spain. A little fellow, and very talkative. Perugini is the slickest bull of the lot. He's big and a good fellow—but he's pretty busy now on the dynamitings, they tell me."

"This Grim—— whatever you call him—this scholar—he's talkative, you say?"

"Yes."

"Straight, too?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want him."

"All right. When does he report?"

"To-morrow morning at seven o'clock, Battery Park—with a description of me. He ain't to call my name first—wait until I tell him who I am—see?"

"Give him a description of you?" ventured McGee, verging now on compliment. "If I do and Maxine Elliot, or any of them, happen to be taking an early morning stroll in the park—"

"Tell him," said Rosalie, breaking in, "to watch out for a dear old lady with hair getting white on top an' lookin' as if she'd seen better days."

"He'll never find you!"

"Again thankin' you for your kind attentions, but resum'in' business," said Rosalie with asper-

ity, "I'll wear my plum-colored suit an' a black turban—you know what a turban is—it's one of those hats"—and she indicated a passing girl—"an' in place of the regular red carnation for meetings in the park, I'll be carryin'"—she considered a moment—"a purple automobile veil. That ought to settle me in his mind."

"I don't want to be prying into what's no business of mine," said Martin, with a touch of sarcasm, "but what's this all about? What's it got to do with the guilt or innocence of Lawrence Wade?"

"A whole lot—with his innocence maybe."

"Oh, come off!" exclaimed Martin. But his tone lacked a little in conviction, as though he were seeking to maintain a front. "You want to be careful in this matter," he added with the tone of a preceptor, "not to let your feelings get away with you. Just because you've a liking for that widow in the case."

"No?" inquired Rosalie.

But that sarcastic word whipped some raw nerve in Inspector McGee.

"All right," he grumbled. "But being on the outside looking in is a queer place for a chief of detectives."

Rosalie only laughed.

"I'd like to have you inside, Martin McGee, but I've got only myself to blame if this fizzles!"

They walked a while in silence; then Rosalie stopped.

"That's all arranged then. We'd better be getting back. I'll take a cross-town car. We shouldn't be seen together in the middle of the city."

"Say," said McGee as they turned, "why don't you ever let me see you between times? Course you must keep away from me now, but after this thing is settled, I want you to come out to lunch and dinner. We might as well be friendly."

"After this thing is settled—oh, you're a cop after all!" said Rosalie. Before McGee could unravel this cryptic, she resumed:

"Haven't you ever thought what we're doin'—we two, gadding about talkin' of lunch and dinners? You've been a cop too long, I guess. I had a sittin' with myself last night. If we succeed—if you make a good case of it, an' if I git what I'm after—somebody goes to the chair. That's what we're doin'. You don't

think of it. You're a man an' a cop. But I do."

"Not enough to make you stop?" inquired McGee, regarding her narrowly.

"No, but enough to make me sure the right one goes, and enough to make me want to stop thinkin' of what will happen when we get through." Her voice caught on this. McGee looked at her sharply. Her eyes were swimming.

"If you listened to the people they leave behind, as a medium has," she said. "But goodness"—and she dabbed her eyes—"that will be about all from me. Only"—a dimple flickered—"this life on the flesh-plane's a hard thing." They were at the car now. "I'll send for you when wanted, Martin McGee," she said. "An' remember—a purple auto veil in my right hand."

Rosalie did not return home at once. Instead, she proceeded to that house in the Latin Quarter before which she had paused and considered a problem three days before. It is one of Rosalie's peculiarities that she shrouds everything in mystery, but lets out a clue here and there to puzzle the observer and to satisfy her

individual sense of humor. I who write of her have caught that trick from Rosalie. I will reveal now—as Rosalie would have revealed it with a flash of eyes and dimples—that this place bore the sign, “J. Martinez, Teacher of Languages,” and that the phonograph which she kept in her closet was a device of the Martinez Method in Languages. She was refreshing her somewhat scattered knowledge of conversational Spanish, gained years ago when she played a profitable season at trance, test and development work in El Paso, San Antonio, and other points near the border. She spent a half-hour in conversation with Professor Martinez, did a few necessary errands, and reached her house at five o’clock. Betsy-Barbara was just coming in.

## CHAPTER XI

### CRYING IT OUT

**T**HERE was something the matter with Betsy-Barbara. Even before she spoke, Rosalie recognized that.

"I'm afraid Constance is going to pieces," said Betsy-Barbara, relieving her mind at once. "She worries me to death. She *will* go to the Tombs. When she leaves there, she's like a rock—Mr. Wade is perfectly bully, and he seems to inspire her with his own confidence. But the moment she gets back here, she just wilts!" Here Betsy-Barbara herself seemed to break; the tears came, and with them a little hard burst of laughter. The experienced Rosalie took her to her own room, wheeled her to the couch, banked her comfortably with pillows.

"Now cry it out, my dear," she said. And Betsy-Barbara cried it out.

Rosalie herself spilled a few tears, so that

she ceased for a time her caressing monosyllables for fear of the unsteadiness in her own voice.

“I ought not to let myself go like this,” said Betsy-Barbara when the storm was over, “I’m as ashamed as I can be. At least, I never let Constance see how I feel. But sometimes when I’m alone—”

“I know, dear, I know!” said Rosalie, bustling about with water, towels, smelling-salts, toilet water, all the restoratives of the feminine pharmacopœia, “there’s two kinds of people in this world, dearie—the posts and the rails. You an’ I are posts. But there’s times when a person would like to quit and be rebuilt an’ sag down an’ be a rail. Now let me put this on your face, dearie, an’ you’ll come to dinner as fresh as ever.” She bathed Betsy-Barbara’s face with long motherly strokes.

“But it’s such a dreadfully long time to wait,” sobbed Betsy-Barbara, her eyes giving signs of a clearing shower, “that I scarcely dare look ahead. And when I think of the trial and the awful strain on Constance—”

“If there ever *is* a trial,” replied Rosalie. “Why, he hasn’t even been indicted yet. You

don't understand the game or you'd know how much that means. They don't dare indict him with the little tiny bit of evidence they've got. It's long, but the longer the night the brighter the day, I say. An' just when it seems you haven't a drop of strength left, is the very time you get strength from somewhere. I've got my own ideas about where it comes from—but there! That's religion, an' we ain't talkin' religion. Of course, you're goin' to let me help you." While Rosalie spoke, she had mechanically handed Betsy-Barbara the atomizer. Mechanically, Betsy-Barbara took it and sprayed her pearly throat with toilet water. Mechanically again, Rosalie gave her a square of cham-  
ois, white with face powder. Mechanically, Betsy-Barbara passed it over cheeks and nose.

"Thank you—but you have helped a great deal already," said Betsy-Barbara, emerging from these ministrations a delicious, white-faced little clown. "I don't know what ever I should have done without you," she added as she dusted off the superfluous powder with little dashing touches of her hands.

"Oh, that's nothin'. I'm a horse for carry-  
ing troubles—other people's. I haven't chick

or child or husband or relation, which is why I never lug round any serious worries of my own. But I've found enough an' to spare of other people's since I took over the remains of this Hanska murder case. If murderers only knew," she added, dimpling, "how much they put out a person's way of life, they'd count ten first and never do it."

Betsy-Barbara, smoothing her brows and brushing powder out of her lashes with her finger-tips, smiled at this pleasantry, grim though it was.

"I didn't know," she said, "that the case greatly bothered any one here except Constance and me—or not since Mr. North was released at any rate."

"Well, I wish that *was* all," began Rosalie. She paused here for a second, her body frozen to a pose. So she always paused upon the birth of a new idea. Had she known of this habit, she would have practised to control it; for she had studied, during thirty years of trafficking with man's emotional expression, to let no external sign betray her real thought—unless she wished to betray that thought. But this was such an infinitesimal trick of manner that none,

not even her shrewd-eyed fellows of her old craft, had ever discovered it. We, however, who behold and study Rosalie Le Grange from the standpoint of the divine, may observe it and make comment. As we tread the mazes of her diplomacies, it will be a guide to our feet.

“Mainly,” resumed Rosalie after this little significant pause, “it’s this Miss Estrilla. The whole affair has got dreadfully on her nerves, she being sick as she is—all run down.”

At mention of that name, Betsy-Barbara looked up suddenly. Some harder emotion, Rosalie observed, seemed to pierce the thinning cloud of her grief.

“Yes?” said Betsy-Barbara. Her tone was non-committal.

“The shock got on her nerves. She was away up on the top floor that night, hearin’ everything and seein’ nothing at all. That always makes it worse. She wouldn’t even read the papers afterward, an’ I never mention the case to her—nor do you, dearie. I soon found out that she’s like you an’ me—she’s the kind to worry about other people’s troubles. An’ it’s queer, but one little thing bothers her a whole lot. She heard about Mr. North comin’ home

drunk, an' she's afraid that he'll go bad with liquor thinkin' about his arrest. Tell me," she added, suddenly shifting the line of attack, "he has really cut out liquor an' got busy, hasn't he?"

Rosalie, reading Betsy-Barbara's mind by the process of observing expressions and making swift deductions thereon, perceived that Betsy-Barbara was about to say, "What affair is it of yours?" She perceived also that the better part of Betsy-Barbara, the part which impelled her to her philanthropies of service, had put down that vixenish reply.

"Yes," said Betsy-Barbara, "I think he won't drink any more. He's too busy with his agency."

"How's it going?" asked Rosalie.

"Splendid, I hear," replied Betsy-Barbara. "He's getting promises of some very good business already."

Rosalie resumed her best motherly expression.

"Now I'm just as sure as I can be," she said, "that you were the person who made him do it. When I first thought over the case of that young man, I saw what he needed. An'

he's got it, all right! Guess you can count on him. When a man really has the habit, he's gone. But when he hasn't, all he needs is something more interesting to do."

"I think so," replied Betsy-Barbara, relieved that Rosalie seemed to be prying no further into her relations with Tommy North.

"I'm sure. Well, gettin' back to Miss Estrilla. She showed to-day in a little talk with me that Mr. North was on her mind. I notice you don't go up there much. But if you could stop in once or twice just like you used to, an' about the second time let it out natural about Mr. North's takin' a brace an' goin' to work, it would be a blessing to her. Of course, it must be led up to—an' you mustn't say anythin' about the murder. She just can't stand that."

Betsy-Barbara did not show the enthusiasm which Rosalie expected. She hesitated. This was genuinely puzzling. Rosalie's memory, playing like lightning over this turn in girl-psychology, called up a set of facts which she had hitherto observed without correlation. Of late, though Señor Estrilla by no means neglected his sister, his visits to the parlor had be-

come more regular. Twice she had seen him talking to Betsy-Barbara in the hall. It was Rosalie's impression that he had waited there to find an opening for a tête-à-tête.

"Is it Mr. Estrilla an' not Tommy North that she's doin' this maneuverin' to cover up?" she asked herself mentally.

All this had passed with the swiftness of thought—when thought travels the electric wires of such a mind as Rosalie's. But now Betsy-Barbara was speaking:

"The reason I haven't been there, Mrs. Le Grange, is frankly because of Mr. Estrilla. He's so—so—so—overpowering I guess I mean. Of course, I don't take him seriously, and yet he does look at me so and pay me such extraordinary compliments! I don't know exactly how to handle that kind of man," she ended with a little nervous laugh.

Rosalie waited.

"Of course, you understand, I *like* him. I can't exactly let him see how much I like him, for fear he'll think it's"—she paused and laughed—"it's the way he seems to want me to like him."

"He's a dear," said Rosalie with genuine

warmth; "can't say when I've seen a young man that an old woman like me feels more like wantin' to play around with. But it is bothersome to you, I can see. Especially when there's a nice young American man that you feel some responsibility for."

Betsy-Barbara bristled a moment at this. But—as Rosalie had foreseen—the feminine instinct for confession was stronger than the feminine instinct for concealment.

"I've had a hard time to keep Mr. North from seeing it. Not that it's any of his business exactly, or that I think he'd care particularly. But just at this moment, Mr. North really needs me. If he thought that Mr. Estrilla—well, it might spoil all I'm trying to do for him."

"Yes, indeed!" replied Rosalie, without a trace of irony.

Betsy-Barbara went on in a nonchalant voice.

"These two men are nothing to me, of course. Mr. Estrilla is a very interesting person. He's handsome, and in the right way—if you know what I mean. I love his little accent and his witty talk, and I think his singing is simply

adorable. As for Mr. North"—Betsy-Barbara paused. Then her voice ran glibly to its carefully careless conclusion—"he's only a very good friend."

"It's Tommy North, all right!" was Rosalie's mental comment.

"Well," she said aloud, "those things are like anything else. They look worse a ways off than they do when you're facin' them. Slip me a word if any of it ever really bothers you, an' I can probably help. You wouldn't care to do what I asked for Miss Estrilla?"

"Oh, yes. I can surely do that!" replied Betsy-Barbara, her generosity reviving, now that she had opened her mind a little.

"That's a good girl! Now remember—wait a while before you get it in—I don't want her to suspect that I tipped you off. Goodness! What are those girls doin' in the kitchen that makes such a smell?" And Rosalie sped to her household duties.

The next evening, as the little party in the parlor adjourned, Betsy-Barbara called Rosalie aside to say:

"I did as you told me—in fact as soon as I began talking about Mr. North this evening,

Miss Estrilla asked me herself how he was doing. So I gave her the whole story—about the agency, you know.”

“Did she seem relieved?” asked Rosalie.

“No,” said Betsy-Barbara, musing, “*relieved* isn’t exactly the word. It was really queer the way she took it—she was so interested. Why, she just listened *breathlessly!*”

As Rosalie finished her session with the phonograph that night and began to take down her hair, she talked to herself under her breath.

“Well, Miss Estrilla connected up the two things, all right—that spirit dope about the whisky bottle with the little talk I planted in Betsy-Barbara Lane. Clever of me to think of Betsy-Barbara. But I’ve got to go slow—slower’n I ever did in my life!”

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PEREZ FAMILY

**I**N a remote corner of Central Park, Rosalie was holding a conference with Grimaldi, her specially-assigned detective in the Hanska case. He was a small Italian of the blond northern type, a throwback to some remote Gothic ancestor. He showed his race, however, in contour, in manner, and in certain personal peculiarities, as the care with which he waxed his mustache, the loud color in his shirt and cravat, the neatness of his small pointed shoes. Schoolmaster that he had been, linguist that he was, he spoke English in academic form but with trimmings of police slang.

"I think," said Grimaldi, "that the real name is Perez."

"How did you get that?"

"It took a little time. First I frisked his room. I went in as the gas inspector."

“Which was takin’ risks,” admonished Rosalie.

“Not the way I did it. The real inspector is my friend; I had his permission to impersonate him.”

“Pretty good!” commented Rosalie. “An’ you found nothing about—what I’m after?”

“No. That was the suspicious thing—I mean, the absence of any sign of identification looked curious to me. I didn’t have much time, so I went straight to the favorable places. This Estrilla or Perez had only four or five books. There was no writing in them—but the fly-leaf was torn out of all the old ones. I examined his clothes. They look English to me—certainly they aren’t the work of an American tailor nor yet a Spanish. Perhaps you don’t know that a tailor generally sews somewhere behind a pocket a little tag giving the date, his own name and the name of the customer?”

“Don’t I?” inquired Rosalie. A hundred times she had used that peculiarity of tailors as a part of her “mediumship.”

“Well,” said Grimaldi, “they are gone!”

Rosalie looked her surprise.

“Gone, every one of them, ripped right out,” said Grimaldi. “You could see where the threads had been. The same with the hats. But I found one thing which didn’t amount to much, except that it was an opening. He has a camera. I don’t know why I examined that, unless it was a hunch. It was foreign-made—American boxes are manufactured by a trust, and they all look alike. Down by the range-scale I found a nickel plate such as agents always put on cameras. It read: ‘J. Lichenstein, Cameras and Camera Supplies, Port of Spain, Trinidad.’”

“Where’s that?”

“Trinidad is an island off the coast of South America—near Venezuela. Port of Spain is the main town. It’s a British possession, but there are many French and Spanish residents. I had taken the precaution, when I started out, to have the police photographer get a snapshot of this Estrilla. I took the picture to—well, never mind who he is. He’s lived all over South America. He knows every Spanish colony in town. He helps the police as a stool-pigeon, which is why I’m not telling his name. And he gave me what may be an identification.

He's almost sure that Estrilla is a Spaniard from Port of Spain named Juan Perez. The Perez family were cacao growers in Trinidad. The head of the family was named Miguel Perez—I suppose, though, you aren't interested in the family."

"That's just what I want to know."

"Miguel Perez was this man's father—if the stool-pigeon is right in his identification. The stool-pigeon was down there about three or four years ago. At that time, Miguel Perez had just died, and this Juan had inherited the business. It seemed that he wasn't getting on well with it. At least, that was the gossip. That's all—oh, yes, the stool-pigeon remembered one other thing about Miguel Perez. He'd had an early romance with an English girl—navy people. Miguel Perez married her, and she didn't live very long. After that, he married again—a Spanish girl from Caracas—and Juan Perez was the son of that marriage. That was about all he could remember."

"Still, the camera marked Port of Spain, seems to fix it, somehow."

"It seems to. But, of course, you can't be

certain. He may be a relative and have a family resemblance."

"Your friend didn't know whether old Miguel Perez had any children by his first marriage—to the English girl?"

"He didn't say, at least."

Rosalie congealed to a pose with the advent of an idea.

"Tell me," she asked, "when a father and a mother are of different nationalities—talk different languages—what language does the baby learn first—the father's or the mother's?"

"Oh, the mother's—always."

"So if there was a child from his first marriage—to the English girl—he'd talk better English than Juan Perez?"

"He'd pronounce it better, anyway. There's no reason why, with such a start, a child brought up in Port of Spain, which is an English possession, shouldn't speak as good English as"—here Grimaldi was about to say "as you," but sense of truth restrained him—"as anybody," he concluded.

"And a mother always talks to her baby in her own language."

"Oh, of course."

“An’ if any foreigner—you, for instance—gits real excited an’ talks quick, what language does he use?”

“Oh, his own first tongue! When I’m really angry, I always begin to swear in Piedmont dialect.”

Rosalie mused aloud; and in that musing she cleared up for us one of her mysteries of method.

“It does look to me,” she said, “as if I’d wasted a lot of time brushin’ up my Spanish with the Martinez Phonograph Method. Still, it’s bound to help here and there. Listen,” she addressed Grimaldi, “I did a turn once—never mind what—on the Mexican border—El Paso, San Antonio, an’ places like that. Circumstance was such that I had to learn as much Spanish as I could—my business called for it. I’ve been studyin’ it again lately. You understand Spanish, don’t you?”

“As well as I do English.”

“Then,” said Rosalie in Spanish, “how does this sound? Is it good conversational Spanish? Tell me what you think.”

“Well,” said Grimaldi, “it runs all right, but any one would know you weren’t Spanish born.

Still, it's pretty good, and I suppose you could fool a Spaniard for a few words. What are you trying to do—with Spanish?"

"Oh, nothing," replied Rosalie carelessly. "Well, I must go on. Keep him shadowed, an' when you git anything new, you know where to find me. Good-by."

At home in her own room again, Rosalie pondered long, a nervous finger picking at a musing lip—pondered until she stood frozen with a new idea. Those rings of Miss Estrilla's—she had long wanted a look at them. Especially that big diamond with a curious onyx and gold setting which she wore on her left hand. The forgotten visiting-cards in wraps laid aside at the door; the initials on a bag; the posy in a ring—by slight clues like these she had found the way to old roads of the mind in all her years of professional endeavor. Rosalie had noted Miss Estrilla's care of that ring; noted how she washed her hands without removing it. Chance, therefore, would never give the opportunity. She herself must make it. She meditated. Again

her finger stopped its drumming on her lip, and she congealed to a pose.

“Molly,” she was saying to the maid half an hour later, “I guess I’ll take up Miss Estrilla’s dinner to-night.” As though by an afterthought, she picked up a late edition of an evening newspaper and laid it on the edge of the tray.

“I’ve brought your dinner myself,” she said to Miss Estrilla. She put down the tray, adjusted the napkin, bolstered the invalid with the pillows, and took up a cup of bouillon.

“There now, I’ll help—oh, dearie, I’m so sorry!” For Rosalie had stumbled slightly in approaching the couch, and the bouillon had splashed over the napkin, the spread, and Miss Estrilla’s hands. Rosalie bubbled apologies as she hurried about the room, getting cloth, towels, warm water. Miss Estrilla was very gracious, but Rosalie continued to apologize as she began to scrub her hands.

“Didn’t burn you, did it?” asked Rosalie.

“No; but it’s very sticky,” replied Miss Estrilla.

“I can’t get under those rings—let me—

there, my dear.” Rosalie deftly removed the rings, laid them without a glance on the edge of the tray, and continued to chatter as she scrubbed.

“I brought you ~~up~~ the evening paper,” she said. “You can’t read it, but I thought you’d like to see the pictures of that new Spanish tenor they’re makin’ all the fuss over—you asked me about him the other day. Remember?” She had finished wiping Miss Estrilla’s hands; and now she gave her the newspaper, the photograph of the tenor folded to the front. Miss Estrilla took the bait. She moved the paper close to her eyes. In that second, the deft Rosalie had made three motions and used her quick perceptions. There was a line inside the big ring:

“Miguel ✠ Victoria, 1873.”

“Now we’re ready for dinner,” said Rosalie. “Shall I send down for more soup? No?” Miss Estrilla seemed in that moment to miss her rings. She perceived them on the edge of the tray and slipped them on.

Before she left, Rosalie spun and tied an-

other thread of the web she was weaving so deftly and yet so cautiously.

"I hate even to mention it," she said, "but I've been feelin' them comin' on to-day—my spells. I know you said I could have 'em in here alone with you, but I haven't wanted to bother you. I sensed the beginnin' of one this afternoon. I beat it this time by workin' hard an' shuttin' my teeth. If it really gets me—if I can't hold it off any longer—I'm likely to be in here 'most any time."

Miss Estrilla, her face and her emotions hidden from view by the eye-shade, answered in a voice which began calmly, evenly:

"I should be very glad—whenever you wish!" There was a little break on the last word. Rosalie noted this. Something was evidently at work under the calm surface. Could it be eagerness?

Rosalie did not return at once to the dining-room, although the rattle of dishes and of voices invited. She sought her own apartment, sat down on the bed, her chin in her hand—and began talking faintly to herself.

"Identification was straight, all right. It's them." A pause. "Think of draggin' moth-

er-love into such a thing!" A pause. "Well, ain't you faked with this mother stuff all your life? Looks to me like some of that lady business had sunk in." Another pause. "But I never did it before to turn a trick like this." And she shuddered. "I'm a softy—what will I ever say to Martin—I can't!"

Twin steps sounded on the stairs; through the half-open door came two voices—those of Betsy-Barbara and Constance. Evidently, they had paused at the landing on their way down to dinner.

"You mustn't go to pieces now, dear. You mustn't. You need to keep every ounce of your strength for the trial!"

"But it's the suspense!" And Constance's voice, usually so soft and low, was shrill with tension. "Oh, I can't go down and face people. I have to hold myself in all the time to keep from screaming! It's killing me!"

"It'll all go the moment you get into the dining-room," Betsy-Barbara promised. "Come, dear. You must eat!"

The voices drifted on. Rosalie raised her face from her hands.

"Well, it's one or the other, ain't it?" she

said to herself. "But my God, life's awful—awful!"

She never faltered again. She forgot that little crisis, as we all forget so many of those momentary crises of the will upon which hang great ultimate decisions. Neither she nor Constance realized, when all was over, how much depended upon those few words, caught by accident through a half-open door. Constance, indeed, never knew; and Rosalie forgot.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A CRITICAL MOMENT

**T**WO days later, and in the middle of the afternoon, Rosalie was again in Miss Estrilla's room suffering from incipient "control." Her eyes stared, her limbs twitched.

"Sorry," said Rosalie, on her entrance, "but I've got it again—an' I can't beat it. Do you mind if I lock the door? I wouldn't be disturbed for a farm—don't know what it would do to me!" She plumped down into a chair, giving a yawn which shook her whole body. Gradually she relaxed. With one heaving sigh she settled back. Her eyes closed; she fell as into sleep. And presently she was babbling first in the baritone of Doctor Carver and then in the liquid accents of Laughing-Eyes.

Let me omit the preliminaries. They dealt only with trivial things—such little affairs of the house as occurred to the mind of Rosalie Le Grange, working in flashes under her sleep-

ing exterior. She had growled and babbled for five minutes before Laughing-Eyes announced suddenly:

“The lady is sick—the pretty lady. Spirit wants to talk to the lady. Pretty spirit. I feel like a great big queen was here—Vic—Vic—Victoria.” The voice of Laughing-Eyes stopped. This was a device of Rosalie’s. She wanted to listen. And the microscopically minute thing which she heard satisfied her. Miss Estrilla had been breathing regularly. Now, on the mention of that name, her breath caught. The voice of Rosalie, her whole facial expression, her manner—if one can attribute manner to a woman who appears to sleep—underwent an abrupt change. The voice deepened; the lines of the face fell; it was Doctor Carver who spoke.

“Victoria is not strong,” said the voice; “I sense that she brings consolation. She says that things are bad; but they will be better by and by. It is a mother’s influence. Miguel—” here Rosalie stopped; and again she noted the irregular breathing from the couch. It was an eternal quarter-minute before she spoke again: this time the voice was a man’s,

but lighter and higher than that of Doctor Carver; and it spoke Spanish.

*"I aní mate, hijita mia!"* it said, and died away. A silence again. "He is gone," said the voice of Doctor Carver. "A spirit wants the young woman who lives below this room—" The séance drifted away into a series of imaginary messages for Miss Harding. But once again Miguel floated into the talk, dropped a word or two of easily-pronounced Spanish, floated out again. Presently, Doctor Carver came no more; the habblings of Laughing-Eyes became disconnected monosyllables, and died out altogether. Rosalie lay as though asleep.

She lay for five minutes; she lay for ten minutes. "Won't she ever wake me up?" thought Rosalie.

Miss Estrilla moved now and then; now and then her breathing caught. And suddenly—she was not breathing at all. Rosalie steeled herself for the shock of cold water, if that were to be the awakening. The shock came—but in another form.

"I am going to kill you!" said the voice of Miss Estrilla in Spanish; "I am pointing a

pistol at your head! Come to me—at once—or I shall fire!”

Thirty years in the profession which deals with deceits both minute and monstrous, thirty years of emotions simulated, had given Rosalie one great practical talent—control of mind, muscle and nerve. It had given her, too, a courage born of self-confidence, of the well-grounded faith that she could master any situation. It had modified her instincts; it had changed nature. Her impulse, under sudden shock of surprise, was to continue, naturally and easily, just what she had been doing. That tided her over the moment of crisis. Her eyes remained closed, her color changed not, her breath came as regularly and evenly as before. There succeeded the critical moment when the control of instinct was gone and the less dependable control of reason reasserted itself. That was hardest of all. She must remember to keep her breathing regular, and her limbs composed; above all—and this is a feat possible only to an actor of parts or a professional medium—to keep the color in her face. She accomplished this by the simple device of sinking her chin close against her collar.

It was easier as the moments passed. Nothing had happened, nor was there any movement on the couch. It became certain that this was a test. Rosalie waited. Her left foot was falling asleep.

It came as she had expected—the second test. Clearly and distinctly, Miss Estrilla said in English:

“You are a fraud. I am pointing a revolver at your head. Wake and hold up your hands or I will shoot you!”

Rosalie slumbered on in seeming; and this time it needed no effort of will. But the foot sent a thousand tiny twinkles of pain and discomfort up her ankle. She was meditating how she might manage a natural awakening, when Miss Estrilla shook her and said in her natural voice:

“Mrs. Le Grange! Mrs. Le Grange! Wake up!”

Rosalie came to full consciousness most artistically and effectively.

“What was it—dear me, my foot’s asleep! Ow!” she said. She rose and hobbled about the room. “Did I stay out long? This just takes the gimp out of me—I won’t be fit for

a thing to-morrow an' it's scrub-day, too! What have I been talkin' about—or did I talk at all? They've told me that sometimes I never say a word."

"Oh, a great many things."

"Well, I must have, I'm that tuckered out. Excuse me for askin', but was it about anybody in the house?"

"I think so." Miss Estrilla paused. "There were a few words for me."

"Indeed! Well, of course that's natural, you bein' right here. Don't set too much store by it, my dear. Take my advice and don't let yourself get to dependin' on the spirit. You never can tell how it will act. I remember Mrs. Blossom. She's dead now, but she was the best professional I ever saw. Well, do you know I've seen her sit with a person an' never bring a spirit that person wanted—they'd all be for a sitter Mrs. Blossom had yesterday. Then again she'd bring the sitter's own spirits right away. More often a person had to come to her three or four times before things started. Some sitters draws 'em, I guess, just like some mediums."

Miss Estrilla pondered a time upon that,

while Rosalie made Swedish gymnastic movements with her sleepy foot. Miss Estrilla twice set her lips to speak before the words came.

“You did bring something for me,” she said; “just a little—but it was something I wanted to know. Do you think you can find more next time, if—”

“Now, my dear!” put in Rosalie, “don’t ask me that! I thought you were sensible. If I’d thought it would take such a holt on you, guns and pistols wouldn’t have drove me into this room with my spells. I can’t tell you how hard I’ve been tryin’ to stop this thing, which is bothersome to say the best about it—let’s unlock the door while I think about it”—she crossed the room—“I’ve old sitters hangin’ round every week beggin’ for just one more demonstration, but I’m firm. I’ve let it come these two or three times just because I couldn’t help it. It would be askin’ a lot.”

“But it would comfort me,” replied the invalid, weakly; and there were tears in her voice. “And, oh, you don’t know how I need comfort!”

“Poor dear! I know how it is. You’re sick, an’ I suppose you have your troubles—we all have in this world. But when a person’s sick, she jest lays an’ lets it roll up in her, like. Well, now, let’s see—” Rosalie paused as though considering. “Why don’t I want to practise any more? It’s the name an’ not the game that’s botherin’ to me. I tell you what I’ll do. I won’t try, an’ I won’t force it, but seein’ this is private-like, I’ll stop resistin’ the influence when it comes over me. An’ I’ll always beat it straight here. Perhaps it was sent to do us both good! That’s settled. Now can’t I do anythin’ for you?”

As she swept about the room, setting things to rights, there came a knock at the door. Rosalie was about to open it, when an exclamation from Miss Estrilla stopped her.

“Listen,” said Miss Estrilla; “if that is my brother, say nothing to him. He is—prejudiced.”

“Why, of course not!” replied Rosalie. “An’ don’t you! I’m more anxious than you can be to keep this thing shut up. I’m the one that’s got something to lose.”

It was, in fact, Molly the maid, announcing the doctor. And that visit gave Rosalie excuse to withdraw.

Rosalie held that night another of her outdoor conferences with Inspector McGee.

"Well, I'm comin' out with it," she announced. "I've got to tell somebody. Everybody confesses at least once, which a cop knows better than I do. I guess I've got your case started, Martin McGee!"

"Then this fellow Wade—"

"You make me," said Rosalie; "you make me want to shut my mouth an' never tell you anythin' at all. Wade! A cop can't keep two ideas in his mind at one an' the same time, any more'n a horse. Martin McGee, you listen an' don't you say a word until I'm through." With a logical consecutiveness almost surprising in Rosalie, she started her case from the beginning. Tommy North's clue of the diamond ring which Tommy North had dropped and which had set Rosalie on the trail, the discovery that the coverlet on Captain Hanska's bed had been wet with rain from the open window—

But here Inspector McGee broke his tacit pledge, and spoke.

"I explained that!" he said. "I told you they opened the windows to let in air after they discovered the murder—when that Mrs. Moore fainted."

"Not rememberin' that it had stopped rainin' when the body was found—it had stopped when I came in," replied Rosalie.

"Had it?" inquired the Inspector.

"Now who's smart?" crowed Rosalie, and she proceeded with the finding of the little red button on the fire-escape, the discovery that Miss Estrilla had among her possessions a pair of red strapped shoes with a button missing, and the final fact—the button matched.

Inspector McGee received that dramatic information with a long whistle of amazement.

"That sick woman!" he said. "Gee, and I'd thought of examining her. But there didn't seem to be a chance on earth. I'd thought more about that brother of hers. But, of course, he'd left the house before the quarreling stopped—while Captain Hanska was alive—and didn't return until after they found the body." He pondered a moment. "But that ain't real evidence—yet."

"You give me a chance," replied Rosalie.

She pursued her narrative then, setting forth her discovery that Estrilla was an assumed name and the discoveries of Detective Grimaldi about the history of the Perez family in Trinidad. She proceeded then to the séances, and to Miss Estrilla's attempt at frightening her out of control.

"An' say," added Rosalie, "if you don't think that minute or so was about the tightest squeeze I ever had, you miss a guess, that's all. Near broke me in two. I was so tuckered out holdin' on to myself that I feel it yet. I had to pretend that my control had weakened me."

"Is that all?" asked McGee.

"Yes. Ain't it enough?"

"Well, it's suspicious. But there's no real evidence. Nothing you can convict on. Just because one of her shoe-buttons was found on the fire-escape, and she's living under an assumed name, and the entrance to the room was through the window, it's no proof that a sick woman came down the fire-escape and killed a big man standing up in front of her. You can't make a jury believe that. Suppose I

pinch her—and her brother, too—and give 'em the Third Degree?"

"See here, Martin McGee," replied Rosalie, "what have I been takin' all this trouble for, spendin' my good time to get her to believe I'm a 'medium, if I ain't to be trusted to run this case? You can have your Third Degree afterward—when I'm through with mine."

"That's so," replied McGee. "Well, anything I can do to help?"

"Yes. How long does it take to get a man to Trinidad? Or is there anybody in Port of Spain that you can use?"

"I've had a man there a week. Another case—missing burglar."

"That's good. Very important?"

"No. I guess he can be spared."

"Luck's with us if nothin' else. This is a three-times winnin'. Now you just cable him—wait a minute, I'll write the message—got a pencil an' paper?"

They were in a side street. A lamp-post threw a shaft of light across the stoop of a vacant house. Rosalie sat herself on the lowest step, braced the note-book which McGee pro-

duced, and, with many a purse of lip and brow, composed the following message:

“Drop anything and get full information on the late Miguel Perez, cacao grower of Port of Spain, and his family, especially Juan his son, and a daughter, probably half-sister of Juan, name unknown. Details about life of the family especially wanted and the smaller the better. Learn everything you can about first wife. Suggest pumping old family servants. Wire in full as you get the dope.”

“There,” concluded Rosalie, “an’ a lot I’m goin’ to cost New York City for cable tolls.”

McGee laughed as he put the note-book carefully in his inner pocket.

“There are several jokes on me to-night,” he said. “Well, if it turns out that Wade didn’t do it, I’ll be kinder glad. I’ve hated that fellow, and yet I’ve kind of come to respect him, too. Say, this is one case where you can’t keep out of court and the papers, ain’t it?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied Rosalie; “maybe I can fix it to slip out and leave you all the credit—as usual.”

The dig told.

“Well, I never asked you to,” replied Inspector McGee in some confusion.

“That’s right,” acknowledged Rosalie, “but tellin’ you about it once in a while keeps you in the right frame of mind.”

“Say,” said Martin McGee, returning to the main subject, “when they put this Estrilla woman through—if she’s the one—I can see the papers. ‘Woman against woman. Ex-medium sends victim to the—’”

“Don’t say that!” exclaimed Rosalie. “For God’s sake, don’t!” She had been walking elbow to elbow, leaning a little upon him. Now she drew away. And much more that Martin McGee had intended to say, remained unsaid that evening.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FINAL TEST

**C**OULD we have sat with Rosalie Le Grange through thirty years of her "mediumship," we would have found in all her assaults on the secrets of the human heart a certain sameness. There are, after all, only a few main roads to the intelligence of man and woman. Rosalie traveled these roads again and again, varying the method only by those infinitesimal shades which the artist knows. Her approach to Señorita Perez—known so far in these pages as Miss Estrilla—differed in no essential from her approach to a thousand love-lorn shop-girls, troubled mothers, perplexed business men, during her thirty years in her old trade. She simply refined her methods a little for Miss Estrilla, as she had done always for her "first-class customers."

First, there was the approach; a mist of

hocus-pocus illuminated here and there with the glint of a secret surprising fact which the medium "could not possibly know." This was a period wherein the dupe was always unconvinced but fascinated. Some professed to be amused; and they showed it by giggles which died prematurely into long silences. Some pretended to be unconvinced; but they proved their dawning conviction by brutal denials. Some put tests to her, obvious and subtle, according to their natures. None had ever attempted so daring and so clever a test as Miss Estrilla, with her pretended revolver; and this was a bit of evidence, a guide-post which would have made slender appeal to Inspector Martin McGee or to any jury that ever sat in judgment. Yet to Rosalie, skilled in weighing factors which no male policeman would ever perceive, adept at reading whole volumes of fact from the incidental drooping of a lip or lifting of an eyebrow, this was the most pertinent bit of evidence she had yet discovered. For those who had most to conceal, most to lose by the revelation of their souls to a blackmailer or a spy, were the very people who put such tests to her; and the harder the test, she had always

found, the deeper and blacker the ultimate secret.

Could we have followed Rosalie through all those years, we should have discovered another most illuminating fact—this one a light on that contradictory and complex character. It was her impatience, as time wore on, with certain blasphemies on human affection which she had committed lightly during the period of her beginnings. It is a dreadful thing to barter with the yearnings of parents for departed children, of bereaved wives for the husband gone before—with man's deepest and highest—and all for the paltry fee of a discredited profession. In her early period, Rosalie had committed this sin of the heart lightly, without inner blemish. Then—as always in youth—her morals were the morals of environment. The thoughts of youth are not voices, but echoes.

When the time came for her to think on her own account, when, out of her infinitely diverse characteristics she began to form character, Rosalie Le Grange salved her conscience with the reflection that she was, after all, doing these people good; that she never hunted, as others did, for big game; that she took only a legiti-

mate fee and gave in return consolation and good advice. That served her into her reflective forties, the period when we have walked over the summit of life, when in lonely dawns and wakeful midnights the thought of man's ultimate end pierces all our meditations on the future. In those somber lights, things become plain to which the brilliant light of full active days blinds us. And Rosalie, adept at reading other hearts, had read her own.

For there was a strong streak of Scotch in Rosalie. From the race of warlocks and dreamers on the edge of the infinite had she got her taste and talent for mysticism, her genuine clairvoyance—whatever that may be. From it had she taken her love for mystery, her deep hidden leaning toward romance. From it, finally, had she taken a conscience which, like a tree wind-planted in the cleft of a rock, grew and matured to bear fruit in spite of an adverse environment. In these forties, conscience mastered her. She could no longer traffic with grief to the shame of her own heart. In her revelation to Martin McGee she had concealed one fact, as it was her habit to conceal the very springs and sources of her ac-

tions. It was that she had left the business of professional "mediumship," when a turn in her romantic life brought fortune, for conscience and conscience alone. The hidden excitement and romance of the profession, the contact with other and strange minds, the opportunity for busybodying, for guiding destinies—all these appealed. But she could no longer endure the treacheries and sacrileges of her own method.

Here, now, when she had thought to put it all behind her, she was embarked on the most treacherous adventure of all. She was playing with human affection, not for the ultimate comfort and consolation of the dupe, but for an end which she dreaded to think on. She had fought that out, it is true, on the afternoon when she heard through the half-open door Constance's weak appeal to Betsy-Barbara. She faltered no more—except in her lonely communings with herself—but her very distaste for the work drove her to hasten it, as one drinks a noxious draught at a single mouthful. Under the pretense that her obsession was driving her, that she had bottled it up too long, that "it just had to come out of her," Rosalie

Le Grange multiplied the séances with Miss Estrilla to the point of danger and incaution.

On the second day after the session in which Miss Estrilla had tried the test of the fictitious revolver, she was back again. This time—having assurance that this was the true line of attack—she brought both Victoria and Miguel. Victoria, according to Doctor Carver, was the stronger; she spoke much, though vaguely. Miguel dropped only a few phrases—now Spanish, now English. During this session, Miss Estrilla never moved nor spoke. But Rosalie, daring a look at her through her long lashes, perceived that her attitude was tense, rapt.

In such long preliminary passages with a difficult sitter (Rosalie's experience had taught her) there is a certain moment when the dupe crosses the line between prudence and absolute credulity. In a quiet self-contained person like Miss Estrilla, this moment comes, generally, with the first question. After that, the course is as easy as lying. The dupe, once the defenses are broken, is eager to believe. Where before the skeptical mind turned every new and

irregular fact to the disadvantage of the medium, now the eager mind turns every fact to her advantage. "Every sheet's a ghost," Rosalie had remarked time and again. "Hardest thing is hold 'em back. There's nothin' they can't swallow." In this, her third séance, Rosalie was proceeding as cautiously as an elephant on a bridge, waiting for that first and vital question.

It came at the fourth sitting.

By this time, Rosalie had begun to receive cable reports from Port of Spain. The detective, it appeared, was a policeman of singular fidelity or of singular acumen. Taking literally the order about "little details," he had filed one of the most curious despatches in the annals of the New York Police Department. It glittered with gems for Rosalie Le Grange. Especially was it strong in facts concerning Miss Estrilla's relations with her father. Their rides together when she was a little girl and the family was conspicuous on the island, the circumstance of an accident to one of the horses, even pet names and small coin of domestic intercourse—all this he set forth fully. Beyond doubt, he had found the "old family serv-

ant" mentioned in the telegram of instruction and milked him dry.

So at this fourth séance Rosalie brought not Miguel—that were too great a strain on her Spanish—but Victoria—introduced her, as usual, with vague sentences, growing always more definite, and crystallizing finally into the vital startling fact. Rosalie was speaking freely now, her pose that of a dead trance.

"Do you remember," she asked, "the time they carried you home, as though you were dead, from the stable, and you revived and spoke to me when they brought you in the door? Do you remember—Margy dear?" The telegram from Detective Hawley had informed Rosalie that the baptismal name of Miss Estrilla—or Miss Perez—was Margarita; and that her mother used the name in its English form and her father in Spanish.

"Do you remember, Margy dear?" repeated the voice of the "spirit" through the entranced lips of Rosalie Le Grange.

"Yes," said Miss Estrilla, so suddenly that it nearly shook Rosalie out of trance. "I remember, mother dear. What was his name—that horse?"

(“Still a little skeptical; but it’s the last gasp. I’ll fix her right now. Lucky I’ve got it!” said the mind of Rosalie Le Grange working rapidly behind her mask.)

“We had Billy and—but it wasn’t he—it was that black horse Vixen which you *would* ride against my wishes!” said the voice. Rosalie heard Miss Estrilla heave a long sigh; heard her settle herself against the pillows as though quite overborne by emotion.

But Rosalie did not proceed directly along the road of treacheries which she was traveling. Victoria went away with the capricious suddenness of all Rosalie’s spirit friends. The voice of Laughing-Eyes, the child control, burst in. Upon Miss Estrilla, Rosalie used Laughing-Eyes sparingly. With an ignorant and overimpressionable sitter she was an invaluable feature, this Laughing-Eyes. To a person of greater discernment, the child impersonation was likely to be ridiculous. Rosalie usually employed her, therefore, only to fill in the chinks, to occupy the time while she was thinking. For Rosalie, after thirty years of experience, produced Laughing-Eyes with

her left hand, so to speak. The child patter came by instinct; it required no effort of the conscious will; her mind was free to think and plan. Now, however, she wove Laughing-Eyes into her web.

“Lady is gone!” said Laughing-Eyes. “Pretty lady! Another spirit—oh—I see pretty things! They shine—oh—go away. Come back! No, he will not stay,” she paused here.

And now Miss Estrilla spoke again, and in such a tone that Rosalie knew she might hurry to her climax.

“Can’t you bring him back, Laughing-Eyes?” she said. “Oh, please bring him back. Tell him, oh, tell him that I am not angry!” A dry sob shook the silences of the room.

“No. He is afraid. And he is weak in spirit!” babbled Laughing-Eyes. “Maybe he will come again—maybe!” And Laughing-Eyes giggled and babbled of Miguel and Victoria and a dozen spirits impertinent to Miss Estrilla. Yet always in her babblings she seemed to hold the atmosphere of truth; she referred casually and in remote ways to a dozen

facts about Miss Estrilla's family and her past. Presently her voice died away; and Rosalie lay silent and impassive, waiting for Miss Estrilla to wake her.

## CHAPTER XV

### JOHN TALKS

**I**N the following séance—held the next afternoon at the special and plaintive request of Miss Estrilla—Rosalie Le Grange reached at last the very kernel of the matter.

She brought “John.”

She had prepared, by a special and subsidiary line of play, for this vital move. She had been cultivating Constance Hanska. With arts all her own, Rosalie broke through the reserves of that distressed widow. From discussion of the murder, Rosalie led her on to details of her married life. From that, she lured Constance into deeper confidences, which involved the personal peculiarities of the late Captain Hanska, such as his way of speaking, the quality of his voice, and his methods with women. When Rosalie settled down to the fifth séance, she had in her mind a picture of

John H. Hanska which was good enough for any of her purposes.

The preliminaries were over; Laughing-Eyes had gone her babbling way back to the land of spirit; Doctor Carver held control.

“A spirit has been trying to communicate, but he is a new spirit and not yet strong. He says that the lady’s sickness is not of the body. It is of the mind. He also is not happy yet. John was his name on the flesh-plane—it is hard—we over here must make an effort—it is a strain on us as on the medium—I get an ‘H.’” In the ensuing silence, Miss Estrilla gave one hard sob.

The silence lasted for half a minute. Rosalie strained and struggled as though a tumult were going on within. Then came a man’s voice, higher and softer than that of Doctor Carver.

“I am John, Margaret. I can not stay long. I am not strong—they tell us over here—that we must forgive—even as we are forgiven. But—I will come again—”

“Oh, John—I am trying to forgive—oh, do you understand—wait—” gasped Miss Estrilla.

But John spoke no more.

“He may grow stronger after a time,” said the voice of Doctor Carver, “if this poor earth vessel through which we speak does not break.” So he finished the pertinent part of that session.

The séances were coming every day now. Miss Estrilla wished it; and Rosalie granted her request with an appearance of indulgent reluctance. The next day, John intruded again. This time, it appeared, he had grown strong enough to speak consecutively.

“I have not full power yet. But it is coming. I grow stronger. But the shock in my breast—I feel it.” That was something of a venture. Rosalie waited to see what reply it would draw.

The reply came, quick and puzzling:

“Did that come first then? Oh, surely you didn’t feel that?” asked Miss Estrilla as though in a fever of anxiety.

Rosalie, thinking like lightning, felt herself for the moment at her wits’ ends. Upon the answer to that cryptic question everything might depend. It were best, she concluded, to humor Miss Estrilla; to give her what she

wanted, but to make the wording vague. She let her body heave, as though John were retaining his control with difficulty.

“No,” said the voice, “that was not first. It had come already. But, somehow—I knew.”

“Oh, thank God!” cried Miss Estrilla.

John departed on this. Doctor Carver and Laughing-Eyes spread clouds of mist, intellectual but rosy. They went; Rosalie entered that apparent sleep with which she concluded her “trances.” As she lay there, with nothing to do but think, this new perplexity revolved itself in her mind. What meant that sudden question—“Did that come first?” The trail was leading into wildernesses of which she had never dreamed.

Rosalie held three more séances with Miss Estrilla before she reached the final vital one to which all her diplomacies had been leading. Let me omit the lumber and packing, as yawns, mumblings, long passages of sleep, solemn orations of Doctor Carver, babblings of Laughing-Eyes, revelations concerning the family life of Miguel and Victoria. Let me but report those little dialogues between John in the spirit, and Miss Estrilla (or Margarita

Perez) in the flesh, to which this hocus-pocus was only an approach.

John is speaking through the lips of Rosalie Le Grange; and Miss Estrilla is answering.

“I am stronger now. The flesh influence is not yet gone from me. There was much on my soul. I find it hard to forgive. And I know I must—little lady.” Rosalie had learned from Constance that “little lady” was Captain Hanska’s pet name for woman in tender relations, and she let it out as a venture.

“Oh, John! But consider how much I have to forgive. Ah, did you ever love me? You never answered my letters.”

“I loved you perhaps too much. Over here, we can not lie. I was carried away—and I was married—”

“Yes. Every one knows that now. You deceived me. It is harder for me to forgive that than the other thing.”

“Yes—but I loved you too much—to risk telling you.”

“Was that why you kept the jewels, then?” A hard attack came into Miss Estrilla’s tone. It was more than a question; there was irony

in it. Rosalie thought rapidly. That diamond buckle on the stair-case—"the jewels"—here was a startling new correlation of facts. She must venture no further; she must have time to imagine and to plan.

"I can not tell you now," said the voice of John. "I am—growing weak—I sinned—"

"Oh, he's gone away!" broke in the voice of Laughing-Eyes.

. . . . .  
Another séance. John is speaking, Miss Estrilla answering.

"Ah, I really love you. But I find it hard to forgive."

"Don't you understand, John, that it wasn't revenge? It was duty."

"I know. There is much that I do not understand, but I do understand that. In the flesh, I was always attracted by the glitter of jewels—" This was a lead into territory only partially explored. And the road opened.

"I think there were two parts of you, John. But, oh, the better part loved me, did it not?"

"Yes, loved you truly, little lady."

"John, if you had stolen them outright—but to use my love!"

“I am going. I am not strong enough yet to endure reproach—”

“Oh, I will not reproach you again. You must forgive. You know how little you have to forgive. Wait, John, wait!”

John is speaking again: Miss Estrilla replies.

“They give me new strength every day. But this poor ignorant woman is weakening. Why did you try to get them as you did?”

“What was I to do when I found I had no claim under the law? What was I to do after you wrote me that letter?”

“That happened before I passed out. I could not see you then. And I have not seen any one clearly. I am not like the better spirits. My soul was not good when it left the flesh. But I think you came to New York just to get the jewels.”

(This was a venture on Rosalie's part; still there were ways of retrieving the mistake if her guess was wrong.)

“Yes. It was my plan, not Juan's. I have been more foolish than he. Every day I spent in the room above you I was afraid you would

discover me. Yet when I thought of you down there—I loved you still! But my eyes were really sick. It was because I cried so much—but I promised not to reproach you.”

“Little lady—I was bad, but I loved you. I think if I had seen you, I would have restored them.”

“Oh, John! That is hardest of all! If you had—you might have died—but we would have been saved this—and your conscience would have been right. And John, I can not die and join you now—I dare not—because it would be wrong—and because of Juan!”

Rosalie noted how the name of Juan came in again. For caution, she must veer away from that lead at present.

“I think that I felt you near me at times.”

“Did you, John? Did you know I was in your room once when you were asleep? Do you remember how you slept through the fire at home? That was why I dared. There was light on your face. I wanted to kiss it.”

“If you had—and wakened me!”

“If I had—if I only had!” Miss Estrilla wept bitterly; the voice of John answered with caressing reassuring words.

“But John, why can you not forgive? Don’t you know all?” continued Miss Estrilla when she had control of her voice.

“Not all. We do not wake to the spirit at once. After the shock, we are in a mist for a time. I knew nothing until I was looking down on the people who surrounded my body—a long time after. Then there were mists and dark spots. I saw one of the jewels on the floor beside the door. I could not see you—nor Juan. I must know—this is hard—I am growing weak—”

“Wait, John, wait!” cried Miss Estrilla, for the first time losing control of herself. “John! Come back! You must come back! I’ve something to tell you that’s killing me! John, John, you must know that he didn’t mean to do it!”

With all the will-power that she had, Rosalie kept herself from the slightest movement when she heard that simple startling pronoun, “he.” It was time to close this séance. She summoned Laughing-Eyes, who bade Miss Estrilla good-by in a weak failing tone; she settled into her concluding “trance.”

. . . . .

In the last two sittings, Rosalie had been awakening from trance of her own accord. Now, she slumbered on for two or three minutes before she let her eyes flutter open; her face resume expression.

Miss Estrilla had controlled her weeping. To Rosalie's cheerful, "Well, was I out long?" she returned no answer. Rosalie looked at her sharply.

"I'm afraid you shouldn't do this any more—in your state of nerves," she said. "Only reason I've kept it up was because it seemed to be doin' you so much good. But to-day you look all tuckered out. An' me—a wet rag is cast-iron beside my feelin' this minute. Tell me—was it long after I stopped talking before I woke up?"

"No. It was shorter than ever before."

"M-hm! Well, those that know me better than I know myself have watched my trances. They say that when I wake up soon after the spirits go, it means just one thing—it seems I'm runnin' down. This mediumship is like a bucket in the rain. You pour out the water, an' you've got to wait a while for the bucket to fill again. When I begun sittin' with you,

I had more in me than I thought. Fact is, I'd just begun to overflow, which is why I couldn't stop that first trance from comin'. But now it's about spilled out. Trance ain't a relief any longer. It's been a strain on me for three sittin's, an' now that it's beginnin' to tell on you, we'd both better stop it, I guess."

But Miss Estrilla raised the eye-shade; and Rosalie saw that she was weeping again. "Oh, just another!" she pleaded. "Couldn't you, Mrs. Le Grange? There was something more I wanted to ask. Something," she went on, "which would seem trivial to you. But to me—"

"Now, my dear," interrupted Rosalie, "I don't want to know anything about what the spirits are sayin' to you. That's your secret." She appeared to hesitate over a decision. "Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I've probably got jest about one more sittin' in me, an' then I'll be through. Sometimes, by sort of reachin' out toward the spirit on the night before—I can't make you understand, I guess, you not bein' mediumistic—I can make the trance stronger—bring more, they tell me. I'll git in touch with the spirit to-night, an' I'll set

with you to-morrow for the last time this spell. Then I must quit. I'm keepin' a boardin'-house, not practisin' professional."

"I'm very grateful," said Miss Estrilla, "more grateful than you can ever understand."

"I know you are. That's why I'm doin' this, I suppose," said Rosalie. "There ain't any too much gratitude in this world."

"Why, I feel as weak as water—an' I must look after the ironin', too," she added as she moved listlessly toward the door.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A STROKE OF LUCK

WE come now to the most crowded and significant day in all the crowded life of Rosalie Le Grange. When she told of it afterward to the only person who ever enjoyed her full confidence, she gave but a narrative of flashes and snatches—a pertinent fact, out of its context, at one session, a state of emotion at another. Rosalie was logical and consecutive only when the long slow road of reason would serve her purpose better than the short cut of intuition. But, indeed, there is in this world hardly a mind so logical and consecutive, so cool and precise, as to be equipped for following closely and recording accurately a course such as Rosalie followed that day. Can you remember exactly what happened, all details in order, on the night when you found the burglar in your room, the day when you were injured in the train wreck? Multiply such

dramatic incident on dramatic incident, such emotional crisis on emotional crisis—and small wonder that Rosalie could never weave a consecutive narrative.

We begin, indeed, with Rosalie Le Grange out of the stage picture. We are in the office of the Thomas W. North Advertising Agency in lower Fifth Avenue. Tommy North sits at a cheap but neat desk, brand-new like all the furnishings of that little old office. He is laboring for an accurate and arresting headline to proclaim the safety, and yet the deadliness, of a new automatic revolver. At the typewriter desk in the corner sits Betsy-Barbara Lane, inexpertly tapping the keys with two fingers of her right hand and one of her left. And as Betsy-Barbara smiles triumphantly over this fair line, frowns at that foul one, purses her lips over the other hard combination, her radiance fills and illuminates the Thomas W. North Advertising Agency.

From inception to interior furnishings, it is all Betsy-Barbara. Hers was the choice and placing of the green Mission furniture. Hers was the selection of the pictures, their arrangement in relation to the wall spaces. That it

might be a pleasant place for work, she picked out prints of her favorite pictures—the Countess Potoska, the Baby Stuart and the Duchess of Devonshire. To give it a business air, she added a framed photograph of the Union Station in St. Louis. Further, Betsy-Barbara found the most spectacular specimens of advertising design executed by Thomas W. North, set them in passe-partouts with her own hands, and hung them just where they would invite the eye and confidence of customers. She remembered also the soul needs of Mr. Thomas W. North himself. In the interstices of the decorations she placed such mottoes as she deemed best for him, as “Do it Now”; “Industry is Happiness”; and, most significant of all to one who understood the reason for the Thomas W. North Agency, “It’s What You Do After Business Hours That Gives You Nervous Prostration.” Finally, to all these decorations she had added more and more frequently of late her own illumined self.

For life, what time she was not busy with the solace of Constance, hung heavy nowadays on the capable hands of Betsy-Barbara. Just when she realized that what she needed was

work, she found that the correspondence of the Thomas W. North Agency was getting greater than Tommy himself could handle. She announced at once her intention of learning the typewriter and doing that work herself—all for the good of the enterprise. To this proposal, Tommy entered a protest of conscience; but the thought that he would see Betsy-Barbara in office hours as well as out rendered it very feeble. So Betsy-Barbara fell to work on the second-hand typewriter; and she had so far progressed that she could write a passably good business letter in four attempts and a morning's time.

On this scene of brisk business activity suddenly entered Rosalie Le Grange. As she stepped into the door, she was large-eyed, serious, a-quiver with inner intensity. She broke into a smile, however, as she surveyed the Thomas W. North Advertising Agency at work. Both Tommy and his amateur stenographer had heard the steps; but each, as people will do when they are intent, failed to look up from his uncompleted line until startled by Rosalie's:

“My! Such a pair of little workers!”

Tommy grinned.

“Ah, a customer!” he said; “business bad at the boarding-house? Anything I can do to advertise you? I recommend our A A Campaign—cheap and fetching for establishments of your class. How’s this for a line: ‘Our eggs straight from the hen—our coffee grew on a vine—our boarders stay till they die.’”

“No, thank you,” replied Rosalie, dimpling upon him. And then, with the air of one who has no time to waste in airy persiflage, “I’m here on business, though. Mr. North, I want to borrow the services of your stenographer for a day.”

“Me?” inquired Betsy-Barbara.

“You,” replied Rosalie Le Grange. She turned back to Tommy North then; and the flash of her dimples disarmed any possible resentment.

“Mr. North, haven’t you got five or ten minutes of business somewhere else? Like buying your day’s cigars or something? When two ladies want to talk something over alone, they hate to talk in the hall.”

“Oh, certainly,” replied Tommy North, rising and reaching for his coat.

“It ain’t every young boarder,” said Rosalie Le Grange, “who is intelligent enough to let his landlady boss him. Now you be back in just ten minutes by the clock, that’s an obedient boy.”

Tommy cast one look at Betsy-Barbara as he went out of the door; and Betsy-Barbara smiled as though to reassure him.

Rosalie was coming now to the end of her operations. She had reached the point where one may relax caution a little—when speed and despatch are more necessary than concealment. So she proceeded to the heart of the matter without any of her customary circumlocution.

“Betsy-Barbara Lane,” she said, “I believe you’d go for a friend to the place we ain’t supposed to mention, except in church. Wouldn’t you?”

“I think I’d do almost anything for you, Mrs. Le Grange,” said Betsy-Barbara, smiling warmly.

“That’s a pretty thing to say, an’ I hope you mean it,” replied Rosalie. “But I ain’t askin’ for myself. I’m askin’ for Mrs. Hanska.”

“What has happened?” asked Betsy-Bar-

bara, her color departing with a rush. "Has Constance—"

"Constance is perfectly all right," reassured Rosalie. "She was tryin' to read—poor thing—when I left her fifteen minutes ago. But I've got my answer, you would."

"I think I would give my life if it would help now," said Betsy-Barbara.

"What I'm askin' then," continued Rosalie Le Grange, "may seem only a little thing. But it's important. I can't tell you how important. It may save him—you know, Mr. Wade—if you play your cards right."

Betsy-Barbara was on her feet now.

"What is it? Quick!" she asked.

"Not beatin' about the bush," replied Rosalie Le Grange, "I want you to spend the day flirtin' perfectly outrageous with Mr. Estrilla."

In spite of herself, Betsy-Barbara let her pink blond coloring suffuse her cheeks. But the color flowed back as her mind leaped from circumstance to circumstance and rested on a suspicion.

"What has he—" she said under her breath, "what has he to do with the Hanska case?"

“Nothin’ much—himself,” said Rosalie, indifferently, “but a great deal to do with solvin’ it. An’ it’s important that he should be delivered at just the right time—as a kind of witness.”

A new idea widened Betsy-Barbara’s eyes and made soft and wondering the little mouth of her.

“And what have you?” she whispered. “Have you—all this time—and I never suspected!”

“Now don’t go cuttin’ corners an’ guessin’,” said Rosalie Le Grange. “I’ve been doin’ my part. Don’t ask me any more, please. I’m just bustin’ to tell. I’m an old fool with my tongue, an’ if I spring the littlest leak in a secret it all comes tumblin’ out. Remember what I’ve told you. First, you can help save Mr. Wade as nobody else can. Next, don’t ask any questions. An’ Betsy-Barbara Lane, now I’m gettin’ solemn. I want you to hold up your right hand an’ swear somethin’ on your honor—that you won’t tell anybody—*anybody*—about this until I let you.”

But now the shade of a suspicion flashed across Betsy-Barbara’s face. Rosalie caught

it and formed her answer mentally before her pretty juror spoke.

“Suppose,” said Betsy-Barbara—“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Le Grange, but one must watch everything in a time like this—suppose you were working for the other side?”

“In case you ever found that out,” said Rosalie, “your oath is all off. Goodness me!”—and now her emotion was real—“do I look like a traitor or anything of that sort? Haven’t I helped Mrs. Hanska every way I could? You’re a woman, Betsy-Barbara, an’ you know me by this time. Am I that kind?”

“No,” replied Betsy-Barbara. “You are not.” And with an air of pretty solemnity, she swore it.

“If I was a man,” said Rosalie Le Grange, “I could just eat you up when you look that way. Now we’re goin’ straight to business. It is a quarter of ten. Has Mrs. Hanska any date to-day?”

“She was going to her lawyer’s at eleven o’clock.”

“Let her do that; but first you’re to see her and tell her that she mustn’t come home afterwards. Let her go anywhere except home.

An' after you've done what I want you to do, you'll meet her somewhere an' take her to dinner at—at the Hotel Hamblen. That's a respectable out-of-the-way place. Got that?"

"Yes."

"Then after you've seen Mrs. Hanska, you'll rest a while. And at two-thirty, sharp, you're to be waiting by the Carlisle Trust Building. It's got only one entrance, which is lucky. And you can hardly miss."

"For—him?"

"For Mr. Estrilla. This is no time to make any bones of anythin'. He's crazy over you. He has an engagement there for two-thirty. Let him go in. He probably won't stay more than fifteen minutes. You're to meet him at the front of the elevator. You're to—encourage him—you know. If he asks you to take a walk, which he probably will, you accept, and start him toward the park. This is the point. At five o'clock sharp, you're to have him takin' tea with you in the Park Casino—you know where that is, don't you? An' you're not to leave until half past five. Probably I'll be there long before that—your job you understand is to deliver him to me—that's

what all this is for, mostly. Then you're to meet Constance—Mrs. Hanska—as I told you. Wait a minute—” Rosalie paused, frozen immobile on the birth of a new thought—“have her pack a suit case and take it with her. You two register at the Hotel Hamblen an' stay there to-night—stay right there until you hear from me. Got all that? Well, repeat it after me.”

Betsy-Barbara repeated it slowly.

“But how can I get him to tea if he doesn't ask me?” she objected.

“Where I was raised, a young woman passin' a soda fountain with a young man, never went thirsty unless she wanted to. Get him in if you have to invite him yourself. I know you, Betsy-Barbara. But don't you be yourself to-day. Let him make love as hard as he wants—just this once.”

The door rattled; Tommy North was back.

“Mr. North,” said Rosalie, “I'm borrowin' your office help for the day. We want you to do somethin' for us. You don't understand now, but you will. Don't you go near my house until to-morrow—you sleep out to-night an' breakfast out to-morrow. I can give you

a rebate if you demand it," she pursued, dimpling on him.

"All right, take it out of that first week's board you stung me so hard for," laughed Tommy North. Then his eyes sought Betsy-Barbara's with a troubled look. "What's the answer?" he asked.

"There's no answer," said Rosalie Le Grange; "not just at present. Except you'll be glad you did it—an' I'll explain some day myself. Go where you want to-night. Only don't get drunk."

"Oh, he won't do that, of course!" put in Betsy-Barbara.

Which defensive assurance quite restored the spirits of Tommy North, and the smile came back to his face.

"But promise us one thing—you will never say a word to anybody about this," put in Rosalie.

"I promise," said Tommy, as solemnly as he could, considering that his heart danced. She had taken up the cudgels for him!

Out in the hall Rosalie remarked:

"You can trust quite a lot of people with a

secret if you pick the right ones. Now we must be gettin' on."

But Betsy-Barbara's curiosity made one final struggle.

"Oh, Mrs. Le Grange, is Mr. Wade to be proved innocent? May I tell Constance that?"

"You can tell her nothing—understand? Just nothing. But probably he is, just the same!"

"When will we know?" asked Betsy-Barbara.

"You may know somethin' to-morrow if you're a good girl an' do just as I've told you."

"From the morning papers?"

"Well, I certainly hope not!" said Rosalie Le Grange.

They parted at the corner. No sooner had Betsy-Barbara taken a Fifth Avenue stage and started on her puzzling journey of intrigue, than Rosalie called a taxicab and set her course for the East Side docks of lower Manhattan.

Here we must introduce a new character in this story, a person who flashes in and out as people are ever flashing in and out of our lives, bearing service in their hands. At this point

also appears—though ever so slightly—the element of coincidence. Luck had entered a little into these operations of Rosalie Le Grange, as it enters, to an extent that a novelist never dares admit, into all chains of human affairs. This final stroke of luck was small; but it fell toward Rosalie's ends. Doubtless had it failed, she, the fertile, would have found another plan as good.

The new character, then, is Skipper Matt Baldwin of the schooner *Maud*, engaged in the coastwise lumber trade. The *Maud* is lying at the dock, preparing to sail for Halifax on the morrow with a return cargo. A battered and pleasant old man, the Skipper Baldwin, with an eagle profile which denotes his courage and a soft eye which indicates his gullibility. He tossed a life long on the seven seas before he bought the *Maud* and settled down for the rest of his days to coasting. He was a widower of long and affectionate memory; because of that and because of his searchings of the spirit on lonely voyages, he became a believer in spiritualism of the kind which Rosalie Le Grange used to practise. Rosalie was his favorite medium—and his friend. Between voy-

ages, whenever he found her in New York, he used to visit her and receive a consolation which was false in detail and yet true in spirit. To the general, there are only two ways of looking at a professional medium—as a hell-born fraud or a heaven-sent friend. To him, she was all a friend. There was nothing, he told her again and again, that he would not do for her. She believed that; and her beliefs in the heights and depths of humanity seldom went wrong. Toward the schooner *Maud* she was now driving her taxicab.

The piece of luck was this: at the very moment when the taxicab rounded the corner from Wall Street and the driver began to inquire for Pier 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ , Captain Baldwin was as near to profanity as his convictions allowed. As for the mate, he had no convictions which prevented him from expressing himself to the limits of his vocabulary, over that unlucky accident, that tumble into the hatches, which had sent a newly-signed Italian member of the crew to Bellevue Hospital nursing a broken arm. With all the heaven-condemned things they had to do before the improper old scow could be cleared in the morning, how the sin and sulphur (the mate

inquired of the bright air) were they going to dig up another sailor to satisfy the port regulations? The skipper, braiding rope, returned no answer, for answer there was none.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LAST SÉANCE

**F**ORTUNATELY for her plans, only three of Rosalie Le Grange's regular boarders ever came home to luncheon—Constance, Betsy-Barbara and Professor Noll. Of these, two were disposed of for the day. Professor Noll, reporting in the dining-room at twelve-thirty sharp—regular meals at regular hours was a canon of the Noll Scientific Plan—found three strangers already placed and eating. Two young men, powerful and slow-moving, sat at either side of the hostess. At the other end of the table, in Miss Harding's accustomed seat, was a matronly woman, gray-haired but alert of motion and eye.

“Mr. Kennedy—Mr. Hunter—Mrs. Leary—I want to introduce Professor Noll. The professor is one of my regular boarders. This lady and these gentlemen are transients; they'll

be with us just a few days," said Rosalie Le Grange. The two men nodded and fell to their luncheon, of which they consumed vast quantities. Mrs. Leary, however, smiled upon him an experienced smile.

"Mrs. Leary," pursued Rosalie Le Grange, "has got some foreign views I'm sure you'd like to see. You won't be droppin' in this afternoon, will you?"

"No," said Professor Noll, "sorry, I'm making up the paper to-day. I won't get home until just before my dinner. My habit," he added, addressing Mrs. Leary, "always to dine just at seven. Not that the hour of seven, or any other hour, makes a difference in the absolute. It is regularity that counts—mathematical regularity. The human intestinal system is a machine, admirable, well-balanced, nicely calculated to its uses. Now the minute study of scientific management has proved that a machine—" And so Professor Noll, having mounted his hobby, rode blithely away upon it; and Mrs. Leary, with all the ready tact of the experienced police matron that she was, vaulted to the pommel and rode with him. Rosalie had learned all she wanted to know.

Professor Noll would not trouble her again that afternoon.

As Professor Noll, still talking diet to Mrs. Leary, put on his overcoat, Rosalie sought the kitchen. She addressed Mrs. Moore, the cook and the waitress, all busy stacking up the soiled dishes.

“I’ve got a little surprise for you girls,” she said. “A gentleman friend of mine who sings in the chorus of the *Laughing Lass* sent me three seats for the professional matinée to-day. But this morning two people I was goin’ to take, telephoned they couldn’t come on account of sickness in the family. Now this Mrs. Leary shows up—she’s an old friend an’ she positively hates music. Just this once, I’m goin’ to give you an afternoon off an’ let you leave the dishes. Mrs. Leary an’ I will do them. She’s been livin’ in hotels that long she’s just hungry for housework, she says. Strikes you kind of funny, don’t it, that anybody’d rather wash dishes than go to a matinée?”

“A professional matinée!” cried the cook. “What’s that?”

“Are they right down-stairs?” asked the waitress.

"I must put on my brown dress," mourned Mrs. Moore.

"Well, you'll have to hurry if you're goin' to fuss up," said Rosalie. "The theater is away up-town and the curtain goes up at two-ten sharp, an' it's way past one now." Rosalie had looked out for these details when she bought the seats at a down-town ticket agency. Forthwith, aprons came off and smiles came on, as the below-stairs inhabitants of Madame Le Grange's select boarding-house scurried to their finery.

They were gone at length, after an uncomfortable period, during which Rosalie twice betrayed her nervousness by knocking at their doors and reminding them that the time was short. Another pause. The chimes of the Metropolitan Tower rang the hour of two. At the first stroke, Rosalie, as one who finds relief in action, ran down the basement steps and opened the back door. Inspector Martin McGee, dressed in plain clothes and carrying a small bag, was waiting outside.

"All set?" he asked under his breath.

"Everything's ready," replied Rosalie as she led the way across the basement.

But Inspector McGee stopped her at the stairway.

“Say, it’s all right to let you have your head and do things your own way. Grimaldi reported back for other duty at one o’clock, just as you told him. But I’m running risks when I take your word that you’ll deliver this Estrilla when we want him—or I would be, if it was anybody but you. Why can’t you tell me?”

“See here, Marty McGee,” said Rosalie, “I’ve got ready to put one of the biggest feathers in your cap that you ever wore. An’ I’ve done it by goin’ my own woman’s way. If it hadn’t been for me, you’d been barkin’ up the wrong tree yet. I’ve acted this way because I do things woman-fashion, an’ there ain’t a single mutt man alive that would ever say I was on the right track—until I delivered the goods. The hardest thing I know is to tell what I know—that’s a habit. Are you goin’ to believe me when I say that I can put my hands on this Estrilla whenever I please? Are you goin’ to leave that to me, just like you’ve left the whole thing so far?”

Reassured, Inspector McGee smiled on her.

Usually that smile, directed on Rosalie Le Grange, brought a responsive flash of coquettish dimples and sparkling teeth. But it seemed like trying to fire dead ashes now. Her face was serious and drawn. Suddenly it entered his mind that she looked her age. Unacquainted with that defiance of time by which a charming woman may be fifty in one minute and twenty in the next, he pondered on this with all his heavy mental processes. And suddenly it came to Inspector McGee with a kind of shock that he regarded her all the more tenderly therefor. It was a pity that such as Rosalie Le Grange should lose her young looks.

“Of course you’re goin’ to leave it to me! Now come on!” said Rosalie Le Grange, breaking into his meditations.

The two city detectives and the one police matron were waiting silently in Rosalie Le Grange’s room. As the Inspector entered, a change came over them. None rose or shifted position, but their bodies took on an appearance of alert stiffness, their faces a look of attention. Salutes, square shoulders, all the frills and decorations of military etiquette, were

unnecessary among these four to prove the strictness of the Inspector's command.

McGee locked the door behind him. Rosalie closed the transom.

"Is this place safe for talk, now?"

"Perfect," said Rosalie. "I've tried it. But talk low, to be sure."

The Inspector opened the bag.

"There's your felt shoes," he said. "Now listen, boys—and you, Mrs. Leary. This here lady is running this thing, until I tell you different. Got your notes and pencils, Kennedy? All right. Mrs. Le Grange, you tell 'em just what you want."

When Rosalie had rehearsed her drama, with careful provision for unforeseen emergencies, when her forces had scattered—Hunter to the basement, Kennedy to Miss Harding's room, Mrs. Leary, impersonating the maid, to the front door—Rosalie stood alone with Inspector McGee.

"Well, everything's ready," said the Inspector, "and time's precious."

"Yes, I'm goin' in a minute," she responded; but her voice was dead. "I feel—like I was going to be operated on. That's how I feel."

“Aw, brace up!” said Martin McGee.

Rosalie did not answer at once. Her eyes, sweeping the room to avoid direct gaze lighted on the dresser, where stood a photograph of Constance Hanska—a solicited gift. She fixed her gaze on that; and the fallen lines of her face lifted with determination.

“Yes,” she said, “I’m goin’ to brace up.”

She started up-stairs, then, to that room on the third floor back, the center of the sinister web which she had made of this, her dwelling-place, so strangely acquired, so strangely used. In that web struggled a half-blind, half-distracted fly, toward which she, the spider, was now creeping. Some such comparison may have struck Rosalie, for she shuddered twice in her slow progress. And these were not the assumed shudders which announced her false “control.”

Rosalie knocked at Miss Estrilla’s door.

“Come in!” cried the invalid, more eagerly than her wont. And as Rosalie entered, “Oh, I was expecting you! Can you—will you—today?”

“I’ve been puttin’ all the power I have into this thing,” said Rosalie Le Grange; “you’ve

no idea how I've tried. I was awake half the night, just gettin' into touch."

"I'm sure I'm grateful for that," replied Miss Estrilla.

"I'm pretty sure I'll be strong," pursued Rosalie, "but I'm just as sure that it will be weeks an' weeks before I can ever do it again. This is my last sittin' with you for ever so long, Miss Estrilla. I can feel it goin'. When I'm playin' for all my power, as I've got to now, conditions must be right. You wouldn't mind, would you, if I darkened this room complete? An' let's have a little more air."

There was a window, which opened upon the fire-escape, at the foot of Miss Estrilla's bed. This window Rosalie darkened last of all; but first she raised the sash a foot.

"That curtain will blow an' disturb me," she said. "I'm goin' to pin it down."

Had Miss Estrilla's soul held any emotions, in that moment, but grief and eagerness—had she been capable just then of suspicion—she might have noted a tiny but significant sound. The fire-escape had creaked a little, as though a weight had been imposed at the bottom. It creaked again at intervals for the next five

minutes, but afterward, usually, when the roar of a passing Ninth Avenue elevated train drowned all slighter sounds.

“Now I’m ready to try,” said Rosalie, settling down at the foot of the couch. “Dear, you do look anxious! Don’t try to crowd the spirits—that’s always the best way—but remember again—this is about the last control that’s in me for a month. Be quiet, dearie.” Her eyes sought the distances, her body shook. Then came the change which Miss Estrilla had watched so often, and with such a fascinated eagerness. Rosalie’s body relaxed and fell backward in the Morris-chair. Her lids gradually closed. She breathed as though asleep.

“Oh, sad lady again!” babbled Laughing-Eyes, quite suddenly. She could hear Miss Estrilla shift eagerly on her couch. “I can’t stay long. John speaks. He says he wants you quick. John is big and strong. Good-by, sad lady.”

Rosalie’s breath came hard; her body wrenched; a masculine voice followed—the voice which Rosalie always assumed when she impersonated Captain John H. Hanska.

“I am here again, Margaret; I love you. I am ready to forgive.”

“Oh, John, thank you—thank God—you will when you know. For, John, you have so little to forgive, beside what I have already forgiven.” As usual Miss Estrilla made reply.

“I know. And I suffer. But I understand. First I have told you how little I saw that night. My flesh still clung to me—”

Rosalie stopped here and seemed to gather her body together, as though the thing which controlled her was struggling to assert more power.

“So I do not know what happened even before I passed out—it came so suddenly—say to me again that you loved me.”

“So much, John dear, that I can not tell you all—”

“And I put aside such a love as that for jewels!”

“Yes, John. And when I searched your room—the night I found you there—I would have given them all to you if you had waked and spoken kindly to me. But you were married—and you would have died soon at the best. Oh, why not before this happened to Juan—”

“Was it Juan? I have told you that I could not see clearly at that time—it is all confused.”

“Yes, dearest. You could not understand because of the clothes—but dearest, it was Juan who held the knife which went into your body. Oh, forgive him more than me. He is my brother—he did it for me—John, I can’t forget his remorse when he came to me—were you watching? Did you see?”

“No—I was not awake in spirit yet—quick”—the voice was growing weak.

“He himself did not understand, then, how you died. He thought the knife killed you. He worked it all out afterward—when I told him about your condition. But then, he said to me: ‘My God, I have run a knife into Captain Hanska!’ What is it—what is it!”

For Rosalie had leaped from her chair, run up the window-shade at the foot of the bed, thrown the sash wide open. Into the room leaped two men. They ranged themselves beside the couch.

“What is it!” screamed Miss Estrilla again.

“These are police detectives,” said Rosalie in her natural voice. “They have been listening behind that window. They’ve come to find

what you know about the death of Captain John H. Hanska."

Miss Estrilla gave a little scream which died in a rattle of her throat. Her eyes caught at Rosalie. "Traitor!" she managed to gasp before she gave another scream—and fainted, as Rosalie Le Grange expected that she would.

Rosalie rushed for water and restoratives.

"Get right at her as she comes out," she whispered to Inspector McGee in passing. "That's the time."

"Ain't you going to stay?" inquired McGee.

"No. She'll be too busy hatin' me ever to talk. An' there's two things I never want to watch. One's a hangin', an' the other's the Third Degree."

And by the time that Miss Estrilla was conscious again of the sights and sounds of this, her terrible world, Rosalie was gone from the room, and Detective Kennedy, police stenographer, who had been listening at the open tell-tale register of the room below, was with the group of inquisitors about her bed.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE THIRD DEGREE

“**A**ND now we will take your statement,” said Martin McGee.

The first brutal processes of the Third Degree were finished—the Third Degree, that modern system of torture more terrible than the medieval by just so much as the mind is more sensitive than the body. We do well, as Rosalie Le Grange has said, not to witness it. Miss Estrilla lies back on the couch, a bruised and broken soul, ready now to tell all the truth because there is in her no more strength to lie. Detective Kennedy has drawn a table to the center of the room, set out his pencils and his note-books, and prepared for his work. McGee and Hunter, expert inquisitors both, sit where she can not avoid their eyes if she but look up. The door has half-opened in the midst of the preliminary proceedings, and into the shadow outside creeps Rosalie Le Grange,

to listen with all her ears. The victim on the couch is no more pale and drawn than Rosalie as she stands there, one hand on the lintel.

"Your name and all about yourself first," says Inspector McGee, urging gently now.

Let me omit, as the expert police stenographer did, certain expletives, repetitions, divagations, which always mar testimony. The police stenographer edits these extraneous words out of official statements. Let me omit, too, those passages of question and answer by which the police refresh the memory of the witness. Let me just give the document, as it was filed away in the archives of the New York Police Department.

"My name is Margarita Perez. I am thirty-five years old, and unmarried. I was born in the Island of Trinidad, where I lived all my life. Juan Perez is my half-brother, ten years younger than I. Our father was the same, but my mother was an Englishwoman, my brother's mother was Spanish. My father was a cacao grower. He was very rich once, but he lost much of his money. When he died, four years ago, he left my brother the planta-

tions, and me a very small income and the family jewels—they were worth twenty thousand dollars of your money. My brother came into his property when he was twenty-one. He managed poorly; and then he had bad luck. By last summer, he was so near failure that there seemed to be only one way out—for me to sell my jewels and give him the money. I wanted to do that, but he wouldn't let me make the sacrifice. He said that he had committed his follies himself, and would suffer for himself. He saw one more chance to save us. We had rich relatives in Caracas, on the Venezuelan mainland. He went there to see if they would help. Caracas is not very far, but it is a long journey on the kind of boats and trains that run in the Indies and South America. He was gone three or four weeks. He sent me only one letter; and it was so discouraging that I felt sure there was no hope.

“Just before that letter arrived, and after Juan left for Caracas, Captain John H. Hanska came to Port of Spain from Antwerp. Though my father was Spanish, we lived in the English fashion; I was free to meet men.

I met Captain Hanska and fell in love with him—”

(Here the police stenographer cut corners. In this last phrase he condensed many divagations and evasions on the part of the witness; indeed, Inspector Martin McGee, expert inquisitor that he was, spent five minutes in bringing out that simple declaration—and the next.)

“He said that he loved me. I believed him. It was all very quick. Within a week we were secretly engaged. I supposed that he was an American army officer on special duty. And after we were betrothed, I told him about our troubles and my wish to help Juan. My mind was made up by that time—I would sell my jewels before my brother returned to prevent me. I told this to Captain Hanska. He offered to help. He said that he must go to England the next week, and in England he could sell them to much better advantage than in Port of Spain. I agreed—I trusted him absolutely, you see. Then he told me that he could dispose of them more easily, and for more money, if he appeared to be the owner. So I made out and signed a bill of sale, describing

in detail every piece to the last ring and pin, and transferring them absolutely to him. Now I know what a foolish thing I did. For that made the jewels his property in law, as surely as though he had bought them from me.

“The steamer on which he planned to sail for England—he told me—was due to leave Port of Spain on Wednesday morning. On Monday night he visited me and took away the jewels. He said that he wanted to register them in advance with the purser. He promised to come again on Tuesday night. He did not appear. I learned the next morning that he had left on Tuesday for New York. I started for the pier from which the Southampton steamer sails, in order to see if there was any mistake. On the way, I met a friend of the family who had been waiting to warn me. He had found out about Captain Hanska’s career in Caracas. He proved to me that the Captain was an adventurer and almost a professional gambler. Then I understood. I told no one about the jewels until Juan came back; but I wrote a letter to Captain Hanska in care of the steamship company. Somehow, it reached him. He answered it

with a cold letter, claiming the jewels absolutely and stating that he bought them from me.

“That arrived just after Juan came back from Caracas. Juan had not succeeded in raising money. The plantation went into bankruptcy. That is the matter with my eyes. They had always been troublesome. But now I gave them a real disease by weeping over the loss of our property.”

(Here, as Miss Estrilla made her statement, she spoke broken phrases about another loss. The police questioned her minutely to discover what she meant. Upon finding that she referred merely to the loss of a whole heart's love, they dismissed this part of her statement as immaterial, and did not enter it upon the record.)

“I told Juan, of course. He was very kind to me. He did not reproach me. But we could do nothing, he found. Captain Hanska had landed in New York—the passenger lists showed that. It was certain that he had smuggled the jewels into the United States without paying duty; and we confirmed that afterward. Juan has found out a great deal since then

about jewel smuggling. The agents of your government watch the big purchases in Europe, and notify the custom-house to look out for them. But an irregular purchase at a remote point like Port of Spain—it is easy for an expert to smuggle such jewels through the customs. We decided at last to go to the United States and see if we could get them back—if not the jewels, at least the bill of sale—because if the diamonds were in our possession with the bill of sale destroyed, we could prove by half the people in Port of Spain that they were ours. We were safe in stealing them from him—perfectly safe. For he would not dare complain to the New York police, since if he claimed them publicly, we could have him arrested for smuggling.

“Juan thought that all out. We took what little money we had left and started for New York, telling our friends that we were going to settle in New Orleans. Juan wrote to our uncles in Caracas and secured the New York agency for a small asphalt company of theirs. That was done to conceal our real reason for being here. On the voyage, my

eyes grew worse, I cried so much. I was very ill with them when I landed.

“Juan and I took rooms apart. We had learned enough about Captain Hanska to know where we might look for him. Juan traced him to Mrs. Moore’s boarding-house. It seemed certain that Captain Hanska had not sold the jewels yet, else he would not be living so cheaply. The first thing was to find where they were. Finally Juan and I formed a plan and acted upon it.

“Juan had discovered that the back room on the top floor of Mrs. Moore’s house was vacant. Captain Hanska lived below; there was no good reason for him ever to come up on that floor. I took the vacant room, calling myself Miss Estrilla, as you know. Juan had been watching Captain Hanska like a detective. He moved me in one day when the Captain had gone to Staten Island. My presence in the house was safer than it may seem to you. I did not leave my room even for meals, since my eyes were really in very bad condition. Then, I wore dark glasses, an eye-shade and a heavy scarf about my head—I do not believe

my own mother would have known me. Captain Hanska had never seen Juan or his picture—it just happened that there were no photographs of him in our house at Port of Spain.

“Juan lived in an apartment-hotel. We were in communication all the time by telephone. He was careful to avoid the Captain when he visited me. It was all dangerous, for at any time we might be discovered. But we had our plan—I was to enter Captain Hanska’s room with a pass-key and search for the jewels or the bill of sale. Whenever I made this search, Juan was to be following Captain Hanska. If the Captain showed signs of returning, Juan was to call me up on the telephone—the ringing of the bell in my room, which informed me from down-stairs that I was wanted on the extension telephone by my door, was to be my warning signal. I could hear that bell from Captain Hanska’s room. There could be no mistake, because Juan was the only person in New York who would be telephoning to me.

“But when I tried Captain Hanska’s door with my pass-key, I found that he had installed a new patent spring-lock. The next time

Juan called, he looked over the house. He found that you could enter Captain Hanska's room from the fire-escape—and that you could get on to the fire-escape from the window of the lumber-room across the hall from mine. That room was never locked. It was only a question of prying open the catch on Captain Hanska's window. One night about a week before Captain Hanska died, I began the search. I went down the fire-escape, carrying a pocket electric torch which Juan had bought for me. I got the window-catch open with a penknife—it was old and loose. I went over the whole room that night and again on another night—and found nothing. I did discover a little strong-box in the top drawer of the dresser. It lay wide open. It had a curious lock. In that, I was sure, he would put the jewels if he ever wanted to move them. There was no sign of the bill of sale. It occurred to me, then, that Captain Hanska might be carrying it on his person. I knew him to be a very sound sleeper—he had boasted to me of that, and he proved it by sleeping through a fire at his hotel when he was in Port of Spain. So I did a dangerous thing.

Without speaking to Juan, I went down the fire-escape at two o'clock in the morning of a night when Captain Hanska was at home, and looked through his pockets. I even examined all the papers in his wallet by the light of the electric torch. But it was not there. Juan, when I told him, was angry with me for taking such a risk. He made me promise never to enter the room again unless Captain Hanska was away.

“And then we found that we must act quickly, or lose our property forever. Juan was watching Captain Hanska, following his movements very closely. That day—the day and night when everything happened—the Captain visited a jeweler in Maiden Lane—I think you call it. He stayed a long time. From there he went to a safe deposit bank. When he came out, he had a package in his pocket—Juan could see his coat bulge. Juan was afraid that he would go straight back to the jeweler and make the sale; and then our last hope would have been gone. Instead, Captain Hanska went to a café and sat alone a long time, drinking. When he left that place, he returned to Mrs. Moore's. And the

shape of his pocket showed that he still carried the package.

“It was plain to us that the package contained the jewels, and that he intended to dispose of them at once—probably the next morning. That night the jewels would be in his room—and it was our last chance. Juan came to see me just after dinner. We talked it all over, and made our final plans. In the first place, it seemed best for Juan to do the work himself. I am a woman, and very weak with grief and illness. I could do nothing in case I was discovered. Though Juan had never been in the room, I could tell him exactly where to look—there seemed no doubt that Captain Hanska was keeping the strong-box for that very purpose.

“Then we considered another thing—how we should both get away. At first we decided that I should leave the house early, and that Juan, after getting the jewels, should follow me. But he did not dare to make the attempt before one or two o’clock in the morning, when Captain Hanska would surely be asleep—even the heaviest sleepers sometime lie awake a long time after they go to bed. Mrs. Moore, we

knew, was very watchful—she was afraid of burglars and she had a habit of running to her door whenever any one entered or left during the night. She would know that I had gone out; if Juan left at one or two in the morning, Mrs. Moore would take alarm, knowing as she did that I was out of the house. Being nervous and ignorant, she was likely, we felt, to seize him or to give some sort of an alarm. We were thinking of every possibility, you see. These things are necessary for me to tell, that you may understand what happened later.”

(This in answer to an objection of Inspector McGee, who was urging her to come to the point.)

“At about ten o’clock, we decided just what to do.

“Juan and I are about of a size. I am large for a woman. He is small for a man. We do not resemble each other in the upper part of the face, but our mouths and chins are very much alike. It was one of our games at home to dress in each other’s clothes. I would put on his ulster, pull his hat far down over my eyes, and fool people into believing that I was

he. Further, his voice is light, and he can talk in falsetto. This was an old family game. We played eternally on the resemblance in the charades and theatricals that English people are always getting up.

“This was our plan: we were to change clothes. We had heard people singing in the parlor all that evening. The boarders all knew that Juan sometimes sang falsetto in fun. I was to watch my chance when the hall was vacant, pass the parlor, sing just a little in my own voice to make them believe I was Juan singing falsetto, and go to his rooms, where I was to wait. The night was rainy. It was natural, therefore, that I should be bundled up in a mackintosh and have my hat pulled down over my eyes.

“Dressed in my clothes, Juan was to enter Captain Hanska’s room, get the jewels, leave by the door, go down the stairs, and join me. I used sometimes to get a little outdoor exercise in the early morning when I need not fear meeting Captain Hanska, and when most of the city lights are out, so that the eyes have less strain. If Mrs. Moore waked, looked out, and saw Juan in my clothes, she would think

it was I going for my exercise and take no alarm.

“In case Juan failed, he was to go back to my room and telephone to me, speaking Spanish and imitating my voice. Then, still dressed as Juan, I was to return to Mrs. Moore’s early next morning and change clothes—but that part of our plan does not matter.

“We began everything just as we planned. As I went down the stairs, I passed Mrs. Moore. In the hall, I saw a young man—Mr. Wade, I believe. I showed myself at the door and looked in, and sang a little. By the way they laughed and spoke, I knew that I had deceived them.

“I went straight to Juan’s rooms. The elevator man in his hotel was fooled just as much as the boarders, it seems. I waited there a long time. Then Juan telephoned to me, talking in Spanish and calling me Juan, as if he were I. He said that Captain Hanska had been murdered and for me to come at once to him—that he needed me—he said it all as a hysterical woman would. Somehow I managed to do as he asked. I had to pass Captain Hanska’s door. I heard people making

a noise inside. Of course I did not enter. But right by the door I saw something bright. I knew it at once—it was one of my diamond buckles—one of the jewels which Captain Hanska had stolen from me. I picked it up, and went on to my room. Juan was there—in my dress. He kept me from fainting or dying while we changed back to our own clothes. I know the rest from Juan. Shall I tell it?"

(At about this point, occurred one of those irruptions of expletives, broken sentences, pleas, prayers, which always mar a confession for legal purposes, and is, therefore, edited out by the police before the finished typewritten statement goes back to the witness for his signature. This extraneous matter, you see, tends to create in the minds of unthinking persons a false sentiment for the criminal.)

"Juan said that he waited until after one o'clock. The house was quiet. From the window of the lumber-room, he crawled to the fire-escape. That window had a spring-catch—you had only to pull it down and it locked of itself. Since he intended to leave Captain Hanska's room by the door, he closed this window behind him in order to cover up his tracks.

That window of the Captain's room which led to the fire-escape, was open for ventilation. The rain was drifting through it. It occurred to Juan that everything would be safer if he closed it—he was afraid that a gust of wind might blow spray into Captain Hanska's face, and wake him. He did that; and he fastened the sash with the catch. Captain Hanska was asleep, breathing very heavily. Remember that.

“You have seen the room. The bureau, where I found the strong-box, was in the corner farthest from the window which Juan had just entered. Between it and the window were a table and Captain Hanska's bed. Juan carried our pocket electric torch. He turned it on the inside of the top bureau drawer. The box was there. Also, the key was in its lock. Juan thought it would be better to take the jewels out and leave the box. By doing that he could find whether the bill of sale was with the jewels, or whether he would have to search further for it. That was his great mistake. It was a trick box. Inside was an alarm-bell which rang whenever the cover was lifted.

“Juan opened it; the bell rang. Captain Hanska awoke at once. Juan had no time to move, before Captain Hanska pressed the button at the head of his bed and turned on the electric light. It must have bewildered him for a moment when he saw what appeared to be a woman standing by his bureau—but Juan held the strong-box in his hands. When he saw that, the Captain came at him. Juan is a small man. Captain Hanska was big and very powerful. Just then, Juan saw on the table between them that great knife.

“Juan is a swordsman. He picked up the knife to stop the Captain by threatening him with it—held the point toward his chest. Captain Hanska was a brave man, and very violent in anger. He had one of his terrible spells of temper now. He began to curse Juan. And then his hands went up to his head all of a sudden, and he tumbled over with all his great weight on the point of the knife. Juan did not thrust—he is sure now he did not thrust—he only held the knife steady—but it pierced Captain Hanska through.” (In this place, Detective Kennedy had to edit the state-

ment a great deal in order to make it seemly for the official archives.)

. . . . .

We will leave for a moment the police statement.

“Fell on it?” asked Martin McGee. “What’s that you’re trying to give us?”

“On my soul and my mother’s,” solemnly declared Miss Estrilla. “Don’t you see—can’t you understand? A doctor in Port of Spain had warned him of it—Juan has done nothing since—nothing—but read medical books—he was dead before he touched the point of the knife—if Juan stabbed him, he stabbed a corpse—Captain Hanska died of apoplexy caused by his anger!”

During these last dramatic stages of Miss Estrilla’s narrative, Rosalie Le Grange had slipped into the room. For a moment, Miss Estrilla gazed full upon her betrayer. For a moment, all that the tropics had given her of storm and flame glared from her eyes. Then that light died away. Thereafter, it was as though Rosalie had not been. If Miss Estrilla’s glance, wandering from one point to another in her effort to concentrate on her nar-

rative, touched upon Rosalie's figure, they looked straight through it.

Rosalie moved by imperceptible stages to Detective Kennedy's table. Casually, she picked up a fountain pen and a sheet of paper, and wrote:

“NEW YORK, NOV. 18, 190—.

“I am telling to the police all I know of my part in the death of Captain John H. Hanska. I have confessed that we followed him to America to get jewels, and that it was my brother Juan who appeared to have stabbed him.”

The Inspector was questioning gently now upon the apoplexy theory, hoping to trap the witness into an inconsistency. While she talked, Miss Estrilla (or Señorita Perez) paused from time to time as though gathering strength. Rosalie waited for such a pause. Then she braced the paper on a book and slipped up to Inspector McGee.

“You've forgotten this,” she said, “you were goin' to git it signed at the very first, you know.”

Inspector McGee's expression proved that he was puzzled. But he had become accustomed to following Rosalie's mental flights without knowledge of their destination. He nodded, therefore, and gave book, paper and pen to Miss Estrilla. It was the best possible compliment to the Inspector's Third Degree methods, that she signed without a protest. Rosalie took the paper silently; but she did not deposit it where it belonged—among the official papers on Detective Kennedy's table. As she resumed her station outside the door, she was folding it in her fingers.

The police went on, then, with their searchings and questionings. They failed to notice, so absorbed were they, the sound of retreating footsteps on the stairs.

. . . . .

We resume, with the painstaking Detective Kennedy, the statement of Margarita Perez, alias Estrilla.

“It was apoplexy. But Juan did not know it yet. He only knew that Captain Hanska had fallen on the knife and died, and that it would look like murder. He understood your

law; he knew that to get our property he was committing what looked like burglary, and that a burglar who commits murder can not plead self-defense. He waited by the window to see whether the fall had disturbed the house. No one stirred—probably an elevated train was passing at the time it happened. Frightened as he was, he still thought of the jewels, and decided to take them, whatever the risk. He examined the box; the bill of sale was there. Circumstances had changed now; an empty strong-box in the room of a man who appeared to have been murdered, might set the police on the track. He thought of this. So he took the box, open as it was, switched off the electric light, and started to leave by the door. The catch of the spring-lock was on. To lock the room from outside, he would have had to slam the door—you know how a spring-lock works. That would have made a great deal of noise. It might awaken some one, who would hear footsteps going from Captain Hanska's room to mine. He put the box under his arm and fastened back the catch of the spring-lock, so that he could close the door without sound. Of course, that left it unlocked. In doing all

this, it seems, he spilled out of the box the diamond buckle which I found on the stairs.

“Juan went back to my room because he wanted time to think. His first idea was to leave the house dressed in my clothes, just as we had planned, and join me. Then we would escape together. But he knew that the police generally catch fugitives from justice in the end. We were in a strange country. We had no friends to help us. If we were missing from the house in the morning, if we were caught escaping, every one would believe us guilty. Then he had another idea. If I could return, still disguised as Juan, after the body was discovered, he would have a perfect alibi.

“While he was thinking about this, Mr. North came home and fell into the blood, as you know.

“Immediately, Juan heard some one calling murder from below. That was his chance to carry out his plan. He telephoned to me. I came. I have told you about that. He changed to his own clothes. I made him go down-stairs and offer to help. My clothes, which Juan had worn down the fire-escape in the rain, were still a little wet. I looked

them over carefully; there were no blood-stains on them. I put them by the register to dry; and I cleaned the shoes—that pair of red ones there in the closet. By the time they came to take me away to this house, no one would have known that my garments had been out in the wet.

“When they moved me, I took away the jewels and the strong-box in my bedding. Later Juan dropped the box into the river, and sent the jewels to my cousin in Caracas.

“It was his plan to leave the country as soon as we might do so without attracting suspicion. But when they arrested Mr. Wade, I could not agree to that—I could not have his death on my soul. Juan was imploring me to leave; but I told him that I would not until Mr. Wade was released or acquitted. If it came to the worst, I would confess. I persuaded Juan that I was right. That is why we stayed. We had no other reason.

“I make this statement without hope or offer of reward or immunity, solely in the interest of justice.

“MARGARITA PEREZ.”

. . . . .

I reiterate—this narrative, which to you may seem to run so plainly and simply, was broken all along the way with police questions, with exclamations, with hesitations, with paroxysms, mental and physical. At times, the voice of Miss Estrilla (or Señora Perez) was a mere whisper of horror. At times it swelled to a full poignant note as she tried to make her points in Juan's defense. Now, as she finished, it simply ran down until it was silence. And with the tired motion of a child who falls asleep, she quietly fainted.

“Here, Kennedy, get some water!” exclaimed Inspector McGee. “Mrs. Le Grange—Rose—Mrs. Le Grange.”

Receiving no answer, McGee searched the hall. She was not there. He went downstairs, calling. He had reached the second floor landing when Mrs. Leary's voice answered him from below.

“She went out a quarter of an hour ago,” called Mrs. Leary. “You said we were to do what she told us, so I let her through. Wasn't that all right, Chief?”

## CHAPTER XIX

### A RUSE

**W**HEN Rosalie Le Grange named the Hotel Deidrich to the taxicab chauffeur, her object—she followed here but an old instinct—was to cover her tracks in case of many contingencies. She dismissed the cab, however, at the north door of the Deidrich, walked through the lobby to the west entrance, walked out on Broadway, walked a block south. There, spying another taxicab whose meter displayed the red sign “vacant,” she commandeered it, and announced her real objective.

“Casino—Central Park—go fast!” she said. During the drive she stared straight ahead and talked in low undertones to herself. This was an old habit, born of her half-believed, half-assumed “mediumship” in her days of active practise. In these later days she was still wont to argue out in soft phrases of her lips the

problems of her soul. One who had overheard these scattered phrases now would have known that she was still fighting for a decision.

“Well, ain’t the world been good to me lately?” she was saying as they swept into the Park entrance. “Can’t I afford to take a chance with myself—an’ happiness?” And then, “Oh, how will Martin look at it—Martin!”

A little later, as the taxicab took the rolling drive beside a park lake, she was saying:

“I couldn’t bear it if he was sent to the chair—I could never live through it—I’d die, too.” It seemed that upon this statement she made her decision, for she talked to herself no more until the taxicab rolled up before the Casino and stopped. And as she rose, her smile broke out for the first time in that passage. But it was a grave smile, whose softness did not reach to her eyes—as though one smiled with the humor of God at the tragic comedy in this world.

“An’ she called me a traitor—an’ she’ll always believe it, what’s more,” she said.

The piazza of the Casino, so gay and colorful in summer, lay bleak and bare now under the

cold November wind and fading afternoon light, so that Rosalie, sensitive to physical impressions what with the tensivity of her soul, shuddered as she passed from the steps to the door. Within, only a few lights were on; the restaurant, plainly, was letting business fade away toward its winter quiescence. Near the door sat a couple; then two men; and there, in the remote corner, was a glint of golden hair which could be only Betsy-Barbara's. Opposite sat the focus of her search—him whom Betsy-Barbara still thought to be Señor Estrilla. He was smiling just then, and his hands were playing in swift, expressive little gestures. As Rosalie Le Grange waved aside the head waiter and took her interminable journey across the room, it occurred to her that however she finished and tied this complex web of hers, these might be the last smiles on his lips for many a weary day.

He sat facing the door; he perceived her first; he rose with an expression of real surprise and pleasure. "Why, Mrs. Le Grange! How did you get here?" he said. But now his eye caught Betsy-Barbara. She, too, had risen, as one who acts at last after long strain of repres-

sion. Her color came and went; she was looking at Rosalie and then back at Estrilla.

“Miss Lane,” said Rosalie in a quiet meaningful voice, “we’ll excuse you. Take your coat, dear.”

Estrilla opened his mouth as though to protest, made an inarticulate sound, stopped. A green tinge came over his face; beginning at his mouth, it crawled upward until it enveloped his eyes, as a cloud-shadow creeps across a landscape. He leaned forward; his hands touched the table; and so he steadied himself. But never once did he turn toward Betsy-Barbara, now vanishing almost at a run. His eyes were on Rosalie.

“What does this mean?” he asked.

“It means first that you had better sit down,” she said. “The waiter’s lookin’ this way. A man in your position can’t afford to make a scene in a public place.”

Estrilla sank with an unsteady motion into his chair. At this physical support, he seemed to grip his nerve.

“What do you mean by my position? Why do you come this way— Why—”

“Listen. First of all, I’m your friend. Get

that right away!—I'm here to help you. An' I'm in a hurry. So are you. Remember to hold on to yourself while I tell you what I've got to tell. The police have your sister. By to-night they'll be after you."

Estrilla gripped the arms of his chair; the green shade crept back. He moistened his lips once or twice with his tongue.

"Remember!" went on Rosalie under her voice, "no scene. Hold on to yourself. Makin' one now is the last thing you ought to do. Is the bill paid? All right. Now get your hat. Now put on your ulster. Yes, your gloves an' your stick!" Estrilla obeyed her docilely. "Now come with me into the park—it's safer, because we can watch."

"But my sister—I don't care for myself—I must go to—"

"I'm here," said Rosalie Le Grange, "to do what I can for you an' your sister both. Now come, I tell you—or will you keep on bein' a fool?" At this dash of mental cold water, he rose. Rosalie walked close behind him, ready to support him should he stagger. Outside, a park foot-policeman walked slowly down the path. Estrilla saw him, started, hesitated.

“Not unless you make a scene!” cried Rosalie, anticipating his thought. “I’m not arresting you—can’t you understand that?” She hurried him to a lonely park bench, half hidden in the shrubbery. When she turned to look him full in the face again, his color was normal; he had regained his grip. And he spoke with a touch of his old boyish insouciance.

“This is a little melodrama you are staging, Mrs. Le Grange? Am I the hero or the villain?”

“I expected you to be suspicious an’ try to bluff this through,” said Rosalie in her most matter-of-fact tone, “that’s why I stole this note an’ brought it here.” She had been keeping her hands in her muff. She drew them out, now, and handed him the vital paper:

“I am telling to the police all I know of my part and my brother’s part in the death of Captain John H. Hanska. I have confessed that we followed him to America to get my jewels, and that it was my brother Juan who appeared to have stabbed him.

“MARGARITA PEREZ.”

He read it. As he looked up he was still master of himself, but Rosalie could perceive behind his mask a kind of vibration, an inner agitation of all his nerves. Suddenly one of his legs began to move as though the great muscles of the thigh were twitching. But his will still mastered his voice.

“Margarita Perez—who is she?”

“She is your sister. You are Juan Perez—not Estrilla. You are from Port of Spain. You came here to follow Captain Hanska—”

“Where did you hear this?” inquired Estrilla, with a pitiful attempt to put sarcasm into his voice.

“I have been listening to her confession,” replied Rosalie calmly. “She told the police—after she signed that paper—how you went into Captain Hanska’s room at night to get your family jewels, how that trick alarm on his strong-box woke him up, an’ how you killed him—”

But Juan Estrilla had leaped up now as though his nerves would be denied no longer.

“You are here to betray me—I know it now!” he said. Somewhere, somehow, the native cun-

ning of him kept his voice low. To one passing, his action would have seemed but the gesture of heated argument. "You are a spy! She did not tell that—she knows I did not kill him!" He stood shaking. "But what are you? Have the police sent you—"

"Now, Mr. Estrilla," said Rosalie, in her most soothing tone, "I'm goin' to answer a lot that's in your mind before we sit right down an' get to cases. In the first place, we're alone here in the park. You're a young man an' I'm an old woman. If you wanted to, you could get away from me right now—easiest thing you know to duck into that shrubbery an' run. If I was a female policeman comin' to git a confession an' then pinch you, do you suppose I'd go at it this way? Do you suppose I'd begin by breakin' the news to you an' givin' you a chance to run before I learned anythin' at all? You've been a fool all this time, Mr. Perez. Don't cap it all by delayin', when time is as valuable as it is."

"How did you know where to find me if you aren't a spy?" said Estrilla.

"I suspected this trouble was comin'," replied Rosalie Le Grange. "I sent Miss Lane

to deliver you here at five o'clock—because it's an out-of-the-way place an' quiet. Sit down."

Estrilla shook as he resumed his seat.

"Does she know?" he asked.

"Not yet!" said Rosalie.

"I didn't give her my real reason. I was glad," she pursued, "to hear you bust out in that sincere way when I said you killed Hanska. I put that in for a test; an' you stood it. Now sit there and listen to what else your sister said, an' see if any of *that* could have been worked out by detectives. She says you didn't kill Hanska, that he died of apoplexy an' fell on the knife you was holdin' against him."

Estrilla turned his great eyes and moistened his lips as though to speak; but he held to his nerve and made no sound.

"She says that you carried out that box of jewels with the cover open, an' that a diamond buckle dropped out as you were passing through the door. An' when she came back in your clothes after you telephoned to her, she picked it up. The jewels are in Caracas. You dropped the box in the river. Could anybody patch that together? Could anybody guess that?"

“Then if he died of apoplexy—if I didn’t kill him—why would they arrest me?” asked Estrilla.

“Young man,” said Rosalie, “how could you prove it?”

Innocently and directly, Estrilla came out with what amounted to his confession.

“He was always in danger from apoplexy—my sister knew that. And undoubtedly it was a mortal seizure. For his hands were going toward his head, not toward the knife. Even when he fell and died, his hands were still going up, not down. I have seen doctors. I have read about apoplexy in every medical book in the Public Library. And when I saw him last—there was blood in his nostrils.”

Rosalie nodded.

“I saw that, too. My, but Coroner’s physicians are dense!” she said. “Now I’ve got to talk hard and straight. You were in the act of burglary. It don’t make no difference that you had a right to burgle—no jury would recognize that. The Coroner’s physician never thought of anything but that stab wound—never thought to look for apoplexy—case seemed too plain. You an’ I are the only peo-

ple who thought about that bloody nose. The body's cremated, an' even if it wasn't—well, we won't go into that. Why Juan Perez, they'd laugh at you. Do you see? Don't you get your fix?"

He was trembling, and now he made a pitiful movement with his hands as though to steady his head.

"So you must get away."

"But my sister—"

"Now hold on to yourself. I've got to talk awful to make you see this thing. She didn't kill him—she couldn't. Anybody could see that. A sick little thing like her hasn't the power in her to drive such a knife into a big man who's standin' on his feet. No jury would swallow it. She's accessory or somethin'—but you can bet, Mr. Juan Perez, that an American jury ain't goin' to give a verdict against a sick little woman who's an accessory because she's standin' by her brother. They may do that in English countries, but not here. An' which do you think would be better for your sister—to go to jail until her trial, or to wait by the gate of Sing Sing an' take you away some morning all dead an' floppy after you'd had ten thousand

volts of electricity switched down your spinal column—”

Estrilla was on his feet now, in a crisis of nerves. His eyes closed and opened to a set stare; every muscle seemed to jump.

“I thought you’d see it,” said Rosalie. “I won’t keep you in suspense any longer. You’re goin’ to git away. An’ I’ve fixed it. Look at this—here, take it!” She pulled another paper from her muff, handed it to Estrilla. It shook in his hands as he read.

“A seaman’s paper,” he said at length.

“For Antonio Corri, an Italian sailor signed for the schooner *Maud*. He fell down a hatch this morning an’ broke his leg. An’ he can’t go. You’re shippin’ as him. I’ve fixed it. The Captain don’t know who you are. He only knows that he’s got a man who must beat it out of the country—an’ he’ll do anythin’ for me. He lands at Halifax. He’ll fix it for you to get to the next place—wherever that may be. I’m going to write him at Halifax advisin’ him about that. An’ you’re to tell *him*, so he can tell *me*, so I can tell your sister, where you’ve gone. Got any money on you?”

“Only a little.”

“Well, the Captain has two hundred dollars of mine—for you. I want you to understand it’s a loan with interest at five per cent., to be paid when it’s safe. If you need any more, I’ll send it to the skipper—same terms. That’s agreed?”

“Yes. Why do you—”

“Take all this trouble? Old fool. Now, listen. There’s a taxi over there dischargin’ passengers at the Casino. We’re goin’ to flag it. We’re goin’ to take it as far as Sixth Avenue, an’ we’ll travel by elevated the rest of the way, because guards don’t remember their passengers an’ taxicab drivers sometimes do. I ain’t takin’ any risks of bein’ traced. We’ll get on separate trains an’ meet on the dock—Pier 16½ East River. Know how to find that? Well, I’ll tell you as we go. Here! Taxi!” And Rosalie waved to the chauffeur.

“Sixth Avenue elevated. Nearest station,” she directed.

In the midst of her minute instructions, Estrilla (or Perez) started once to thank her.

“How do you come to do this?” he said. “And how did the police ever—”

Rosalie put her mouth close to his ear.

"Taxis are built funny sometimes," she whispered; "the chauffeur might hear."

He turned on her a caressing look of gratitude. Life was back in his face and motion now. And Rosalie, looking him over, was moved to speak in such general terms as no chauffeur could possibly interpret.

"What I can't understand," she said, "is how a man could live in a situation like that an' be gay an' natural an' take risks. Dagos—Italian an' Spanish an' such-like I mean—must be different. It beats me."

"We are different," said Estrilla. "I have learned that." He looked out on the serried rows of West Side apartment-houses, and dropped for a second into Spanish.

"*Sangre de Dios!*" he said, and then, "how I shall always hate New York!"

They were drawing up at the elevated.

"Remember how to get there?" she whispered before she opened the door. "Sure? Go ahead an' take the first train. I'll follow on the next. Walk slow after you git off. I'll walk fast—neither of us wants to loiter on that pier."

If Estrilla hoped that he would hear further clearance of these mysteries at the dock, he was disappointed. As he passed the gate, Rosalie shot from under shadow of a truck. She glanced to right and left. None of the roustabouts was looking or listening.

"That first gangplank," she said. "The Captain's aboard expectin' you. Just say to him, 'I am Corri.' He knows the rest. You'll change clothes in his cabin. He'll keep you at work below until you sail—at daybreak. Go—don't thank me—go—I'm sure you'll see your sister in a year or two. Go." Now for the first time in her dialogue with him, soft emotion entered her voice. "An' God be good to you!" she said. She turned him almost roughly.

"One moment," he said; "my love to my sister—oh, take care of her." His voice grew lighter, then, and he almost smiled. "And tell the *mantilla blanca* for me that she is beautiful and good!" He walked away. When a second later, he glanced back over his shoulder, she was making a rapid pace toward the dock-gate.

Rosalie passed the shadow of the pier, and gained sight of the *Maud's* deck. She saw Estrilla go aboard, saw Captain Baldwin meet him, saw them enter the cabin together. She waited no longer.

That was a day of heavy personal expense for Rosalie. Two blocks away she took another taxicab. This time she hesitated a moment before she gave the driver his directions.

“Hotel Cyrano, Brooklyn, first, I guess.”

After a time, she began talking under her breath again—repeating her last phrase to Estrilla.

“‘God be good to you’—God or somebody will have to be awful good to me, now.” Then her thought turned, and so did her speech.

“‘Tell the *mantilla blanca* she is beautiful—an’ smilin’ when he said it—well, there’s one relievin’ feature, he won’t break his heart over Betsy-Barbara. It was only a flirtation with him, after all. I wonder what they’re made of inside—those high-class dagos!’”

## CHAPTER XX

### WHEN DIMPLES WIN

**I**NSPECTOR MARTIN MCGEE, as one who must do something, no matter how futile, to lull his impatience, rang a bell on his desk.

“Send for Grimaldi again,” he said to the doorman.

“Grimaldi,” he greeted the scholar of the Italian squad, “what did this Mrs. Le Grange say to you when she let you go—and just when was it?”

“It was night before last,” replied Grimaldi. “I’d met her for a report and told her that Estrilla—or Perez—had an engagement with his tailor to try on some clothes for two-thirty yesterday afternoon. She told me then that she had finished with me, and I was to report back to headquarters—which I did yesterday. I don’t know why she called me off so suddenly; maybe she thought I was spotted.

She's a mysterious thing, and she never would let me know what she was doing; but you instructed me to obey her orders and ask no questions."

"Yes, that's right," responded the Inspector. "His rooms—Estrilla's—are being watched in case he returns?"

"Yes. One man in the house and three shadowing from the outside. We've got some one at every place where he's likely to appear."

"All right. That will do."

But Grimaldi's curiosity got for the moment the better of his sense of discipline.

"This Mrs. Le Grange," he said at the door, "where is she, anyhow?"

"I wish I knew!" replied McGee. "I wish I knew—that will do, Grimaldi." Then the Inspector fell to pacing the floor and to meditating. He had paced and meditated in this fashion ever since eight o'clock that morning. He durst not leave his office. The search was covered at every point where the missing criminal or the missing Rosalie Le Grange might be expected to appear. Here, at headquarters, one would get the first news. He must

stay in his office until—oh, why had he trusted Rosalie Le Grange to arrest a desperate criminal alone? For that Perez, alias Estrilla, was a criminal, and the tale about apoplexy a bizarre invention of desperation, Inspector McGee, cynical by police habit, never once doubted. One obvious suspicion did not occur to him; never for a moment did he distrust Rosalie. She had gone out to make the arrest single-handed, for some good reason of her own. She had failed, and dreaded to come back without her man; she had been delayed and would appear with him yet; she had ventured too much and—something had happened to her. Here, Inspector McGee smote a fist into an open palm and swore under his breath. That consideration, and not the failure of the department to put the finishing touch on a big case, was the thing which haunted him now, made him unable to rest his body or to quiet his mind.

The last eighteen hours had been one long secret hunt for Juan Perez alias Estrilla, and for Rosalie Le Grange. When, after the detectives finished with Miss Estrilla—Señorita Perez—he found Rosalie Le Grange mysteri-

ously gone, he waited for a time at the house. Rosalie made no sign. Presently, Miss Harding and Miss Jones came home to dinner, and afterward Professor Noll. McGee detained them all. Seven o'clock passed; and the other three boarders failed, like the landlady, to appear. They were Mr. North, Mrs. Hanska, and Miss Lane—all involved in the Hanska case. When he noted this suspicious circumstance, he removed Miss Estrilla to a private room in the criminal ward at Bellevue. Booked as Margaret Perez, she attracted no great attention from the reporters; especially since a surgeon, instructed in advance, gave out a hint that she was merely a witness in a counterfeiting case. Then began an all-night search—for Estrilla first, for Rosalie next, and, last of all for North and the two women. Late that night, Inspector McGee, clutching at every possibility, visited Lawrence Wade in his cell at the Tombs and questioned him. The announcement that Mrs. Hanska had disappeared seemed to disturb him more than any device for breaking silence that the police had ever used; but still he maintained his attitude of defiant and somewhat insolent calm. Un-

shaken, he stood all the questioning; and McGee, aware now of his innocence, had not the heart to crowd him to the wall.

So the night had worn away; and so the morning. And Rosalie Le Grange made no sign. How long—how long? A vision entered the mind of Inspector McGee—a flash of imagination compounded from many old experiences. Some day the Coroner would report a woman's body floating in the bay or buried in a cellar. And that body—he must search the cellar under Estrilla's rooms. He turned to ring for a detective.

The doorman entered.

"Mrs. Le Grange to see you," he said.

For the first time in his life of brute force, Martin McGee felt his physical powers crumbling and waning within him. He sat down at his desk. Rosalie Le Grange had come. That meant present success and ultimate triumph; for Rosalie Le Grange had never failed him yet. Doubtless she had achieved another of her miracles—possibly Juan Perez alias Estrilla was just behind her.

"Show her in—and I'm engaged—don't disturb me for anything—until I tell you."

He expected her to appear with some of her old bounce and gaiety. In the long half-minute before the door opened, he pictured that entrance—her face smiling, dimpled; her voice vibrating as though with suppressed laughter; her step a miracle of lightness and spring. So he started as she stood for a moment facing him. Dead of eye, dead of expression, dead of tint—she looked again all her age. She moved toward him at a pace which showed effort with every step.

“Well,” he cried, “well! We’ve had a chase for you. Gee! I couldn’t think what had happened!” His professional concerns rushed into his mind with the departure of his greater anxiety. “Where is he? Did you get him?” he asked.

She had ignored the chair which he pushed toward her. And she simply shook her head.

“What!” exclaimed Martin McGee. The sharpness of his tone showed the depth of his old trust in Rosalie. “What! That comes of letting you try to get him alone. What a damn fool—did he get away from you?”

Rosalie, still looking into his eyes, shook her head again.

The change in Inspector McGee's face expressed his emotion as clearly as though he had spoken in volumes. His skin flushed; his eyes grew hard; his jaw snapped.

"You didn't?"

Again Rosalie shook her head.

"What do you mean—what do you mean?"

"I let him go—I helped him get away," said Rosalie Le Grange.

"Well, by God!" cried Inspector McGee—"by God, we'll get him and you. Fool me, will you—and I'd trusted you! If you think you can beat a general alarm—where's that doorman"—with another thought, his hand went toward the battery of electric bells which could summon armed men as from the ground. But Rosalie caught his wrist.

"Wait!" she said, "if you ring that bell, you shut me up for good. Do you think any little police Third Degree can git anythin' out of me that I don't want to tell? Your one chance to get the truth is to hear it now. The minute anybody else comes into that door—I close my face. Take your hand away from there. Sit down!"

His good sense reasserted itself; he obeyed.

But still his face was red and hard. Then—though Inspector McGee was some minutes in noting it consciously—a change crossed the countenance of Rosalie Le Grange. Little by little, the life came back. One by one, the lights of her began twinkling in mouth and chin and dimples. And she spoke:

“Martin McGee, you’re free to look for that Perez man wherever you want. You won’t get him. You’d stand a chance if you had just him on the other side. But you’ve got me, too. An’ you know me! Now, listen. Maybe this is the last talk we’ll ever have together, an’ I want to put it straight. You’re out to send that boy to the electric chair, just like you’d send a piece of stove wood to be burned up in the fire. You ain’t thinkin’ about anythin’ else. I know how you and the District Attorney would put it to the jury. He was committin’ burglary—he stabbed his man—he’s a dago with no pull—that talk about apoplexy is to laugh. But I ask you private—do you think he deserves it?”

“Well, that’s the law, ain’t it?” growled McGee. “That’s what I’m here for.”

Rosalie’s heart gave a little jump. But she

controlled her expression. He was willing to argue the case—the first skirmish was won.

“The law!” exclaimed Rosalie. “That for your law! Golly, I could carry a ‘Votes for Women’ banner when I think about it! You men have been makin’ the law all these years. An’ you’ve run it on rules—nothin’ but rules. Diagrams. Did he do it? All right, hang him. You can’t look at things except on the outside. I wish you did have a few women to look at ’em inside an’ out. Once in a while one of your cussed juries uses its common sense an’ lets a man go when the police evidence is against him. But they don’t do it themselves. No, sir! It’s their mothers in ’em—”

“That will do,” snarled McGee; “this suffragette dope has nothing to do with the case. Where’s Perez?”

“Now this Perez,” pursued Rosalie, treating the Inspector’s anger as though it had not been, “was a darn fool—worst fool I ever saw—as those cute little men generally are. But what was he doin’ when Hanska died? Gettin’ his own from a crook, the property that belonged to him, in the only way he knew. Suppose it’s true he killed Captain Hanska—

did ever you see a man that deserved killin' more? Besides, he didn't."

"You aren't swallowing that yarn about apoplexy, are you?" asked Inspector McGee.

"In the first place," said Rosalie, "who knows Margarita Perez better, you that pumped her yesterday afternoon or me that watched her for a month? Me that heard her talk her soul out to her mother an' her lover? I tell you, she told the truth."

"Yes, and how did she know he died of apoplexy? She wasn't there—"

"She didn't know except on hearsay. But I do."

"How?"

"Because, Martin McGee, just because. That don't go down with you, though comin' from me it's the best reason that is. But this ought to fix you, even. You know Cleary—I don't mean the sergeant, I mean the Coroner's physician that made the Hanska autopsy. There's some Coroner's doctors I'd trust my life with as soon as any, but Cleary—political appointment—you know. Do you think that Cleary, when they handed him over a man stabbed in the heart, looked any further into

the cause? I'm betting, though, that even Cleary must have seen one thing which would have meant something to anybody but a political doctor. I saw it that night. And this Perez—Estrilla—fellow saw it."

"Oh, you've talked to him then?"

"That'll come in later—if you're still listenin' to me. Well, before he knew what I knew, this Estrilla told me that Captain Hanska, after he fell, was bleeding at the nose. I'd seen that, too—when I came into the house ahead of the doctor. Now here's the thing to do," she added. "You call up that Dr. Cleary right now. You see if he didn't notice it an' just walk away from it—"

Inspector McGee, with the air of one who punctures bubbles, opened his telephone.

"Spring double O," he said; and then to Rosalie: "You can listen on the extension if you want to." His voice was formal, and he averted his eyes.

While they waited for the police central to get the number, neither spoke. Rosalie, however, regarded him with an expression whereof the main tint was anxiety and the undertone soft mischief.

“Dr. Cleary?” inquired the Inspector, “Inspector McGee. Doctor have you your notes on the Hanska case? The autopsy I mean. In your pocket note-book? Well, just one little thing. Did you find any blood on the nostrils?”

“Here’s the record,” came back Dr. Cleary’s voice after a half-minute; “slight bleeding from the nostril, caused probably by the fall—”

“That will do,” said McGee—“wait a second—you didn’t perform any autopsy on his head? You didn’t look into his brain?”

“What was the use?” came back Cleary’s voice, a little defiantly. “He was stabbed in the heart, wasn’t he?”

“Now who’s lyin’?” said Rosalie Le Grange, as she hung up the telephone.

But there was still a snarl in McGee’s voice as he spoke:

“You think you can monkey with the law! You! You think you can set crooks loose just as you please and get away with it! It’s all very well for you, but look at the fix you’re leaving for me. The Hanska case is cleared up. Wade is innocent. We’ve had the wrong

man all the time. That's joke enough on us. But when we find the right one, he gives us the slip. The Big Commissioner will get roasted by the papers and hand it to the Deputy Comish, and the Deputy will pass the buck down to me, and I'll have to report how it happened. Yes, and I will, too!" he burst out. "I'll tell, all right! Conniving at escape. You know what that means?"

"Is it a felony or a misdemeanor?" asked Rosalie. "I sort of forgot which it was at the time I committed it."

"You better worry," replied McGee. "I'm going to do my duty by you."

"Your duty! Yes, I forgot that. You always do your duty. When a cop's involved, for instance. When Leroy went blind drunk and beat in the head of that boy—you did your duty in his case, like a little man. That's how it comes Leroy's livin' on Staten Island this day, without once seein' the inside of a State's prison. Talk to me about duty!"

"Look here," said McGee, "you can't bluff me."

"I know I can't," said Rosalie, "an' you can't me, either."

“Come, out with it then—what have you done and why did you do it?”

“As for what I’ve done,” said Rosalie, “tellin’ you would be spoilin’ it. Why did I do it? I’ve answered that. I couldn’t trust you or any man alive to let that poor boy off. Apoplexy? You snorted when his sister said it, an’ you’d be snortin’ now if you had him here in front of you. They’d laugh him out of court on such a plea. They’d laugh him to the chair. I’ve saved you the necessity of killin’ an innocent man. An’ I ought to be thanked, not kicked.”

“You’ll get worse,” said Martin McGee; “you’ll go up—that’s what will happen to you!”

“Now will I,” mocked Rosalie, breaking out her dimples, full-blazon, for the first time in two days. “What an awful trick on a lady! Especially when you’ll have to do it yourself. You’re the only witness—the only person who knows that I promised to deliver Estrilla. You’re the only person that’s heard me confess I let him get away. So you’ll be put on the witness-stand, an’ then I’ll be put on the stand. An’ I’ll testify how the New York police were

baffled with the real criminals passin' right under their noses twenty times a day, an' how a poor boardin'-house keeper that used to be a medium—jest a plain, good old soul—took a hairpin an' a thimbleful of common sense an' got a confession an' made you all fools. My lawyer'll get it in; an' if he don't, the papers will, because I'll tell 'em. I'll be at home in my cell to every reporter in New York. There's a lot of 'em would like it right now. But of course," she added, flashing her dimples, "I won't try to bluff you. No, indeed. You can't be bluffed.

"Marty McGee," she added, "let's git down to cases. You can't do a thing to me that'll help your position at all. I'll go to jail for life an' never tell where Juan Perez has gone. But if you'll listen, I'll show you just how to fix this without trouble for anybody."

Inspector McGee was now playing with a flexible paper-knife, his downcast eyes fixed upon it as he twisted it back and forth.

"How?" he asked in a voice from which the bluster had gone. Nothing could have better proved the logic in Rosalie's combination of woman-wit and common sense.

Rosalie established herself comfortably in her chair.

“Well, it’s a funny thing for us to do—you an’ me—tell the truth. Not quite the truth, either; the truth fixed up a little, which is the best kind of a lie that is. Give out what happened—but say your own smartness cleared up the case, not mine. Get Dr. Cleary to certify that he found apoplexy at a more careful autopsy, made after the Coroner’s inquest, but that he suppressed the report at the request of the police. You can force him to do that to save his skin; his work is gittin’ careless enough so’s one more slip would make his political backers drop him. Say the theory that a man died of apoplexy, just when a knife was held at his breast ready for him to fall on it, was so strange an’ unusual that you couldn’t believe it in the beginnin’. So you held Lawrence Wade until you made sure. Say you suspected Miss Estrilla—Miss Perez—from the first, an’ learnin’ that she was superstitious, had her worked by a police stool-pigeon who played at bein’ a professional medium. Say your men listened to the séances, an’ broke in at the end an’ pulled the whole story out of her. An’ if

that ain't awful near the truth, I never made up a lie that was."

"I fail to see how that excuses us for letting Estrilla—Perez—go," said Inspector McGee, with a stir of sarcasm.

"That point," said Rosalie, "is the best thing I've thought out—the very best. Up to the confession—that's our story—you hadn't the least idea but Miss Estrilla done it all herself. We'd never thought about their changin' clothes. An' when you got the confession, you sent out to arrest him, but he was gone—probably tipped off somehow. How, search me! I haven't thought out a good lie there. Maybe you'll have to invent that yourself. Otherwise it'll just be one of the mysteries of the New York Police Department. Reprimand you! Why they'll give you a medal!"

McGee still looked down at the paper-knife.

"That ain't all," he said; "you fooled me, that's what you did. You made a fool out of me."

At this Rosalie fired. A light came into her eyes that rolled ten years from her age—the light of anger. A color came into her cheeks that took off another ten—the pink of con-

tempt. "Make a fool of you, Martin McGee! I only made a fool of one person. That's me, Rosalie Le Grange. Who took all the risks in this job? You? Not a bit of it! Me, Rosalie. And what's more, Martin"—she paused and gulped; and something came into her face that reduced her to a girl—"who did I do it for? Me, Rosalie? I guess not. What was there in it for me? When this thing broke, I was independent and living my own life—an' a clean, self-respecting life. Do you think I wanted to do it? Well, you can bet not. I started this job mainly 'cause I didn't want to see the fine young fellow Wade go to the chair an' because I didn't want to see that beautiful young thing broken for life—I mean Constance Hanska.

"But after I got into it, I realized that I was workin' more for somebody else than I was for them. And that somebody else was you, Martin McGee. I'd a given it up long ago if I hadn't kept my mind on you. An' I'd become fond of that sick Estrilla woman and of that little brother of hers. But I went right on. Do you suppose I like to do what I did to them? Well, you never made a bigger mistake. I

ain't what I used to be. When I brought back her father and mother to trick that poor Miss Estrilla, I just gagged. But after I found that she wasn't guilty, nor him—in a manner of speaking—I had to hand them a square deal just like the rest. I'd done everything I could think of, Martin McGee—but I couldn't kill a man I liked and sympathized with, just to help your career. An' so I done the next best thing. I fixed it so nobody would be involved in it but me. I could have told you, an' persuaded you, maybe, that the right thing was to let this Perez get away. But you'd have been my accomplice. You couldn't have gone on the stand an' sworn clean—as you can now—that you had nothin' to do with it. I kept you out of it. I'm here to take my medicine. I never whimpered yet, an' I won't now. An' that, Martin McGee, is why I fooled you!"

Never had words poured so fast from the lips of Rosalie Le Grange. And as they poured, many expressions chased across Inspector McGee's clean-shaven police face.

"Is this the truth, Rose?" he said—and gulped. "Is it the truth?"

"It's the truth if anybody ever told it," she replied.

He was on his feet now; she rose also.

"You're a wonder of the world," he said.

"I've always maintained that!" she replied, her old self dancing in her dimples.

Martin McGee who had never perceived that an intelligent woman may look twenty and forty in successive hours—whose heavy police mind, in short, had little skill to weigh finer values—knew not that love goes by contrasts, that the Lord Archer smites never so surely and certainly as in the moment when jealousy or suspicion are departing. He never understood why his defenses fell all at once, why his arms, working as though in defiance of his will, encircled Rosalie Le Grange.

When, a month before, Martin so exploded in her presence, Rosalie had wrenched herself away. If she lay unresisting in his arms now, it was because she had seen his face. And Rosalie Le Grange knew above all things how to read faces. She yielded her waist, but not yet her lips.

"Martin," she asked softly, "is this on the level?"

“It’s on the level, Rose. Rose, I don’t care—for anything. I want you to marry me!”

The doorkeeper had been told not to disturb Inspector McGee. We will join the doorkeeper. It seems more tactful. Let us merely glance in on them ten minutes later. They are seated again; and McGee is patting her hand, ponderously but yet softly. Rosalie’s eyes, usually so big and grave—in such contrast with her smiles and her dimples—are shining as we have never seen them shine before.

“How did it come,” asked Martin, “that you could ever take to a great big cow of a fellow like me?”

The mischief danced in her dimples.

“Because you *are* so big an’ mutton-headed!” she said. Then the dimples went away, and the eyes again reigned over her expression. “Because you’re a real man, Marty. Because you’ve plugged ahead and done things, an’ because you’re a brute, too, I guess. It ain’t good for a man to be too kind an’ smart. That’s for the woman—that’s my part in this combination. An’ besides, the way your hair grows in front is cute—”

“Aw, cut that out, Rosalie”—this in a tone

of infinite tenderness—a tone as playful as comports with the dignity of an Inspector.

And—but we had better rejoin the doorman.

Only we should glance in just once more. Inspector McGee, as though struck with a sudden humorous idea, is saying:

“It’s funny, Rosie—here we’ve got engaged—and I don’t know your real name!”

“That’s how I’m sure you love me, Martin. When folks are in love, they don’t ask no questions. Well, it’s Rose Granger, if you’ve got to know, born Smith. A widow—sod, not grass. I married Jim Granger. He was no good, but I cared for him till he died. You’ve got thirty years or so—because I sense we’ll both live long—to listen to what Jim Granger did to me. We’ve other things to talk about first. Marty, you haven’t given me an engagement present.”

“You’ll get a diamond solitaire as soon as I can beat it up-town!” said Martin.

“Somethin’ else first. I want you to fix it so the New York Police Department makes an awful bluff at findin’ Juan Perez—an’ never looks in the right place.”

"I guess I can promise that," laughed Inspector McGee. Less than a half an hour before, he had been talking about his duty; but one's ideas of duty vary according to the shifting lights of circumstances.

"An' for a weddin' present," pursued Rosalie, "I guess you can see that this poor sister never gets put through."

"That's easy, too," replied McGee. "Say—now that everything is fixed up, where's that Estrilla-Perez person, anyhow? What did you do with him?"

"That information is goin' to be my weddin' present to you," responded Rosalie Le Grange.

## CHAPTER XXI

### TAKING STOCK

“**H**OW’S this head-line for that stocking job?” asked Tommy North, suddenly looking up from his writing, “‘Mountain Climbers Wear Our Hose And Come Back Without a Hole’?”

“Pretty good,” replied Betsy-Barbara from her corner by the typewriter. “Now get the rest of it.” She resumed her furious little stabs at the keys.

The sudden conclusion of the Hanska case left Betsy-Barbara afloat. She could not go back to Arden if she would, and she would not if she could. It was her whim to remain in New York; but the select young ladies’ seminaries of the metropolis hesitated to employ a young woman who had figured so consistently on the front pages of the yellow newspapers. Between trips in search of employment, Betsy-Barbara continued to typewrite the corre-

spondence of the Thomas W. North Agency. Tommy, indeed, had offered her regular employment as his clerk. She spurned that offer, holding it to be mere gratitude. When she had learned the trade, she said, she might accept a position as typist, and not a minute before. Betsy-Barbara was vastly improved in technique. She could draft a passable circular letter in not more than three attempts and twenty-five minutes.

Tommy, unruffled by her businesslike reminder, continued to view Betsy-Barbara. Presently the pencil dropped from his hand. He turned in his swivel chair and called: "Betsy-Barbara!" in a tone wholly inappropriate to office hours.

Being a woman, she caught it.

"Tommy North," she said, without looking up from the keys, "read me that motto over your desk!"

"'Business Thoughts in Business Hours,' " read Tommy, obediently.

"Well, what does that mean?" asked Betsy-Barbara. And she continued to write, "respectfully solicit your patronage for the Thomas W. North Agency." At least, that is

what she thought she was writing. As a matter of fact, what she produced was this:

respec fully silicityour patrona nage for teh  
2Thomasw North agency."

"But what I want to talk about now," replied Tommy in a wheedling tone, "is a matter of business. I've been taking stock. This fine-going concern made last month a hundred and fifty dollars above light, rent, office expenses and overhead charges. That revolver contract and that beauty-parlor deal are as good as permanent. By Christmas we'll be making a hundred dollars a week."

"*You'll* be making," corrected Betsy-Barbara as she jerked back the typewriter carriage to begin the struggle with another line.

"That's the point of these remarks. You ought"—he paused here—"you ought to have a share."

"If you'll kindly turn your eyes to the panel beside the door," said Betsy-Barbara, "you'll see a card which reads 'Business is Business.' The idea of talking partnership to a mere stenographer who hasn't learned her trade!"

"That isn't fair. You always put me in

the wrong, somehow. You know you're responsible for the whole thing. Who made me start this concern? Who got me to cut out the booze and go into business for myself?"

"Well," replied Betsy-Barbara, "a tract or a preacher might have done that—anything which set you on the right way at the right time. And you wouldn't think of offering a partnership to a tract or a preacher."

"Betsy-Barbara!" called Tommy again. And on that name, uttered all too gently for the address of a stern employer to an inexperienced stenographer, he rose and crossed to her side. Somehow she did not protest—although she continued to look down on the keys. Her fingers stopped.

Tommy gulped; and his first words, as he settled on the stool at her side, were far from his original intention—and further still from strict business.

"Betsy-Barbara—why did you play around with that poor devil of an Estrilla?"

"If I wanted to be impertinent, I'd ask how that concerns you," replied Betsy-Barbara, saucily. "Well—because I liked him, I suppose."

“You didn’t like him too well?” inquired Tommy.

“Of course not—now, I’m just sorry for him,” she replied. Then, as though duty drove, she picked up an eraser and began furiously to eradicate a figure “2” which she had printed for a quotation mark.

“Do you remember,” Tommy pursued, “the last time I got drunk—the last time I ever will?”

“The shoe-buckle night? Yes.” She resumed typewriting with furious energy and utterly incommensurate results. But even the noise of the typewriter could not silence Tommy now. And when she came to the end of the line, she stopped again.

“You never knew why, of course!” said Tommy. “Do you remember some one coming into the front hall and going right out again? That was I. You were sitting—I saw you looking at him—I thought—”

“You didn’t think right,” responded Betsy-Barbara. She paused while the truth in her struggled against woman’s instinct to use strategy in that branch of human activity which is woman’s chief business. The truth won.

“That’s funny. You saw me when I was nearer—well, liking him—than I ever was before or after. He was a dear. You couldn’t help being amused and flattered by him—but nothing else.”

“Why didn’t you like him really—what held you back?”

Betsy-Barbara pulled over the carriage for another line—not with a jerk this time, but slowly and softly. At the same languid pace, she resumed striking the keys.

“Do you call this business?” she asked—but very weakly.

Tommy North laid a hand upon hers, stilling the keys under her fingers.

“Betsy-Barbara, this *is* business. I was talking partnership. I didn’t mean that kind. You know—oh, blazes—I meant—why did I brace up and go to work, anyhow? It was because—you—I love you—there, that’s out!”

Betsy-Barbara, her hand still helpless between the keys and his greater hand, raised her face. If she had shone before with elfin light, she shone now with the light of many angels. The sheen and glitter of her hair, the fire of her eyes, the sparkle of her little teeth

behind her parted lips—all the glory which makes stars and systems and beasts and the generations of men—illuminated and transformed Betsy-Barbara. An instant so, and that light faded. The elfin light shone again. And—

“Tommy North,” she said, “are you proposing to me right in business hours? Get back to your seat! Your answer will be transmitted to you in business form.”

There was hope and yet wonderment in Tommy’s face as he obeyed. Betsy-Barbara tweaked the sheets from the roller, inserted a new page, and began to type very fast—for her. She finished. She was suffused with color as she drew out the page and laid it on Tommy’s desk. He turned to read; and Betsy-Barbara’s hand brushed his cheek ever so lightly.

mR Thomas WNorth;

dear sir;

Your pro positiin is accepted  
and I trust tha t the ensuig partnership will be  
long adn prosperous

yurs sincerelly

ElizabethLane.

“Business forms must be maintained even in this solemn and awful moment,” said Betsy-Barbara.

“Well, there’s one thing about being a high cop that’s worth while,” remarked Martin McGee, “you certainly do get swell attention in a lobster palace.”

Inspector McGee, in his dinner coat and his diamonds, sat in the preferred corner farthest from the music. Rosalie, reigning opposite in two thousand dollars’ worth of diamonds, eight hundred dollars’ worth of clothes, three hundred dollars’ worth of massage, and a hundred dollars’ worth of hair-dressing and hat, followed with smiling eyes a wave of agitation which ran from waiter to waiter until it broke at the door, in a spray of Italian-Swiss-French gestures, against the head waiter and majordomo. The lady with Inspector McGee, the lady whom he brought regularly—so an excited waiter-captain explained to his chief—had complained of a tainted clam. It was frightful, terrific, the head waiter replied. Some one must suffer. Inspector McGee might never come again. Some morning

after hours the bar would be raided. *Mâche!*  
*Accidenté!*

When McGee had condescended to accept apologies, he resumed to Rosalie:

"I don't even have to pay for my New-year's Eve table reservations. That's what it is—being a cop!"

Rosalie dropped her pink right hand on her pinker left one, and fell to playing with a new diamond solitaire that dimmed for size and luster all her other jewels. Her dimples threw back an answering flash.

"Enjoy it while you can, Marty," she said. "It won't be long."

Even yet, Inspector McGee reflected, Rosalie Le Grange had surprises for him. He did not realize, for he was no seer of the future, that she would be giving him just such surprises all his life long.

"What's new with you this time?" he inquired, smiling indulgently.

"Nothin' with me," replied Rosalie, "only I'm breakin' the news to *you*. Inspector is as high up as a policeman can get. Your days on the force are numbered, Martin McGee. An' I haven't made up my mind yet,"

she added, dimpling now not on the diamonds, but on him, "whether to make you Democratic boss of the State Senate, or just leader of Tammany Hall!"

That day was raw November, with a wet sticky suggestion of rain in the air. From the colonial piazza where Constance stood, waiting, the grounds rolled away cold and naked to the great double gate. A cluster of bare elms hid the farther reaches of the walk from her view. He who was coming would approach unobserved until he was almost upon her. In the whirl and perturbation of her spirit, she found herself thankful for that. Whatever happened, it would come suddenly.

Rosalie Le Grange and every one else most vitally concerned in the Wade-Hanska case had considered it best that she, the too-romantic heroine of these events, should be in hiding when Lawrence Wade came out of the Tombs, a free man. One must consider the newspapers—always the newspapers, with their photographers, their special writers, their insistence on the "human interest" features of

this celebrated case. So even before Captain McGee flashed to the headquarters reporters that Margarita Perez, detained in the criminal ward at Bellevue Hospital, was the solvent of the Hanska case, Rosalie removed her secretly to this friendly country place near Arden. Days followed in which the reporters tracked Lawrence Wade at all hours in order to discover him in the act of meeting Constance. In that period, he scarcely dared write, lest the address on an envelope might betray her whereabouts. Now, in the general march of events, the interest in the Hanska case had become dulled. And to-day, in this very hour, he was coming—with what message on his lips?

In the distance sounded the whistle of a locomotive; a column of white smoke rose above the bare trees. She glanced at the watch on her wrist. This was his train. In five minutes he would emerge to view from behind that clump of trees. In five minutes, she would know.

Or would she? The hopes, the fears, the sick fancies of a week's waiting whirled in her mind. She leaned against one of the pillars

for support, while she went over everything again.

She knew her heart now—irrevocably. But he? From the moment when the tragedy came, he had said no word, no single little word, which meant love. In their visiting through the bars of the Tombs, he had done everything to keep up her spirits. He had been incredibly gay, unbelievably tender. He had behaved as though she were the afflicted and he the comforter. He had joked when she knew that his laughter only cloaked a hell of impatience and suppressed apprehension. When her courage seemed about to break, he had put new spirit in her through the excess of bravery in his own great heart. But never once had he renewed the declaration which he made long ago, before the trouble came, before he knew her story.

Was it honor with him—or was it something else? How far he would go for honor's sake, she knew best of all. It was like him to refuse the consolation of her love at a time when a tender from him might mean only shame for her. But did he love her still? Suppose that she had become to him only the incarnate

symbol of his trouble? Suppose that the thought of her, now, only renewed those meditations on shameful death which must have haunted his nights in prison? Such things, she knew, had happened—must happen.

Then there was one more aspect of his honor to reckon with. Would he not feel that he had compromised her in the eyes of the world? Loathing her as the cause of his sorrows, would he not consider it his duty to offer his own life in expiation? How would she know—how would she ever know?

She must wait and dissemble. She must hold herself very even and calm. She must be cordial and friendly and a little distant, as she used to be in the gray days before the black ones. She must smother her heart until some sign—

A step crackled on the dried leaves about the turn of the path. From about one of the bare brown trunks appeared a man's figure. And at the sight, a very calm of indifference settled over the spirit of Constance. So the devotee who has anticipated the sacrament through nights and days of raptures finds herself, as the priest approaches, without a

ripple of emotion; so the coward, who has shivered through eternities of agony at the thought of the ax, finds himself incapable of thought or feeling or action in the presence of the headsman. She simply leaned against the pillar, her soul as blank as her eyes.

He was a tall man and stalwart, with a fine resolute jaw and straight blue eyes which were dancing now with a feverish light. At the sight of the figure by the pillar, a flush had come into his face; but apart from the two spots of color which it made, his skin was very pale. Lines, new-creased in his young skin, ran backward from his eyes.

His step quickened as he perceived her, but he said no word. Now he had come so close that he might almost touch her; and she, still leaning against the pillar, moved neither hand nor tongue nor eye. He stood close beside her on the piazza and—

“Forever!” he said.

Constance swayed forward into his outstretched waiting arms.

## CHAPTER XXII

### HAPPY EVER AFTER

Señor Juan Perez,  
Peralta,  
Argentine Republic,  
South America.

Dear Friend:

Received your letter last month and was glad to hear that everything is going well with you. Thank you for the picture. I see you're just as handsome as ever. If you wear those clothes all the time, though, your laundry bills must be something fierce. Both Martin and I are glad you're doing so fine in a business way. I knew you would, once you settled down—guess the jolt helped you. Trouble with you at the start was, you went up against the big game too soon. But I am most pleased to hear that your sister is beginning to get kinder in her feelings to me. Lord knows, everything I did was for the best.

Am also glad to hear that her health is good and she is getting stout. I bet she's as handsome as a picture, now she hasn't anything on her mind.

In regard to a certain event three years ago, would say that it's all blowed over. Marty still drops in at headquarters a good deal, and I had him look it up. He says it would be perfectly safe for a certain party to go back to Port of Spain, though he wouldn't advise visiting this land of the free and the home of the brave for quite some time. Not that he expects anything would happen—but it's best to be on the safe side.

Well, Martin and I are getting on fine. He comes up for reelection in November—fact is we're campaigning now—and it looks like a sure thing. Martin still thinks I'm the smartest and prettiest in the world, and I take care that he won't get on to me—but oh, my dear, my massage bills are something fierce! We just live in a whirl. Seems like we're never both home to dinner unless we have company. Marty is going ahead so fast I'm afraid he'll be President of the United States before I've learned enough law to run this country. We

go to church regular—in our own district. I'm getting so careful with my grammar that I almost never talk like I want to, except when Martin and I are alone.

Now as regards friends of yours and mine, I'll tell you all the news I've got. Do you remember that Miss Harding in the boarding-house? She's Marty's stenographer now, and a mighty good one. We're so afraid she'll get married sometime, and Marty will lose her. Miss Jones is married—lives somewhere up Yonkers way. Mrs. Moore has gone over to Jersey to keep house for an old uncle. Guess she expects some money from him when he dies. Poor Professor Noll broke down last winter and was in the hospital for a month. I knew it was coming—no human stomach could stand those slop victuals. I went to see him as often as I could and talked to him like a mother. Well, he's eating his steaks and chops now as regular as the day comes round. He's very much interested in a new fancy kind of religion—it's called "The Thought of the Age." I can't seem to get the hang of it—but the point is that if everybody would get together and think the same thought all the

time for a piece—why, something's going to happen. I guess likely.

Betsy-Barbara and Mr. North live in a little house on Long Island, and Mr. North commutes. He's making so much money he says he's ashamed of it. They have twin boys, and if ever I saw *limbs*—well, Betsy-Barbara is on the jump all the time keeping them from committing fifty-seven varieties of murder and suicide they've thought out for themselves. Martin says he's glad he's given up his old job, for it certainly would be up to him to get them both "life" some day. But I notice he's ready to go over there every time we're invited, and he spends the whole time playing with those youngsters.

The Wades are still abroad. Their little daughter was born in Florence. Mrs. Wade nearly died, but she didn't mind—that child, judging by the pictures they've sent, is a perfect little angel. Mrs. Wade says her name is Betsy-Barbara and she's the apple of her father's eye. They'll come back next spring.

Well, I guess that's about all. I gave Marty your invitation, but he says he can't see time ahead to take a long vacation. If we

ever can, we'll come down there and visit you with great pleasure. And so, with love to your sister and best wishes to yourself, in which my husband joins me, I remain,

Yours truly,  
ROSALIE MCGEE.

New York,  
October 2, 19—.

THE END



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