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***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BRASS BOWL *****

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THE BRASS BOWL

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

I

DUST

In the dull hot dusk of a summer's day a green touring-car, swinging out of the East Drive, pulled up smartly, trembling, at the edge of the Fifty-ninth Street car-tracks, then more sedately, under the dispassionate but watchful eye of a mounted member of the Traffic Squad, lurched across the Plaza and merged itself in the press of vehicles south-bound on the Avenue.

Its tonneau held four young men, all more or less disguised in dust, dusters and goggles; forward, by the side of the grimy and anxious-eyed mechanic, sat a fifth, in all visible respects the counterpart of his companions. Beneath his mask, and by this I do not mean his goggles, but the mask of modern manner which the worldly wear, he was, and is, different.

He was Daniel Maitland, Esquire; for whom no further introduction should be required, after mention of the fact that he was, and remains, the identical gentleman of means and position in the social and financial worlds, whose somewhat sober but sincere and whole-hearted participation in the wildest of conceivable escapades had earned him the affectionate regard of the younger set, together with the sobriquet of "Mad Maitland."

His companions of the day, the four in the tonneau, were in that humor of subdued yet vibrant excitement which is apt to attend the conclusion of a long, hard drive over country roads. Maitland, on the other hand, (judging him by his preoccupied pose), was already weary of, if not bored by, the hare-brained enterprise which, initiated on the spur of an idle moment and directly due to a thoughtless remark of his own, had brought him a hundred miles (or so) through the heat of a broiling afternoon, accompanied by spirits as ardent and irresponsible as his own, in search of the dubious distraction afforded by the night side of the city.

As, picking its way with elephantine nicety, the motor-car progressed down the Avenue--twilight deepening, arcs upon their bronze columns blossoming suddenly, noiselessly into spheres of opalescent radiance--Mr. Maitland ceased to respond, ceased even to give heed, to the running fire of chaff (largely personal) which amused his companions. Listlessly engaged with a cigarette, he lounged upon the green leather cushions, half closing his eyes, and heartily wished himself free for the evening.

But he stood committed to the humor of the majority, and lacked entirely the shadow of an excuse to desert; in addition to which he was altogether too lazy for the exertion of manufacturing a lie of serviceable texture. And so he abandoned himself to his fate, even though he foresaw with weariful particularity the programme of the coming hours.

To begin with, thirty minutes were to be devoted to a bath and dressing in his rooms. This was something not so unpleasant to contemplate. It was the afterwards that repelled him: the dinner at Sherry's, the subsequent tour of roof gardens, the late supper at a club, and then, prolonged far into the small hours, the session around some green-covered table in a close room reeking with the fumes of good tobacco and hot with the fever of gambling....

Abstractedly Maitland frowned, tersely summing up: "Beastly!"--in an undertone.

At this the green car wheeled abruptly round a corner below Thirty-fourth Street, slid half a block or more east, and came to a palpitating halt. Maitland, looking up, recognized the entrance to his apartments, and sighed with relief for the brief respite from boredom that was to be his. He rose, negligently shaking off his duster, and stepped down to the sidewalk.

Somebody in the car called a warning after him, and turning for a moment he stood at attention, an eyebrow raised quizzically, cigarette drooping from a corner of his mouth, hat pushed back from his forehead, hands in coat pockets: a tall, slender, sparely-built figure of a man, clothed immaculately in flannels.

When at length he was able to make himself heard, "Good enough," he said clearly, though without raising his voice. "Sherry's in an hour. Right. Now, behave yourselves."

"Mind you show up on time!"

"Never fear," returned Maitland over his shoulder.

A witticism was flung back at him from the retreating car, but spent itself unregarded. Maitland's attention was temporarily distracted by the unusual--to say the least--sight of a young and attractive woman coming out of a home for confirmed bachelors.

The apartment house happened to be his own property. A substantial and old-fashioned edifice, situated in the middle of a quiet block, it contained but five roomy and comfortable suites, --in other words, one to a floor; and these were without exception tenanted by unmarried men of Maitland's own circle and acquaintance. The janitor, himself a widower and a convinced misogynist, lived alone in the basement. Barring very special and exceptional occasions (as when one of the bachelors felt called

upon to give a tea in partial recognition of social obligations), the foot of woman never crossed its threshold.

In this circumstance, indeed, was comprised the singular charm the house had for its occupants. The quality which insured them privacy and a quiet independence rendered them oblivious to its many minor drawbacks, its lack of many conveniences and luxuries which have of late grown to be so commonly regarded as necessities. It boasted, for instance, no garage; no refrigerating system maddened those dependent upon it; a dissipated electric lighting system never went out of nights, because it had never been installed; no brass-bound hall-boy lounged in desuetude upon the stoop and took too intimate and personal an interest in the tenants' correspondence. The inhabitants, in brief, were free to come and go according to the dictates of their consciences, unsupervised by neighborly women-folk, unhindered by a parasitic corps of menials not in their personal employ.

Wherefore was Maitland astonished, and the more so because of the season. At any other season of the year he would readily have accounted for the phenomenon that now fell under his observation, on the hypothesis that the woman was somebody's sister or cousin or aunt. But at present that explanation was untenable; Maitland happened to know that not one of the other men was in New York, barring himself; and his own presence there was a thing entirely unforeseen.

Still incredulous, he mentally conned the list: Barnes, who occupied the first flat, was traveling on the Continent; Conkling, of the third, had left a fortnight since to join a yachting party on the Mediterranean; Bannister and Wilkes, of the fourth and fifth floors, respectively, were in Newport and Buenos Aires.

"Odd!" concluded Maitland.

So it was. She had just closed the door, one thought; and now stood poised as if in momentary indecision on the low stoop, glancing toward Fifth Avenue the while she fumbled with a refractory button at the wrist of a long white kid glove. Blurred though it was by the darkling twilight and a thin veil, her face yet conveyed an impression of prettiness: an impression enhanced by careful grooming. From her hat, a small affair, something green, with a superstructure of grey ostrich feathers, to the tips of her russet shoes,--including a walking skirt and bolero of shimmering grey silk,--she was distinctly "smart" and interesting.

He had keenly observant eyes, had Maitland, for all his detached pose; you are to understand that he comprehended all these points in the flickering of an instant. For the incident was over in two seconds. In one the lady's hesitation was resolved; in another she had passed down the steps and swept by Maitland without giving him a glance, without even the trembling of an eyelash. And he had a view of her back as she moved swiftly away toward the Avenue.

Perplexed, he lingered upon the stoop until she had turned the corner; after which he let himself in with a latch-key, and, dismissing the affair temporarily from his thoughts, or pretending to do so, ascended the single flight of stairs to his flat.

Simultaneously heavy feet were to be heard clumping up the basement steps; and surmising that the janitor was coming to light the hall, the young man waited, leaning over the balusters. His guess proving correct, he called down:

"O'Hagan? Is that you?"

"Th' saints presarve us! But 'twas yersilf gave me th' s'hart, Misther Maitland, sor!" O'Hagan paused in the gloom below, his upturned face quaintly illuminated by the flame of a wax taper in his gaslighter.

"I'm dining in town to-night, O'Hagan, and dropped around to dress. Is anybody else at home?"

"Nivver a wan, sor. Shure, th' house do be quiet's anny tomb--"

"Then who was that lady, O'Hagan?"

"Leddy, sor?"--in unbounded amazement.

"Yes," impatiently. "A young woman left the house just as I was coming in. Who was she?"

"Shure an' I think ye must be dr'amin', sor. Divvle a female-- rayspicks to ye!--has been in this house for manny an' manny th' wake, sor."

"But, I tell you--"

"Belike 'twas somewan jist s'hepped into the vestibule, mebbe to tie her shoe, sor, and ye thought--"

"Oh, very well." Maitland relinquished the inquisition as unprofitable, willing to concede O'Hagan's theory a reasonable one, the more readily since he himself could by no means have sworn that the woman had actually come out through the door. Such had merely been his impression, honest enough, but founded on circumstantial evidence.

"When you're through, O'Hagan," he told the Irishman, "you may come and shave me and lay out my things, if you will."

"Very good, sor. In wan minute."

But O'Hagan's conception of the passage of time was a thought vague: his one minute had lengthened into ten before he appeared

to wait upon his employer.

Now and again, in the absence of the regular "man," O'Hagan would attend one or another of the tenants in the capacity of substitute valet: as in the present instance, when Maitland, having left his host's roof without troubling even to notify his body-servant that he would not return that night, called upon the janitor to understudy the more trained employee; which O'Hagan could be counted upon to do very acceptably.

Now, with patience unruffled, since he was nothing keen for the evening's enjoyment, Maitland made profit of the interval to wander through his rooms, lighting the gas here and there and noting that all was as it should be, as it had been left--save that every article of furniture and bric-a-brac seemed to be sadly in want of a thorough dusting. In the end he brought up in the room that served him as study and lounge,--the drawing-room of the flat, as planned in the forgotten architect's scheme,--a large and well-lighted apartment overlooking the street. Here, pausing beneath the chandelier, he looked about him for a moment, determining that, as elsewhere, all things were in order--but grey with dust.

Finding the atmosphere heavy, stale, and oppressive, Maitland moved over to the windows and threw them open. A gush of warm air, humid and redolent of the streets, invaded the room, together with the roar of traffic from its near-by arteries. Maitland rested his elbows on the sill and leaned out, staring absently into the night; for by now it was quite dark. Without concern, he realized that he would be late at dinner. No matter; he would as willingly miss it altogether. For the time being he was absorbed in vain speculations about an unknown woman whose sole claim upon his consideration lay in a certain but immaterial glamour of mystery. Had she, or had she not, been in the house? And, if the true answer were in the affirmative: to what end, upon what errand?

His eyes focused insensibly upon a void of darkness beneath him,--night made visible by street lamps; and he found himself suddenly and acutely sensible of the wonder and mystery of the City: the City whose secret life ran fluent upon the hot, hard pavements below, whose voice throbbed, sibilant, vague, strident, inarticulate, upon the night air; the City of which he was a part equally with the girl in grey, whom he had never before seen, and in all likelihood was never to see again, though the two of them were to work out their destinies within the bounds of Manhattan Island. And yet....

"It would be strange," said Maitland thoughtfully, "if...." He shook his head, smiling. "'_Two shall be born,_' " quoted Mad Maitland sentimentally,--

"'_Two shall be born the whole wide world apart--_' "

A piano organ, having maliciously sneaked up beneath his window, drove him indoors with a crash of metallic melody.

As he dropped the curtains his eye was arrested by a gleam of white upon his desk,--a letter placed there, doubtless, by O'Hagan in Maitland's absence. At the same time, a splashing and gurgling of water from the direction of the bath-room informed him that the janitor-valet was even then preparing his bath. But that could wait.

Maitland took up the envelope and tore the flap, remarking the name and address of his lawyer in its upper left-hand corner. Unfolding the inclosure, he read a date a week old, and two lines requesting him to communicate with his legal adviser upon "a matter of pressing moment."

"Bother!" said Maitland. "What the dickens--"

He pulled up short, eyes lighting. "That's so, you know," he argued: "Bannerman will be delighted, and--and even business is better than rushing round town and pretending to enjoy yourself when it's hotter than the seven brass hinges of hell and you can't think of anything else.... I'll do it!"

He stepped quickly to the corner of the room, where stood the telephone upon a small side table, sat down, and, receiver to ear, gave Central a number. In another moment he was in communication with his attorney's residence.

"Is Mr. Bannerman in? I would like to--"

* * * * *

"Why, Mr. Bannerman! How _do_ you do?"

* * * * *

"You're looking a hundred per cent better--"

* * * * *

"Bad, bad word! Naughty!--"

"Maitland, of course."

* * * * *

"Been out of town and just got your note."

* * * * *

"Your beastly penchant for economy. It's not stamped; I presume you sent it round by hand of the future President of the United

States whom you now employ as office-boy. And O'Hagan didn't forward it for that reason."

* * * * *

"Important, eh? I'm only in for the night--"

* * * * *

"Then come and dine with me at the Primordial. I'll put the others off."

* * * * *

"Good enough. In an hour, then? Good-by." Hanging up the receiver, Maitland waited a few moments ere again putting it to his ear. This time he called up Sherry's, asked for the head-waiter, and, requested that person to be kind enough to make his excuses to "Mr. Cressy and his party": he, Maitland, was detained upon a matter of moment, but would endeavor to join them at a later hour.

Then, with a satisfied smile, he turned away, with purpose to dispose of Bannerman's note.

"Bath's ready, sor."

O'Hagan's announcement fell upon heedless ears. Maitland remained motionless before the desk--transfixed with amazement.

"Bath's ready, sor!"--imperatively.

Maitland roused slightly.

"Very well; in a minute, O'Hagan."

Yet for some time he did not move. Slowly the heavy brows contracted over intent eyes as he strove to puzzle it out. At length his lips moved noiselessly.

"Am I awake?" was the question he put his consciousness.

Wondering, he bent forward and drew the tip of one forefinger across the black polished wood of the writing-bed. It left a dark, heavy line. And beside it, clearly defined in the heavy layer of dust, was the silhouette of a hand; a woman's hand, small, delicate, unmistakably feminine of contour.

"Well!" declared Maitland frankly, "I _am_ damned!"

Further and closer inspection developed the fact that the imprint had been only recently made. Within the hour,--unless Maitland were indeed mad or dreaming,--a woman had stood by that desk and rested a hand, palm down, upon it; not yet had the dust had time

to settle and blur the sharp outlines.

Maitland shook his head with bewilderment, thinking of the grey girl. But no. He rejected his half-formed explanation--the obvious one. Besides, what had he there worth a thief's while? Beyond a few articles of "virtue and bigotry" and his pictures, there was nothing valuable in the entire flat. His papers? But he had nothing; a handful of letters, cheque book, a pass book, a japanned tin despatch box containing some business memoranda and papers destined eventually for Bannerman's hands; but nothing negotiable, nothing worth a burglar's while.

It was a flat-topped desk, of mahogany, with two pedestals of drawers, all locked. Maitland determined this latter fact by trying to open them without a key; failing, his key-ring solved the difficulty in a jiffy. But the drawers seemed undisturbed; nothing had been either handled, or removed, or displaced, so far as he could determine. And again he wagged his head from side to side in solemn stupefaction.

"This is beyond you, Dan, my boy." And: "But I've got to know what it means."

In the hall O'Hagan was shuffling impatience. Pondering deeply, Maitland relocked the desk, and got upon his feet. A small bowl of beaten brass, which he used as an ash-receiver, stood ready to his hand; he took it up, carefully blew it clean of dust, and inverted it over the print of the hand. On top of the bowl he placed a weighty afterthought in the shape of a book.

"O'Hagan!"

"Waitin', sor."

"Come hither, O'Hagan. You see that desk?"

"Yissor."

"Are you sure?"

"Ah, faith--"

"I want you not to touch it, O'Hagan. Under penalty of my extreme displeasure, don't lay a finger on it till I give you permission. Don't dare to dust it. Do you understand?"

"Yissor. Very good, Mr. Maitland."

POST-PRANDIAL

Bannerman pushed back his chair a few inches, shifting position the better to benefit of a faint air that fanned in through the open window. Maitland, twisting the sticky stem of a liqueur glass between thumb and forefinger, sat in patient waiting for the lawyer to speak.

But Bannerman was in no hurry; his mood was rather one contemplative and genial. He was a round and cherubic little man, with the face of a guileless child, the acumen of a successful counsel for soulless corporations (that is to say, of a high order), no particular sense of humor, and a great appreciation of good eating. And Maitland was famous in his day as one thoroughly conversant with the art of ordering a dinner.

That which they had just discussed had been uncommon in all respects; Maitland's scheme of courses and his specification as to details had roused the admiration of the Primordial's chef and put him on his mettle. He had outdone himself in his efforts to do justice to Mr. Maitland's genius; and the Primordial in its deadly conservatism remains to this day one of the very few places in New York where good, sound cooking is to be had by the initiate.

Therefore Bannerman sucked thoughtfully at his cigar and thought fondly of a salad that had been to ordinary salads as his 80-H.-P. car was to an electric buckboard. While Maitland, with all time at his purchase, idly flicked the ash from his cigarette and followed his attorney's meditative gaze out through the window.

Because of the heat the curtains were looped back, and there was nothing to obstruct the view. Madison Square lay just over the sill, a dark wilderness of foliage here and there made livid green by arc-lights. Its walks teemed with humanity, its benches were crowded. Dimly from its heart came the cool plashing of the fountain, in lulls that fell unaccountably in the roaring rustle of restless feet. Over across, Broadway raised glittering walls of glass and stone; and thence came the poignant groan and rumble of surface cars crawling upon their weary and unvarying rounds.

And again Maitland thought of the City, and of Destiny, and of the grey girl the silhouette of whose hand was imprisoned beneath the brass bowl on his study desk. For by now he was quite satisfied that she and none other had trespassed upon the privacy of his rooms, obtaining access to them in his absence by means as unguessable as her motive. Momentarily he considered taking Bannerman into his confidence; but he questioned the advisability of this: Bannerman was so severely practical in his outlook upon life, while this adventure had been so madly whimsical, so engagingly impossible. Bannerman would be sure to suggest a call at the precinct police station.... If she had made way with anything, it would be different; but so far as Maitland had been

able to determine, she had abstracted nothing, disturbed nothing beyond a few square inches of dust....

Unwillingly Bannerman put the salad out of mind and turned to the business whose immediate moment had brought them together. He hummed softly, calling his client to attention. Maitland came out of his reverie, vaguely smiling.

"I'm waiting, old man. What's up?"

"The Graeme business. His lawyers have been after me again. I even had a call from the old man himself."

"Yes? The Graeme business?" Maitland's expression was blank for a moment; then comprehension informed his eyes. "Oh, yes; in connection with the Dougherty investment swindle."

"That's it. Graeme's pleading for mercy."

Maitland lifted his shoulders significantly. "That was to be expected, wasn't it? What did you tell him?"

"That I'd see you."

"Did you hold out to him any hopes that I'd be easy on the gang?"

"I told him that I doubted if you could be induced to let up."

"Then why--?"

"Why, because Graeme himself is as innocent of wrong-doing and wrong-intent as you are."

"You believe that?"

"I do," affirmed Bannerman. His fat pink fingers drummed uneasily on the cloth for a few moments. "There isn't any question that the Dougherty people induced you to sink your money in their enterprise with intent to defraud you."

"I should think not," Maitland interjected, amused.

"But old man Graeme was honest, in intention at least. He meant no harm; and in proof of that he offers to shoulder your loss himself, if by so doing he can induce you to drop further proceedings. That proves he's in earnest, Dan, for although Graeme is comfortably well to do, it's a known fact that the loss of a cool half-million, while it's a drop in the bucket to you, would cripple him."

"Then why doesn't he stand to his associates, and make them each pay back their fair share of the loot? That'd bring his liability down to about fifty thousand."

"Because they won't give up without a contest in the courts. They deny your proofs--you have those papers, haven't you?"

"Safe, under lock and key," asserted Maitland sententiously. "When the time comes I'll produce them."

"And they incriminate Graeme?"

"They make it look as black for him as for the others. Do you honestly believe him innocent, Bannerman?"

"I do, implicitly. The dread of exposure, the fear of notoriety when the case comes up in court, has aged the man ten years. He begged me with tears in his eyes to induce you to drop it and accept his offer of restitution. Don't you think you could do it, Dan?"

"No, I don't." Maitland shook his head with decision. "If I let up, the scoundrels get off scot-free. I have nothing against Graeme; I am willing to make it as light as I can for him; but this business has got to be aired in the courts; the guilty will have to suffer. It will be a lesson to the public, a lesson to the scamps, and a lesson to Graeme--not to lend his name too freely to questionable enterprises."

"And that's your final word, is it?"

"Final, Bannerman.... You go ahead; prepare your case and take it to court. When the time comes, as I say, I'll produce these papers. I can't go on this way, letting people believe that I'm an easy mark just because I was unfortunate enough to inherit more money than is good for my wholesome."

Maitland twisted his eyebrows in deprecation of Bannerman's attitude; signified the irrevocability of his decision by bringing his fist down upon the table--but not heavily enough to disturb the other diners; and, laughing, changed the subject.

For some moments he gossiped cheerfully of his new power-boat, Bannerman attending to the inconsequent details with an air of abstraction. Once or twice he appeared about to interrupt, but changed his mind: but because his features were so wholly infantile and open and candid, the time came when Maitland could no longer ignore his evident perturbation.

"Now what's the trouble?" he demanded with a trace of asperity.

"Can't you forget that Graeme business and--"

"Oh, it's not that." Bannerman dismissed the troubles of Mr. Graeme with an airy wave of a pudgy hand. "That's not my funeral, nor yours.... Only I've been worried, of late, by your utterly careless habits."

Maitland looked his consternation. "In heaven's name, what now?" And grinned as he joined hands before him in simulated petition. "Please don't read me a lecture just now, dear boy. If you've got something dreadful on your chest wait till another day, when I'm more in the humor to be found fault with."

"No lecture." Bannerman laughed nervously. "I've merely been wondering what you have done with the Maitland heirlooms."

"What? Oh, those things? They're safe enough--_in_ the safe out at Greenfields."

"To be sure! Quite so!" agreed the lawyer, with ironic heartiness. "Oh, quite." And proceeded to take all Madison Square into his confidence, addressing it from the window. "Here's a young man, sole proprietor of a priceless collection of family heirlooms,-- diamonds, rubies, sapphires galore; and he thinks they're safe enough _in_ a safe at his country residence, fifty miles from anywhere! What a simple, trustful soul it is!"

"Why should I bother?" argued Maitland sulkily. "It's a good, strong safe, and--and there are plenty of servants around," he concluded largely.

"Precisely. Likewise plenty of burglars. You don't suppose a determined criminal like Anisty, for instance, would bother himself about a handful of thick-headed servants, do you?"

"Anisty?"--with a rising inflection of inquiry.

Bannerman squared himself to face his host, elbows on table. "You don't mean to say you've not heard of Anisty, the great Anisty?" he demanded.

"I dare say I have," Maitland conceded, unperturbed. "Name rings familiar, somehow."

"Anisty,"--deliberately, "is said to be the greatest jewel thief the world has ever known. He has the police of America and Europe by the ears to catch him. They have been hot on his trail for the past three years, and would have nabbed him a dozen times if only he'd had the grace to stay in one place long enough. The man who made off with the Bracegirdle diamonds, smashing a burglar-proof vault into scrap-iron to get 'em--don't you remember?"

"Ye-es; I seem to recall the affair, now that you mention it," Maitland admitted, bored. "Well, and what of Mr. Anisty?"

"Only what I have told you, taken in connection with the circumstance that he is known to be in New York, and that the Maitland heirlooms are tolerably famous--as much so as your careless habits, Dan. Now, a safe deposit vault--"

"Um-m-m," considered Maitland. "You really believe that Mr. Anisty has his bold burglarious eye on my property?"

"It's a big enough haul to attract him," argued the lawyer earnestly; "Anisty always aims high.... Now, will you do what I have been begging you to do for the past eight years?"

"Seven," corrected Maitland punctiliously. "It's just seven years since I entered into mine inheritance and you became my counselor."

"Well, seven, then. But will you put those jewels in safe deposit?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"But when?"

"Would it suit you if I ran out to-night?" Maitland demanded so abruptly that Bannerman was disconcerted.

"I--er--ask nothing better."

"I'll bring them in town to-morrow. You arrange about the vault and advise me, will you, like a good fellow?"

"Bless my soul! I never dreamed that you would be so--so--"

"Amenable to discipline?" Maitland grinned, boylike, and, leaning back, appreciated Bannerman's startled expression with keen enjoyment. "Well, consider that for once you've scared me. I'm off--just time to catch the ten-twenty for Greenfields. Waiter!"

He scrawled his initials at the bottom of the bill presented him, and rose. "Sorry, Bannerman," he said, chuckling, "to cut short a pleasant evening. But you shouldn't startle me so, you know. Pardon me if I run; I might miss that train."

"But there was something else--"

"It can wait."

"Take a later train, then."

"What! With this grave peril hanging over me? Im possible! 'Night."

Bannerman, discomfited, saw Maitland's shoulders disappear through the dining-room doorway, meditated pursuit, thought better of it, and reseated himself, frowning.

"Mad Maitland, indeed!" he commented.

As for the gentleman so characterized, he emerged, a moment later, from the portals of the club, still chuckling mildly to himself as he struggled into a light evening overcoat. His temper, having run the gamut of boredom, interest, perturbation, mystification, and plain amusement, was now altogether inconsequential: a dangerous mood for Maitland. Standing on the corner of Twenty-sixth Street he thought it over, tapping the sidewalk gently with his cane. Should he or should he not carry out his intention as declared to Bannerman, and go to Greenfields that same night? Or should he keep his belated engagement with Cressy's party?

An errant cabby, cruising aimlessly but hopefully, sighted Maitland's tall figure and white shirt from a distance, and bore down upon him with a gallant clatter of hoofs.

"Keb-sir?" he demanded breathlessly, pulling in at the corner.

Maitland came out of his reverie and looked up slowly. "Why yes, thank you," he assented amiably.

"Where to, sir?"

Maitland paused on the forward deck of the craft and faced about, looking the cabby trustfully in the eye. "I leave it to you," he replied politely. "Just as you please."

The driver gasped.

"You see," Maitland continued with a courteous smile, "I have two engagements: one at Sherry's, the other with the ten-twenty train from Long Island City. What would you, as man to man, advise me to do, cabby?"

"Well, sir, seein' as you puts it to me straight," returned the cabby with engaging candor, "I'd go home, sir, if I was you, afore I got any worse."

"Thank you," gravely. "Long Island City depot, then, cabby."

Maitland extended himself languidly upon the cushions. "Surely," he told the night, "the driver knows best--he and Bannerman."

The cab started off jogging so sedately up Madison Avenue that Maitland glanced at his watch and elevated his brows dubiously; then with his stick poked open the trap in the roof.

"If you really think it best for me to go home, cabby, you'll have to drive like hell," he suggested mildly.

"Yessir!"

A whip-lash cracked loudly over the horse's back, and the hansom,

lurching into Thirty-fourth Street on one wheel, was presently jouncing eastward over rough cobbles, at a regardless pace which roused the gongs of the surface cars to a clangor of hysterical expostulation. In a trice the "L" extension was roaring overhead; and a little later the ferry gates were yawning before them. Again Maitland consulted his watch, commenting briefly: "In time."

Yet he reckoned without the ferry, one of whose employees deliberately and implacably swung to the gates in the very face of the astonished cab-horse, which promptly rose upon its hind legs and pawed the air with gestures of pardonable exasperation. To no avail, however; the gates remained closed, the cabby (with language) reined his steed back a yard or two, and Maitland, lighting a cigarette, composed himself to simulate patience.

Followed a wait of ten minutes or so, in which a number of vehicles joined company with the cab; the passenger was vaguely aware of the jarring purr of a motor-car, like that of some huge cat, in the immediate rear. A circumstance which he had occasion to recall ere long.

In the course of time the gates were again opened. The bridge cleared of incoming traffic. As the cabby drove aboard the boat, with nice consideration selecting the choicest stand of all, well out upon the forward deck, a motor-car slid in, humming, on the right of the hansom.

Maitland sat forward, resting his forearms on the apron, and jerked his cigarette out over the gates; the glowing stub described a fiery arc and took the water with a hiss. Warm whiffs of the river's sweet and salty breath fanned his face gratefully, and he became aware that there was a moon. His gaze roving at will, he nodded an even-tempered approbation of the night's splendor: in the city a thing unsuspected.

Never, he thought, had he known moonlight so pure, so silvery and strong. Shadows of gates and posts lay upon the forward deck like stencils of lamp-black upon white marble. Beyond the boat's bluntly rounded nose the East River stretched its restless, dark reaches, glossy black, woven with gorgeous ribbons of reflected light streaming from pier-head lamps on the further shore. Overhead, the sky, a pallid and luminous blue around the low-swung moon, was shaded to profound depths of bluish-black toward the horizon. Above Brooklyn rested a tenuous haze. A revenue cutter, a slim, pale shape, cut across the bows like a hunted ghost. Farther out a homeward-bound excursion steamer, tier upon tier of glittering lights, drifted slowly toward its pier beneath the new bridge, the blare of its band, swelling and dying upon the night breeze, mercifully tempered by distance.

Presently Maitland's attention was distracted and drawn, by the abrupt cessation of its motor's pulsing, to the automobile on his right. He lifted his chin sharply, narrowing his eyes, whistled

low; and thereafter had eyes for nothing else.

The car, he saw with the experienced eye of a connoisseur, was a recent model of one of the most expensive and popular foreign makes: built on lines that promised a deal in the way of speed, and furnished with engines that were pregnant with multiplied horse-power: all in all not the style of car one would expect to find controlled by a solitary woman, especially after ten of a summer's night.

Nevertheless the lone occupant of this car was a woman. And there was that in her bearing, an indefinable something,--whether it lay in the carriage of her head, which impressed one as both spirited and independent, or in an equally certain but less tangible air of self-confidence and reliance,--to set Mad Maitland's pulses drumming with excitement. For, unless indeed he labored gravely under a misapprehension, he was observing her for the second time within the past few hours.

Could he be mistaken, or was this in truth the same woman who had (as he believed) made herself free of his rooms that evening?

In confirmation of such suspicion he remarked her costume, which was altogether worked out in soft shades of grey. Grey was the misty veil, drawn in and daintily knotted beneath her chin, which lent her head and face such thorough protection against prying glances; of grey suede were the light gauntlets that hid all save the slenderness of her small hands; and the wrap that, cut upon full and flowing lines, cloaked her figure beyond suggestion, was grey. Yet even its ample drapery could not dissemble the fact that she was quite small, girlishly slight, like the woman in the doorway; nor did aught temper her impersonal and detached composure, which had also been an attribute of the woman in the doorway. And, again, she was alone, unchaperoned, unprotected....

Yes? Or no? And, if yes: what to do? Was he to alight and accost her, accuse her of forcing an entrance to his rooms for the sole purpose (as far as ascertainable) of presenting him with the outline of her hand in the dust of his desk's top?... Oh, hardly! It was all very well to be daringly eccentric and careless of the world's censure; but one scarcely cared to lay one's self open either to an unknown girl's derision or to a sound pummeling at the hands of fellow passengers enraged by the insult offered to an unescorted woman....

The young man was still pondering ways and means when a dull bump apprised him that the ferry-boat was entering the Long Island City slip. "The devil!" he exclaimed in mingled disgust and dismay, realizing that his distraction had been so thorough as to permit the voyage to take place almost without his realizing it. So that now--worse luck!--it was too late to take any one of the hundred fantastic steps he had contemplated half seriously. In another two minutes his charming mystery, so bewitchingly incarnated, would

have slipped out of his life, finally and beyond recall. And he could do naught to hinder such a finale to the adventure.

Sulkily he resigned himself to the inevitable, waiting and watching, while the boat slid and blundered clumsily, paddle-wheels churning the filthy waters over side, to the floating bridge; while the winches rattled, and the woman, sitting up briskly in the driver's seat of the motor-car, bent forward and advanced the spark; while the chain fell clanking and the car shot out, over the bridge, through the gates, and away, at a very considerable, even if lawful, rate of speed.

Whereupon, writing _Finis_ to the final chapter of Romance, voting the world a dull place and life a treadmill, anathematizing in no uncertain terms his lack of resource and address, Maitland paid off his cabby, alighted, and to that worthy's boundless wonder, walked into the waiting-room of the railway terminus without deviating a hair's-breadth from the straight and circumscribed path of the sober in mind and body.

The ten-twenty had departed by a bare two minutes. The next and last train for Greenfields was to leave at ten-fifty-nine.

Maitland with assumed nonchalance composed himself upon a bench in the waiting-room to endure the thirty-seven minute interval. Five minutes later an able-bodied washerwoman with six children in quarter sizes descended upon the same bench; and the young man in desperation allowed himself to be dispossessed. The news-stand next attracting him, he garnered a fugitive amusement and two dozen copper cents by the simple process of purchasing six "night extras," which he did not want, and paying for each with a five-cent piece. Comprehending, at length, that he had irritated the news-dealer, he meandered off, jingling his copper-fortune in one hand, lugging his newspapers in the other, and made a determined onslaught upon a slot machine. The latter having reluctantly disgorged twenty-four assorted samples of chewing-gum and stale sweetmeats, Maitland returned to the washerwoman, and sowed dissension in her brood by presenting the treasure-horde to the eldest girl with instructions to share it with her brothers and sisters.

It is difficult to imagine what folly might next have been recorded against him had not, at that moment, a ferocious and inarticulate howl from the train-starter announced the fact that the ten-fifty-nine was in waiting.

Boarding the train in a thankful spirit, Maitland settled himself as comfortably as he might in the smoker and endeavored to find surcease of ennui in his collection of extras. In vain: even a two-column portrait of Mr. Dan Anisty, cracksman, accompanied by a vivacious catalogue of that notoriety's achievements in the field of polite burglary, hardly stirred his interest. An elusive resemblance which he traced in the features of Mr. Anisty, as presented by the Sketch-Artist-on-the-Spot, to some one whom he,

Maitland, had known in the dark backwards and abysm of time, merely drew from him the comment: "Homely brute!" And he laid the papers aside, cradling his chin in the palm of one hand and staring for a weary while out of the car window at a reeling and moonsmitten landscape. He yawned exhaustively, his thoughts astray between a girl garbed all in grey, Bannerman's earnest and thoughtful face, and the pernicious activities of Mr. Daniel Anisty, at whose door Maitland laid the responsibility for this most fatiguing errand....

The brakeman's wolf-like yelp--"Greenfields!"--was ringing in his ears when he awoke and stumbled down aisle and car-steps just in the nick of time. The train, whisking round a curve cloaked by a belt of somber pines, left him quite alone in the world, cast ruthlessly upon his own resources.

An hour had elapsed; it was now midnight; the moon rode high, a cold white disk against a background of sapphire velvet, its pellucid rays revealing with disheartening distinctness the inanimate and lightless roadside hamlet called Greenfields; its general store and postoffice, its _soi-disant_ hotel, its straggling line of dilapidated habitations, all wrapped in silence profound and impenetrable. Not even a dog howled; not a belated villager was in sight; and it was a moral certainty that the local livery service had closed down for the night.

Nevertheless, Maitland, with a desperation bred of the prospective five-mile tramp, spent some ten valuable minutes hammering upon the door of the house infested by the proprietor of the livery stable. He succeeded only in waking the dog, and inasmuch as he was not on friendly terms with that animal, presently withdrew at discretion and set his face northwards upon the open road.

It stretched before him invitingly enough, a ribbon winding silver-white between dark patches of pine and scrub-oak or fields lush with rustling corn and wheat. And, having overcome his primary disgust, as the blood began to circulate more briskly in his veins, Maitland became aware that he was actually enjoying the enforced exercise. It could have been hardly otherwise, with a night so sweet, with airs so bland and fragrant of the woods and fresh-turned earth, with so clear a light to show him his way.

He stepped out briskly at first, swinging his stick and watching his shadow, a squat, incredibly agitated silhouette in the golden dust. But gradually and insensibly the peaceful influences of that still and lovely hour tempered his heart's impatience; and he found himself walking at a pace more leisurely. After all, there was no hurry; he was unwearied, and Maitland Manor lay less than five miles distant.

Thirty minutes passed; he had not covered a third of the way, yet remained content. By well-remembered landmarks, he knew he must be nearing the little stream called, by courtesy, Myannis River; and

in due course, he stepped out upon the long wooden structure that spans that water. He was close upon the farther end when--upon a hapchance impulse--he glanced over the nearest guard-rail, down at the bed of the creek. And stopped incontinently, gaping.

Stationary in the middle of the depression, hub-deep in the shallow waters, was a motor-car; and it, beyond dispute, was identical with that which had occupied his thoughts on the ferry-boat. Less wonderful, perhaps, but to him amazing enough, it was to discover upon the driver's seat the girl in grey.

His brain benumbed beyond further capacity for astonishment, he accepted without demur this latest and most astounding of the chain of amazing coincidences which had thus far enlivened the night's earlier hours; and stood rapt in silent contemplation, sensible that the girl had been unaware of his approach, deadened as his footsteps must have been by the blanket of dust that carpeted both road and bridge deep and thick.

On her part she sat motionless, evidently lost in reverie, and momentarily, at least, unconscious of the embarrassing predicament which was hers. So complete, indeed, seemed her abstraction that Maitland caught himself questioning the reality of her.... And well might she have seemed to him a pale little wraith of the night, the shimmer of grey that she made against the shimmer of light on the water,--a shape almost transparent, slight, and unsubstantial--seeming to contemplate, and as still as any mouse....

Looking more attentively, it became evident that her veil was now raised. This was the first time that he had seen her so. But her countenance remained so deeply shadowed by the visor of a mannish motoring-cap that the most searching scrutiny gained no more than a dim and scantily satisfactory impression of alluring loveliness.

Maitland turned noiselessly, rested elbows on the rail, and, staring, framed a theory to account for her position, if not for her patience.

On either hand the road, dividing, struck off at a tangent, down the banks and into the river-bed. It was credible to presume that the girl had lost control of the machine temporarily and that it, taking the bit between its teeth, had swung gaily down the incline to its bath.

Why she lingered there, however, was less patent. The water, as has been indicated, was some inches below the tonneau; it did not seem reasonable to assume that it should have interfered with either running-gear or motor....

At this point in Maitland's meditations the grey girl appeared to have arrived at a decision. She straightened up suddenly, with a little resolute nod of her head, lifting one small foot to her

knee, and fumbled with the laces of her shoe.

Maitland grasped her intention to abandon the machine, with her determination to wade! Clearly this would seem to demonstrate that there had been a breakdown, irreparable so far as frail feminine hands were concerned.

One shoe removed, its fellow would follow, and then.... Out of sheer chivalry, the involuntary witness was moved to earnest protest.

"Don't!" he cried hastily. "I say, don't wade!"

Her superb composure claimed his admiration. Absolutely ignorant though she had been of his proximity, the voice from out of the skies evidently alarmed her not at all. Still bending over the lifted foot, she turned her head slowly and looked up; and "Oh!" said a small voice tinged with relief. And coolly knotting the laces again, she sat up. "I didn't hear you, you know."

"Nor I see you," Maitland supplemented unblushingly, "until a moment ago. I--er--can I be of assistance?"

"Can't you?"

"Idiot!" said Maitland severely, both to and of himself. Aloud: "I think I can."

"I hope so,"--doubtfully. "It's very unfortunate. I ... was running rather fast, I suppose, and didn't see the slope until too late. _Now_, " opening her hands in a gesture ingenuously charming with its suggestion of helplessness and dependence, "I don't know what _can_ be the matter with the machine."

"I'm coming down," announced Maitland briefly. "Wait."

"Thank you, I shall."

She laughed, and Maitland could have blushed for his inanity; happily he had action to cloak his embarrassment. In a twinkling he was at the water's edge, pausing there to listen, with admirable docility, to her plaintive objection: "But you'll get wet and--and ruin your things. I can't ask that of you."

He chuckled, by way of reply, slapping gallantly into the shallows and courageously wading out to the side of the car. Whereupon he was advised in tones of fluttered indignation:

"You simply _wouldn't_ listen to me! And I _warned_ you! Now you're soaking wet and will certainly catch your death of cold, and--and what can _I_ do? Truly, I am sorry...."

Here the young man lost track of her remark. He was looking up

into the shadow of the motoring-cap, discovering things; for the shadow was set at naught by the moon luster that, reflected from the surface of the stream, invested with a gentle and glamorous radiance the face that bent above him. And he caught at his breath sharply, direst fears confirmed: she was pretty indeed--perilously pretty. The firm, resolute chin, the sensitive, sweet line of scarlet lips, the straight little nose, the brows delicately arched, the large, alert, tawny eyes with the dangerous sweet shadows beneath, the glint as of raw copper where her hair caught the light--Maitland appreciated them all far too well; and clutched nervously the rail of the seat, trying to steady himself, to re-collect his routed wits and consider sensibly that it all was due to the magic of the moon, belike; the witchery of this apparition that looked down into his eyes so gravely.

"Of course," he mumbled, "it's too beautiful to endure. Of course it will all fade, vanish utterly in the cold light of day...."

Above him, perplexed brows gathered ominously. "I beg pardon?"

"I--er--yes," he stammered at random.

"You--er--what?"

Positively, she was laughing at him! He, Maitland the exquisite, Mad Maitland the imperturbable, was being laughed at by a mere child, a girl scarcely out of her teens. He glanced upward, caught her eye a-gleam with merriment, and looked away with much vain dignity.

"I was saying," he manufactured, "that I did not mind the wetting in the least. I'm happy to be of service."

"You weren't saying anything of the sort," she contradicted calmly. "However...." She paused significantly.

Maitland experienced an instantaneous sensation as of furtive guilt, decidedly the reverse of comfortable. He shuffled uneasily. There was a brief silence, on her part expectant, on his, blank. His mental attitude remained hopeless: for some mysterious reason his nonchalance had deserted him in the hour of his supremest need; not in all his experience did he remember anything like this--as awkward.

The river purred indifferently about his calves; a vagrant breeze disturbed the tree-tops and died of sheer lassitude; Time plodded on with measured stride. Then, abruptly, full-winged inspiration was born out of the chaos of his mind. Listening intently, he glanced with covert suspicion at the bridge: it proved untenanted, inoffensive of mien; nor arose there any sound of hoof or wheel upon the highway. Again he looked up at the girl; and found her in thoughtful mood, frowning, regarding him steadily beneath level brows.

He assumed a disarming levity of demeanor, smiling winningly.

"There's only one way," he suggested--not too archly--and extended his arms.

"Indeed?" She considered him with pardonable dubiety.

Instantly his purpose became as adamant.

"I must carry you. It's the only way."

"Oh, indeed no! I--couldn't impose upon you. I'm--very heavy, you know--"

"Never mind," firmly insistent. "You can't stay here all night, of course."

"But are you sure?" (She was yielding!) "I don't like to--"

He shook his head, careful to restrain the twitching corners of his lips.

"It will take but a moment," he urged gravely. "And I'll be quite careful."

"Well--" She perceived that, if not right, he was stubborn; and with a final small gesture of deprecation, weakly surrendered. "I'm sorry to be such a nuisance," she murmured, rising and gathering skirts about her.

Maitland stoutly denied the hideous insinuation: "I am only too glad--"

She balanced herself lightly upon the step. He moved nearer and assured himself of a firm foothold on the pebbly river-bed. She sank gracefully into his arms, proving a considerable burden--weightier, in fact, than he had anticipated. He was somewhat staggered; it seemed that he embraced countless yards of ruffles and things ballasted with (at a shrewd guess) lead. He swayed.

Then, recovering his equilibrium, incautiously glanced into her eyes. And lost it again, completely.

"I was mistaken," he told himself; "daylight will but enhance...."

She held herself considerately still, perhaps wondering why he made no move. Perhaps otherwise; there is reason to believe that she may have suspected--being a woman.

At length, "Is there anything I can do," she inquired meekly, "to make it easier for you?"

"I'm afraid," he replied, attitude apologetic, "that I must ask

you to put your arm around my ne--my shoulders. It would be more natural."

"Oh."

The monosyllable was heavy with meaning--with any one of a dozen meanings, in truth. Maitland debated the most obvious. Did she conceive he had insinuated that it was his habit to ferry armfuls of attractive femininity over rocky fords by the light of a midnight moon?

No matter. While he thought it out, she was consenting. Presently a slender arm was passed round his neck. Having awaited only that, he began to wade cautiously shorewards. The distance lessened perceptibly, but he contemplated the decreasing interval without joy, for all that she was of an appreciable weight. For all burdens there are compensations.

Unconsciously, inevitably, her head sank toward his shoulder; he was aware of her breath, fragrant and warm, upon his cheek.... He stopped abruptly, cold chills running up and down his back; he gritted his teeth; he shuddered perceptibly.

"What _is_ the matter?" she demanded, deeply concerned, but at pains not to stir.

Maitland made a strange noise with his tongue behind clenched teeth. "_Urrrrgh,_" he said distinctly.

She lifted her head, startled; relief followed, intense and instantaneous.

"I'm sorry," he muttered humbly, face aflame, "but you ... tickled."

"I'm--so--_sorry!_" she gasped, violently agitated. And laughed a low, almost a silent, little laugh, as with deft fingers she tucked away the errant lock of hair.

"Ass!" Maitland told himself fiercely, striding forward.

In another moment they were on dry land. The girl slipped from his arms and faced him, eyes dancing, cheeks crimson, lips a tense, quivering, scarlet line. He met this with a rueful smile.

"But--thank you--but," she gasped explosively, "it was _so_ funny!"

Wounded dignity melted before her laughter. For a time, there in the moonlight, under the scornful regard of the disabled motor-car's twin headlights, these two rocked and shrieked, while the silent night flung back disdainful echoes of their mad laughter.

Perhaps the insane incongruity of their performance first became apparent to the girl; she, at all events, was the first to control herself. Maitland subsided, rumbling, while she dabbed at her eyes with a wisp of lace and linen.

"Forgive me," she said faintly, at length; "I didn't mean to--"

"How could you help it? Who'd expect a hulking brute like myself to be ticklish?"

"You are awfully good," she countered more calmly.

"Don't say that. I'm a clumsy lout. But--" He held her gaze inquiringly. "But may I ask--"

"Oh, of course--certainly: I am--was--bound for Greenpoint-on-the-Sound--"

"Ten miles!" he interrupted.

The corners of her red lips drooped: her brows puckered with dismay. Instinctively she glanced toward the waterbound car.

"What am I to do?" she cried. "Ten miles!... I could never walk it, never in the world! You see, I went to town to-day to do a little shopping. As we were coming home the chauffeur was arrested for careless driving. He had bumped a delivery wagon over--it wasn't really his fault. I telephoned home for somebody to bail him out, and my father said he would come in. Then I dined, returned to the police-station, and waited. Nobody came. I couldn't stay there all night. I 'phoned to everybody I knew, until my money gave out; no one was in town. At last, in desperation, I started home alone."

Maitland nodded his comprehension. "Your father--?" he hinted delicately.

"Judge Wentworth," she explained hastily. "We've taken the Grover place at Greenpoint for the season."

"I see,"--thoughtfully. And this was the girl who he had believed had been in his rooms that evening, in his absence! Oh, clearly, that was impossible. Her tone rang with truth. She interrupted his train of thought with a cry of despair. "What will they think!"

"I dare say," he ventured hopefully, "I could hire a team at some farm-house--"

"But the delay! It's so late already!"

Undeniably late: one o'clock at the earliest. A thought longer Maitland hung in lack of purpose, then without a word of explanation turned and again, began to wade out.

"What do you mean to do?" she cried, surprised.

"See what's the trouble," he called back. "I know a bit about motors. Perhaps--"

"Then--but why--"

She stopped; and Maitland forbore to encourage her to round out her question. It was no difficult matter to supply the missing words. Why had he not thought of investigating the motor before insisting that he must carry her ashore?

The humiliating conviction forced itself upon him that he was not figuring to great advantage in this adventure. Distinctly a humiliating sensation to one who ordinarily was by way of having a fine conceit of himself. It requires a certain amount of egotism to enable one to play the exquisite to one's personal satisfaction; Maitland had enjoyed the possession of that certain amount; theretofore his approval of self had been passably entire. Now--he could not deny--the boor had shown up through the polish of the beau.

Intolerable thought! "Cad!" exclaimed Maitland bitterly. This all was due to hasty jumping at conclusions: if he had not chosen to believe a young and charming girl identical with an--an adventuress, this thing had not happened and he had still retained his own good-will. For one little moment he despised himself heartily--one little moment of clear insight into self was his. And forthwith he began to meditate apologies, formulating phrases designed to prove adequate without sounding exaggerated and insincere.

By this time he had reached the car, and--through sheer blundering luck--at once stumbled upon the seat of trouble: a clogged valve in the carbureter. No serious matter: with the assistance of a repair kit more than commonly complete, he had the valve clear in a jiffy.

News of this triumph he shouted to the girl, receiving in reply an "Oh, thank you!" so fervently grateful that he felt more guilty than ever.

Ruminating unhappily on the cud of contemplated abasement, he waded round the car, satisfying himself that there was nothing else out of gear; and apprehensively cranked up. Whereupon the motor began to hum contentedly: all was well. Flushed with this success, Maitland climbed aboard and opened the throttle a trifle. The car moved. And then, with a swish, a gurgle, and a watery _whoosh!_ it surged forward, up, out of the river, gallantly up the slope.

At the top the amateur chauffeur shut down the throttle and jumped out, turning to face the girl. She was by the step almost before

he could offer a hand to help her in, and as she paused to render him his due meed of thanks, it became evident that she harbored little if any resentment; eyes shining, face aglow with gratitude, she dropped him a droll but graceful little courtesy.

"You are too good!" she declared with spirit. "How can I thank you?"

"You might," he suggested, looking down into her face from his superior height, "give me a bit of a lift--just a couple of miles up the road. Though," he supplemented eagerly, "if you'd really prefer, I should be only too happy to drive the car home for you?"

"Two miles, did you say?"

He fancied something odd in her tone; besides, the question was superfluous. His eyes informed with puzzlement, he replied: "Why, yes--that much, more or less. I live--"

"Of course," she put in quickly, "I'll give you the lift--only too glad. But as for your taking me home at this hour, I can't hear of that."

"But--"

"Besides, what would people say?" she countered obstinately. "Oh, no," she decided; and he felt that from this decision there would be no appeal; "I couldn't think of interfering with your ... arrangements."

Her eyes held his for a single instant, instinct with mischief, gleaming with bewildering light from out a face schooled to gravity. Maitland experienced a sensation of having grasped after and missed a subtlety of allusion; his wits, keen as they were, recoiled, baffled by her finesse. And the more he divined that she was playing with him, as an experienced swordsman might play with an impertinent novice, the denser his confusion grew.

"But I have no arrangements--" he stammered.

"Don't!" she insisted--as much as to say that he was fabricating and she knew it! "We must hurry, you know, because.... There, I've dropped my handkerchief! By the tree, there. Do you mind--?"

"Of course not." He set off swiftly toward the point indicated, but on reaching it cast about vainly for anything in the nature of a handkerchief. In the midst of which futile quest a change of tempo in the motor's impatient drumming surprised him.

Startled, he looked up. Too late: the girl was in the seat, the car in motion--already some yards from the point at which he had left it. Dismayed, he strode forward, raising his voice in perturbed expostulation.

"But--I say--!"

Over the rear of the seat a grey gauntlet was waved at him, as tantalizing as the mocking laugh that came to his ears.

He paused, thunderstruck, appalled by this monstrosity of ingratitude.

The machine gathered impetus, drawing swiftly away. Yet in the stillness the farewell of the grey girl came to him very clearly.

"Good-by!" with a laugh. "Thank you and good-by--_Handsome Dan!_"

III

"HANDSOME DAN"

Standing in the middle of the road, watching the dust cloud that trailed the fast disappearing motorcar, Mr. Maitland cut a figure sufficiently forlorn and disconsolate to have distilled pity from the least sympathetic heart.

His hands were thrust stiffly at full arm's length into his trousers pockets: a rumpled silk hat was set awry on the back of his head; his shirt bosom was sadly crumpled; above the knees, to a casual glance, he presented the appearance of a man carefully attired in evening dress; below, his legs were sodden and muddied, his shoes of patent-leather, twin wrecks. Alas for jauntiness and elegance, alack for ease and aplomb!

"Tricked," observed Maitland casually, and protruded his lower lip, thus adding to the length of a countenance naturally long.

"Outwitted by a chit of a girl! Dammit!"

But this was crude melodrama. Realizing which, he strove to smile: a sorry failure.

"Handsome Dan," quoted he; and cocking his head to one side eyed the road inquiringly. "Where in thunder d'you suppose she got hold of _that_ name?"

Bestowed upon him in callow college days, it had stuck burr-like for many a weary year. Of late, however, its use had lapsed among his acquaintances; he had begun to congratulate himself upon having lived it down. And now it was resurrected, flung at him in sincerest mockery by a woman whom, to his knowledge, he had never before laid eyes upon. Odious appellation, hateful invention of an ingenious enemy!

"Handsome Dan! She must have known me all the time--all the time I was making an exhibition of myself.... 'Wentworth'? I know no one of that name. Who the dickens can she be?"

If it had not been contrary to his code of ethics, he would gladly have raved, gnashed his teeth, footed the dance of rage with his shadow. Indeed, his restraint was admirable, the circumstances considered. He did nothing whatever but stand still for a matter of five minutes, vainly racking his memory for a clue to the identity of "Miss Wentworth."

At length he gave it up in despair and abstractedly felt for his watch-fob. Which wasn't there. Neither, investigation developed, was the watch. At which crowning stroke of misfortune,--the timepiece must have slipped from his pocket into the water while he was tinkering with that infamous carbureter,--Maitland turned eloquently red in the face.

"The price," he meditated aloud, with an effort to resume his pose, "is a high one to pay for a wave of a grey glove and the echo of a pretty laugh."

With which final fling at Fortune he set off again for Maitland Manor, trudging heavily but at a round pace through the dust that soon settled upon the damp cloth of his trousers legs and completed their ruination. But Maitland was beyond being disturbed by such trifles. A wounded vanity engaged his solicitude to the exclusion of all other interests.

At the end of forty-five minutes he had covered the remaining distance between Greenfields station and Maitland Manor. For five minutes more he strode wearily over the side-path by the box hedge which set aside his ancestral acres from the public highway. At length, with an exclamation, he paused at the first opening in the living barrier: a wide entrance from which a blue-stone carriage drive wound away to the house, invisible in the waning light, situate in the shelter of the grove of trees that studded the lawn.

"Gasoline! Brrr!" said Maitland, shuddering and shivering with the combination of a nauseous odor and the night's coolness--the latter by now making itself as unpleasantly prominent as the former.

Though he hated the smell with all his heart, manfully inconsistent he raised his head, sniffing the air for further evidence; and got his reward in a sickening gust.

"Tank leaked," he commented with brevity. "Quart of the stuff must have trickled out right here. Ugh! If it goes on at this rate, there'll be another breakdown before she gets home." And, "Serve her right, too!" he growled, vindictive.

But for all his indignation he acknowledged a sneaking wish that he might be at hand again, in such event, a second time to give gratuitous service to his grey lady.

Analyzing this frame of mind (not without surprise and some disdain of him who weakly entertained it) he crossed the drive and struck in over the lawn, shaping his course direct for the front entrance of the house.

By dead reckoning the hour was two, or something later; and a chill was stealing in upon the land, wafted gently southward from Long Island Sound. All the world beside himself seemed to slumber, breathless, insensate. Wraith-like, grey shreds of mist drifted between the serried boles of trees, or, rising, veiled the moon's wan and pallid face, that now was low upon the horizon. In silent rivalry long and velvet-black shadows skulked across the ample breadths of dew-drenched grass. Somewhere a bird stirred on its unseen perch, chirping sleepily; and in the rapt silence the inconsiderable interruption broke with startling stress.

In time,--not long,--the house lifted into view: a squat, rambling block of home-grown architecture with little to recommend it save its keen associations and its comfort. At the edge of the woods the lord and master paused indefinitely, with little purpose, surveying idly the pale, columned facade, and wondering whether or not his entrance at that ungodly hour would rouse the staff of house servants. If it did not--he contemplated with mild amusement the prospect of their surprise when, morning come, they should find the owner in occupation.

"Bannerman was right," he conceded; "any-----" The syllables died upon his lips; his gaze became fixed; his heart thumped wildly for an instant, then rested still; and instinctively he held his breath, tip-toeing to the edge of the veranda the better to command a view of the library windows.

These opened from ceiling to floor and should by rights have presented to his vision a blank expanse of dark glass. But, oddly enough, even while thinking of his lawyer's warning, he had fancied.... "Ah!" said Maitland softly.

A disk of white light, perhaps a foot or eighteen inches in diameter, had flitted swiftly across the glass and vanished.

"Ah, ah! The devil, the devil!" murmured the young man unconsciously.

The light appeared again, dancing athwart the inner wall of the room, and was lost as abruptly as before. On impulse Maitland buttoned his top-coat across his chest, turning up the collar to hide his linen, darted stealthily a yard or two to one side, and with one noiseless bound reached the floor of the veranda. A breath later he stood by the front door, where, at first glance,

he discovered the means of entrance used by the midnight marauder; the doors stood ajar, a black interval showing between them.

So that, then, was the way! Cautiously Maitland put a hand upon the knob and pushed.

A sharp, penetrating squeak brought him to an abrupt standstill, heart hammering shamefully again. Gathering himself to spring, if need be, he crept back toward the library windows, and reconnoitering cautiously determined the fact that the bolts had just been withdrawn on the inside of one window frame, which was swinging wide.

"It's a wise crook that provides his own quick exit," considered Maitland.

The sagacious one was not, apparently, leaving at that moment. On the contrary, having made all things ready for a hurried flight upon the first alarm, the intruder turned back, as was clearly indicated by the motion of the light within. The clink of steel touching steel became audible; and Maitland nodded. Bannerman was indeed justified; at that very moment the safe was being attacked.

Maitland returned noiselessly to the door. His mouth had settled into a hard, unyielding, thin line; and a dangerous light flickered in his eyes. Temporarily the idler had stepped aside, giving place to the real man that was Maitland--the man ready to fight for his own, naked hands against firearms, if it need be. True, he had but to step into the gun-room to find weapons in plenty; but these must be then loaded to be of service, and precious moments wasted in the process--moments in which the burglar might gain access to and make off with his booty.

Maitland had no notion whatever of permitting anything of the sort to occur. He counted upon taking his enemy unawares, difficult as he believed such a feat would be, in the case of a professional cracksman.

Down the hallway he groped his way to the library door, his fingers at length encountering its panels; it was closed, doubtless secured upon the inside; the slightest movement of the handle was calculated to alarm the housebreaker. Maitland paused, deliberating another and better plan, having in mind a short passageway connecting library and smoking-room. In the library itself a heavy tapestry curtained its opening, while an equally heavy portiere took the place of a door at the other end. In the natural order of things a burglar would overlook this.

Inch by inch the young man edged into the smoking-room, the door to which providentially stood unclosed. Once within, it was but a moment's work to feel his way to the velvet folds and draw them aside, fortunately without rattling the brass rings from which the curtain depended. And then Maitland was in the passage, acutely on the alert, recognizing from the continued click of metal that his

antagonist-to-be was still at his difficult task. Inch by inch-- there was the tapestry! Very gently the householder pushed it aside.

An insidious aroma of scorching varnish (the dark lantern) penetrated the passage while he stood on its threshold, feeling for the electric-light switch. Unhappily he missed this at the first cast, and--heard from within a quick, deep hiss of breath. Something had put the burglar on guard.

Another instant wasted, and it would be too late. The young man had to chance it. And he did, without further hesitation stepping boldly into the danger-zone, at the same time making one final, desperate pass at the spot where the switch should have been--and missing it. On the instant there came a click of a different caliber from those that had preceded it. A revolver had been cocked, somewhere there in the blank darkness.

Maitland knew enough not to move. In another respect the warning came too late; his fingers had found the switch at last, and automatically had turned it. The glare was blinding, momentarily; but the flash and report for which Maitland waited did not come. When his eyes had adjusted themselves to the suddenly altered conditions, he saw, directly before him and some six feet distant, a woman's slight figure, dark cloaked, resolute upon its two feet, head framed in veiling, features effectually disguised in a motor mask whose round, staring goggles shone blankly in the warm white light.

On her part, she seemed to recognize him instantaneously. On his.... It may as well be admitted that Maitland's wits were gone wool-gathering, temporarily at least: a state of mind not unpardonable when it is taken into consideration that he was called upon to grapple with and simultaneously to assimilate three momentous facts. For the first time in his life he found himself nose to nose with a revolver, and that one of able bodied and respect-compelling proportions. For the first time in his life, again, he was under necessity of dealing with a housebreaker. But most stupefying of all he found the fact that this housebreaker, this armed midnight marauder, was a woman! And so it was not altogether fearlessness that made him to all intents and purposes ignore the weapon; it is nothing to his credit for courage if his eyes struck past the black and deadly mouth of the revolver and looked only into the blank and expressionless eyes of the wind-mask; it was not lack of respect for his skin's integrity, but the sheer, tremendous wonder of it all, that rendered him oblivious to the eternity that lay the other side of a slender, trembling finger-tip.

And so he stared, agape, until presently the weapon wavered and was lowered and the woman's voice, touched with irony, brought him to his senses.

"Oh," she remarked coolly, "it's only you."

Thunderstruck, he was able no more than to parrot the pronoun:
"_You--you_!"

"Were you expecting to meet any one else, here, to-night?" she inquired in suavest mockery.

He lifted his shoulders helplessly, and tried to school his tongue to coherence. "I confess.... Well, certainly I didn't count on finding you here, Miss Wentworth. And the black cloak, you know--"

"Reversible, of course: grey inside, as you see--Handsome Dan!" The girl laughed quietly, drawing aside an edge of the garment to reveal its inner face of silken grey and the fluted ruffles of the grey skirt underneath.

He nodded appreciation of the device, his mind now busy with speculations as to what he should do with the girl, now that he had caught her. At the same time he was vaguely vexed by her persistent repetition of the obsolescent nickname.

"Handsome Dan," he iterated all but mechanically. "Why do you call me that, please? Have we met before? I could swear, never before this night!"

"But you are altogether too modest," she laughed. "Not that it's a bad trait in the character of a professional.... But really! it seems a bit incredible that any one so widely advertised as Handsome Dan Anisty should feel surprise at being recognized. Why, your portrait and biography have commanded space in every yellow journal in America recently!"

And, dropping the revolver into a pocket in her cloak, "I was afraid you might be a servant--or even Maitland," she diverted the subject, with a nod.

"But--but if you recognized me as Anisty, back there by the ford, didn't you suspect I'd drop in on you--"

"Why, of course! Didn't _you_ all but tell me that you were coming here?"

"But--"

"I thought _perhaps_ I might get through before you came, Mr. Anisty; but I knew all the time that, even if you did manage to surprise me--er--on the job, you wouldn't call in the police." She laughed confidently, and--oddly enough--at the same time nervously. "You are certainly a very bold man, and as surely a very careless one, to run around the way you do without so much as troubling to grow a beard or a mustache, after your picture has been published broadcast."

Did he catch a gleam of admiration in the eyes behind the goggles?

"Now, if ever they get hold of _my_ portrait and print it....

Well!" sighed the girl wickedly, lifting slim, bare fingers in affected concern to the mass of ruddy hair, "in that event I suppose I shall have to become a natural blonde!"

Her humor, her splendid fearlessness, the lightness of her tone, combined with the half-laughing, half-serious look that she swept up at him, to ease the tension of his emotions. For the first time since entering the room, he smiled; then in silence for a time regarded her steadfastly, thinking.

So he resembled this burglar, Anisty, strongly enough to be mistaken for him--eh? Plainly enough the girl believed him to be Anisty.... Well, and why not? Why shouldn't he be Anisty for the time being, if it suited his purpose so to masquerade?

It might possibly suit his purpose. He thought his position one uncommonly difficult. As Maitland, he had on his hands a female thief, a hardened character, a common malefactor (strange that he got so little relish of the terms!), caught red-handed; as Maitland, his duty was to hand her over to the law, to be dealt with as--what she was. Yet, even while these considerations were urging themselves upon him, he knew his eyes appraised her with open admiration and interest. She stood before him, slight, delicate, pretty, appealing in her ingenuous candor; and at his mercy. How could he bring himself to deal with her as he might with--well, Anisty himself? She was a woman, he a gentleman.

As Anisty, however,--if he chose to assume that expert's identity for the nonce,--he would be placed at once on a plane of equality with the girl; from a fellow of her craft she could hardly refuse attentions. As Anisty, he would put himself in a position to earn her friendship, to gain--perhaps--her confidence, to learn something of her necessities, to aid and protect her from the consequences of her misdeeds; possibly--to sum up--to divert her footsteps to the paths of a calling less hazardous and more honorable.

Worthy ambition: to reform a burglar! Maitland regained something of his lost self-esteem, applauding himself for entertaining a motive so laudable. And he chose his course, for better or worse, in these few seconds. Thereby proving his incontestable title to the name and repute of Mad Maitland.

His face lightened; his manner changed; he assumed with avidity the role for which she had cast him and which he stood so ready to accept and act.

"Well and good," he conceded with an air. "I suppose I may as well own up----"

"Oh, I know _you_," she assured him, with a little, confident shake of her head. "There's no deceiving me. But," and her smile became rueful, "if only you'd waited ten minutes more! Of course I recognized you from the first--down there by the river; and knew very well what was your--lay; you gave yourself away completely by mentioning the distance from the river to the Manor. And I did so want to get ahead of you on this job! What a feather in one's cap to have forestalled Dan Anisty!... But hadn't you better be a little careful with those lights? You seem to forget that there are servants in the house. Really, you know, I find you most romantically audacious, Mr. Anisty--quite in keeping with your reputation."

"You overwhelm me," he murmured. "Believe me, I have little conceit in my fame, such as it is." And, crossing to the windows, he loosed the heavy velvet hangings and let them fall together, drawing their edges close so that no ray of light might escape.

She watched him with interest. "You seem well acquainted here."

"Of course. Any man of imagination is at pains to study every house he enters. I have a map of the premises--house and grounds--here." He indicated his forehead with a long forefinger.

"Quite right, too--and worth one's while. If rumor is to be believed, you have ordinarily more than your labor for your pains. You have taught me something already.... Ah, well!" she sighed, "I suppose I may as well acknowledge my inferiority--as neophyte to hierophant. Master!" She courtesied low. "I beg you proceed and let thy cheela profit through observation!" And a small white hand gestured significantly toward the collection of burglar's tools,--drills and chisels, skeleton keys, putty, and all,--neatly displayed upon the rug before the massive safe.

"You mean that you wish me to crack this safe for you?" he inquired, with inward consternation.

"Not for me. Disappointment I admit is mine; but not for the loss I sustain. In the presence of the master I am content to stand humbly to one side, as befits one of my lowly state in--in the ranks of our profession. I resign, I abdicate in your favor; claiming nothing by right of priority."

"You are too generous," he mumbled, confused by her thinly veiled ridicule.

"Not at all," she replied briskly. "I am entirely serious. My loss of to-day will prove my gain, tomorrow. I look for incalculable benefit through study of your methods. My own, I confess," with a contemptuous toss of her head toward the burglar's kit, "are clumsy, antiquated, out of date.... But then, I'm only an amateur."

"Oh, but a woman----" he began to apologize on her behalf.

"Oh, but a woman!" she rapped out smartly. "I wish you to understand that this woman, at least, is no mean----" And she hesitated.

"Thief?" he supplied crudely.

"Yes, thief! We're two of a feather, at that."

"True enough.... But you were first in the field; I fail to see why I should reap any reward for tardiness. The spoils must be yours."

It was a test: Maitland watched her keenly, fascinated by the subtlety of the game.

"But I refuse, Mr. Anisty--positively refuse to go to work while you stand aside and--and laugh."

Pride! He stared, openly amazed, at this bewilderingly feminine bundle of inconsistencies. With each facet of her character discovered to him, minute by minute, the study of her became to him the more engrossing. He drew nearer, eyes speculative.

"I will agree," he said slowly, "to crack the safe, but upon conditions."

She drew back imperceptibly, amused, but asserting her dignity. "Yes?" she led him on, though in no accent of encouragement.

"Back there, in the river," he drawled deliberately, forcing the pace, "I found you--beautiful."

She flushed, lip curling. "And, back there, in the river, I thought you--a gentleman!"

"Although a burglar?"

"A gentleman for all that!"

"I promise you I mean no harm," he prefaced. "But don't you see how I am putting myself in your power? Every moment you know me better, while I have not yet even looked into your face with the light full upon it. Honor among thieves, little woman!"

She chose to ignore the intimate note in his voice. "You're wasting time," she hinted crisply.

"I am aware of that fact. Permit me to remind you that you are helping me to waste it. I will not go ahead until I have seen your face. It is simply an ordinary precaution."

"Oh, if it's a matter of business----"

"Self-preservation," he corrected with magnificent gravity.

She hesitated but a moment longer, then with a quick gesture removed her mask. Maitland's breath came fast as he bent forward, peering into her face; though he schooled his own features to an expression of intent and inoffensive studiousness, he feared the loud thumping of his heart would betray him. As he looked it became evident that the witchery of moonlight had not served to exaggerate the sensitive, the almost miniature, beauty of her. If anything, its charm was greater there in the full glare of the electric chandelier, as she faced him, giving him glance for glance, quite undismayed by the intentness of his scrutiny.

In the clear light her eyes shone lustrous, pools of tawny flame; her hair showed itself of a rich and luminous coppery hue, spun to immeasurable fineness; a faint color burned in her cheeks, but in contrast her forehead was as snow--the pure, white, close-grained skin that is the heritage of red-headed women the world over, and their chiefest charm as well; while her lips....

As for her lips, the most coherent statement to be extracted from Mr. Maitland is to the effect that they were altogether desirable, from the very first.

The hauteur of her pose, the sympathy and laughter that lurked in her mouth, the manifest breeding in the delicate modeling of her nostrils, and the firm, straight arch of her nose, the astonishing allurements of her eyes, combined with their spirited womanliness: these, while they completed the conquest of the young man, abashed him. He found himself of a sudden endowed with a painful appreciation of his own imperfections, the littleness of his ego, the inherent coarseness of his masculine fiber, the poor futility of his ways, contrasted with her perfections. He felt as if rebuked for some unwarrantable presumption.... For he had looked into eyes that were windows of a soul; and the soul was that of a child, unsullied and immaculate.

You may smile; but as for Maitland, he deemed it no laughing matter. From that moment his perception was clear that, whatever she might claim to be, however damning the circumstances in which she appeared to him, there was no evil in her.

But what he did not know, and did not even guess, was that, from the same instant, his being was in bondage to her will. So Love comes, strangely masked.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S MADNESS

At length, awed and not a little shamefaced, "I beg your pardon," he stammered wretchedly.

"For what?" she demanded quickly, head up and eyes light.

"For insisting. It wasn't--ah--courteous. I'm sorry."

It was her turn now to wonder; delicacy of perception such as this is not ordinarily looked for in the person of a burglar. With a laugh and a gibe she tried to pass off her astonishment.

"The thief apologizes to the thief?"

"Unkind!"

Briefly hesitant, with an impulsive gesture she flung out a generous hand.

"You're right; I was unkind. Forgive me. Won't you shake hands? I ... I do want to be a good comrade, since it has pleased Fate to throw us together like this, so--so oddly." Her tone was almost plaintive; unquestionably it was appealing.

Maitland was curiously moved by the touch of the slim, cool fingers that lay in his palm. Not unpleasantly. He frowned in perplexity, unable to analyze the sensation.

"You're not angry?" she asked.

"No--but--but--"

"Yes?"

"Why do you do this, little woman? Why do you stoop to this--this trade of yo--of ours? Why sully your hands,--and not only your hands,--imperil your good name, to say nothing of your liberty----?"

She drew her hand away quickly, interrupting him with a laugh that rang true as a coin new from the mint, honest and genuine.

"And this," she cried, "this from Dan Anisty! Positively, sir, you are delightful! You grow more dangerously original every minute! Your scruples, your consideration, your sympathy--they are touching--in _you_!" She wagged her head daintily in pretense of disapprobation. "But shall I tell you?" more seriously, doubtfully. "I think I shall ... truly. I do this sort of thing, since you must know, because--_imprimis_, because I like it. Indeed and I do! I like the danger, the excitement, the exercise of cunning and--and I like the rewards, too. Besides----"

The corners of her adorable mouth drooped ever so slightly.

"Besides----?"

"Why... But this is not business! We must hurry. Will you, or shall I----?"

A crisis had been passed; Maitland understood that he must wait until a more favorable time to renew his importunities.

"I will," he said, dropping on his knees by the safe. "In my lady's service!"

"Not at all," she interposed. "I insist. The job is now yours; yours must be the profits."

"Then I wash my hands of the whole affair," he stated in accents of finality. "I refuse. I shall go, and you can do as you will,-- blunder on," scornfully, "with your nitroglycerin, your rags, and drills and--and rouse the entire countryside, if you will."

"Ah, but--"

"Will you accept my aid?"

"On conditions, only," she stipulated. "Halvers?"

He shook his head.

"Half shares, or not at all!" She was firm.

"A partnership?"

This educed a moue of doubt, with: "I'm not worthy the honor."

"But," he promised rashly, "I can save you--oh, heaps of trouble in other--ah--lays."

She shrugged helplessly. "If I must--then I do accept. We are partners, Dan Anisty and I!"

He nodded mute satisfaction, brushed the tools out of his way, and bent an attentive ear to the combination.

The girl swept across the room, and there followed a click simultaneous with the total extinction of light.

Startled, "Why--?" he demanded.

"The risk," she replied. "We have been frightfully careless and thoughtless."

Helplessly Maitland twirled the combination dial; without the light he was wholly at a loss. But a breath later her skirts

rustled near him; the slide of the bull's-eye was jerked back, and a circle of illumination thrown upon the lock. He bent his head again, pretending to listen to the fall of the tumblers as the dial was turned, but in point of fact covertly watching the letters and figures upon it.

The room grew very silent, save for the faintly regular respiration of the girl who bent near his shoulder. Her breath was fragrant upon his cheek. The consciousness of her propinquity almost stifled him.... One fears that Maitland prolonged the counterfeit study of the combination unnecessarily.

Notwithstanding this, she seemed amazed by the ease with which he solved it. "Wonderful!" she applauded, whispering, as the heavy door swung outward without a jar.

"Hush!" he cautioned her.

In his veins that night madness was running riot, swaying him to its will. With never a doubt, never a thought of hesitancy, he forged ahead, wilfully blind to consequences. On the face of it he was playing a fool's part; he knew it; the truth is simply that he could not have done other than as he did. Consciously he believed himself to be merely testing the girl; subconsciously he was plastic in the grip of an emotion stronger than he,--moist clay upon the potter's whirling wheel.

The interior of the safe was revealed in a shape little different from that of the ordinary household strong-box. There were several account-books, ledgers, and the like, together with some packages of docketed bills, in the pigeon-holes. The cash-box, itself a safe within a safe, showed a blank face broken by a small combination dial. Behind this, in a secreted compartment, the Maitland heirlooms languished, half-forgotten of their heedless owner.

The cash-box combination offered less difficulty than had the outer dial. Maitland had it open in a twinkling. Then, brazenly lifting out the inner framework, bodily, he thrust a fumbling hand into the aperture thus disclosed and pressed the spring, releasing the panel at the back. It disappeared as though by witchcraft, and the splash of light from the bull's-eye discovered a canvas bag squatting humbly in the secret compartment: a fat little canvas bag, considerably soiled from much handling, such as is used by banks for coin, a sturdy, matter-of-fact, every-day sort of canvas bag, with nothing about it of hauteur, no air of self-importance or ostentation, to betray the fact that it was the receptacle of a small fortune.

At Maitland's ear, incredulous, "How did you guess?" she breathed.

He took thought and breath, both briefly, and prevaricated shamelessly: "Bribed the head-clerk of the safe-manufacturer who

built this."

Rising, he passed over to the center-table, the girl following. "Steady with the light," he whispered; and loosed the string around the mouth of the bag, pouring its contents, a glistening, priceless, flaming, iridescent treasure horde, upon the table.

"Oh!" said a small voice at his side. And again and again: "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Maitland himself was moved by the wonder of it. The jewels seemed to fill the room with a flashing, amazing, coruscant glamour, rainbow-like. His breath came hot and fast as he gazed upon the trove; a queen's ransom, a fortune incalculable even to its owner. As for the girl, he thought that the wonder of it must have struck her dumb. Not a sound came from the spot where she stood.

Then, abruptly, the sun went out: at least, such was the effect; the light of the hand-lamp vanished utterly, leaving a party-colored blur swimming against the impenetrable blackness, before his eyes.

His lips opened; but a small hand fell firmly upon his own, and a tiny, tremulous whisper shrilled in his ear.

"Hush--ah, hush!"

"What--?"

"Steady ... some one coming ... the jewels...."

He heard the dull musical clash of them as her hands swept them back into the bag, and a cold, sickening fear rendered him almost faint with the sense of trust misplaced, illusions resolved into brutal realities. His fingers closed convulsively about her wrists; but she held passive.

"Ah, but I might have expected that!" came her reproachful whisper. "Take them, then, my--my partner that was." Her tone cut like a knife, and the touch of the canvas bag, as she forced it into his hands, was hateful to him.

"Forgive me--" he began.

"But listen!"

For a space he obeyed, the silence at first seeming tremendous; then, faint but distinct, he heard the tinkle and slide of the brazen rings supporting the smoking-room portiere.

His hand sought the girl's; she had not moved, and the cool, firm pressure of her fingers steadied him. He thought quickly.

"Quick!" he told her in the least of whispers. "Leave by the

window you opened and wait for me by the motor-car."

"No!"

There was no time to remonstrate with her. Already he had slipped away, shaping a course for the entrance to the passage. But the dominant thought in his mind was that at all costs the girl must be spared the exposure. She was to be saved, whatever the hazard. Afterwards....

The tapestry rustled, but he was yet too far distant to spring. He crept on with the crouching, vicious attitude, mental and physical, of a panther stalking its prey....

Like a thunderclap from a clear sky the glare of the light broke out from the ceiling. Maitland paused, transfixed, on tiptoe, eyes incredulous, brain striving to grapple with the astounding discovery that had come to him.

The third factor stood in the doorway, slender and tall, in evening dress,--as was Maitland,--a light, full overcoat hanging open from his shoulders; one hand holding back the curtain, the other arrested on the light switch. His lips dropped open and his eyes, too, were protruding with amazement. Feature for feature he was the counterpart of the man before him; in a word, here was the real Anisty.

The wonder of it all saved the day for Maitland; Anisty's astonishment was sincere and the more complete in that, unlike Maitland, he had been unprepared to find any one in the library.

For a mere second his gaze left Maitland and traveled on to the girl, then to the rifled safe--taking in the whole significance of the scene. When he spoke, it was as if dazed.

"By God!" he cried--or, rather, the syllables seemed to jump from his lips like bullets from a gun.

The words shattered the tableau. On their echo Maitland sprang and fastened his fingers around the other's throat. Carried off his feet by the sheer ferocity of the assault, Anisty gave ground a little. For an instant they were swaying back and forth, with advantage to neither. Then the burglar's collar slipped and somehow tore from its stud, giving Maitland's hands freer play. His grasp tightened about the man's gullet; he shook him mercilessly. Anisty staggered, gasping, reeled, struck Maitland once or twice upon the chest,--feeble, weightless elbow-jabs that went for nothing, then concentrated his energies in a vain attempt to wrench the hands from his throat. Reeling, tearing at Maitland's wrists, face empurpling, eyes staring in agony, he stumbled. Mercilessly Maitland forced him to his knees and bullied him across the floor toward the nearest lounge--with premeditated design; finally succeeding in throwing him flat; and knelt upon

his chest, retaining his grip but refraining from throttling him.

As it was, all strength and thought of resistance had been choked out of Anisty. He lay at length, gasping painfully.

Maitland glanced over his shoulders and saw the girl moving forward, apparently making for the switch.

"No!" he cried, peremptory. "Don't turn off the light--please!"

"But--" she doubted.

"Let me have those curtain cords, if you please," he requested shortly.

She followed his gaze to the windows, interpreted his wishes, and was very quick to carry them out. In a trice she was offering him half a dozen of the heavy, twisted silk cords that had been used to loop back the curtains.

Soft yet strong, they were excellently well adapted to Maitland's needs. Unceremoniously he swung his captive over on his side, bringing his neck and ankles in juxtaposition to the legs of that substantial piece of furniture, the lounge.

His hands the first to be secured, and tightly, behind his back, Anisty lay helpless, glaring vindictively the while gradually he recovered consciousness and strength. Maitland cared little for his evil glances; he was busy. The burglar's ankles were next bound together and to the lounge leg; and, an instant later, a brace of half-hitches about the man's neck and the nearest support entirely eliminated him as a possible factor in subsequent events.

"Those loops around your throat," Maitland warned him curtly, "are loose enough now, but if you struggle they'll tighten and strangle you. Understand?"

Anisty nodded, making an incoherent sound with his swollen tongue. At which Maitland frowned, smitten thoughtful with a new consideration.

"You mustn't talk, you know," he mused half aloud; and, whipping forth a handkerchief, gagged Mr. Anisty.

After which, breathing hard and in a maze of perplexity, he got to his feet. Already his hearing, quickened by the emergency, had apprised him of the situation's imminent hazards. It needed not the girl's hurried whisper, "_The servants_!" to warn him of their danger. From the rear wing of the mansion the sounds of hurrying feet were distinctly audible, as, presently, were the heavy, excited voices of men and the more shrill and frightened cries of women.

Heedless of her displeasure, Maitland seized the girl by the arm and urged her over to the open Window. "Don't hang back!" he told her nervously. "You must get out of this before they see you. Do as I tell you, please, and we'll save ourselves yet! If we both make a run for it, we're lost. Don't you understand?"

"No. Why?" she demanded, reluctant, spirited, obstinate--and lovely in his eyes.

"If he were anybody else," Maitland indicated, with a jerk of his head toward the burglar. "But didn't you see? He must be Maitland--and he's my double. I'll stay, brazen it out, then, as soon as possible, make my escape and join you by the gate. Your motor's there--what? Be ready for me...."

But she had grasped his intention and was suddenly become pliant to his will. "You're wonderful!" she told him with a little low laugh; and was gone, silently as a spirit.

The curtains fell behind her in long, straight folds; Maitland stilled their swaying with a touch, and stepped back into the room. For a moment he caught the eye of the fellow on the floor; and it was upturned to his, sardonically intelligent. But the lord of the manor had little time to debate consequences.

Abruptly the door was flung wide and a short stout man, clutching up his trousers with a frantic hand, burst into the library, brandishing overhead a rampant revolver.

"Ands hup!" he cried, leveling at Maitland. And then, with a fallen countenance; "G-r-r-reat 'eavins, sir! _You_, Mister Maitland, sir!"

"Ah, Higgins," his employer greeted the butler blandly.

Higgins pulled up, thunderstruck, panting and perspiring with agitation. His fat cheeks quivered like the wattles of a gobbler, and his eyes bulged as, by degrees, he became alive to the situation.

Maitland began to explain, forestalling the embarrassments of cross-examination.

"By the merest accident, Higgins, I was passing in my car with a party of friends. Just for a joke I thought I'd steal up to the house and see how you were behaving yourselves. By chance--again-- I happened to see this light through the library windows." And Maitland, putting an incautious hand upon the bull's-eye on the desk, withdrew it instantly, with an exclamation of annoyance and four scorched fingers.

"He's been at the safe," he added quickly, diverting attention from himself. "I was just in time."

"My wor-r-rd!" said Higgins, with emotion. Then quickly: "Did 'e get anythin', do you think, sir?"

Maitland shook his head, scowling over the butler's burly shoulders at the rapidly augmenting concourse of servants in the hallway--lackeys, grooms, maids, cooks, and what-not; a background of pale, scared faces to the tableau in the library. "This won't do," considered Maitland. "Get back, all of you!" he ordered sternly, indicating the group with a dominant and inflexible forefinger. "Those who are wanted will be sent for. Now go! Higgins, you may stay."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. But wot an 'orrid 'appenin', sir, if you'll permit me--"

"I won't. Be quiet and listen. This man is Anisty--Handsome Dan Anisty, the notorious jewel thief, wanted badly by the police of a dozen cities. You understand?... I'm going now to motor to the village and get the constables; I may," he invented desperately, "be delayed--may have to get a detective from Brooklyn. If this scoundrel stirs, don't touch him. Let him alone--he can't escape if you do. Above all things, don't you dare to remove that gag!"

"Most cert'inly, sir. I shall bear in mind wot you says----"

"You'd best," grimly. "Now I'm off. No; I don't want any attendance--I know my way. And--don't--touch--that--man--till I return."

"Very good, sir."

Maitland stepped over to the safe, glanced within, cursorily, replaced a bundle of papers which he did not recall disturbing, closed the door and twirled the combination.

"Nothing gone," he announced. An inarticulate gurgle from the prostrate man drew a black scowl from Maitland. Recovering, "Good morning," he said politely to the butler, and striding out of the house by the front door, was careful to slam that behind him, ere darting into the shadows.

The moon was down, the sky a cold, opaque grey, overcast with a light drift of cloud. The park seemed very dark, very dreary; a searching breeze was sweeping inland from the Sound, souging sadly in the tree-tops; a chill humidity permeated the air, precursor of rain. The young man shivered, both with chill and reaction from the tension of the emergency just past.

He was aware of an instantaneous loss of heart, a subsidence of the elation which had upheld him throughout the adventure; and to escape this, to forget or overcome it, took immediately to his heels, scampering madly for the road, oppressed with fear lest he

should find the girl gone--with the jewels.

That she should prove untrue, faithless, lacking even that honor which proverbially obtains in the society of criminals--a consideration of such a possibility was intolerable, as much so as the suspense of ignorance. He could not, would not, believe her capable of ingratitude so rank; and fought fiercely, unreasoningly, against the conviction that she would have followed her thievish instincts and made off with the booty.... A judgment meet and right upon him, for his madness!

Heart in mouth, he reached the gates, passing through without discovering her, and was struck dumb and witless with relief when she stepped quietly from the shadows of a low branching tree, offering him a guiding hand.

"Come," she said quietly. "This way."

Without being exactly conscious of what he was about he caught the hand in both his own. "Then," he exulted almost passionately,-- "then you didn't----"

His voice choked in his throat. Her face, momentarily upturned to his, gleamed pale and weary in the dreary light; the face of a tired child, troubled, saddened; yet with eyes inexpressibly sweet. She turned away, tugging at her hand.

"You doubted me, after all!" she commented, a trifle bitterly.

"I--no! You misunderstand me. Believe me, I----"

"Ah, don't protest. What does it make or mar, whether or not you trusted me?... You have," she added quietly, "the jewels safe enough, I suppose?"

He stopped short, aghast. "!! The jewels!"

"I slipped them in your coat pocket before----"

Instantly her hand was free, Maitland ramming both his own into the side pockets of his top-coat. "They're safe!"

She smiled uncertainly.

"We have no time," said she. "Can you drive--?"

They were standing by the side of her car, which had been cunningly hidden in the gloom beneath a spreading tree on the further side of the road. Maitland, crestfallen, offered his hand; the tips of her fingers touched his palm lightly as she jumped in. He hesitated at the step.

"You wish me to?"

She laughed lightly. "Most assuredly. You may assure yourself that I shan't try to elude you again----"

"I would I might be sure of that," he said, steadying his voice and seeking her eyes.

"Procrastination won't make it any more assured."

He stepped up and settled himself in the driver's seat, grasping throttle and steering-wheel; the great machine thrilled to his touch like a live thing, then began slowly to back out into the road. For an instant it seemed to hang palpitant on dead center, then shot out like a hound unleashed, *_ventre-a-terre_*,-- Brooklyn miles away over the hood.

It seemed but a minute ere they were thundering over the Myannis bridge. A little further on Maitland slowed down and, jumping out, lighted the lamps. In the seat again,--no words had passed,--he threw in the high-speed clutch, and the world flung behind them, roaring. Thereafter, breathless, stunned by the frenzy of speed, perforce silent, they bored on through the night, crashing along deserted highways.

In the east a band of pallid light lifted up out of the night, and the horizon took shape against it, stark and black. Slowly, stealthily, the formless dawn dusk spread over the sleeping world; to the zenith the light-smitten stars reeled and died, and houses, fields, and thoroughfares lay a-glimmer with ghostly twilight as the car tore headlong through the grim, unlovely, silent hinterland of Long Island City.

The gates of the ferry-house were inexorably shut against them when at last Maitland brought the big machine to a tremulous and panting halt, like that of an over-driven thoroughbred. And though they perforce endured a wait of fully fifteen minutes, neither found aught worth saying; or else the words wherewith fitly to clothe their thoughts were denied them. The girl seemed very weary, and sat with head drooping and hands clasped idly in her lap. To Maitland's hesitant query as to her comfort she returned a monosyllabic reassurance. He did not again venture to disturb her; on his own part he was conscious of a clogging sense of exhaustion, of a drawn and haggard feeling about the eyes and temples; and knew that he was keeping awake through main power of will alone, his brain working automatically, his being already a-doze.

The fresh wind off the sullen river served in some measure to revive them, once the gates were opened and the car had taken a place on the ferry-boat's forward extreme. Day was now full upon the world; above a horizon belted with bright magenta, the cloudless sky was soft turquoise and sapphire; and abruptly, while the big unwieldy boat surged across the narrow ribbon of green

water, the sun shot up with a shout and turned to an evanescent dream of fairy-land the gaunt, rock-ribbed profile of Manhattan Island, bulking above them in tier upon tier of monstrous buildings.

On the Manhattan side, in deference to the girl's low-spoken wish, Maitland ran the machine up to Second Avenue, turned north, and brought it to a stop by the curb, a little north of Thirty-fifth Street.

"And now whither?" he inquired, hands somewhat impatiently ready upon the driving and steering-gear.

The girl smiled faintly through her veil. "You have been most kind," she told him in a tired voice. "Thank you--from my heart, Mr. Anisty," and made a move as if to relieve him of his charge.

"Is that all?" he demanded blankly.

"Can I say more?"

"I ... I am to go no further with you?" Sick with disappointment, he rose and dropped to the sidewalk--anticipating her affirmative answer.

"If you would please me," said the girl, "you won't insist...."

"I don't," he returned ruefully. "But are you quite sure that you're all right now?"

"Quite, thank you, dear Mr. Anisty!" With a pretty gesture of conquering impulse she swept her veil aside, and the warm rose-glow of the new-born day tinted her wan young cheeks with color. And her eyes were as stars, bright with a mist of emotion, brimming with gratitude--and something else. He could not say what; but one thing he knew, and that was that she was worn with excitement and fatigue, near to the point of breaking down.

"You're tired," he insisted, solicitous. "Can't you let me----?"

"I am tired," she admitted wistfully, voice subdued, yet rich and vibrant. "No, please. Please let me go. Don't ask me any questions--now."

"Only one," he made supplication. "I've done nothing----"

"Nothing but be more kind than I can say!"

"And you're not going to back out of our partnership?"

"Oh!" And now the color in her cheeks was warmer than that which the dawn had lent them. "No ... I shan't back out." And she smiled.

"And if I call a meeting of the board of management of Anisty and Wentworth, Limited, you will promise to attend?"

"Ye-es...."

"Will it be too early if I call one for to-day?"

"Why...."

"Say at two o'clock this afternoon, at Eugene's. You know the place?"

"I have lunched there----"

"Then you shall again to-day. You won't disappoint me?"

"I will be there. I ... I shall be glad to come. Now--
please!"

"You've promised. Don't forget."

He stepped back and stood in a sort of dreamy daze, while, with one final wonderful smile at parting, the girl assumed control of the machine and swung it out from the curb. Maitland watched it forge slowly up the Avenue and vanish round the Thirty-sixth Street corner; then turned his face southward, sighing with weariness and discontent.

At Thirty-fourth Street a policeman, lounging beneath the corrugated iron awning of a corner saloon, faced about with a low whistle, to stare after him. Maitland experienced a chill sense of criminal guilt; he was painfully conscious of those two shrewd eyes, boring gimlet-like into his back, overlooking no detail of the wreck of his evening clothes. Involuntarily he glanced down at his legs, and they moved mechanically beneath the edge of his overcoat, like twin animated columns of mud and dust, openly advertising his misadventures. He felt in his soul that they shrieked aloud, that they would presently succeed in dinning all the town awake, so that the startled populace would come to the windows to stare in wonder as he passed by. And inwardly he groaned and quaked.

As for the policeman, after some reluctant hesitation, he overcame the inherent indisposition to exertion that affects his kind, and, swinging his stick, stalked after Maitland.

Happily (and with heartfelt thanksgiving) the young man chanced upon a somnolent and bedraggled hack, at rest in the stenciled shadows of the Third Avenue elevated structure. Its pilot was snoring lustily the sleep of the belated, on the box. With some difficulty he was awakened, and Maitland dodged into the musty, dusty body of the vehicle, grateful to escape the unprejudiced

stare of the guardian of the peace, who in another moment would have overtaken him and, doubtless, subjected him to embarrassing inquisition.

As the ancient four-wheeler rattled noisily over the cobbles, some of the shops were taking down their shutters, the surface cars were beginning to run with increasing frequency, and the sidewalks were becoming sparsely populated. Familiar as the sights were, they were yet somehow strangely unreal to the young man. In a night the face of the world had changed for him; its features loomed weirdly blurred and contorted through the mystical grey-gold atmosphere of the land of Romance, wherein he really lived and moved and had his being. The blatant day was altogether preposterous: to-day was a dream, something nightmarish; last night he had been awake, last night for the first time in twenty-odd years of existence he had lived....

He slipped unthinkingly one hand into his coat pocket, seeking instinctively his cigarette case; and his fingers brushed the coarse-grained surface of a canvas bag. He jumped as if electrified. He had managed altogether to forget them, yet in his keeping were the jewels, Maitland heirlooms--the swag and booty, the loot and plunder of the night's adventure. And he smiled happily to think that his interest in them was Fifty-percent depreciated in twenty-four hours; now he owned only half....

Suddenly he sat up, with happy eyes and a glowing face. She had trusted him!

V.

INCOGNITO

At noon, precisely, Maitland stirred between the sheets for the first time since he had thrown himself into his bed--stirred, and, confused by whatever alarm had awakened him, yawned stupendously, and sat up, rubbing clenched fists in his eyes to clear them of sleep's cobwebs. Then he bent forward, clasping his knees, smiled largely, replaced the smile with a thoughtful frown, and in such wise contemplated the foot of the bed for several minutes,--his first conscious impression, that he had something delightful to look forward to yielding to a vague recollection of a prolonged shrill tintinnabulation--as if the telephone bell in the front room had been ringing for some time.

But he waited in vain for a repetition of the sound, and eventually concluded that he had been mistaken; it had been an echo from his dreams, most likely.

Besides, who should call him up? Not two people knew that he was in town:

not even O'Hagan was aware that he had returned to his rooms that morning.

He gaped again, stretching wide his arms, sat up on the edge of the bed, and heard the clock strike twelve.

Noon and.... He had an engagement at two! He brightened at the memory and, jumping up, pressed an electric call-button on the wall. By the time he had paddled barefoot to the bath-room and turned on the cold-water tap, O'Hagan's knock summoned him to the hall door.

"Back again, O'Hagan; and in a desperate rush. I'll want you to shave me and send some telegrams, please. Must be off by one-thirty. You may get out my grey-striped flannels"--here he paused, calculating his costume with careful discrimination,--"and a black-striped negligee shirt; grey socks; russet low shoes; black and white check tie--broad wings. You know where to find them all?"

"Shure yiss, sor."

O'Hagan showed no evidence of surprise; the eccentricities of Mr. Maitland could not move him, who was inured to them through long association and observation. He moved away to execute his instructions, quietly efficient. By the time Maitland had finished splashing and gasping in the bath-tub, everything was ready for the ceremony of dressing.

In other words, twenty minutes later Maitland, bathed, shaved, but still in dressing-gown and slippers, was seated at his desk, a cup of black coffee steaming at his elbow, a number of yellow telegraph blanks before him, a pen poised between his fingers.

It was in his mind to send a wire to Cressy, apologizing for his desertion of the night just gone, and announcing his intention to rejoin the party from which the motor trip to New York had been as planned but a temporary defection, in time for dinner that same evening. He nibbled the end of the pen-holder, selecting phrases, then looked up at the attentive O'Hagan.

"Bring me a New Haven time-table, please," he began, "and--"

The door-bell abrupted his words, clamoring shrilly.

"What the deuce?" he demanded. "Who can that be? Answer it, will you, O'Hagan?"

He put down the pen, swallowed his coffee, and lit a cigarette, listening to the murmurs at the hall door. An instant later, O'Hagan returned, bearing a slip of white pasteboard which he deposited on the desk before Maitland.

"James Bursleson Snaith," Maitland read aloud from the faultlessly engraved card. "I don't know him. What does he want?"

"Wouldn't say, sor; seemed surprised whin I towld him ye were in, an' said he was glad to hear it--business pressin', says he."

"Snaith'? But I never heard the name before. What does he look like?"

"A gentleman, sor, be th' clothes av him an' th' way he talks."

"Well.... Devil take the man! Show him in."

"Very good, sor."

Maitland swung around in his desk chair, his back to the window, expression politely curious, as his caller entered the room, pausing, hat in hand, just across the threshold.

He proved to be a man apparently of middle age, of height approximating Maitland's; his shoulders were slightly rounded as if from habitual bending over a desk, his pose mild and deferential. By his eyeglasses and peering look, he was near-sighted; by his dress, a gentleman of taste and judgment as well as of means to gratify both. A certain jaunty and summery touch in his attire suggested a person of leisure who had just run down from his country place, for a day in town.

His voice, when he spoke, did nothing to dispel the illusion.

"Mr. Maitland?" he opened the conversation briskly. "I trust I do not intrude? I shall be brief as possible, if you will favor me with a private interview."

Maitland remarked a voice well modulated and a good choice of words. He rose courteously.

"I should be pleased to do so," he suggested, "if you could advance any reasons for such a request."

Mr. Snaith smiled discreetly, fumbling in his side pocket. A second slip of cardboard appeared between his fingers as he stepped over toward Maitland.

"If I had not feared it might deprive me of this interview, I should have sent in my business card at once," he said. "Permit me."

Maitland accepted the card and elevated his brows. "Oh!" he said, putting it down, his manner becoming perceptibly less cordial. "I say, O'Hagan."

"Yessor?"

"I shall be busy for--Will half an hour satisfy you, Mr. Snaith?"

"You are most kind," the stranger bowed.

"In half an hour, O'Hagan, you may return."

"Very good, sor." And the hall door closed.

"So," said Maitland, turning to face the man squarely, "you are from Police

Headquarters?"

"As you see." Mr. Snaith motioned delicately toward his business card--as he called it.

"Well?"--after a moment's pause.

"I am a detective, you understand."

"Perfectly," Maitland assented, unmoved.

His caller seemed partly amused, partly--but very slightly--embarrassed. "I have been assigned to cover the affair of last night," he continued blandly. "I presume you have no objection to giving me what information you may possess."

"Credentials?"

The man's amusement was made visible in a fugitive smile, half-hidden by his small and neatly trimmed mustache. Mutely eloquent, he turned back the lapel of his coat, exposing a small shield; at which Maitland glanced casually.

"Very well," he consented, bored but resigned. "Fire ahead, but make it as brief as you can; I've an engagement in"--glancing at the clock--"an hour, and must dress."

"I'll detain you no longer than is essential.... Of course you understand how keen we are after this man, Anisty."

"What puzzles me," Maitland interrupted, "is how you got wind of the affair so soon."

"Then you have not heard?" Mr. Snaith exhibited polite surprise.

"I am just out of bed."

"Anisty escaped shortly after you left Maitland Manor."

"Ah!"

Mr. Snaith knitted his brows, evidently at a loss whether to ascribe Maitland's exclamation as due to surprise, regret, or relief. Which pleased Maitland, who had been at pains to make his tone noncommittal. In point of fact he was neither surprised nor regretful.

"Thunder!" he continued slowly. "I forgot to 'phone Higgins."

"That is why I called. Your butler did not know where you could be found. You had left in great haste, promising to send constables; you failed to do so; Higgins got no word. In the course of an hour or so his charge began to choke,--or pretended to. Higgins became alarmed and removed the gag. Anisty lay quiet until his face resumed its normal color and then began to

abuse Higgins for a thick-headed idiot."

Mr. Snaith interrupted himself to chuckle lightly.

"You noticed a resemblance?" he resumed.

Maitland, too, was smiling. "Something of the sort."

"It is really remarkable, if you will permit me to say so." Snaith was studying his host's face intently. "Higgins, poor fellow, had his faith shaken to the foundations. This Anisty must be a clever actor as well as a master burglar. Having cursed Higgins root and branch, he got his second wind and explained that he was--Mr. Maitland! Conceive Higgins' position. What could he do?"

"What he did, I gather."

"Precisely."

"And Anisty?"

"Once loosed, he knocked Higgins over with the butt of a revolver, jumped out of the window, and vanished. By the time the butler got his senses back, Anisty, presumably, was miles away ... Mr. Maitland!" said Snaith sharply.

"Yes?" responded Maitland, elevating his brows, refusing to be startled.

"Why," crisply, "didn't you send the constables from Greenfields, according to your promise?"

Maitland laughed uneasily and looked down, visibly embarrassed, acting with consummate address, playing the game for all he was worth; and enjoying it hugely.

"Why.... I.... Really, Mr. Snaith, I must confess--"

"A confession would aid us materially," dryly. "The case is perplexing. You round up a burglar sought by the police of two continents, and listlessly permit his escape. Why?"

"I would rather not be pressed," said Maitland with evident candor; "but, since you say it is imperative, that you must know--" Snaith inclined his head affirmatively. "Why ... to tell the truth, I was a bit under the weather last night: out with a party of friends, you know. Dare say we all had a bit more than we could carry. The capture was purely accidental; we had other plans for the night and--well," laughing shortly, "I didn't give the matter too much thought, beyond believing that Higgins would hold the man tight."

"I see. It is unfortunate, but ... you motored back to town."

It was not a question, but Maitland so considered it.

"We did," he admitted.

"And came here directly?"

"_I_ did."

"Mr. Maitland, why not be frank with me? My sole object is to capture a notorious burglar. I have no desire to meddle with your private affairs, but.... You may trust in my discretion. Who was the young lady?"

"To conceal her identity," said Maitland, undisturbed, "is precisely why I have been lying to you."

"You refuse us that information?"

"Absolutely. I have no choice in the matter. You must see that."

Snaith shook his head, baffled, infinitely perturbed, to Maitland's hidden delight.

"Of course," said he, "the policeman at the ferry recognized me?"

"You are well known to him," admitted Snaith. "But that is a side issue. What puzzles me is why you let Anisty escape. It is inconceivable."

"From a police point of view."

"From any point of view," said Snaith obstinately. "The man breaks into your house, steals your jewels--"

"This is getting tiresome," Maitland interrupted curtly. "Is it possible that you suspect me of conniving at the theft of my own property?"

Snaith's eyes were keen upon him. "Stranger things have been known. And yet--the motive is lacking. You are not financially embarrassed,--so far as we can determine, at least."

Maitland politely interposed his fingers between his yawn and the detective's intent regard. "You have ten minutes more, I'm sorry to say," he said; glancing at the clock.

"And there is another point, more significant yet."

"Ah?"

"Yes." Snaith bent forward, elbows on knees, hat and cane swinging, eyes implacable, hard, relentless. "Anisty," he said slowly, "left a tolerably complete burglar's kit in your library."

"Well--he's a burglar, isn't he?"

"Not that kind." Snaith shook his head.

"But his departure was somewhat hurried. I can conceive that he might abandon his kit--"

"But it was not his."

"Not Anisty's?"

"Anisty does not depend on such antiquated methods, Mr. Maitland; save that in extreme instances, with a particularly stubborn safe, he employs a high explosive that, so far as we can find out, is practically noiseless. Its nature is a mystery.... But such old-fashioned strong-boxes as yours at Greenfields he opens by ear, so to speak,--listens to the combination. He was once an expert, reputedly employed by a prominent firm of safe manufacturers, in whose service he gained the skill that has made him--what he is."

"But,--Maitland cast about at random, feeling himself cornered,--"may he not have had accomplices?"

"He's no such fool. Unless he has gone mad, he worked alone. I presume you discovered no accomplice?"

"I? The devil, no!"

Snaith smiled mysteriously, then fell thoughtful, pondering.

"You are an enigma," he said, at length. "I can not understand why you refuse us all information, when I consider that the jewels were yours--"

"Are mine," Maitland corrected.

"No longer."

"I beg your pardon; I have them."

Snaith shook his head, smiling incredulously. Maitland flushed with annoyance and resentment, then on impulse rose and strode into the adjoining bedroom, returning with a small canvas bag.

"You shall see for yourself," he said, depositing the bag on the desk and fumbling with the draw-string. "If you will be kind enough to step over here--"

Mr. Snaith, still unconvinced, hesitated, then assented, halting a brief distance from Maitland and toying abstractedly with his cane while the young man plucked at the draw-string.

"Deuced tight knot, this," commented Maitland, annoyed.

"No matter. Don't trouble, please. I'm quite satisfied, believe me."

"Oh, you are!"

Maitland turned; and in the act of turning, the loaded head of the cane landed with crushing force upon his temple.

For an instant he stood swaying, eyes closed, face robbed of every vestige of color, deep lines of agony graven in his forehead and about his mouth; then fell like a lifeless thing, limp and invertebrate.

The _soi-disant_ Mr. Snaith caught him and let him gently and without sound to the floor.

"Poor fool!" he commented, kneeling to make a hasty examination. "Hope I haven't done for him.... It would be the first time.... Bad precedent!... So! He's all right--conscious within an hour.... Too soon!" he added, standing and looking down. "Well, turn about's fair play."

He swung on his heel and entered the hallway, pausing at the door long enough to shoot the bolt; then passed hastily through the other chambers, searching, to judge by his manner.

In the end a closed door attracted him; he jerked it open, with an exclamation of relief. It gave upon a large bare room, used by Maitland as a trunk-closet. Here were stout leather straps and cords in ample measure. "Mr. Snaith" selected one from them quickly but with care, choosing the strongest.

In two more minutes, Maitland, trussed, gagged, still unconscious, and breathing heavily, occupied a divan in his smoking-room, while his assailant, in the bedroom, ears keen to catch the least sound from with-out, was rapidly and cheerfully arraying himself in the Maitland grey-striped flannels and accessories--even to the grey socks which had been specified.

"The less chances one takes, the better," soliloquized "Mr. Snaith."

He stood erect, in another man's shoes, squaring back his shoulders, discarding the disguising stoop, and confronted his image in a pier-glass.

"Good enough Maitland," he commented, with a little satisfied nod to his counterfeit presentment. "But we'll make it better still."

A single quick jerk denuded his upper lip; he stowed the mustache carefully away in his breast pocket. The moistened corner of a towel made quick work of the crow's-feet about his eyes, and, simultaneously, robbed him of a dozen apparent years. A pair of yellow chamois gloves, placed conveniently on a dressing table, covered hands that no art could make resemble Maitland's. And it was Daniel Maitland who studied himself in the pier-glass.

Contented, the criminal returned to the smoking-room. A single glance assured him that his victim was still dead to the world. He sat down at the desk, drew off the gloves, and opened the bag; a peep within which was enough. With a deep and slow intake of breath he knotted the draw-string

and dropped the bag into his pocket. A jeweled cigarette case of unique design shared the same fate.

Quick eyes roaming the desk observed the telegram form upon which Maitland had written Cressy's name and address. Momentarily perplexed, the thief pondered this; then, with a laughing oath, seized the pen and scribbled, with no attempt to imitate the other's handwriting, a message:

"Regret unavoidable detention. Letter of explanation follows.""

To this Maitland's name was signed. "That ought to clear him neatly, if I understand the emergency."

The thief rose, folding the telegraph blank, and returned to the bedroom, taking up his hat and the murderous cane as he went. Here he gathered together all the articles of clothing that he had discarded, conveying the mass to the trunk-room, where an empty and unlocked kit-bag received it all.

"That, I think, is about all."

He was very methodical, this criminal, this Anisty. Nothing essential escaped him. He rejoiced in the minutiae of detail that went to cover up his tracks so thoroughly that his campaigns were as remarkable for the clues he did leave with malicious design, as for those that he didn't.

One final thing held his attention: a bowl of hammered brass, inverted beneath a ponderous book, upon the desk. Why? In a twinkling he had removed both and was studying the impression of a woman's hand in the dust, and nodding over it.

"That girl," deduced Anisty. "Novice, poor little fool!--or she wouldn't have wasted time searching here for the jewels. Good looker, though--from what little _he_"--with a glance at Maitland--"gave me a chance to see of her. Seems to have snared him, all right, if she did miss the haul.... Little idiot! What right has a woman in this business, anyway? Well, here's one thing that will never land me in the pen."

As, with nice care, he replaced both bowl and book, a door slammed below stairs took him to the hall in an instant. Maitland's Panama was hanging on the hat-rack, Maitland's collection of walking-sticks bristled in a stand beneath it. Anisty appropriated the former and chose one of the latter. "Fair exchange," he considered with a harsh laugh. "After all, he loses nothing ... but the jewels."

He was out and at the foot of the stairs just as O'Hagan reached the ground floor from the basement.

"Ah, O'Hagan!" The assumption of Maitland's ironic drawl was impeccable. O'Hagan no more questioned it than he questioned his own sanity. "Here, send this wire at once, please; and," pressing a coin into the ready palm, "keep the change. I was hurried and didn't bother to call you. And, I say, O'Hagan!" from the outer door:

"Yissor."

"If that fellow Snaith ever calls again, I'm not at home."

"Very good, sor."

Anisty permitted himself the slightest of smiles, pausing on the stoop to draw on the chamois gloves. As he did so his eye flickered disinterestedly over the personality of a man standing on the opposite walk and staring at the apartment house. He was a short man, of stoutish habit, sloppily dressed, with a derby pulled down over one eye, a cigar-butt protruding arrogantly from beneath a heavy black mustache, beefy cheeks, and thick-soled boots dully polished.

At sight of him the thief was conscious of an inward tremor, followed by a thrill of excitement like a wave of heat sweeping through his being. Instantaneously his eyes flashed; then were dulled. Imperturbable, listless, hall-marked the prey of ennui, he waited, undecided, upon the stoop, while the watcher opposite, catching sight of him, abruptly abandoned his slouch and hastened across the street.

"Excuse me" he began in a loud tone, while yet a dozen feet away, "but ain't this Mr. Maitland?"

Anisty lifted his brows and shoulders at one and the same time and bowed slightly.

"Well, my good man?"

"I'm a detective from Headquarters, Mr. Maitland. We got a 'phone from Greenfields, Long Island, this morning--from the local police. Your butler----"

"Ah! I see; about this man Anisty? You don't mean to tell me--what? I shall discharge Higgins at once. Just on my way to breakfast. Won't you join me? We can talk this matter over at our leisure. What do you say to Eugene's? It's handy, and I dare say we can find a quiet corner. By the way, have you the time concealed about your person?"

Anisty was fumbling in his fob-pocket and inwardly cursing himself for having been such an ass as to overlook Maitland's timepiece. "Deuced awkward!" he muttered in genuine annoyance. "I've mislaid my watch."

"It's 'most one o'clock, Mr. Maitland."

Flattered, the man from Headquarters dropped, into step by the burglar's side.

EUGENE'S AT TWO

"Since we don't want to be overheard," remarked Mr. Anisty, "it's no use trying the grill-room down-stairs, although I admit it is more interesting."

"Just as yeh say, sir."

Awed and awkward, the police detective stumbled up the steps behind his imperturbable guide; it was a great honor, in his eyes, to lunch in company with a "swell." Man of stodgy common-sense and limited education that he was, the glamour of the Maitland millions obscured his otherwise clear vision completely. And uneasily he speculated as to whether or not he would be able to manipulate correctly the usual display of knives and forks.

An obsequious head-waiter greeted them, bowing, in the lobby. "Good afternoon, Mr. Maitland," he murmured. "Table for two?"

"Good afternoon," responded the masquerader, with an assumed abstraction, inwardly congratulating himself upon having hit upon a restaurant where the real Maitland was evidently known. There were few circumstances which he could not turn to profit, fewer emergencies to which he could not rise, he complimented Handsome Dan Anisty.

"A table for two," he drawled Maitland-wise, "In a corner somewhere, away from the crowd, you know."

"This way, if you please, Mr. Maitland."

"By the way," suggested the burglar, unfolding his serviette and glancing keenly about the room,--which, by good chance, was thinly populated, "by the way, you know, you haven't told me your name yet."

"Hickey--John W. Hickey, Detective Bureau."

"Thank you." A languid hand pushed the pink menu card across the table to Mr. Hickey. "And what do you see that you'd like?"

"Well..." Hickey became conscious that both unwieldy feet were nervously twined about the legs of his chair; blushed; disentangled them; and in an attempt to cover his confusion, plunged madly into consideration of a column of table-d'hote French, not one word of which conveyed the slightest particle of information to his intelligence.

"Well," he repeated, and moistened his lips. The room seemed suddenly very hot, notwithstanding the fact that an obnoxious electric fan was sending a current of cool air down the back of his neck.

"I ain't," he declared in ultimate desperation, "hungry, much. Had a bite a little while back, over to the Gilsey House bar."

"Would a little drink----?"

"Thanks. I don't mind."

"Waiter, bring Mr. Hickey a bottle of Number Seventy-two. For me--let me see--_cafe au lait_, " with a grand air, "and rolls.... You must remember this is my breakfast, Mr. Hickey. I make it a rule never to drink anything for six hours after rising." Anisty selected a cigarette from the Maitland case, lit it, and contemplated the detective's countenance with a winning smile. "Now, as to this Anisty affair last night...."

Under the stimulus of the champagne, to say naught of his relief at having evaded the ordeal of the cutlery, Hickey discoursed variously and at length upon the engrossing subject of Anisty, gentleman-cracksman, while the genial counterpart of Daniel Maitland listened with apparent but deceptive apathy, and had much ado to keep from laughing in his guest's face as the latter, perspiringly earnest, unfolded his plans for laying the burglar by the heels.

From time to time, and at intervals steadily decreasing, the hand of the host sought the neck of the bottle, inclining it carefully above the thin-stemmed glass that Hickey kept in almost constant motion. And the detective's fatuous loquacity flowed as the contents of the bottle ebbed.

Yet, as the minutes wore on, the burglar began to be conscious that it was but a shallow well of information and amusement that he pumped. The game, fascinating with its spice of daring as it had primarily been, began to pall. At length the masquerader calculated the hour as ripe for what he had contemplated from the beginning; and interrupted Hickey with scant consideration, in the middle of a most interesting exposition.

"You'll pardon me, I'm sure, if I trouble you again for the time."

The fat red fingers sought uncertainly for the timepiece: the bottle was now empty. The hour, as announced, was ten minutes to two.

"I've an engagement," invented Anisty plausibly, "with a friend at two. If you'll excuse me----? _Garcon, l'addition!_"

"Then I und'stand, Mister Maitland, we e'n count on yeh?"

Anisty, eyelids drooping, tipped back his chair a trifle and regarded Hickey with a fair imitation of the whimsical Maitland smile. "Hardly, I think."

"Why not?"--truculently.

"To be frank with you, I have three excellent reasons. The first should be sufficient: I'm too lazy."

Disgruntled, Hickey stared and shook a disapproving head. "I was afraid of that; yeh swells don't never seem to think nothin' of yer duties to soci'ty."

Anisty airily waved the indictment aside. "Moreover, I have lost nothing. You see, I happened in just at the right moment; our criminal friend got nothing for his pains. The jewels are safe. Reason Number Two: Having retained my property, I hold no grudge against Anisty."

"Well--I dunno--"

"And as for reason Number Three: I don't care to have this affair advertised. If the papers get hold of it they'll cook up a lot of silly details that'll excite the cupidity of every thief in the country, and make me more trouble than I care to--ah--contemplate."

Hickey's eyes glistened. "Of course, if yeh want it kept quiet--" he suggested significantly.

Anisty's hand sought his pocket. "How much?"

"Well, I guess I can leave that to you. Yeh oughttuh know how bad yeh want the matter hushed."

"As I calculate it, then, fifty ought to be enough for the boys; and fifty will repay you for your trouble."

The end of Hickey's expensive panetela was tilted independently toward the ceiling. "Shouldn't wonder if it would," he murmured, gratified.

Anisty stuffed something bulky back into his pocket and wadded another something--green and yellow colored--into a little pill, which he presently flicked carelessly across the table. The detective's large mottled paw closed over it and moved toward his waistcoat.

"As I was sayin'," he resumed, "I'm sorry yeh don't see yer way to givin' us a hand. But p'rhaps yeh're right. Still, if the citizens'd only give us a hand onct in a while----"

"Ah, but what gives you your living, Hickey?" argued the amateur sophist. "What but the activities of the criminal element? If society combined with you for the elimination of crime, what would become of your job?"

He rose and wrung the disconsolate one warmly by the hand. "But there, I am sorry I have to hurry you away.... Now that you know where to find me, drop in some evening and have a cigar and a chat. I'm in town a good deal, off and on, and always glad to see a friend."

At another time, and with another man, Anisty would not have ventured to play his catch so roughly; but, as he had reckoned, the comfortable state of mind induced by an unexpected addition to his income and a quart of champagne, had dulled the official apprehensions of Sergeant Hickey.

Mumbling a vague acceptance of the too-genial invitation, the exalted detective rose and ambled cheerfully down the room and out of the door.

Anisty lit another cigarette and contemplated the future with satisfaction. As a diplomat he was inclined to hold himself a success. Indeed, all things taken under mature consideration, the conclusion was inevitable that he was the very devil of a fellow. With what consummate skill he had played his hand! Now the pursuit of the Maitland burglar would be abandoned; the news item suppressed at Headquarters. And it was equally certain that Maitland (when eventually liberated) would be at pains to keep his part of the affair very much in shadow.

The masquerader ventured a mystical smile at the world in general. One pictured the evening when the infatuated detective should find it convenient to drop in on the exclusive Mr. Maitland....

"Mr. Anisty?"

VII

ILLUMINATION

In a breath was self-satisfaction banished; simultaneously the masquerader brought his gaze down from the ceiling, his thoughts to earth, his vigilance to the surface, and himself to his feet, summoning to his aid all that he possessed of resource and expedient.

Trapped!--the word blazed incandescent in his brain. So long had he foreseen and planned against this very moment.

Yet panic swayed him for but a little instant; as swiftly as it had overcome him it subsided, leaving him shocked, a shade more pale, but rapidly reasserting control of his faculties. And with this shade of emotion came complete reassurance.

His name had been uttered in no stern or menacing tone; rather its syllables had been pitched in a low and guarded key, with an undernote of raillery and cordiality. In brief, the moment that he recognized the voice as a woman's, he was again master of himself, and, aware that the result of his instinctive impulse to rise and defend himself, which had brought him to a standing position, would be interpreted as only the natural action of a gentleman addressed by a feminine acquaintance, he was confident that he had not betrayed his primal consternation. He bowed, smiled, and with eyes in which astonishment swiftly gave place to gratification and complete comprehension, appraised her who had addressed him.

She seemed to have fluttered to the table, beside which she now stood, slightly swaying, her walking costume of grey shot silk falling about her in soft, tremulous petals. Dainty, chic, well-poised, serene, flawlessly pretty in her miniature fashion: Anisty recognized her in a twinkling. His perceptions, trained to observations as instantaneous as those of a snap-shot camera, and well-nigh as accurate, had photographed her

individuality indelibly upon the film of his memory, even in the abbreviated encounter of the previous night.

By a similar play of educated reasoning faculties keyed to the highest pitch of immediate action, he had difficulty as scant in accounting for her presence there. What he did not quite comprehend was why Maitland had used her so kindly; for it had been plain enough that that gentleman had surprised her in the act of safe-breaking before conniving at her escape. But, allowing that Maitland's actions had been based upon motives vague to the burglar's understanding, it was quite in the scheme of possibilities that he should have arranged to meet his protegee at the restaurant that afternoon. She was come to keep an appointment to which (now that Anisty came to remember) Maitland had alluded in the beginning of their conversation.

Well and good: once before, within the past two hours, he had told himself that he was Good-enough Maitland. He would be even better now....

"But you did surprise me!" he declared gallantly, before she could wonder at his slowness to respond. "You see, I was dreaming...."

He permitted her to surmise the object round which his dreams had been woven.

"And I had expected you to be eagerly watching for me!" she parried archly.

"I was ... mentally. But," he warned her seriously, "not that name. Maitland is known here; they call me Maitland--the waiters. It seems I made a bad choice. But with your assistance and discretion we can bluff it out, all right."

"I forgot. Forgive me." By now she was in the chair opposite him, tucking the lower ends of her gloves into their wrists.

"No matter--nobody heard."

"I very nearly called you Handsome Dan." She flashed a radiant smile at him from beneath the rim of her picture hat.

A fire was kindled in Anisty's eyes; he was conscious of a quickened drumming of his pulses.

"Dan is Maitland's front name, also," he remarked absently.

"I thought as much," she responded, quietly speculative.

The burglar hardly heard. It has been indicated that he was quick-witted, because he had to be, in the very nature of his avocation. Just now his brain was working rather more rapidly than usual, even: which was one reason why the light had leaped into his eyes.

It was very plain--to a deductive reasoner--from the girl's attitude toward him that she had fallen into relations of uncommon friendliness with this

Maitland, young as Anisty believed their acquaintance to be. There had plainly been a flirtation--wherein lay the explanation of Maitland's forbearance: he had been fascinated by the woman, had not hesitated to take Anisty's name (even as Anisty was then taking his) in order to prolong their intimacy.

So much the better. Turn-about was still fair play. Maitland had sown as Anisty; the real Anisty would reap the harvest. Pretty women interested him deeply, though he saw little enough of them, partly through motives of prudence, partly because of a refinement of taste: women of the class of this conquest-by-proxy were out of reach of the enemy of society. That is, under ordinary circumstances. This one, on the contrary, was not: whatever she was or had been, however successful a crackswoman she might be, her cultivation and breeding were as apparent as her beauty; and quite as attractive.

A criminal is necessarily first a gambler, a votary of Chance; and the blind goddess had always been very kind to Mr. Anisty. He felt that here again she was favoring him. Maitland he had eliminated from this girl's life; Maitland had failed to keep his engagement, and so would never again be called upon to play the part of burglar with her interest for incentive and guerdon. Anisty himself could take up where Maitland had left off. Easily enough. The difficulties were insignificant: he had only to play up to Maitland's standard for a while, to be Maitland with all that gentleman's advantages, educational and social, then gradually drop back to his own level and be himself, Dan Anisty, "Handsome Dan," the professional, the fit mate for the girl....

What was she saying?

"But you have lunched already!" with an appealing pout.

"Indeed, no!" he protested earnestly. "I was early--conceive my eagerness!--and by ill chance a friend of mine insisted upon lunching with me. I had only a cup of coffee and a roll." He motioned to the waiter, calling him "Waiter!" rather than "_Garcon!_"---intuitively understanding that Maitland would never have aired his French in a public place, and that he could not afford the least slip before a woman as keen as this.

"Lay a clean cloth and bring the bill of fare," he demanded, tempering his lordly instincts and adding the "please" that men of Maitland's stamp use to inferiors.

"A friend!" tardily echoed the girl when the servant was gone.

He laughed lightly, determined to be frank. "A detective, in point of fact," said he. And enjoyed her surprise.

"You have many such?"

"For convenience one tries to have one in each city."

"And this----?"

"Oh, I have him fixed, all right. He confided to me all the latest developments and official intentions with regard to the Maitland arrest."

Her eyes danced. "Tell me!" she demanded, imperious: the emphasis of intimacy irresistible as she bent forward, forearms on the cloth, slim white hands clasped with tense impatience, eyes seeking his.

"Why ... of course Maitland escaped."

"No!"

"Fact. Scared the butler into ungagging him; then, in a fit of pardonable rage, knocked that fool down and dashed out of the window--presumably in pursuit of us. Up to a late hour he hadn't returned, and police opinion is divided as to whether Maitland arrested Anisty, and Anisty got away, or _vice versa_."

"Excellent!" She clasped her hands noiselessly, a gay little gesture.

"So, whatever the outcome, one thing is certain: Higgins will presently be seeking another berth."

She lifted her brows prettily. "Higgins?"--with the rising inflection.

"The butler. Didn't you hear----?"

Eyes wondering, she moved her head slowly from side to side. "Hear what?"

"I fancied that you had waited a moment on the veranda," he finessed.

"Oh, I was quite too frightened...."

He took this for a complete denial. Better and better! He had actually feared that she had eaves-dropped, however warrantably; and Maitland's authoritative way with the servants had been too convincingly natural to have deceived a woman of her keen wits.

There followed a lull while Anisty was ordering the luncheon: something he did elaborately and with success, telling himself humorously: "Hang the expense! Maitland pays." Of which fact the weight in his pocket was assurance.

Maitland.... Anisty's thoughts verged off upon an interesting tangent. What was Maitland's motive in arranging this meeting? It was self-evident that the twain were of one world--the girl and the man of fashion. But, whatever her right of heritage, she had renounced it, declassing herself by yielding to thievish instincts, voluntarily placing herself on the level of Anisty. Where she must remain, for ever.

There was comfort in that reflection. He glanced up to find her eyes bent in gravity upon him. She, too, it appeared, had fallen a prey to reverie. Upon what subject? An absorbing one, doubtless, since it held her

abstracted despite her companion's direct, unequivocally admiring stare.

The odd light was flickering again in the cracks-man's glance. She was then more beautiful than aught that ever he had dreamed of. Such hair as was hers, woven seemingly of dull flames, lambent, witching! And eyes!--beautiful always, but never more so than at this moment, when filled with sweetly pensive contemplation.... Was she reviewing the last twenty-four hours, dreaming of what had passed between her and that silly fool, Maitland? If only Anisty could surmise what they had said to each other, how long they had been acquainted; if only she would give him a hint, a leading word!...

If he could have read her mind, have seen behind the film of thought that clouded her eyes, one fears Mr. Anisty might have lost appetite for an excellent luncheon. For she was studying his hands, her memory harking back to the moment when she had stood beside the safe, holding the bull's-eye....

In the blackness of that hour a disk of light shone out luridly against the tapestry of memory. Within its radius appeared two hands, long, supple, strong, immaculately white, graceful and dexterous, as delicate of contour as a woman's, yet lacking nothing of masculine vigor and modeling; hands that wavered against the blackness, fumbling with the shining nicked disk of a combination-lock.... The impression had been and remained one extraordinarily vivid. Could her eyes have deceived her so?...

"Thoughtful?"

She nodded alertly, instantaneously mistress of self; and let her gaze, serious yet half smiling, linger upon his the exact fractional shade of an instant longer than had been, perhaps, discreet. Then lashes drooped long upon her cheeks, and her color deepened all but imperceptibly.

The man's breath halted, then came a trace more rapidly than before. He bent forward impulsively.

... The girl sighed, ever so gently.

"I was thoughtful.... It's all so strange, you know."

His attitude was an eager question.

"I mean our meeting--that way, last night." She held his gaze again, momentarily, and---

"Damn the waiter!" quoth savagely Mr. Anisty to his inner man, sitting back to facilitate the service of their meal.

The girl placated him with an insignificant remark which led both into a maze of meaningless but infinitely diverting inconsequences; diverting, at least, to Anisty, who held up his head, giving her back look for look, jest for jest, platitude for platitude (when the waiter was within hearing distance): altogether, he felt, acquitting himself very creditably....

As for the girl, in the course of the next half or three-quarters of an hour she demonstrated herself conclusively a person of amazing resource, developing with admirable ingenuity a campaign planned on the spur of a chance observation. The gentle mannered and self-sufficient crook was taken captive before he realized it, however willing he may have been. Enmeshed in a hundred uncomprehended subtleties, he basked, purring, the while she insinuated herself beneath his guard and stripped him of his entire armament of cunning, vigilance, invention, suspicion, and distrust.

He relinquished them without a sigh, barely conscious of the spoliation. After all, she was of his trade, herself mired with guilt; she would never dare betray him, the consequences to herself would be so dire.

Besides, patently,--almost too much so,--she admired him. He was her hero. Had she not more than hinted that such was the case, that his example, his exploits, had fired her to emulation--however weakly feminine?... He saw her before him, dainty, alluring, yielding, yet leading him on: altogether desirable. And so long had he, Anisty, starved for affection!...

"I am sure you must be dying for a smoke."

"Beg pardon!" He awoke abruptly, to find himself twirling the sharp-ribbed stem of his empty glass. Abstractedly he stared into this, as though seeking there a clue to what they had been talking about. Hazily he understood that they had been drifting close upon the perilous shoals of intimate personalities. What had he told her? What had he not?

No matter. It was clearly to be seen that her regard for him had waxed rather than waned as a result of their conversation. One had but to look into her eyes to be reassured as to that. One did look, breathing heavily.... What an ingenuous child it was, to show him her heart so freely! He wondered that this should be so, feeling it none the less a just and graceful tribute to his fascinations.

She repeated her arch query. She was sure he wanted to smoke.

Indeed he did--if she would permit? And forthwith Maitland's cigarette case was produced, with a flourish.

"What a beautiful case!"

In an instant it was in her hands. "Beautiful!" she iterated, inspecting the delicate tracery of the monogram engraver's art--head bended forward, face shaded by the broad-brimmed hat.

"You like it? You would care to own it?" Anisty demanded unsteadily.

"I?" The inflection of doubtful surprise was a delight to the ear. "Oh!... I couldn't think of accepting.... Besides, I have no use for it."

"Of course you ain't--_are_ not that sort." An hour back he could have kicked himself for the grammatical blunder; now he was wholly illuded;

besides, she didn't seem to notice. "But as a little token--between us----"

She drew back, pushing the case across the cloth; "I couldn't dream...."

"But if I insist----?"

"If you insist?... Why I suppose ... it's awfully good of you." She flashed him a maddening glance.

"You do me pro--honor," he amended hastily. Then, daringly: "I don't ask much in exchange, only----"

"A cigarette?" she suggested hastily.

He laughed, pleased and diverted. "That'll be enough now--if you'll light it for me."

She glanced dubiously round the now almost deserted room; and a waiter started forward as if animated by a spring. Anisty motioned him imperiously back. "Go on," he coaxed; "no one can see." And watched, flattered, the slim white fingers that extracted a match from the stand and drew it swiftly down the prepared surface of the box, holding the flickering flame to the end of a white tube whose tip lay between lips curved, scarlet, and pouting.

There! A pale wraith of smoke floated away on the fan-churned air, and Anisty was vaguely conscious of receiving the glowing cigarette from a hand whose sheer perfection was but enhanced by the ripe curves of a rounded forearm.... He inhaled deeply, with satisfaction.

Undetected by him, the girl swiftly passed a furtive handkerchief across her lips. When he looked again she was smiling and the golden case had disappeared.

She shook her head at him in mock reproof. "Bold man!" she called him; but the crudity of it was lost upon him, as she had believed it would be. The moment had come for vigorous measures, she felt, guile having paved the way.

"Why do you call me that?"

"To appear so openly, running the gauntlet of the detectives...."

"Eh?"--startled.

"Of course you saw," she insisted.

"Saw? No. Saw what?"

"Why.... Perhaps I am mistaken, but I thought you knew and trusted to your likeness to Mr. Maitland...."

Anisty frowned, collecting himself, bewildered. "What are you driving at,

anyhow?" he demanded roughly.

"Didn't you see the detectives? I should have thought your man would have warned you. I noticed four loitering round the entrance, as I came in, and feared...."

"Why didn't you tell me, then?"

"I have just told you the reason. I supposed you were in your disguise...."

"That's so." The alarmed expression gradually faded, though he remained troubled. "I sure am Maitland to the life," he continued with satisfaction. "Even the head-waiter----"

"And of course," she insinuated delicately, "you have disposed of the loot?"

He shook his head gloomily. "No time, as yet."

Her dismay was evident. "You don't mean to say----?"

"In my pocket."

"Oh!" She glanced stealthily around. "In your pocket!" she whispered. "And--and if they stopped you----"

"I am Maitland."

"But if they insisted on searching you...." She was round-eyed with apprehension.

"That's so!" Her perturbation was infectious. His jaw dropped.

"They would find the jewels--known to be stolen----"

"By God!" he cried savagely.

"Dan!"

"I--I beg your pardon. But ... what am I to do? You are sure----?"

"McClusky himself is on the nearest corner!"

"_Phew_!" he whistled; and stared at her, searchingly, through a lengthening pause.

"Dan...." said she at length.

"Yes?"

"There is a way...."

"Go on."

"Last night, Dan"--she raised her glorious eyes to his--"last night, I ...
I trusted you."

His face hardened ever so slightly; yet when he took thought the tense lines about his eyes and mouth softened. And she drew a deep breath, knowing that she had all but won.

"I trusted you," she continued softly. "Do you know what that means? I trusted _you_."

He nodded, eyes to hers, fascinated, with an odd commingling of fear and hope and satisfied self-love. "Now I am unconnected with the affair. No one knows that I had any hand in it. Besides, no one knows me--that I--steal." Her tone fell lower. "The police have never heard of me. Dan!"

"I--believe----"

"I could get away," she interrupted; "and then, if they stopped you----"

"You're right, by the powers!" He struck the table smartly with his fist. "You do that and we can carry this through. Why, lacking the jewels, I _am_ Maitland--I am even wearing Maitland's clothes!" he boasted. "I went to his apartments this morning and saw to that, because it suited my purpose to _be_ Maitland for a day or two."

"Then----?" Her gaze questioned his.

"Waiter!" cried Anisty. And, when the man was deferential at his elbow: "Call a cab, at once, please."

"Certainly, sir."

The rest of the corps of servants was at the other end of the big room. Anisty made certain that they were not watching, then stealthily passed the canvas bag to the girl. She bent her head, bestowing it in her hand-bag.

"You have made me ... happy, Dan," came tremulously from beneath the hat-brim.

Whatever doubts may have assailed him when it was too late, by that remark were effaced, silenced. Who could mistrust her sincerity?...

"Then when and where may I see you again?" he demanded.

"The same place."

It was a bold move; but she was standing; the waiter was back, announcing the cab in waiting, and he dared not protest. Yet his pat _riposte_ commanded her admiration.

"No. Too risky. If they are watching here, they may be there, too." He shook his head decidedly. The flicker of doubt was again extinguished; for

undoubtedly Maitland had escorted her home that morning; her reference had been to that place. "Somewhere else," he insisted, confident that she was playing fair.

She appeared to think for an instant, then, fumbling in her pocket-book, extracted a typical feminine pencil stub,--its business-end looking as though it had been gnawed by a vindictive rat,--and scribbled hastily on the back of a menu card:

"_Mrs. McCabe, 205 West 118th Street. Top floor. Ring 3 times._"

"I shall be there at seven," she told him. "You won't fail me?"

"Not if I'm still at liberty," he laughed.

And the waiter smiled at discretion, a far-away and unobtrusive smile that could by no possibility give offense; at the same time it was calculated to convey the impression that, in the opinion of one humble person, at least, Mr. Maitland was a merry wag.

"Good-by ... Dan!"

Anisty held her fingers in his hard palm for an instant, rising from his chair.

"Good-by, my dear," he said clumsily.

He watched her disappear, eyes humid, temples throbbing. "By the powers!" he cried. "But she's worth it!"

Perhaps his meaning was vague, even to himself. He resumed his seat mechanically and sat for a time staring dreamily into vacancy, blunt fingers drumming on the cloth.

"No," he declared at length. "No; I'm safe enough ... in _her_ hands."

* * * * *

Once secure from the public gaze, the girl crowded back into a corner of the cab, as though trying to efface herself. Her eyes closed almost automatically; the curve of laughing lips became a doleful droop; a crinkle appeared between the arched brows; waves of burning crimson flooded her face and throat.

In her lap both hands lay clenched into tiny fists--clenched so tightly that it hurt, numbing her fingers: a physical pain that, somehow, helped her to endure the paroxysms of shame. That she should have stooped so low!...

Presently the fingers relaxed, and her whole frame relaxed in sympathy. The black squall had passed over; but now were the once tranquil waters ruffled and angry. Then languor gripped her like an enemy: she lay listless in its hold, sick and faint with disgust of self.

This was her all-sufficient punishment: to have done what she had done, to be about to do what she contemplated. For she had set her hand to the plow: there must now be no drawing back, however hateful might prove her task....

The voice of the cabby dropping through the trap, roused her. "This is the Martha Washington, ma'am."

Mechanically she descended from the hansom and paid her fare; then, summoning up all her strength and resolution, passed into the lobby of the hotel and paused at the telephone switchboard.

VIII

DANCE OF THE HOURS

Four P. M.

The old clock in a corner of the study chimed resonantly and with deliberation: four double strokes; and while yet the deep-throated music was dying into silence the telephone bell shrieked impertinently.

Maitland bit savagely on the gag and knotted his brows, trying to bear it. The effect was that of a coarse file rasped across raw quivering nerves. And he lay helpless, able to do no more toward endurance than to dig nails deep into his palms.

Again and again the fiendish clamor shattered the echoes. Blinding flashes of agony danced down the white-hot wires strung through his head, taut from temple to temple.

Would the fool at the other end never be satisfied that he could get no answer? Evidently not: the racket continued mercilessly, short series of shrill calls alternating with imperative rolls prolonged until one thought that the tortured metal sounding-cups would crack. Thought! nay, prayed that either such would be the case, or else that one's head might at once mercifully be rent asunder....

That anguish so exquisite should be the means of releasing him from his bonds seemed a refinement of irony. Yet Maitland was aware, between spasms, that help was on the way. The telephone instrument, for obvious convenience, had been equipped with an extension bell which rang simultaneously in O'Hagan's quarters. When Maitland was not at home the janitor-valet, so warned, would answer the calls. And now, in the still intervals, the heavy thud of unhurried feet could be heard upon the staircase. O'Hagan was coming to answer; and taking his time about it. It seemed an age before the rattle of pass-key in latch announced him; and another ere, all unconscious of the figure supine on the divan against the further study wall, the old man shuffled to the instrument, lifted receiver

from the hook, and applied it to his ear.

"Well, well?" he demanded with that impatience characteristic of the illiterate for modern methods of communication. "Pwhat the divvle ails ye?"

"Rayspicks to ye, ma'am, and 'tis sorry I am I didn't know 'twas a leddy."

"He's _not_."

"Wan o'clock, there or thereabouts."

"Faith and he didn't say."

"Pwhat name will I be tellin' him?"

"Kape ut to yersilf, thin. 'Tis none of me business."

"If ye do, I'll not answer. Sure, am I to be climbin' two flights av sthairs iv'ry foive minits----"

"Good-by yersilf," hanging up the receiver. "And the divvle fly away wid ye," grumbled O'Hagan.

As he turned away from the instrument Maitland managed to produce a sound, something between a moan and a strangled cough. The old man whirled on his heel. "Pwhat's thot?"

The next instant he was bending over Maitland, peering into the face drawn and disfigured by the gag. "The saints presarve us! And who the divvle are ye at all? Pwhy don't ye spake?"

Maitland turned purple; and emitted a furious snort.

"Misther Maitland, be all thot's strange!... Is ut mad I am? Or how did ye get back here and into this fix, sor, and me swapin' the halls and polishin' the brasses fernist the front dure iv'ry minute since ye wint out?"

Indignation struggling for the upper hand with mystification in the Irishman's brain, he grumbled and swore; yet busied his fingers. In a trice the binding gag was loosed, and ropes and straps cast free from swollen wrists and ankles. And, with the assistance of a kindly arm behind his shoulders, Maitland sat up, grinning with the pain of renewing circulation in his limbs.

"Wid these two oies mesilf saw ye lave three hours gone, sor, and I c'u'd swear no sowl had intered this house since thin. Pwhat does ut all mane, be all thot's holy?"

"It means," panting, "brandy and soda, O'Hagan, and be quick."

Maitland attempted to rise, but his legs gave under him, and he sank back with a stifled oath, resigning himself to wait the return of normal

conditions. As for his head, it was threatening to split at any moment, the tight wires twanging infernally between his temples; while the corners of his mouth were cracked and sore from the pressure of the gag. All of which totted up a considerable debit against Mr. Anisty's account.

For Maitland, despite his suffering, had found time to figure it out to his personal satisfaction--or dissatisfaction, if you prefer--in the interval between his return to consciousness and the arrival of O'Hagan. It was simple enough to deduce from the knowledge in his possession that the burglar, having contrived his escape through the disobedience of Higgins, should have engineered this complete revenge for the indignity Maitland had put upon him.

How he had divined the fact of the jewels remaining in their owner's possession was less clear; and yet it was reasonable, after all, to presume that Maitland should prefer to hold his own. Possibly Anisty had seen the girl slip the canvas bag into Maitland's pocket while the latter was kneeling and binding his captive. However that was, there was no denying that he had trailed the treasure to its hiding-place, unerringly; and succeeded in taking possession of it with consummate skill and audacity. When Maitland came to think of it, he recalled distinctly the trend of the burglar's inquisition in the character of "Mr. Snaith," which had all been calculated to discover the location of the jewels. And, when he did recall this fact, and how easily he had been duped, Maitland could have ground his teeth in melodramatic rage--but for the circumstance that when first it occurred to him, such a feat was a physical impossibility, and even when ungagged the operation would have been painful to an extreme.

Sipping the grateful drink which O'Hagan presently brought him, the young man pondered the case; with no pleasure in the prospect he foresaw. If Higgins had actually communicated the fact of Anisty's escape to the police, the entire affair was like to come out in the papers,--all of it, that is, that he could not suppress. But even figuring that he could silence Higgins and O'Hagan,--no difficult task: though he might be somewhat late with Higgins,--the most discreet imaginable explanation of his extraordinary conduct would make him the laughing stock of his circle of friends, to say nothing of a city that had been accustomed to speak of him as "Mad Maitland," for many a day. Unless....

Ah, he had it! He could pretend (so long as it suited his purpose, at all events), to have been the man caught and left bound in Higgins' care. Simple enough: the knocking over of the butler would be ascribed to a natural ebullition of indignation, the subsequent flight to a hare-brained notion of running down the thief. And yet even that explanation had its difficulties. How was he to account for the fact that he had failed to communicate with the police--knowing that his treasure had been ravished?

It was all very involved. Mr. Maitland returned the glass to O'Hagan and, cradling his head in his hands, racked his brains in vain for a satisfactory tale to tell. There were so many things to be taken into consideration. There was the girl in grey....

Not that he had forgotten her for an instant; his fury raged but the higher

at the thought that Anisty's interference had prevented his (Maitland's) keeping the engagement. Doubtless the girl had waited, then gone away in anger, believing that the man in whom she had placed faith had proved himself unworthy. And so he had lost her for ever, in all likelihood: they would never meet again.

But that telephone call?

"O'Hagan," demanded the haggard and distraught young man, "who was that on the wire just now?"

Being a thoroughly trained servant, O'Hagan had waited that question in silence, a-quiver with impatience though he was. Now, his tongue unleashed, his words fairly stumbled on one another's heels in his anxiety to get them out in the least possible time. "Sure, an' 'twas a leddy, sor, be the v'ice av her, askin' were ye in, and mesilf havin' seen ye go out no longer ago thin wan o'clock and yersilf sayin' not a worrud about comin' back at all at all, pwhat was I to be tellin' her, aven if ye were lyin' there on the dievan all unbeknownest to me, which the same mesilf can not----"

"Help!" pleaded the young man feebly, smiling. "One thing at a time, please, O'Hagan. Answer me one question: Did she give a name?"

"She did not, sor, though mesilf----"

"There, there! Wait a bit. I want to think."

Of course she had given no name; it wouldn't be like her.... What was he thinking of, anyway? It could not have been the grey girl; for she knew him only as Anisty; she could never have thought him himself, Maitland.... But what other woman of his acquaintance did not believe him to be out of town?

With a hopeless gesture, Maitland gave it up, conceding the mystery too deep for him, his intellect too feeble to grapple with all its infinite ramifications. The counsel he had given O'Hagan seemed most appropriate to his present needs: One thing at a time. And obviously the first thing that lay to his hand was the silencing of O'Hagan.

Maitland rallied his wits to the task. "O'Hagan," said he, "this man, Snaith, who was here this afternoon, called himself a detective. As soon as we were alone he rapped me over the head with a loaded cane, and, I suspect, went through the flat stealing everything he could lay hands on.... Hand me my cigarette case, please."

"'Tis gone, sor--'tis not on the desk, at laste, pwhere I saw ut last."

"Ah! You see?... Now for reasons of my own, which I won't enter into, I don't want the affair to get out and become public. You understand? I want you to keep your mouth shut, until I give you permission to open it."

"Very good, sor." The janitor-valet had previous experiences with Maitland's generosity in grateful memory; and shut his lips tightly in promise of virtuous reticence.

"You won't regret it.... Now tell me what you mean by saying that you saw me go out at one this afternoon?"

Again the flood gates were lifted; from the deluge of explanations and protestations Maitland extracted the general drift of narrative. And in the end held up his hand for silence.

"I think I understand, now. You say he had changed to my grey suit?"

O'Hagan darted into the bedroom, whence he emerged with confirmation of his statement.

"'Tis gone, sor, an'--."

"All right. But," with a rueful smile, "I'll take the liberty of countermanding Mr. Snaith's order. If he should call again, O'Hagan, I very much want to see him."

"Faith, and 'tis mesilf will have a worrud or two to wispher in the ear av him, sor," announced O'Hagan grimly.

"I'm afraid the opportunity will be lacking: ... You may fix me a hot bath now, O'Hagan, and put out my evening clothes. I'll dine at the club to-night and may not be back."

And, rising, Maitland approached a mirror; before which he lingered for several minutes, cataloguing his injuries. Taken altogether, they amounted to little. The swelling of his wrists and ankles was subsiding gradually; there was a slight redness visible in the corners of his mouth, and a shadow of discoloration on his right temple--something that could be concealed by brushing his hair in a new way.

"I think I shall do," concluded Maitland; "there's nothing to excite particular comment. The bulk of the soreness is inside."

* * * * *

Seven P. M.

"Time," said the short and thick-set man casually, addressing no one in particular.

He shut the lid of his watch with a snap and returned the timepiece to his waistcoat pocket. Simultaneously he surveyed both sides of the short block between Seventh and St. Nicholas Avenues with one comprehensive glance.

Presumably he saw nothing of interest to him. It was not a particularly interesting block, for that matter: though somewhat typical of the neighborhood. The north side was lined with five-story flat buildings, their dingy-red brick facades regularly broken by equally dingy brownstone stoops, as to the ground floor, by open windows as to those above. The south side was mostly taken up by a towering white apartment hotel with

an ostentatious entrance; against one of whose polished stone pillars the short and thick-set man was lounging.

The sidewalks, north and south, swarmed with children of assorted ages, playing with that ferocious energy characteristic of the young of Harlem; their blood-curdling cries and premature Fourth-of-July fireworks created an appalling din: to which, however, the more mature denizens had apparently become callous, through long endurance.

Beyond the party-colored lights of a drug-store window on Seventh Avenue, the electric arcs were casting a sickly radiance upon the dusty leaves of the tree-lined drive. The avenue itself was crowded with motor-cars and horse-drawn pleasure vehicles, mostly bound up-town, their occupants seeking the cooler airs and wider spaces to be found beyond the Harlem River and along the Speedway. A few blocks to the west Cathedral Heights bulked like a great wall, wrapped in purple shadows, its jagged contour stark against an evening sky of suave old rose.

The short and thick-set body, however, seemed to have no particular appreciation of the beauties of nature as exhibited by West One-hundred and Eighteenth Street on a summer's evening. If anything, he could apparently have desired a cooling breeze; for, after a moment's doubtful consideration, he unbuttoned his waistcoat and heaved a sigh of relief.

Then, carefully shifting the butt of a dead cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other, where it was almost hidden by the jutting thatch of his black mustache, and drawing down over his eyes the brim of a rusty plug hat, he thrust fat hands into the pockets of his shabby trousers and lounged against the polished pillar even more energetically than before: if that were possible. An unromantic, apathetic figure, fitting so naturally into his surroundings as to demand no second look even from the most observant; yet one seeming to possess a magnetic attraction for the eyes of the hall-boy of the apartment hotel (who, acquainted by sight and hearsay with the stout gentleman's identity and calling, bent upon him a steadfast and adoring regard), as well as for the policeman who lorded it on the St. Nicholas Avenue corner, in front of the real-estate office, and who from time to time shifted his contemplation from the infinite spaces of the heavens, the better to exchange a furtive nod with the idler in the hotel doorway.

Presently,--at no great lapse of time after the short and thick-set man had stowed away his watch,--out of the thronged sidewalks of Seventh Avenue a man appeared, walking west on the north side of the street and reviewing carelessly the numbers on the illuminated fanlights: a tall man, dressed all in grey, and swinging a thin walking stick.

The short, thick-set person assumed a mien of more intense abstraction than ever.

The tall man in grey paused indefinitely before the brownstone stoop of the house numbered 205, then swung up the steps and into the vestibule. Here he halted, bending over to scrutinize the names on the letter-boxes.

The short, thick-set man reluctantly detached himself from his polished pillar and waddled ungracefully across the street.

The policeman on the corner seemed suddenly interested in Seventh Avenue; and walked in that direction.

The grey man, having vainly deciphered all the names on one side of the vestibule, straightened up and turned his attention to the opposite wall, either unconscious of or indifferent to the shuffle of feet on the stoop behind him.

The short, thick-set man removed one hand from a pocket and tapped the grey man gently on the shoulder.

"Lookin' for McCabe, Anisty?" he inquired genially.

The grey man turned slowly, exhibiting a countenance blank with astonishment. "Beg pardon?" he drawled; and then, with a dawning gleam of recognition in his eyes: "Why, good evening, Hickey! What brings you up this way?"

The short, thick-set man permitted his jaw to droop and his eyes to protrude for some seconds. "Oh," he said in a tone of great disgust, "hell!" He pulled himself together with an effort. "Excuse _me_, Mr. Maitland," he stammered, "I wasn't lookin' for yeh."

"To the contrary, I gather from your greeting that you were expecting our friend, Mr. Anisty?" And the grey man smiled.

Hickey smiled in sympathy, but with less evident relish of the situation's humor.

"That's right," he admitted. "Got a tip from the C'miss'ner's office this evening that Anisty would be here at seven o'clock lookin' for a party named McCabe. I guess it's a bum tip, all right; but of course I got to look into it."

"Most assuredly." The grey man bent and inspected the names again. "I am hunting up an old friend," he explained carelessly: "a man named Simmons--knew him in college--down on his luck--wrote me yesterday. There he is: fourth floor, east. I'll see you when I come down, I hope, Mr. Hickey."

The automatic lock clicked and the door swung open; the grey man passing through and up the stairs. Hickey, ostentatiously ignoring the existence of the policeman, returned to his post of observation.

At eight o'clock he was still there, looking bored.

At eight-thirty he was still there, wearing a puzzled expression.

At nine he called the adoring hall-boy, gave him a quarter with minute instructions, and saw him disappear into the hallway of Number 205. Three

minutes later the boy was back, breathless but enthusiastic.

"Missis Simmons," he explained between gasps, "says she ain't never heard of nobody named Maitland. Somebody rang her bell a while ago an' apologized for disturbin' her--said he wanted the folks on the top floor. I guess yer man went acrost the roofs: them houses is all connected, and yuh c'n walk clear from the corner here tuh half-way up tuh Nineteenth Street, on Sain' Nicholas Avenoo."

"Uh-huh," laconically returned the detective. "Thanks." And turning on his heel, walked westward.

The policeman crossed the street to detain him for a moment's chat.

"I guess it's all off, Jim," Hickey told him. "Some one must've tipped that crook off. Anyway, I ain't goin' to wait no longer."

"I wouldn't neither," agreed the uniformed member. "Say, who's yer friend yeh was talkin' tuh, 'while ago?"

"Oh, a frien' of mine. Yeh didn't have no call to git excited then, Jim. G'night."

And Hickey proceeded westward, a listless and preoccupied man by the vacant eye of him. But when he emerged into the glare of Eighth Avenue his face was unusually red. Which may have been due to the heat. And just before boarding a down-town surface car, "Oh," he enunciated with gusto, "_hell_!"

* * * * *

One A. M.

Not until the rich and mellow chime had merged into the stillness did the intruder dare again to draw breath. Coming as it had the very moment that the door had closed noiselessly behind her, the double stroke had sounded to her like a knell: or, perhaps more like the prelude to the wild alarum of a tocsin, first striking her heart still with terror, then urging it into panic flutterings.

But these, as the minutes drew on, marked only by the dull methodic ticking of the clock, quieted; and at length she mustered courage to move from the door, against which she had flattened herself, one hand clutching the knob, ready to pull it open and fly upon the first aggressive sound.

In the interval her eyes had become accustomed to the darkness. The study door showed a pale oblong on her right; to her left, and a little toward the rear of the flat, the door of Maitland's bed-chamber stood ajar. To this she tiptoed, standing upon the threshold and listening with every fiber of her being. No sounds as of the regular respiration of a sleeper warning her, she at length peered stealthily within; simultaneously she pressed the button of an electric hand-lamp. Its circumscribed blaze wavered over pillows and counterpane spotless and undisturbed.

Then for the first time she breathed freely, convinced that she had been right in surmising that Maitland would not return that night.

Since early evening she had watched the house from the window of a top-floor hall bedroom in the boarding-house opposite. Shortly before seven she had seen Maitland, stiff and uncompromising in rigorous evening dress, leave in a cab. Since then only once had a light appeared in his rooms; at about half-after nine the janitor had appeared in the study, turning up the gas and going to the telephone.

Whatever the nature of the communication received, the girl had taken it to indicate that Maitland had decided to spend the night elsewhere; for the study light had burned for some ten minutes, during which the janitor could occasionally be seen moving mysteriously about; and something later, bearing a suitcase, he had left the house and shuffled rapidly eastward to Madison Avenue.

So she felt convinced that she had all the small hours before her, secure from interruption. And this time, she told herself, she purposed making assurance doubly sure....

But first to guard against discovery from the street.

Turning back through the hall, she dispensed with the hand-lamp, entering the darkened study. Here all windows had been closed and the outer shades drawn--O'Hagan's last act before leaving with the suit-case: additional proof that Maitland was not expected back that night. For the temperature was high, the air in the closed room stifling.

Crossing to the windows, the girl drew down the dark green inner shades and closed the folding wooden shutters over them. And was conscious of a deepened sense of security.

Next going to the telephone, she removed the receiver from the hook and let it hang at the full length of the cord. In the dead silence the small voice of Central was clearly articulate: "_What number? Hello, what number_?"--followed by the grumbling of the armature as the operator tried fruitlessly to ring the disconnected bell. The girl smiled faintly, aware that there would now be no interruption from an inopportune call.

There remained as a final precaution only a grand tour of the flat; which she made expeditiously, passing swiftly and noiselessly (one contemplating midnight raids does not attire one's self in silks and starched things) from room to room, all comfortably empty. Satisfied at last, she found herself again in the study, and now boldly, mind at rest, lighted the brass student lamp with the green shade, which she discovered on the desk.

Standing, hands resting lightly on hips, breath coming quickly, cheeks flushed and eyes alight with some intimate and inscrutable emotion, she surveyed the room. Out of the dusk that lay beyond the plash of illumination beneath the lamp, the furniture began to take on familiar shapes: the divans, the heavy leather-cushioned easy chairs, the tall clock with its pallid staring face, the small tables and tabourettes, handily

disposed for the reception of books and magazines and pipes and glasses, the towering, old-fashioned mahogany book-case, the useless, ornamental, beautiful Chippendale escritoire, in one corner: all somberly shadowed and all combining to diffuse an impression of quiet, easy-going comfort.

Just such a study as _he_ would naturally have. She nodded silent approbation of it as a whole. And, nodding, sat down at the desk, planting elbows on its polished surface, interlacing her fingers and cradling her chin upon their backs: turned suddenly pensive.

The mood held her but briefly. She had no time to waste, and much to accomplish.... Sitting back, her fingers sought and pressed the clasp of her hand-bag, and produced two articles--a golden cigarette case and a slightly soiled canvas bag. The Maitland jewels were returning by a devious way, to their owner.

But where to put them, that he might find them without delay? It must be no conspicuous place, where O'Hagan would be apt to happen upon them; doubtless the janitor was trustworthy, but still.... Misplaced opportunities breed criminals.

It was all a risk, to leave the treasure there, without the protection of nickeled-steel walls and timelocks; but a risk that must be taken. She dared not retain it longer in her possession; and she would contrive a way in the morning to communicate with Maitland and warn him.

Her gaze searched the area where the lamplight fell soft yet strong upon the dark shining wood and heavy brass desk fittings; and paused, arrested by the unusual combination of inverted bowl and super-imposed book. A riddle to be read with facility; in a twinkling she had uncovered the incriminating hand-print--incriminating if it could be traced, that is to say.

"Oh!" she cried softly. And laughed a little. "Oh, how careless!"

Fine brows puckered, she pondered the matter, and ended by placing her own hand over the print; this one fitted the other exactly.

"How he must have wondered! He is sure to look again, especially if...."

No need to conclude the sentence. Quickly she placed bag and case squarely on top of the impression, the bowl over all, and the book upon the bowl; then, drawing from her pocket a pair of long grey silk gloves, draped one across the book; and, head tilted to one side, admired the effect.

It seemed decidedly an artistic effect, admirably calculated to attract attention. She was satisfied to the point of being pleased with herself: a fact indicated by an expressive flutter of slim, fair hands.... And now, to work! Time pressed, and.... A cloud dimmed the radiance of her eyes; irresolutely she shifted in her chair, troubled, frowning, lips woefully drooping. And sighed. And a still small whisper, broken and wretched, disturbed the quiet of the study.

"I can not! O, I can not!... To spoil it all, _now_, when...."

Yet she must. She must forget herself and steel her determination with the memory that another's happiness hung in the balance, depended upon her success. Twice she had tried and failed. This third time she _must_ succeed.

And bowing her head in token of her resignation, she turned back squarely to face the desk. As she did so the toe of one small shoe caught against something on the floor, causing a dull jingling sound. She stooped, with a low exclamation, and straightened up, a small bunch of keys in her hand: eight or ten of them dangling from a silver ring: Maitland's keys.

He must have dropped them there, forgetting them altogether. A find of value and one to save her a deal of trouble: skeleton keys are so exasperatingly slow, particularly when used by inexpert hands. But how to bring herself to make use of these? All's fair in war (and this was a sort of war, a war of wits at least); but one should fight with one's own arms, not pilfer the enemy's and turn them against him. To use these keys to ransack Maitland's desk seemed an action even more blackly dishonorable than this clandestine visit, this midnight foray.

Swinging the notched metal slips from a slender finger, she contemplated them: and laughed ruefully. What qualms of conscience in a burglar self-confessed! She was there for a purpose, a recognized, nefarious purpose. Granted. Then why quibble?... She would not quibble. She would be firm, resolute, determined, cold-blooded, unmindful of all kindness and courtesy and.... She would use them, accomplish her purpose, and have done, finally and for ever, with the whole hateful business!

There was a bright spot of color on either cheek and a hot light of anger in her eyes as she set about her task. It would never be less hideous, never less immediate.

The desk drawers yielded easily to the eager keys. One by one she had them open and their contents explored--vain repetition of yesterday afternoon's fruitless task. But she must be sure, she must leave no stone unturned. Maitland Manor was closed to her for ever, because of last night. But here she was safe for a few short hours, and free to make assurance doubly sure.

There remained the despatch-box, the black japanned tin box which had proved obdurate yesterday. She had come prepared to break its lock this time, if need be; Maitland's carelessness spared her the necessity.

She lifted it out of a lower drawer, and put it in her lap. The smallest key fitted the lock at the first attempt. The lid came up and....

Perhaps it is not altogether discreditable that one should temporarily forget one's compunctions in the long-deferred moment of triumph. The girl uttered a little cry of joy.

Crash!--the front door down-stairs had been slammed.

She was on her feet in a breath, faint with fear. Yet not so overcome that she forgot her errand, her success. As she stood up she dropped the despatch-box back into the drawer, without a sound, and, opening her hand-bag, stuffed something into it.

No time to do more: a dull rumble of masculine voices was distinctly, frightfully audible in the stillness of the house: voices of men conversing together in the inner vestibule. One laughed, and the laugh seemed to penetrate her bosom like a knife. Then both strode across the tiling and began to ascend, as was clearly told her by footsteps sounding deadened on the padded carpet.

Panic-stricken, she turned to the student lamp and with a quick twirl and upward jerk of the chimney-catch extinguished the flame. A reek of smoke immediately began to foul the close, hot air: and she knew that it would betray her, but was helpless to stop it. Besides, she was caught, trapped, damned beyond redemption unless ... unless it were not Maitland, after all, but one of the other tenants, unexpectedly returned and bound for another flat.

Futile hope. Upon the landing by the door the footsteps ceased; and a key grated in the wards of the lock.

Blind with terror, her sole thought an instinctive impulse to hide and so avert discovery until the last possible instant, on the bare chance of something happening to save her, the girl caught up her skirts and fled like a hunted shadow through the alcove, through the bed-chamber, thence down the hall toward the dining-room and kitchen offices.

The outer door was being opened ere she had reached the hiding-place she had in mind: the trunk-closet, from which, she remembered remarking, a window opened upon a fire-escape. It was barely possible, a fighting chance.

She closed the door, grateful that its latch slipped silently into place, and fairly flung herself upon the window, painfully bruising her soft hands in vain endeavor to raise the sash. It stuck obstinately, would not yield. Too late, she remembered that she had forgotten to draw the catch--fatal oversight! A sob of terror choked in her throat. Already footsteps were hurrying down the hall; a line of light brightened underneath the door; voices, excitedly keyed, banded question and comment, an unmistakable Irish brogue mingling with a clear enunciation which she had but too great reason to remember. The pair had passed into the next room. She could hear O'Hagan announcing: "No wan here, sor."

"Then it's the dining-room, or the trunk-closet. Come along!"

One last, frantic attempt! But the window catch, rusted with long disuse, stuck. Panting, sick with fear, the girl leaped away and crushed herself into a corner, crouching on the floor behind a heavy box, her dark cloak drawn up to shield her head.

And the door opened.

A flood of radiance from the relighted student lamp fell athwart the floor.
The girl lay close and still, holding her breath.

Ten seconds, perhaps, ticked on into Eternity: seconds that were in themselves eternities. Then: "No one here, O'Hagan."

The door was closed, and through its panels more faintly came: "Faith, and the murdering divvle must've flew th' coop afore ye come in, sor."

The girl tried to rise, to make again for the window; but it was as though her limbs had turned to water; there was no strength in her; and the blackness swam visibly before her eyes, radiating away in whirling, streaky circles.

Even such resolution and strong will as was hers could not prevail against that numbing, deathly exhaustion. Her eyes closed and her head fell back against the wall.

It seemed but an instant (though it was in point of fact a full five minutes) ere the sound of a voice again roused her.

She looked up, dazzled by a gush of warm light.

He stood in the doorway, holding the lamp high above his head, his face pale, grave, and shadowed as he peered down at her.

"I have sent O'Hagan away," he said gently. "If you will please to come, now----"

IX

PROCRASTINATION

The cab which picked Maitland up at his lodgings carried him but a few blocks to the club at which he had, the previous evening, entertained his lawyer. Maitland had selected it as the one of all the clubs of which he and Bannerman were members, wherein he was least likely to meet the latter. Neither frequented its sober precincts by habit. Its severe and classical building on a corner of Madison Avenue overlooking the Square, is but the outward presentment of an institution to be a member of which is a duty, but emphatically no great pleasure, to the sons of a New York family of any prominence.

But in its management the younger generation holds no suffrage; and is not slow to declare that the Primordial is rightly named, characterizing the individual members of the Board of Governors as antediluvians, prehistoric monsters who have never learned that laughter lends a savor to existence. And so it is that the younger generation, (which is understood to include

Maitland and Bannerman), while it religiously pays its dues and has the name of the Primordial engraved upon its cards, shuns those deadly respectable rooms and seeks its comfort elsewhere.

Maitland found it dull and depressing enough, that same evening, something before seven. The spacious and impressive lounging-rooms were but sparsely tenanted, other than by the ennuied corps of servants; and the few members who had lent the open doors the excuse of their presence were of the elderly type that hides itself behind a newspaper in an easy chair and snorts when addressed.

The young man strolled disconsolately enough into the billiard-room, thence (dogged by a specter of loneliness) to the bar, and finally, in sheer desperation, to the dining-room, where he selected a table and ordered an evening paper with his meal.

When the former was brought him, he sat up and began to take a new interest in life. The glaring head-lines that met his eye on the front page proved as bracing as a slap in the face.

"The Maitland Jewels," he read, half aloud: "Daring Attempt at Burglary. "Mad" Maitland Catches "Handsome Dan" Anisty in the Act of Cracking His Safe at Maitland Manor. Which was Which? Both Principals Disappear."

A dull red glow suffused the reader's countenance; he compressed his lips, only opening them once, and then to emit a monosyllabic oath, which can hardly have proved any considerable relief to his surcharged emotional nature.

The news-story was exploited as a "beat"; it could have been little else, since nine-tenths of its "exclusive details" had been born full-winged from the fecund imagination of a busy reporter to whom Maitland had refused an interview while in his bath, some three hours earlier. Maitland discovered with relief that boiled down to essentials it consisted simply of the statement that somebody (presumably himself) had caught somebody (presumably Anisty) burglarizing the library safe at Maitland Manor that morning: that one of the somebodies (no one knew which) had overpowered the other and left him in charge of the butler, who had presently permitted his prisoner to escape and then talked for publication.

It was not to this so much that Maitland objected. It was the illustrations that alternately saddened and maddened the young man: the said illustrations comprising blurred half-tone reproductions of photographs taken on the Maitland estate; a diagram of the library, as fanciful as the text it illuminated, and two portraits, side by side, of the heroes, himself and Anisty, excellent likenesses both of the originals and of each other.

Mr. Maitland did not enjoy his dinner.

Anxious and preoccupied, he tasted the dishes mechanically; and when they had all passed before him, took his thoughts and a cigar to a gloomy corner of the smoking-room, where he sat for two solid hours, debating the matter

pro and con, and arriving at no conclusion whatever, save that Higgins was doomed.

At ten-fifteen he began to contemplate with positive pleasure the prospect of discharging the butler. That, at least, was action, something that he could do; wherever else he thought to move he found himself baffled by the blank darkness of mystery, or by his fear of publicity and ridicule.

At ten-twenty he decided to move upon Greenfields at once, and telephoned O'Hagan, advising him to profess ignorance of his employer's whereabouts.

At ten-twenty-two, or in the midst of his admonitions to the janitor, he changed his mind and decided to stay in New York; and instructed the Irishman to bring him a suit-case containing a few necessaries; his intention being to stay out the night at the club, and so avoid the matutinal siege of his lodgings by reporters and detectives.

At ten-forty-five a club servant handed him the card of a representative of the *Evening Journal*. Maitland directed that the gentleman be shown into the reception-room.

At ten-forty-six he skulked out of the club by a side entrance, jumped into a cab and had himself driven to the East Thirty-fourth Street ferry, arriving there just in time to miss the last train for Greenfields.

Denied the shelter alike of his lodgings, his club, and his country home, the young man in despair caused himself to be conveyed to the Bartholdi Hotel, where, possessed of a devil of folly, he preserved his incognito by registering under the name of "M. Daniels." And straightway retired to his room.

But not to rest. The portion of the mentally harassed, sleeplessness, was his; and for an hour or more he tossed upon his bed (upon which he had thrown himself without troubling to undress), pondering, to no profit of his, the hundred problems, difficulties, and disadvantages suggested or created by the events of the past twenty-four hours.

The grey girl, Anisty, the jewels, himself: unflagging, his thoughts circumnavigated the world of his romance, touching only at these four ports, and returning always to linger longest in the harbor of sentiment.

The grey girl: strange that her personality should have come to dominate his thoughts in a space of time so brief! and upon grounds of intimacy so slender!... Who and what was she? What cruel rigor of circumstance had impelled her to seek a livelihood in ways so sinister? At whose door must the blame be laid, against what flaw in the body social should the indictment be drawn, that she should have been forced into the ranks of the powers that prey--a girl of her youth and rare fiber, of her cultivation, her charm, and beauty?

The sheer loveliness of her, her grace and gentleness, her ingenuous sensitiveness, her wit: they combined to make the thought of her, to him, at least, at once terrible and a delight. Remembering that once he had

held her in his arms, had gazed into her starlit eyes, and inhaled the impalpable fragrance of her, he trembled, was both glad and afraid.

And her ways so hedged about with perils! While he must stand aside, impotent, a pillar of the social order secure in its shelter, and see her hounded and driven by the forces of the Law, harried and worried like an unclean thing, forced, as it might be, to resort to stratagems and expedients unthinkable, to preserve her liberty....

It was altogether intolerable. He could not stand it. And yet--it was written that their paths had crossed and parted and were never again to touch. Or was it?... It must be so written: they would never meet again. After all, her concern with, her interest in, him, could have been nothing permanent. They had encountered under strange auspices, and he had treated her with common decency, for which she had repaid him in good measure by permitting him to retain his own property. Their account was even, and she for ever done with him. That must be her attitude. Why should it be anything else?

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed the young man in disgust. And rising, took his distemper to the window.

Leaning on the sill, he thrust head and shoulders far out over the garish abyss of metropolitan night. The hot breath of the city fanned up in stifling waves into his face, from the street below, upon whose painted pavements men crawled like insects--round moving spots, to each his romance under his hat.

The window was on the corner, overlooking the junction of three great highways of humanity: Twenty-third Street, with its booming crosstown cars, stretching away into the darkness on either hand; Broadway, forking off to the left, its distances merging into a hot glow of yellow radiance; Fifth Avenue, branching into the north with its desolate sidewalks oddly patterned in areas of dense shadow and a cold, clear light. Over the way the park loomed darkly, for all its scattered arcs, a black and silent space, a well of mystery....

It was late, quite late; the clock in front of Dornon's (he craned his neck to see), made the hour one in the morning; the sidewalks were comparatively deserted, even the pillared portico of the Fifth Avenue Hotel destitute of loungers. A timid hint of coolness, forerunning the dawn, rode up on the breeze.

He looked up and away northward, for many minutes, over housetops stenciled black against the glowing sky, his gaze yearning into vast distances of space, melancholy tingeing the complexion of his mind. He fancied himself oppressed by a vague uneasiness, unaccountable as to cause, unless....

From the sublime to the ridiculous with a vengeance, his thoughts tumbled. Gone the glamour of Romance in a twinkling, banished by rank materialism. He could have blushed for shame; he got slowly to his feet, irresolute, trying to grapple with a condition that never before in his existence had he been called upon to consider.

He had just realized that he was flat-strapped for cash. He had given his last quarter to the cabby, hours back. He was registered at a strange hotel, under an assumed name, unable to beg credit even for his breakfast without declaring his identity and thereby laying himself open to suspicion, discourtesy, insult....

Of course there were ways out. He could telephone Bannerman, or any other of half a dozen acquaintances, in the morning; but that involved explanations, and explanations involved making himself the butt of his circle for many a weary day. There was money in his lodgings, in the Chippendale escritoire; but to get it he would have to run the gauntlet of reporters and detectives which had already dismayed him in prospect. O'Hagan--ah!

At the head of his bed was a telephone. Impulsively, inconsiderate of the hour, he turned to it.

"Give me Nine-o-eight-nine Madison, please," he said; and waited, receiver to ear.

There was a slight pause; a buzz; the voice of the switchboard operator below stairs repeating the number to Central; Central's appropriately mechanical reiteration; another buzz; a silence; a prolonged buzz; and again the sounding silence....

"Hello!" he said softly into the transmitter, at a venture.

No answer.

"Hello!"

Then Central, irritably: "Go ahead. You've got your party."

"Hello, hello!"

A faint hum of voices, rising and falling, beat against the walls of his understanding. Were the wires crossed? He lifted an impatient finger to jiggle the hook and call Central to order, when--something crashed heavily. He could have likened the sound, without a strain of imagination, to a chair being violently overturned. And then a woman's voice, clear, accents informed with anger and pain: "_No!_" and then....

"Say, that's my mistake. That line you had's out of order. I had a call for them a while ago, and they didn't answer. Guess you'll have to wait."

"Central! Central!" he pleaded desperately. "I say, Central, give me that connection again, please."

"Ah, say! what's the matter with you, anyway? Didn't I tell you that line was out of order? Ring off!"

Automatically Maitland returned the receiver to its rest; and rose,

white-lipped and trembling. That woman's voice....

X

CONSEQUENCES

Breathing convulsively, wide eyes a little wildly fixed upon his face in the lamplight, the girl stumbled to her feet, and for a moment remained cowering against the wall, terribly shaken, a hand gripping a corner of the packing-box for support, the other pressed against the bosom of her dress as if in attempt forcibly to quell the mad hammering of her heart.

In her brain, a turmoil of affrighted thought, but one thing stood out clearly: now she need look for no mercy. The first time it had been different; she had not been a woman had she been unable then to see that the adventure intrigued Maitland with its spice of novelty, a new sensation, fully as much as she, herself, the pretty woman out of place, interested and attracted him. He had enjoyed playing the part, had been amused to lead her to believe him an adventurer of mettle and caliber little inferior to her own--as he understood her: unscrupulous, impatient of the quibble of meum-et-tuum, but adroit and keen-witted, and distinguished and set apart from the herd by grace of gentle breeding and chivalric instincts.

How far he might or might not have let this enjoyment carry him, she had no means of surmising. Not very far, not too far, she was inclined to believe, strongly as she knew her personality to have influenced him: not far enough to induce him to trust her out of sight with the jewels. He had demonstrated that, to her humiliation.

The flush of excitement waning, manlike soon had he wearied of the game--she thought: to her mind, in distorted retrospect, his attitude when leaving her at dawn had been insincere, contemptuous, that of a man relieved to be rid of her, relieved to be able to get away in unquestioned possession of his treasure. True, the suggestion that they lunch together at Eugene's had been his.... But he had forgotten the engagement, if ever he had meant to keep it, if the notion had been more than a whim of the moment with him. And O'Hagan had told her by telephone that Maitland had left his rooms at one o'clock--in ample time to meet her at the restaurant....

No, he had never intended to come; he had wearied; yet, patient with her, true to the ethics of a gentleman, he had been content to let her go, rather than to send a detective to take his place....

And this was something, by the way, to cause her to revise her theory as to the manner in which Anisty had managed to steal the jewels. If Maitland had gone abroad at one, and without intending to keep his engagement at Eugene's, then he must have been despoiled before that hour, and without

his knowledge. Surely, if the jewels had been taken from him with his cognizance, the hue and cry would have been out and Anisty would not have dared to linger so long in the neighborhood!

To be just with herself, the girl had not gone to the restaurant with much real hope of finding Maitland there. Curiosity had drawn her,--just to see if.... But it was too preposterous to credit, that he should have cared enough.... Quite too preposterous! It was her cup, her bitter cup, to know that she had learned to care enough--at sight!... And she recalled (with what pangs of shame and misery begged expression!) how her heart had been stirred when she had found him (as she thought) true to his tryst: even as she recalled the agony and distress of mind with which she had a moment later fathomed Anisty's impersonation.

For, of course, she had known that Maitland was Maitland and none other, from the instant when he told her to make good her escape and leave him to brazen it out: a task to daunt even as bold and resourceful a criminal as Anisty, and more especially if he were called upon to don the mask at a minute's notice, as Maitland had pretended to. Or, if she had not actually known, she had been led to suspect: and it had hardly needed what she had heard him say to the servants, when he thought her flying hotfoot over the lawn to safety, to harden suspicion into certainty.

And now that he should find her here, a second time a trespasser, doubly an ingrate,--that he should have caught her red-handed in this abominably ungrateful treachery!... She could pretend, of course, that she had returned merely to restore the jewels and the cigarette case; and he would believe her, for he was generous.... She could, but--she could not. Not now. Yesterday, the excitement had buoyed her; she had gained a piquant enjoyment from befooling him, playing her part of the amateur crackswoman in this little comedy of the stolen jewels. But therein lay the difference: yesterday it had been comedy, but to-day--ah! to-day she could no longer laugh. For now she cared.

A little lie would clear her--yes. But it was not to be cleared that she now so passionately desired; it was to have him believe in her, even against the evidence of his senses, even in the face of the world's condemnation; and so prove that he, too, cared--cared for her as his attitude toward her had taught her to care....

Ever since leaving him in the dawn she had fed her starved heart with the hope, faint hope though it were, that he would come to care a little, that he would not utterly despise her, that he would understand and forgive, when he learned why she had played out her part, nor believe that she was the embodiment of all that was ignoble, coarse, and crude; that he would show a little faith in her, a little faith that like a flickering taper might light the way for ... Love.

But that hope was now dead within her, and cold. She had but to look at him to see how groundless it had been, how utterly unmoved he was by her distress. He waited patiently--that was all--seeming so very tall, a pillar of righteous strength, distinguished and at ease in his evening clothes: waiting, patient but cold, dispassionate and disdainful.

"I am waiting, you see. Might I suggest that we have not all week for our--our mutual differences?"

His tone was altogether changed; she would hardly have known it for his voice. Its incisive, clipped accents were like a knife to her sensitiveness.... She summoned the reserve of her strength, stood erect, unsupported, and moved forward without a word. He stood aside, holding the lamp high, and followed her, lighting the way down the hall to the study.

Once there, she sank quivering into a chair, while he proceeded gravely to the desk, put down the lamp,--superfluous now, the gas having been lighted,--and after a moment's thought faced her, with a contemptuous smile and lift of his shoulders, thrusting hands deep into his pockets.

"Well?" he demanded cuttingly.

She made a little motion of her hands, begging for time; and, assenting with a short nod, he took a turn up and down the room, then abstractedly reached up and turned out the gas.

"When you are quite composed I should enjoy hearing your statement."

"I ... have none to make."

"So!"--with his back to the lamp, towering over and oppressing her with the sense of his strength and self-control. "That is very odd, isn't it?"

"I have no--no explanation to give that would satisfy you, or myself," she said brokenly. "I--I don't care what you think," with a flicker of defiance. "Believe the worst and--and do what you will--have me arrested----"

He laughed sardonically. "Oh, we won't go so far as that, I guess; harsh measures, such as arrest and imprisonment, are so unsatisfactory to all concerned. But I am interested to know why you are here."

Her breathing seemed very loud in the pause; she kept her lips tight, fearing to speak lest she lose her mastery of self. And hysteria threatened: the fluttering in her bosom warned her. She must be very careful, very restrained, if she were to avert that crowning misfortune.

"I don't think I quite understand you," he continued musingly; "surely you must have anticipated interruption."

"I thought you safely out of the way----"

"One presumed that." He laughed again, unpleasantly. "But how about Maitland? Didn't you have him in your calculations, or--"

He paused, unfeignedly surprised by her expression. And chuckled when he comprehended.

"By the powers, I forgot for a moment! So you thought me Maitland, eh? Well, I'm sorry I didn't understand that from the first. You're so quick, as a rule, you know,--I confess you duped me neatly this afternoon,--that I supposed you were wise and only afraid that I'd give you what you deserve.... If they had sent any one but that stupid ass, Hickey, to nab me, I'd be in the cooler now. As it was, you kindly selected the very best kind of a house for my purpose; I went straight up to the roofs and out through a building round the corner...."

But the shock of discovery, with its attendant revulsion of feeling, had been too much for her. She collapsed suddenly in the chair, eyes half closed, face pallid as a mask of death.

Anisty regarded her in silence for a meditative instant, then, taking up the lamp, strode down the hall to the pantry, returning presently with a glass brimming with an amber-tinted, effervescent liquid.

"Champagne," he announced, licking his lips. "Wish I had Maitland's means to gratify my palate. He knows good wine.... Here, my dear, gulp this down," placing the glass to the girl's lips and raising her head that she might swallow without strangling.

As it was, she choked and gasped, but after a moment began to show some signs of having benefited by the draught, a faint color dawning in her cheeks.

"That's some better," commended the burglar, not unkindly. "Now, if you please, we'll stop talking pretty and get down to brass tacks. Buck up, now, and answer my questions. And don't be afraid; I'm holding no great grudge for what you did this afternoon. I appreciate pluck and grit as much as anybody, I guess, though I do think you ran it pretty close, peaching on a pal after you'd lifted the jewels. By the way, why did you do it?"

"Because.... But you wouldn't understand if I told you."

"I suppose not. I'm not much good splitting sentimental hairs. But Maitland must have been pretty decent to you to make you go so far.... Speaking of which, where are they?"

"They?"

"Don't sidestep. We understand one another. I know you've brought back the jewels. Where have you stowed them?"

The wine had fulfilled its mission, endowed her with fresh strength and renewed spirit. She was thinking quickly, every wit alert.

"I won't tell you."

"Won't, eh? That's an admission that they're here, you know. And you may as well know I propose to have 'em. Fair means or foul, take your pick. Where are they?"

"I have told you I wouldn't tell."

"I've known pluckier women than you to change their minds, under pressure." He came nearer, bending over, face close to hers, eyes savage, and gripped her wrists none too gently. "Tell me!"

"Let me go."

He proceeded calmly to imprison both small wrists in one strong, bony hand. "Better tell."

"Let me go!" she panted, struggling to rise.

His voice took on an ugly tone. "Tell!"

She was a child in his hands, but managed nevertheless to rise. As he applied the pressure more cruelly to her arms she cried aloud with pain and, struggling desperately, knocked the chair over.

It went down with a crash appallingly loud in that silent house and at that hour; and taking advantage of his instant of consternation she jerked free and sprang toward the door. He was upon her in an instant, however, hard fingers digging into her shoulders. "You little fool!"

"No!" she cried. "No, no, no! Let me go, you--you brute!----"

Abruptly he thought better of his methods and released her, merely putting himself between her and the doorway.

"Don't be a little fool," he counseled. "You kick up that row and you'll have us both pinched inside of the next five minutes."

Defiance was on her tongue's tip, but the truth in his words gave her pause. Palpitating with the shock, every outraged instinct a-quiver, she subdued herself and fell back, eying him fixedly.

"They're here," he nodded thoughtfully. "You wouldn't have stood for that if they weren't. And since they are, I can find them without your assistance. Sit down. I shan't touch you again."

She had scant choice other than to obey. Desperate as she was, her strength had been severely overtaxed, and she might not presume upon it too greatly. Fascinated with terror, she let herself down into an easy chair.

Anisty thought for a moment, then went over to the desk and sat himself before it.

"Keys," he commented, rapidly inventorying what he saw. "How'd you get hold of them?"

"They are Mr. Maitland's. He must have forgotten them."

The burglar chuckled grimly. "Coincidences multiply. It is odd. That harp,

O'Hagan, was coming in with a can of beer while I was picking the lock, and caught me. He wanted to know if I'd missed my train for Greenfields, and I gave him my word of honor I had. Moreover, I'd mislaid my keys and had been ringing for him for the past ten minutes. He swallowed every word of it... By the way, here's a glove of yours. You certainly managed to leave enough clues about to insure your being nabbed even by a New York detective."

He faced about, tossing her the glove, and with it so keen and penetrating a glance that her heart sank for fear that he had guessed her secret. But as he continued she regained confidence.

"I could teach you a thing or two," he suggested pleasantly. "You make about as many mistakes as the average beginner. And, on the other hand, you've got the majority beaten to a finish for 'cuteness. You're as quick as they make them."

She straightened up, uneasy, oppressed by a vague surmise as to whither this tended.

"Thank you," she said breathlessly, "but hadn't you better----"

"Plenty of time, my dear. Maitland has gone to Greenfields and we've several hours before us.... Look here, little woman, why don't you take a tumble to yourself, cut out all this nonsense, and look to your own interests?"

"I don't understand you," she faltered, "but if----"

"I'm talking about this Maitland affair. Cut it out and forget it. You're too good-looking and valuable to yourself to lose your head just all on account of a little moonlight flirtation with a good-looking millionaire. You don't suppose for an instant that there's anything in it for yours, do you? You're nothing to Maitland--just an incident; next time he meets you, the baby-stare for yours. You can thank your lucky stars he happened to have a reputation to sustain as a village cut-up, a gay, sad dog, always out for a good time and hang the expense!--otherwise he'd have handed you yours without a moment's hesitation. I'm not doing this up in tin-foil and tying a violet ribbon with tassels on it, but I'm handing it straight to you: something you don't want to forget.... You just sink your hooks in the fact that you're nothing to Maitland and that he's nothing to you, and never will be, and you won't lose anything--except illusions."

She remained quiescent for a little, hands twitching in her lap, torn by conflicting emotions--fear of and aversion for the man, amusement, chill horror bred of the knowledge that he was voicing the truth about her, the truth, at least, as he saw it, and--and as Maitland would see it.

"Illusions?" she echoed faintly, and raised her eyes to his with a pitiful attempt at a smile. "Oh, but I must have lost them, long ago; else I shouldn't be...."

"Here and what you are. That's what I'm telling you."

She shuddered imperceptibly; looked down and up again, swiftly, her expression inscrutable, her voice a-tremble between laughter and tears: "Well?"

"Eh?" The directness of her query figuratively brought him up all standing, canvas flapping and wind out of his sails.

"What are you offering me in exchange for my silly dream?" she inquired, a trace of spirit quickening her tone.

"A fair exchange, I think ... something that I wouldn't offer you if you hadn't been able to dream." He paused, doubtful, clumsy.

"Go on," she told him faintly.... Since it must come, as well be over with it.

"See here." He took heart of desperation. "You took to Maitland when you thought he was me. Why not take to me for myself? I'm as good a man, better _as_ a man, than he, if I do blow my own horn.... You side with me, little woman, and--and all that--and I'll treat you square. I never went back on a pal yet. Why," brightening with enthusiasm as his gaze appraised her, "with your looks and your cleverness and my knowledge of the business, we can sweep the country, you and I."

"Oh!" she cried breathlessly.

"We'll start right now," he plunged on, misreading her; "right now, with last night's haul. You'll chuck this addled sentimental pangs-of-conscience lay, hand over the jewels, and--and I'll hand 'em back to you the day we're married, all set and ... as handsome a wedding present as any woman ever got...."

She twisted in her chair to hide her face from him, fairly cornered at last, brain a-whirl devising a hundred maneuvers, each more helpless than the last, to cheat and divert him for the time, until ... until....

The consciousness of his presence near her, of the sheer strength and might of will-power of the man, bore upon her heavily; she was like a child in his hands, helpless.... She turned with a hushed gasp to find that he had risen and come close to her chair; his face was not a foot from hers, his eyes dangerous; in another moment he would have his strong arms about her. She shrank away, terrified.

"No, no!" she begged.

"Well, and why not? Well?"--tensely.

"How do I know?... This afternoon I outwitted you, robbed and sold you for--for what you call a scruple. How can I know that you are not paying me back in my own coin?"

"Oh, but little woman!" he laughed tenderly, coming nearer. "It is because you did that, because you could hold those scruples and make a fool of me

for their sake, that I want you. Don't think I'm capable of playing with you--it takes a woman to do that. Don't you know,"--he bent nearer and his breath was warm upon her cheek,--"don't you know that you're too rare and fine and precious for a man to risk losing?... Come now!"

"Not yet." She started to her feet and away.

"Wait.... There's a cab!"

The street without was echoing with the clattering drum of galloping hoofs. "At this hour!" she cried, aghast. "Could it be--"

"No fear. Besides--there, it's stopped."

"In front of this house!"

"No, three doors up the street, at least. That's something you must learn, and I can teach you to judge distance by sound in the darkness--"

"But I tell you," she insisted, retreating before him, "it's a risk.... There, did you hear that?"

"That" was the dulled crash of the front door.

Anisty stepped to the table on the instant and plunged the room in darkness.

"Steady!" he told her evenly. "Steady. It can't be--but take no chances. Go to the trunk-closet and get that window open. If it's Maitland,"--grimly--"well, I'll follow."

"What do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"Leave that to me ... I've never been caught yet."

Cold fear gripped her heart as, in a flash of intuition, she divined his intention.

"Quick!" he bade her savagely. "Don't you want--"

"I can't see," she invented. "Where's the door? I can't see...."

"Here."

Through the darkness his fingers found hers. "Come," he said.

"Ah!"

Her hand closed over his wrist, and in a thought she had flung herself before him and caught the other. In the movement her hand brushed against something that he was holding; and it was cold and smooth and hard.

"Ah! no, no!" she implored. "Not that, not that!"

With an oath he attempted to throw her off, but, frail strength magnified by a fury of fear, she joined issue with him, clinging to his wrists with the tenacity of a wildcat, though she was lifted from her feet and dashed this way and that, brutally, mercilessly, though her heart fell sick within her for the hopelessness of it, though....

XI

"DAN"----QUIXOTE

Leaving the hotel, Maitland strode quietly but rapidly across the car-tracks to the sidewalk bordering the park. A dozen nighthawk cabbies bore down upon him, yelping in chorus. He motioned to the foremost, jumped into the hansom and gave the fellow his address.

"Five dollars," he added, "if you make it in five minutes."

An astonished horse, roused from a droop-eared lethargy, was yanked almost by main strength out of the cab-rank and into the middle of the Avenue. Before he could recover, the long whip-lash had leaped out over the roof of the vehicle, and he found himself stretching away up the Avenue on a dead run.

Yet to Maitland the pace seemed deadly slow. He fidgeted on the seat in an agony of impatience, a dozen times feeling in his waistcoat pocket for his latch-keys. They were there, and his fingers itched to use them.

By the lights streaking past he knew that their pace was furious, and was haunted by a fear lest it should bring the police about his ears. At Twenty-ninth Street, indeed, a dreaming policeman, startled by the uproar, emerged hastily from the sheltering gloom of a store-entrance, shouted after the cabby an inarticulate question, and, getting no response, unsheathed his night-stick and loped up the Avenue in pursuit, making the locust sing upon the pavement at every jump.

In the cab, Maitland, turning to watch through the rear peep-hole, was thrown violently against the side as the hansom rocketed on one wheel into his street. Recovering, he seized the dashboard and gathered himself together, ready to spring the instant the vehicle paused in its headlong career.

Through the cabby's misunderstanding of the address, in all likelihood, the horse was reined in on its haunches some three houses distant from the apartment building. Maitland found himself sprawling on his hands and knees on the sidewalk, picked himself up, shouting "You'll wait?" to the driver, and sprinted madly the few yards separating him from his own front door, keys ready in hand.

Simultaneously the half-winded policeman lumbered around the Fifth Avenue

corner, and a man, detaching himself from the shadows of a neighboring doorway, began to trot loudly across the street, evidently with the intention of intercepting Maitland at the door.

He was hardly quick enough. Maitland did not even see him. The door slammed in the man's face, and he, panting harshly, rapped out an imprecation and began a frantic assault on the push-button marked "Janitor."

As for Maitland, he was taking the stairs three at a clip, and had his pass-key in the latch almost as soon as his feet touched the first landing. An instant later he thrust the door open and blundered blindly into the pitch-darkness of his study.

For a thought he stood bewildered and dismayed by the absence of light. He had thought, somehow, to find the gas-jets flaring. The atmosphere was hot and foul with the odor of kerosene, the blackness filled with strange sounds and mysterious moving shapes. A grunting gasp came to his ears, and then the silence and the night alike were split by a report, accompanied by a streak of orange flame shooting ceilingward from the middle of the room.

Its light, transient as it was, gave him some inkling of the situation. Unthinkingly he flung himself forward, ready to grapple with that which first should meet his hands. Something soft and yielding brushed against his shoulder, and subconsciously, in the auto-hypnosis of his excitement, he was aware of a man's voice cursing and a woman's cry of triumph trailing off into a wail of pain.

On the instant he found himself at grips with the marauder. For a moment both swayed, dazed by the shock of collision. Then Maitland got a footing on the carpet and put forth his strength; the other gave way, slipped, and went to his knees. Maitland's hands found his throat, fingers sinking deep into flesh as he bore the fellow backward. A match flared noiselessly and the gas blazed overhead. A cry of astonishment choked in his throat as he recognized his own features duplicated in the face of the man whose throat he was slowly and relentlessly constricting. Anisty! He had not thought of him or connected him with the sounds that had thrilled and alarmed him over the telephone wire coming out of the void and blackness of night. Indeed, he had hardly thought any coherent thing about the matter. The ring of the girl's "No!" had startled him, and he had somehow thought, vaguely, that O'Hagan had surprised her in the flat. But more than that....

He glanced swiftly aside at the girl standing still beneath the chandelier, the match in one hand burning toward her finger-tips, in the other Anisty's revolver. Their eyes met, and in hers the light of gladness leaped and fell like a living flame, then died, to be replaced by a look of entreaty and prayer so moving that his heart in its unselfish chivalry went out to her.

Who or what she was, howsoever damning the evidence against her, he would believe against belief, shield her to the end at whatever hazard to

himself, whatever cost to his fortunes. Love is unreasoning and unreasonable even when unrecognized.

His senses seemed to vibrate with redoubled activity, to become abnormally acute. For the first time he was conscious of the imperative clamor of the electric bell in O'Hagan's quarters, as well as of the janitor's rich brogue voicing his indignation as he opened the basement door and prepared to ascend. Instantly the cause of the disturbance flashed upon him.

His strangle-hold on Anisty relaxed, he released the man, and, brows knitted with the concentration of his thoughts, he stepped back and over to the girl, lifting her hand and gently taking the revolver from her fingers.

Below, O'Hagan was parleying through the closed door with the late callers. Maitland could have blessed his hot-headed Irish stupidity for the delay he was causing.

Already Anisty was on his feet again, blind with rage and crouching as if ready to spring, only restrained by the sight of his own revolver, steady and threatening in Maitland's hand.

For the least part of a second the young man hesitated, choosing his way. Then, resolved, in accents of determination, "Stand up, you hound!" he cried. "Back to the wall there!" and thrust the weapon under the burglar's nose.

The move gained instant obedience. Mr. Anisty could not reasonably hesitate in the face of such odds.

"And you," Maitland continued over his shoulder to the girl, without removing his attention from the burglar, "into the alcove there, at once! And not a word, not a whisper, not a sound until I call you!"

She gave him one frightened and piteous glance, then, unquestioning, slipped quietly behind the portieres.

To Anisty, again: "Turn your pockets out!" commanded Maitland. "Quick, you fool! The police are below; your freedom depends on your haste." Anisty's hands flew to his pockets, emptying their contents on the floor. Maitland's eyes sought in vain the shape of the canvas bag. But time was too precious. Another moment's procrastination and---

"That will do," he said crisply, without raising his voice. "Now listen to me. At the end of the hall, there, you'll find a trunk-closet, from which a window----"

"I know."

"Naturally you would. Now go!"

Anisty waited for no repetition of the permission. Whatever the madness of Mad Maitland, he was concerned only to profit by it. Never before had the

long arm of the law stretched hungry fingers so near his collar. He went, springing down the hall in long, soundless strides, vanishing into its shadows.

As he disappeared Maitland stepped to the door, raised his revolver, and pulled the trigger twice. The shots detonated loudly in that confined space, and rang coincident with the clash and clatter of shattered glass. A thin cloud of vapor obscured the doorway, swaying on the hot, still air, then parted and dissolved, dissipated by the entrance of four men who, thrusting the door violently open, struggled into the hallway.

Blue cloth and brass buttons moved conspicuously in the van, a grim face flushed and perspiring beneath the helmet's visor, a revolver poised menacingly in one hand, locust as ready in the other. Behind this outward and visible manifestation of the law's majesty bobbed a rusty derby, cocked jauntily back upon the red, shining forehead of a short and thick-set person with a black mustache. O'Hagan's agitated countenance loomed over a dusty shoulder, and the battered silk hat of the nighthawk brought up the rear.

"Come in, everybody," Maitland greeted them cheerfully, turning back into the study and tossing the revolver, shreds of smoke still curling up from its muzzle, upon a divan. "O'Hagan," he called, on second thought, "jump down-stairs and see that all New York doesn't get in. Let nobody in!"

As the janitor unwillingly obeyed, policeman and detective found their tongues. A volley of questions, to the general purport of "What's th' meanin' of all this here?" assailed Maitland as he rested himself coolly on an edge of the desk. He responded, with one eyebrow slightly elevated: "A burglar. What did you suppose? That I was indulging in target practice at this time of night?"

"Which way'd he go?"

"Back of the flat--through the window to the fire-escape, I suppose. I took a couple of shots after him, but missed, and inasmuch as he was armed, I didn't pursue."

Hickey stepped forward, glowering unpleasantly at the young man. "Yeh go along," he told the uniformed man, "'nd see 'f he's tellin' the truth. I'll stay here 'nd keep him company."

His tone amused Maitland. In the reaction from the recent strain upon his wits and nerve, he laughed openly.

"And who are you?" he suggested, smiling, as the policeman clumped heavily away. Hickey spat thoughtfully into a Satsuma jardiniere and sneered. "I s'pose yeh never saw me before?"

Maitland bowed affirmation. "I'm sorry to say that that pleasure has heretofore been denied me."

"Uh-huh," agreed the detective sourly, "I guess that's a hot one, too." He

scowled blackly in Maitland's amazed face and seemed abruptly to swell with mysterious rage. "My name's Hickey," he informed him venomously, "and don't yeh lose sight of that after this. It's somethin' it won't hurt yeh to remember. Guess yer mem'ry's taking a vacation, huh?"

"My dear man," said Maitland, "you speak in parables and--if you'll pardon my noticing it--with some uncalled-for spleen. Might I suggest that you moderate your tone? For," he continued, facing the man squarely, "if you don't, it will be my duty and pleasure to hoist you into the street."

"I got a photergraph of yeh doing it," growled Hickey. "Still, seeing as yeh never saw me before, I guess it won't do no harm for yeh to connect with this." And he turned back his coat, uncovering the official shield of the detective bureau.

"Ah!" commented Maitland politely. "A detective? How interesting!"

"Fire-escape winder's broke, all right." This was the policeman, returned. "And some one's let down the bottom length of ladder, but there ain't nobody in sight."

"No," interjected Hickey, "nd there wouldn't 've been if you'd been waitin' in the back yard all night."

"Certainly not," Maitland agreed blandly; "especially if my burglar had known it. In which case I fancy he would have chosen another route--by the roof, possibly."

"Yeh know somethin' about roofs yehself, donchuh?" suggested Hickey. "Well, I guess yeh'll have time to write a book about it while yeh--"

He stepped unexpectedly to Maitland's side and bent forward. Something cold and hard closed with a snap around each of the young man's wrists. He started up, face aflame with indignation, forgetful of the girl hidden in the alcove.

"What the devil!" he cried hotly, jingling the handcuffs.

"Ah, come off," Hickey advised him. "Yeh can't bluff it for ever, you know. Come along and tell the sarge all about it, Daniel Maitland, _Es_ -quire, _alias_ Handsome Dan Anisty, gentleman burglar... Ah, cut that out, young fellow; yeh'll find this ain't no laughin' matter. Yeh're foxy, all right, but yeh've pushed yer run of luck too hard."

Hickey paused, perplexed, finding no words wherewith adequately to voice the disgust aroused in him by his prisoner's demeanor, something far from seemly, to his mind.

The humor of the situation had just dawned upon Maitland, and the young man was crimson with appreciation.

"Go on, go on!" he begged feebly. "Don't let _me_ stop you, Hickey. Don't, please, let me spoil it all.... Your Sherlock Holmes, Hickey, is one

of the finest characterizations I have ever witnessed. It is a privilege not to be underestimated to be permitted to play Raffles to you.... But seriously, my dear sleuth!" with an unhappy attempt to wipe his eyes with hampered fists, "don't you think you're wasting your talents?"

By this time even the policeman seemed doubtful. He glanced askance at the detective and shuffled uneasily. As for the cabby, who had blustered in at first with intent to demand his due in no uncertain terms, apparently Maitland's bearing, coupled with the inherent contempt and hatred of the nighthawk tribe for the minions of the law, had won his sympathies completely. Lounging against a door-jamb, quite at home, he genially puffed an unspeakable cigarette and nodded approbation of Maitland's every other word.

But Hickey--Hickey bristled belligerently.

"Fine," he declared acidly; "fine and dandy. I take off my hat to yeh, Dan Anisty. I may be a bad actor, all right, but yeh got me beat at the post."

Then turning to the policeman, "I got him right. Look here!" Drawing a folded newspaper from his pocket, he spread it open for the officer's inspection. "Yeh see them pictures? Now, on the level, is it _natural_?"

The patrolman frowned doubtfully, glancing from the paper to Maitland. The cabby stretched a curious neck. Maitland groaned inwardly; he had seen that infamous sheet.

"Now listen," the detective expounded with gusto. "Twice to-day this here Maitland, or Anisty, meets me. Once on the stoop here, 'nd he's Maitland 'nd takes me to lunch--see? Next time it's in Harlem, where I've been sent with a hot tip from the C'mmiss'ner's office to find Anisty, 'nd he's still Maitland 'nd surprised to see me. I ain't sure then, but I'm doin' some heavy thinkin', all right. I lets him go and shadows him. After a while he gives me the slip 'nd I chases down here, waitin' for him to turn up. Coming down on the car I buys this paper 'nd sees the pictures, and then I'm _on_. See?"

"Uh-huh," grunted the patrolman, scowling at Maitland. The cabby caressed his nose with a soiled forefinger reflectively, plainly a bit prejudiced by Hickey's exposition.

"One minute," Maitland interjected, eyes twinkling and lips twitching. "How long ago was it that you began to watch this house, sleuth?"

"Five minutes before yeh come home," responded Hickey, ignoring the insult. "Now--"

"Took you a long time to figure this out, didn't it? But go on, please."

"Well, I picked the winner, all right," flared the detective. "I guess that'll be about all for yours."

"Not quite," Maitland contradicted brusquely, wearying of the complication. "You say you met me on the stoop here. At what o'clock?"

"One; 'nd yeh takes me to lunch at Eugene's."

"Ah! When did I leave you?"

"I leaves yeh there at two."

"Well, O'Hagan will testify that he left me in these rooms, in dressing-gown and slippers at about one. At four he found me on this divan, bound and gagged, by courtesy of your friend, Mr. Anisty. Now, when was I with you in Harlem?"

"At seven o'clock, to the minute, yeh comes--"

"Never mind. At ten minutes to seven I took a cab from here to the Primordial Club, where I dined at seven precisely."

"And what's more," interposed the cabman eagerly, "I took yer there, sir."

"Thank you. Furthermore, sleuth, you say that you followed me around town from seven o'clock until--when?"

"I said--" stammered the plain-clothes man, purple with confusion.

"No matter. I didn't leave the Primordial until a quarter to eleven. But all this aside, as I understand it, you are asserting that, having given you all this trouble to-day, and knowing that you were after me, I deliberately hopped into a cab fifteen minutes ago, came up Fifth Avenue at such breakneck speed that this officer thought it was a runaway, and finally jumped out and ran up-stairs here to fire a revolver three times, for no purpose whatsoever beyond bringing you gentlemen about my ears?"

Hickey's jaw sagged. The cabby ostentatiously covered his mouth with a huge red paw and made choking noises.

"Pass it up, sarge, pass it up," he whispered hoarsely.

"Shut yer trap," snapped the detective. "I know what I'm doin'. This crook's clever all right, but I got the kibosh on him this time. Lemme alone." He squared his shoulders, blustering to save his face. "I don't know why yeh done it----"

"Then I'll tell you," Maitland cut in crisply. "If you'll be good enough to listen." And concisely narrated the events of the past twenty-four hours, beginning at the moment when he had discovered Anisty in Maitland Manor. Save that he substituted himself for the man who had escaped from Higgins and eliminated all mention of the grey girl, his statement was exact and convincing. As he came down to the moment when he had called up from the Bartholdi and heard mysterious sounds in his flat, substantiating his story by indicating the receiver that dangled useless from the telephone, even Hickey was staggered.

But not beaten. When Maitland ceased speaking the detective smiled superiority to such invention.

"Very pretty," he conceded. "Yeh c'n tell it all to the magistrate to-morrow morning. Meantime yeh'll have time to think up a yarn explainin' how it come that a crook like Anisty made three attempts in one day to steal some jewels, 'nd didn't get 'em. Where were they all this time?"

"In safe-keeping," Maitland lied manfully, with a furtive glance toward the alcove.

"Whose?" pursued Mr. Hickey truculently.

"Mine," with equanimity. "Seriously--_sleuth!_--are you trying to make a charge against me of stealing my own property?"

"Yeh done it for a blind. 'Nd that's enough. Officer, take this man to the station; I'll make the complaint."

The policeman hesitated, and at this juncture O'Hagan put in an appearance, lugging a heavy brown-paper bundle.

"Beg pardon, Mither Maitland, sor----?"

"Well, O'Hagan?"

"The crowd at the dure, sor, is dishpersed," the janitor reported. "A couple av cops kem along an' fanned 'em. They're askin' fer the two av yees," with a careless nod to the policeman and detective.

"Yeh heard what I said," Hickey answered the officer's look.

"I'm thinkin'," O'Hagan pursued, calmly ignoring the presence of the outsiders, "thot these do be the soot that domned thafe av the worruld stole off ye the day, sor. A la-ad brought ut at ayeleven o'clock, sor, wid particular rayquist thot ut be daylivered to ye at once. The paper's tore, an'----"

"O'Hagan," Maitland ordered sharply, "undo that parcel. I think I can satisfy you now, sleuth. What kind of a suit did your luncheon acquaintance wear?"

"Grey," conceded Hickey reluctantly.

"An' here ut is," O'Hagan announced, arraying the clothing upon a chair.

"Iv'ry down' thing, aven down to the socks.... And a note for ye, sor."

As he shook out the folds of the coat a square white envelope dropped to the floor; the janitor retrieved and offered it to his employer.

"Give it to the sleuth," nodded Maitland.

Scowling, Hickey withdrew the inclosure--barely glancing at the superscription.

"Dear Mr. Maitland," he read aloud; "As you will probably surmise, my motive in thus restoring to you a portion of your property is not altogether uninfluenced by personal and selfish considerations. In brief, I wish to discover whether or not you are to be at home to-night. If not, I shall take pleasure in calling; if the contrary, I shall feel that in justice to myself I must forego the pleasure of improving an acquaintance begun under auspices so unfavorable. In either case, permit me to thank you for the use of your wardrobe,--which, quaintly enough, has outlived its usefulness to me: a fat-headed detective named Hickey will tell you why,--and to extend to you expression of my highest consideration. Believe me, I am enviously yours, Daniel Anisty'--Signed," added Hickey mechanically, his face working.

"Satisfied, Sleuth?"

By way of reply, but ungraciously, the detective stepped forward and unlocked the handcuffs.

Maitland stood erect, smiling. "Thank you very much, sleuth. I shan't forget you ... O'Hagan," Tossing the janitor the keys from his desk, "you'll find some--ah--lemon-pop and root-beer in the buffet, this officer and his friends will no doubt join you in a friendly drink downstairs. Cabby, I want a word with you.... Good morning, gentlemen, _Good Morning,_ sleuth."

And he showed them the door. "I shall be at your service officer," he called over the janitor's shoulder, "at any time to-morrow morning. If not here, O'Hagan will tell you where to find me. And, O'Hagan!" The Janitor fell back. "Keep them at least an hour," Maitland told him guardedly, "and say nothing."

The Irishman pledged his discretion by a silent look. Maitland turned back to the cabby.

"You did me a good turn, just now," he began.

"Don't mention it, sir; I've carried you hoften before this evenin', and--excuse my sayin' so--I never _'ad_ a fare as tipped 'andsomer. It's a real pleasure, sir, to be of service."

"Thank you," returned Maitland, eying him in speculative wise. "I wonder--"

The man was a rough, burly Englishman of one of the most intelligent, if not intellectual, kind; the British cabby, as a type, has few superiors for sheer quickness of wit and understanding. This man had been sharpened and tempered by his contact with American conditions. His eyes were shrewd, his face honest if weather-beaten, his attitude respectful.

"I've another use for you to-night," Maitland decided, "if you are at liberty and--discreet?" The final word was a question, flung over his shoulder as he turned toward the escritoire.

"Yes, sir," said the man thoughtfully. "I allus can drive, sir, even when I'm drinkin' 'ardest and can't see nothink."

"Yes? You've been drinking to-night?" Maitland smiled quietly, standing at the small writing-desk and extracting a roll of bills from a concealed drawer.

"I'm fair blind, sir."

"Very well." Maitland turned and extended his hand, and despite his professed affliction, the cabby's eyes bulged as he appreciated the size of the bill.

"My worrd!" he gasped, stowing it away in the cavernous depths of a trousers pocket.

"You will wait outside," said Maitland, "until I come out or--or send somebody for you to take wherever directed. Oh, that's all right--not another word!"

The door closed behind the overwhelmed nighthawk, and the latch clicked loudly. For a space Maitland stood in the hallway, troubled, apprehensive, heart strangely oppressed, vision clouded by the memory of the girl as he had seen her only a few minutes since: as she had stood beneath the chandelier, after acting upon her primary clear-headed impulse to give her rescuer the aid of the light.

He seemed to recall very clearly her slight figure, swaying, a-quiver with fright and solicitude,--care for him!--her face, sensitive and sweet beneath its ruddy crown of hair, that of a child waking from evil dreams, her eyes seeking his with their dumb message of appeal and of.... He dared not name what else.

Forlorn, pitiful, little figure! Odd it seemed that he should fear to face her again, alone, that he should linger reluctant to cross the threshold of his study, mistrustful and afraid alike of himself and of her--a thief.

For what should he say to her, other than the words that voiced the hunger of his heart? Yet if he spoke ... words such as those to--to a thief ... what would be the end of it all?

What did it matter? Surely he, who knew the world wherein he lived and moved and had his being, knew bitter well the worth of its verdicts. The world might go hang, for all he cared. At least his life was his own, whether to make or to mar, and he had not to answer for it to any power this side of the gates of darkness. And if by any act of his the world should be given a man and a woman in exchange for a thief and an idler, perhaps in the final reckoning his life might not be accounted altogether wasted....

He set back his shoulders and inspired deeply, eyes lightening; and stepped into the study, resolved. "Miss--" he called huskily; and stopped, reminded that not yet did he even know her name.

"It is safe now," he amended, more clearly and steadily, "to come out, if you will."

He heard no response. The long gleaming folds of the portieres hung motionless. Still, a sharp and staccato clatter of hoofs that had risen in the street, might have drowned her voice.

"If you please--?" he said again, loudly.

The silence sang sibilant in his ears; and he grew conscious of a sense of anxiety and fear stifling in its intensity.

At length, striding forward, with a swift gesture he flung the hangings aside.

XII

ON RECONSIDERATION

Gently but with decision Sergeant Hickey set his face against the allurements of the wine-cup and the importunities of his fellow-officers.

He was tired, he affirmed with a weary nod; the lateness of the hour rendered him quite indisposed for convivial dalliance. Even the sight of O'Hagan, seduction incarnated, in the vestibule, a bottle under either arm, clutching a box of cigars jealously with both hands, failed to move the temperate soul.

"Nah," he waved temptation aside with a gesture of finality. "I don't guess I'll take nothin' to-night, thanks. G'night all."

And, wheeling, shaped a course for Broadway.

The early morning air breathed chill but grateful to his fevered brow. Oddly enough, in view of the fact that he had indulged in no very violent exercise, he found himself perspiring profusely. Now and again he saw fit to pause, removing his hat and utilizing a large soiled bandana with grim abandon.

At such times his face would be upturned, eyes trained upon the dim infinities beyond the pale moon-smitten sky. And he would sigh profoundly--not the furnace sigh of a lover thinking of his mistress, but the heartfelt and moving sigh of the man of years and cares who has drunk deep of that cup of bitterness called Unappreciated Genius.

Then, tucking the clammy bandana into a hip pocket and withdrawing his yearning gaze from the heavens, would struggle on, with a funereal countenance as the outward and visible manifestation of a mind burdened with mundane concerns: such as (one might shrewdly surmise) that autographed portrait of a Deputy Commissioner of Police which the detective's lynx-like eyes had discovered on Maitland's escritoire, unhappily, toward the close of their conference, or, possibly, the mighty processes of departmental law, with its attendant annoyances of charges preferred, hearings before an obviously prejudiced yet high-principled martinet, reprimands and rulings, reductions in rank, "breaking," transfers; or--yet a third possibility--with the prevailing rate of wage as contrasted between detective and "sidewalk-pounder," and the cost of living as contrasted between Manhattan, on the one hand, and Jamaica, Bronxville, or St. George, Staten Island, on the other.

A dimly lighted side-entrance presently loomed invitingly in the sergeant's path. He glanced up, something surprised to find himself on Sixth Avenue; then, bowed with the fatigue of a busy day, turned aside, entering a dingy back room separated from the bar proper (at that illicit hour) by a curtain of green baize. A number of tables whose sloppy imitation rosewood tops shone dimly in the murky gas-light, were set about, here and there, for the accommodation of a herd of sleepy-eyed, case-hardened habitués.

Into a vacant chair beside one of these the detective dropped, and familiarly requested the lantern-jawed waiter, who presently bustled to his side, to "Back meh up a tub of suds, George.... Nah," in response to a concerned query, "I ain't feelin' up to much to-night."

Hat tilted over his eyes, one elbow on the chairback, another on the table, flabby jowls quivering as he mumbled the indispensable cigar, puffy hands clasped across his ample chest, he sat for many minutes by the side of his unheeded drink, pondering, turning over and over in his mind the one idea it was capable of harboring at a time.

"He c'u'd 've wrote that letter to himself.... He's wise enough.... Yeh can't fool Hickey all the time.... I'll get him yet. Gottuh make good 'r it's the sidewalks f'r mine.... Me, tryin' hard to make an 'onest livin'.... 'Nd him with all kinds of money!"

The fat mottled fingers sought a waistcoat pocket and, fumbling therein, touched caressingly a little pellet of soft paper. Its possessor did not require to examine it to reassure himself as to its legitimacy as a work of art, nor as to the prominence of the Roman C in its embellishment of engraved arabesques.

"A century," he reflected sullenly; "one lonely little century for mine. 'Nd _he_ had a wad like a ham ... _on_ him.... 'Nd I might've had it all for my very own if...." His brow clouded blackly.

"_Sleuth!_" Hickey ground the epithet vindictively between his teeth. And spat. "Sleuth! Ah hell!"

Recalled to himself by the very vehemence of his emotion, he turned hastily, drained to its dregs the tall glass of lukewarm and vapid beer which had stood at his elbow, placed a nickel on the table, and, rising, waddled hastily out into the night.

It was being borne in upon him with much force that if he wished to save his name and fame somethin' had got to be done about it.

"I hadn't oughtuh left him so long, I guess," he told himself; "but ... I'll _get_ him all right."

And turning, lumbered gloomily eastward, rapt with vain imaginings, squat, swollen figure blending into the deeper, meaner shadows of the Tenderloin; and so on toward Maitland's rooms--morose, misunderstood, malignant, coddling his fictitious wrongs; somehow pathetically typical of the force he represented.

On the corner of Fifth Avenue he paused, startled fairly out of his dour mood by the loud echo of a name already become too hatefully familiar to his ears, and by the sight of what, at first glance, he took to be the beginning of a street brawl.

XIII

FLIGHT

In the alcove the girl waited, torn in the throes of incipient hysteria: at first too weak from reaction and revulsion of feeling to do anything other than lean heavily against the wall and fight with all her strength and will against this crawling, shuddering, creeping horror of nerves, that threatened alike her self-control, her consciousness, and her reason.

But insensibly the tremor wore itself away, leaving her weary and worn but mistress of her thoughts and actions. And she dropped with gratitude into a chair, bending an ear attentive to the war of words being waged in the room beyond the portieres.

At first, however, she failed to grasp the import of the altercation. And when in time she understood its trend, it was with incredulity, resentment, and a dawning dread lest a worse thing might yet befall her, worse by far than aught that had gone before. But to be deprived of his protection, to feel herself forcibly restrained from the shelter of his generous care--!

A moment gone she had been so sure that all would now be well with her, once Maitland succeeded in ridding himself of the police. He would shut that door and----and then she would come forth and tell him, tell him everything, and, withholding naught that damned her in her own esteem,

throw herself upon his mercy, bruised with penitence but serene in the assurance that he would prove kind.

She had such faith in his tender and gentle kindness now.... She had divined so clearly the motive that had permitted Anisty's escape in order that she might be saved, not alone from Anisty, not alone from the shame of imprisonment, but from herself as well--from herself as Maitland knew her. The burglar out of the way, by ruse, evasion, or subterfuge she would be secreted from the prying of the police, smuggled out of the house and taken to a place of safety, given a new chance to redeem herself, to clean her hands of the mire of theft, to become worthy of the womanhood that was hers....

But now--she thrust finger-nails cruelly into her soft palms, striving to contain herself and keep her tongue from crying aloud to those three brutal, blind men the truth: that she was guilty of the robbery, she with Anisty; that Maitland was--Maitland: a word synonymous with "man of honor."

In the beginning, indeed, all that restrained her from doing so was her knowledge that Maitland would be more pained by her sacrifice than gladdened or relieved. He was so sure of clearing himself.... It was inconceivable to her that there could be men so stupid and crassly unobservant as to be able to confuse the identity of the two men for a single instant. What though they did resemble each other in form and feature? The likeness went no deeper: below the surface, and rising through it with every word and look and gesture, lay a world-wide gulf of difference in every shade of thought, feeling, and instinct.

She herself could never again be deceived--no, never! Not for a second could she mistake the one for the other.... What were they saying?

The turmoil of her indignation subsided as she listened, breathlessly, to Maitland's story of his adventures; and the joy that leaped in her for his frank mendacity in suppressing every incident that involved her, was all but overpowering. She could have wept for sheer happiness; and at a later time she would; but not now, when everything depended on her maintaining the very silence of death.

How dared they doubt him? The insolents! The crude brutish insolence of them! Her anger raged high again ... and as swiftly was quenched, extinguished in a twinkling by a terror born of her excitement and a bare suggestion thrown out by Hickey.

"... _explainin' how a crook like Anisty made three tries in one day to steal some jewels and didn't get 'em. Where were they, all this time?_"

Maitland's cool retort was lost upon her. What matter? If they disbelieved him, persisted in calling him Anisty, in natural course they would undertake to search the flat. And if she were found.... Oh, she must spare him that! She had given him cause for suffering enough. She must get away, and that instantly, before.... From a distance, to-morrow

morning,--to-night, even,--by telegraph, she could communicate with him.

At this juncture O'Hagan entered with his parcel. The rustle of the paper as he brushed against the door-jamb was in itself a hint to a mind keyed to the highest pitch of excitement and seeking a way of escape from a position conceived to be perilous. In a trice the girl had turned and sped, lightfooted, to the door opening on the private hall.

Here, halting for a brief reconnaissance, she determined that her plan was feasible, if hazardous. She ran the risk of encountering some one ascending the stairs from the ground floor; but if she were cautious and quick she could turn back in time. On the other hand, the men whom she most feared were thoroughly occupied with their differences, dead to all save that which was happening within the room's four walls. A curtain hung perhaps a third of the way across the study door, tempering the light in the hall; and the broad shoulders of the cabby obstructed the remainder of the opening.

It was a chance. She poised herself on tiptoe, half undecided, and--the rustling of paper as O'Hagan opened the parcel afforded her an opportunity to escape, by drowning the noise of her movements.

For two eternal seconds she was edging stealthily down toward the outer door; then, in no time at all, found herself on the landing and--confronted by a fresh complication, one unforeseen: how to leave the house without being observed, stopped, and perhaps detained until too late? There would be men at the door, beyond doubt; possibly police, stationed there to arrest all persons attempting to leave....

No time for weighing chances. The choice of two alternatives lay before her: either to return to the alcove or to seek safety in the darkness of the upper floors--untenanted, as she had been at pains to determine. The latter seemed by far the better, the less dangerous, course to pursue. And at once she took it.

There was no light on the first-floor landing--it having presumably been extinguished by the janitor early in the evening. Only a feeble twilight obtained there, in part a reflected glow from the entrance hall, partly thin and diffused rays escaping from Maitland's study. So it was that the first few steps upward took the girl into darkness so close and unrelieved as to seem almost palpable.

At the turn of the staircase she paused, holding the rail and resting for an instant, the while she listened, ere ascending at a more sedate pace to a haven of safety more complete in that it would be more remote from the battle-ground below.

And, resting so, was suddenly chilled through and through with fear, sheer childish dread of the intangible and unknown terrors that lurked in the blackness above her. It was as if, rendered supersensitive by strain and excitement, the quivering filaments of her subconsciousness, like spiritual tentacles feeling ahead of her, had encountered and recoiled from a shape of evil, a specter of horror obscene and malign, crouching,

ready to spring, there, in the shadow of night. . . .

And her breath was smothered in her throat and her heart smote so madly against the frail walls of its cage that they seemed like to burst, while she stood transfixed, frozen in inaction, limbs stiffening, roots of her hair stirring, fingers gripping the banister rail until they pained her; and with eyes that stared wide into the black heart of nothingness, until the night seemed pricked with evanescent periods of dim fire, peopled with monstrous and terrible shadows closing about her. . . .

Yet--it was absurd! She must not yield to such puerile superstitions.

There was nothing there. . . .

There was something there . . . something that like an incarnation of hatred was stalking her. . . .

If only she dared scream! If only she dared turn and fly, back to the comfort of light and human company!...

There arose a trampling of feet in the hallway; and she heard Maitland's voice like a far echo, as he bade the police good night. And distant and unreachable as he seemed, the sound of his words brought her strength and some reassurance, and she grew slightly more composed. Yet, the instant that he had turned away to talk to the cabman, her fright of that unspeakable and incorporeal menace flooded her consciousness like a great wave, sweeping her--metaphorically--off her feet. And indeed, for the time, she felt as if drowning, overwhelmed in vast waters, sinking, sinking into the black abyss of syncope....

Then, as a drowning person--we're told--clutches at straws, she grasped again at the vibrations of his voice.... What was he saying?

"_You will wait outside, please, until I come out or send somebody, whom you will take wherever directed_...."

----Speaking to the cabman, thinking of her, providing for her escape! Considerate and fore-sighted as always! How she could have thanked him! The warmth of gratitude that enveloped her almost unnerved her; she was put to it to restrain her impulse to rush down the stairs and....

But no; she must not risk the chance of rebuff. How could she foretell what was in his mind and heart, how probe the depths of his feeling toward her? Perhaps he would receive her protestations in skeptic spirit. Heaven knew he had cause to! Dared she.... To be repulsed!...

But no. He had provided this means for flight; she would advantage herself of it and ... and thank him by letter. Best so: for he must ever think the worst of her; she could never undeceive him--pride restraining and upholding her.

Better so; she would go, go quickly, before he discovered her absence from the flat.

And incontinently she swung about and flew down the stairs, silently, treading as lightly on the heavily padded steps as though she had been thistledown whirled adrift by the wind, altogether heedless of the creeping terror she had sensed on the upper flight, careless of all save her immediate need to reach that cab before Maitland should discover that she had escaped.

The door was just closing behind the cabby as she reached the bottom step; and she paused, considering that it were best to wait a moment, at least, lest he should be surprised at the quickness with which his employer found work for him; paused and on some mysterious impulse half turned, glancing back up the stairs.

Not a thought too soon; another instant's hesitation and she had been caught. Some one--a man--was descending; and rapidly. Maitland? Even in her brief glance she saw the white shield of a shirt bosom gleam dull against the shadows. Maitland was in evening dress. Could it be possible...?

No time now for conjecture, time now only for action. She sprang for the door, had it open in a trice, and before the cabby was really enthroned upon his lofty box, the girl was on the step, fair troubled face upturned to him in wild entreaty.

"Hurry!" she cried, distracted. "Drive off, at once! Please--oh, please!"

Perhaps the man had expected something of the sort, analyzing Maitland's words and manner. At all events he was quick to appreciate. This was what he had been engaged for and what he had been paid for royally, in advance.

Seizing reins and whip, he jerked the startled animal between the shafts out of its abstraction and---

"I say, cabby! One moment!"

The cabman turned; the figure on the stoop of the house was undoubtedly Maitland's--Maitland as he had just seen him, with the addition of a hat. As he looked the man was at the wheel, clambering in.

"Changed my mind--I'm coming along, cabby," he said cheerfully. "Drive us to the St. Luke Building, please and--hurry!"

"Yessir!"

Bitter as poverty the cruel lash cut round the horse's flanks; and as the hansom shot out at break-neck speed toward Fifth Avenue, the girl cowered back in her corner, shivering, staring wide-eyed at the man who had so coolly placed himself at her side.

This, then, was that nameless danger that had stalked her on the staircase, this the personality whose animosity toward her had grown so virulent that, even when consciously ignorant of its proximity, she had

been repelled and frightened by its subtle emanations! And now--and now she was in his power!

Dazed with fear she started up, acting blindly on the primitive instinct to fly; and in another moment, doubtless, would have thrown herself boldly from the cab to the sidewalk, had her companion not seized her by the forearm and by simple force compelled her to resume her seat.

"Be still, you little fool!" he told her sharply. "Do you think that I'm going to let you go a third time? Not till I'm through with you.... And if you scream, by the powers, I'll throttle you!"

XIV

RETRIBUTION

She sank back, speechless. Anisty glanced her up and down without visible emotion, then laughed unpleasantly,--the hard and unyielding laugh of brute man brutishly impassioned.

"This silly ass, Maitland," he observed, "isn't really as superfluous as he seems. _I_ find him quite a convenience, and I suppose that ought to be totted up to his credit, since it's because he's got the good taste to resemble me.... Consider his thoughtfulness in providing me this cab! What'd I've done without it? To tell the truth I was quite at a loss to frame it up, how to win your coy consent to this giddy elopement, back there in the hall. But dear kind Mis-ter Maitland, bless his innocent heart! fixes it all up for me.... And so," concluded the criminal with ironic relish,--"and so I've got _you_, my lady."

He looked at her in sidelong fashion, speculative, calculating, relentless. And she bowed her head, assenting, "Yes--"

"You're dead right, little woman. Got you. Um-mmm."

She made no reply; she could have made none aside from raising an outcry, although now she was regaining something of her shattered poise, and with it the ability to accept the situation quietly, for a little time (she could not guess how long she could endure the strain), pending an opportunity to turn the tables on this, her persecutor.

"What is it," she said presently, with some effort--"what is it you wish with me?"

"I have my purpose," with a grim smile.

"You will not tell me?"

"You've guessed it, my lady; I will not--just yet. Wait a bit."

She spurred her flagging spirit until it flashed defiance. "Mr. Anisty!"

"Yes?" he responded with a curling lip, cold eyes to hers.

"I demand--"

"No you don't!" he cut her short with a snarl. "You're not in a position to demand anything. Maybe it would be as well for you to remember who you're dealing with."

"And---?"--heart sinking again.

"And I've been made a fool of just as long as I can stand for it. I'm a crook--like yourself, my lady, but with more backbone and some pride in being at the head of my profession. I'm wanted in a dozen places; I'll spend the rest of my days in the pen, if they ever get me. Twice today I've been within an ace of being nabbed--kindness of you and your Maitland. Now--I'm desperate and determined. Do you connect?"

"What--?" she asked breathlessly.

"I can make you understand, I fancy. Tonight, instead of dropping to the back yard and shinning over the fences to safety, I took the fire escape up to the top flat--something a copper would never think of--and went through to the hall. Why? Why, to interrupt the tender tete-a-tete Maitland had planned. Why again? Because, for one thing, I've never yet been beaten at my own game; and I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks. Moreover, no man yet has ever laid hands on me in anger and not regretted it." The criminal's voice fell a note or two, shaking with somber passion. "I'll have that pup's hide yet!" he swore.

The girl tried to nerve herself. "It--it doesn't seem to strike you," she argued, controlling her hysteria by sheer strength of purpose, "that I have only to raise my voice to bring all Broadway to my rescue."

For by now the cab had sheered off into that thoroughfare, and was rocking rapidly south, between glittering walls of light. A surface car swooped down upon them, and past, making night hideous with gong and drumming trucks, and drowning Anisty's response. For which reason he chose to repeat it, with added emphasis.

"You try it on, my lady, and see what happens."

She had no answer ready, and he proceeded, after waiting a moment: "But you're not going to be such a fool. You have no pleasure in the prospect of seeing the inside of the Tombs, yourself; and, besides, you ought to know me well enough to know...."

"What?" she breathed, in spite of herself.

Anisty folded his arms, thrusting the right hand beneath his coat.

"Maitland got only one of my guns," he announced ironically. "He'd've got the contents of the other, only he chose to play the fool and into my hands. Now I guess you understand,"--and turning his head he fixed her with an inflexible glare, chill and heartless as steel,--"that one squeal out of you will be the last. Oh, I've got no scruples; arrest to me means a living death. I'll take a shorter course, by preference, and--I'll take you with me for company."

"You--you mean you would shoot me?" she whispered, incredulous.

"Like a dog," he returned with unctious.

"You, a man, would--would shoot a woman?"

"You're not a woman, my lady: you're a crook. Just as I'm not a man: _I'm_ a crook. We're equals, sexless, soulless. You seem to have overlooked that. Amateurs often do.... To-night I made you a fair proposition, to play square with me and profit. You chose to be haughty. Now you see the other side of the picture."

Bravado? Or deadly purpose? How could she tell? Her heart misgave her; she crushed herself away from him as from some abnormally vicious, loathly reptile.

He understood this; and regarded her with a confident leer, inscrutably strong and malevolent.

"And there is one other reason why you will think twice before making a row," he clinched his case. "If you did that, and I weakly permitted the police to nab and walk us off, the business would get in the papers--your name and all; and--what'd Maitland think of you then, my lady? What'd he think when he read that Dan Anisty had been pinched on Broadway in company with the little woman he'd been making eyes at--whom he was going, in his fine manlike way, to reach down a hand to and yank up out of the gutter and redeem and--and all that slush? Eh?"

And again his low evil laugh made her shudder. "Now, you won't risk that. You'll come with me and behave, I guess, all right."

She was dumb, stupefied with misery.

He turned upon her sharply.

"Well?"

Her lips moved in soundless assent,--lips as pallid and bloodless as the wan young face beneath the small inconspicuous hat.

The man grunted impatiently; yet was satisfied, knowing that he had her now completely under control: a condition not hard to bring about in a woman who, like this, was worn out with physical fatigue and overwrought with nervous strain. The conditions had been favorable, the result was preeminently comfortable. She would give him no more trouble.

The hansom swerved suddenly across the car-tracks and pulled up at the curb. Anisty rose with an exclamation of relief and climbed down to the sidewalk, turning and extending a hand to assist the girl.

"Come!" he said imperatively. "We've no time to waste."

For an instant only she harbored a fugitive thought of resistance; then his eyes met hers and held them, and her mind seemed to go blank under his steadfast and domineering regard. "Come!" he repeated sharply. Trembling, she placed a hand in his and somehow found herself by his side. Regardless of appearances the man retained her hand, merely shifting it beneath his arm, where a firm pressure of the elbow held it as in a vise.

"You needn't wait," he said curtly to the cabby; and swung about, the girl by his side.

"No nonsense now," he warned her tensely, again thrusting a hand in his breast pocket significantly.

"I understand," she breathed faintly, between closed teeth.

She had barely time to remark the towering white facade of upper Broadway's tallest sky-scraper ere she was half led, half dragged into the entrance of the building.

The marble slabs of the vestibule echoed strangely to their footsteps--those slabs that shake from dawn to dark with the tread of countless feet. They moved rapidly toward the elevator-shaft, passing on their way deserted cigar- and news-stands shrouded in dirty brown clothes. By the dark and silent well, where the six elevators (of which one only was a-light and ready for use) stood motionless as if slumbering in utter weariness after the gigantic exertions of the day, they came to a halt; and a chair was scraped noisily on the floor as a night-watchman rose, rubbing his eyes and yawning, to face them.

Anisty opened the interview brusquely. "Is Mr. Bannerman in now?" he demanded.

The watchman opened his eyes wider, losing some of his sleepy expression; and observed the speaker and his companion--the small, shrinking, frightened-looking little woman who bore so heavily on her escort's arm, as if ready to drop with exhaustion. It appeared that he knew Maitland by sight, or else thought that he did.

"Oh, ye're Mister Maitland, ain't yous?" he said. "Nope; if Mither Bannerman's in his offis, I dunno nothin' about it."

"He was to meet me here at two," Anisty affirmed. "It's a very important case. I'm sure he must be along, immediately, if he's not up-stairs. You're sure--?"

"Nah, I ain't sure. He may've been there all night, f'r all I know. But

I'll take you up 'f you want," with a doubtful glance at the girl.

"This lady is one of Mr. Bannerman's clients, and in great trouble." The self-styled Maitland laid his hand in a protecting gesture over the fingers on his arm; and pressed them cruelly. "I think we will go up, thank you. If Bannerman's not in, I can 'phone him. I've a pass-key."

The watchman appeared satisfied: Maitland's social standing was guaranty enough.

"All right, sir. Step in."

The girl made one final effort to hang back. Anisty's brows blackened. "By God!" he told her in a whisper. "If you dare...!"

And somehow she found herself at his side in the steel cage, the gate's clang ringing loud in her ears. The motion of the car, shooting upwards with rapidly increasing speed, made her slightly giddy. Despite Anisty's supporting arm she reeled back against the wall of the cage, closing her eyes. The man observed this with covert satisfaction.

As the speed decreased she began to feel slightly stronger; and again opened her eyes. The floor numbers, black upon a white ground, were steadily slipping down; the first she recognized being 19. The pace was sensibly decreased. Then with a slight jar the elevator stopped at 22.

"You know the way?"

"Perfectly," replied Anisty. "Two flights up--in the tower."

"Right. When you wants me, ring."

The car dropped like a plummet, leaving them in darkness--or rather in a thick gloom but slightly moderated by the moonlight streaming in at windows at either end of the corridor. Anisty gripped the girl more roughly.

"Now, my lady! No shennanigan!"

A futile, superfluous reminder. Temporarily at least she was become as wax in his hands. So complex had been the day's emotions, so severe her nervous tension, so heavy the tax upon her stamina, that she had lapsed into a state of subjective consciousness, in which she responded without purpose, almost dreamily, to the suggestions of the stronger will.

Wearily she stumbled up the two brief flights of stairs leading to the tower-like cupola of the sky-scraper: two floors superimposed upon the roof with scant excuse save that of giving the building the distinction of being the loftiest in that section of the city--certainly not to lend any finishing touch of architectural beauty to the edifice.

On the top landing a door confronted them, its glass panel shining dimly in the darkness. Anisty paused, unceremoniously thrusting the girl to one

side and away from the head of the staircase; and fumbled in a pocket, presently producing a jingling bunch of keys. For a moment or two she heard him working at the lock and muttering in an undertone,--probably swearing,--and then, with a click, the door swung open.

The man thrust a hand inside, touched an electric switch, flooding the room with light, and motioned the girl to enter. She obeyed passively, thoroughly subjugated: and found herself in a large and well-furnished office, apparently the outer of two rooms. The glare of electric light at first partly blinded her; and she halted instinctively a few steps from the door, waiting for her eyes to become accustomed to the change.

Behind her the door was closed softly; and there followed a thud as a bolt was shot. An instant later Anisty caught her by the arm and, roughly now and without wasting speech, hurried her into the next room. Then, releasing her, he turned up the lights and, passing to the windows, threw two or three of them wide; for the air in the room was stale and lifeless.

"And now," said the criminal in a tone of satisfaction, "now we can talk business, my dear."

He removed his overcoat and hat, throwing them over the back of a convenient chair, drew his fingers thoughtfully across his chin, and, standing at a little distance, regarded the girl with a shadow of a saturnine smile softening the hard line of his lips.

She stood where he had left her, as if volition was no longer hers. Her arms hung slack at her sides and she was swaying a trifle, her face vacant, eyes blank: very near the breaking-down point.

The man was not without perception; and recognized her state--one in which, he felt assured, he could get very little out of her. She must be strengthened and revived before she would or could respond to the direct catechism he had in store for her. In his own interest, therefore, more than through any yielding to motives of pity and compassion, he piloted her to a chair by a window and brought her a glass of clear cold water from the filter in the adjoining room.

The cold, fresh breeze blowing in her face proved wonderfully invigorating. She let her head sink back upon the cushions of the easy, comfortable leather chair and drank in the clean air in great deep draughts, with a sense of renewing vigor, both bodily and spiritual. The water helped, too: she dabbled the tip of a ridiculously small handkerchief in it and bathed her throbbing temples. The while, Anisty stood over her, waiting with discrimination if with scant patience.

What was to come she neither knew nor greatly cared; but, with an instinctive desire to postpone the inevitable moment of trial, she simulated deadly languor for some moments after becoming conscious of her position: and lay passive, long lashes all but touching her cheeks,--in which now a faint color was growing,--gaze wandering at random out over a dreary wilderness of flat rectangular roofs, livid in the moonlight, broken by long, straight clefts of darkness in whose depths lights gleamed

faintly. Far in the south the sky came down purple and black to the horizon, where a silver spark glittered like a low-swung star: the torch of Liberty.

"I think," Anisty's clear-cut tones, incisive as a razor edge, crossed the listless trend of her thoughts: "I think we will now get down to business, my lady!"

She lifted her lashes, meeting his masterful stare with a look of calm inquiry. "Well?"

"So you're better now? Possibly it was a mistake to give you that rest, my lady. Still, when one's a gentleman-cracksman----!" He chuckled unpleasantly, not troubling to finish his sentence.

"Well?" he mocked, seating himself easily upon an adjacent table. "We're here at last, where we'll suffer no interruptions to our little council of war. Beyond the watchman, there's probably not another soul in the building; and from that window there it is a straight drop of twenty-four stories to Broadway, while I'm between you and the door. So you may be resigned to stay here until I get ready to let you go. If you scream for help, no one will hear you."

"Very well," she assented mechanically, turning her head away with a shiver of disgust. "What is it you want?"

"The jewels," he said bluntly. "You might have guessed that."

"I did..."

"And have saved yourself and me considerable trouble by speaking ten minutes ago."

"Yes," she agreed abstractedly.

"Now," he continued with a hint of anger in his voice, "you are going to tell."

She shook her head slightly.

"Oh, but you are, my lady." And his tone rasped, quickened with the latent brutality of the natural criminal. "And I know that you'll not force me to extreme measures. It wouldn't be pleasant for you, you know; and I promise you I shall stop at nothing whatever to make you speak."

No answer; in absolute indifference, she felt, lay her strongest weapon. She must keep calm and self-possessed, refusing to be terrified into a quick and thoughtless answer. "This afternoon," he said harshly, "you stole from me the Maitland jewels. Where are they?"

"I shall not tell."

He bent swiftly forward and took one of her hands in his. Instinctively

she clenched it; and he wrapped his strong hard fingers around the small white fist, then deliberately inserted a hard finger joint between her second and third knuckles, slowly increasing the pressure. And watched with absolute indifference the lines of agony grave themselves upon her smooth unwrinkled forehead, and the color leave her cheeks, as the pain grew too exquisite. Then, suddenly discontinuing the pressure, but retaining her hand, he laughed shortly.

"Will you speak, my lady, or will you have more?"

"Don't," she gasped, "please...!"

"Where are the jewels? Will you?"

"No."

"Have you given them to Maitland?"

"No."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know."

"Stop that nonsense unless.... Where did you leave them?"

"I won't tell--I won't.... Ah, please, _please!_"

"Tell me!"

"Never.... Ah-h!..."

An abrupt and resounding hammering at the outer door forced him to leave off. He dropped her hand with an oath and springing to his feet drew his revolver; then, with a glance at the girl, who was silently weeping, tears of pain rolling down her cheeks, mouth set in a thin pale line of determination, strode out and shut the door after him.

As it closed the girl leaped to her feet, maddened with torture, wild eyes casting about the room for a weapon of some sort, of offense or defense; for she could not have endured the torture an instant longer. If forced to it, to fight, fight she would. If only she had something, a stick of wood, to defend herself with.... But there was nothing, nothing at all.

The room was a typical office, well but severely furnished. The rug that covered the tile floor was of rich quality and rare design. The neutral-tinted walls were bare, but for a couple of steel engravings in heavy wooden frames. There were three heavily upholstered leather arm-chairs and one revolving desk-chair; a roll-top desk, against the partition wall, a waste-paper basket, and a flat-topped desk, or table. And that was all.

Or not quite all, else the office equipment had not been complete. There

was the telephone!

But he would hear! Or was the partition sound-proof?

As if in contradiction of the suggestion, there came to her ears very clearly the sound of the hall door creaking on its hinges, and then a man's voice, shrill with anger and anxiety.

"You fool! Do you want to ruin us both? What do you mean----"

The door crashed to, interrupting the protest and drowning Anisty's reply.

"I was passing," the new voice took up its plaintive remonstrance, "and the watchman called me in and said that you were telephoning for me----"

"Damn the interfering fool!" interrupted Anisty.

"But what's this insanity, Anisty? What's this about a woman? What----"
The new-comer's tones ascended a high scale of fright and rage.

"Lower your voice, you ass!" the burglar responded sternly. "And----"

He took his own advice; and for a little time the conference was conducted in guarded tones that did not penetrate the dividing wall save as a deep rumbling alternating with an impassioned squeak.

But long ere this had come to pass the girl was risking all at the telephone. Receiver to ear she was imploring Central to connect her with Ninety-eighty-nine Madison. If only she might get Maitland, tell him where the jewels were hidden, warn him to remove them--then she could escape further suffering by open confession..

"What number?" came Central's languid query, after a space. "Did you say Nine-ought-nine-eight?"

"No, no, Central. Nine-o-eight-nine Madison, please, and hurry-----
hurry!"

"Ah, I'm ringin' 'em. They ain't answered yet. Gimme time.... There they are. Go ahead."

"Hello, hello!"

"Pwhat is ut?"

Her heart sank: O'Hagan's voice meant that Maitland was out.

"O'Hagan--is that you?... Tell Mr. Maitland-----"

"He's gawn out for the noight an'-----"

"Tell him, please-----"

"But he's out. Ring up in the mornin'."

"But can't you take this message for him? Please...."

The door was suddenly jerked open and Anisty leaped into the room, face white with passion. Terrified, the girl sprang from the desk, carrying the instrument with her, placing the revolving chair between her and her enemy.

"The brass bowl, please,--tell him that," she cried clearly into the receiver.

And Anisty was upon her, striking the telephone from her grasp with one swift blow and seizing her savagely by the wrist. As the instrument clattered and pounded on the floor she was sent reeling and staggering half-way across the room.

As she brought up against the flat-topped desk, catching its edge and saving herself a fall, the burglar caught up the telephone.

"Who is that?" he shouted imperatively into the transmitter.

Whatever the reply, it seemed to please him. His brows cleared, the wrath that had made his face almost unrecognizable subsided; he even smiled. And the girl trembled, knowing that he had solved her secret; for she had hoped against hope that the only words he could have heard her speak would have had too cryptic a significance for his comprehension.

As, slowly and composedly, he replaced the receiver on its hook and returned the instrument to the desk, a short and rotund figure of a man, in rumpled evening dress and wearing a wilted collar, hopped excitedly into the room, cast at the girl one terrified glance out of eyes that glittered with excitement like black diamonds, set in a face the hue of yeast, and clutched the burglar's arm.

"Oh, Anisty, Anisty!" he cried piteously. "What is it? What is it? Tell me!"

"It's all right," returned the burglar. "Don't you worry, little man. Pull yourself together." And laughed.

"But what--what----" stammered the other.

"Only that she's given herself away," chuckled Anisty: "beautifully and completely. 'The brass bowl,' says she,--thinking I never saw one on Maitland's desk!--and 'O'Hagan, and who the divvle are you?' says the man on the other end of the wire, when I ask who he is."

"And? And?" pleaded the little man, dancing with worry.

"And it means that my lady here returned the jewels to Maitland by hiding them under a brass ash-receiver on his desk--ass that I was not to know!... You are 'cute, my lady!" with an ironic salute to the girl, "but

you've met your match in Anisty."

"And," demanded the other as the burglar snatched up his hat and coat, "what will you do, Anisty?"

"Do?"--contemptuously. "Why, what is there to do but go and get them? We've risked too much and made New York too hot for the two of us, my dear sir, to get out of the game without the profits."

"But I beg of you----"

"You needn't,"--grimly. "It won't bring you in any money."

"But Maitland--"

"Is out. O'Hagan answered the 'phone. Don't you understand?"

"But he may return!"

"That's his lookout. I'm sorry for him if he does." Anisty produced the revolver from his pocket, and twirled the cylinder significantly. "I owe Mr. Maitland something," he said, nodding to the white-faced girl by the table, "and I shouldn't be sorry to----"

"And what," broke in the new-comer, "what am I going to do meanwhile?"

"Devil the bit _I_ care! Stay here and keep this impetuous female from calling up Police Headquarters, for a good guess.... Speaking of which, I think we had best settle this telephone business once and for all."

The burglar turned again to the desk and began to work over the instrument with a small screwdriver which he produced from his coat pocket, talking the while.

"Our best plan, my dear Bannerman, is for you to come with me, at least as far as the nearest corner. You can wait there, if you're too cowardly to go the limit, like a man.... I'll get the loot and join you, and we can make a swift hike for the first train that goes farthest out of town.... A pity, for we've done pretty well, you and I, old boy: you with your social entree and bump of locality to locate the spoils, me with my courage and skill to lift 'em, and an equitable division.... Oh, don't worry about _her_, Bannerman! She's as deep in it as either of us, only she happens to be sentimental, and an outsider on this deal. She won't blab. Besides, you're ruined anyway, as far as New York's concerned.... Come along. That's finished: she won't send any important messages over that wire to-night, I guess."

"My dear young lady!" Rising and throwing the overcoat over his arm, he waved his hat at her in sardonic courtesy. "I can't say it has been a pleasure to know you but--you have made it interesting, I admit. And I bid you a very good night. The charwoman will let you out when she comes to clean up in the morning. Adieu, my dear!"

The little man bustled after him, bleating and fidgeting; and the lock clicked.

She was alone ... utterly and forlornly alone ... and had lost ... lost all, all that she had prized and hoped to win, even ... even him....

She raised fluttering, impotent white hands to her temples, trying to collect herself. In the outer room a clock was ticking. Unconsciously she moved to the doorway and stood looking for a time at the white, expressionless dial. It was some time--a minute or two--before she deciphered the hour.

Ten minutes past two!... Ah, the lifetime she had lived in the past seventy minutes! And the futility of it all!

XV

THE PRICE

Slowly Maitland returned to the study and replaced the lamp upon his desk; and stood briefly in silence, long fingers stroking his well-shaped chin, his face a little thin and worn-looking, a gleam of pain in his eyes. He sighed.

So she was gone!

He laughed a trace harshly. This surprise was nothing more than he might have discounted, of course; he had been a fool to expect anything else of her, he was enjoying only his just deserts both for having dared to believe that the good in human nature (and particularly in woman's nature) would respond to decent treatment, and for having acted on that asinine theory.

So she was gone, without a word, without a sign!...

He sat down at the desk, sidewise, one arm extended along its edge, fingers drumming out a dreary little tune on the hard polished wood; and thought it all over from the beginning. Nor spared himself.

Why, after all, should it be otherwise? Why should she have stayed? Why should he compliment himself by believing that there was aught about him visible through the veneer acquired in a score and odd years of purposeless existence, to attract a young and pretty woman's heart?

He enumerated his qualities specifically; and condemned them all. Imprimis, he was a conceited ass. A fascinating young criminal had but to toss her head at him to make him think that she was pleased with him, to make him forget that she was what she was and believe that, because he was

willing to stoop, she was willing to climb. And he had betrayed himself so mercilessly! How she must have laughed in her sleeve all the time, while he pranced and bridled and preened himself under her eyes, blinded to his own idiocy by the flame of a sudden infatuation--how she must have laughed!

Undoubtedly she had laughed; and, measuring his depth,--or his shallowness,--had determined to use him to her ends. Why not? It had been her business, her professional duty, to make use of him in order to accomplish her plundering. And because she had not dared to ask him for the jewels when he left her in the morning, she had naturally returned in the evening to regain them, very confident, doubtless, that even if surprised a second time, she would get off scot-free. Unfortunately for her, this fellow Anisty had interfered. Maitland presumed cynically that he ought to be grateful to Anisty.... The unaccountable scoundrel! Why had he returned?

How the girl had contrived to escape was, of course, more easy to understand. Maitland recalled that sudden clatter of hoofs in the street, and he had only to make a trip to the window to verify his suspicion that the cab was gone. She had simply overheard his concluding remarks to the cabby, and taken pardonable advantage of them. Maitland had footed the bill.... She was welcome to that, however. He, Maitland, was well rid of the whole damnable business.... Yes, jewels and all!

What were the jewels to him?... Beyond their sentimental associations, he did not hold them greatly in prize. Of course, since they had been worn by his mother, he would spare no expense or effort to trace and re-collect them, for that dim sainted memory's sake. But in this case, at least, the traditional usage of the Maitland's would never be carried out. It had been faithfully observed when, after his mother's death, the stones had been removed from their settings and stored away; but now they would never be reset, even should he contrive to reassemble them, to adorn the bride of the Maitland heir. For he would never marry. Of course not....

Maitland was young enough to believe, and to extract a melancholy satisfaction from this.

Puzzled and saddened, his mind harked back for ever to that carking question: Why had she returned? What had brought her back to the flat? If she and Anisty were confederates, as one was inclined at times to believe,--if such were the case, Anisty had the jewels, and there was nothing else of any particular value so persistently to entice such expert and accomplished burglars back to his flat. What else had they required of him? His peace of mind was nothing that they could turn into cash; and they seemed to have reaved him of nothing else.

But they had that; unquestionably they had taken that.

And still the riddle haunted him: Why had she come back that night? And, whatever her reason, had she come in Anisty's company, or alone? One minute it seemed patent beyond dispute that the girl and the great plunderer were hand-in-glove; the next minute Maitland was positively

assured that their recent meeting had been altogether an accident. From what he had heard over the telephone, he had believed them to be quarreling, although at the time he had assigned to O'Hagan the masculine side to the dispute. But certainly there must have arisen some difference of opinion between Anisty and the girl, to have drawn from her that frantic negative Maitland had heard, to have been responsible for the overturning of the chair,--an accident that seemed to argue something in the nature of a physical struggle; the chair itself still lay upon its side, mute witness to a hasty and careless movement on somebody's part....

But it was all inexplicable. Eventually Maitland shook his head, to signify that he gave it up. There was but one thing to do,--to put it out of mind. He would read a bit, compose himself, go to bed.

Preliminary to doing so, he would take steps to insure the flat against further burglarizing, for that night, at least. The draught moving through the hall stirred the portiere and reminded him that the window in the trunk-room was still open, an invitation to any enterprising sneak-thief or second-story man. So Maitland went to close and make it fast.

As he shut down the window-sash and clamped the catch he trod on something soft and yielding. Wondering, he stooped and picked it up, and carried it back to the light. It proved to be the girl's hand-bag.

"Now," admitted Maitland in a tone of absolute candor, "I am damned. How the dickens did this thing get there, anyway? What was she doing in my trunk-closet?"

Was it possible that she had followed Anisty out of the flat by that route? A very much mystified young man sat himself down again in front of his desk, and turned the bag over and over in his hands, keenly scrutinizing every inch of it, and whistling softly.

That year the fashion in purses was for capacious receptacles of grained leather, nearly square in shape, and furnished with a chain handle. This which Maitland held was conspicuously of the mode,--neither too large, nor too small, constructed of fine soft leather of a gun-metal shade, with a framework and chain of gun-metal itself. It was new and seemed well-filled, weighing a trifle heavy in the hand. One face was adorned with a monogram of cut gun-metal, the initials "S" and "G" and "L" interlaced. But beyond this the bag was irritatingly non-committal.

Undoubtedly, if one were to go to the length of unsnapping the little, frail clasp, one would acquire information; by such facile means would much light be shed upon the darkness. But Maitland put a decided negative to the suggestion.

No. He would give her the benefit of the doubt. He would wait, he would school himself to patience. Perhaps she would come back for it,--and explain. Perhaps he could find her by advertising it,--and get an explanation. Pending which, he could wait a little while. It was not his wish to pry into her secrets, even if--even if....

It was something to be smoked over.... Strange how it affected him to have in his hands something that she had owned and touched!

Opening a drawer of the desk, Maitland produced an aged pipe. A brazen jar, companion piece to the ash receiver, held his tobacco. He filled the pipe from the jar, with thoughtful deliberation. And scraped a match beneath his chair and ignited the tobacco and puffed in contemplative contentment, deriving solace from each mouthful of grateful, evanescent incense. Meanwhile he held the charred match between thumb and forefinger.

Becoming conscious of this fact, he smiled in deprecation of his absent-minded mood, looked for the ash-receiver, discovered it in place, inverted beneath the book; and frowned, remembering. Then, with an impatient gesture,--impatient of his own infirmity of mind: for he simply could not forget the girl,--he dropped the match, swept the book aside, lifted the bowl....

After a moment of incredulous awe, the young man rose, with eyes a-light and a jubilant song in the heart of him. Now he knew, now understood, now believed, and now was justified of his faith!

After which depression came, with the consciousness that she was gone, for ever removed beyond his reach and influence, and that by her own wilful act. It was her intelligible wish that they should never meet again, for, having accomplished her errand, she had flown from the possibility of his thanks.

It was so clear, now! He perceived it all, plainly. Somehow (though it was hard to surmise how) she had found out that Anisty had stolen the jewels; somehow (and one wondered at what risk) she had contrived to take them from him and bring them back to their owner. And Anisty had followed.

Poor little woman! What had she not suffered, what perils had she not braved, to prove that there was honor even in thieves! It could have been at no inconsiderable danger,--a danger not incommensurate with that of robbing a tigress of her whelps,--that she had managed to filch his loot from that pertinacious and vindictive soul, Anisty!

But she had accomplished it; and all for him!

If only he could find her, _now!_

There was a clue to his hand in that bag, of course, but by this act she had for ever removed from him the right to investigate _that_.

If he could only find that cabby.

Perhaps if he tried at the Madison Square rank, immediately....

Besides, it was clearly his duty not to remain in the flat alone with the jewels another night. There was but one attainable place of safety for them; and that the safe of a reputable hotel. He would return to the

Bartholdi at once, merely pausing on his way to inquire of the cabmen if they could send their brother-nighthawk to him.

Maitland shook himself into his topcoat, jammed hat upon head, dropped the jewels into one pocket, the cigarette case into another, and--on impulse--Anisty's revolver, with its two unexploded cartridges, into a third; and pressed the call button for O'Hagan, not waiting, however, for that worthy to climb the stairs, but meeting him in the entry hall.

"I'm going back to the Bartholdi, O'Hagan, for the night. You may bring me my letters and any messages in the morning. I should like you to sleep in the flat to-night and answer any telephone calls."

"Yiss, Mither Maitland, sor."

"Have the police gone, O'Hagan?"

"There's a whole bottle full yet, sor."

"You've not been drinking, I trust?"

The Irishman shuffled. "Shure, sor, an' wud that be hosphitable?"

Laughing, Maitland bade him good night and left the house, turning west to gain Fifth Avenue, walking slowly because he was a little tired, and enjoying the rather unusual experience of being abroad at that hour without company. The sky seemed cleaner than ordinarily, the city quieter than ever he had known it, and in the air was a sweet smell, reminiscent of the country-side ... reminding one unhappily of the previous night when one had gone whistling to one's destiny along a perfumed country road....

"Good 'eavings, Mister Maitland, sir! It carn't be you!"

Maitland looked up, bewildered for the instant. The voice that hailed him out of the sky was not unfamiliar....

A cab that he had waited on the corner to let pass, was reined back suddenly. The driver leaned down from the box and in a thunderstruck tone advertised his stupefaction.

"It aren't in nature, sir--if yer'll pardon my mentionin' it. But 'ere I leaves you not ten minutes ago at the St. Luke Building and finds yer 'ere, when you 'aven't 'ad time--"

Maitland woke up. "What's that?" he questioned sharply. "You left me where ten minutes--?"

"St. Luke Buildin', corner Broadway an'--."

"I know it," excited, "but--"

"--'avin' took yer there with the young lady--"

"Young lady!"

"--that comes out the 'ouse with yer, sir--"

"The devil!" Maitland hesitated no longer: his foot was on the step as he spoke. "Drive me there at once, and drive for all you're worth!" he cried. "If there's an ounce of speed in that plug of yours and you don't get it out--"

"Never fear, sir! We'll make it in five minutes!"

"It'll be worth your while."

"Right-O!"

Maitland dropped into his seat, dumbfounded. "Good Lord!" he whispered; and then savagely: "In the power of that infamous scoundrel-----!" And felt of the revolver in his pocket.

The cab had been headed north; the St. Luke rears its massive bulk south of Twenty-third Street. The driver expertly swung his vehicle almost on dead center. Simultaneously it careened with the impact of a heavy bulk landing upon the step and falling in a heap on the deck.

"My worrd, what's that?" came from aloft. Maitland was altogether too startled to speak.

The heap sat up, resolving itself into the semblance of a man; who spoke in decisive tones:

"If yeh're goin' there, I'm goin' with yeh, 'r yeh don't go--see?"

"The sleuth!" gasped Maitland, astounded.

"Ah, cut that, can't yeh?" Hickey got on all fours, found his cigar, stuck it in his mouth, and fell into place at Maitland's side.

"Hickey, I mean. But how--"

"If yeh're Maitland, 'nd Anisty's at the St. Luke Buildin', tell that fool up there to drive!"

Maitland had no need to lift the trap; the cabby had already done that.

"All right," the young man called. "It's Detective Hickey. Drive on!"

The lash leaped out over the roof--_cr-rack!_--and the horse, presumably convinced that no speed other than a dead-run would ever again be demanded of it, tore frantically down the Avenue, the hansom rocking like a topsail-schooner in a heavy gale.

Maitland and the detective were battered against the side and back of the vehicle and slammed against one another with painful regularity. Under

such circumstances speech was difficult; yet they managed to exchange a few sentences.

"Yeh gottuh gun?"

"Anisty's--two good cartridges."

"Jus' as well I'm along, I guess."

And again: "How'd yeh s'pose Anisty got this cab?"

"I don't know--must've been in the house--I told cabby to wait--Anisty seems to have walked out right on your heels."

"Hell!" And a moment later: "What's this about a woman in the case?"

Maitland took swift thought on her behalf.

"Too long to go into now," he parried the query. "You help me catch this scoundrel Anisty and I'll put in a good word for you with the deputy commissioner."

"Ah, yeh help _me_ nab him," grunted the detective, "nd I won't need no good word with nobody."

The hansom swung into Broadway, going like a whirlwind; and picked up an uniformed officer in front of the Flatiron Building, who, shouting and using his locust stridently, sprinted after them. A block further down another fell into line; and he it was who panted at the step an instant after the cab had lurched to a stop before the entrance to the St. Luke Building.

Hickey had rolled out before the policeman had a chance to bluster.

"Lo, Bergen," he greeted the man. "Yeh know me--I'm Hickey, Central Office. Yeh're jus' in time. Anisty's in this buildin'--'r was ten minutes ago. We want all the help we c'n get."

By way of reply the officer stooped and drummed a loud alarm on the sidewalk with his night-stick.

"Say," he panted, rising, "you're a wonder, Hickey--if you get him."

"Uh-huh," grunted the detective with a sidelong glance at Maitland. "C'm 'long."

The lobby of the building was quite deserted as they entered, the night-watchman invisible, the night elevator on its way to the roof--as was discovered by consultation of the indicator dial above the gate. Hickey punched the night call bell savagely.

"Me 'nd him," he said, jerking the free thumb at Maitland, "Il go up and hunt him out. Begin at th' top floor an' work down. That's th' way,

huh? 'Nd," to the policeman, "yeh stay here an' hold up anybody 't tries tuh leave th' buildin'. There ain't no other entrance, I s'pose, what?"

"Basement door an' ash lift's round th' corner," responded the officer.
"But that had ought tuh be locked, night."

"Well, 'f anybody else comes along yeh put him there, anyway, for luck....
What 'n hell's th' matter with this elevator?"

The detective settled a pudgy index-finger on the push button and elicited a far, thin, shrill peal from the annunciator above. But the indicator arrow remained as motionless as the car at the top of the shaft. Another summons gained no response, in likewise, and a third was also disregarded.

Hickey stepped back, face black as a storm-cloud, summed up his opinion of the management of the building in one soul-blistering phrase, produced his bandana and used it vigorously, uttered a libel on the ancestry of the night-watchman and the likes of him, and turned to give profane welcome to the policeman who had noticed the cab at Twenty-third Street and who now panted in, blown and perspiring.

Much to his disgust he found himself assigned to stand guard over the basement exits, and waddled forth again into the street.

Meanwhile the first officer to arrive upon the scene was taking his turn at agitating the button and shaking the gates; and with no more profit of his undertaking than Hickey. After a minute or two of it he acknowledged defeat with an oath, and turned away to browbeat the straggling vanguard of belated wayfarers,--messenger-boys, slatternly drabs, hackmen, loafers, and one or two plain citizens conspicuously out of their reputable grooves,--who were drifting in at the entrance to line the lobby walls with blank, curious faces. Forerunners of that mysterious rabble which is apparently precipitated out of the very air by any extraordinary happening in city streets, if allowed to remain they would in five minutes have waxed in numbers to the proportions of an unmanageable mob; and the policeman, knowing this, set about dispersing them with perhaps greater discretion than consideration. They wavered and fell back, grumbling discontentedly; and Maitland, his anxiety temporarily distracted by the noise they made, looked round to find his erstwhile cabby at his elbow. Of whom the sight was inspiration. Ever thoughtful, never unmindful of her whose influence held him in this coil, he laid an arresting hand on the man's sleeve.

"You've got your cab--?"

"Yessir, right houtside."

"Drive round the corner, away from the crowd, and wait for me. If she--the young lady--comes without me, drive her anywhere she tells you and come to my rooms to-morrow morning for your pay."

"Thankee, sir."

Maitland turned back, to find the situation round the elevator shaft _in status quo_. Nothing had happened, save that Hickey's rage and vexation had increased mightily.

"But why don't you go up after him?"

"How 'n blazes can I?" exploded the detective. "He's got th' night car. 'F I takes the stairs, he comes down by th' shaft, 'nd how'm I tuh trust this here mutt?" He indicated his associate but humbler custodian of the peace with a disgusted gesture.

"Perhaps one of the other cars will run--" Maitland suggested.

"Ah, they're all dead ones," Hickey disagreed with disdain as the young man moved down the row of gates, trying one after another. "Yeh're only wastin'--"

He broke off with a snort as Maitland, somewhat to his own surprise managing to move the gate of the third shaft from the night elevator, stepped into the darkened car and groped for the controller. Presently his fingers encountered it, and he moved it cautiously to one side. A vicious blue spark leaped hissing from the controller-box and the cage bounded up a dozen feet, and was only restrained from its ambition to soar skywards by an instantaneous release of the lever.

By discreet manipulation Maitland worked the car down to the street floor again, and Hickey with a grunt that might be interpreted as an apology for his incredulity, jumped in.

"Let 'er rip!" he cried exultantly. "Fan them folks out intuh th' street, Bergen, 'nd watch ow-ut!"

Maitland was pressing the lever slowly wide of its catch, and the lighted lobby dropped out of sight while the detective was still shouting admonitions to the police below. Gradually gaining in momentum the car began to shoot smoothly up into the blackness, safety chains clanking beneath the floor. Hickey fumbled for the electric light switch but, finding it, immediately shut the glare off again and left the car in darkness.

"Safer," he explained, sententious. "Anisty'll shoot, 'nd they says he shoots straight."

Floor after floor in ghostly strata slipped silently down before their eyes. Half-way to the top, approximately, Hickey's voice rang sharply in the volunteer operator's ear.

"Stop 'er! Hold 'er steady. T'other's comin' down."

Maitland obeyed, managing the car with greater ease and less jerkily as he began to understand the principle of the lever. The cage paused in the black shaft, and he looked upward.

Down the third shaft over, the other cage was dropping like a plummet, a block of golden light walled in by black filigree-work and bisected vertically by the black line of the guide-rail.

"Stop that there car!"

Hickey's stentorian command had no effect; the block of light continued to fall with unabated speed.

The detective wasted no more breath. As the other car swept past, Maitland was shocked by a report and flash beside him. Hickey was using his revolver.

The detonation was answered by a cry, a scream of pain, from the lighted cage. It paused on the instant, like a bird stricken a-wing, some four floors below, but at once resumed its downward swoop.

"Down, down! After 'em!" Hickey bellowed. "I dropped one, by God! T'other can't--"

"How many in the car?" interrupted Maitland, opening the lever with a firm and careful hand. "Only two, same's us, I hit th' feller what was runnin' it--"

"Steady!" cautioned Maitland, decreasing the speed, as the car approached the lower floor.

The other had beaten them down; but its arrival at the street level was greeted by a short chorus of mad yells, a brief fusillade of shots--perhaps five in all--and the clang of the gate. Then, like a ball rebounding, the cage swung upwards again, hurtling at full speed.

Evidently Anisty had been received in force which he had not bargained for.

Maitland instinctively reversed the lever and sent his own car upward again, slowly, waiting for the other to overtake it. Peering down through the iron lattice-work he could indistinctly observe the growing cube of light, with a dark shape lying huddled in one corner of the floor. A second figure, rapidly taking shape as Anisty's, stood by the controller, braced against the side of the car, one hand on the lever, the other poised a shining thing, the flesh-colored oval of his face turned upwards in a supposititious attempt to discern the location of the dark car.

Hickey, by firing prematurely, lent him adventitious aid. The criminal replied with spirit, aiming at the flash, his bullet spattering against the back wall of the shaft. Hickey's next bullet rang with a bell-like note against the metal-work, Anisty's presumably went wide--though Maitland could have sworn he felt the cold kiss of its breath upon his cheek. And the lighted cage rocketed past and up.

Maitland needed no admonition to pursue; his blood was up, his heart

singing with the lust of the man-hunt. Yet Anisty was rapidly leaving them, his car soaring at an appalling pace. Towards the top he evidently made some attempt to slow up, but either he was ignorant of the management of the lever, or else the thing had got beyond control. The cage rammed the buffers with a crash that echoed through the sounding halls like a peal of thunder-claps; it was instantaneously plunged into darkness. There followed a splintering and rending sound, and Maitland, heart in mouth, could make out dimly a dark, falling shadow in the further shaft. Yet ere it had descended a score of feet the safety-clutch acted and, with a third tremendous jar, shaking the building, the car halted.

Hickey and Maitland were then some five floors below. "Stop 'er at Nineteen," ordered the detective. There was a lilt of exultancy in his voice. "We got him now, all right, all right. He'll try to get down by-- There!" Overhead the crash of a gate forced open was followed by a scurry of footsteps over the tiling. "Stop 'er and we'll head him off. So now-- _eee_asy!"

Maitland shut off the power as the car reached the nineteenth floor. Hickey opened the gate and jumped out. "Shut that," he commanded sharply as Maitland followed him, "in case he gets past us."

He paused a moment in thought, heavy head on bull-neck drooping forward as he stared toward the rear of the building. He was fearless and resourceful, for all his many deficiencies. Maitland found time, quaintly enough, to regard him with detached curiosity, a rare animal, illustrating all that was best and worst in his order. Endowed with unexceptionable courage, his address in emergencies seemed altogether admirable.

"Yeh guard them stairs," he decided suddenly. "I'll run through this hall, 'nd see what's doing. Don't hesitate to shoot if he tries to jump yeh." And was gone, clumping briskly down the corridor to the rear.

Maitland, yielding the initiative to the other's superior generalship, stood sentinel, revolver in hand, until the detective returned, overheated and sweating, from his tour, to report "nothin' doin'," with characteristic brevity. He had the same report to make on both the twentieth and twenty-first floors, where the same procedure was observed; but as the latter was reached unexpected and very welcome reinforcements were gained by the arrival of a third car, containing three patrolmen and one roundsman. Yet numbers created delay; Hickey was seized and compelled to pant explanations, to his supreme disgust.

And, suddenly impatient beyond endurance, Maitland left them and alone sprang up the stairs.

That this was simple foolhardiness may be granted without dispute. But it must be borne in mind that he was very young and ardent, very greatly perturbed on behalf of an actor in the tragedy in whom the police, to their then knowledge, had no interest whatsoever. And if in the heat of chase he had for an instant forgotten her, now he remembered; and at once the capture of Anisty was relegated to the status of a matter of secondary importance. The real matter at stake was the safety of the girl whom

Anisty, by exercise of an infernal ingenuity that passed Maitland's comprehension, had managed to spirit into this place of death and darkness and whispering halls. Where she might be, in what degree of suffering and danger,--these were the considerations that sent him in search of her without a thought of personal peril, but with a sick heart and overwhelmed with a stifling sense of anxiety.

More active than the paunch-burdened detective, he had sprinted down and back through the hallway of the twenty-second floor, without discovering anything, ere the police contingent had reached an agreement and the stairhead.

There remained two more floors, two final flights. A little hopelessly he swung up the first. And as he did so the blackness above him was riven by a tongue of fire, and a bullet, singing past his head, flattened itself with a vicious spat against the marble dado of the walls. Instinctively he pulled up, finger closing upon the trigger of his revolver; flash and report followed the motion, and a panel of ribbed glass in a door overhead was splintered and fell in clashing fragments, all but drowning the sound of feet in flight upon the upper staircase.

A clamor of caution, warning, encouragement, and advice broke out from the police below. But Maitland hardly heard. Already he was again in pursuit, taking the steps two at a leap. With a hand upon the newel-post he swung round on the twenty-third floor, and hurled himself toward the foot of the last flight. A crash like a rifle-shot rang out above, and for a second he fancied that Anisty had fired again and with a heavier weapon. But immediately he realized that the noise had been only the slamming of the door at the head of the stairs,--the door whose glazed panel loomed above him, shedding a diffused light to guide his footsteps, its opalescent surface lettered with the name of

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the door of the office whose threshold he had so often crossed to meet a friend and adviser. It was with a shock that he comprehended this, a thrill of wonder. He had all but forgotten that Bannerman owned an office in the building, in the rush, the urge of this wild adventure. Strange that Anisty should have chosen it for the scene of his last stand,--strange, and strangely fatal for the criminal! For Maitland knew that from this eyrie there was no means of escape, other than by the stairs.

Well and good! Then they had the man, and--

The thought was flashing in his mind, illumining the darkness of his despair with the hope that he would be able to force a word as to the girl's whereabouts from the burglar ere the police arrived; Maitland's foot was on the upper step, when a scream of mortal terror--_her_ voice!--broke from within. Half maddened, he threw himself bodily against the door, twisting the knob with frantic fingers that slipped upon its immovable polished surface.

The bolt had been shot, he was barred out, and, with only the width of a man's hand between them, the girl was in deathly peril and terror.

A sob that was at the same time an oath rose to his lips. Baffled, helpless, he fell back, tears of rage starting to his eyes, her accents ringing in his ears as terribly pitiful as the cry of a lost and wandering soul.

"God!" he mumbled incoherently, and in desperation sent the pistol-butt crashing against the glass. It was tough, stout, stubborn; the first blow scarcely flawed it. As he redoubled his efforts to shatter it, Hickey's hand shot over his shoulder to aid him.... And with startling abruptness the barrier seemed to dissolve before their eyes, the glass falling inward with a shrill clatter.

Quaintly, with the effect of a picture cast by a cinematograph in a darkened auditorium, there leaped upon Maitland's field of vision the picture of Anisty standing at bay, face drawn and tense, lips curled back, eyes lurid with defiance and despair. He stood, poised upon the balls of his feet, like a cat ready to spring, in the doorway between the inner and outer offices. He raised his hand with an indescribably swift and vicious gesture, and a flame seemed to blaze out from his finger-tips.

At the same instant Hickey's weapon spat by Maitland's cheek; the young man felt the hot furnace breath of it.

The burglar reeled as though from a tremendous blow. His inflamed features were suddenly whitened, and his right arm dropped limply from the shoulder, revolver falling from fingers involuntarily relaxing.

Hickey covered him. "Surrender!" he roared. And fired again. For Anisty had gone to his knees, reaching for the revolver with his uninjured arm.

The detective's second bullet winged through the doorway, over Anisty's head, and bit through the outer window. As Anisty, with a tremendous strain upon his failing powers, struggled to his feet, Maitland, catching the murderous gleam in the man's eye, pulled trigger. The burglar's answering shot expended itself as harmlessly as Maitland's. Both went wide of their marks.

And of a sudden Hickey had drawn the bolt, and the body of police behind forced Maitland pell-mell into the room. As he recovered he saw Hickey hurling himself at the criminal's throat--one second too late. True to his pledge never to be taken alive, Anisty had sent his last bullet crashing through his own skull.

A cry of horror and consternation forced itself from Maitland's throat. The police halted, each where he stood, transfixed. Anisty drew himself up, with a trace of pride in his pose; smiled horribly; put a hand mechanically to his lips....

And died.

Hickey caught him as he fell, but Maitland, unheeding, leaped over the body that had in life resembled him so fatally, and entered Bannerman's private office.

The grey girl lay at length in a corner of the room, shielded from observation by one of the desks. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks wore the hue of death; the fair young head was pillowed on one white and rounded forearm, in an attitude of natural rest, and the burnished hair, its heavy coils slipping from their fastenings, tumbled over her head and shoulders in shimmering glory, like a splash of living flame.

With a low and bitter cry the young man dropped to his knees by her side. In the outer office the police were assembled in excited conclave, blind to all save the momentous fact of Anisty's last, supremely consistent act. For the time Maitland was utterly alone with his great and aching loneliness.

After a little while timidly he touched her hand. It lay upturned, white slender fingers like exotic petals curling in upon the rosy hollow of her palm. And it was soft and warm.

He lifted it tenderly in both his own, and so held it for a space, brooding, marveling at its perfection. And inevitably he bent and touched it with his lips, as if their ardent contact would warm it to sentience....

The fingers tightened upon his own, slowly, surely; and in the blinding joy of that moment he was made conscious of the ineffable sweetness of opening, wondering eyes.

XVI

RECESSIONAL

"_Hm, hrumm!_" Thus Hickey, the inopportunistly ubiquitous, lumbering hastily in from the other office and checking, in an extreme of embarrassment, in the middle of the floor.

Maitland glanced over his shoulder, and, subduing a desire to flay the man alive, released the girl's hand.

"I say, Hickey," he observed, carefully suppressing every vestige of emotion, "will you lend me a hand here? Bring a chair, please, and a glass of water."

The detective stumbled over his feet and brought the chair at the risk of his neck. Then he went away and returned with the water. In the meantime the girl, silently enough for all that her eyes were speaking, with Maitland's assistance arose and seated herself.

"You will have to stay here a few minutes," he told her, "until--er--"

"I understand," she told him in a choking tone.

Hickey awkwardly handed her the glass. She sipped mechanically.

"I have a cab below," continued Maitland. "And I'll try to arrange it so that we can get out of the building without having to force a way through the crowd."

She thanked him with a glance.

"There's th' freight elevator," suggested Hickey helpfully.

"Thank you.... Is there anything I can do for you, anything you wish?" continued Maitland to the girl, standing between her and the detective.

She lifted her face to his and shook her head, very gently. "No," she breathed through trembling lips.

"You--you've been--" But there was a sob in her throat, and she hung her head again.

"Not a word," ordered Maitland. "Sit here for a few minutes, if you can, drink the water and--ah--fix up your hat, you know," (damn Hickey! Why the devil did the fellow insist on hanging round so!) "and I will go and make arrangements."

"Th-thank you," whispered the small voice shakily.

Maitland hesitated a moment, then turned upon Hickey in sudden exasperation. His manner was enough; even the obtuse detective could not ignore it. Maitland had no need to speak.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, standing his ground manfully but with a trace more of respect in his manner than had theretofore characterized it, "but there's uh gentleman--uh--your fren' Bannerman's outside 'nd wants tuh speak tuh yeh."

"Tell him to--"

"Excuse _me_. He says he's gottuh see yeh. If yeh don't come out, he'll come after yeh. I thought yeh'd ruther--"

"That's kindly thought of," Maitland relented. "I'll be there in a minute," he added meaningly.

Hickey took an impassive face to the doorway, where, whether or not with design, he stood precisely upon the threshold, filling it with his burly shoulders. Maitland bent again over the girl, and took her hand.

"Dearest," he said gently, "please don't run away from me again."

Her eyes were brimming, and he read his answer in them. Quickly--it was no time to harry her emotions further; but so much he had felt he must say-- he brushed her hand with his lips and joined Hickey. Thrusting the detective gently into the outer room, with a not unfriendly hand upon his shoulder, Maitland closed the door.

"Now, see here," he said quietly and firmly, "you must help me arrange to get this lady away without her becoming identified with the case, Hickey. I'm in a position to say a good word for you in the right place; she had positively nothing to do with Anisty," (this, so far as he could tell, was as black a lie as he had ever manufactured under the lash of necessity), "and--there's a wad in it for the boys who help me out."

"Well...." The detective shifted from one foot to the other, eying him intently. "I guess we can fix it,--freight elevator 'nd side entrance. Yeh have the cab waitin', 'nd--"

"I'll go with the lady, you understand, and assume all responsibility. You can come round at your convenience and arrange the details with me, at my rooms, since you will be so kind."

"I dunno." Hickey licked his lips, watching with a somber eye the preparations being made for the removal of Anisty's body. "I'd 've give a farm if I could've caught that son of a gun alive!" he added at apparent random, and vindictively. "All right. Yeh be responsible for th' lady, if she's wanted, will yeh?"

"Positively."

"I gottuh have her name 'nd add-ress."

"Is that essential?"

"Sure. Gottuh protect myself 'n case anythin' turns up. Yeh oughttuh know that."

"I--don't want it to come out," Maitland hesitated, trying to invent a plausible lie.

"Well, any one can see how you feel about it."

Maitland drew a long breath and anticipated rashly. "It's Mrs. Maitland," he told the man with a tremor.

Hickey nodded, unimpressed. "Uh-huh. I knowed that all along," he replied. "But seein' as yeh didn't want it talked about...." And, apparently heedless of Maitland's startled and suspicious stare: "If yeh're goin' to see yer fren', yeh better get a wiggle on. He won't last long."

"Who? Bannerman? What the deuce do you mean?"

"He's the feller I plugged in the elevator, that's all. Put a hole through

his lungs. They took him into an office on the twenty-first floor, right opp'site the shaft."

"But what in Heaven's name has he to do with this ghastly mess?"

Hickey turned a shrewd eye upon Maitland. "I guess he can tell yeh better'n me."

With a smothered exclamation, Maitland hurried away, still incredulous and impressed with a belief, firmer with every minute, that the wounded man had been wrongly identified.

He found him as Hickey had said he would, sobbing out his life, supine upon the couch of an office which the janitor had opened to afford him a place to die in. Maitland had to force a way through a crowded doorway, where the night-watchman was holding forth in aggrieved incoherence on the cruel treatment he had suffered at the hands of the lawbreakers. A phrase came to Maitland's ears as he shouldered through the group.

"...grabbed me an' trun me outer the cage, inter the hall, an' then the shootin' begins, an' I jumps down-stairs t' the sixteent' floor...."

Bannerman opened dull eyes as Maitland entered, and smiled faintly.

"Ah-h, Maitland," he gasped; "thought you'd ... come."

Racked with sorrow, nothing guessing of the career that had brought the lawyer to this pass, Maitland slipped into a chair by the head of the couch and closed his hand over Bannerman's chubby, icy fingers.

"Poor, poor old chap!" he said brokenly. "How in Heaven--"

But at Bannerman's look the words died on his lips. The lawyer moved restlessly. "Don't pity me," he said in a low tone. "This is what I might have ... expected, I suppose ... man of Anisty's stamp ... desperate character ... it's all right, Dan, my just due...."

"I don't understand, of course," faltered Maitland.

Bannerman lay still a moment, then continued: "I know you don't. That's why I sent for you.... 'Member that night at the Primordial? When the deuce was it? I ... can't think straight long at a time.... That night I dined with you and touched you up about the jewels? We had a bully salad, you know, and I spoke about the Graeme affair...."

"Yes, yes."

"Well ... I've been up to that game for years. I'd find out where the plunder was, and ... Anisty always divided square.... I used to advise him.... Of course you won't understand,--you've never wanted for a dollar in your life...."

Maitland said nothing. But his hand remained upon the dying man's.

"This would never have happened if ... Anisty hadn't been impatient. He was hard to handle, sometimes. I wasn't sure, you know, about the jewels; I only said I thought they were at Greenfields. Then I undertook to find out from you, but he was restive, and without saying anything to me went down to Greenfields on his own hook--just to have a look around, he said. And so ... so the fat was in the fire."

"Don't talk any more, Bannerman," Maitland tried to soothe him. "You'll pull through this all right, and--You need never have gone to such lengths. If you'd come to me--"

The ghost of a sardonic smile flitted, incongruously, across the dying man's waxen, cherubic features.

"Oh, hell," he said; "you wouldn't understand. Perhaps you weren't born with the right crook in your nature,--or the wrong one. Perhaps it's because you can't see the fun in playing the game. It's that that counts."

He compressed his lips, and after a moment spoke again. "You never did have the true sportsman's love of the game for its own sake. You're like most of the rest of the crowd--content with mighty cheap virtue, Dan.... I don't know that I'd choose just this kind of a wind-up, but it's been fun while it lasted. Good-by, old man."

He did not speak again, but lay with closed eyes.

Five minutes later Maitland rose and unclasped the cold fingers from about his own. With a heavy sigh he turned away.

At the door Hickey was awaiting him. "Yer lady," he said, as soon as they had drawn apart from the crowd, "is waitin' for yeh in the cab down-stairs. She was gettin' a bit highsteerical 'nd I thought I'd better get her away.... Oh, she's waitin' all right!" he added, alarmed by Maitland's expression.

But Maitland had left him abruptly; and now, as he ran down flight after echoing flight of marble stairs, there rested cold fear in his heart. In the room he had just quitted, a man whom he had called friend and looked upon with affectionate regard, had died a self-confessed and unrepentant liar and thief.

If now he were to find the girl another time vanished,--if this had been but a ruse of hers finally to elude him,--if all men were without honor, all women faithless,--if he had indeed placed the love of his life, the only love that he had ever known, unworthily,--if she cared so little who had seemed to care much....

CONFESSIONAL

I

But the cab was there; and within it the girl was waiting for him.

The driver, after taking up his fare, had at her direction drawn over to the further curb, out of the fringe of the rabble which besieged the St. Luke Building in constantly growing numbers, and through which Maitland, too impatient to think of leaving by the basement exit, had elbowed and fought his way in an agony of apprehension that brooked no hindrance, heeded no difficulty.

He dashed round the corner, stopped short with a sinking heart, then as the cabby's signaling whip across the street caught his eye, fairly hurled himself to the other curb, pausing at the wheel, breathless, lifted out of himself with joy to find her faithful in this ultimate instance.

She was recovering, whose high spirit and recuperative powers were to him then and always remained a marvelous thing; and she was bending forth from the body of the hansom to welcome him with a smile that in a twinkling made radiant the world to him who stood in a gloomy side street of New York at three o'clock of a summer's morning,--a good hour and a half before the dawn. For up there in the tower of the sky-scraper he had as much as told her of his love; and she had waited; and now--and now he had been blind indeed had he failed to read the promise in her eyes. Weary she was and spent and overwrought; but there is no tonic in all the world like the consciousness that where one has placed one's love, there love has burgeoned in response. And despite all that she had suffered and endured, the happiness that ran like soft fire in her Veins, wrapping her being with its beneficent rapture, had deepened the color in her cheeks and heightened the glamour in her eyes.

And he stood and stared, knowing that in all time to no man had ever woman seemed more lovely than this girl to him: a knowledge that robbed his mind of all other thought and his tongue of words, so that to her fell the task of rousing him.

"Please," she said gently--"please tell the cabby to take me home, Mr. Maitland."

He came to and in confusion stammered: Yes, he would. And he climbed up on the step with no other thought than to seat himself at her side and drive away for ever. But this time the cabby brought him to his senses, forcing him to remember that some measure of coherence was demanded even of a man in love.

"Where to, sir?"

"Eh, what? Oh!" And bending to the girl: "Home, you said--?"

She told him the address,--a number on Park Avenue, above Thirty-fourth

Street, below Forty-second. He repeated it mechanically, unaware that it would remain stamped for ever on his memory, indelibly,--the first personal detail that she had granted him: the first barrier down.

He sat down. The cab began to move, and halted again. A face appeared at the apron,--Hickey's, red and moon-like and not lacking in complacency: for the man counted of profiting variously by this night's work.

"Excuse me, Mr. Maitland, 'nd"--touching the rim of his derby--"yeh, too, ma'am, f'r buttin' in--"

"Hickey!" demanded Maitland suddenly, in a tone of smoldering wrath, "what the--what do you want?"

"Yeh told me tuh call round to-morrow, yeh know. When'll yeh be in?"

"I'll leave a note for you with O'Hagan. Is that all?"

"Yep--that is, there's somethin' else...."

"Well?"

"Excuse me for mentionin' it, but I didn't know--it ain't generally known, yeh know, 'nd one uh th' boys might've heard me speak tuh yer lady by name 'nd might pass it on to a reporter. What I mean's this," hastily, as the Maitland temper showed dangerous indications of going into active eruption: "I s'pose yeh don't want me tuh mention't yeh're married, jes' yet? Mrs. Maitland here," with a nod to her, "didn't seem tuh take kindly tuh the notion of it's bein' known--"

"Hickey!"

"Ah, excuse _me!_"

"Drive on, cabby--instantly! Do you hear?"

Hickey backed suddenly away and the cab sprang into motion; while Maitland with a face of fire sat back and raged and wondered.

Across Broadway toward Fourth Avenue dashed the hansom; and from the curb-line Hickey watched it with a humorous light in his dull eyes. Indeed, the detective seemed in extraordinary conceit with himself. He chewed with unaccustomed emotion upon his cold cigar, scratched his cheek, and chuckled; and, chuckling, pulled his hat well down over his brows, thrust both hands into his trousers pockets, and shambled back to the St. Luke Building--his heavy body vibrating amazingly with his secret mirth.

And so, shuffling sluggishly, he merges into the shadows, into the mob that surges about the building, and passes from these pages.

II

In the clattering hansom, steadying herself with a hand against the

window-frame, to keep from being thrown against the speechless man beside her, the girl waited. And since Maitland in confusion at the moment found no words, from this eloquent silence she drew an inference unjustified, such as lovers are prone to draw, the world over, and one that lent a pathetic color to her thoughts, and chilled a little her mood. She had been too sure....

But better to have it over with at once, rather than permit it to remain for ever a wall of constraint between them. He must not be permitted to think that she would dream of taking him upon his generous word.

"It was very kind of you," she said in a steady, small voice, "to pretend that we--what you did pretend, in order to save me from being held as a witness. At least, I presume that is why you did it? "--with a note of uncertainty.

"It is unnecessary that you should be drawn into the affair," he replied, with some resumption of his self-possession. "It isn't as if you were--"

"A thief?" she supplied as he hesitated.

"A thief," he assented gravely.

"But I--I am," with a break in her voice.

"But you are not," he asserted almost fiercely. And, "Dear," he said boldly, "don't you suppose I _know?_"

"I ... what do you know?"

"That you brought back the jewels, for one minor thing. I found them almost as soon as you had left. And then I knew ... knew that you cared enough to get them from this fellow Anisty and bring them back to me, knew that I cared enough to search the world from end to end until I found you, that you might wear them--if you would."

But she had drawn away, had averted her face; and he might not see it; and she shivered slightly, staring out of the window at the passing lights. He saw, and perforce paused.

"You--you don't understand," she told him in a rush. "You give me credit beyond my due. I didn't break into your flat again, to-night, in order to return the jewels--at least, not for that alone."

"But you did bring back the jewels?"

She nodded.

"Then doesn't that prove what I claim, prove that you've cleared yourself--?"

"No," she told him firmly, with the firmness of despair; "it does not. Because I did not come for that only. I came with another purpose,--to

steal, as well as to make restitution. And I ... I stole."

There was a moment's silence, on his part incredulous. "I don't know what you mean. What did you steal? Where is it?"

"I have lost it--"

"Was it in your hand-bag?"

"You found that?"

"You dropped it in the trunk-closet. I found it there. There is something of mine in it?"

Dumb with misery, she nodded; and after a little, "You didn't look, of course."

"I had no right," he said shortly.

"Other men wo-would have thought they had the right. I th-think you had, the circumstances considered. At all events," steadying her voice, "I say you have, now. I give you that right. Please go and investigate that hand-bag, Mr. Maitland. I wish you to."

He turned and stared at her curiously. "I don't know what to think," he said. "I can not believe--"

"You mu-must believe. I have no right to profit by your disbelief.... Dear Mr. Maitland, you have been kind to me, very kind to me; do me this last kindness, if you will."

The young face turned to him was gravely and perilously sweet; very nearly he forgot all else. But that she would not have.

"Do this for me.... What you will find will explain everything. You will understand. Perhaps"--timidly--"perhaps you may even find it in your heart to forgive, when you understand.... If you should, my card-case is in the bag, and" She faltered, biting her lip cruelly to steady a voice quivering with restrained sobs. "Please, please go at once, and--and see for yourself!" she implored him passionately.

Of a sudden he found himself resolved. Indeed, he fancied that it were dangerous to oppose her; she was overwrought, on the verge of losing her command of self. She wished this thing, and though with all his soul he hated it, he would do as she desired.

"Very well," he assented quietly. "Shall I stop the cab now?"

"Please."

He tapped on the roof of the hansom and told the cabby to draw in at the next corner. Thus he was put down not far from his home,--below the Thirty-third Street grade.

Neither spoke as he alighted, and she believed that he was leaving her in displeasure and abhorrence; but he had only stepped behind the cab for a moment to speak to the driver. In a moment he was back, standing by the step with one hand on the apron and staring in very earnestly and soberly at the shadowed sweetness of her pallid face, that gleamed in the gloom there like some pale, shy, sad flower.

Could there be evil combined with such sheer loveliness, with features that in every line bodied forth the purity of the spirit that abode within? In the soul of him he could not believe that a thief's nature fed canker-like at the heart of a woman so divinely, naively dear and desirable. And ... he would not.

"Won't you let me go?"

"Just a minute. I ... I should like to.... If I find that you have done nothing so very dreadful." he laughed uneasily, "do you wish to know?"

"You know I do." She could not help saying that, letting him see that far into her heart. "You spoke of my calling, I believe. That means to-morrow afternoon, at the earliest. May I not call you up on the telephone?"

"The number is in the book," she said in a tremulous voice.

"And your name in the card-case?"

"Yes."

"And if I should call in half an hour--?"

"O, I shall not sleep until I know!... Good night!"

"Good night!... Drive on, cabby."

He stood, smiling queerly, until the hansom, climbing the Park Avenue hill, vanished over its shoulder. Then swung about and with an eager step retraced his way to his rooms, very confident that God was in His Heaven and all well with the world.

III

The cab stopped. The girl rose and descended to the walk. The driver touched his hat and reined the horse away. "Goodnight, ma'am," he bade her cheerfully. And she told him "Good night" in her turn.

For a moment she seemed a bit hesitant and fearful, left thus alone. The house in front of which she stood, like its neighbors, reared a high facade to the tender, star-lit sky, its windows, with drawn shades and no lights, wearing a singular look of blind patience. It had a high stoop and a sunken area. There was a dull glow in one of the basement windows.

It was very late,--or extremely early. The moon was down, though its place

was in some way filled by the golden disk of the clock in the Grand Central Station's tower. The air was impregnated with the sweet and fragrant breath of the new-born day. In the tunnel beneath the street a trolley-car rumbled and whined and clanked lonesomely. A stray cat wandered out of a cross-street with the air of a seasoned debauchee; stopped, scratched itself with inimitable abandon, and suddenly, mysteriously alarmed at nothing, turned itself into a streak of shadow that fled across the street and vanished. And, as if affected by its terror, the grey girl slipped silently into the area and tapped at the lighted window.

Almost immediately the gate was cautiously opened. A woman's head looked out, with suspicion. "Oh, thank Heavens!" it said with abrupt fervor. "I was afraid it mightn't be you, Miss Sylvia. I'm so glad you're back. There ain't--hasn't been a minute these past two nights that I haven't been in a fidget."

The girl laughed quietly and passed through the gateway (which was closed behind her) into the basement hall, where she lingered a brief moment.

"My father, Annie?" she inquired.

"He ain't--hasn't stirred since you went out, Miss Sylvia. He's sleepin' peaceful as a lamb."

"Everything is all right, then?"

"Now that you're home, it is, praises be!" The servant secured the inner door and turned up the gas. "Not if I was to be given notice to-morrow mornin'," she announced firmly, "will I ever consent to be a party to such goin's-on another night."

"There will be no occasion, Annie," said the girl. "Thank you, and--good night."

A resigned sigh,--"Good night, Miss Sylvia,"--followed her up the stairs.

She went very cautiously, careful to brush against no article of movable furniture in the halls, at pains to make no noise on the stairs. At the door of her father's room on the second floor she stopped and listened for a full moment; but he was sleeping as quietly, as soundly, as the servant had declared. Then on, more hurriedly, up another flight, to her own room, where she turned on the electric bulb in panic haste. For it had just occurred to her that the telephone bell might ring before she could change her clothing and get down-stairs and shut herself into the library, whose closed door would prevent the bell from being audible through the house.

In less than ten minutes she was stealing silently down to the drawing-room floor again, quiet as a spirit of the night. The library door shut without a sound: for the first time she breathed freely. Then, pressing the button on the wall, she switched on the light in the drop-lamp on the center-table. The telephone stood beside it.

She drew up a chair and sat down near the instrument, ready to lift the receiver off its hook the instant the bell began to sound; and waited, the soft light burning in the loosened tresses of her hair, enhancing the soft color that pulsed in her cheeks, fading before the joy that lived in her eyes when she hoped....

For she dared hope--at times; and at times could not but fear. So greatly had she dared, who greatly loved, so heavy upon her untarnished heart was the burden of the sin that she had put upon it, because she loved.... Perhaps he would not call; perhaps the world was to turn cold and be for ever grey to her eyes. He was even then deciding; at that very moment her happiness hung in the scales of his mercy. If he could forgive....

There was a click. And her face flamed scarlet, as hastily she lifted the receiver to her ear. The armature buzzed sharply. Then Central's voice cut the stillness.

"Hello! Nine-o-five-one?"

"Yes...."

"Wait a minute."

She waited, breathless, in a quiver. The silence sang upon the wire, the silence of the night through which he was groping toward her....

"Hello! Is this Nine-o--"

"Yes, yes!"

"Is this the residence of Alexander C. Graeme?"

"Yes." The syllable almost choked her.

"Is this Miss Graeme at the 'phone?"

"It is."

"Miss Sylvia Graeme?"

"Yes."

"This is Daniel Maitland ... Sylvia!"

"As if I did not know your voice!" she cried involuntarily.

There followed a little pause; and in her throat the pulses tightened and drummed.

"I have opened the bag, Sylvia...."

"Please go on."

"And I've sounded the depths of your hideous infamy!"

"Oh!" He was laughing.

"I've done more. I've made a burnt offering, within the last five minutes. Can you guess what it is?"

"I--I--don't want to guess! I want to be told."

"A burnt offering on the altar of your happiness, dear. The papers in the case of the Dougherty Investment Company no longer exist."

"Dan!"

"Sylvia.... Does it please you?"

"Don't you know?... How can it do anything but please me? If you knew how I have suffered because my father suffered, fearing the.... No, but you must listen! Dan, it was wearing him down to his grave, and I thought--"

"You thought that if you could get the papers and give them to him--"

"Yes. I could see no harm, because he was as innocent as you--"

"Of course. But why didn't you ask me?"

"He did, and you refused."

"But how could I tell, Sylvia, that you were his daughter, and that I should--"

"Hush! Central will hear!"

"Central's got other things to do, besides listening to early morning confabulations. I love you."

"Dan...."

"Yes?"

"I love--to hear you say so, dear."

"Please say that last word over again. I didn't get it."

"Dear...."

"And that means that you'll marry me?"

A pause.

"I say, that means--"

"I heard you, Dan."

"But it does, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Whenever you please."

"I'll come up now."

"Don't be a silly."

"Well, when then? To-day?"

"Yes--_no_!"

"But when?"

"To-morrow--I mean next week--I mean next month."

"No; to-day at four. I'll call for you."

"But, Dan...."

"Sweetheart!"

"But you mustn't!... How can I--"

"Easily enough. There's the Little-Church-Around-the-Corner--"

"But I've nothing to wear!"

"Oh!"

Another pause.

"Dan.... You don't wish it--truly?"

"I do wish it, truly. To-day, at four. The Church of the Transfiguration. Yes, I'll scare up a best man if you'll find bridesmaids. Now you will, won't you?"

"I--if you wish it, dear."

"I'll have to ask you to repeat that."

"I shan't. There!"

"Very well," meekly. "But will you tell me one thing, please?"

"What is it?"

"Where on earth did you get hold of that kit of tools?"

She laughed softly. "My big Brother caught a burglar once, and kept the kit for a remembrance. I borrowed them."

"Give me your big brother's address and I'll send 'em back with my thanks--No, by George! I won't, either. I've as much right to keep 'em as he has on _that_ principle."

And again she laughed, very gently and happily. Dear God, that such happiness could come to one!

"Sylvia?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you love me?"

"I think you may believe it, when I sit here at four o'clock in the morning, listening to a silly boy talk nonsense over a telephone wire."

"But I want to hear you say so!"

"But Central--"

"I tell you Central has other things to do!"

At this juncture the voice of Central, jaded and acidulated, broke in curtly:

"Are you through?"

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