

The Capture of Paul Beck

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Chapter I

A Proposal

“Don’t say ‘No’ right away, that’s all I ask. I’m sorry I spoke. It was just like my infernal cheek—I beg your pardon—I mean it was sheer presumption. I know well I’m not fit to tie your shoe-string. But have a little pity on a chap. I couldn’t hold in; upon my soul I couldn’t. Don’t refuse me straight away; give me a little hope. I don’t want you to say ‘Yes.’”

“You don’t want me to say ‘Yes’?” The words came out softly one by one in a little ripple of mocking laughter. The wretched young man, who had plunged headlong into an unpremeditated proposal and was floundering beyond his depth, raised his eyes for the first time from the carpet to the face of the girl. It was a face to justify his fervour. The cheeks were flushed rosy red before his ardent gaze; the sweet, sensitive lips quivered a little, but two merry imps of laughter danced in the depths of the clear brown eyes.

A wild hope sprung to life in his heart. “Oh, Norma, is it possible? Can you? Will you?”

“But you don’t want me to say ‘Yes,’” more softly than before.

Then he knew, and took his answer from those sweet lips without resistance. A delicious glow of love and triumph warmed his whole being. The ordeal was over. He had won. The love his soul longed for was his for ever. Nothing else in the whole world mattered now. At that instant those two tasted the supreme bliss that makes human life worth living, even if there were nothing before or after—the entrancing ecstasy of first love which God has given as his best gift to man.

“Oh! you foolish boy,” she said, as she touched the hair from his forehead timidly, yet with a familiarity that made him tingle with delight, “you might have known I loved you better than ever you’ll love me. I was only waiting for you to speak to tell you so.”

For a little while he was dizzy with his delight. “She loves you, she loves you,” a voice seemed to cry with the quick beating of his heart. He held her to him close and kissed her unresisting lips till the full assurance of her love came to him with

a flood of rapturous delight. They were alone in the world in their sublime, delicious selfishness, with no thought outside themselves—unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday were both forgotten. They lived their whole, full life *in* the swiftly-passing moments. The dimly-lit drawing-room with its subdued glow of rich colours was as the temple of their love.

The man woke first from this ecstatic trance, impatient for still greater bliss. For the woman, the present was all-sufficient.

“Norma,” he whispered in the small pink ear, “when will we be married?”

“Never! never! if you hold me like that. I’m afraid of you. Why, we are not even regularly engaged yet, and you talk of marriage. We may never marry.”

“What!” he cried, with a twinge of his old nervousness. “You’re jesting. Of course we are engaged. I’ll prove it to you. Now, are we? Now?”

“I cannot help myself, you are stronger than I am. But I don’t consider myself really engaged till father knows. I have no mother to tell,” she added a little wistfully. “I never missed my mother more than now.”

“You need miss no one when you are mine, darling. I will settle the engagement right away. Your father is in his study, I suppose. Will you wait here till I come back?”

“Yes, I’ll wait. I’ve said that I’m not at home to anyone. But mind this, Mr. Armitage—well, Phil then—if dad won’t have you, I won’t; so you must be awfully nice to him for my sake.”

“Oh, that will be all right,” he answered with ready confidence from the door. “He and I are good friends.”

As it closed behind him she switched on the electric light and made for the big Chippendale mirror that filled one panel of the room. Vanity? Not a bit of it. She wanted to see the girl he loved. In that broad mirror she saw a girl worthy of any man’s love. She hardly knew herself at first. She had never seen that face before; that strange sweet face, rosy with love’s kisses; and brown eyes, warm with the dawn of love.

After a moment the light in her own eyes frightened her and kindled her cheek to

a rosier red. Instinctively she switched off the light, dropped languidly on the soft couch, trembling with vague, delicious hopes and fears, and hugging the mysterious little god close to her virginal bosom.

“Come in,” cried the sharp voice of Mr. Theophilus Lee, and Phil Armitage walked confidently into the spacious, well-appointed study. From his big roll-top desk Mr. Lee rose, tall and thin and straight, to greet him, but there was no cordiality in his greeting. The hand he offered was nerveless and chill. The cold grey eyes questioned the intruder courteously but coldly. Mr. Lee wore his gold spectacles low down near the bridge of his long, sharp nose, and had a disconcerting trick of looking over them unexpectedly, straight into a visitor’s eyes.

Poor Phil Armitage’s confidence began to evaporate. He had never been treated in this fashion before by Mr. Lee, who, standing himself, let his visitor stand, and whose cold, questioning attitude said plainer than words, “What is your business, sir? Tell it and go.”

“It is about your daughter, Mr. Lee,” stammered out poor Phil.

“My daughter! ah, indeed! And what about my daughter, Mr. Armitage?”

There was no hint in his voice that he divined his errand; nothing but polite surprise that the young man should have anything to say or ask about his daughter.

His tone stung the suitor to courage. “I came, Mr. Lee,” he said very quietly—no stammer now, no nervousness—“to ask your permission to marry your daughter.”

Mr. Lee’s long face remained for a moment quite expressionless, and he drew his thin hand softly over his pointed beard as though he were stroking a pet dog.

Phil felt himself wondering vaguely how this could be his Norma’s father.

Then the cold grey eyes met his over the gold-rimmed glasses with stealthy suddenness.

“You have already spoken to my daughter of this?” he asked sharply.

“Only a moment ago.”

“You consider that honourable, of course?”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Oh! I suppose not. You know my daughter is an only child and an heiress?”

“I never gave the matter a thought.”

“Of course, of course, but you knew the fact when you came here to make love to her. Having inveigled her into a promise you come here to ask me for her hand and fortune.”

“I didn’t; I don’t. I tell you now I don’t want a farthing of her fortune.”

“There is no use whatever in indulging in mock heroics, Mr. Armitage, they don’t affect me in the least. You know as well as I do that my fortune goes with my girl.”

His voice warmed a little at the word. “The world, I know, calls me a hard man, because I have worked hard and made a big pile honestly and because I wasted none of it. But no one has ever called me a hard father. Young man, you say you love my daughter. You don’t love her a hundredth part as well as her father does. All I am or have is hers. If Norma were to marry a beggar or a blackguard it would be hers just the same; but she shan’t marry a beggar or a blackguard if I can help it.”

It was a curious sight if there was anyone to see it. The feeble, cadaverous old man quietly heaping insult after insult on the young athlete who could have crushed him with a grip, could have killed him with a blow.

The young fellow bit his lip hard and clenched his hands tight, as though by strong physical effort, to keep down the hot, strong passion that pressed for an outlet. “He is an old man; he is her father,” he kept repeating to himself.

For a moment or two he could not find his voice. “I trust, Mr. Lee,” he said at last, with a calmness and a coolness that surprised himself, “that I am neither a blackguard nor a beggar. In a year or so I will have got my profession of electrical engineer, and I am promised a good appointment. Meanwhile, I have

twenty thousand pounds of my own to go on with.”

“Twenty thousand,” sneered the old man. “You are willing to set that huge sum against the two hundred thousand that my girl will have the day she is married? How generous of you! A good commercial speculation! Love and prudence run together with you, Mr. Armitage. You don’t want money, of course; you don’t value it, of course. The disinterested young man never does when he wants to marry an heiress! Well, I do believe in money. People call me a miser. I suppose you have often called me a miser yourself. There, you needn’t answer. I don’t care two straws whether you did or not. If it be miserly to believe in money’s worth and money’s power *I am a miser.*”

He sank back into a chair exhausted by his own vehemence. His face had suddenly grown grey. There was a bluish tint in his lips and a queer catch in his voice when he spoke again.

“You may sit down,” he said, pointing to a chair. “I will finish this thing out while I’m at it and not let it keep on worrying me.” He leaned back in his chair and wiped his clammy face with his handkerchief. But he went on relentlessly :

“I believe in money for myself and for my girl. I want her to have everything that money can buy, and that’s pretty nearly everything there is. Well, she can have it if she chooses. Abraham Lamman has asked her to be his wife, and I have given my consent if he can get hers.”

Young Armitage was taken completely aback by this announcement. “Have you told Lamman,” he blurted out, “that I—”

The father cut him short. “You?” he said with stinging contempt. “Why should I mention you?”

“I only meant he is a friend of mine.”

“Does that mean he must marry or not marry as you wish? Does it mean I must have your leave to choose a son-in-law?” Then contempt flared again into anger. “I tell you straight, young man, I want my daughter to marry Lamman. Anyhow, I don’t want her to marry you. When you have a hundred thousand in your own right you may ask me again. Not till then. Now go.”

“May I see your daughter before I go?”

Mr. Theophilus Lee stared at him steadily for a moment before he answered. "Certainly," he said coldly. "I suppose you would contrive to see her anyhow. Best get the business over. I can trust my daughter. When you do see her kindly tell her the truth."

With this parting shot he swung round his office chair to the desk and wrote, or made pretence to write, while Armitage got out of the room as best he could.

The girl heard his step on the stairs and leaped up from her chair.

"Well?" she cried impetuously, "you were very long. Did he—" Then even in that dim light she saw his face, and with love's keen eyes read its meaning.

"Oh! Phil, what is it? He hasn't refused? You haven't quarrelled? Tell me quickly!"

"Your father has treated me like a dog, Norma," he answered bitterly. "I was at his mercy. He knew I could not resent it from him. He called me a fortune-hunter, a beggar, a blackguard, and almost a liar in so many words. He wants you to marry the millionaire Abraham Lamman."

"Oh!" It was a pitiful little gasp, almost a sob, but he was too absorbed in his own grievance to comfort her.

"I might have had a chance if the millionaire hadn't turned up. Now I'm the beggar and blackguard that is sneaking after your fortune. A man may be a blackguard all right if he has the millions, it doesn't count against him. No, I shouldn't say that either," he added remorsefully, "for Abe Lamman is a very good friend of mine and as straight a chap as there is going."

"I hate the very sight of the man!" she broke out impetuously. Strange to say young Armitage did not resent this aspersion on his friend.

"You won't marry him, Norma?" he urged eagerly.

"Not for the world! How dare you ask such a question?"

"My own darling!" he said. Then he took his own marriage for granted. "Our troubles will soon blow over. Your father may be a bit annoyed at first, but he will come round right enough when we are married. The sooner the better."

He drew her towards him as he spoke and she didn't resist. For a moment he thought the trouble was indeed over.

"Phil," she whispered, "we must wait. Don't you see we must? I could not go against his wishes. I will coax him round in time, but meanwhile we must wait."

"Wait! wait!" he cried impatiently, "what do you mean by wait, Norma? How long?"

"How can I tell? Until I get father to consent."

"But if he won't?"

"Oh, he will. I know he will. I know him better than you, Phil."

Her voice was not as confident as her words. Perhaps it was because she knew her father only too well.

The impatient lover's ear caught the hint of a doubt. "But if he won't," he persisted, "will you promise to marry me in three months—well, in six months? That's long enough. Will you promise?"

His eagerness forgot to be gentle. It was a demand he made, not an entreaty. He spoke as one who had a right and meant to enforce it. The spirit of revolt rose in her to meet his insistence.

"No," she answered shortly and coldly, "I will promise you nothing of the kind. I'll never marry without my father's consent."

"Then you don't love me as you said you did. You have deceived me; you don't know what real love is."

"And you do!" There was pitiless scorn in her voice though she spoke gently. "A half an hour ago you were all humility. You only asked for leave to wait and hope. Now, because I was fool enough to show my love you take the first chance to insult me."

"To insult you, Norma!"

"Yes, to insult me, to tell me I am fickle and false. You say I do not know what

love means. Very well, I accept your verdict. There is no more to be said. Now I hope you are satisfied.”

Every word stung him all the more sharply that dimly in the bottom of his heart he felt they were deserved. But for the moment that feeling only served to rasp his temper. Shame made his anger more bitter.

“I suppose that means my dismissal?” he said.

“If you so choose.”

“Well, good-bye, Miss Lee.”

“Good-bye,” with a stately little nod.

He fumbled for his hat and stick, feeling vaguely that he was a clown and a brute, ready to kick himself for boorishness, ready to fall on his knees for pardon, but all the time driven sullenly forward by his temper.

“Good-bye,” he repeated sullenly, and made across the room for the door without looking round.

His hand was on the door knob when he felt a touch on his shoulder that thrilled him through and through.

Her light step had made no sound on the thick carpet. She blushed and trembled as he faced round with the gratitude of a sudden reprieve in his face.

“No! no!” she cried, “please don’t touch me. I’m much too ashamed of myself. There, just sit down—no, not so close—in that chair and listen to me. I could not bear that we should part in anger, even if we have to part. I believe you like me. Well, yes, don’t stir, I believe you love me, and that it was your love that made you seem rough with me just now. It is not fair for me to be angry with you for that.”

“I deserve to be kicked,” protested Armitage.

“Father has been saying nasty things to you, and you are angry naturally with him. But try to see with my eyes for a moment. He loves me and I love him. He has earned my love. Oh! dear, how well he has earned it. He may be nasty to

other people, never, never to me. I never had a mother to remember. She died when I was a baby; he has been father and mother to me. I never could even think of a wish that he didn't grant it. When I had scarlet fever and the doctors gave me up for dead he nursed me through it, more patient and gentle than any woman. The doctors said he saved my life and I believe them. Do you wonder, Phil, I love him; that I want to please him? He has never punished me when I was a naughty child. He wouldn't think of punishing me if I were to marry you tomorrow."

"So he said," groaned poor Phil. He meant to be straight, though he felt his hopes slipping away from him.

"I knew it without his saying. He wouldn't even be angry with me, but it would break his heart to think I cared so little for him as to do it against his wish. His heart is not strong and my disobedience might kill him. Now, do you wonder that, even for you, I cannot hurt his great love?"

"You are an angel, Norma, and I am a selfish brute not worthy to kiss your feet."

It may be her smile dissipated his humility for he caught her in his arms, and well—it was not her feet he kissed.

"You'll wait for me?" he whispered.

"For a hundred years, Phil."

"Not quite so long as that, I hope," he cried ruefully, and they both laughed, for it is hard to kill hope in the young. "Did I tell you that your father would give his consent if I had one hundred thousand pounds?"

"But you haven't, dear?"

"But I might make it. Abe Lamman told me that he sometimes makes a hundred thousand in a week."

"Oh! Abe Lamman!"

There was thorough dislike and contempt in the three words. She couldn't say more in a long speech.

“I don’t want you to like him, darling. Indeed, I’d much prefer you didn’t, all things considered. But he has been a good friend to me and may give me a useful hint.”

“Don’t trust him, Phil.”

“So far and no further than I have reason to. Don’t you be afraid, Norma. I fancy I know my way about as well as Abe. Wish me good luck and good-bye.”

That good-bye was a very long and complicated business, but it ended at last. As the street door closed behind him the girl noticed a little locket, that had fallen from his chain, lying on the carpet. She picked it up and touched the spring. The lid flying open showed her own face. “Oh! you lucky girl,” she whispered, and kissed it softly and hid it in her bosom.

Chapter II

A Friend in Need

“In the name of good fortune what brings *you* to the City, old chap? Whatever it is you are heartily welcome to yours truly, doubly welcome if I can be of service.”

There was hearty welcome in every tone of the big man’s voice, in every line of his broad, strong, goodhumoured face. “Sit yourself down there, old man.” With a strong hand on his chest he flung our friend Phil Armitage back into a deep, cosy armchair and set a box of cigars beside him. “Light up, Phil. They’re the mildest money can buy, warranted to promote appetite. You’ll lunch with me, of course? I’ll chuck business for the day and give you a regular City half-holiday lunch. Now, if there is anything I can do for you meantime, get it off your chest at once.”

Abe Lamman, with his kindly voice and big, strong, clumsy figure, that was the despair of Bond Street tailors, was the last person in the world that anyone would dream of taking on the view for a successful money-grubber. His office was like the man—big, untidily comfortable. There was a golf-bag in one corner and a fishing-rod in another. A huge roll-top desk with a telephone attachment filled the centre of the room. A tape machine clicked away in a corner with such a litter of paper ribbons as a conjurer takes from his hat littered beneath it. The appearance of the man, the atmosphere of his snugger, suggested confidence and courage.

Phil Armitage felt to the full the cheerful, encouraging influence of place and man.

“It’s a bit cheeky of me, Abe,” he said, “to come to you at all, for I’ve just discovered we are rivals.”

For a moment Lamman’s genial face darkened as a sun from a swift-passing cloud, and the brows came down in a sudden frown over his eyes.

But his self-control was wonderful. His face was smiling; his voice placid when he spoke.

“Miss Lee?” he asked quietly.

Armitage nodded.

“I thought so, I feared so. You are not come to challenge me to a duel, Phil? You don’t want me to resign my pretensions and all that kind of thing?”

“Well, not exactly,” said Armitage. He was glad that the other man seemed to take the affair so lightly. “I don’t in the least want to quarrel with you unless you insist.”

“I’m glad of that,” cried Lamman, cheerily, in his big, hearty voice. “A fair field then and the best man wins. I’m desperately fond of the little girl, Phil. You can understand that.”

At the sudden earnestness in his voice Armitage felt a thrill of something like remorse. “I’m awfully sorry for you, old chap,” he faltered. “I had no idea you were so hard hit, but Miss Lee and I are engaged.”

Plainly Lamman was stunned by the news. He leant his head on his hands so that Armitage couldn’t see his face, and remained so a full half minute, motionless, without speaking, till Armitage felt the strain of the silence like a physical pain. Then, still without a word, Lamman got up and paced the room twice very slowly.

“Phil,” he said at last, gripping his shoulder, “I won’t deny that this hurts, but if I’m not to get the girl there is no one I’d sooner see get her than you. I congratulate you, old man. When is it to be?”

“I don’t know,” said Phil, awkwardly.

“About when, I mean?”

“Still I don’t know. To be quite frank, the father does not want me. He wants you, or rather—you’ll forgive me for putting it so plainly—he wants your money.”

“I can understand that,” said Lamman, slowly. “But you have money enough to marry on.”

“Money enough for Norma—God bless her!—but not money enough for old Lee. He has fixed a hundred thousand pounds as the minimum.”

“That’s not so very hard to come by,” retorted Lamman, smiling a little scornfully.

“Not for you who are a born money-maker, who have got hold of Aladdin’s wonderful lamp and bring it down with you to the Stock Exchange. I haven’t the gift.”

“Everyone cannot have everything,” said the other, a little bitterly. “You’ve got your share. I’d swop willingly.”

Armitage did not seem to notice the bitterness. “I say, old man,” he went on hesitatingly, “I came here thinking you might do me a good turn. It’s hardly fair, I know, but as you said you would prefer me to anyone else you might perhaps —”

“What?” demanded Lamman, impatiently, for Armitage stumbled long over the next word.

“Well, I thought perhaps you wouldn’t mind giving me a tip or two on the Stock Exchange. I have over twenty thousand I could put tomorrow into anything you recommend. I never wanted to make money before, but I’m aching to do it now. A straight tip and a big coup would set me all right with old Lee.”

Lamman eyed him whimsically, a curious smile tightening his lips. “Well, you certainly are a cool young man. You want me to cut my own throat, to forfeit my own last chance, to help my rival to what I want myself.”

“But really you have no chance at all,” protested Armitage, eagerly. “Norma—Miss Lee—told me she would not marry you under any circumstances. You haven’t the ghost of a chance, whatever happens to me.”

“That’s as it may be. Girls have been known to change their minds. But one thing is certain. If the girl marries you I’ve no chance, and that’s what you want me to help you to.”

“No, I don’t want you, if you take it that way,” retorted Armitage, stiffly. “I can wait or have a try off my own bat. Anyhow, you have no chance.”

“Easy does it,” said the goodnatured Lamman; “keep the lid on your pepper-box, old chap. I didn’t say I wouldn’t help you, and I don’t say I will. This is a thing that wants to be thought out. But we’ve talked enough for one sitting, and the debate is getting too hot. I move the House do now adjourn. You must lunch, dine and theatre with me to-day and tonight. There is a devilish clever thing, *The Bear Squeeze*, at the Criterion. We will resume controversial business here at twelve o’clock tomorrow. Not another word till then.”

Armitage found Lamman, not for the first time, the most generous and judicious of hosts. They lunched simply on oysters, brown bread-and-butter, and a pint of Guinness’s stout in its “native pewter.” They dined gloriously at “The Epicures’ Club,” as Lamman said, “on claret.” There was no other wine at dinner or after it, and they wound up with a bottle that held imprisoned in its ruddy glow the sunshine of a hot summer a quarter of a century ago. It was the best wine, even in the “Epicures”—wine worth half a sovereign a glass; a wine of which, as Lamman plaintively remarked to his friend, there were only five dozen bottles now left in the world.

Lamman had forbid smoking until the wine was finished, but they lit up at the coffee and liqueurs, and as the two men sauntered, with cigars alight, from Pall Mall to the Strand in the gentle afterglow of an autumnal sunset Armitage felt pleasantly confident and at ease with the world.

The play justified its reputation. *The Bear Squeeze* was a light and sparkling little comedy of financial and social intrigue, from which the stockbroking hero, Stephen Rhober, emerged triumphant. In that big, kind-hearted, straightforward financier, whose simplicity was more than a match for fraud, Armitage found a striking resemblance to his friend, Abe Lamman. The friends parted that night in hilarious goodhumour. But Lamman was grave as a judge when Armitage called by appointment next day about noon at his office.

He handed him his cigar box silently. Lamman’s cigars were justly famous, and in silence they smoked for a five minutes. Then Lamman spoke.

“See here, old man,” he said slowly, “I wish you’d let me back out.”

“Do, if you want to,” said Armitage, shortly.

“Don’t put it in that way; it’s for your sake I’m anxious.”

“Oh! if that’s it, never mind me. I see you have got something good up your sleeve.”

“Something I believe to be good. But it is not by any means a dead cert.”

“Is anything certain on the Stock Exchange?”

“Well, no, if you put it that way. Nothing big is, anyway.”

“Are you going into this yourself?” asked Armitage.

“Baldheaded.”

“Then I go too; that is, if you let me.”

“Now, you mustn’t get riled if I point out it is not quite the same thing your plunging and mine. A loss that would hardly hurt me might ruin you.”

“I’ll take my chance of that.”

“All right then,” said Lamman; “if you will you must. Honestly I may say,” he added with manifest reluctance, “I don’t think there is much danger. But I have a condition to make.”

“Fire away.”

The big man was plainly embarrassed. “Armitage,” he began awkwardly at last, “I want to be quite straight with you. I have not given up all hope of Norma Lee. As I said before, I don’t mean to give up until you two are married and done for. That is to say if you are married. Don’t look so black, old man, try to put yourself in my place for a minute. Anyhow, straight talk is the best. If this coup comes off and you clear enough, you mean to marry her right away?”

The other nodded.

“That don’t suit my book. I want my chance. Girls change their minds.”

“Norma is not of that kind.”

“So much the better for you then. So much the easier my condition. Will you promise, if you pull off this game, to wait six months—well, three months then?”

I don't want to be a dog in the manger."

Armitage paused for a moment. "Done," he said, and stretched out his hand.

Lamman caught it in a cordial grasp.

"Now to business," he said briskly. "From the information I have received Amalgamated Gold wants buying. You have heard of the Amalgamated Gold Co., Ltd?"

"I cannot say I have, unless I tell a lie."

"Well, you are out of everything. Amalgamated Gold is going to be the biggest boom for many a day on the Stock Exchange. A lot of American bosses have gathered together a handful of mines, good and bad, old and new, and sent them booming. The five-dollar shares were at ten a week after issue. They dropped again to five dollars in a month. I believe they are only falling back for a jump higher than the first."

"I see," said Armitage, knowingly; "the mines have proved better than was expected."

Lamman regarded him with goodhumoured amusement.

"Well, you are green! Why, the mines, or the gold in the mines if there is any, don't matter in the least. The men that are manipulating the market—the richest and smartest in the States, I believe—are engineering another big rise, and I mean to get into that elevator on the ground floor."

"And for me?"

"You come too, if you are willing to risk it. The word is buy, buy, buy and keep on buying. Here is a wire I'm just sending to my American agent. The cypher is plain when you know the key word. Mine is Norma. Don't look so black; I didn't know about you when I chose it. I mean to put the message on the cable at once. One cannot be too careful, or, for that matter, too smart. Every minute may mean a thousand pounds when the shares once begin to jump."

"Could you buy for me?"

“One off there. You must act through your own brokers—Samson & Locke, I think. But mind you don’t give me away or you’ll upset the apple cart.”

“You may trust me. When shall I begin?”

“No time like the present. Do it now. I read that in a little book the other day—smart little book too. The fellow said it was the secret of success.”

They walked together to a quiet office close by, where Lamman handed in his message. Armitage noticed with a start that the clerk who took it bore a strange resemblance in face and figure to himself. Armitage was clean shaved, and the clerk wore a neat moustache and a short pointed beard. But all the same, in figure and face the resemblance was very remarkable. It struck him too as curious that neither Lamman nor the clerk himself seemed to notice it.

Lamman parted with him at the door of the office, and he went on alone to his own respectable brokers.

Mr. Samson—grave, sedate and silver-haired— was amazed when Philip Armitage came to him with instructions to plunge to the limit of twenty thousand pounds on Amalgamated Gold.

“It is a big order, Mr. Armitage,” he said, regarding him paternally through his gold spectacles. “I have heard that Amalgamated Gold are rather— ahem—a speculative security.”

“I’m taking the risk,” answered Armitage.

“But, my dear young man, you have given me no instructions. What is your limit? Shall I buy for cash or account?”

“You are very kind, Mr. Samson, but I really don’t know much of these details. I want you to buy and keep on buying as far as twenty thousand pounds will run to. I leave the rest to you.”

“Then I’ll buy for account,” he began, “and when the cover runs off—”

“You’ll forgive me,” interrupted Armitage, “I’m a child in those matters. I leave myself entirely in your hands,” and he bolted.

“He seems very confident,” mused Mr. Samson. “He must have some information. I’ll risk a little flutter myself.” So he bought a substantial block of Amalgamated Gold on his own account before he placed Phil Armitage’s order at a fractional advance.

Chapter III

Boom and Crash

Phil Armitage, for the first time in his life, took to studying the Stock Exchange lists. He passed lightly over the columns of his newspaper that were used to hold him—Parliament or sport for the most part, he was an amateur statesman and a practical cricketer—and buried himself in the money columns of the *Times*.

For the first few days Amalgamated Gold lay quite still and torpid. Then they began to show a fitful life—nothing to speak of, a little move this way and that, backwards and forwards, over the border line of par. Then, quietly at first, the boom began. Fraction by fraction the shares crept steadily up in the market to a premium. One-eighth, one-fourth, one-half was reached, and still they climbed upwards.

Armitage was no longer content with the *Times* money column. He watched the progress on the tape at his club. The fever of the gambler was hot in his veins. Soon the magnitude of the boom began to attract general notice. The papers speculated on its progress. All sorts of wild rumours were afloat. The men at the club knew all about it.

“Amalgamates had struck it rich at Johannesburg,” one man declared.

“No, at Coolgardie,” another interrupted.

“They were taking the gold in lumps from mines in West Australia,” declared a third; “the shares would go to fifty—to a hundred dollars, see if they didn’t.”

The croakers at the club—the men who were sorry they hadn’t bought in at first and were afraid to buy in now—were certain the market was rigged, and prophesied a crash. Our friend Phil smiled superior as he listened to their cackle. He felt himself in the know. The folly of the outsiders amused him.

He chanced to meet Lamman one day in the street, but the big stockbroker was in a hurry and had only a word or two with him.

“Well,” he said, as Armitage gripped his hand warmly, “are you satisfied?”

“Will they go higher?” asked Armitage.

Lamman laughed a reassuring laugh. “How can I tell? I’m not a prophet. But if you want to sell at present prices I’ll take your little lot off your hands, and I think I’m entitled to the preference. Gambling is not good for young men who are not used to it. It gets on their nerves.”

“What are you doing?” asked Phil.

“Buying,” said Lamman, with an encouraging wink, and was off at a great pace.

For the moment Phil was satisfied, but the big stakes, as Lamman anticipated, had got on his nerves.

When the five-dollar shares stood for a day at eleven he called at the office of his brokers.

Mr. Samson received him with most flattering effusion. “I congratulate you, Mr. Armitage,” he said, “most heartily. You have shown wonderful judgment. You will forgive me if I attempted to discourage you, but I really did not know this kind of thing was in your line.”

Phil Armitage was very young. He accepted the compliment as if he had really done something wonderful. “Oh! that’s all right, Mr. Samson,” he said casually, with a slightly superior air. “I knew what I was about. I just dropped in now to find how I stand.”

“Certainly, my dear sir,” said the broker, obsequiously moving to the door. “Jenkins,” he called to the outer office, “will you kindly bring me Mr. Armitage’s account. That will do, Jenkins; you need not wait.”

He spread the book out on the table. “Let me see. On the day your order was given we purchased two blocks to account at—”

Armitage interrupted politely: “I won’t trouble you for the details, Mr. Samson. Can you tell me how I stand now—I mean, how much I would make if I sold out?”

“Then you think they have touched the limit?” queried Mr. Samson, “that there is danger of a fall?” He asked the question anxiously, yet with a curious

deference too, as a veteran worshipper might consult the latest oracle.

Again Armitage accepted the situation. He smiled mysteriously and shook his head wisely. "I did not say that, Mr. Samson. I merely asked you for a little information."

"I beg your pardon if I have been indiscreet, but I thought perhaps — just a moment, if you please. I will give you the figures you want in a moment."

He busied himself with a gold pencil-case and a half sheet of notepaper. "Here are the figures you want—roughly. We have twenty thousand shares to your account. The average profit is about six dollars—perhaps a shade over. If you decide to take your profit at the current price, Mr. Armitage, you will realise, within a few hundred one way or the other, twenty-four thousand pounds net profit."

Armitage gasped. The figure took his breath away. Twenty-four thousand pounds in a week! What a simple thing money-making was after all. In a month, if all went well, it would run to hundreds of thousands.

"Shall I realise for you?" asked Mr. Samson. There was a suppressed note of personal eagerness in his voice.

For the moment Armitage was perplexed. One word and the twenty-four thousand pounds was his. But the twenty-four thousand pounds might grow in another week to fifty thousand pounds; to one hundred thousand or two hundred thousand pounds. Some of the papers he had been reading had confidently predicted the shares would go to a hundred dollars. For all his assumption of knowingness he was, as he had said, a child in these matters. He felt he must consult Lamman again. He had kept aloof from his friend after that chance meeting. He had an uneasy feeling in the back of his mind that it was hardly fair to appeal to him. The help the other man gave him so generously galled a little. But once again interest cried down conscience. "Hang it," he muttered half aloud, "as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I'll chance it."

"I beg your pardon," said the surprised Mr. Samson, "I did not quite catch your remark."

"I beg yours, sir," said Armitage, a little confused, "I was speaking to myself—it is a bad habit I've got. No, Mr. Samson, I won't sell just now. I rather think

Amalgamates will go a bit higher. You shall hear from me again in a day or two.”

He wondered at his own outward coolness as he bade the broker good day and walked down the street. He felt the pulses throbbing in his temples. Familiar places seemed new and strange. The accustomed bustle of the streets filled him with a queer surprise, as if he had suddenly wakened in a new world. The change was in himself. The gambler’s fever was in his blood. He was giddy at the thought of this great wealth so easily and so rapidly accumulated. The deference shown him by the old financier Samson helped the intoxication. In some curious, illogical fashion he took credit to himself for the courage and intelligence that had achieved this dazzling success.

He had traversed a mile of crowded streets, walking with his head high up amongst the clouds, when a sudden thought sobered and chilled him.

This strange wealth was fairy gold. It might vanish as suddenly as it came. He knew very little of stockbroking, but this he knew—there were falls as well as rises in the market, and at any moment a sudden fall might sweep away his huge winnings. As the thought struck him he stood stock still in the thronged pathway, and the crowd jostled angrily round him as a stream round a rock in mid-current. For a moment he stood there unheeding, held by an absorbing debate in his own mind. Should he return to the broker, sell out and lay hands on the wealth that had come to him? Should he call on his friend, Abe Lamman, for advice? He had still an uneasy feeling that he had taxed a rival’s friendship too far and a strong repugnance to tax it further. He would go back to Mr. Samson. He turned and walked a dozen paces backwards to the broker’s office. Then by a sudden impulse, before he was conscious that he had changed his mind, he hailed a cab and gave the driver Abe Lamman’s address.

Lamman was delighted to see him. “Half expected you’d call, old chap. Well?” The one word meant a lot.

“I should have called long ago,” Armitage protested awkwardly, “but I did not want to worry you. You are a wonder. How can I thank you?”

“Don’t try. A hint one way or another costs me nothing. I have made a bit on this deal myself and hope to make more before I’m through with it.”

Armitage saw the opening made for him and plunged in. “Then you would

advise me to hold on a little longer?” he asked.

The other took him up abruptly. “No,” he answered gravely, “I won’t advise you one way or the other. I won’t take the responsibility. You mustn’t have to blame me afterwards if by a miracle anything goes wrong.”

Armitage smiled at the way the broker had let his opinion slip without meaning it. It was plain that if he gave advice at all it would be hold on.

He was half ashamed of his own cunning which had caught Lamman unawares.

“You don’t think the stock is likely to fall?” he asked, smiling.

“I think it is almost certain to,” Lamman answered.

Armitage stared in surprise.

“There are always these ups and downs,” the other went on, “before a boom settles steadily at top price. Then it is time for speculators to clear out and investors to come in.”

The indication was plain enough, though Lamman did not seem conscious of having given it. He might safely hold on through ups and downs for a further rise. He had got the advice he wanted.

“Well, good-bye, old man,” he said, “and a thousand thanks for the hint. I’m heartily ashamed of having asked it under the circumstances.”

“You needn’t be then,” retorted Lamman, “all’s fair in love and war. I’m glad you asked and glad I gave. You’re heartily welcome to what you make out of it.”

“What are you going to do yourself?”

“Get out, you sly thief,” said Lamman, laughingly, “that would be telling. How do you know but I might be tempted to give you a crooked tip?”

“I’ve no fear of that anyway. Good-bye again, old chap.”

Next day, when the shares began to sag in the market, Armitage read the money article in the *Times* with complacency in the intervals of an excellent breakfast at

his well-appointed chambers, and congratulated himself on his interview with his friend.

He congratulated himself again when next morning the shares turned the corner and rose to nineteen dollars—the highest point they had yet touched. Like a host of other speculators he resolved to sell out the moment the round numbers were reached. But that moment never came.

About noon the tape in the club told him that the prices were again sagging. They seemed to waver for a while—rising and falling. Then suddenly the bottom fell out of the market, and they tumbled through into space. Down! down! they went, without change or pause—pushed and kicked and banged by the triumphant bears.

There was wild tumult and panic in New York, hardly less violent in Throgmorton Street. Men lost their humanity and became fierce, howling, wild beasts.

In Wall Street one man shot a triumphant manipulator in the moment of his triumph and blew out his own brains on the floor of the house. Three losers went stark, staring mad. Such a financial cyclone had never swept through the street before. When evening came the bubble was burst, the fraud exposed; the shares of the Amalgamated Gold were not worth the paper they were written on, and incidentally, Philip Armitage was ruined.

Chapter IV

A Rescue

“Back from the Jaws of Death”

Armitage was stunned by the unexpected disaster. He did not realise it at first. He did not want to realise it. He kept the thought from him as a man stricken by a fatal disease keeps from him the thought of the inevitable death near at hand. That evening he did what he never did before and never did again. He deliberately drowned his consciousness in wine. Returning from the tumult in Throgmorton Street, to which he had been drawn from the club in the wild desire to know the worst, he carried up to his bedroom three bottles of champagne, switched on the electric light, locked the door and drank steadily till sleep came.

But he paid dearly for the brief respite. After a few hours of troubled sleep he woke slowly to consciousness. The vague dreams with which his sleep had been harassed receded very slowly. He wondered to find the electric light glaring in his room; he wondered to find himself dressed. Then with a suddenness that was like a stab of physical pain the memory of his disaster returned, aggravated by the sickening feeling that he had met it like a coward. For hours he lay staring dismally into the blank future in which he could find no ray of hope. He was ruined by his own rank folly. It was not his fortune alone was lost, but his love. Her father had held his poverty a bar when he was comparatively rich. What hope was there for him as a pauper? He could not hold the girl to her promise. He would write and release her. He tossed restlessly from side to side as those dismal thoughts shook him, as a wretch tosses in the throes of a restless fever.

But by-and-by the manliness that was in him asserted itself. He began to look the future in the face resolutely. A new life opened for him, a life of hard work and hardship. He steadied himself to meet it. Heretofore his life had been happy, self-indulgent, enervating. An orphan, his own master, healthy, strong, good-looking, goodnatured and goodhumoured, reasonably clever, a favourite with men and women, with sufficient money to get all the pleasure he wanted, working just enough to give zest to his enjoyments, he had drifted with the stream till his great love for Norma Lee checked and captured him. Now, as he communed dismally with himself through the night till the grey glimmer of the dawn

mingled with the glare of the electric light, he was willing to give everything up except the girl he loved. This was the one regret that wrenched his heart. She was lost to him. She should pass out of his life which her presence had enraptured. She would belong to another than him. He clenched his hands tight at the thought. But hope dies hard in the young. He couldn't quite shut out the hope that some supreme good fortune might give her to him even yet.

A stinging cold bath restrung his quivering nerves, and he went down to breakfast with a good appetite; a man must eat even if he is ruined.

There were three letters on the table. He pounced on the smallest first. It was very short. Yesterday he would have thought it very sweet; to-day it stabbed him.

“DEAR PHIL,—I will be at home and alone to-day at twelve.—Your loving NORMA.

“P.S.—Father knows.”

He dare not trust himself to keep the appointment. He felt he would play the coward and claim her love, and he felt she would love him the more warmly because he was ruined: would be more willing—not less—to come to him as a pauper.

“No,” he muttered angrily, “I'm not that sort of a cad anyway. I'll drop her a line telling her everything. When I leave here I'll leave no address. I'll cut myself completely adrift.”

The second letter was from Lamman, short, manly, straightforward, like the man.

“DEAR ARMITAGE”—it ran,—“I cannot forgive myself if I have let you in for trouble. I have been hoping all yesterday you sold out—at least a part of your holding in Amalgamateds—in time. I have been kicking myself that I did not tell you to get out with your winnings. The sharpest of us are fools sometimes. I have been pretty hard hit myself, but I can stand it. If I can help you in any way don't spare me.—Your friend,

“A. LAMMAN.”

“Good old chap,” Armitage thought to himself; “decent of him to offer it, but he is the last man living I would take help from. It wasn't fair to have gone to him

at all, knowing what I did. I have got what I deserved. If I could stand any man marrying—” The sentence snapped short with a pang at the thought of any man but himself married to Norma.

Mr. Samson’s note, the third on the table and the last read was precise and dry. There was an account enclosed with figures which Armitage didn’t in the least understand, and an intimation at the end that there was a balance due of £129, 73. 4d. from Armitage’s twenty thousand pounds, for which Mr. Samson would be happy to forward a cheque on request.

The letter, though formal, was polite. Mr. Samson had sold out his own little block of Amalgamates quite close to the top price and so could afford to be goodnatured.

The note sent Armitage to a calculation of ways and means. When he had finished his breakfast—and not a bad breakfast, all things considered—he made a short calculation with pencil and paper of his assets and liabilities. He had twenty-seven pounds to current account and two hundred on deposit receipt. His debts were small. It was his fad to pay ready money. When every farthing he owed was paid he would at least have two hundred pounds to go on with.

That would give him time, he thought, to look about him. Then he took an inventory of his own capabilities. He was studying in a desultory way to be an electrical engineer, but he loitered on the way and turned off the course as one invention or another attracted him. Now it was the aeroplane, now it was wireless telegraphy. He had devised a flying machine on paper. He could operate a telegraph instrument through wire or ether. Surely, he thought, he could turn his accomplishments into money—enough money at least to keep him.

When he had written his three short letters he went out to have a look about for something to do.

For three successive weeks he looked about for something to do and found nothing. Nobody seemed to want the commodities he had for sale. He got tired of answering advertisements and applying for situations. All his friends gave him their opinion with friendly candour about his folly. Many of them were liberal in good advice—none of them had anything else to offer. Strangers inquired where he had worked before, and then bowed him out more or less politely. There was no room anywhere for beginners.

So the weeks dragged on to months. He had changed his chambers for cheap lodgings in Mornington Terrace, close to Euston Station. He lived cheaply, shunning his former acquaintances, but still the two hundred pounds was slipping rapidly through his fingers. Never in his life had he been able to keep a tight grip on money, and the habit is not one to be easily or quickly acquired.

One evening late he strolled along the broad pavement by the Marble Arch with a reasonably good cigar between his lips. "You can't possibly get a decent cigar for less than eightpence," he pleaded in excuse for his extravagance, "and smoking helps a fellow to think." By way of compensation he had dined on a roll and a glass of milk. He was an injudicious economist.

His thoughts, as he walked, were busy with the troublesome problem of a livelihood, but in a half-conscious fashion he watched a young fellow that walked a little unsteadily about a score of yards in front of him—a well-dressed young fellow with a good figure that struck Armitage as being curiously familiar. He wasn't exactly tipsy, but he walked with a studied steadiness that showed he was conscious of a centre of gravity and had some trouble in keeping it in its right place. Armitage was close up when the man in front suddenly, without looking from right to left, stepped sideways off the pavement into the traffic, recklessly as a bather plunges into a rough sea. A motor driven at a smart pace came throbbing close behind. The driver hooted furiously. The man heard, and turned and swayed irresolute for a moment. To step back on the pathway was the easy and obvious thing to do. Instead, he made a dart to cross the track of the motor. The space beyond was clear of traffic, but before he reached it he stumbled and fell almost under the wheels. The driver crammed on the brakes, but the machine was going too fast.

It had almost touched the prostrate body when, with a desperate side leap, Armitage shot across the road, stooped and gripped the fallen man by the collar as he passed, and slid him from beneath the advancing wheels. So close he passed that his elbow, as he stooped, struck the glaring lamp of the motor. He was almost in time, not quite. The man's body slid from under the machine, but one of his trailing legs was caught by the wheel, which lifted and rolled slowly over it, crushing the flesh and snapping the bone like a pipe shank.

The yell of agony rang shrill through the still air, and drew a crowd running from all directions. The motor stopped stock still, panting excitedly, and the big fur-enveloped man in it jumped out, his kindly face as pale as paper.

“Is he dead?” he whispered to Armitage, who had drawn the quivering body clear of the car and was standing over it.

“I think not; I hope not,” answered Armitage, eagerly. “I fancy I feel his heart beat.”

“Sure,” broke in a third voice, with the nasal drawl of the Yankee, “no knockout this round, friend. Leg in two pieces, that’s all is the matter with me.”

With a groan the prostrate man half raised himself on his elbow and looked up. Armitage gave a cry of surprise. The face, pale and distorted with pain, was the face of the telegraph clerk which had struck him as so like his own.

The motorist saw the likeness too. “A brother, sir?” he said to Armitage, who shook his head.

The victim smiled a very one-sided smile and tried to speak, but pain conquered pluck, and the poor wretch collapsed in a limp heap and lay in a dead faint on the road.

“Quick!” cried the motorist, “lift him in, we must get him to the hospital. This car is smoother than any ambulance and a deal faster.” Even at this exciting moment the car owner’s irrepressible pride in his car showed in his voice.

He flung open the door, and with Armitage to help lifted the limp body tenderly. “There, stretch him full length on the front seat, I’ll drive standing; plank a cushion under the hurt leg—so. Lucky he has fainted; well have him at Guy’s in no time. You’ll come too, sir? Hadn’t time to mention it, but never saw anything pluckier than the way you waltzed in and yanked him from under the wheels. All right, constable,” to the constable, who bore down with stately stride, scattering the crowd, “you clear the way for us. Here’s my card, and there is my number. “Twasn’t my fault this time, but cannot expect you to take my word for that. I’m bringing the poor devil to hospital; broken leg, I think. Shove these chaps out of the way; see you later.”

As he spoke the machine crept slowly into motion; aided by the constable it pushed its way through the crowd into the open road and whirred smoothly and swiftly away in the direction of Guy’s Hospital.

Chapter V

A Transformation

The accident proved nothing worse than a simple fracture readily reduced. When Armitage called to see the patient next day he found him lying on the flat of his back, calmly contemplating his left leg cased in plaster of paris, pale, but cheerful and voluble.

“Sit down there, old chap—there in the light, where I can have a good look at you. You held me back out of heaven, I hear, when I was half way through the golden gate, but I bear no grudge. I’m in no hurry there yet awhile. This old ball with its crowd of jolly sinners is good enough for me.” He took breath and ran on before Armitage could say a word. “The policeman has just been here. I told him it was no fault of old Goggles; decent old chap; offered to come down handsomely if I wanted money, which I don’t. Besides, it was I ran into the car. I’d have come out in another world, he tells me, if it weren’t for you. I’m not good at the thankee stunt, but if ever you feel like running into an automobile give me the chance to pull you out. Shake!”

He stretched out a long arm from under the bedclothes.

Armitage had another little spasm of surprise when their hands met. They were identical as the features and figure. The two men seemed to have been cast in the same mould.

The pale face on the pillow smiled wanly. “Yes,” he answered Armitage’s look, “we might have been brothers. I wish we were. I have got none. Say, you’d like to know who I am and all about me, and how I came under the wheels of the automobile? The last is simple enough. I’d been celebrating. The extra bottle of ‘fizz’ at dinner knocked me over. But that’s the wrong end of the story. Let me begin with an introduction to the hero. Cyril M. Littledale at your service, 7 West Avenue, New York, and Log Hut, Long Island, late telegraph clerk in His British Majesty’s service. You see it’s this way. I wanted to marry the governor’s typist last Fall—the dearest little girl in the world, but that’s by the way. The governor is a millionaire in dry goods. He wouldn’t hear of it. Neither he nor I would give in. He said he’d get rid of the girl. I told him that was low, downright mean. The fault was mine, I said, and I’d go.

“The governor is straight. He told me to go to the devil, so I went. But the girl stayed and he gave her an increase and treated her better than ever.

“I got a sit. in the post-office. I could operate all right, and I knew a chap who knew another who knew your head boss, and he just jobbed me in. Irene—that’s my girl’s name—wrote twice a week, but I hadn’t a line from the governor for over a year. Yesterday he cabled five thousand dollars with the message ‘Come back and marry your girl.’ You don’t wonder I celebrated? No?”

Armitage was keenly interested in the story. Plainly this young fellow had grit. He felt in a curious way proud of his other self.

“I saw you before when you were a telegraph clerk. I came into the office with a friend of mine, Mr. Abraham Lamman.”

“Oh! I know old Abe,” retorted the other, irreverently, “as sharp as a reaping hook and as crooked. He always handed in his messages at our place. I got curious about it, made inquiries on the other side of the herring pond, and found out.”

“Found out what?”

“Abe. I know his tricks and his ways. He wears the Standard Oil Collar, though it wants sharp eyes to see it round his bull neck. What Abe don’t know is not worth knowing.”

There was a tone in his voice that told more clearly than his words that he thought Mr. Abraham Lumman’s intelligence was much in excess of his honesty.

Armitage flushed with annoyance at this bitter badinage. There was no man more loyal than he to his friends.

The Yankee’s quick eyes saw and read. “Beg pardon, old chap,” he cried penitently, “didn’t know he was a friend of yours.”

“As good a friend as ever a man had,” Armitage retorted warmly. “He did me a good turn the other day. At least, that is to say, he meant it for a good turn, though—”

Littledale eyed him sharply while he hesitated. “Sure?” he drawled slowly. For

the life of him he could not keep the mocking note out of the long-drawn-out word.

“Indeed, you’re all wrong,” the other cried eagerly.

“Why, I said nothing.”

“But you thought the more, like the sailor’s parrot. You thought I was tricked. Come! I’ll tell you the whole story. I won’t have you thinking ill of old Abe.”

He told the whole story, skimming lightly over the love episode, but hiding little from the keen eyes that watched out of the pale face in the bed. “In a way.” Armitage concluded, “you are mixed up in it in a way yourself. We went into your office that day. Do you remember?”

“Rather! About four months ago. I remember too. I took a liking to you at first sight, and wondered what you were doing in that company.”

“It was to you that Lamman gave his message to buy Amalgamated Gold.”

“To *sell* Amalgamated Gold,” replied the other with emphasis. “I remember the message as well as if it were yesterday—‘Sell Amalgamated Golds and keep on selling till they burst.’

“Easy on, old chap,” for Armitage bounced up from his seat, “take it cool. There ain’t no sense in getting riled, and I’m not in first-class training for a fight. ‘Strike me, but hear me,’ as the old chap said in the Latin grammar long ago. May the next motor that comes along cut me in two if I’m not telling you the naked truth. This is how it was. I had a dull time at the blamed post-office, and for amusement sake I took to studying cypher. I had always a taste that way since I read Poe’s ripping story, *The Gold Bug*, when I was a kid. I used to copy some of the cypher messages I took in and sit up at night over them. I worried out old Abe’s system at last, though it was the toughest job of the lot. In that way I came to know a deal about him. The message you mention I particularly remember, because I was tempted to send the tip to the governor. I didn’t, and it wasn’t wanted. The governor sold Amalgamates from start to finish. Sorry if I’ve vexed you, old chap,” he ended penitently, “but the truth’s the truth and it’s as well you should have it straight.”

It was impossible to doubt him. Even as he was speaking Armitage’s quick

memory, once set on the track, found a hundred little trifles in his talks with Lamman to confirm the story.

So he had been played with like a silly child, duped, ruined under pretence of friendship. A sudden wave of fury sent the hot blood to his face. His rage almost choked him. "The confounded scoundrel!" he stammered.

"That's right," said the voice from the bed approvingly, "he's all that and more."

"The cursed, treacherous dog! I should like to strangle him. I shall give him a bit of my mind when we meet."

"I say 'No' to that. Keep every bit of your mind to yourself. The less Abe knows about it the better. Strangling him no doubt might be good biz., but it would be troublesome to do and troublesome when it was done. I think I see a better way. It's in a bit of a tangle at present. I must have time to puzzle it out. Now, off you pop! The doc. says I must talk little and sleep much if I'm to go back to Irene in two months, and I mean to go back, you bet."

When Armitage strolled back to his shabby lodgings and sat there far into the night making pretence to read, as an idle boy studies, with his mind elsewhere, rage and self-contempt raged continuously in his heart. What a knave Lamman had been, but what a fool himself. How he had fallen headlong into the open pit and never guessed the treacherous hand that pushed him in.

He was one of those men void of suspicion, who believe all men honest, all women true; whom it is hard, almost impossible, to convince of treachery, but whom once convinced it is impossible to appease. His wrath against Lamman hurt and frightened him. He felt as if he could have strangled the plausible scoundrel with his bare hands.

Then slowly his mood changed, and self-contempt mastered all other feeling in his heart. He had been a fool in the business—a weak, reckless fool. By a rogue's treachery or a fool's folly—what did it matter? He had got what he deserved. He had made his own bed and must lie on it.

He was still in this mood when, after a restless night, he visited Littledale next morning at the hospital.

The Yankee eyed him shrewdly. The man could not play the part of an invalid.

Tied there to the bed by his rigid leg he was quick, alert and cheerful, brimming over with exuberant life.

“Well, double,” he cried, as he grasped the other’s hand tightly, “do you still want to get even with friend Abe? No?”

“I trust I shall never see the scoundrel again. I could not keep my hands off him if I did.”

A shade of disappointment flitted across Littledale’s face—brief as a shadow of a bird on the ground. “Is it as bad as that? I was thinking of a plan that might help; kind of poetical justice; a Roland for his Oliver; tit for tat and part fair. Well, you needn’t shake your head. If you won’t, you won’t. Let us talk of something else. What do you mean to do with yourself? Now, don’t get up on your high horse. I want to help if I may. Let me say for the first and last time I owe you my life. There is no man puts a bigger premium on my life than I do. I don’t hope ever to pay the principal debt, but I’d like to pay a trifle by way of interest if you will let me.”

Strong feeling underlay his light words. Armitage was touched by his manifest sincerity.

In his turn he tried to pass the matter off lightly. “A hand on your coat collar is all you’ve to thank me for.”

“A life risked and a life saved. Well, we’ll let it go at that. I can see with half an eye you are down on your luck. You must let me help you one way or another or I’ll burst.”

“Seems to me you’re in a worse way yourself than I am.”

“Me! Oh, I’m all right. I am as snug as a bug in a rug. I’ve had a cablegram from the boss this morning and another from Irene. They two are as thick as thieves. Call each other father and daughter already. Coming events, you know. I’m all right if the old man don’t cut me out with Irene. The doc. says the leg will be well as ever in two months. If I lie up for two months I’m in clover.”

“Two months on the broad of your back. Do you call that clover?”

“Why not, sonny? Game legs do not a prison make, nor surgeons’ splints a cage.

So long as you can keep your mind going you are free, and mine has been galloping since we met. Minding other people's business is always lively work. I want to put you through. There is no use offering you money, though? I've enough, as you know, for two. No, I thought not. You want to earn your own bread honourable and independent. Nod if I am right."

Armitage laughed and nodded. "You couldn't get me the sit. you have thrown up?" he asked jestingly.

The Yankee caught at the word with sudden seriousness. "I haven't thrown up the place," he protested, but there was a twinkle in his eye that belied the sober face. "On the contrary, I have applied for leave and got it. I applied yesterday, enclosing surgeon's certificate that I would be fit to resume duty in two months. I told you I have a pal in the office. I got the leave; here's the letter. Two months leave on full pay."

"But I thought you were going home to your father and Irene," cried Armitage, utterly bewildered at this change of front.

"Sure," drawled the other.

"Then how can you keep this place?"

"I must find a substitute. Don't look at me like that, old man, or I must laugh at you, and laughing shakes the leg up and makes it feel bad. You're to be the substitute. There's room enough on the globe for two Cyril Littledales. One in the Old World, one in the New. You'll be the Old World Cyril if you don't mind."

"But I can't see—"

"Oh, yes, you can, if you get on your spectacles. We two are twin brothers. Why, I myself can hardly tell one from the other. I shall clean shave and you grow a beard and moustache. You must learn to write like me and talk like me. You've got two months to learn. When the time is up you take my name and place and no one will be a pennyworth the wiser. See!"

The madcap project appealed to Phil Armitage in his reckless frame of mind. He objected feebly, but the other resolutely overruled his objections.

“You want to earn your bread; well, earn it. You want to disappear; well, vanish into me. ‘Not honest,’ you say. Why not? What does it matter to the Government who does the work so long as it is well done?”

Suddenly another objection occurred to Armitage which made him flush with anger. “I should see that scoundrel Lamman constantly. I could not keep my hands off him.”

“No, you wouldn’t, unless you are aching for a sight of him. I only once saw the chap, at the same time I saw you. I had heard of him from the governor. He is the Standard Oil man in London. He has the best financial information in Europe, spends a hundred thousand a year on spies, has them in every big workshop or laboratory. I wanted a peep at him and I took it. But you need never move, unless you want to, from the cosy little room behind the public office. The messages will be brought to you by a girl—a dear little girl. If it hadn’t been for Irene I don’t know what would have happened. You have your Norma to keep you out of trouble.”

“Don’t jest on that subject, like a good chap.”

“Sorry. But at any rate you may have a chance peep at your girl so long as you live in the same village.”

There was a minute’s silence. Armitage stared at the ground, the other watched him eagerly. “It’s a wild plan—a dangerous one,” he said at last, sorely tempted and wavering.

“Not the least,” retorted the Yankee. “You can shave your beard and come back to yourself any time you choose. Say ‘Done’ at once, and have done with it.”

“Done!” cried Armitage, with sudden reckless resolution. “It don’t much matter what becomes of me.”

But all the same he found more enjoyment in the prospect of the adventure than he cared to confess as, day after day, he prepared for the part he had to play. Littledale was an indefatigable tutor and learned while he taught. The man was a born mimic, and often he startled Armitage with the very echo of his own gestures, voice or laughter.

More slowly but not less surely Armitage mastered the quiet drawl and faint

nasal twang of his friend, and imitated his handwriting so that it was impossible to tell the two apart.

Littledale plied him with every detail of his life at his lodgings and at the telegraph office, so that he might slip at once into his new identity. "They won't have seen me for two months," he said, "and they will be all the more ready to take you on trust."

One day, when the two months had slipped into the last week, Littledale said, "You don't want any more lessons. You're me right through from the top knot to the toe nails. Irene would marry right off if you asked her in that voice. But there is another little thing I'd like to show you—a rather interesting little thing. You may remember I told you I had mastered the cypher of your friend Mr. Lamman."

"Curse Lamman!" Armitage growled.

"Right oh!" replied Littledale, cheerily, "a stronger word if you like, but all the same his cypher is interesting and ingenious."

"Curse himself and his cypher!" Armitage retorted ungraciously. "I don't want to hear any more about either of them. You might guess without telling that it is not a particularly pleasant topic for me. A man doesn't want to be reminded every other moment that he made a fool of himself."

But Littledale was curiously persistent. "Don't be pig-headed," he replied goodhumouredly, "you can never tell when a scrap of knowledge will turn in handy. Now, if you had known this cypher at the time—"

He chucked himself in the middle of the sentence. "To oblige me," he went on persuasively. "I'm a bit vain of the way I picked out the puzzle."

At that Armitage yielded at once. He had the reward of his goodnature for he was delighted with the combined simplicity and ingenuity of the cypher and amazed at the acuteness that solved it.

"I cannot understand how you got inside the thing," he said.

Littledale was flattered. "They say that any cypher the mind of man can invent, the mind of man can unriddle. There are Johnnies I am told in the British

Museum that can read the signs that the savages scratched on the stones with hands that are dust for five thousand years. Lamman's cypher belongs to no system. It is his own invention, I believe. That made it as hard to open without the key as it is easy with it. You can read it now without trouble?"

"Perfectly."

"And write it? Try if you can write it. Let me have a letter tomorrow in that cypher. You may take the key with you."

"But why?"

"Just to oblige me. I have a whim for it. Perhaps"—he spoke more slowly, as if watching his words.—"perhaps some time we might have occasion to communicate with each other in cypher."

"It's not likely," laughed Armitage, "this is my last conspiracy." But he added goodnaturedly, "I'll do it if you want me."

Littledale smiled to himself, reading the letter next morning in the quiet lodgings into which he had moved from the hospital. "Yes," he muttered, as he put the paper into his pocket-book, "I think it will work out all right when the time comes."

He had another surprise for Armitage the day before they were to swop selves.

"My name is not Littledale," he said abruptly.

"No?"

"Very much no. Nor Cyril either. I'm Carl Thornton. My father is known on Wall Street as Old Thorns. I took the other name because I thought it sounded good. Here's my address. Get it by heart thoroughly. See that you know it tomorrow and the day after; then burn it. Now, I want you to do me a great favour if ever you get the chance."

"That's not likely, I'm afraid."

"But you'll promise?"

“Of course I’ll promise.”

The other hesitated for a moment as if at a loss how to frame his request.

“I have told you my father is one of the big guns in Wall Street. He runs fifteen stores in New York. He has more money than he knows what to do with, but he loves a nutter on the street as boys love pitch-and-toss.”

“You want to tell him my case as a dreadful example?”

“Well, not exactly. You see, the firm is to be Thornton & Son from this out, and the son is a bit of a gambler as well as the father.”

“Well, gamble away. You can afford to amuse yourself.”

“I intend to, and I want you to cable me a straight tip if you ever come across one.”

“Me! You’re laughing at me.”

“Pon my soul I’m not. You think it unlikely, impossible.” Armitage nodded.

“Well, I think it possible, perhaps likely. I want you to remember your promise. You take no responsibility. We act on our own judgment. If we win you get half the winnings.”

“But, I say—”

“Oh! I know,” his friend cut him short. “You say you won’t take the money. But on your own showing there isn’t the remotest chance of your being offered it, so we need not fight over shadows.”

“As you put it that way, all right. I’m to share the first pot of gold you find under the rainbow.”

“That you help us to find under the rainbow,” corrected his friend, smilingly.

“It’s a bargain, and don’t you forget it.”

Chapter VI

Lost And Found

The conspiracy worked like a charm. Armitage gradually transferred his goods and chattels to Thornton's lodgings from his own. Finally he gave up the key and drove away with his portmanteau and a parcel of books—the last remnant of his belongings. That evening the friends had a sumptuous farewell dinner at the Savoy, where Thornton slept. The excitement of the adventure was hot upon both, and they talked far into the night. Armitage had a feeling that it was all a curious dream from which he would wake presently, but Thornton kept him well up to his part with a coolness that forbade revolt.

Next morning they changed clothes. Thornton shaved clean, bade his friend a hearty good-bye, and drove off in a hansom to catch the boat train for Liverpool, leaving Phil Armitage, with beard and moustache, transformed into Cyril Littledale, behind him.

Armitage had wondered why the restless Yankee, who generally caught his train in motion, had given himself such ample time. Thornton had put his questions by unanswerd with vague talk of farewell visits to be paid, and he never guessed the mad freak that was in the mind of the reckless Yankee.

But as the hansom turned the corner Thornton rapped the trap door with the handle of his umbrella, and when a big, red face filled the aperture he called out Abe Lamman's city address.

The surprised but ever-genial Abe received his dear friend Armitage with effusion, gripping him by both hands, and Armitage's double was not less cordial.

Lamman, it appeared, had been broken-hearted at his disappearance.

"I even feared," he said—"I don't want to tell what I feared sometimes. I used to be awake at nights thinking what had become of you. I was tortured with the idea it was I that put you in the hole, though with the best intentions, and I felt bound to help you out. If there is anything in the world I can do to help, tell me. I was hit hard myself by those cursed Amalgamateds, harder than I care to think

about. Still, if—”

The other cut him short with the news that he started that afternoon for New York.

Lamman professed himself astounded and dismayed. It was devilish hard, he told him again and again, to have to break up his old life and part with his old friends. He even tried to make the sham Armitage change his mind, and waxed the more vehement the more he saw the other determined. Finally he came to see it was the best thing that could be done, and he again made generous offer of a loan, which was gratefully refused.

“Say what!” he cried cordially, “I have a great mind to shut up shop and run with you to Liverpool. Egad! I’ll do it.”

He did it. The two travelled down together, second-class. Poor Armitage’s funds would not run to first. They lunched together, but Armitage insisted on paying his share. Lamman went with him on board and chatted with him until the moment the gangways were raised and the huge ship began to swing round slowly and point her nose towards the west, and all the time no doubt dawned on him that it was the real Armitage he was seeing off safely out of the country.

Thornton kept the fraud up to the last, waved him good-bye from the railings across the widening gap of water, and then rewarded himself for his exertions by a long drink in the smoking-room.

“If Armitage only keeps up his end of the game,” he thought, as he put down the big tumbler half empty, “it’s a sure win.”

Meanwhile, Armitage was accepted at the telegraph office with a readiness which surprised and delighted him. He found that he had always been a great favourite. His substitute was a surly boor, and the postmaster and the postmaster’s daughter were delighted to have the goodhumoured Yankee back again. Indeed, the girl’s welcome was so hearty that Armitage was tempted to the belief that the claims of the distant Irene were not always sufficiently remembered.

It is strange how easily life slips into a new routine like a wheel into a groove, and how easily and how smoothly it moves along. In a week Armitage was familiar with his new duties; in a month they had grown to be second nature. His

work was light; his little room was his own, and there were hours at a stretch when he could sit in his chair and read hard, undisturbed by telegram sent or received. There is nothing more impossible than to work or idle in moderation. The two things are like oil and water—they won't mix. They must be taken turn about or not at all. Armitage, the gentleman at large, when he was complete master of his own time, could only find an hour or so every second day for study. Armitage, the telegraph clerk, read a steady average of five hours a day. The hard work blunted, as nothing else could, the pangs of despairing love. It was like a strong narcotic dulling the pain it could not cure. Early in the days of his weary search for employment he had read of the death of Theophilus Lee. He read it with unmixed pity for the daughter and no hope for himself. She had given him a peep into her heart that evening that seemed so long ago, and the soreness of his own injuries was forgotten in his sorrow for her. He had at the time to hold hard to his resolution; to withstand his longing to go to her or to write to her, in some way to comfort her in her great grief. But pride for once conquered love. He would not justify the dead father's bitter taunt. He would not go as a pauper to the heiress, for he knew that at the first glance of her reproachful eyes his manhood would melt away like a barrier of ice and the warm tide of love sweep him from his resolve.

So pride, struggling against love, held him back and tortured while it held.

In the new life, as has been said, hard work and strange duties for a while eased his pain. But after a while they failed, as a narcotic loses its charm by constant use, and love and longing returned as pain returns on waking to a man who has been drugged to a brief unconsciousness. The thought of the girl he loved haunted him from day to day, disturbed his hours of work, and kept him waking and restless far into the night.

That thought was still with him as one afternoon, in the intervals of work, which had been very brisk during the morning, he listlessly opened the pages of his favourite magazine.

It was with a queer little thrill, in which half a dozen feelings had part—surprise, and pain, and pleasure—that he found staring at him from the page under the frontispiece, where no advertisement had ever been before, the following announcement:

FOUND. A small gold locket with lady's portrait and

initials P. A. A handsome reward will be expected.

Apply personally.

His locket with her photo. The advertisement brought him back to the day he had lost it, the day he had told her his love. It seemed years ago in another world. He had missed the little locket horribly. The thought that he should find it again thrilled him with impatient delight.

Since his arrival he had taught the whole art of telegraphing to the dear little girl whom the impulsive Yankee had so praised, and she was always glad to take his place at the instrument. Five minutes after he had read the advertisement he was whirling in a fast hansom as fast as it could carry him to the address in Queen Anne Mansions given in the advertisement.

While he is on his way it may be as well to tell shortly how that advertisement got into the front page of the magazine, though it is necessary for that purpose to go back a fortnight in our story.

Two girls are sitting together in a large and delightfully-furnished drawing-room, of which the pervading tint of paper, curtain and carpets is the most becoming of all colours—pink.

Norma Lee lolls listlessly in a deep-cushioned easy-chair, making belief to read a very beautiful edition of Shakespeare. The book is open at Romeo and Juliet. She had wept over the play at the theatre last night, but the cold type could not move her like the living voice, and now she has forgotten Juliet's love troubles in her own.

The other girl—bright-haired and blue-eyed—was in every respect a striking contrast to the dark-eyed, womanly beauty. The elder of the two, she looked the younger with the slim, agile figure of an athletic out-of-doors girl. A tailor-made gown fitted perfectly a perfect figure. No one who looked could have dreamt for a moment that this slip of a girl was Dora Myrl, the famous lady detective, whose subtle wit had foiled the most cunning criminals, whose cool courage had faced the most appalling dangers. Brisk and blithe as a bird on a spring morning, alert as her friend was languid, she sat writing rapidly with a fountain pen at a little inlaid desk. It was a small thing but noteworthy that she used no blotting-pad, but wrote with fine, delicate lines and let the ink dry on the paper. For a moment there was dead silence in the room till the girl at the desk finished the

last page and packed the paper into a stout envelope and sealed it neatly with a sphinx's head. Then she whirled her desk chair round and faced the other.

“Still moping, Norma?”

“What an ugly word, Dora.”

“I'll say pining, if you like the word better.”

“That's worse, and it's not true either.”

“Well, grieving then?”

“Haven't I good cause to grieve? My father's sudden death, and, and—”

“Well, and what?”

“How can you be so nasty? I'm all alone in the world. Isn't that enough?”

Dora Myrl was across the room in an instant and perched on the arm of the easy-chair. “Don't I count, my dear? There! don't waste your kisses on poor me. I'm not jealous. I know I count as much as a girl can count under the circumstances. Why won't you be frank with me, Miss Hypocrite? You are sorry for your father, but you are sorry for someone else too.”

“Oh! Dora,” she broke out suddenly, “do you think I shall ever see him again?”

“Of course you will, if you want to.”

“Oh! you darling, I knew you would help me.”

“Why didn't you ask me then? What's worth having is worth asking for.”

“I was half ashamed.”

“Ashamed!” cried Dora, indignantly; “a girl shouldn't be ashamed of being in love if the man is worth it, and of course the girl in love always thinks he is.”

“Were you ever in love, Dora?” asked Norma, surprised at the sudden warmth of that self-possessed little personage.

“Never, my dear, I’m sorry to say never. I think I have no heart. I like young men better than young girls as a rule. I like to chat and laugh and jest and play games with them. Kind friends say I flirt outrageously. But I don’t really; that is if to flirt is to make believe you are in love with a man. I’ve had a hard kind of life, Norma, in spite of its successes and enjoyments. Sometimes, when I am lonely, I just long to be in love like the girls one reads of in poems and stories, and see sometimes in real life— you, for example. I’d love to have a man all my very own, to be married, and, and—why shouldn’t I say it out?—to have babies of my own; to be just a real womanly woman like you, Norma. Oh! you can’t think how I envy you sometimes!”

“But I’m not to be envied; I’m to be pitied. He is gone out of my life. He may be dead for all I can tell.”

“He’s not dead,” the other returned briskly, the wave of sentiment overblown, her own brisk, bright self again, “and he’s in love with you and you’re in love with him; that’s the great matter.”

“What good is that when I cannot find him?”

“Oh! we’ll find him all right.”

“But how?”

“You know the way they set a bloodhound on a man’s track? You give him something the man wore. Now, you must fancy me a bloodhound, Norma.”

“You are more like a dear little lapdog, Dora.”

“Don’t be pert, miss. You have a locket of this young man’s. It is round your neck at this moment. Take it out of your blouse.”

“Oh! Dora, how did you know it was his?”

“Because it has your photo in it. Girls don’t wear their own photos inside their bosom without a reason. Now, Norma, we are going to use this locket as a bait. We will advertise it.”

“It’s no use, he seldom reads a paper, and never an advertisement.”

“What’s his favourite magazine?”

“But he never sees the advertisements in that either.”

“Well, we’ll put it where he must see it, on the front page.”

“Can that be done?”

“Of course it can, you little goose. I know the people and I think they will oblige me. If they don’t do it for love they’ll do it for money. You see, I’ll bait the trap for your shy bird.”

The trap was duly baited, and a week later Philip Armitage walked into it. He found himself in the drawing-room of Dora Myrl’s flat, confronting that sprightly young person.

“Your locket?” she said in reply to his eager questions, “yes, I suppose it is yours. There was a girl’s face in it, you say? Yes, that’s right. Rather a nice-looking girl, I thought,” with a glance of the quick blue eyes and an impish smile.

“I don’t desire to discuss that question,” retorted Armitage, stiffly. “If you will kindly restore the locket I will willingly pay you any reasonable reward.”

“Oh, I didn’t find the locket,” she laughingly replied. “I don’t want the reward, and I’m quite sure you would sooner pay it to the person who found the locket. She will insist on payment in full.”

Armitage heard an indignant little cry behind him, and turning sharply saw a girl start from her chair behind the shadow of a Japanese screen.

Norma Lee came forward demurely with the locket in her hand. “Never mind that flighty personage, Mr. Armitage,” she cried. “Here is your locket. I’m very glad you wanted it back.”

“The reward,” cried Dora, “don’t forget the reward,” and she vanished from the room.

Chapter VII

A Rich Revenge

Philip Armitage's life was no longer monotonous. He was like one who, rowing on a dull, deep river between high banks, comes suddenly out into the bright sunshine of the open sky, while the flashing water of the swift current carries him with a rush towards the rapids. It was exciting, delightful, and very dangerous.

Norma was very kind, kinder than she had been in the old days, and treated his change of fortune as a matter of no moment. Dora Myrl pitied him and teased him alternately, led him daily into temptation, and by a thousand sly devices tested his self-restraint to the uttermost. For that lively little woman was absorbed in the love story which was being lived before her eyes, and was resolved, as she assured her friend, that it would have a happy ending.

So Phil spent his spare time at the flat, and he brought the girls to the theatres now and again, when, by saving and skimping, he could afford it. He had, as he told himself, a real good time. But in the height of his love fever, even when Norma's eyes were brightest and her voice softest, he remembered and refrained. A telegraph clerk, who had got his post by a trick, who was at any moment liable to be fired out in disgrace, was no lover for a beautiful heiress. Her father had called him a fortune-hunter and he swore he would not justify the dead man's taunt. He could not shun temptation, but he would not yield to it. To keep away from her was indeed as impossible as for the iron to withstand the magnet. After a while he began to pay for his weakness. Her beauty and her sweetness tormented him with passionate longings, as the cool water tortured Tantalus flowing past his parched lips. Yielding to the current he found it hard to hold himself back from the fall.

Shrewd little Dora Myrl laughed to herself with full confidence that love would conquer pride when they came to close quarters. But Norma was troubled at times by the hot and cold fits of her lover, and tried to persuade herself that it was only her father's recent death that restrained the fervent wooing of old times.

The struggle began to tell on Armitage's health and spirits. He tried to curtail his

visits to the bachelor girls' flat and give more time to his work. He took less and less advantage of his gay little assistant at the office, who, on her part, shrewdly surmised he was in love, and found him in some vague way quite changed from the gay Yankee who was always in good humour.

Just about this time a little incident occurred which diverted his love-sick fancies to sterner thoughts. As he was working in his own room he heard Lamman's well-known voice in the outer office.

With his customary good humour the big, bluff man was explaining to the girl he had been away "on a bit of a holiday," and that he must work double shifts now he had come back or else eat his bread without butter. The good humour of the man's voice and laughter moved Armitage to fierce anger. It brought back to him with a rush the remembrance of how he had been tricked and duped under the guise of friendship, and robbed, not of his money merely, but of his hopes.

With difficulty he could hold himself down in his chair, the passion of revenge was so strong in him. But he feared his own wrath, as one might fear a wild beast if it once got loose. So he sat still and pale, trembling with fierce wrath, his hands clenched tight on the arms of his chair, until he heard Lamman's genial voice say, "Good-bye, little sweetheart, have that sent at once."

"Pleasant gentleman Mr. Lamman," said the girl a moment afterwards, showing her pretty face at the door, whereat Armitage growled so ferociously that she was startled and asked anxiously had he a pain. For answer he smiled an apology and took the telegram from her hand.

It was merely a private message this time. But a little later Lamman's business wires began to come in pretty regularly, always brought by himself. Custom begets self-control. Armitage was no longer tempted by the mere sound of the man's voice to rush out and assault him. He did not hate the man one whit less than before, but he had mastered the wrath that had at first almost mastered him. The messages became a diversion to him in the monotonous day's work. It amused him to spell out the cypher by the code he had got from Littledale.

One memorable morning Lamman came into the office, no longer the jovial, careless, goodhumoured Lamman that laughed with the pretty girl behind the counter, but keen, brisk, business-like, determined. Nor did he as usual write his message on a form, but put down a cablegram already written.

“I want this sent at once,” he said sharply.

Armitage noticed the suppressed excitement, the note of triumph in his voice, and felt the stirring of a strong curiosity to know what the important message might be.

He had not long to wait. The girl came in with it a moment later. “From your friend Mr. Lamman,” she said with a woman’s quickness. She knew he hated the man, and thought it was jealousy of her own pretty self. “He wants it sent at once.”

Armitage picked up the message eagerly and read it. The cypher by this time was plain as print to him. The address was the same, “Broadway, New York,” as that other which he had such good cause to remember.

“Buy Marconis,” it ran, “buy, buy, and keep on buying.”

Armitage smoothed out the paper, and his forefinger was on the key of his instrument to despatch it when a thought, illuminating as sheet lightning, flashed through his brain. The sudden flash lit up a number of things that had puzzled him.

He knew in an instant why Littledale had got him that particular post, why he had taught him Lamman’s cypher code, why he had insisted on a promise that he should wire the first good tip he had got to the firm in New York.

In an instant, too, his resolve was taken. The tip had come and should be sent. Not the faintest twinge of remorse restrained him. He would do to Abraham Lamman as he had been done by.

As quick as his fingers could work he tapped off the cypher message to Lamman’s agent in New York, “Sell Marconis, sell, sell, and keep on selling.” Then to Thornton & Son he despatched Lamman’s true message, “Buy, buy, and keep on buying.”

As he finished and tore the paper to small pieces and tossed the bits into the fire he was warmed by a thrill of triumph; a sense of excitement and adventure at the thought of those two messages on their way over miles of wire, through town and country and long leagues of darkness under the ocean, to stir the money-makers in New York to madness.

Even while he wrote another side of his mind was arranging what was to be done next. He had burned his boats. The next morning would bring inquiry, discovery, conviction. The vivid anticipation of Lamman's storm of amazement and wrath filled him with savage delight. But he did not mean to be there when the storm burst.

Without conscious mental effort his plans seemed to shape themselves out of his excitement.

"Jane," he said to the girl, "would you mind going on for me for a while? I have an important appointment to keep."

"With pleasure," she answered cheerily. Then, as she looked in his face, "Oh, Mr. Littledale, you are not sick; you are very pale."

"Never better in my life, Jenny."

"You don't look it then, I must say. You look as if you wanted a change badly."

"Well, I hope to have a change soon, my dear, a complete change. Good-bye for the present, Jenny, and thanks for being so good to me."

She had the surprise of her life when suddenly, without a warning, he stooped and kissed her.

But, as she said afterwards, in the hubbub that followed Littledale's disappearance, there was not a bit of sweethearting about that kiss. She knew at the time, she declared, that it was good-bye for ever, and she felt sure that he had gone to drown himself.

But at the moment she gave no hint of those dismal forebodings. Laughing and blushing she fetched Littledale a playful box on the ear with a soft palm and bade him "get out."

He promptly got out, and at the corner of the street took a hansom for his lodgings, and went up the stairs three steps at a time to his room.

He locked the door and got out his razor and shaved clean. Then he packed his own portmanteau with his own clothes, leaving everything that had belonged to Thornton behind him. He put on a light overcoat with the collar turned up to his

chin, lugged the portmanteau downstairs to the passage and whistled for a cab.

“To Euston,” he said as he climbed in, giving the man as little chance as possible of seeing his face.

At Euston a porter took possession of his portmanteau. The cabman, getting twice his fare, went off in a hurry.

“Where, sir?” said the porter.

“Nowhere for the present. I am waiting for a friend who may not turn up.”

The porter touched his cap and grinned. He could put two and two together. The turned-up collar, the haste to get rid of the cabby. Ladies were uncertain sometimes, he thought. However, the tip was liberal, and it was no affair of his anyway, so he bustled off to capture other sixpences, leaving Armitage to his own devices. When the next train came in Armitage promptly hailed a hansom and was whirled off amongst the crowd.

Littledale, the telegraph clerk, had vanished into space, leaving no trail behind; and Phil Armitage drove back out of space to the door of the Ganymede Club.

“You can let me have a room, John?” he said to the head porter.

“Think so, sir. Glad to see you back again, Mr. Armitage. I’ll inquire.”

Yes, he was in luck, the manager said, there was just one room vacant, he could have it for a week.

It was pleasant to get back to the old haunts and habits and companions, to be himself again and live his own life, if only for a brief space. He lunched in the grill-room—a steak, fried potatoes and a pint of iced lager in a glass-bottomed tankard. But the cooking and the service made the simple meal luxurious. He was dallying with the cool, clear liquor and rusks and cheese and celery when a man, whom he knew slightly, a Jewish-looking stockbroker named Fagan, rushed into the room.

“Halloa! Armitage,” he cried casually, “that you! Have you seen Karnigey anywhere?”

“Why, what’s up?”

“The devil’s up and about. Anyhow there’s the devil’s work across the herring pond.”

The words stirred Armitage to sudden remembrance of his two cables, which he suspected had raised the devil in New York.

“What’s it all about?” he asked with instantly-awakened interest.

“Oh! it’s a blazing cyclone in Wall Street, and we have caught the tail end of the storm. Halloo! there’s Karnigey, I must be off. You’ll find all the news you want in the smoking-room, Armitage,” he called over his shoulder as he started in excited pursuit.

Armitage hurried to the underground smoking-room, catching up a *Westminster Gazette* from a table as he passed. There was an excited crowd round the tape, watching the battle of the leaders of frenzied finance three thousand miles away.

From the paragraphs in his paper under scare headings, and the broken talk of the men around him, Armitage pieced together the main incidents of the great melee of the millionaires.

Early that day a bolt had fallen from the blue. In a quiet hour and, without a hint of warning, a ferocious attack had been delivered on Marconis Wireless, and the Standard Oil showed boldly in the front of the battle, leading the bears. No security could hold against such an attack. The Marconi prices broke at once. Without rest or respite the shares were driven down headlong. Still the bears sold and sold. The investors caught the panic and joined in the stampede. Then of a sudden one man sprang into the breach. Like a Horatius on the bridge he held his ground while the enemy stormed in their thousands around him. William G. Thornton—“Old Thorney,” as he was called in the street—faced the storm undaunted, as a rock in mid torrent. Almost, as it were in a breath, he snapped up from the yelling crowd half a dozen offers at once. His “Done,” “Done,” “Done,” “Done,” “Done,” emphasised with pointing forefinger, came sharp and fast as revolver shots. Then there was a pause, and then the Standard Oil leaders flung themselves upon him. He took all their lances on his shield, never yielding an inch, while block after block of the shares were hurled at him. The conflict was still in full swing when Armitage had rushed into the club smoking-room and gathered its progress from the cablegrams in the evening paper. The men

round the tape, that unemotionally rolled out its wild news, could almost see the blows struck in this conflict of giants at the other side of the broad ocean. It was a game in which the stakes were piled up in millions, and its varying fortunes gripped the hearts of the speculators. Armitage's entrance seemed to bring a change in the luck. "You were Old Thorney's mascot," the men around him said to him afterwards.

Certainly the fortunes of the conflict changed suddenly. The wild rash of the Standard Oil, which threatened to carry all before it, was stayed. Slowly they began to give way before Old Thorney's remorseless pressure. The tape showed growing prices. Strange rumours got abroad of new patents more marvellous than the old which doubled the value of the stock.

There was a sudden rally and, as the bears receded, the bulls rushed in. The stocks advanced steadily, faster and faster, till finally they came with a rush that carried all before it. The losses of the day were regained, par was reached and passed, and still the boom went on. Higher and higher the prices soared, amid frantic excitement, with none to oppose. At closing the five-dollar shares had reached ten dollars premium. There were all buyers and no sellers when the shouting, seething mass poured out into the street.

So the great one day's financial battle—the wildest and fiercest that Wall Street had ever known—was fought and won, and fortunes of many millions were lost or gained in a few frenzied hours.

There was no reaction. Next day the news was confirmed of a new patent that made wireless messages at any distance more easy and more certain than cables, and the shares went slowly up to a fraction over twenty dollars, at which they stood firm.

Armitage could neither eat nor sleep. He was dizzy with excitement and exultation. It was he who raised the storm that had shaken the money markets of the two Continents. He knew that his friend had won and his foe had lost in the colossal conflict, and that he had organised the victory and the defeat.

No wonder he waited for news from the other side with feverish anxiety. Nor had he long to wait. A button boy came wandering through the club, wailing his name like a lost spirit, "Mr. Armitage! Mr. Armitage! Mr. Arm— Yes, sir, for you, sir, just come in."

He took the cable message from the boy's hand. Just two words, "Have written."

Plainly young Thornton would not trust the telegraph offices where messages are recorded. The post was safer. He must wait. The hint of danger in the brevity of the message Armitage put from him easily. His precautions had been well taken. Detection was impossible. Nor was his sense of triumph marred by any touch of remorse. Unfeignedly he rejoiced that Lamman had been hoisted with his own petard, and he was quite ready to take his share of the spoil off the enemy with a free conscience, even as the knights of old stripped the golden armour from a fallen foe.

Chapter VIII

Attack

Abe Lamman was hard hit by the raid on Marconis. He reckoned his dead loss at half a million at least, not to count the half million or upwards he stood to make if his instructions had been followed. Worst of all, his credit was hurt with the Standard Oil group, who had plunged at his bidding with a trust born of continuous success. There was a furious interchange of cable recrimination. It was borne in on Lamman by a storm of strong language that the blunder or the trick, whichever it might prove to be, was not in New York. When he went down to the office where his message had been handed in, and found that the clerk had vanished a half hour afterwards, his suspicions were aroused. When he learned at his lodgings that Littledale had driven off the same evening with his portmanteau, suspicion became certainty. The keen-witted man saw through the stratagem of which he had been the victim and was reluctantly compelled to the belief that the clever cypher, of whose invention he was so proud, had been read by an outsider.

As he walked slowly away from the clerk's house, pursued by the landlady's voluble assurance that Mr. Littledale was a perfect gentleman, his heart was a smouldering furnace of wrath. He loved money and he had been plundered. He prided himself on his smartness and he had been fooled. The thirst for vengeance burned in him fiercely. He longed to have the man who had fooled him by the throat and squeeze the life out of him. His big fist clutched viciously at the thought of one straight, smashing blow at a mocking face. If a wish could have slain that clerk, and sent him straight to the bottomless pit of hell, Lamman would have wished him there without an instant's remorse.

When his blind fury had evaporated in smothered execrations, ground out between his teeth, the shrewd instincts of the man asserted themselves. He dropped into an easy-chair in his study and bent his whole mind on the capture of the runaway clerk. If he could not choke him or damn him by a wish he could land him in a convict prison. He rang the telephone bell and put the mouthpiece to his lips.

"Halloa! halloa! are you there? Yes. Put me on to Mr. Beck, Moon Street. Yes,

Mr. Paul Beck. Yes, that's right, thanks." Then, after a pause, "Mr. Beck, is that you? Yes, I'm Abe Lamman. You remember me? Yes, quite right, that was the case I mean. Never knew anything neater in my life. No, I've another job now in hand that I would like you to take up. Yes, very important, money no object. Could you manage to come round to my office? Yes, at once, thanks awfully. I'll wait in till you come."

It was not a long wait. In less than half an hour, in answer to Mr. Lamman's brisk "Come in," the door opened softly and Mr. Paul Beck was in the room. A stout man was Mr. Beck, who seemed cumbersome to those who did not know that his stoutness was all bone and muscle with no ounce of superfluous flesh. His kindly face, frank eyes, and a benevolent mouth—a little turned down at the corners—suggested a charitable clergyman whose charities exceeded his means; a doctor who cared more for his patient than his fee; anything in the world rather than the shrewd, determined and eminently successful detective.

Mr. Lamman welcomed his visitor effusively.

"Sit down, Mr. Beck, there's whisky-and-soda on that table. Take the easy-chair, that's right. Here are some decent cigars. I want to have you in good humour before I begin my story."

"I'm always in good humour," said Mr. Beck, "at least almost always."

"Well, talking is dry work anyway, and listening is drier. The more comfortable you are the more patient you'll be."

With that Mr. Lamman plunged into his story, while Mr. Beck, listening imperturbably, purred his cigar and sipped his whisky-and-soda with meditative enjoyment.

"You are sure the change in the message was made this side?" he said when Lamman came to an end. "It was deliberate, of course, whoever made it."

"Quite sure. My people have verified the message as received in New York. Besides, the flight of the clerk Littledale is conclusive proof."

"Strong," said Mr. Beck, "but not quite conclusive."

"Good enough for me," retorted Lamman. "I'll give you a thousand pounds

down when you catch him.”

“Well, I’ll try. It ought to be an easy enough job if there were nothing more behind, but I seem to scent a complication. I don’t believe that any telegraph clerk ever ran up that long score off his own bat. Can I see you here about the same hour the day after tomorrow? If my luck holds I should have some news for you within two days.”

He finished his whisky-and-soda and lit another cigar before he left. In quantity and quality Mr. Lamman’s cigars were unsurpassable, and no one appreciated any good thing more thoroughly than Mr. Beck.

Two days later, punctual to the second, he entered Mr. Lamman’s office.

“Well?” cried that gentleman, eagerly, for he saw the detective had news to impart. Mr. Beck took a cigar from the open box at his elbow and lit it carefully at the electric lighter on the chimney-piece.

“Well,” he responded placidly, “the trick was not played by the telegraph clerk Littledale. I am inclined to think there is no such person extant as Littledale.”

“But you have found the real culprit?”

“Yes,” Mr. Beck answered slowly between two luxurious puffs of his cigar, “I think so. Indeed, I may say I’m sure of it.”

“And you can lay hands on him?”

“Why, certainly, at any minute.”

“Then you have earned your cheque, and I must say you were not long about it. Five hundred a day is not bad even for you, Mr. Beck.”

“Easy does it, Mr. Lamman. You go too fast. My cheque is yet to earn. Knowledge is one thing, proof is another. I have not got a scrap of legal evidence against our man.”

“Then how in the devil’s name—” began Lamman, petulantly.

“Am I sure of him?” asked Mr. Beck, quietly finishing the sentence. “It’s a fair

question. Perhaps the best answer is to tell you the whole story. This cigar is really first-class. Thanks, just half a glass. I rarely take any thing before my dinner. Well, you see, my first task was to trace the man in the telegraph office who tampered with your message—”

“But I thought you said—”

“Kindly don’t mind what you thought,” Mr. Beck begged very blandly; “if you will hear me out you will know better what to think.”

“I went straight from here to the telegraph office. The young man, I told them, had disappeared and I was instructed to find him. They were all very much concerned about that young man, especially a nice little girl who seemed half in love with him.”

“Oh! I know the girl,” interposed Mr. Lamman.

“I bet you do,” said Mr. Beck, “such a pretty girl is not readily forgotten. Well, I was very gentle and sympathetic. It was only half acting, for I liked the look of the girl, and in return for my sympathy she gave me all the help she could. I searched his office and wastepaper basket. I found some fragments of letters, and this—”

He took very gingerly from his pocket-book a torn scrap of what telegraph people call “a flimsy.” Here was a faint black smudge on it, veined with a maze of thin lines, like a pressed skeleton leaf in a lady’s album.

“And what’s that, may I ask?” asked Mr. Lamman, while Mr. Beck contemplated his prize with undisguised delight.

“That mark was made by a man’s thumb,” responded Mr. Beck. “You know, of course, how telegrams are copied with carbon paper. In fitting the copy he blackened his thumb with the carbon and left that mark on the flimsy. There is only one thumb in the wide world that could make it. When we find a thumb that will make the same mark we have found the man we are after.”

“I see,” said Mr. Lamman, deeply interested. “I had heard something about identifying a man in that way, but I did not quite understand. And the scraps of writing?”

“They only told me that the hand they were written in was disguised, very cleverly disguised, grown almost natural from long practice, but to my eyes, which have some experience in those things, not quite spontaneous. There was no more news to be had there. It was quite plain the people at the post-office knew nothing. They all liked the missing clerk, especially the nice little girl. They were civil to me because I was hunting him up, but they would have hooted me out of the place if they guessed why I wanted him. His lodgings were the next cover I tried. The landlady told me what she told you, and a few little things besides, which were of use. But she knew nothing of him from the moment he drove from her door in a hansom. She, too, was more or less in love with our swindler. He has a way with the women, that’s certain.

“At the lodging-house door I paused to think if I would go back or go forward.”

“Back where?” asked Lamman.

“Along the trail I was following. It is generally the right course to take. The detective must have eyes in the back of his head as well as in the front, ‘looking before and after,’ as some one has said. When you lose the scent, the best way is to try back. Before I tried to find where he had gone to I resolved to find where he came from, and I found that easily enough, with the help of some unconscious pointers the friendly landlady had given me. To make a long story short, some months ago the telegraph clerk was run over by a motor and was rescued by a young fellow about his own age, of whom I will have something more to say later on. The clerk’s life was saved, but his leg was broken, and the motorist—a decent chap, whom I know very well—drove rescuer and victim to Guy’s Hospital. As was natural enough, the two young fellows chummed up to each other.

“Now comes the interesting part of the story. One of them wore a beard at that time and the other was clean shaven, but apart from this they were as like as two peas. When the shaven man grew a beard there were all kinds of mistakes. Figure, features, complexion, colour, they were as two eggs from the same hen. An old doctor at the hospital told me that he had never seen twin brothers so like. Though our friend the telegraph clerk seemed to have whips of money, wherever it came from, his place was kept open for him at the telegraph office, and when his leg was all right again he returned to his post—at least a young man of the same name and appearance returned. I began to smell a rat, and a little further inquiry convinced me that the twin that came back was not the twin

that went out.”

“Where did the other go to?” asked Lamman, eagerly. He was beginning to have a glimmering of the truth.

“To New York, where I have no doubt he got a telegram from his pal to buy Marconis after your message had been tampered with.”

“Have you found the forger’s real name?”

“Certainly; Philip Armitage.”

Lamman jumped from his seat with an oath. “The cursed scoundrel! Somehow I half guessed it was he.” Then he subsided as suddenly. “No, Beck, you are on the wrong track this time. I myself saw Phil Armitage on board the American boat at Liverpool.”

“You saw Littledale, or the man that passed for Littledale, on board the boat. When Littledale shaved and Armitage grew a beard the two men swopped identities. After Armitage had doctored your wire as Littledale he shot back into himself again. He changed into his own clothes, shaved clean, and drove off his old self from the lodging-house door. By a neat bit of hankey-pankey at Euston he covered up his trail and appeared as Phil Armitage at the Ganymede Club, where he is staying at present.”

“‘Pon my soul I believe you are right,” broke in Lamman, impetuously, “though the thing seems impossible, like a scene from an Adelphi play, or a chapter in a detective story in one of the magazines; still—”

“I don’t want you to believe anything on trust,” interposed Mr. Beck. “I have here a photo, taken a week ago, of the man that called himself Littledale. Is it at all like your dear friend Armitage?”

Lamman examined the photo with staring eyes. “It is Armitage himself,” he shouted, “except the beard.”

“He hasn’t got the beard now.”

“I’d swear to that photo anywhere as Armitage.”

“Just so, but unhappily there are at least a score just as ready to swear it is Littledale.”

“Perjurers!”

“Not in the least. Honest people, who honestly believe it. The postmaster, for example, and his pretty daughter, who had known Littledale for a year before the accident, and the lodging-house woman, who had also known him. It is wonderful how people can believe what they want to believe. The woman, for example, is honestly prepared to swear that the man wore his beard when he drove away from her place, though it is quite certain he had just shaved himself. The more I questioned her the more distinctly she remembered the beard that wasn’t there. Her evidence alone would acquit Armitage.”

“But you are sure it was he?”

“As sure as I am myself.”

“So am I. I feel it in my bones. Arrest the scoundrel!”

“I won’t.”

“I don’t see what business it is of yours, Mr. Beck,” fumed Lamman, “if I am willing to take my chance.”

Mr. Beck looked him steadily in the eyes, and Lamman’s passion simmered down under that steady gaze.

“Go slow if you please, Mr. Lamman,” he said; “if you want my help you can only have it on my terms. I don’t make a fool of myself to please any man. You say you will take your chance. As things stand now you have no chance. The man would be discharged next day. You’d let yourself in for big damages for malicious arrest. That’s not my way. We have found our man, we have got to find our proofs.”

“Can you find them?”

“I can try.”

“What will the fellow get if you convict him?”

“Penal servitude most likely. It is a grave offence tampering with telegrams.”

“Look here Beck,” said the other, eagerly, “I offered you a thousand to find my man. I will give you a cheque for five thousand the day Armitage is convicted.”

“Softly, Mr. Lamman. I don’t put my services up to auction, and you need not bid against yourself. I promised to do my best for a thousand. I could do no more for a hundred thousand. Now tell me, why are you so specially keen on jailing young Armitage?”

Lamman hesitated for a moment. But he felt Mr. Beck’s steady eyes on his face and met them without flinching. His cunning brain was hard at work concocting a plausible story, half truth, half lies.

“I would rather not tell,” he said at last slowly.

“You are the best judge of that, of course, but if you refuse I drop out. I must have no half confidences.”

“There is a woman in the case.”

“There almost always is.”

“Mr. Beck,” Lamman burst out, with a sudden access of frankness, “this secret is not mine, but I feel I can trust you.”

Mr. Beck raised a protesting hand. “Do you mean that as a compliment, Mr. Lamman? It is none. Of course you can trust me. If you deal honestly with me I’ll deal honestly with you.”

“The lady’s name is Miss Lee; her father was Theophilus Lee.”

“I knew the man,” said Mr. Beck, dryly.

“At any rate,” said Lamman, answering the tone of his voice, “he was devoted to his daughter.”

Mr. Beck nodded. “That’s true.”

“Well, this young Armitage traded on the father’s affection. He entrapped the

girl into a kind of engagement. She's very young. The father objected to giving his daughter to a handsome young profligate. Armitage was mad with disappointment and swore to be revenged."

"Where do you come in?"

"I wanted the girl myself. The father favoured me, and I believe the girl was willing enough till young Lothario stepped in between. Don't laugh at the confession of a rough old codger like me. But the naked truth is, I'm head and ears in love with the little girl."

"That's not a thing to laugh at," said Mr. Beck, gravely, and Lamman exulted to find a new friendliness in his voice.

"You can understand then that if I can't have the girl myself I don't want this young profligate and swindler to have her. He is a bad lot any way you take him. He professed to be my fast friend while he was planning to swindle me. He philanders with other women while he is courting Miss Lee. In love, or friendship, or business, there's no trusting him. Now you understand why I want him out of harm's way, safe under lock and key."

"I understand," said Mr. Beck, simply; "and let me say you were right to be frank with me."

"You will help me to save the little girl from a scamp?"

"I will do my best."

"Oh! that's all right. I have no fear. I know you too well. In Mr. Beck's notebook there's no such word as fail."

"It seems a plain case enough," Mr. Beck admitted grudgingly; "it ought to be easy to run Littledale to earth under the skin of Armitage. But I've learned to distrust your plain cases. Many a horse jumps his fences cleverly and comes to grief in the straight run home. The chap is clever and has clever friends. I have a strong feeling that there is a tough time to put in before we fit the broad arrow suit on your friend Philip Armitage."

Chapter IX

Defence

With growing impatience Phil Armitage waited for his promised letter from New York. There is nothing so exciting as uncertainty. No thought of danger troubled him. He knew that Lamman would fume and rage, and took pleasure in the thought, but he believed himself safe from pursuit. While the thing was a-doing he had enjoyed it. He had been conscious of no strain on his nerves. Now that it was done the reaction came. An uncontrollable restlessness possessed him. Only by persistent effort could he hold himself in hand. He forced himself to chat with the other men though it bored him terribly. He made belief to read the papers in the smoking-room and the books in the library, though it was only by a continuous effort he got the meaning of the words through his eye to his brain, and the moment the effort was relaxed his thoughts broke loose.

When he slept he was troubled with vague dreams, of which he could remember nothing when he woke but a sense of some impending danger. He kept resolutely away from Norma Lee while the uncertainty lasted, reluctant to tell any of the story till he could tell the whole of it, and this self-imposed abstinence tried him sorely.

Slowly, very slowly, a week went by, and then the long-expected letter came at last. It came in with his hot water in the morning—a big registered letter in a stout envelope, with a pretty girl's face for seal on the wax. He leaped out of bed and bolted the door after the departing boots before he broke the seal. Then he curled himself up comfortably in the bedclothes and settled down to read.

“MY DEAR ARMITAGE “—it ran,—“Of course you have dropped Littledale for good and all by this time. I need not tell you we struck it rich in Marconis. It was just fine. The street went mad for four hours. ‘A brain storm of emotional insanity,’ I heard a chap call it. When the storm blew over Thornton & Son were just one million dollars richer than before it began and Standard Oil a million poorer. I hear your dear friend Lamman had to stump up, so you got home then. I knew you would drop to my game when the chance came your way. It was a pretty little deal for both of us. You remember we arranged to go snacks, so I herewith enclose you a draft for your share of the plunder.”

Armitage turned the page and found the draft in the fold of the letter. For a moment or two he gazed at the figures spellbound, hardly able to believe his eyes. Then he took the thin slip of crackling paper that held such limitless possibilities in its few words and figures, folded it neatly in his purse, which he replaced in his trousers' pocket, and went on with his letter.

“I have arranged that the draft cannot by any chance be traced to us. My advice is invest and drop gambling. The drunkard is the best temperance lecturer. Marry your girl—Norma is her name if I remember—and live happy ever afterwards. Irene Thornton sends as much love as she can spare from her darling husband. Her face is on the seal of the letter. Isn't she a daisy? I'd say more but she is looking over my shoulder and I don't want to flatter her vanity. Never again, my dear. That's an aside. Good-bye, old chap. Bring your wife out here when you get her, and Irene will look after her while you and I—”

There the letter ended abruptly, but there was a postscript in a woman's hand, underlined—“Do come.—Irene.”

Phil put the letter down beside him. He was a little dizzy and could not quite realise that this huge fortune had come to him so suddenly. But after a little while the tumult in his brain settled down and his thoughts cleared to unadulterated delight.

He dressed rapidly and got to his accustomed place in the breakfast-room in an angle of the big window that looked out over the Thames. While he waited he read his letter again twice, and then he put it back in its envelope and laid it beside him on the cloth and fell to work heartily on his breakfast. All the time the glow of contentment warmed his heart. He had fulfilled the condition that her father had laid down. He could claim his wife with a fortune equal to her own.

It is curious how small things stick in the memory while great ones escape. He had always a pleasant remembrance of that meal and the thoughts that lent such a delicious flavour to the food. The dancing of the sunshine on the broad waters of the Thames, the chirp of the birds in the terrace garden, whose happy voices came to him with the fresh morning air through the open window. All these trifles, that went to flatter the sublime contentment of happy love, photographed themselves for ever on his memory.

A little thing breaks a dream. The softly-moving waiter, as he set a dish of

devilled kidneys on the table, brushed the letter lightly with his elbow to the carpet. Armitage, roused in an instant from his reverie, stooped to recover it, but the waiter was before him and replaced the letter with a murmured apology for his clumsiness.

Annoyed at his own carelessness, Armitage, while he thanked the waiter, slipped the letter into the inner pocket of his coat. But in a moment he thought better of it. There was a small, clear fire burning in the huge grate near the end of the room. He crossed to it, dropped the letter into the white heat of the coals, and watched to see every particle consumed. He ran across his waiter again at the entrance to the dressing-room, wondered what brought him there, and in the gladness of his heart tipped the man half a crown as he passed.

There are times in their lives when the least vain of men are anxious to look their best. Such a time had come to Armitage. He titivated himself in the club dressing-room as eagerly as a young lady for her first ball. The sit of his tie and the parting of his hair were arranged with anxious care. When he resumed his coat, which he had hung on a peg behind him, by mere chance he put his hand in the breast pocket. The letter-case was gone. He started at once for the grill-room, believing he had dropped it, but half way he met the grateful waiter whom he had just tipped running with the case in his hands. The man had found it, he said, under the chair and hoped to restore it before it was missed.

The two girls, Norma and Dora, were at home when Armitage called an hour later at Norma's house in Belgrave Square. The mistress was crouched cosily, tailor fashion, her feet under her, in the recesses of a deep armchair, knitting an impossible red silk gold-beaded purse. Dora sat on a pile of cushions on the carpet, reading. As he came suddenly into the room the one girl blushing dropped the purse and slipped her feet out from under the folds of her dress. The other placidly set her book face down on the floor.

"Well!" they both cried at once, for they read news in his face. Norma hardly gave him time to shake hands before she pushed him down into the big chair from which she had jumped when he entered.

"I have a strange story to tell."

"What is it?" Norma cried excitedly. "I'm just dying to know!"

"Shall I go?" queried Dora, demurely.

Before Armitage could reply—perhaps she did not quite trust him—the other girl broke in with eager protest. “No! no! no! If you go I will, Dora, and I’m dying to hear the news.”

Then Armitage, as in duty bound, also insisted on her staying, and Dora, with an air of martyrdom, said, “Well, if I must, I must,” and resumed her seat on the floor.

“Oh, you hypocrite!” cried her friend, “you know you are burning with curiosity. Go on at once, Phil; please don’t keep us on tenterhooks.”

He went on at once and told his strange story from start to finish. The girls listened with rapt attention, breathing softly in long breaths till he came to the exciting climax.

Then Norma broke out, brimming over and sparkling with delight:

“Half a million dollars, Phil? How many pounds is that? A hundred and twenty thousand! No? It is splendid! magnificent! Why, it sounds like a story out of the *Arabian Nights*. To win it from horrid Mr. Lamman that cheated you; that’s the best of all. Oh! I’m so glad. With all my heart I congratulate you on your good fortune.”

She came to him with eager, outstretched hands, flushed cheeks and bright eyes that danced with joy. It is possible for a brief moment Phil Armitage regretted that Dora Myrl was in the room. Norma read something in his eyes that made her turn away blushing to her friend, who sat grave and silent when the story was told.

“Why, what’s the matter with you, Dora? You haven’t a word to throw to a dog! Why don’t you congratulate him on his good luck? Perhaps,” with sudden scorn, “you think he did wrong to get back his money from that creature Lamman.”

“No,” said Dora, slowly, “I think he did quite right, but—”

“Well, what is your but?”

“There’s danger, my dear. Mr. Lamman, from all I hear of him and know of him, is not a man to lie down under it.”

“He can do his best,” said Armitage, defiantly.

“He is doing it at present, I have no doubt.” Then, suddenly, “What have you done with that letter?”

The girl’s face and voice and manner had changed strangely. Keen, sharp, decisive, no one would know her as the bright, laughter-loving Dora Myrl of social life.

Armitage smiled at the change. Dora Myrl, the famous lady detective, the tracker of criminals, the unraveller of mysteries, was always something of a joke to him. He didn’t quite believe in her powers.

“I burned it, every scrap,” he answered goodhumouredly. “Does that satisfy your ladyship?”

She nodded. “So far.”

“I intended at first to bring it along,” he said, “but I changed my mind and burned it.” Then he told how the waiter had brushed the letter off the table and he had at first put it in his letter-case. “A moment afterwards I realised the danger of its falling into wrong hands, so I burned it. I was glad I did when I missed my letter-case from my coat pocket in the dressing-room.”

“You missed your letter-case? How was that?”

“Why, Dora, you are turned into a cross-examining lawyer.”

“Norma, dear, do give me a minute, please. This is serious.” Then again to Armitage, “How did you miss your letter-case?”

He told her. “You see, I was so flustered I must have let it slip inside my coat to the floor when I thought I put it in my pocket.”

“Don’t be silly, Mr. Armitage. Of course the letter-case was taken out of your pocket and was given back when it was searched for the American letter. It was lucky you chanced to notice the waiter brushed it off the table or you would never have seen it again. I almost think I can guess who that waiter is. They say he makes a wonderful waiter. But he is a wonder every way.”

“Who is your wonder, may I ask?”

“Don’t laugh, Mr. Armitage; it is not by any means a laughing matter, if I am right. What you have just told me means that your enemies have found you out and are on your track.”

Norma gave a little cry and clapped her hand over her friend’s mouth. “Don’t frighten me, Dora.”

“I don’t want to frighten you, darling; but there is nothing to be gained by shutting one’s eyes tight.”

“But he did no more to Mr. Lamman than Lamman did to him.”

“He was right and Lamman was wrong, if you like, dear, but Lamman didn’t break the law, and he did.”

“Can they punish him?”

“They must first catch and convict him, and that’s what we must try and prevent.”

In spite of himself Armitage was impressed by her earnestness. He no longer smiled.

“You think the waiter was a spy, Miss Myrl?”

“I think he was a detective, Mr. Armitage—the ablest detective living, a man who does his own work whenever he can. It is plain the man, whoever he is, suspects already that Mr. Philip Armitage, gentleman, and Littledale, telegraph clerk, are one and the same person. It is plain, too, he cannot prove it or he wouldn’t be lurking around looking for proofs.”

“Now that you mention it,” said Armitage, “I had a vague notion once or twice since I came to the club that I was being shadowed, but I could find no reason for it.”

“Instinct is more useful than reason sometimes.”

“There was another little thing happened at the club but I gave it little thought at

the time. Indeed, even now it hardly seems worth mentioning.”

“Everything is worth mentioning.”

“Well, one night as I was going to bed I dropped my shirt stud on the floor. It was a little opal affair and it rolled away somewhere. I let it be, thinking I would pick it up in the morning. In the morning I found it crushed. I can’t tell how it got broken.”

“I think I can. A heavy man wearing felt slippers stood on it while you were asleep. You locked your door, I suppose?”

“I always do. It was locked in the morning.”

“Then a man came in through the locked door to search your room, and locked it afterwards when he went out. That convinces me I guessed rightly.

Lamman has engaged the most dangerous detective alive and he is hot on your track.”

“Oh, Dora, what shall we do?” cried her friend. “And I was so glad a moment ago. This is terrible!”

Armitage, fully alive to the danger he ran, cast a swift, appealing glance from Dora over the other girl’s shoulder, and she nodded a ready response.

“There is not a scrap of danger, you little goose,” she said, as she kissed her reassuringly, “only we must be careful.”

“You will do your best for Phil? I am sure you will save him.”

“I will do my best if Mr. Armitage accepts my best.”

“My dear Miss Myrl,” he said gallantly, and her quick ear found an earnestness under the playful tone he assumed to soothe his sweetheart, “I have much pleasure in retaining you as leading counsel for the defence.”

Dora nodded her acceptance.

“May I ask,” he went on in the same playful fashion, “what is the name of the

leader on the other side? You hinted just now you knew him.”

“Well, I’m pretty sure it is he. No one else could have got on the track so quickly. I wonder if either of you two children have ever heard the name of Paul Beck?”

Chapter X

The Signed Photograph

“I should have got that letter,” said Mr. Beck. “I’m not pleased with myself, Mr. Lamman.”

But there was no trace of annoyance in his placid voice or smiling face as he drew a silver dish to him and helped himself generously to devilled fowl and ham.

They were breakfasting together at Mr. Lamman’s luxurious house in Park Lane, and Mr. Beck had just finished the tale of his adventures and misadventures at the Ganymede Club.

“You did first-class,” Lamman replied heartily, “I don’t see how you could have done better. Luck was against you, that was all. How could you guess he would burn the precious letter when your back was turned?”

“That’s so,” Mr. Beck assented. “I can do nothing without luck, but mine seldom fails.”

“You are quite sure about the letter?”

“Quite sure. I’m not altogether a fool, though I did let it slip through my fingers. I saw the American stamp on it. I am willing to bet there was a draft in it, and a big one. The whole thing is plain as daylight. The letter and draft came from his accomplice in New York.”

“If you are so precious sure of that why not lay hold of him at once?”

“Have you ever tried to trap a bird when you were a boy?” asked Mr. Beck. “If you pulled the string before the bird was in the trap, you know what happened. You only frightened the bird away. There is no use catching a man until you can hold him, and it’s worth waiting for, to get a firm grip. I showed you the photo, I think?”

“Oh, yes, Armitage with whisker and a beard.”

“Littledale, if you please,” retorted Mr. Beck, smiling. “The photo was taken as Littledale. It was entered in the books as Littledale, and it was paid for by Littledale. Now if we could prove it was Armitage.”

“I can swear it is,” broke in Lamman.

“That’s no use. There are a dozen people who would swear it isn’t, but if we could get himself to admit it.”

“Not quite such a fool.”

“Well. I’m not so sure of that. Men do many foolish things when they are in love. Littledale— Armitage got this photograph taken about three weeks ago for the girl he is in love with.”

“For Miss Lee? The impudent scoundrel!”

“The same. The photographer is a knowing chap, with great experience in such matters. He says he always knows when a young fellow gets his photo taken for his best girl, and was particularly sure he was right about this one. When he told me the young man’s symptoms I was as sure as himself.”

“Now,” Mr. Beck went on, “I have no doubt he sent the photo, signed with his own name, in his own handwriting, to Miss Lee. When we lay hands on that photo the rest of the game is simple as kiss hands.”

“And you think you can lay hands on it?”

“Ought to, with luck, but I never prophesy until I know. Another cup of coffee, if you please. Your coffee is supreme. Yes, thank you, plenty of cream, and one large lump of sugar.”

Two days later Norma Lee drove in a hansom to the door of Redfern’s big shop and met Dora Myrl at the entrance.

“So sorry to be late, dear,” Norma cried breathlessly, “but I simply couldn’t get away sooner.”

“Don’t mind me,” replied Dora, goodhumouredly. “I always like watching a crowd and thinking what each member of it is up to. There’s a kleptomaniac just

driven off in that carriage. She had a lace scarf in her muff. Now you don't carry lace in your muff if you have honestly bought it."

"Dora, you are a wonder. I'm often half afraid of you. When I go out to steal lace, my dear, I won't bring you with me. Still, I wish I had had you with me today. You'd have enjoyed it, they were all such clever people."

"Breakfast at the Honourable Vernon's, wasn't it?"

"Yes, with half the famous people in London. I knew them by their pictures in the paper. The man I sat beside I never saw before, but he was the nicest of the lot."

"I'll tell Phil."

"Tell away, he was old enough to be my father. He was close on to forty years of age, and had such a nice fatherly way with him. I call it real good of Lill to give him to me for breakfast. He knew the people I knew, and the games I liked, and the books I'd read, and we chatted as if we had been friends all our lives."

"He put the comether on you, Norma, as they say in Ireland. Well, my dear, you ought to have had enough of chatting for one morning, so come along straight now. You have kept the best and crossest tailor in London five minutes late for a try on."

"One moment, Dora, just one little second. He knew all about Phil."

"Who knew?"

"My man."

"What was his name?"

"I don't know. We just sat down at our places; there were no introductions, and his name was not at his plate, but I was not in the least shy, he had such a way with him."

"I know all that, dear," broke in Dora, briskly, her interest now thoroughly awakened. "What did he say about Mr. Armitage?"

“Oh, Dora, you always call him Phil to me.”

“Don’t mind what I call him; answer me, answer me at once, or I’ll shake you here in the shop. What did the man say?”

“Everything nice and good. What are you so excited about, Dora? What else should he say? Do you think I’d stand a word against Phil? He seemed to have known him from a boy.”

“Did Mr. Armitage—well, Phil—ever speak of this man to you?”

“How can I say. I don’t know even the man’s name. I think not. You are just horrible this morning, Dora. My man certainly knows all about Phil. He even hinted at some trouble he was in. Of course I said nothing.”

“Oh, of course not,” with keen irony.

“Of course not, but he asked me for my address and might he call.”

“And you said?”

“I said ‘Yes,’ of course. He wanted to call to-day, but I told him I was going to shop with you and would not be back till three o’clock. Why are you looking like that?”

Dora did not seem to hear her. Her brain was hard at work.

“It must be him,” she thought, “it’s so like him, hiding his name, finding the time she would be out. What, I wonder, does he hope to discover in her house? Oh!”—with a sudden inspiration that turned her pale with fright—“the signed photo. I was a fool not to insist on her burning it long ago.” Then suddenly, aloud, “Good-bye, Norma, I’m off.”

Like a flash she was gone, slipping edgewise through the throng, leaving the other girl in a state of such manifest bewilderment that a shop-walker came up to her briskly. “Has she snatched anything from you, miss?” he said. “Shall I call the police?”

“No, no, she is my greatest friend,” Norma explained breathlessly, “she has just forgotten something and gone off in a hurry.”

In a raging hurry Dora found the shop door and hailed a hansom with a good horse. She gave the address, with the injunction, "As quick as your horse can go. Double fare," and they were off like an arrow.

All the way her mind was busy with the thought, "Am I in time? am I in time?"

As the hansom whisked round the corner she saw another drive away and caught a glimpse of a man's back in the doorway. Her plan was promptly laid.

She leaped lightly from the hansom, before it had come to a stand, and reached the promised double fare to the cabby, who drove off rejoicing.

Then she pressed the button of the electric bell, but without waiting for an answer opened the door softly with her latchkey.

The servant girl met her in the hall. "Hush! Margaret, speak softly. A gentleman has just gone up to the drawing-room?"

"Yes, miss."

"Did you let him in?"

"No, miss; Eliza. I heard him say to her Miss Lee asked him to call and to wait till she returned from shopping."

"He didn't see you at all? That's right. Off with your cap and apron at once, girl. Why do you stare? Help me with them."

The girl was quick-witted and caught her meaning in an instant. Dora tossed aside her toque and jacket. Her dress was of a plain dark stuff, her hair plainly done. She fitted on the cap and streamers at the glass in the hall stand and dexterously tied the white apron round her waist. In five seconds she was transformed into a trim parlourmaid.

Up the stairs she went, light as a cat and as swiftly, and opened the door without a sound. For a moment the visitor, standing with his face to the window, neither saw nor heard her.

The photo, she knew, was on a small table near the door. It chanced that a vase of newly cut flowers almost completely concealed it. Dora's heart jumped with

joy as she caught a glimpse of it through the curtain of leaves and flowers. Noiselessly she whisked it under her apron and slipped the stand of the frame through the belt of her dress.

Not one second too soon.

The visitor turned sharply from the window. One glance at that kindly, clever face with the resolute mouth and chin and Dora knew her fears were justified. It was the redoubtable Paul Beck himself that faced her smilingly. Her heart was beating rapidly but her face gave no sign. She was a very pretty, shy, pleasant-faced parlourmaid, nothing more.

Mr. Beck had a quick eye for feminine charms. "I never saw a sweeter woman's face," he thought to himself, as he met the smiling blue eyes of the parlourmaid.

Strangely enough her thoughts took the same turn. "No wonder he captured poor little Norma," she thought. "What a strong face it is, and what a kind one; a man to like and look up to—oh! I'm so sorry he is on the wrong side."

In answer to his inquiring glance she said, with the respectful manner of the well-trained servant:

"I came to ask, sir, if you would have tea or wine while you wait? The mistress told me always to ask."

"Thank you, my dear, I won't trouble you." Dora felt her cheeks warm at his admiring gaze. "I shan't be able to wait very long. But I'll take a look round this pretty room, if I may."

"Just as you please, sir," she replied demurely, with a pleasant consciousness that the "pretty thing" he was most anxious to see was secure under her apron.

"Would you kindly get me a scrap of paper?" said Mr. Beck, producing his fountain pen. "I will leave a line for your mistress in case she has not returned before I have to leave."

When Dora returned with the paper she knew that Mr. Beck had vainly searched the drawing-room for the photo, but there was no trace of disappointment on his placid face as he sat down to write his note.

“He will have a look at the bedroom before he leaves,” thought Dora; “he will fancy Norma may keep the photo there.” So she went upstairs instead of down when she left the drawing-room and hid herself behind the curtained bed in Norma’s room.

Her surmise was correct. She had vainly listened with strained ears for the opening or closing of a door or a step on the stairs, but suddenly, without warning, she saw through a pin hole in the curtain the door open noiselessly and Mr. Beck in the opening. She felt his eyes were searching the room. The temptation to startle him out of his placidity was irresistible. She slipped suddenly from behind the bed with a little scream of surprise and a look of fright in her eyes as they lit on the intruder.

But Mr. Beck was not in the least startled at her sudden appearance. He was complete master of the situation.

“Don’t be frightened, my dear,” he said soothingly. “I smudged my fingers, and I’m afraid my face as well, with that confounded pen. I was just looking for some water to wash them. Perhaps you will be kind enough to show me the bathroom?”

There was a smudge of ink plain to be seen on the side of his nose, and his finger tips were dirty. Plainly he had got his excuse ready for the emergency. His coolness delighted the expert soul of Dora. Without a word she led the way to the bathroom and turned the hot-water tap in the wash-hand basin and handed him the towel.

“I’m afraid I frightened you just now,” said Mr. Beck. “I suppose you took me for a burglar?”

“Oh, no, sir,” replied Dora, shyly, “quite the contrary.”

The *naiveté* of the answer seemed to amuse the genial visitor. “Quite the contrary,” he repeated smilingly; “that’s rather neat, you know. You’re right, my dear, quite the contrary.”

His unabated good humour was a puzzle and a trouble to the girl who knew he had failed in his quest.

“Any message, sir?” she asked when they parted in the hall and he slipped half a

crown into her hand.

“No, my dear, no message. I will do myself the pleasure of calling again.” Then, forgetting in his hurry to mention the name of the caller, an omission that by no means surprised her, he took his departure.

Dora spun the half-crown to the ceiling like an exultant schoolboy. “I will never part with it,” she cried; “it is a mascot that must bring me luck. It is a distinguished-service medal won in my first engagement with the greatest detective alive.”

When Norma returned half an hour later she found her volatile friend dressed like a parlourmaid, fondling a half-crown.

“Why, what mad freak is this?” she began, before her quick glance round the room missed the precious photo from its accustomed place. “Oh, Dora, what have you done with it?”

“It is there,” said Dora, coolly, pointing to a little heap of ashes on the hearth.

“Oh! you wicked girl; you didn’t really burn his photo?”

“But I did, and you should go down on your two knees when I tell you why. Ring for tea, Norma, I’m just aching for a cup of tea, and I’ll tell you how and why.”

Norma listened breathless to the tale. “May I keep the frame?” Dora concluded.

“Of course, dear. Why do you want it?”

“For Paul’s photo. I’m more than half in love with the man. Oh, Norma, he’s worth a score of your commonplace Phils. How I wish he were on our side instead of against us!”

Chapter XI

To The Rescue

“Isn’t she just wonderful, Phil?”

It was Miss Lee asked the question, of course. She had just finished the tale of Miss Dora Myrl’s first encounter with Mr. Beck.

“Wonderful is not the word, Norma. Astonishing, amazing, astounding; ‘pon my word I don’t know any word to quite fit her. That chap, I know, is thought to be the ablest detective in London.”

“And is,” interposed Dora, promptly.

“The ablest male detective,” assented Phil Armitage.

“Oh, I wish you and Norma wouldn’t talk nonsense. I cannot hold a candle to him. I am frightened at the man; he takes things so calmly. He is so quiet and so confident. We are only at the first moves of the game yet. I wish it was all over.”

“I think it is pretty well over, if you ask me,” retorted Armitage. “You have bested him, Miss Myrl, all along the line. I don’t see what he is to do next.”

“Nor I. I wish I did.”

“Why, Dora,” interrupted Norma, “I never saw you nervous before.”

“I never had such cause my dear.”

“Cheer up, Miss Myrl,” cried Armitage, “I’m not hanged yet nor likely to be while I have you to look after me.”

“What were you going to tell us when you came in just now, Phil?” interrupted Norma. She wasn’t in the least jealous, but she did not like him to talk too much to Dora. “I think you said you had something to tell.”

“Think! I like that. I had begun my simple little story when you chipped in. I’m not complaining. Your story was worth a dozen of mine, but I had a little

adventure of my own last night. Don't look so startled; it has nothing in the world to do with our game of hide-and-seek with Paul Beck. It was just a nice little irrelevant adventure with a happy ending. Give me another cup of tea and I'll tell you my little tale."

"You may get into the armchair and light a cigarette. Dora does not mind, and I like it."

There was some "business" about lighting the cigarette. Dora wished herself out of the room, and perhaps, if the truth were known, the others shared the wish.

"I was coming home pretty late last night," Armitage began slowly between luxurious puffs.

"From where?"

"You mustn't interrupt, little woman. Remember you refused to come to the theatre. I was returning pretty late thinking of—"

"Of nothing at all, like the jolly young waterman," interrupted Norma.

"You need not be so impetuous. I wasn't thinking of you; I was thinking of Miss Myrl, and how clever and pretty she is, when a rough arm across my windpipe nearly jerked me off my feet."

"Oh! Phil, how horrible!" In an instant the laughter died out of her eyes and the colour from her face.

"There was no harm done, Norma," he went on quickly. "I managed to grip the fellow's wrist and twisted myself free. He cried out at the pain of the twist. Then the other chap—there were two of them—came at me with a life-preserver. Funny why they call the thing a life-preserver! I ducked and he missed the blow. He never got the chance of a second. Suddenly a third man raced up to take a hand. I thought at first he was one of the gang, till I saw him grip my friend with the life-preserver by the wrist and then by the collar. The burly ruffian was a baby in his hands. He wrenched the weapon from his grip and raised him and flung him against his pal. The two rolled over and over in the street, and the instant they found their feet they ran."

"The thing was all over in ten seconds. I had no part in it after my friend's

arrival. He took the stage and held it. As the brace of garotters slunk swiftly round the corner he turned to me as cool as you please.

“I hope those scamps haven’t hurt you, sir?”

“Not in the least,” I said; ‘you made short work of them.’

“Oh, they are a poor lot, those garotters. If they miss the first grip at the throat or the knockout with a sandbag they show no fight. You could have managed very well without me. But I could not resist taking a hand in the game. It cost me a good cigar. Could you oblige me with a light?”

“I obliged him with a light and he insisted on obliging me with an excellent cigar from a big leather case. As I lit the match and held it to him I had a good look at his face. A strong, clever face—a man to like and trust; the kind of man you’d want to have beside you in a row, not against you.”

Dora shifted her position on the sofa and listened more eagerly than before.

“It turned out we were going the same way, and we smoked and chatted along a street or two. In the second next street to mine he stopped and fitted his latchkey to the lock of a door. ‘Curious we should live so close,’ he said. ‘I took this place only a few days ago. Come in for five minutes; a thimbleful of old Irish whisky won’t hurt either of us after our exertions.’

“I went in at half-past eleven; I didn’t come out till half-past one. It wasn’t the whisky, Norma; don’t think it, though the whisky was first-class— it was the man. I never in my life met a pleasanter chap. He seemed to know something about everything. He could give me more about the latest electric dodges than I knew, though it’s my business. He didn’t brag a bit either, but I could see that he had been everywhere and had seen everything, and he told a first-class story. I never met a man I took such a fancy to at first start. You felt he was a man to be trusted. More than once I was tempted to tell him my own story and take his advice. I believe I would too if it had been altogether my own secret.”

Dora glanced over his shoulder, caught Norma’s eye and winked a wicked little wink, just a quiver of the eyelid, whereat Norma coloured guiltily, remembering the nice man *she* was so near confiding in at Mrs. Harcourt’s. Then Dora’s lips shaped the words, “Babes in the wood “so softly that only the other girl could hear or see her breathe them.

“My man has promised to lunch with me the day after tomorrow,” Armitage went on, unconscious of this byplay. “Will you come, Norma? You, too, Miss Myrl?” This as an afterthought. “I’m sure you’d both like him.”

“I’ll be there,” said Dora, promptly, and Norma, after a little hesitation, to enhance the value of her assent, promised too.

“I’m quite sure I’ll like him, Phil,” she said.

“Yes,” added Dora, dryly, “I’m quite sure you will.”

A little later when Armitage left, one of the girls saw him to the door, and returned to the drawing-room looking particularly prim and proper in order to discourage frivolous comment.

“Don’t be afraid, my dear,” cried Dora, mockingly. “I’m not going to say a word about it. I won’t even ask how many. I’ve more important matters to attend to.”

“Dora, I wish you’d learn to have a little more sense.”

“Lucky for you two babes in the wood I have so much. Of course you know who the pleasant friend is?”

“I! How could I?”

“Well, you are a dear little goose. Why, it’s as plain as— I was going to say the nose on your face, but you might not think that a compliment. Phil’s friend of the midnight whisky-and-soda symposium is your friend of the fashionable breakfast conversation and my friend of the burned-photo adventure. It’s as clear as daylight. Just think of the diabolical cleverness of the man.” There was genuine, undiluted admiration in her voice. “Of course the garotters were arranged beforehand to introduce him to Phil. That’s just the kind of introduction that leads to sudden friendship and confidence. Oh, Norma, Norma,” with sudden tremor in her voice, “I fear this man will be too much for us in the long run. I’m not given to fear, as you know, but I’m afraid this time. I’ve met more than my match. There, don’t cry, you dear little goose,” she broke off, “I didn’t mean it. I’m sure it will come all right. Anyhow, there is nothing to be gained by crying, and especially when there is no man to look on.”

“I cannot help it, Dora,” the other girl sobbed, “I’m very miserable. If I let

myself be happy for a moment I suffer for it afterwards. Oh, I'm horribly frightened, and I can see that Phil thinks it serious too, though he pretends to make little of the danger. For—"

"For what? Go on, you mustn't have any secrets from me, Norma."

"You won't laugh at me, Dora?"

"Indeed I won't. I'm in no humour for laughing."

"You mean there's danger to Phil?"

"No, I don't, you frightened little goose. I mean I don't want to laugh when you are crying, but I do want to know why you are crying."

"He is not the same to me as he used to be."

"Is that all? He seems still rather nice to you, so far as I can judge. If I had a young man I wouldn't wish him any nicer."

"Oh, you don't know what you will wish till you come to try. Long ago Phil was very anxious I should marry him. Now he never mentions the subject. Of course I'm in no hurry to get married, still—"

"Still one likes to get the chance to say 'No.' I'm not laughing really, Norma, and I think I can tell you why he doesn't worry you to marry him tomorrow, or the day after at latest. It isn't from want of wanting, you may be sure. No one who has sat out a long evening as I have, watching him watching you, can doubt that. He is nervous, Norma."

"Is it Phil?"

"It is Phil; not for his own sake, but for yours. He does not want to risk marrying you to a convict, and I like him the better for it. You need not look quite so dumbfounded. You are a woman, remember, not a frightened child. You know that his enemies are after him, and that he will be punished if he is caught. You and I think he did quite right, but the law takes a different view, and a judge and jury will follow the law."

"You don't think there is any danger?"

“There is always some danger of something. But if you mean do I think they will catch him, I don’t. Cheer up, my dear, you are as white as a stick of celery, with a faint shade of green that isn’t becoming, let me tell you.”

“Oh, Dora, my only hope is in you.”

“As I said before I’ll do my best. If Mr. Beck was out of it I’d snap my fingers at that brute Lamman, who, by the way, is, or was, a very warm admirer of my own. But Beck takes watching. I don’t like that new trick of his.”

“You are sure that it is he?”

“As sure as that I am myself. I see ‘Paul Beck, his mark,’ on that garotting business. I must find out what he is at. Norma, dear, I want you to give me a character.”

“I never know what you are at, Dora. You are never serious for a moment.”

“I am very serious now. I am going to look out for a new situation—isn’t that plain enough?—and I want a character. How would this do? ‘Jane Morton’—that’s a good name—‘has lived with me for nearly three years, during which time I found her strictly sober, honest and proper.’”

“You stole my best hat one day,” interposed her friend, promptly, “you are never sober, and as to proper, well—”

Dora went on unheedingly: “‘Sober, honest and proper, and most willing to oblige. I now part with her at her own request, having first paid all wages due.’ Do you think Mr. Armitage’s housekeeper would take me as housemaid on such a recommendation?”

“Phil’s housekeeper!”

“I don’t know what’s come to you this evening, Norma. I can get nothing out of you but ejaculations. Cannot you see I want to be on the spot, to keep my eye on Paul. He saw me here as parlourmaid, and he’ll just think I’ve changed my situation. I want you to say a word to Mr. Armitage about it.”

There was a long pause.

“You need not be a bit jealous, my dear,” said Dora, quietly, at last.

Norma flushed guiltily. She had not recognised her own feeling until the other named it.

“I won’t make love to him, I promise you, nor tempt him to make love to me, especially as it would be no use. He would not give your little finger for my whole body, so don’t be a goose.”

“Of course, I’ll do what you think best, Dora.”

“I think this is best. I don’t want you to say a word to Mr. Armitage about Oom Paul. Just say you have given me a roving commission to look after him. He’ll laugh, very likely, and treat it as a good joke. Well, I don’t mind that if it amuses him; it won’t hurt me.”

So it came to pass that when Mr. Beck lunched with Armitage he was waited on by the same pretty, innocent little parlourmaid whom he had admired when he paid his surprise visit to Miss Lee. He noticed, too, with strong disapproval, that young Armitage, who was engaged to another girl, seemed disposed to be on very familiar terms with his new parlourmaid, though she demurely repelled his advances and refused to catch his eye or return his smiles.

Mr. Beck was much annoyed with Mr. Armitage; more, perhaps, than the circumstances seemed to warrant. He remembered Lamman’s description of the young libertine and was keener than ever on bringing him to book.

Chapter XII

A False Alarm

If Mr. Beck did not like Mr. Armitage, and as we know he did not, that genial gentleman showed no hint of dislike in his manner. He was frank, friendly and goodhumoured. On the other hand, the regard and admiration which poor Phil conceived for his rescuer grew daily. So the one-sided friendship developed into close intimacy, and more than once Dora, as she went in or out of the room when they smoked and chatted of an evening, was frightened lest Phil, in an irresistible burst of confidence, should tell his whole story to his vigilant foe.

She felt that Mr. Beck was keener than ever on hunting down his quarry, and with that subtle feminine instinct that men lack she felt that a growing personal dislike to Armitage enhanced his keenness.

Like electricity on a dull, close day, danger made itself felt in the air. At any instant the lightning might strike, so she kept incessant watch, letting no action, no word of Beck's, escape her. Yet in spite of her vigilance it was pure accident—or rather say gross carelessness on the part of Armitage—that warned her of the first unexpected attack.

She had given herself a brief holiday, and taken afternoon tea with Norma Lee, whom she alternately teased and soothed with her news of Armitage.

In the afternoon she rode back on her bicycle to Tite Street. As she turned the corner she saw a cab drive rapidly away from Armitage's door.

A sudden fear took her, and she bent a little over her handle bars, and alighting from her bicycle almost in full flight, she set the machine by the area railings, opened the door with her latchkey and went straight to the parlour. She knew Armitage was to lunch at home, this was his lunch hour. When she found the room empty she was frightened but not surprised.

In some way that it would be impossible to put in words her quick eyes read disturbance and disorder in the room.

The chair had been pushed suddenly back from the table, the fork lay on the

cloth and the napkin on the floor.

Plainly he had been called away suddenly from his lunch and had promptly obeyed the summons; but how, and by whom? She was instantly certain that there was some trap; but what was the bait?

Her eye lit on a crumpled letter that Armitage by a lucky carelessness had let fall and forgotten to pick up. "Our indiscretions sometimes serve us well." Dora pounced on the letter like a bird on a crumb, and smoothed the paper out on the tablecloth.

Blank disappointment! The letter was in unintelligible cypher. The address alone was legible, "Macklin's Private Hotel, 37 Rodolph Row."

Her nimble wits rapidly got to work piecing the incidents together, searching a way out. The cypher was probably the Lamman cypher. Three people at least knew it—Lamman, Armitage and Thornton, probably Mr. Beck also. The letter had brought Armitage off in a hurry. A letter from Lamman or Beck would not do that, a letter from Thornton would. Her mind leaped to the light. They had forged an appeal from Thornton to Armitage. That would fetch him. It had fetched him. Where? The heading on the notepaper gave the cue. It was only a chance, but at any rate the best chance.

These thoughts chased each other so swiftly through her brain that there was scarce a pause between the finding of the letter and the cramming of it into her pocket.

Down the stairs she went headlong, her feet scarcely touching the steps, her hand sliding on the rail. In the street she clicked the high speed gear to her bicycle and was off in pursuit of the truant like a bird on the wing. At any cost she must reach him and stop him before he went blundering into the trap.

Dora knew London as a rabbit knows its warren, the knowledge that comes without thought. The labyrinth of streets lay like a map before her mind's eye. She knew, as a hansom driver knows, the streets that were wide and empty and those that were narrow and crowded, those that were "up" and those that were down. The course of Armitage's cab from Tite Street to Rodolph Row stretched clear before her. She must catch him; she would catch him on his way to the hotel. Bending a little over the handle bars she made the bicycle fly.

For a while it was plain sailing. The streets were broad, empty and wood paved. She knew the start the cab had got and how soon she might hope to overhaul it, and the bicycle flew. It comforted her to see how quickly the fastest hansoms slipped behind her. But presently the traffic thickened. She came down a narrow bye street into Victoria Road. She found herself in a rushing stream of vehicles and went through it zig-zag, like a darting trout in a stream, finding an opening to the right or left, and shooting through before it closed again. It was perilous work for eyes less quick or nerves less steady than Dora's. With the cunning speed of the footballer, who carries the ball at a run, safe from the pressing crowd from goal to goal, writhing clear of collisions by an inch, she got safe from Victoria Station to Westminster. Up Whitehall there was a clear run and a smooth track. She shot on free wheels past Northumberland Avenue, despite the raised hand of a policeman, and plunged into the turmoil of the Strand. But just past Charing Cross she found herself suddenly wedged in a block, where it was impossible to move backwards or forwards, to the right or the left.

Then for the first time, but only for a moment, her heart failed her. The comforting thought came quickly that his hansom she pursued must have been caught too.

As the traffic began to crawl at a snail's pace, she edged her way across the road, through the jumble of wheels, to the kerbstone. Then she boldly slipped off her bicycle on to the footpath and ran.

It is wonderful how much will be pardoned a pretty and pleasant young woman. A man would be mobbed if he tried such a thing. But pedestrians took her apologies in good part, and actually made room for her as she ran. She was nearing the head of the block when she saw a hansom in front impatiently struggling to free itself from the throng.

Her eyes had searched the rows of cabs as she passed. Armitage was in none of them. This one escaped unsearched. A moment more and she too was on the road, clear of the block, in swift pursuit of the flying hansom, which was driven at a pace that spoke of double fare. There was not a cab horse in London that could keep his distance from Dora on her bicycle. Slowly she crept up behind the high back of the hansom, which swayed like a boat in a heavy sea. As she slipped to the side she closed her eyes in an agony of excitement. She was riding level with the window when she opened them, and with a sudden thrill of victory recognised the clean-cut profile of Phil Armitage. With his hat a little on the

back of his head, his hands on the knob of his umbrella between his knees, sitting bolt upright, and staring straight before him, he was a very monument of impatience.

Dora rang her bicycle bell furiously, but he took no heed.

She dipped her hand in her pocket and brought up a loose coin, which she tossed against the glass of the hansom.

The jangle of glass and metal at his ear woke him up to his surroundings, and a cry of amazement broke from his lips when he saw Dora gliding with perfect ease by the side of the rushing, rocking hansom.

She beckoned him to stop. He rapped at the trap and the cab lumbered to a standstill by the pathway. The bicycle was instantly beside it. Armitage flung open the wooden apron. "What is it, Dora?" he cried impatiently, "quickly as you can. I'm in a desperate hurry. It's a matter of life or death."

But Dora was in no hurry now. She drew a long breath or two and wiped her flushed face with a flimsy rag of lace before she answered.

"You forgot a letter on the floor," she said coolly, "I thought I would bring it to you."

"You came all that way," he cried in utter bewilderment, "to bring me a letter I had forgotten! No?"

"Oh, I knew it was a very important letter," and she produced it.

"That! Do you know what's in it? No, of course you could not."

"But I do. It is a letter in cypher from your American friend, telling you he is in great danger, and begging you to come to him at once."

"But how in the name of wonder did you guess that?"

"Oh, I guessed more than that," she answered coolly; "I guessed that letter was not written by your friend, that it was written by Lamman and inspired by Paul Beck. It is a trap, my innocent and impetuous young friend."

“But why? How?”

“Don’t you see? Your mere knowledge of the special cypher would be evidence against you. They plainly hoped to trap you into other admissions as well.”

“I don’t believe it. How could they possibly know anything of Thornton or our friendship?” he asked impatiently.

“Kindly ask me some other conundrum. How did they know you were Littledale who forged the message? How does Mr. Beck know pretty nearly everything he wants? I cannot tell you, but he does all the same.”

Armitage was not convinced. “It was awfully good of you,” he said, “to run me down on the bicycle. I don’t know how you managed it any more than I know how you guessed what was in the cypher letter. You are a wonder—just a wonder. The odds are a hundred to one that you are right about the letter, but there is just the off-chance that you are wrong and that poor Thornton is really in trouble and wants me.”

“Mr. Thornton is in New York. What do you think he wants you for?”

“I cannot think, still—”

“Still you are going to walk blindly into Beck’s trap?”

“I’ll be on my guard, my dear girl, thanks to you. Forewarned is forearmed, you know.”

“Then you mean to go?”

“Well, yes,” he answered slowly, “if you don’t mind.”

“But I do mind. I won’t let you go. I will hang on to your coat tails if need be to hold you back. Remember, Norma gave me charge of you, and I intend to keep charge.”

Armitage only thought how pretty she looked in her excitement, how animated, how resolute, as, half joke, whole earnest, she threatened him with physical force. But she did not turn him from his purpose. Though he had spoken diplomatically of odds in her favour, in his heart he was convinced that Thornton

had really written the letter and was in danger. He felt he would be a sneak to desert him.

The quick blue eyes read his thoughts and his purpose, and Dora passed at once from threats to wheedling.

“Have it your own way then,” she said; “if you must, you must. All I ask is just a little time to show who’s right. There is a restaurant opposite the hotel—Jammet’s is the name. Now, I’m actually dying of hunger and thirst, and I think you owe me a lunch after the ride I have taken, rightly or wrongly, for your sake. We will slip in quietly and find a table at the window where you can watch the hotel door. If Mr. Lamman or Mr. Beck—one or both—don’t come out of the hotel before we have finished lunch I will own up that I am wrong and you can fly to the rescue of your friend. Is it a bargain? I really am horribly hungry, and of course I cannot go into the place by myself. A lunch at Jammet’s, let me tell you, for I know, is a thing to dream about.”

Still he hesitated.

“If your friend is in the hotel,” she pleaded, “he cannot come out without your seeing him. You are not afraid of his being murdered, are you, while we are at our lunch next door?”

She put irresistible entreaty into her voice and smile. The blue eyes met his with a pitiful appeal. “Do, please,” she coaxed, “I’m so hungry.”

Then he surrendered at discretion. They had discussed the luncheon question on the footpath, while cabby waited with an amiable and somewhat patronising smile on his rubicund face.

The smile became beatific when Armitage handed him a double fare.

“Good luck to you and your lidy,” he said unctuously and was off.

Armitage wheeled Dora’s bicycle while she showed the way to the restaurant a little distance off. He had no idea how close he was to his goal when he was caught. Seven minutes’ walk brought them to the side entrance of Jammet’s. Through the broad windows at the front there was full view of a hotel porch with “Macklin’s” in gilt letters on the iron lattice work of the porch.

Armitage sat with his face to the street. Dora, facing him, her back to the window, proceeded to study the menu.

She knew the place well and the waiters knew her. She had often lunched there or supped with a friend. It was a little bit out of the way, it is true, but very quiet and cosy, and the best cooking and wine in London, if you were disposed to pay for them.

The place was very plain—no gilding, no mirrors, no “decorative “pictures of nymphs and Cupids— but the exquisite fineness of the table napery, to a woman’s eye, was eloquent of refinement and expense.

Dora dallied with the menu for a few minutes. “Have you any choice?” she said. “No! Then I’ll order and you’ll pay—a fair division of labour.”

With the pencil attached to the card she ticked off a dainty little lunch. A delicate clear soup was followed by dressed crab seething hot in its own broad shell— a very triumph of enticing cookery. Its ravishing flavour diverted even Armitage’s attention for a moment from the hotel door, which he watched intently as a cat watches a mouse hole, and with the same tension of suppressed excitement. A bottle of cool light Hock was an admirable foil to the pungent flavour of the delectable crab. Then followed sweetbread cooked to a miracle, with mushrooms culled in far-away field, and afterwards a wild duck, whose plump brown breast cut like cheese. The repast closed with a raspberry tart and whipped cream, whose flavour was rapture to the artistic palate.

Dora bluntly refused Armitage’s suggestion to desecrate such a meal by a flavourless dry champagne. She ordered a bottle of sparkling Moselle, breathing the faint odour of the muscatel. The delicate wine had none of the vulgar “fizz “of champagne; a pure white foam just whitened the amber surface for an instant and vanished, and its cool touch dimmed the clear sparkle of the tall Venetian glass from which they drank.

“Of all the heresies of luxury,” said Dora, as she sipped her wine with appreciation, “dry champagne is the worst. Men drink it as they drink medicine, because it is wholesome. I have always held the comfortable doctrine that what we like best is best for us. The beasts, birds and fishes live and thrive in that belief and practice.”

She peeled an apricot slowly as she sipped her wine, quietly ignoring Armitage’s

impatience.

“You can smoke if you like,” she said; “they have wonderful Turkish cigarettes here.”

“Thanks,” he answered a little curtly, “I don’t care to smoke.”

He tossed off his second glass of wine hastily, perhaps as a hint to her to do the same, and stretched his hand to pour himself a third glass, but stopped abruptly with his grip on the neck of the bottle.

Two men emerged from the door of the hotel opposite and came down the stone steps slowly. Lamman was one, his hat rammed down on his forehead, looking particularly ill-tempered. The other was a stout, florid young chap of the “masher” type, whose face was the picture of inanity and goodhumour. As they crossed the street Armitage for a moment fancied that Lamman caught sight of his staring face at the window and started at the sight, but his companion at the moment jogged his elbow and whispered some joke, whereat Lamman’s face lightened and they both laughed heartily.

Then the two, arm-in-arm, passed down the street without another look at the window where Armitage sat.

While he watched his two men Dora watched him as closely and read the scene in his face as in a mirror.

“Well,” she asked with a mocking little smile, “are you satisfied?”

“Oh! I apologise most heartily, Miss Myrl; you were quite right, of course, as you always are. It was a trap, still—”

“Still you want to make quite sure that your friend Thornton is not in trouble. Well, I have no objection. Just pay for our lunch—I fancy you never had a better, nor a dearer—and then we’ll slip across to the hotel and inquire.”

“No,” the hall porter told them, “there was no Mr. Thornton stopping at the hotel. But two gentlemen—very haffable gentlemen—had lunch in a private room and told him if anyone inquired for Mr. Thornton he was to be shown up at once. You must be the gentleman they expected, sir. Your friends have left not quite five minutes. They seemed sorry to have missed you.”

“I daresay,” murmured Dora when they were back in the street. “Now tell me, Mr. Armitage, was the other ‘haffable’ gentleman at all like your good friend, Mr. Peter Baxter, rescuer?”

“Not the least bit in the world,” cried Armitage, perhaps not wholly displeased that Dora should be proved wrong once in a way; “he was absolutely different in every respect.”

“Then,” thought the shrewd young lady to herself, “I’m quite sure it was he.”

Chapter XIII

Turning the Tables

“That last trick, I’ll swear, was Lamman’s own,” Phil confided to Norma in a pleasant *tete-tete* in his drawing-room in Tite Street. “The fellow with him was a fool manifest. Your bright little friend Dora fancied it might be Peter Baxter in disguise. Well, she cannot be right all the time, but she certainly is a wonder. I would have blundered straight into the trap but for her. That wild bicycle ride through the traffic was a caution. She is about the cleverest girl I ever knew, and the pluckiest.”

“And the prettiest? Phil, honestly, don’t you think she is wonderfully pretty?”

“Well, yes, she is rather nice-looking.”

“Nice-looking! Why, there is no one like her. That’s the way with men always. They are afraid to praise one girl to another. They think we are all a pack of jealous fools.”

“There is one girl I’m never afraid to praise anyway to anyone.”

“I don’t believe you one bit when you say I’m pretty any more than when you say that Dora is plain.”

“I didn’t say that exactly. I merely said that in comparison with—”

“Comparisons are odious.”

“Not in this case anyway. One of them is beautiful and the other rather nice-looking.”

It is possible that with all her protestations Norma was not really displeased at the terms of the comparisons. She did not pursue the topic further.

“Dora swears that Paul Beck was at the bottom of the last trick too,” she went on; “she believes that only he could have thought of it. She has got Paul Beck on the brain, Phil.”

“Or on the heart.”

“Oh, no, she wouldn’t own to it or laugh about it if she were really in love. She solemnly swears that he’s the only man she ever loved. So of course he’s not, but most certainly she sees him everywhere, in everything and everyone. Shall I tell you a secret, Phil?”

“Just as you please.”

“That’s so like a man too; when you are dying with curiosity you say ‘just as you please.’ You must not breathe a word of it to anyone. I promised Dora faithfully I wouldn’t tell it.”

“Then don’t.”

“But I must. It doesn’t make a bit of difference telling it to you. I’m sure you wouldn’t be so dishonourable as ever to mention to her that I told you. She thinks your friend Mr. Baxter that rescued you, that is coming here this evening to teach us spiritualism, is Paul Beck in disguise.”

“You are chaffing, Norma.”

“I’m in sober earnest, and so was she.”

“Why, the thing is absurd,” cried Phil, indignantly. “I could not imagine a clever girl so absurd. She showed me a photo of Paul Beck and there is not a feature the same. Baxter is a clever chap, no doubt, but as transparent as a child. He’s no more a detective than I’m an archbishop.”

“Perhaps you are an archbishop—in disguise.” A mocking smile gave point to the accusation.

“That’s a challenge. I must vindicate my character.”

“Don’t, Phil! How dare you? Aunt will be here in a moment. I wonder what is keeping her?”

“My new housemaid, good little Dora, God bless her! is keeping her. I’ve no doubt auntie is titivating upstairs. We have a good five minutes yet to ourselves.”

“Mrs. Matilda Pye!” announced the new parlourmaid at the door, and a nice-looking, old-fashioned, middle-aged lady in brocaded silk, with a black lace cap on her pure white hair, came quickly into the room.

“How do you do, Mr. Armitage? I must apologise for delay. My cap caught hooked to my dress and it took a time to get it free. Only for that dear, bright little maid of yours I never could have managed it. It was very good of you to ask me, and Norma, too. You know, of course, I am a devout believer in spiritualism and enjoy nothing so much as a s^oance.”

“But, my dear lady, Mr. Baxter makes no pretence to be a spiritualist. He confesses the whole business is trickery.”

“He is not the first medium, Mr. Armitage, that has taken that line to convert the unbeliever. For my part I don’t approve of those pretences, even for a good object. I think the subject too solemn to be trifled with.”

“Well, here’s the man to speak for himself anyway,” replied Armitage, as the smiling Mr. Baxter, with a small pillar-and-claw table held by the pillar under his arm, appeared at the door. He put the table down promptly and shook hands with the ladies and with his host.

“You’ll excuse me, Armitage,” he said, “bringing my own table to your rooms. It’s a trick table designed by a very clever fellow named Grabbeau, who got into trouble about a diamond necklace, but he was a goodnatured fellow as well as a clever one, and made me a present of this table between his arrest and conviction.”

He set the table on its claws as he spoke, near the centre of the room. In appearance it was a commonplace table enough, of dark walnut, the upper surface dull and unpolished.

The old lady quivered with excitement, more convinced than ever that he was a genuine medium who, for greater effect, disclaimed his own miraculous powers.

“Shall we ‘sit’ at once?” she asked, proud of her knowledge of the slang of the spiritualists.

“I’m frightened of the whole thing,” pleaded Norma, “I’ll have no hand, act or part, in it.”

“Don’t be silly, my dear,” remonstrated her aunt. “Rightly understood spiritualism is a religion, our commune with beings of another world is a kind of religious exercise. I am sure the spirits that Mr. Baxter will invoke will be both beneficent and communicative. It is clearly a duty to learn all we can of our future state, and of our friends who have gone before.”

“My dear young lady,” said Mr. Baxter, “you need not be the least bit frightened. It is just a clever conjuring trick I am going to show you. I’m not such a fool as to believe, neither are you, I am sure, that beings of another world have no better way of spending their time or their eternity than romping with furniture and rapping out foolish answers to foolish questions on a table.”

Mrs. Pye was not in the least offended. She understood him. He was just soothing her niece’s foolish nervousness, of course.

“Mr. Baxter,” she whispered earnestly, “I’m convinced you are a genuine medium.”

“As genuine as the very best of them,” he replied in the same tone, and with that answer she was wholly content.

So was her niece. “If you are sure there are no spirits, Mr. Baxter,” she said, “I’m not afraid of the table.”

“Let us sit at once,” repeated Mrs. Pye, eagerly.

“One moment, my dear madam,” pleaded Mr. Baxter.

He cleared the course, as it were, pushing the furniture aside, helped by the new parlourmaid, and so left a wide space of carpet for the table’s evolutions.

Norma uttered a little cry when the electric lights went out suddenly and the brightly-furnished room vanished in black darkness.

But there was an instant flash of light as Mr. Baxter pressed the button of a small pocket electric lamp. This he set on the grand piano at the end of the room, where it gleamed like a glow-worm, lighting up a fine Bartolozzi print that hung close to it, till it seemed the living face of a beautiful girl, and diffusing through the whole room a faint twilight that was more ghostly than utter darkness.

All four took their places at the table, with fingers and thumbs pressed to its surface, and waited.

From the darkest background the new parlourmaid watched the performance with intelligent curiosity.

Phil Armitage, when he pressed his thumb and finger tips to the surface of the table, noticed that it was covered with something soft and sticky, and thought it was part of the game.

As their eyes grew used to the semi-darkness they found light enough in the room to be sure that none of the four sitters moved in their places, and all eight hands were stationary on the table, which gradually began to quiver and stir restively on its three claws.

“The spirits are present,” murmured Mrs. Pye in a whisper, half frightened, half exultant; “speak to them, Mr. Baxter.”

“Who is there?” asked Mr. Baxter, in the most matter-of-fact tone, as though someone had knocked at the door.

The table, in the approved language of tables, slowly rapped out the answer, “Nathaniel Pye.”

Thereupon Mrs. Pye was immensely agitated. “Ask him is he happy? Mr. Baxter.”

Without waiting for the question from Mr. Baxter, the deceased Nathaniel rapped out, “Never so happy in my life.”

Nathaniel seemed to have a fund of dry humour, but his eager widow never noticed that the answer was capable of a double meaning.

“Oh, I’m so glad,” she whispered, “my poor dear Nathaniel. Ask him”—in a bashful whisper—“does he love me as well as ever?”

This time Nathaniel waited for Mr. Baxter to repeat the question, and paused for a moment before he rapped out his reply.

“More than ever—much more,” came the answer at last, and there were two or

three supplementary raps, that might be interpreted as a spiritual chuckle.

Then apparently the table grew tired of good behaviour. It became suddenly frisky. Rearing up on one claw it nearly pushed the unsuspecting Mrs. Pye on her back. It whisked itself dexterously from under the hands of the sitters, and pranced round and round on the free space of carpet. For a while the sitters now become runners, tried to keep pace with it. But presently it flung off their hands completely, and danced an Irish jig in the open space, keeping perfect time to the tune hummed by Mr. Baxter, and humouring the music with its three claws on the carpet. Suddenly a bell rang in a far corner of the room. Instantly the table shot back to its place, and in the dim light they could see a paper drop from the ceiling and light on its centre. The room flashed into brightness again, and all saw written on the paper in bold letters, the ink still wet, the two words "Good night."

"The spirits have gone home to bed," said Mr. Beck, "they keep early hours in Borderland."

The whole party were in a tremor of pleasant excitement. Phil and Norma urged Mr. Baxter to explain, but he put them off with one pretence or another. "My table can do more wonderful things than that," he said to Armitage, "as I may show you some other time, but I must not spoil the effect by explaining."

Mrs. Pye smiled superior. She knew the explanation without telling. Her thoughts were with the departed Nathaniel, perhaps a little jealous of his happiness in Borderland.

Mr. Baxter would have left at once, but his hospitable host would not hear of it. "If you go," he said, "I will confiscate the table and pull it to pieces to learn its secret. There is a little bit of supper coming later and you must wait for it."

Mr. Baxter submitted goodhumouredly as ever, on condition, as he said laughingly, that no one laid a finger on his table.

To humour the jest they gathered to the other end of the room, leaving the table severely alone. None of the party noticed that on its surface there were faint smudges, where the fingers and thumbs of the sitters had pressed. Perhaps the new parlourmaid noticed it. Anyway, when coming in presently with the tea-things on a silver tray, she had to pass close by where the table stood. She tripped somehow on the edge of the carpet, recovered in time to save the tea-

things, but not in time to prevent the contents of the hot water jug splashing all over the precious table.

With a little cry of dismay she set the silver tray on the floor, plucked a large serviceable handkerchief from the pocket of her apron and proceeded to dry and polish the table vigorously. The party turned at the cry and saw the mishap. For the fraction of a second a shadow of annoyance flitted across the goodhumoured face of Mr. Baxter; the next instant he was smiling again.

It was he that consoled the pretty, innocent little parlourmaid, who was sorely distressed at her own clumsiness. "There is no harm done, my dear," he said heartily. "I really think my table looks the better for the polishing."

For the rest of the evening, and during their pleasant impromptu supper, he was the life and soul of the party, told stories, cracked jokes, and played the accompaniments to Norma's Irish melodies, which she sang with wonderful feeling.

Mrs. Pye, to whom he listened with absorbing interest, confided to him several delightful anecdotes about the departed Nathaniel. Norma, as she afterwards confessed, felt in love with him and wondered how a clever girl like Dora could suspect that goodnatured, simple creature of being a detective in disguise.

Armitage was honestly delighted at the good impression his friend had created and the triumphant vindication of his own judgment.

When Mr. Baxter went off at last, carrying his wonderful table with him in a cab, the whole party sang his praise in chorus, to which the new parlourmaid listened demurely.

But when Mr. Baxter got back to his rooms and turned on the light, he put his precious table down with a jerk and regarded its polished surface ruefully.

"Was there ever a more unfortunate accident?" he muttered. "Paul, my boy, your luck seems to have gone on a long holiday. I hope it will soon return to work."

Chapter XIV

A Warning

Toothache is regarded as a rather good joke by those who have not got it. A dentist is supposed to be a comical person, and many amusing stories are told about tooth extraction. But Phil Armitage did not find toothache in the least degree amusing—quite the contrary. He had lain awake one awful night, tortured by the grinding pain, which seems the more terrible because it is close to the brain. It is wonderful how much easier it is to bear pain in the toe than in the tooth.

Poor Phil shut his mouth tight and bore the dull agony through the long night with the stoical steadiness of a Red Indian, though at times he was sorely tempted to leap from his bed and pace about the room, and bang his offending headpiece furiously against the wall. He felt he would go mad if he once let slip his self-control, so he lay still without a groan and heard the hours strike—a year between the hours—until the longed-for dawn came up at last.

With the dawn, as often happens, there came a little ease of his agony, but the dull pain still endured. He had arranged to spend the day with his sweetheart. But even love cannot mitigate a toothache. So he sent an apology of business, whereat she was mightily offended, and through the long forenoon he entertained his unwelcome visitor with undivided attention.

In the afternoon, when the pain had more or less worn itself out—the pace was too hot to hold—he had a friendly visit from Mr. Baxter. That kindly and tactful gentleman was not in the least disposed to laugh at the comicalities of toothache. His friendly sympathy was pleasant to the unhappy wretch who had fought the torturing devil a long night and day. The talk turned on remedies, of course. But Mr. Baxter avoided the usual brutality of the Job's comforter to the victim with its suggestion of superior fortitude. He never even once said, "I'd have it pulled out if I was you." All the same Armitage felt the unspoken reproach on his courage and explained why he didn't have it pulled out.

"I had my first toothache about six weeks ago," he said.

"Lucky man," murmured the visitor.

“I was more than lucky,” Armitage went on “in my dentist. I went to a man named Brennan— Andrew Brennan. He told me I had the best set of teeth he ever saw in a human head and point blank refused to pull out the acher. He gave me some wonderful stuff that burned like the very devil, but stopped the pain in five minutes. Next day he put in a gold stopping. But he warned me I might have another bout of pain within a month or so, and told me to come to him at once and he would put me through permanently. His last words, as I fee’d him, were, ‘Let nobody tempt you to have that tooth pulled.’”

“But why didn’t you go to him at once?” Mr. Baxter asked naturally enough.

“Because I couldn’t; because he had gone away and I wasn’t able to find his new address. The man hung out at Morrel Row. I used to pass the place, and one day I saw the shutters up. I inquired what had become of him. But the landlord was a surly fellow, mad to lose a good tenant most likely, and would give me no information.”

Mr. Baxter was deeply interested. “It’s always easy to find a man in London if he’s not hiding.”

“I wish you’d find my dentist for me.”

“Perhaps I may; I’ll have a try anyhow. You will be at home tomorrow?”

“All day. I have an arrear of work to do if my kind friend in my upper jaw will allow me to do it. Have another drink before you go; well, a cigar anyway?”

“It was very good of you to look me up,” said Armitage to Mr. Baxter next day. “Yes, the pain is almost gone. I’m half afraid to say wholly gone lest it should come back to make a liar of me.”

The goodnatured Baxter was triumphant and bursting with his good news. He had found Armitage not working, but idling in a deep, cosy armchair, a pipe between his teeth, a detective story in his hand, lazily basking, as it were, in the supreme beatitude that comes with relief from sharp physical pain. So impatient was Mr. Baxter to tell his good news that he took no notice of the parlourmaid, who was busy at the sideboard, but broke into his subject at once.

“I’ve got him,” he said. “I told you I would.”

“My dentist?”

“Your dentist.”

“You’re sure it’s he?”

“As sure as you are yourself.”

“Whisky-and-soda, Jane “—this to the girl at the sideboard; “we’ll drink your discovery in a bumper. Now, tell me all about it.”

“There is very little to tell.” Mr. Baxter was not disposed to disclose his methods. “I inquired at the address you gave me. One thing led to another, and more by good luck than by good management I found your man. He has set up in a big way of business in Gower Street; seems to be doing remarkably well. Andrew Brennan is the name; tall, thin, rather good-looking chap, with hair parted down the middle.”

“The very man!”

“I was sure of it.”

“It was real good of you to take so much trouble on my account.”

“Not at all. I did better still. As he seemed to be so busy I made an appointment for you for three today. There’s lots of time, and I’ll go with you if you like to see fair play.”

The girl at the sideboard shifted the whisky decanter, syphon and tumblers on to a tray. The glass tinkled noisily: “Tink, tink, tink—tink, tink,” and again, “tink, tink, tink—tink, tink,” the sound rang out.

Mr. Baxter turned sharply towards the sideboard. He did not see the look of surprise that came and passed on the face of Armitage.

Once again the glasses tinkled as the girl carried them across the room and set the tray on a small table between the two men. Mr. Baxter eyed the pretty face keenly, and she blushed with engaging shyness under his scrutiny.

He helped himself to a moderate dose of old Irish whisky-and-soda.

“You will come at once?” he asked, when he had sampled his drink.

“I think not to-day,” Armitage answered slowly. “There is no hurry now. The pain is gone. You see I’ve been idling all the morning, and I have really got work on hands. Another day will do for Brennan. Thanks to you I know where he hangs out when I want him.”

Mr. Baxter didn’t press him. “You know best,” he said easily. “But hadn’t I better telephone to him that the engagement is off? The instrument is in the study, I think; don’t stir. I know my way. I’ll be back in less than a minute.”

The moment the door closed on Mr. Baxter, Armitage, full of curiosity, turned to the pretty parlourmaid.

“Why did you telegraph ‘No, no’ to me just now, Miss Myrl? I’m sure you had some good reason for it, but for the life of me I cannot see why I shouldn’t go with Baxter to the dentist.”

“You cannot see! That means you won’t see,” she retorted with a touch of scorn in her tone. “You first went to this dentist Brennan as Littledale. You want to go now as Armitage. Do you think he won’t recognise his own handiwork? He’d know you as they know horses and—well, other animals too—by your teeth. You can’t see indeed! Well, Mr. Beck could see plain enough.”

“But—”

“Oh, I understand; he’s not Mr. Beck, of course, he’s only Mr. Baxter, and his discovery of the dentist and his anxiety to bring you there were all a mere coincidence. Anyhow, you can see the dentist is a danger, can’t you? Shesh!”

Mr. Baxter had come back suddenly and silently to the room and found master and maid in animated whispering. But if his suspicions were aroused he gave no sign.

“It’s all right,” he said to Armitage, “I got on to him at once.” Two minutes later he was busily discussing electric aeroplanes with Armitage—a subject in which both were deeply interested.

It was a full hour before he left. Dora showed him to the door. She was always anxious to see him safe off the premises. But as she brushed his hat and handed

it to him in the hall he said abruptly

“Jane, when did you learn to telegraph?”

She felt the sudden thrust in the question. Her wits were instantly on the alert, and quick as thought the parry came. Frank confession was her only hope.

Trembling and blushing—a piteous picture of bashfulness—she stammered out, “I was a telegraph girl, sir, before I went to service, but the hours were too hard so I gave it up.” Then, impetuously, “You heard me telegraph ‘No, no’ to the master? You mustn’t think me forward, I’ll tell you the whole truth. That toothache of his was only a pretence to avoid visiting his young lady. He wanted me to go and lunch with him just as you came in, sir. He was coaxing and half threatening me and I found it easier to telegraph the answer. He was at it again the moment you left the room.”

“Did you ever lunch with him?” queried Mr. Beck, abruptly.

“Oh, oh! he saw me and knew me that time at Jammet’s,” thought Dora, delightedly, “he knew the back of my head. What eyes he has!”

She blushed again as she answered demurely, “Once, sir, only once at Jammet’s restaurant. I went on my bicycle and he met me there. I was foolish, I know. I thought it no harm at the time, but afterwards—”

“I understand, my girl,” said Mr. Baxter very kindly. He pitied the blushing, artless little maid who looked so pretty in her confusion and was furious with Armitage for trifling with her simplicity. He had got to half like the frank young fellow in spite of himself, and to hate his task of running him to earth, but now there was a sudden revulsion of feeling. “Lamman was right,” he thought, “a smooth-spoken, plausible, bad lot. Engaged to that nice girl, Miss Lee, he is trying to ruin this simple little maid too; plainly a bad lot. A prison is the proper place for him.”

The parlourmaid watched his grave face with eyes of timid appeal. “You are not angry with me, sir?” she ventured.

“Of course not, my dear,” he answered more kindly than ever. “What right have I to be angry?”

“I should not like to lose your good opinion, sir,” she murmured with a coquetry so subtle he failed to find it.

“No one could blame you. You have done quite right, my dear,” he said encouragingly, “you have behaved very well indeed. But why do you stay in the house with this young man?”

“It’s a good place, sir, and I might find it hard to get another. I have no relatives alive. Miss Lee sent me here. She has been very kind to me, and she would be angry if I left without cause, and more angry still if I told her the true cause.”

Mr. Baxter felt the shrewdness of this. The girl was quick in spite of her simplicity. “Well, perhaps you are right. I’m glad I spoke to you, and glad you told me the truth. Remember this: if ever you want a friend you can count on me.”

“I won’t forget, sir,” said the simple, truthful little parlourmaid, and she did not mean to forget.

Chapter XV

“Love’s Young Dream”

Norma Lee was a gentle little soul. When she learned the nature of “the business” that kept Armitage from her side her resentment was instantly dissolved and disappeared in sympathy. When he came at last he could not have been more pitied and made much of if he had been a wounded hero returned from the wars. Poor Phil grew a little restive under this excessive sympathy. He did not feel a bit like a hero, and a toothache, when it is over, appears, even to the victim, a somewhat comical complaint.

“Why did you not tell me the real truth, sir?” she demanded. “You know I would have come to you at once.” Then, with a little touch of petulance, “But of course you had Dora to pet you and you didn’t want poor me. I’m sorry she could not come with us to-day.”

“I’m not.”

“Of course you are bound in politeness to say that, but you would say the same thing if she were here instead of me. No, no; don’t stir, you will upset the boat, and I don’t want a cold bath, thank you.”

The two were alone together in a light skiff in one of the calm and beautiful upper reaches of the Thames. It was Norma who thought of this river picnic, but it was Phil who proposed it, and he quite plumed himself on his happy notion and on the cringing and coaxing by which he had won her hard consent to the trip.

It was very pleasant on the river that delightful day in the early autumn which excels the fierce glow of midsummer, as mellow wine excels a crude and fiery vintage. The air had a pure transparency which only the autumn knows, in which trees and water, and distant towns peering through the trees, take on a new and surprising beauty. The leaves stirred softly but no breeze touched the surface of the water, only a lazy swell moved slowly over its smooth surface, “A balmy liquor chrystoline of hue.” Down in its transparent depths the trees grew up to meet the trees along the river’s brim, with the stir of leaves and the flutter of birds in the dim, deep mystery of the water. A solitary thrush piped pure and

shrill from the recesses of the wood. His voice went with the river as it ran, heightening the charm.

They were very happy—that man and maid— alone together on the placid water, and the beauty of the outer world was but the fairy framework of their hearts' delight. The maid, dainty in loose cool muslin and fluttering ribbons, sat couched amid the silken cushions in the stern of the skiff, with the silken rudder strings in one hand, the other trailing lightly in the cool water. The man, clean built and supple, in white flannels, with a panama hat pushed back from his face, dipped his sculls noiselessly into the noiseless stream and with long, smooth strokes pushed the light boat against the current.

There is a happiness so intense it verges on pain, and, for woman at least, it finds its easiest expression in tears. They felt it then. The charm of the scene was upon them, mingling with the love that flooded their hearts as the sunshine flooded the river. For a time neither spoke; the girl kept down the silken curtain of her eyes, for she knew her lover's gaze was on her face.

Slowly and silently, to the rhythmic dip of the oars, the boat moved on with its freight of youth and love and happiness.

The man spoke first, in a whisper that trembled with its own intensity, the old familiar words, "Oh, Norma, how I love you!"

There was no petulance now in the soft voice that answered him, only the wistfulness of an all-jealous, all-absorbing love.

"Best of all, Phil—do you love me best of all?"

"There is no other, darling, only you."

"Dora is very beautiful, Phil." She looked at him with sudden jealous eagerness. A thought that had troubled her for weeks past found words at last.

His smile assured her. "What! jealous, Norma?" he said, "you foolish, foolish lassie. But I like to see you jealous, though there is no cause. Miss Myrl is pretty enough in a way and wonderfully clever, and a dear good friend of yours and mine. Twice, at least, she has saved me from great danger. You do not love her the less for that, Norma?"

“Do you think the danger is so great as Dora thinks?” she queried suddenly, all other thoughts at once absorbed in fear for her lover. “Tell the truth, Phil, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You two have been hiding it from me as if I were a child.”

“No,” he answered slowly, “I do not think the danger is so great. But there is some danger. If the thing were to do again, Norma, I’d do it and take the consequences. I don’t feel the very slightest twinge of remorse, but there is no doubt the law calls what I did an ugly name, and if the law gets me there will be trouble. Lamman will have his revenge if he can manage it.”

“It is most unjust and unfair,” cried the girl, indignantly, “you only paid the villain back in his own coin. Why shouldn’t he be sent to prison instead of you?”

“A very sensible man—called Mr. Bumble—once said, ‘The law is a hass.’ It is more like a mule sometimes. It’s obstinate and vicious and bites and kicks without cause. But don’t let us talk about the law any more, Norma. What will be, will be. It’s time enough to bid misfortune good-morrow when you meet it. Don’t let us waste this glorious day crying over milk that is not spilt yet.”

“But I must talk of it, because I can’t get it out of my mind. Your thoughts won’t turn one way and another to please you, as I turn the boat.” She jerked the rudder lines as she spoke and made the boat go zig-zag like a darting trout.

“The thought has been worrying me for months,” she went on. “It is an ease to my mind to talk of it. What does Dora think?”

“Well, she says little, but I can see she is nervous. She does not care two pins for Lamman—a cunning, conceited fool she calls him, ‘whom I could twist round my little finger if I cared to.’ But she is afraid of the man Beck, and the oftener she fools him the more frightened she is.”

“Does she still believe that Mr. Baxter is Mr. Beck in disguise?”

“She has said nothing about it of late, so I fancy she has given up the idea. Silly notion, wasn’t it, for such a clever girl?”

“I’m not quite so sure of that. When I meet the man I feel it impossible that anyone could suspect him, he is so frank and goodnatured. But I have known Dora for a long time, as girls count friendship; —nearly five years. I have known

her to do many wonderful things, but I have never known her to be mistaken. If she told me point blank that Mr. Baxter was Mr. Beck I'm afraid I'd have to believe her in spite of myself."

"She won't tell you that now, Norma. Yesterday she said to me, when she came into my study under pretence of dusting it, and almost dusted my cigar out of my mouth, 'I won't say another word, Mr. Armitage, against your good friend Mr. Baxter, and the more he is about the place the better pleased I'll be.'"

"Perhaps she wants the chance to keep an eye on him."

"I think that is drawing it a bit too fine. Anyhow, we need have no scruple while we are obeying our guardian angel, and I confess I like Baxter and trust him."

"So do I, but—"

"We will leave all the 'buts' to Dora, if you please. She'll look after them, never fear. It's for your sake, darling, that this business troubles me at all."

"But why for my sake, Phil?"

"Why, because I love you, because I love you every day a thousand times more than the day before; because I'm longing to have you all my own, and I dare not ask you to marry me until this trouble blows over."

"You need not ask me," she answered with the sudden courage of her love, "I am ready to marry you any time you like." Then, frightened at her own daring, she blushed rosy red and hid her face in her hands. "Oh, Phil!" she sobbed, "I was afraid you had ceased to care for me at all."

In his surprise and delight he nearly dropped his oars into the river. With one swift movement he shipped them, and with two steps he was beside her in the stern, his arm round her waist, her head on his shoulder.

"My precious little darling—not love you! I shall love you while I live in this world, and when I die I shall love you in the next, always, always. If I were dead in my grave and heard you call I would come to you."

"If you really love me like that, Phil, you should know how I love. Do you think I'd let anything— yes, anything—part us now? I don't care a straw for your

Lamman or your Beck so long as you love me. I was reading a beautiful old poem the other day. I wonder if you ever heard of it, 'The Nut Brown Maid'?"

"I know a good half of it by heart, Norma."

"Then you know how the maid answered when the man thought the law should part them. I cried as I read the lines last night." Her sweet voice was tremulous as she repeated:

"Oh, Lord, what is this world of bliss

That changeth as the moon?

My summer day in lusty May

Is darkened ere the noon.

I hear you say "farewell." Nay, nay,

We may not part so soon.

Why say ye so, or whither go?

Alas! what have ye done?

All my welfare to sorrow and care

Should change if you were gone,

For in my mind, of all mankind

I love but you alone."

"Is that true?" he said and held her closer to him.

"True? Why, of course it's true. You said just now you knew the poem."

"But do *you* mean it? Don't play with me, Norma; tell me the truth."

"Yes, I do mean it; that's the simple truth. The maid wasn't one bit fonder of him than I am, and you are worth a score of the man."

Armitage did not reply—in words. He held her close and kissed her while the boat drifted and the sky smiled and the water and the trees murmured softly of love. “I shall answer my darling,” he whispered at last, “as the man answered the maid when the danger he feared was overpast.

“‘Mine own dear love, I see thee prove

That ye be kind and true,

Of maid and wife in all my life

The best that ever I knew.

Be merry and glad, no more be sad,

The case is changed now,

For it were ruth that for your truth

You should have cause to rue.

Be not dismayed whatever I said

To you when I began,

I will not to the greenwood go,

I am no banished man.’”

He took his oars again, and humming Moore’s boat song sent the skiff, to the accompaniment of vigorous strokes, swift and straight up stream, ripping the smooth surface with the sharp prow and leaving a trail of bubbles behind. Presently he turned the boat’s nose to land and drove her in beside a bank of smooth green turf overhung by the broad branches of a sycamore.

How good the food tasted, eaten in the fresh air with the hearty appetite of youth. The cold meat and salad and crisp rolls, the tart and the fruit, and the cool light wine that sparkled for joy in the sunshine. “All things,” the poet tells us, “minister to love and feed his sacred flame.” That bright day on the sparkling water, that pleasant lunch by the river side in the shade of green trees, was no

ineffective ministration.

When she lit his cigar and made him comfortable with pillows on the smooth sward, and nestled beside him with a confiding hand on his shoulder, in the whole world there were no two happier than they as they talked the pretty, foolish prattle of love of which lovers never tire, and planned a happy future into which fear nor sorrow should ever enter.

So the sunshiny day slid by in happiness without alloy. But with the evening clouds came, and a chill wind stole upon the river, and the dark shadow of the impending danger fell again as they rowed swiftly homewards in gathering gloom.

Chapter XVI

A Game of Bridge

The obliging Mr. Baxter was quite willing to have his table in again to perform for Mrs. Pye, but Mrs. Pye's niece protested. She was afraid of the table, she said, there was something uncanny about it. Of course she didn't believe in spirits. Of course she did believe Mr. Baxter that it was all trickery, still— With that illogical feminine "still" there was no arguing.

Then Armitage, who had been eager on his own part to encore the performing table, shifted like a weathercock and pooh-poohed it. "A repetition," he gravely pronounced, "would spoil the surprise and novelty of the first performance."

So the performing table was tabooed, and the pretty parlourmaid, who had listened to the discussion with an inward resolve to accidentally smash the table if it were produced, drew a sigh of relief when the adverse verdict was given.

Mr. Baxter, as usual, was perfectly goodhumoured about it. But the disappointed Mrs. Pye looked glum. Then suddenly Armitage had an inspiration. "What do you say, good people, to a game of bridge? We are just four. You play, Baxter, of course? I know the others do."

"A little," answered Mr. Baxter, modestly.

Norma welcomed the suggestion with the rapture of the novice, her aunt with the deeper delight of the veteran.

Her countenance cleared at once and the acrobatic, spiritualistic table was forgotten.

She had been a famous whist player in her day, like Mrs. Battle, loving a bright fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game. She had scorned the upstart bridge at the start, and long after its supremacy was established refused to do homage to the usurper. But when all her old cronies fell away, and even a game of dummy whist was not to be had literally for "love or money," then at last she bowed her haughty head and tamed her heart of fire before the tyrant. She had held out so long that when she fell she fell like Lucifer, never to rise again. The

game captivated her and she sang its praises with the undisciplined enthusiasm of the convert. She brought to bridge her whist equipment of a wonderful memory of the cards, but, on the other hand, she was hampered by the rigidity of whist rules, from whose thralldom she never wholly escaped.

The elasticity and the versatility which constitute the chief charm of bridge continued to elude her. She was a sound rather than a brilliant exponent of the game. Armitage was a steady average club player, and Norma a brilliant but erratic novice. Mr. Baxter was the unknown element in the rubber.

As usual he was most anxious to oblige. It was he who shifted into the centre of the room the pretty inlaid card-table with the spider legs, that being opened showed an expanse of smooth green cloth. It was he that rummaged in the drawer for cards and marker.

“Only one pack here,” he cried to Armitage after a prolonged search.

“Nonsense, man,” retorted Armitage, “there are two.” He searched in his turn but without effect.

“I was almost sure there were two packs there this morning,” he said.

The little parlourmaid was *quite* sure there were two packs there five minutes ago, and wondered what other game besides bridge was to be played during the evening.

Goodnatured Mr. Baxter was, as usual, equal to the emergency.

“I will fetch a pack from my room,” he said.

“I won’t be five minutes.” He was__off before they could say “Thank you.”

He was not quite so quick as he promised, but he was back in less than a quarter of an hour, not with one but with two packs, each in a neat case.

The party promptly grouped themselves at the table. Mr. Baxter spread the cards in a fan, and Armitage, who cut first, secured the deal with an ace. Mrs. Pye cut a seven of clubs. Mr. Baxter and Norma came together as partners with two kings.

“You have the choice of seats, aunt,” cried Norma. But Mrs. Pye disclaimed frivolous superstition in serious business. “I am very comfortable where I am, dear,” she replied contentedly. She knew Armitage’s form and was pleased with the cut that gave him as a partner.

“Don’t bite me if I trump your ace, Mr. Baxter,” cried that gentleman’s partner, gaily. “I hope you are not a very good player.”

“I know the cards,” he answered diffidently, “just know the cards, no more.”

After all, knowing the cards means a great deal when you come to think of it, as was demonstrated presently by Mr. Baxter’s play.

Armitage began to deal with one of the packs that Mr. Beck had brought from his room. He was a good dealer, as a rule, making the cards fly from his hands like leaves in a high wind, but this evening “all his fingers were thumbs.” The cards stuck to his fingers and to each other in an extraordinary way, and twice he dealt two cards at the same time. He grew annoyed at his own awkwardness and bungled still more in his annoyance.

When he was about three-quarters through, and plainly approaching the climax of a misdeal, Mr. Baxter came goodhumouredly to the rescue.

“It’s not your fault, Armitage,” he said, “there is something wrong with the cards. Best have a fresh deal with a fresh pack; we have still two left.”

Without waiting for assent he swept the dealt cards from the table, slipped the discarded pack back into its case and dropped it into the pocket of his dinner jacket.

The second pack proved perfect. Armitage, as usual, made the cards fly. In a few seconds a little heap rose in front of each player and the deal was over.

For the first hand or two neither Armitage nor his partner knew what to make of Mr. Baxter. At one time he seemed to play his game brilliantly; at another he was erratic as Norma herself, violating all rules. But after a while they found the cue to his eccentricities. When Mr. Baxter had control of the dummy’s hand he played a game which Armitage was player enough to appreciate and had never seen equalled for consummate skill. But when the other side dealt Mr. Baxter played for his partner’s hand, violating in her interest all rules. He seemed, after

the first few rounds, to divine instinctively how she would play, and playing up to her it was miraculous what desperate tricks he secured.

Though the luck, on the whole, sided with Armitage and his partner the pile of silver grew steadily in front of Norma and Mr. Baxter. The girl was elated with her success and laughed gaily at her aunt's discomfiture. Mr. Baxter, too, was in unusually high spirits, even for him. Was it only his success at cards that inspired them? The little parlourmaid thought not.

They had played several rubbers and were playing "the very last" when Norma, with a queer little jealous pang, noticed the maid, as she passed with a tray of coffee and liqueurs behind Mr. Baxter's back, make an almost imperceptible sign to Armitage.

A little later, with an apology and an assurance that he would not be a second away, he rose and left the room.

It was a good ten minutes before he returned, and it seemed even longer to the players, who sat staring at their cards. Armitage was a little nervous and disturbed and avoided his sweetheart's questioning eyes.

With an awkward "Very sorry to have you all waiting," he took up his cards and led.

As it often happens the last rubber was the most exciting of the evening. They were a game each. Armitage and his partner were twenty-eight points; the others twenty-four. Mr. Baxter had dealt and left it to his partner on a very weak hand. She, on a weaker still, went spades in despair. When she had laid down her cards she strolled round behind her partner's chair, looked over his hand and turned away, convinced the game was hopelessly lost.

But Mr. Baxter's skill rose to the emergency. He and the dummy had eight spades between them, four each. He contrived two ruffs from dummy's hand and then drew the whole spade suit. When the spades were exhausted he was the odd trick to the good. Then he led a thirteenth card from his own hand, and so wanted only one trick more to win the game.

"It's very curious," said Mr. Baxter, meditatively. "I don't think I ever knew it to happen before."

“What?” asked Mrs. Pye, a little sharply. She was not pleased at the turn the game was taking.

“That the four last cards should be the five, four, three, two of the same suit,” replied Mr. Baxter

He put down the five of diamonds. The two was on the table in dummy’s hand. Armitage and his partner played the four and three. So Mr. Baxter with an impossible hand had won three tricks and the “very last rubber.”

While Mrs. Pye, who was a good loser, congratulated Mr. Baxter graciously on his play, Norma, whose twinge of jealousy had passed away, contrived to whisper a word or two to her lover, who still seemed disturbed and perplexed.

“Anything wrong, Phil?”

“Nothing, darling.”

“Oh, I’m sure Dora told you news of some sort, good or bad. Come and see me tomorrow and tell me. I’ll be in at half-past one.”

“Good-bye, Mr. Baxter; good-bye, Mr. Armitage,” said Mrs. Pye. “Pray don’t move on our account; our carriage is at the door. Thanks for that lesson at bridge, Mr. Baxter.”

But when Mr. Baxter, in his turn, would have taken his departure Armitage detained him just five minutes to have a last drink and light a cigar.

“There is something I want very much to talk to you about.” he said.

The ever-obliging Mr. Baxter dropped back into his seat, and Armitage began a long-winded question regarding something in the design of the model electric aeroplane.

But those shrewd eyes that watched him, and the shrewd ears that heard, knew that his heart was not in the question, that this was some ruse to gain time.

“I wonder what your little game is, my plausible young scoundrel?” said Mr. Baxter to himself while he listened with smiling patience to Armitage’s remarks. He had taken a strong dislike to Mr. Armitage ever since he had heard of his

attentions to the pretty, innocent little parlourmaid. When at last Mr. Baxter did get away, to his surprise he found that same pretty little parlourmaid waiting for him in the hall, red-eyed, tear-stained, in a state of violent excitement.

She held a small Gladstone bag in her hand, and she was dressed for the street. “Oh, Mr. Baxter,” she sobbed when she saw him, “you promised to help me if I wanted help, you promised to save me!”

“Well, my dear, what’s the trouble now?” he asked in a soothing voice and laying a kindly hand on her shoulder.

“He tried to kiss me,” she sobbed in a choking voice. “He came out from beside the young lady he is engaged to, and whom he pretends to be fond of, and tried to kiss me by force.”

“The young scoundrel!” cried Mr. Baxter, heartily. He understood now why Armitage had left the room and why afterwards he had tried to detain him until the girl should be out of the way.

“I won’t stay another night in the house,” she sobbed; “nothing would induce me to stay.”

Mr. Baxter thought for a moment. “If you will trust me,” he said, “I will take you away now to my place. It’s only a little distance off, and I will give you in charge of my housekeeper—a kindly, motherly old soul. There is a cab at the door. Will you come?”

“Oh, thank you a thousand times. I have no fear with you.”

He was not quite pleased with the readiness with which she trusted him. He felt there was something too filial in that innocent confidence. She trusted him, he thought, as a man old enough to be her father.

Would he have been pleased if he had known the real reason why the pretty parlourmaid accepted his invitation so eagerly?

Chapter XVII

An Armistice

Mr. Baxter was shy and nervous as a schoolboy when he helped the little parlourmaid into the cab for their midnight drive together. He was surprised at himself, and he could in no way account for his emotions. Always susceptible to feminine beauty in a quiet, unemotional, easy-going kind of way, he liked the companionship of pretty women and found them good to look at and talk to. They liked him in return, and petted him outrageously, to the distraction of younger and more ardent admirers. But hitherto no woman, however beautiful, had ever made his heart beat faster. His regard was purely platonic; just a shade warmer than his delight in a fine picture, or a frolicsome child. How came it then that he thrilled and trembled like a raw schoolboy in his first calf love as he sat close beside the pretty parlourmaid during that short drive, and caught glimpses in the gloom of the cab of her perfect face and of the confiding appeal in her beautiful eyes?

It was a small cab, and they sat pretty close together, and Mr. Baxter was in such a state he could not tell if he were glad or sorry when the drive was over.

His housekeeper was up when they arrived, and at once took motherly charge of the girl at a word from her master. His servants always loved and trusted him, and the housekeeper was, moreover, one used to strange happenings in that household.

A room was made ready for the girl—she herself assisting—and ten minutes after her arrival she was comfortably settled in her new quarters.

Mr. Baxter had shown himself strangely anxious about her comfort, and she thanked him heartily before retiring. “You have been very good to me,” she said meekly—a dancing light in her eyes belied meekness; “you have helped me far more than I could have expected. I hope you will never see cause to regret your kindness.”

“Never, my dear,” said Mr. Baxter, heartily, “never, I feel certain. You may make your mind quite easy on that point.”

It warmed his heart with delight to think he had rescued this simple-minded little girl from the insulting attentions of a scoundrel like young Armitage. Already his thoughts were busy with her future care and happiness.

He walked up and down his own room half a dozen times in unwonted agitation after she had left him, with a bewitching smile of simple gratitude that went straight to his heart.

“Poor little girl!” he said, as he filled himself a modest whisky-and-soda and lit a cigar, “she must have had a hard time of it. I daresay she has known happier days. She looks clever and well bred. ‘Pon my soul I wouldn’t mind—”

The sentence never got finished. He pulled himself together with a jerk. “This won’t do; I’m growing sentimental in my old age. I had best confine my attentions to my dear friend Armitage. I’ve got him safe enough now, anyway.”

He dipped his hand in the right-hand pocket of his dining-jacket, groped foolishly with his fingers for a moment, before the truth came to him—the pack of cards he had put there was gone.

For once the man was shaken out of his habitual calm. He searched his left pocket, his breast pocket, and the pockets of his light overcoat, that lay on a chair beside him, but all the time he knew it was labour in vain, for he knew it was into the right-hand pocket of his dinner-jacket he had dropped the cards.

They had been taken; stolen. Who had taken them? Was it that cunning dog Armitage, or his girl? Surely it was not the sedate, old-fashioned dowager, Mrs. Pye? They none of them had got a chance. Who could it be?” Oh!” That sudden thought was the nastiest pang of all—no, not that surely? That artless little girl was incapable of such trickery and treachery. Her face was an affidavit of innocence. But suspicion insisted. She had the best—indeed the only—chance of stealing the cards if so disposed, and undoubtedly the cards were gone.

He rang the bell sharply and his housekeeper appeared. “Will you kindly tell the young girl I would like to have a word with her, if she doesn’t mind?”

“She is gone to bed, sir,” the housekeeper answered at once. “I heard her shoot both bolts of her door a good ten minutes ago. She’ll be in bed by this time, but I’ll call her up if you wish it.”

“No thank you,” Mrs. Howard, he answered, always considerate, “tomorrow will do very well.”

When the housekeeper left him he relapsed into his customary easy-going philosophy. “There is nothing more to be done anyway tonight,” he thought. “I don’t believe, and I won’t believe, without clear proof, that little girl tricked me. But I’m not going to puzzle any more about it now and spoil my night’s rest. Good-night, Mr. Armitage, I’ll meet you and your case tomorrow morning at seven.”

Thereupon he forcibly thrust all troublesome and unwelcome thoughts from his mind, as he might have thrust an unwelcome visitor from his rooms, and five minutes after his head touched his pillow he was buried in a dreamless sleep.

He rose early next morning and dressed, as was his habit, quickly. Yet when he got to the breakfast-room he found a visitor before him, seated at a small table at the window, her back to the door.

Something about the figure seemed familiar, but before he had time to wonder she rose and faced him. It was the pretty, bashful, sobbing parlourmaid of the night before—herself, yet not herself. This girl was daintily and even richly dressed, and showed the quiet self-possession of a lady. She answered his amazement with a beaming smile and introduced herself.

“Mr. Beck, I presume. I am Miss Dora Myrl. I can hardly flatter myself you have heard of me before?”

With the name came illumination. A gleam of light shone through the memory of Mr. Beck, lighting up a score of incidents with a new meaning.

To her utter amazement he laughed out goodhumouredly, “So it was you all the time. *I am a fool*. I’ll have my brains taken out and cooked in a pie-dish. Beg pardon, Miss Myrl. Of course I have heard of you before, and am delighted to have the privilege of making your personal acquaintance.”

She was dumbfounded for a moment. She had expected anger, rough language, reproaches. It was delightful to be taken in this spirit. Now she could play the pretty little comedy out to the close. She smiled more bewitchingly than ever. “I have been busy already on your account, Mr. Beck,” she said.

He looked where she pointed to the table and saw the missing pack of cards. He did not need now to be told how they got there.

“I noticed last night,” she said, “when Mr. Armitage was dealing, that the cards were very sticky. After you were kind enough to let me have the pack, during that drive in the cab, I examined them and found they were thinly coated with wax that took the thumb and finger marks of the dealer. By the way, I noticed something of the same kind on that interesting little table of yours. You really ought to be more careful, Mr. Beck, how you keep your furniture. However, I have wiped the cards quite clean. You will have no difficulty in dealing them now.”

She offered him the polished pack demurely.

He took them with a bow and a smile. “Miss Myrl, you’re a wonder,” was his irrelevant comment. There was genuine admiration in his voice, unmixed with the faintest taint of annoyance.

Her whole manner changed suddenly. The pose relaxed, the formality melted and vanished. “You don’t mean it, Mr. Beck? You are not vexed at the way I tricked you and played on your goodnature?”

“Vexed!” he exclaimed heartily. “Why should I be? I’d have done the same thing by you if I were bright enough. All’s fair in love and war.”

The light danced in her eyes. “Which is it?” she asked audaciously.

He winced at this—the imperturbable Mr. Beck. “Don’t chaff, Miss Myrl. As you are strong be merciful; have pity on a fallen foe. You have whipped me all along the line, and I never guessed who was at the other end. That signed photo, of course?”

“Oh, yes, of course, I took it.”

“And the cypher letters also? Of course it was you that kept young dunderhead’s neck out of the trap—and the magic table, and the cards. You’ve won every trick of the game—a regular grand slam, by Jove!”

Somehow his good humour frightened her. He confessed defeat but he talked like a winner.

“Still, you don’t give in?” she said.

“Well, no,” he answered slowly, “I don’t. I’ll try another deal, if you don’t mind. Luck will tell in the long run against the best play, and I’m lucky.”

“Then good-bye, Mr. Beck. Will you have my bag sent on to Miss Lee’s? I’m very glad you don’t bear malice.”

He took the hand she gave him so frankly and held it.

“No, no, Miss Myrl, you don’t escape so easily,” he said, leading her across the room to the breakfast-table, already laid with dainty china and silver, for Mr. Beck was a man of fine taste who loved comfort. “You owe me something for all the tricks you’ve played on my stupidity. Sit down and pour out a lonely old bachelor’s tea for him.”

Nothing loth, Dora complied, laid aside hat and boa, smoothed her hair at the mirror over the mantelpiece, and took her place sedately opposite the Queen Anne teapot.

“Sugar, Mr. Beck?—one lump, yes; much cream?” Never was there a more tantalising apparition at a bachelor’s breakfast-table. If she had been a wife of six months’ standing she could not have been more at her ease.

Mr. Beck thought he had never tasted such delicious tea. He was a hearty breakfast eater, and Dora, too, did ample justice to the good things provided, and the two talked like old friends.

“Mind this is only a truce between us two,” she said, “not a peace. We start as enemies again when breakfast is over, and I’ll trick you again if I’m able.”

“It’s an honour,” he said gallantly, “to be conquered by such a foe.”

“While we are friends, Mr. Beck, will you tell me why you are so keen to run poor Mr. Armitage into prison? I have heard that Mr. Paul Beck only caught real criminals.”

“Armitage is all that,” said Mr. Beck, shortly. “Let me help you to a devilled kidney, Miss Myrl; I can recommend it. He’s a forger and a swindler— at least that’s my present opinion, and I don’t think one whit the better of a forger and a

swindler because he happens to be young and good-looking. Question for question. Why are you so keen to save him?"

Dora hesitated for one moment. She thought of throwing herself on Mr. Beck's mercy and telling him the whole truth. But she daren't risk it. "For my friend's sake," she said at last.

He noticed the hesitation and misconstrued it.

"May I ask an injudicious question?"

"No question is injudicious, Mr. Beck, though the answer may be."

"Well, I should like to know—that is, if you like to tell me—is Miss Lee engaged to Mr. Armitage?"

Again there was a slight hesitation.

"Well, yes," she answered, "in a kind of way they are supposed to be engaged. But there is nothing definitely settled."

She meant to delicately hint that his persistent man-hunt spoiled the happiness of those young people. But, misled by a vague jealousy of Armitage, Beck read her meaning all awry. "The scamp is playing with the two girls," he thought; "it is wonderful how good women so often contrive to fall in love with bad men. Plainly they are both fond of him."

"Have you known this Armitage long, Miss Myrl?" he asked.

Love, that makes men blind, makes women keen-sighted. With a glow of delight Dora realised that Mr. Beck—the stolid, imperturbable Mr. Beck—was jealous of Armitage.

"He is an old friend, and a very dear one," she answered wickedly, in a voice that gave a deeper meaning to her words. "If," she added softly, "I were to beg him off for my sake, Mr. Beck, what would you do?"

"I would do a good deal for your sake, Miss Myrl, believe me."

"Not that?"

“But not that—for your sake.”

“Then we must fight it out to a finish. Well, good-bye, Mr. Beck, and thanks. The truce is over. You can be as nice as a friend as you are dangerous as an enemy. I should like to be friends with you.”

“We may be friends again when our fight is finished.” There was an almost tender appeal in his voice.

“Oh, yes, certainly, if I win. Good-bye again.” She shook his hand and was gone from the room like a vanishing sunbeam.

It seemed to Mr. Beck the room was colder and darker by her absence. Her last words, “If I win,” chilled him. He dropped listlessly into the chair from which she had just risen. “She will never forgive me,” he thought, “if I bring this scamp to book. Women are like that; they can’t bear failure. I have half a mind—” Then his brows came together in a frown and his lips tightened. “No,” he said decidedly, “friend Armitage will be safer in prison. She shan’t marry that scamp anyway; I’ll save her from herself, even if she hates me for saving her.”

Chapter XVIII

Plotting

At afternoon tea the same day Dora told her friends the story of Mr. Beck's impromptu hospitality the night before, and of the *te-te-te* breakfast in the morning. Norma Lee was indignant with the detective.

"I could not have believed it of that goodhumoured, pleasant-mannered Mr. Baxter. A contemptible spy all the time; and he was so nice and fatherly to me too, while he was striving to trap Phil."

Dora was surprised to find she was so angered by this little speech. The word "fatherly" particularly rasped her. She closed her lips tight and held her peace. But when Armitage broke in, "I think myself it was playing the game rather low down," she could not stand it any longer.

"I don't think so at all," she retorted with a spirit that surprised them both; "all's fair in love and war. It was a stratagem of war; I'd have done the same in his place. Remember Mr. Beck was just hunting down a criminal. You need not look so indignant, Norma, I speak from Mr. Beck's point of view. That's all he knows about Mr. Armitage, that he forged a telegraph message for money. It's not a game with him, but a duty to catch his man."

"Well, thanks to you, darling, he didn't catch him," said Norma, placably. "You needn't blaze up like that, Dora. I didn't mean to say anything disrespectful of detectives. I know who is the cleverest detective in the whole world."

"So do I," said Dora, despondently, "but I'm sorry to say it's not Dora Myrl, my dear."

"All's well that ends well," chimed in Armitage. "How can I thank you? I never suspected old Baxter. Miss Myrl, you have saved me in spite of my own stupidity."

"So far," corrected Dora.

"So far and always. I fancy our friend, Mr. Baxter, has had about enough of it."

He must feel he has cut a contemptible—well, at any rate a ridiculous figure in the business. I'd lay a wager we hear no more of him."

"You'd lose your wager. You don't know Mr. Beck."

"You seem to know him very well on a short acquaintance, Dora," interposed Norma with a shrewd glance at her friend, which, in spite of herself, brought the colour flaming to her cheeks.

"I know him by reputation," she returned shortly, "and I fear him."

Armitage was so far right in his conjecture that Mr. Baxter visited him no more. The shadow of the fear in which he had lived for some months lightened. He believed he was safe from pursuit, and Norma rejoiced, as she confided to her friend Dora, to find him "coming back to his old self," which, being interpreted, meant that his lovemaking was fervent and unrestrained. They were always together now and there were whispers of an approaching wedding. Both were very grateful to Dora and tried to share with her their own high spirits and happiness. But she, usually the gayest of the gay, was downhearted and despondent, and not to be cheered by the innocent frivolities of love. Indeed, lovemaking is hardly ever an enlivening spectacle for an outsider.

Dora had at this time three offers of very interesting cases and refused them all. She had still a strong presentiment that the danger to her friend and her friend's lover was not yet over.

Meanwhile, by a curious coincidence, Mr. Beck was also very low-spirited and despondent. He took a fortnight's rest and holiday at a lovely Irish watering-place. He returned more low-spirited than he went, eager for work and victory.

"So the little girl made good," said Mr. Lamman. "I know her well. Pretty little woman, Dora Myrl, cute and lively as they make them, and not over particular."

This comment was apparently not to Mr. Beck's liking. He helped himself freely to sweetbread and mushroom, and drank half a cup of fragrant coffee before replying. "Miss Myrl is one of the most charming young ladies I have ever had the happiness to meet, and as clever as charming."

"Oh, ho!" cried Lamman, with boisterous humour, "has the divine Dora captivated you too? Have a care, old man. Solomon was a wise man, and

Samson was a strong one, but a woman got the better of both of them.”

“Miss Myrl certainly got the better of me,” confessed Mr. Beck, good humouredly.

“You are not going to give in?” queried Lamman. A fierce eagerness underlay his joviality. Mr. Beck was curiously reminded of Irving’s Shylock when he claimed his pound of flesh. The man was horribly in earnest. The detective thought he would cut the heart out of Armitage if he had the chance.

“You don’t mean to give in?” queried Lamman again.

“No,” replied Mr. Beck, quietly, “I never give in.”

The quiet voice was more effective and encouraging than any braggadocio. Lamman chuckled savagely, as if his enemy were already in his power.

They had breakfasted together and alone in Mr. Lamman’s cosy den in his great house in Park Lane, and Mr. Beck had frankly related to his employer the story of his repeated discomfiture by Dora, extenuating nothing of his defeat.

“I must try a new trick,” he said, “that’s why I came to you to-day, Lamman. You can help.”

“If I can, I will; you may take your oath on that.”

“That boom in Marconis—who was the chief bull?”

“I meant to be, but Armitage—curse him—with his forged cable made me a bear instead.”

“Who _was _the chief bull? To whom did Armitage cable to buy? We may surely tell that from who bought.”

“Thornton & Son were the chief buyers. Old Thorney they call him in Wall Street.”

“Thornton & Son! The son may be the man I want. You must get me his photo from the other side and any news about him that is procurable.”

“Why, certainly; there is no trouble about that. I’ll cable to-day. I ought to have what you want in about a week’s time.”

This last shot of Mr. Beck’s hit the bull’s-eye. When he called at Lamman’s office eight days later, in response to a telephone message, he found him strangely excited and exultant.

“It is his fetch—his double,” Lamman cried the moment the door had closed behind Mr. Beck and that careful person had turned the key in the lock. “You have nailed him this time, old man.”

“Steady, cavalry,” said Mr. Beck, soothingly. “I gather you have got young Thornton’s photo?”

“Here it is. If it weren’t for the New York name at the back I’d swear it was Armitage. I’ve got full information besides. Young Thornton, it seems, had a row with his governor, some nonsense about a typist. He has married her since. He was away for nearly a year, my correspondent cannot say where. But I guess we can. The story fits the facts like a kid glove. We have got our proofs at last; the young forger is clean cornered.”

“Is he?” asked Mr. Beck.

The quiet question cooled Mr. Lamman’s enthusiasm as suddenly as a splash of cold water when a pot is boiling over. But he made an effort to seem confident.

“Why, certainly,” he said. “The case is clear enough.”

“It was always clear enough,” said Mr. Beck; “you have heard nothing from America that I did not know before, except the real name and address of this double of Armitage’s. It is evidence we wanted, and it is evidence we want still, that Armitage was ever that telegraph clerk Littledale. We haven’t got evidence enough to hang a dog.”

“I don’t see what stronger evidence we can get.”

“Luckily I do. What’s more, I think I see how to get it. Before we trap our bird we must have the cage ready to keep him. We must get young Thornton over to prove our case.”

“But he is plainly a pal of Armitage’s.”

“So much the better for us.”

“And he is in New York.”

“Well, we must get him across to England. The plan is simple enough, and it should work out all right. We ought to be able to get Thornton across by means of a cypher telegram from his friend Armitage. These Yankees think as little of crossing the ocean as you or I do of crossing the street.

Thornton will have no Dora Myrl at his elbow to caution him. Once over, as a friend of Armitage’s—and I fancy I can play that part all right—I’ll coax the facts from him.”

“Will he come?” asked Lamman, doubtfully.

“He’ll come jumping. It’s plain, as you said just now, he and Armitage are pals. I’m not afraid about his coming.”

“What else is there to be afraid of?”

“Miss Dora Myrl.”

Lamman laughed boisterously. “Egad, Beck, you have got Dora Myrl on the brain. If you weren’t such a steady-going customer I’d fancy you were in love. How can Dora help them or hinder us on the other side of the Atlantic?”

“If you will figure it out for yourself you will soon see how. I read a very clever book when I was a boy called, _Put Yourself in his Place. _That’s what a detective always has got to do. Say that we time our cable so as to give our friend Thornton just time to catch the boat, what is he likely to do?”

“Catch it—if you are right about him.”

“I take that as a matter of course. But what next?”

“Cross over. He can’t help himself if he goes on board.”

“Ay, but before he crosses over that smart, up-to-date New Yorker is pretty

certain to cable to his friend Armitage that he is coming. Armitage will show the cable to Dora Myrl first thing.”

“Dora Myrl again,” murmured Lamman under his breath.

“What will she do?” went on Mr. Beck, imperturbably.

“I give it up; I’m not a prophet. How can anyone tell beforehand what she will do?”

“I fancy I can. She will guess our game at once and do the best thing that can be done to spoil it. When Thornton comes between easy range of Marconi she will let him know he has been tricked, and direct him to get out at Queenstown and wait a messenger from Armitage. That’s what I’ve got to meet. The trouble is that she is just as likely to place the cards I hold as I am to place hers. However, the sooner we start the game the better. I’ll send the cable to Thornton tomorrow, giving him just time to catch the _Celtic.“_

Chapter XIX

Counter Plotting

Armitage laughed when he read the cable in that familiar cypher. It was dated from the _Celtic _and was very short :

“Am coming, of course, straight on to Savoy, London. Watch boat. Look me up on arrival.— THORNTON.”

“It’s just a little bit too thin,” he thought, “to try the same bait twice. Forewarned is forearmed. Paul Beck cannot be so smart as Dora thinks him or he would have found some new dodge. They don’t catch me looking up bogus Thorntons at the Savoy.”

He tore the cable in two and was about to toss it into the fire when he changed his mind.

“It will amuse the girls,” he thought. “If Lamman, Beck & Co. can do no better than that there isn’t much fear. This seems about their last trick.”

So he put the cablegram under his plate and finished his breakfast contentedly. Then he smoked his cigar in the same mood of pleasurable anticipation.

More and more the conviction grew upon him that he was safe at last. He had never quite realised how strong had been the harassing, hunted feeling till he escaped from it. As he watched the blue wreaths of smoke curl and dissolve in the thin air his heart glowed with the joys of the future. Never was his love more eager, never more insistent. His imagination warmed to its work. He had visions of his honeymoon in Italy with Norma all his own for ever. They had planned together the places they would visit, the things they would do. He had been there before, and now his heart glowed at the thoughts of revisiting these scenes with his bride and of sharing his rapture with her.

Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Venice, Florence, Milan, the glorious altitude of the Alps, the blue waters and wooded shores of the lakes—they should share those delights and double them by sharing together. “Together,” that word was the keynote of the harmony. Norma his own, his very own, in the close, sweet

intimacy of wedded life. The rapturous thought quite mastered him. He could not sit still. He tossed his cigar half smoked into the grate and paced the room restlessly, his heart and brain on fire with vivid visions of love.

After a little he sobered down with the afterglow of content still warm in his soul, and settled to steady work on the plans of his electric aeroplane that was to make his fame and fortune. From time to time, as he came to a knotty point, he missed the helpful suggestions of his late friend Mr. Baxter, and with grim amusement caught himself wishing that genial gentleman back again.

At four o'clock Armitage was engaged at afternoon tea with his girl, and was punctual with a lover's punctuality—half an hour before his time.

She was alone, for Dora Myrl was judicious and considerate. He showed her the cablegram, and they talked over it and laughed at it and enjoyed themselves generally as lovers have done and will do to the end of time, oblivious of the outside world.

They had only begun their love talk, though they had been an hour at it, when Dora Myrl came upon the scene, neat, alert, self-possessed as ever.

"Sorry to disturb you young people," she said with impudent patronage, "but I'm simply famished for my tea. Thanks, dear"—to Norma—"plenty of cream, please. Mr. Armitage, you look absurdly and preposterously happy this morning. Even love cannot account for it. Have you heard that our esteemed friend, Mr. Abraham Lamman, has been killed in a motor accident?"

"Not quite that," he answered laughingly. "But I don't think I need trouble my head any longer about him. Both he and your illustrious Paul Beck seem pretty well played out."

"My Paul Beck! Why do you say my Paul Beck?": _What do you mean, Mr. Armitage?"

"Don't bite my head off, please, I mean no harm. He is yours by right of conquest, Miss Myrl. You have had some sharp bouts over my prostrate body and you beat him every time. Indeed, I can never tell you how grateful I am," he added with a sudden earnestness.

"And I, darling," whispered Norma, squeezing her friend's hand in both of hers.

“You will be glad, as we are, to know that the game is pretty well played out, Miss Myrl,” Armitage went on.

“But why do you say that? How do you know it?”

“They have to fall back on their old tricks. You remember the letter which would have landed me if you hadn’t come between? Well, I’ve got a facsimile of it this morning. The same old wheeze. I’m to go meet Thornton at the Savoy. He is coming over from New York on purpose. Rather a poor performance for Beck’s master mind, Miss Myrl. What do you think?”

He smiled mockingly. Dora’s frank fear of Beck had always amused him. No man likes a pretty and clever girl to think another man so much cleverer than himself.

But there was no answering smile on Dora Myrl’s face.

“Have you got the cablegram, Mr. Armitage? Thank you. Please “—she lifted a deprecating finger, for he was about to speak—“just for a moment. Let me read it quietly.”

She read, not once but three times, and her face grew grave at each reading.

“Why, Dora, what’s the matter?” cried Norma. “You look as if you had just heard of the death of a friend.”

“Sorry for Paul Beck?” queried Armitage, still smiling. “It’s rather a come-down for the omniscient and omnipotent detective.”

“I’m sorry for you, Mr. Armitage,” retorted Dora, sharply; “sorry you have a man like Mr. Beck on your track.” Then, in a gentler voice, “This,” tapping the paper with her finger, “is very serious.”

“Oh, Dora,” cried Norma, quick to catch the infection of fear, “I thought the danger was all over.”

“I may be dull, Miss Myrl,” said Armitage, still complacent, “but I confess I don’t see where the seriousness comes in. You don’t suppose I’m going to accept this kind invitation, ‘Will you walk into my parlour said the spider to the fly ‘?’”

“You think that Mr. Beck or Mr. Lamman sent you that cablegram?” asked Dora, with a touch of impatience in her voice. “Why?”

“Why did they send the cypher letter before?”

“Oh, cannot you see that was quite different? Then they hoped to take you unawares when you met them. They could not hope to do this now, even if they were fools enough to try a stale trick that you had already detected.”

“That *you* had already detected,” he interposed.

“What does that matter?” she went on, still impatiently. “They knew that the trick was detected, and you should know enough by this time, Mr. Armitage, to know at least that Mr. Beck is no fool.”

“Then what do *you* think of the cablegram?”

“I must think it out,” she answered slowly. “I have a feeling it means danger. It is clear they have got one step further. You remember to the first cypher telegram you got there was no signature. Mr. Thornton’s name is to this. I don’t like it.”

“But—” Armitage began again.

“Give me a minute or two,” she pleaded. “I think I see light.”

Her impatience had passed. She was bringing her whole mind to bear on the puzzle, as a student strains his eyes to read small print.

Phil Armitage and his *fiance* sat silent for a long minute watching her face. With half-closed eyes and knitted brows and fingers tightly interlaced Dora wrestled with the problem.

“I think I have it,” she said at last, the tension suddenly relaxing. “How does this strike you, Mr. Armitage, and you, Norma? I always like, if I can, to test my thoughts. In the first place, I put aside the notion that the cablegram is meant to bring you to meet them. They must know that trick could not succeed; it would serve no purpose if it did. Then how does Thornton’s name come at the foot of the message? I believe he put it there himself. I believe the message is perfectly genuine.”

“Then everything is perfectly right,” said Armitage, much relieved. “I can trust Thornton as I’d trust my own right hand. But what the devil is bringing him to London?”

“That’s the real question. I fancy I have found the answer to that too. Mr. Beck and Mr. Lamman are bringing him to London. They have found his name and address, very likely they have got his photo. It was a simple task for Paul Beck. He would ask himself who profited most by the Marconi coup. Of course they have cabled him in your name, as they telegraphed you in his name, and urged him to come across to meet you. If you read the message again you will find it is plainly meant as an answer to a message from you.”

“But why should they want him to cable me to give the whole show away?”

“They didn’t. Of course they didn’t. That was the weak part of their plan. He was bound to send you a message, and they could do nothing to prevent it. Now, let us see how we stand. If I have read the riddle right Cyril Thornton is crossing in the *Celtic* in response to a message, as he thinks, from you. Paul Beck, who has got his photo, means to meet him as he steps ashore at Liverpool with a plausible story that he is a friend sent by you. He will first worm the whole truth out of him, and then hold him as a witness for the prosecution. Well, Mr. Armitage, what do you think of my guess?”

“It seems horribly plausible. I have no doubt you are right, Miss Myrl. What a silly I have been!”

“Oh, Dora, this is terrible! and we were so happy only a moment ago. We were laughing at the message. We thought the danger was past; now it is back again worse than ever. Have you no plan, darling, to circumvent that horrid Mr. Beck?”

“Horrid Mr. Lamman, if you like, Norma, but remember always Mr. Beck is only trying to catch a criminal.”

“Phil a criminal! Dora, I’m ashamed of you.”

“Well, Mr. Beck thinks him a criminal.”

“Then Mr. Beck is a fool.”

“It would be well for you and Mr. Armitage if he were, but he’s not. Don’t let us wrangle over Mr. Beck. We have got to circumvent him if we can. I have thought of a plan that may work.”

“Oh, I’m sure it will work.”

“I’m not so sure, but we must do the best we can and trust to Providence. In three or four days, Mr. Armitage, your friend will be in reach of a wireless message. You must tell him to get out at Queenstown instead of at Liverpool, and that you will have an agent to meet him with full credentials and letters.”

“But why not meet him myself? Who can I get as agent?”

“Dora, of course,” broke in her friend. “You are too foolish for words, Phil. Dora will manage the whole business.”

“I don’t think it would be safe for you to go yourself,” explained Dora. “They will probably have you shadowed, and you are not used to disguises. If you can trust me—”

“Of course we can trust you, but—”

“Dora, you are our guardian angel,” whispered Norma.

“I don’t believe a guardian angel ever before fell in for so tough a job,” said Armitage. “A journey to Ireland and back again is taxing your kindness too far, Miss Myrl. Besides, there may be danger. Those scoundrels will stop at nothing.”

For an instant Dora’s eyes flashed angrily, but she held herself in. “There is only one scoundrel in the business,” she said quietly, “and he’s not in command. As I told you more than once, I know something of Mr. Beck, and you know nothing. He has been called the Don Quixote of detectives. He has never yet been known to be rude to a woman. So we’ll consider that settled, if you think my plan good enough.”

“Good!” cried Armitage. “I should rather say so. I don’t see how it can fail.”

But Norma glanced anxiously at her friend’s grave face. “You don’t think we can fail, Dora?” she said

“I’m not sure; I’m afraid of Paul Beck.”

Chapter XX

An Encounter

It was a prim, natty little old maid, with spectacles and a false front—not too obvious—that took a first-class return ticket from Euston to Queenstown, and with many injunctions confided her Gladstone bag to the porter.

“I will take it with me in the carriage,” she said with a faint nasal twang in her voice; “you railway people are always losing things. First-class, please; thank you,” and she planted a sixpence neatly in his broad palm. The little old maid was plainly used to travel. She had come a good half-hour too soon for her train, and made herself quite cosy in the corner of her carriage with rug and air cushion. She took a neatly-bound Indian paper copy of *The Newcomes* from a small handbag which, with her Gladstone, was her only baggage, and settled herself comfortably for a read.

It was a perfect disguise. Dora had tried it on both Armitage and Norma, and it had completely baffled them both. They had each in turn chatted for ten minutes to the little old maid who had called about a subscription for an American cats’ home without the smallest notion of whom they spoke to.

Yet even now she was not quite confident. She had never in her life taken such trouble about a disguise, never felt so satisfied with the artistic result; yet she still feared one shrewd pair of eyes.

The platform began to fill with hurrying passengers. She had chosen the carriage furthest from the engine, so the crowd had to pass in review before her, and though she seemed wholly absorbed in her book no single passenger escaped the scrutiny of those watchful eyes behind the plain glasses of her spectacles.

There were many people she knew. The Chief Secretary for Ireland, returning to his delightful lodge in the Phoenix Park, passed up along the platform with his private secretary and nodded in passing to Mr. Donnelly—a well-known and popular member of Parliament for a division in the south of Ireland. There were several sporting men and a sprinkling of tourists—unmistakable. Dora saw, with some amusement, a pickpocket of her acquaintance and a leader in his profession pass slowly along the platform, a handsome, well-set-up aristocrat,

perfectly groomed, whom the obsequious porters plainly mistook for a nobleman. She guessed he was on his way to an Irish racecourse, and regretted that more urgent business spoiled her chance of improving his acquaintance.

With much banging of doors and shouting of guards the passengers settled into their seats. Dora had three women only in her compartment. As the train stole quietly past the long, deserted platform she settled down to the quiet enjoyment of her book, for she had made quite certain that Mr. Paul Beck was not her fellow-passenger.

It was something, at least, that she was not shadowed at the start. It seemed to show that the astute Mr. Beck had not anticipated her plan of campaign.

Leaving nothing to chance she had started a day too soon. Her plan was to rest in Dublin that day, go down next night by the night mail to Queenstown and get on board the *Celtic*, that was timed to arrive the following morning.

It was a pleasant journey for Dora, who loved fast travelling. She never concealed her belief that a first-class railway carriage was better than the most up-to-date motor—quicker and more comfortable, no dust and almost no danger. She used to outrage the motor maniacs of her acquaintance by her contempt for their favourite pastime of rushing nowhere and back again at the rate of forty miles an hour in a whirlwind of dust, pursued by the curses of all whom they encountered or overpassed on the road. A motor is convenient, she would confess, when you are in a hurry and there is no train. But as an amusement—

She was never let finish that sentence; the contempt in her voice was too provocative.

Now her spirits rose with the swift motion of the train through the glimpses of green fields fenced with bushy hedgerows, whose quiet, rural beauty even the blatant advertisement of somebody's pills could not wholly degrade.

Her luncheon basket was perfect with many "cute" novelties, which suggested the Yankee, for when Dora played a part she entered completely into the character. She neglected not the slightest detail, like the conscientious actor who blacked himself all over to play Othello.

There was cold chicken and tongue, and tart and fruit, and a bottle of still Moselle, and a dainty glass to drink from, and a variety of delicious candies. The

instinct of the gipsy was in the girl's blood, for she dearly loved a picnic, whether in the woods, by the riverside or the seashore, or even in a train or on a boat. She had many brisk controversies with her friend Norma, who abominated a scramble, and loved, she confessed, to sit down on a comfortable chair and at a well-appointed table.

By the time Dora had finished her lunch and shared her candies with her fellow-passengers they were all good friends. The carriage was as comfortable and social as a drawing-room. Dora practised her American accent on the company and was pleased to find they frankly accepted her as a Yankee.

She made tea for the party in a cunning contrivance stored in a special compartment of her lunch basket, and so thawed their British standoffishness that she received a cordial invitation from one lady to visit her in London, and heard another, who got out at Chester, gush to her husband about the charm of American women when you meet the right kind.

On board the boat she had further testimony to the merit of her make-up and acting. She almost ran against the Irish member, Mr. Donnelly, whom she had met in the House and liked, but who failed in the very smallest degree to recognise her. Mr. Donnelly apologised goodnaturedly to her for his awkwardness, and by way of reparation politely carried a comfortable deck chair to where she stood by the railings on deck. He planted himself beside her and drifted into conversation. It was plain he, too, accepted her as American. It seemed that he had been twice across the Atlantic, and he discoursed fluently, in his mellifluous Irish brogue, of his impressions of the people and institutions of that wonderful country, but always with deference to the superior knowledge of the native and with a courteous willingness to listen as well as talk. Presently she contrived to start him on his own country and was delighted at the mingled shrewdness and humour of his discourse. Indeed, she was quite charmed with the lively Irishisms of Mr. Donnelly, M.P., and was well pleased when he told her that he, too, was on his way to visit Queenstown to meet his constituents, and that they would be down by the same train the next evening.

Dora found Dublin much to her taste. Her room at the Shelbourne Hotel looked out across the lovely landscape garden of St. Stephen's Green, with the blue rim of the Dublin mountains showing over the ridge of the distant houses. There was a cheery goodnature about the place. The attendants seemed as if it were a genuine pleasure to them to oblige, and there was a kindly readiness to make

friends on the part of her fellow-guests, which was in pleasant contrast with the formal comfort and cold civility of the best hotels on the other side of the Channel.

The day was spent in sightseeing in the pleasant, easy-going Irish capital. She drove on an outside car through the renowned Phoenix Park—the largest and finest park in the three kingdoms—climbed to the top of Nelson’s Pillar, and had a glimpse of the silver sheen of Dublin Bay beyond the wilderness of towers, domes and turrets that crowded the blue sky, for Dublin is a city of many churches. She saw the old cathedrals of Christ Church and St. Patrick, which were restored at the cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds by a famous Irish distiller, and of a still more famous Irish brewer, whose family was rewarded for their religious devotions, even in this life, not to speak of the next, by a double-barrelled peerage. The House of Parliament, the temple of Irish liberty, now thronged with the money-changers of the Bank of Ireland, interested her immensely, and in the library of old Trinity College she marvelled, as all who look must marvel, at the famous Book of Kells, with its miraculous traceries and illuminations in gold and colours, brilliant and varied as a flower-garden in full bloom.

In her brief scramble through the city and familiar chats with the natives she had, in the language of the Prime Minister, “found salvation,” like St. Paul, suddenly, and she was a convinced Home Ruler, in love with Ireland and things Irish, when she parted with an interchange of coin and blessing, with her goodhumoured “jarvey” at Kingsbridge Station.

It was on this account all the pleasanter to meet her newly-found friend, Mr. Donnelly, M.P., on the platform, and have his companionship for the long tedious night’s journey to Queenstown.

They had a carriage to themselves by the contrivance of the genial and popular member, whom porter and guard treated with a kind of respectful familiarity. Dora found him the pleasantest man she had ever encountered—with a single exception—and the exception was the man she least desired to meet. Her newly-awakened interest in Ireland gave a zest to his talk of the “old country,” with which he was so familiar. Plainly he loved his own people. Many stories he had to tell of the present day and of the good old times, and he told them, in his mellifluous southern brogue, with the quaint mingling of humour and pathos which is so characteristic of the Celt.

So the time went by pleasantly and Dora brewed a cup of pure China tea with her cunning Yankee lamp and kettle, and the two thoroughly enjoyed the simple meal while they chatted—Yankee and Irish, who had only met the day before—like old friends.

Presently the girl's quick eyes behind their plain glass spectacles noticed that the man was getting drowsy, and told him so with American frankness.

As frankly he owned the soft impeachment.

"I played a small game of spoil five with the boys last night," he confessed, "and the hours were smaller than the stakes when we gave up. I couldn't leave before, for I had been winning all night and they wanted their revenge. Twenty minutes' snooze, if you don't mind, and I'll wake up as bright as a button."

She didn't mind in the least; on the contrary, she insisted and lent him her air cushion and showed him how to fix it in the corner of the carriage. "I can read," she said, "I have an interesting book in my pocket."

"And I can help you in that same," he replied goodnaturedly, "for I have a lamp in my bag." He got his kit bag from the rack, opened its bellows mouth and rummaged out an electric hand lamp with hooks to catch the cushions of the carriage.

"I travel so much," he explained, "and I'm a bit of a reader myself, in a kind of way. Will you allow me?"

He proceeded to fix the lamp on the cushion behind her. But somehow he fumbled at his task and their hands touched as her defter woman's fingers helped to get the hooks in their place. The light from the lamp, when it was in its place, fell full and clear on the printed page of her book. She smiled her thanks to Mr. Donnelly, who looked up smiling from fastening the straps of his kit bag.

All of a sudden it struck her that he was very like someone she knew. She racked her brain for a moment. Then it came to her like a flash. That pleasant smile showing a line of even white teeth, the shape of the head, the twinkle in the clear blue eyes. He is like— Good heavens! He is Paul Beck!

Almost instinctively she raised her book to hide her face, for she felt herself go white with the shock of that paralyzing conviction. Her first quick fear was for

the handbag which held her letters and credentials. Thank goodness, it was there safe by her side. She slipped the leather handle quietly over her wrist and tested the fastening. It was still locked, and she gasped a breathless prayer of gratitude at the thought of that danger escaped.

She, the sedate, self-possessed Dora, whom nothing could ruffle, was quivering with fear and excitement. The cleverness, the audacity of the man, the absolute perfection of the personation frightened her. He had taken the Irish member whom he most resembled, and he had literally assumed his personality in voice and manner, face and figure. Dora, whose business in life was to disguise herself and pry through the disguises of others, Dora, who knew both the personator and the man personated, was absolutely deceived. From behind her book she stole a glance at the innocent Mr. Donnelly sleeping placidly. Quite naturally and carelessly he had so disposed himself that an arm shaded his face from the light. There was little more to be seen than the fringe of his beard. His careless attitude would have confirmed Dora's conviction if confirmation were needed. But there was no need. She knew it was he. Thoughts and fears seemed to hum in her busy brain like the noise of a motor at full speed.

Did he know her? was the worrying question that troubled her most. At first she was quite sure he did. Plainly he was there to shadow her to Queenstown. No disguise, she felt, could escape his diabolical cleverness. Then a comforting doubt stole into her mind. What if their meeting was a mere coincidence? Dora had great faith, born of long and curious experience, in the proverbial long-armed coincidence. Mr. Beck would try and capture Thornton the instant he came within range. The same thought had struck them both. Queenstown was his first chance; it was hers. So it chanced they had come together by the same train. One thing, at least, was encouraging, her bag with letters and credentials was safe. Mr. Beck could do nothing without them. Surely if he had known her he would have guessed what the bag held and captured it on chance. More by good fortune than by good advice she was safe so far, but she trembled at the narrowness of her escape.

When Mr. Donnelly awoke from his brief slumber he found his little Yankee spinster cheery and chatty as ever. On his side the patriotic member played his part with a natural ease and skill that delighted her artistic sense in spite of her tremors. Never for one second did he outstep the modesty of nature. Even the feel of the little locked bag on her wrist could not wholly quiet her superstitious fear of the man and his methods.

There was much bustle and confusion when the Q train arrived at the Queenstown platform. Miss Penelope Putman, keeping a tight hold of her precious bag, got out on the platform but was unable to make way through the crush.

Mr. Donnelly promptly came to her assistance. Everybody there seemed to know Mr. Donnelly and to make way for him. "If you will wait here for one moment, Miss Putman," he said, "I will find you a porter and a car to take you to the hotel. The Queen's Hotel I think you said?"

She thanked him with the pleasant consciousness that her grip was firm on the handle of her bag. He bustled through the crowd, and, after a little time, returned with a porter, who took Miss Putman's bag to her car.

Still holding her handbag tight she climbed up to the high seat of the outside car by the help of Mr. Donnelly, who arranged the cushions comfortably at her back and tucked the rug cosily under her feet with unnecessary solicitude, she thought, as the hotel was close to the station.

"Now, Mike," said Mr. Donnelly, "mind you take good care of the lady."

"You may trust me for that, your honour," was the ready response. Mike cracked his whip and the car went off at a pace that took Dora's breath away.

Chapter XXI

Outwitted

The outside car rattled rapidly down one street of Queenstown and up another, turned to the right and the left, swept a short suburb, and in less than ten minutes was in the open country.

At the rate of a good twelve miles an hour they swept along a good road that stretched far ahead in the light of a full moon, which shone a white globe from a clear sky.

Dora held on like grim death to the rushing car. For just one moment she thought the man had mistaken her directions. With her free hand she plucked his sleeve, and he turned with a goodhumoured grin on his weather-beaten face, and she shaped the name of the hotel through the clamour of wheels and hoofs.

He grinned and nodded for answer and touched his little mare up to more furious speed. They flew along the road.

Dora was at once perplexed and furious. What did it mean? Robbery, murder perhaps. She had heard terrible stories of the wild Irish, and her hand slid on to the butt of the neat revolver which went with her everywhere. But the face of the driver was not the face of a robber or murderer. His goodhumoured grin and the twinkle in his light blue eyes told of a man who was playing a practical joke and enjoying it.

She was not used to outside cars and had to grip the back rail tightly to keep her seat as the little blood mare whirled them along the road and the soft wind blew a gale in her face.

They had gone a good five miles when the driver slackened his pace a little on a smooth stretch of road and leant across the car with an ingratiating smile.

“You were wishful to talk to me, my lady?”

“Where are you taking me to?” cried Dora.

“To Cork’s own town.”

“But there is a mistake, I’m not going beyond Queenstown.”

“Faix, that’s a great mistake, sure enough, but it’s your own, me lady, for it’s to Cork you’re going, the pleasantest town in all Ireland, and that’s a big word. It’s a fine night you have for the journey, glory be to God.”

Then a quick suspicion of Paul Beck shot through her. This was his doing; he knew her after all, and had sent her on this wild-goose chase. The answer to her next question was plain before the question was asked.

“Why are you taking me to Cork when I want to go to Queenstown?”

“By Mr. Donnelly’s orders no less.”

The murder was out. She was trapped, and furious. She lost her head in her anger. “That man is not Mr. Donnelly,” she cried, “he’s an impostor.”

“When you persuade me that I’m not Mike Tracy but his twin brother I’ll believe you in that, me lady. Shure I know Mr. Donnelly from a gossoon.”

“I’ll pay you double what he paid you if you will drive me straight back to Queenstown. I don’t know what he gave or promised, but I’ll give you twenty pounds here and now.”

Mike merely shrugged his shoulders disconsolately. “Ah, then, do you think it’s for the sake of the dirty lucre I’m doing what I’m doing? Sorra wan farthing did Mr. Donnelly give or promise me for the job, and sorra farthing I’d take nayther.”

“Mike,” she coaxed, “do please bring me back. I’m a stranger in the country, but I always heard Irishmen were kind to women and children. I must be in Queenstown tomorrow morning.” She whipped off her spectacles and looked into his face with pleading eyes.

“Why must you?” he asked curtly. “Answer me that. Is it to meet the American boat when she lands?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Are you a lady detective?” She hesitated for a second. It was enough for the quick-witted Irishman. “A wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse,” he said. “You’ll be better in Cork than in Queenstown tomorrow morning, I’m thinking.”

“But why?”

“That’d be telling, but maybe it could do no harm now to tell you the truth. ‘Mike,’ said Mr. Donnelly to meself a while ago at the station, ‘there’s a lady down from Dublin wants to meet the boat in the morning. She’s a detective,’ says he, ‘and there’s a man coming over, one of the boys that she has a quare welcome for. ‘Thigum thu?’”

“‘Thigum,’ says meself, ‘she’d be safer in Cork, your honour, than in Queenstown.’ With that he just nodded and winked, so to Cork you’re going, bedad, as fast as the best little mare in the country can take you there.”

He cracked his whip again and they flew. A mile or so they drove in silence through a lovely country that bared its beauties to the pure moonlight. Great trees threw black shadows across the road. In the distance a range of mountains rose, sharp outlined against the moonlit sky.

Dora, by nature and profession a shrewd judge of character, felt instinctively that this soft-spoken Irishman was not to be coaxed, corrupted or bribed.

“To Cork you are going.” The sentence was inexorable as Fate, so she held her peace.

The driver spoke first, a social soul to whom silence was torture.

“If I might make so bold,” he said, “I’m thinking it was a queer trade for a lady like yourself, miss, to take to. The peelers themselves are ashamed of it oftentimes. There’s that poor boy from America now, what did he ever do on you that id make you so mad to jail him?”

“But I don’t want to jail him, I don’t want to jail anybody. On the contrary, I want to save a man from jail, if you’d only believe me.”

“Aisy there, mam,” he interrupted. “I’m wishful to be civil and fair-spoken, and to believe every word you let out of your mouth, but I’m bound at the same time to believe Mr. Donnelly, our member, whom I knew since he was a curly-headed

gosssoon at the Christian Brothers. When he tells me wan thing, and you tell me another, what's a man to do?"

"Believe your friend, right or wrong," cried Dora, for she knew the verdict against her was inevitable.

"But you are a detective, aren't you?" he persisted.

"Have it so," said Dora, goodhumouredly. She never believed in useless or ineffective falsehood, even in the way of business, and always told the truth for preference when there seemed to be nothing to be gained by telling the other thing.

"I suppose you're not altogether to blame in that," he mused, "no more nor a bailiff nor a landlord. It's what you were brought up to, and you don't know any better. Faix, that's what I used always be saying meself to the boys in the wild old times when there was any talk of shootin' or the like. Talkin' of shootin'," he went on confidentially, "you see the hole there, miss, on the right-hand side of the car? I was bringing a landlord into Cork a couple of years back when that same took place. We were goin' slow at the time and the man that fired the shot was not five yards off from the man he fired at, but he missed him clean and clever, being more than half drunk at the time. Shure his reverence is right, it's drink is the curse of the country, ever and always."

"You don't drink yourself?" said Dora, laughing.

"An' if I didn't I wouldn't know half the harm it does. What do thim teetotallers know about it at all, at all, for all the talk they have out of them."

"There is a flask in that basket beside you," said Dora, "and you're welcome to what's in it."

He stared at her in whimsical surprise. "Bedad you're the right sort, me lady, peeler or no peeler, and better to me than what I deserve." He found the flask and poured the brandy gurgling into the silver cup.

"If you'd put it to your own lips first," he said, with queer old-fashioned courtesy, "it id taste a dale sweeter afterwards."

The comedy of the situation appealed to Dora. Here was she, kidnapped and

carried against her will across country, hobnobbing familiarly with her kidnapper. She put the silver cup to her lips and sipped a few drops and handed it back.

“Here’s luck while you live,” he cried heartily, “and glory afterwards,” and tossed the strong brown liquor down at a gulp.

Meanwhile, Dora’s spirits were rising rapidly. All was not yet lost. If they got to Cork in time she might still catch the mail train and travel back with Thornton to Dublin. Above all she had her credentials safe. Instinctively her hand tightened on the precious handbag. Beck’s clever trick would avail him nothing. Thornton had his warning. Even if she missed catching him now he would communicate with Armitage at his club, or Armitage would look him up at the Savoy and all would go well. It was the girl’s nature to make the best of things, and the moonlight drive through a wild and beautiful country and the old-world talk of the driver, were a strange experience, and as a stranger she bade it welcome.

The car no longer whirled them wildly along the road. The little mare, unstimulated by the whip, dropped into a smooth even trot on the level and climbed at a walk up the hills.

Dora feared the man’s shrewdness and dare not urge the driver to greater speed lest he should suspect her motive and thwart it.

Slowly the night merged into dawn and found them still on the road. The lamp of the moon grew dim and went out, and the rim of a red sun popped up over the line of eastern sky and flooded the hills with crimson light. Below them in the valley Dora had sight of the clustering houses and tall spires of Cork’s own city, circled by the broad bright stream of the river Lea.

Even as she looked a puff of white smoke went up from the edge of the town, another followed, and another in quick succession, till they grew into a long trail of fleecy vapour across the pale blue of the morning sky.

“There goes the boat train for Dublin,” cried the driver, pointing with his whip. His goodhumoured grin told Dora that her scheme had been seen through and thwarted even before he added, “That’s the token Mr. Donnelly gave me. ‘The lady will be time enough in Cork,’ says he, ‘when the train has gone out.’ Sony to keep you waitin’ on the road, me lady, but I’ll have you there now in three shakes of a cow’s tail.”

A loosening of the reins and a flick of the whip and the little mare went off at her old speed. Houses came out to meet them along the road, first singly, then in rows as they rattled through the suburbs into the heart of the city.

“Turner’s Hotel will be the best for you, I’m thinkin’,” said the driver. “It’s quiet and cosy for a lady, even if the Imperial is more stylish itself.”

“Wherever you choose,” said Dora, laughing. It was impossible to be angry with the man for long.

The result justified her confidence. Turner’s Hotel was quiet, clean and comfortable, and when the car-driver woke the place up with thunderous knocking that roused the whole street there was a kindly bustle of welcome.

The driver looked sheepishly at the sovereign that Dora gave him before she followed her luggage into the hotel.

“I couldn’t take it, me lady,” he said. He touched the yellow coin that lay in the hollow of his palm dubiously with a thick forefinger as if he feared it would burn him. “I couldn’t take it at all, me lady. Mr. Donnelly wanted to pay me, but I wouldn’t have it from him nayther. I was wishful to do a stroke for the cause.”

Again Dora laughed. “I had my long drive,” she said, “and it’s only right I should pay for it. It won’t hurt the cause any way.”

“Bedad you’re better nor good,” he said, as his big fist closed on the coin. “Shure another than yourself would be tearin’ mad at the trick that was played on you. But who knows but the day may come when you’ll count it the luckiest drive of your life.”

Even now the vigorous health and spirit of the girl asserted themselves. In a couple of hours she slept off the fatigue and disappointment of the long night on train and car, and came down to breakfast after a cold shower bath, glowing with health and wholesome beauty. She had gone straight to her room with the hood of her travelling cloak round her head and a veil across her face. But she left Penelope Putman in her travelling bag and came down to breakfast as Dora Myrl. It was a comfort to get back to her own personality again.

She was almost in good humour as she sat at the abundant breakfast-table, poured herself a cup of strong tea and diluted it to a golden brown with rich

cream. Sleep had brought consolation. She was healthy and hungry, and hunger is a happy sensation when the means of appeasing it are at hand and abundant.

Besides, the precious handbag lay on the table at her elbow—a talisman against despondency. So she broke the head of the freckled turkey egg and spread her toast thick with the famous butter of Cork and enjoyed herself.

She was more than half-way through her breakfast when, toying with the bag, she took a fancy to finger the precious papers.

It was a surprise to find the key wouldn't fit. That it wouldn't turn in the lock might be accounted for, but it was too big for the keyhole. There was no accounting for that. In blank amazement Dora examined the key and bag. Yes, it was the right key undoubtedly, she had none other like it on the ring; and it was the right bag, a small brown leather purse bag with brass frame and P. P. embossed in gold on the leather. There could be no mistake about that. Scarcely knowing what she did she strove to force the key into the hole that was several sizes too small for it. Then with a cold chill came the doubt that it was really her bag.

She plucked a hairpin from her hair, crooked the wire and fitted it to the keyhole. Under pressure of these skilled fingers the lock clicked in a moment and the bag flew open.

She could not keep back a cry of dismay as some folded scraps of newspapers tumbled out on the table. Hidden amongst them was a leather case. She snapped it open impatiently and found a dainty emerald brooch—a cluster of shamrocks with stalks of gold. On a scrap of paper was written, in a clear hand she knew well:

“For Miss Dora Myrl with Paul Beck's respectful regards.”

Then the whole mockery and misery of the business came to her suddenly. It was not alone that she had been outwitted and befooled, but that her friends who trusted her were ruined. Paul Beck had got the papers, he had got his witness. There was no hope. Prison for Armitage—a broken heart for Norma.

Dora was a woman unused to the melting mood, but the keen pang of that terrible disappointment was too much for her. She dropped her head upon her hands and sobbed bitterly.

A knock at the door startled her. “A gentleman to see you, miss,” the waiter announced. “Mr. Paul Beck!”

Chapter XXII

Triumphant

Mr. Donnelly, M.P., watched the outside car go off with a rush, carrying the lady detective and her fortunes to Cork and leaving his road free. Then he slung his kit bag on an outside car and bade the driver carry it to the Queen's Hotel. "I'll walk," he said; "kindly tell them I'll want a private sitting-room and bedroom."

"Yes, your honour," said the jarvey, respectfully, for Mr. Donnelly, M.P., was the most popular man in Queenstown.

Having locked the door of his bedroom Mr. Donnelly unstrapped his kit bag and took out a lady's small handbag with brass frame and the monogram P. P. embossed in gold on the brown leather. He coaxed the bag open with the smallest of a bunch of skeleton keys, and, unlike unhappy Dora Myrl, found pretty much what he expected to find.

There was a letter addressed to "Cyril Thornton" in an open envelope, a bundle of other papers fastened with a rubber ring, and a small pasteboard box. The letter claimed his first attention. It was an introduction, of course, but how framed, that was the rub. Could he use it?

"My luck has come home again," he murmured as he read the few lines of the letter.

"My DEAR THORNTON," it ran,— "You may trust the bearer of this implicitly.
—Yours sincerely,

"PHIL ARMITAGE.

"_P.S._—All news when we meet."

Not a line more. The introduction fitted him as closely as the girl he had stolen it from. The other papers were letters and telegrams that had passed between Armitage and Thornton. They were clearly meant to confirm his confidence in the bearer.

The neat cardboard box contained merely a small pointed brown beard and moustache to match, plainly intended for the use of Mr. Cyril Thornton should it be thought necessary for him to revert to his old character of Littledale.

“Wonderful little woman,” said Mr. Donnelly, admiringly, as he folded letters and papers into a large leather pocket-book, “she forgot nothing. It’s a bit hard on her, no doubt, poor girl, but it can’t be helped—the fortunes of war.”

There was no triumph in his face, and none in his voice, as he went down to his sitting-room to supper. But whatever might be his feelings they did not in the least interfere with his hearty appreciation of the excellent meal provided or the glass of hot whisky punch that closed the repast.

“I’ll lie down for an hour or two, Pat,” he said to the waiter. “Have me called when the boat comes in. I want to go out in the tender.”

He was asleep as his head touched the pillow. He always slept when he wished and never when he didn’t—a facility that he had often found most serviceable.

Ten minutes after the waiter had called him he was up and dressed and was out of doors, fresh and invigorated by copious cold water.

In the tender, which was just starting, a comfortable seat was found at once for the popular M.P., and when the midget boat, tossing through the troubled water, reached the steep side of the great floating city that lay at the harbour’s mouth motionless, holding the waves down by sheer weight, Mr. Donnelly was the first to climb the steep ladder to her deck.

In the brightening dawn the passengers were assembled to catch their first glimpse of land after six long days on the wide, bare curve of the ocean. There were many opera-glasses levelled across the intervening strip of sea at the sloping terraces and great new cathedral of Queenstown, standing out broad and strong with tall spire sharp against the glow of the sunrise.

A score of passengers, who were getting off with the mails, had their luggage piled around them. Amongst those Mr. Donnelly’s keen eyes searched and found almost at once the man he sought.

For a moment he could hardly believe that the tall figure in dark, well-fitting tweed suit, with a soft felt hat, was not Armitage himself—a little browner from

a week's air and sunshine; a little thinner perhaps, and keener looking, but in face and figure Armitage unmistakable.

"Mr. Thornton, I presume?" said Mr. Donnelly at his elbow.

The other started and turned sharply—the approach had been quite noiseless. "Thornton is my name," he said. The American twang was unmistakable. "But you have the advantage of me, sir."

"Halloa, Donnelly, old chap," interposed a third man, standing close by, a stranger whom this particular Mr. Donnelly had never seen before, "it's a sight for sore eyes to see you. Hope we'll have as good a time this side as we had the other."

In the hand that met his there was the clasp of unquestioning friendship, on the pleasant face a smile of cordial welcome.

"One moment, old man," responded Mr. Donnelly. "I want to have half a word first with Mr. Thornton here."

"The decentest fellow in all Ireland, Thornton. Say your half word smart, Donnelly. You'll find me in the bar when you have said it." So saying he vanished down the saloon steps and out of this truthful story.

Mr. Donnelly took his prey to a quiet corner of the deck. "I have a letter of introduction for you," he said, and handed it.

The other read the letter carefully, like a man strictly on his guard. Perhaps he was surprised at its brevity. "It's very like Armitage's handwriting," he conceded grudgingly.

Mr. Donnelly was not the least offended. "It is Mr. Armitage's handwriting," he said genially; "however, you are right to be suspicious, Mr. Thornton, after that trick cable. But this little packet of papers will convince you."

When Mr. Thornton glanced through his own letters and telegrams to his friend he brightened into confidence and cordiality.

"That's all right, and you're all right," he said with straightforward directness. "Mr. Donnelly, I think, you said the name was. Now, what am I to do, Mr.

Donnelly? I'm here to take orders. If my friend is in a scrape it's up to me to get him out of it."

"You must come with me in the same carriage from Queenstown to Cork. I'll see that we get the carriage to ourselves, and tell you as we go. You'll come?"

"Sure" was Mr. Thornton's laconic reply.

On the platform Mr. Donnelly got a word with the guard of the train, who was an old friend and follower of the popular Irish member, and who led them to an empty first-class carriage.

"Sure, there was no need of that at all, Mr. Donnelly," expostulated the guard as his hand closed on a half-crown. "I'd do more nor that for yourself anyways with all the pleasure in life."

He locked the door as he spoke, pasted a label "engaged" on the glass, and turned a deaf ear to the frantic passengers who crowded round. Several first-class passengers had to travel second-class in that crowded train, but the favoured Mr. Donnelly and Mr. Thornton had the carriage to themselves.

"Now," said Mr. Thornton, "what's the programme?"

"We have no time to spare," replied Mr. Beck. "I get out at Cork so I'll give it to you as shortly as I can. To begin with, I'm not Mr. Donnelly at all, but Mr. Beck—Paul Beck—you may possibly have heard the name on the other side."

Thornton nodded. "On both sides. Private detective?"

"Exactly." With a whisk the beard and moustache and bushy eyebrows were gone. The whole face had changed. Paul Beck was himself again.

Thornton bore the ordeal of the transformation without a wink.

"Clever," he drawled out. "Well, what next?"

"I'm in charge of this case. There is a move to run Armitage in for forgery and obtaining money by false pretences. Lamman is at the bottom of it."

"I know Lamman," answered Thornton, "to be a thorough-paced scoundrel."

“Well, this is his job. You can help or hinder. Which?”

“Hinder of course. What must I do?”

“Go straight on to London. Stop at a quiet private hotel—Mackay’s in Norfolk Street will do; it’s clean and comfortable. Give no one your address for the next couple of days. See no one under any pretence until I look you up with further instructions.”

“But why? What’s your little game?”

“It would take too long to explain,” said Mr. Beck, truthfully enough, “and I have to get out here.”

The train was slowing into Cork Station. He had reckoned on that.

“You have but to follow directions and leave the rest to me.”

“Right oh!” assented Thornton. “Tell Armitage, if you see him before I do, that he can count on me to the death.”

The next moment Beck was out on the Cork platform with a horde of porters and carmen competing for himself and his luggage, while the train carried the deluded Thornton on to his fate.

Over a substantial breakfast at the Imperial Hotel Mr. Beck took stock of the situation. He had won out and out. With the documents he held and the evidence to be judiciously extracted from Thornton a conclusive case could be constructed against Armitage. There was no loophole for doubt or escape. Beck’s work was practically over; a triumph scored after many failures; a huge reward earned. But never perhaps in his whole life was he less pleased with himself.

The feeling grew upon him when he had finished a hearty breakfast and sat smoking a cigar—a vague, uncomfortable, miserable, mean-spirited feeling—for which he could not find a cause, till his thoughts searching about, as it were in the dark, suddenly came upon Dora Myrl.

Then the bandage was at once whipped off and he saw. What would she think of him? What could she think of him except that he had tricked and cheated and stolen? True, it was all in the way of business; true, she would certainly have

done the same by him if she got a chance. But Paul Beck was too well versed in feminine logic to find comfort in this. The thought of Dora—bright, fascinating, sparkling Dora—as she poured out tea for him in his chambers, came to him, and with it the inevitable contrast of a miserable, baffled and broken-hearted Dora, worn out by a long night drive, defeated and humiliated, all alone with her defeat in one of the hotels in Cork.

The picture drove him out into the streets when the fresh sting of the morning was still in the air. After a couple of blank draws he came to Turner's Hotel. "Yes," he was told, "a young lady had come over from Queenstown during the night, a good-looking young lady, God bless her, and good humoured as she was good-looking. She had given a gold sovereign to Mike Tracy that brought her."

Mr. Beck smiled. That was an argument of good humour on Dora's part. But he remembered that his audacious change of bags was most likely not known at the time she tipped the kidnapping driver, and his spirits subsided.

"Could I see the young lady?" he asked.

The buxom chambermaid blushed and laughed. "Faix, you couldn't at the present time anyways. She's gone to bed, and small blame to the cratur to be tired and she driving all night. She left orders that she was to be called in three hours time for breakfast. Maybe she'd see you then."

The chambermaid was left smiling with half a crown in her hand and the thought in her maiden heart, "That's the kind of man I could fancy if I was one of the marrying lot myself."

Mr. Beck sauntered away, bent on putting in the three hours' wait somehow. Chance carried him to the river side, and a boathouse and a gangway sloping from its door to the water.

"Half a crown, your honour," said the boatman, "and no one could call it dear at that. As neat a little craft as swims in the Lea; and you can have a clean towel thrown in if you are wishful to have a trip up the river and a swim. That little boat will wait for you like a baker's horse on his rounds."

Stripped of coat and waistcoat, with long, even strokes of the light oars Mr. Beck sent the little skiff up the dancing current in a fashion to win the outspoken admiration of the boatman. The river wandered through a pleasant country of

green fields and trees, sunshine and singing birds, whose rapturous notes welcomed a new dawn.

Three miles outside the town he found a quiet nook of the river stream in a deep pool, green shaded by overhanging trees. He tied the boat to a branch and plunged into the water, whose sharp chill stung him to fierce motion and sent him racing like an otter up stream hand over hand, while the current rippled and broke against the strong push of his shoulders.

The pleasant glow that is begotten of chill air and exercise was in his blood as he turned his boat's head back to the city. But not all the freshness and beauty of the morning could break the spell of his deep despondency. There are moods when all a man's thoughts combine to torment him. So it was now with Mr. Beck. He was sick of the world and his life in it; of his calling, which had brought him excitement and a huge fortune. He longed for rest, and, though he was but vaguely conscious of the feeling, he longed for love.

Money had come to him, as it often comes to a man who has no special care for it. Big fees in big cases from grateful clients had multiplied themselves tenfold, twentyfold by judicious investments. More than once he had contemplated retirement. He loved the country, he loved reading, he loved field sports and excelled in them. His work heretofore gave him little time for enjoyment. A great reputation is a hard taskmaster, and incessant work is brain-wearing and body-wearing.

Some six months ago he had bought a charming country place in Kent, beautifully furnished. A roomy old-fashioned house with a great old-fashioned garden at the side, through which a clear stream stole, broadening to a river as it flowed downwards to the sea.

At the time he meant to settle down to a long vacation, but within a week an urgent call—the call of a woman in sore distress, which he could never resist—had carried him from his country paradise to the lowest slums and disreputable haunts of London. That troublesome problem was but two days solved when Lamman had, as it were, caught him on the rebound and sent him on the track of Armitage.

Never before had he been in a case which had interested him more or pleased him less. Almost from the first he took an instinctive dislike to Lamman and an

instinctive liking to Armitage, but it was not till Dora appeared on the scene that the case really caught hold of him. It was in the nature of the man that failure after failure should stimulate him to fresh eagerness. Then jealousy came as the last incentive. Dora's artful tale of Armitage's pursuit was a spur to Beck's determination to succeed. But success had brought bitter disappointment. He had never felt more lonely or more miserable than that bright autumn morning, drifting in the sunshine down the pleasant water of the River Lea.

The vivid imagination of the man—a sort of second sight which had helped him to solve so many perplexing problems—played him strange tricks now. Clearly, as in a dream, he saw himself in his great house in Kent, in the quaint oak-panelled room that looked through a wide French window upon the garden. He saw the pictures on the walls, the silver and china on the breakfast-table. Most clearly of all he saw *her* there—winsome and smiling, all his own. In the garden outside a child played and the noise of his shouts and laughter came to his father through the open window. Her eyes met his full of smiling happiness and love. Then in an instant the picture vanished and he was a lonely man on the silent river, tortured by the thought that of all men living she hated him most and with most cause.

But this dismal thought could not thwart his purpose. Bending to his work he rushed his oars through the water and made the light boat fly with the current back to Cork.

“Yes,” the waiter said, “Miss Myrl was at breakfast,” and Mr. Beck followed him upstairs.

He knocked at the door. “A gentleman to see you, miss. Mr. Paul Beck,” and so without more ado walked him into the room and closed the door behind him.

Chapter XXIII

A Truce

Dora leaped up from the table with a quick cry of surprise and stared at the intruder.

Mr. Beck's heart smote him as he saw her pale, pitiful face, her eyes still wet with tears. He thought she looked even lovelier in sadness than in laughter. For a long minute they stood facing each other and neither spoke.

The woman found her voice first. She spoke in a hard, strained voice, striving bravely to keep the tears back.

"So you have come," she said, "to enjoy your triumph? It was hardly a manly thing to do. Well, you have won, I own it; the final victory is yours. Now go, and take this with you!" She pointed to the little emerald brooch which glittered on the white tablecloth, where it had fallen.

Surely never did victor look less victorious than poor Mr. Beck. "I have come," he said, "because I felt I must see you and tell you how sorry I am."

"That you won?"

"That you lost."

His gentleness only angered her the more. "You lied to me," she cried, "you cheated me, you stole from me, and now when you have triumphed by such devices you come to tell me you are sorry. A pretty story indeed!"

"Is that quite fair, Miss Myrl?" he asked.

Her heart told her it was not fair, but her face gave no sign. "It was a fair fight between us," he said; "luck helped me and I won."

"But how did you win?"

"As you tried to win. We fought with the same weapons. Forgive me for asking,

Miss Myrl, did you always tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Would you have scrupled to trick me out of any papers that would have helped you? Once upon a time I saw two conjurers sit down to a little game of cards together.” He smiled at the resemblance. “One asked the other, ‘Shall we play fair, or all we know?’ ‘All we know,’ was the reply. Do you think the man that lost could complain of cheating after that?”

The goodhumour of the man conquered her at last. She remembered how cheerily he had taken his defeats.

“Forgive me,” she whispered, “I was unjust, but I’m very miserable.”

She lapsed again into her chair, dropped her face on her hands, and sobbed unrestrainedly.

Mr. Beck could never stand a woman’s tears. His friends told it of him in praise, his rivals in disparagement. Least of all could he stand this woman’s tears.

He came close to her, leant over her and timidly touched her bent shoulder with a strong hand, more gentle than a woman’s.

“Dora,” he whispered, “why worry so much over this miserable business? You lost one game; you’ll win the next. It happens to us all.”

She looked up, a sudden flash of indignation lightening in the blue eyes through her tears.

“Do you think it’s wounded vanity that hurts me, that makes me cry—that I’m so small and mean? Indeed, indeed, it’s not that. But my folly has ruined my dearest friend, who trusted me. It will break her heart if he is sent to prison.”

“But he deserves it.”

“He doesn’t deserve it. How dare you say he deserves it! He’s as straight as a die, honest and generous and truthful, and as fond of her as she is of him. Is that what you call a criminal?”

“He tampered with Abe Lamman’s telegram.”

“Of course he did, and quite right too. Oh, don’t look like that! Abe Lamman

cheated him out of a hundred thousand; cheated him meanly. He only took back his own money. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it. I wish I had told you long ago."

Mr. Beck listened patiently to her story.

"Are you quite sure of all this?" he asked when she had finished.

"Quite. I know Mr. Lamman well. He is about as bad as they make them. He has gathered his millions by stealing secrets. If he scents a new patent, or an improvement on an old one, he steals it. There is a gang of professional thieves in his employment. I was in a case in which he bribed an old servant to steal his master's patent for a flying machine. The man confessed, but Lamman was too cunning for us. We could never bring the guilt home to him.

"In another case there was a burglary. He employed a professional burglar named Hackett—a big murderous ruffian—to break open a safe. That case was clear as daylight. I thought I had him then, but the people refused to prosecute; a huge bribe held them back.

"When I met Lamman afterwards," she went on impetuously, "he laughed at me, and knowing that I knew him as I did he dared to make love to me, the brute. We were both staying at a country house and we met by chance in a lonely part of the grounds. If I had been a frightened girl I don't know what horrible thing might have happened. But I'm not. I carry a revolver, and he knew I could and would shoot, so—"

She broke off suddenly and glanced at Mr. Beck. His lips had tightened and his right hand that lay on the table was clenched hard as a sledge-hammer.

"You believe me?" whispered Dora, softly, not ill pleased at his manifest wrath.

"Yes, I believe you," he muttered through his teeth. "The scoundrel, I wish I was there at the time."

"Oh, I wish you were," she said, "then you would have known the man and this thing could never have happened. I wish I had told you in time when we had our chat together. Do you remember our pleasant little breakfast?" —as if he were likely to forget it. "But I was afraid; I did not know you then as I know you now, and I was vain enough to think I could win by my own wit. Now it is too late."

“It is not too late.”

The voice and words thrilled her. She leaped from her seat, panting with the excitement of hope suddenly revived.

“Do you mean it?” searching his face with shining eyes.

“Of course I mean it. There is no harm done. Lamman—I never liked him; I’m glad I never liked him—knows nothing of what has happened. Miss Myrl, I’m like yourself in this, I care nothing for the law when I believe the law is wrong. I have broken it a score of times and helped its victims to escape. I mean to do it again now. Will you shake hands on the bargain? We’re on the same side.”

She clasped her hand joyously on his big palm. He squeezed it tight, and the answering pressure, live and warm, thrilled him through and through.

“Oh, I’m so glad, so glad; you cannot think how glad I am. I can hardly believe it yet, it seems too good to be true.”

“Don’t trouble about that. The good things are as true as the bad. But there is work to be done yet and I want you to help. We’re comrades now, aren’t we?”

He seemed to take great comfort from that comradeship. “Can you come back to London tomorrow?” he asked.

“By the next train, if you wish.”

“No, tomorrow will be time enough. Cork is worth looking at. I have sent Thornton to Mackay’s Hotel in Norfolk Street, to be kept till called for. Armitage will call for him now, not Lamman.”

“How can I ever thank you enough, Mr. Beck? Five minutes ago I was the most miserable of girls; now I’m the happiest. If I could only repay you in any way.”

“You can,” said Mr. Beck, quietly, “a thousandfold.”

Their eyes met and hers fell and her cheeks flushed.

“Isn’t that rather high interest?” she murmured. “I fear, after all, you are a very grasping creditor, Mr. Beck.”

A tell-tale dimple showed in the rosy cheek; there was a gay challenge in the glance she shot at him. Then she fled the dangerous ground. "How glad Norma and Phil will be; they were so foolishly in love and longing to marry at once. She'd have risked it, but he would not till the danger had passed. 'He would not have her tied to a convict,' he told me. Splendid of him, I thought; very few men in love are willing to wait."

"Very few," agreed Mr. Beck, decidedly.

"But there may be more delay yet," he added soberly, "Lamman is not a quitter. When I throw over his case, which I mean to do and give him a bit of my mind at the same time, it will only blood him to a keener hunt. He knows enough to make him dangerous. Armitage is not yet out of the wood."

"Will you leave Lamman to me?" said Dora, smiling. "I have a plan to shake him off. You have taken the conceit out of me, but I think I'm a match for Lamman anyway."

"I sincerely hope not," said Mr. Beck. "I forbid the banns."

"Now you are frivolous and it doesn't suit you. This is serious. Don't you want to hear my plan?"

"If I may. Will you come for a row on the River Lea and tell it to me?"

She pretended to hesitate. "Can I trust you? You were dangerous as Mr. Donnelly; you may be more dangerous as Mr. Beck. Mind, if I go, it is for a serious talk."

"I never in my life was more serious," said Mr. Beck.

She looked at him with whimsical suspicion in her eyes. "I only want to talk over my plan."

"So do I—want to talk over my plan."

When Dora Myrl started out that sunshiny autumn afternoon for a row on the pleasant waters of the River Lea she wore an emerald brooch in her blouse; when she returned she wore a diamond and emerald ring on the third finger of her left hand.

Chapter XXIV

A Woman's Will

“Foiled again, Beck?” said Mr. Lamman, mockingly. “Little Dora one too many for you, eh? Have a whisky-and-soda to cheer you up.”

Mr. Beck waved aside Mr. Lamman's hospitable offer of decanter and soda syphon and cigar box.

“On the contrary,” he said curtly, “I succeeded this time.”

“No!” shouted Lamman, exultingly, “you don't say so? Egad, I was beginning to despair. Little Dora Myrl is a demon. You don't mean that you have bested her; that you have the evidence you wanted; that you can jail our young friend?”

“That's exactly what I do mean. I have got documents sufficient to convict him even without Thornton's evidence, and I have got Thornton waiting my orders at a private hotel here in London.”

Lamman leaped excitedly from his seat.

“You're a genius, Beck, that's what you are.”

He walked up and down his office, flinging the chairs out of his way. As he passed Mr. Beck the second time he clapped him on the shoulder and offered his hand in hearty congratulation. But Mr. Beck, who was looking at his notebook at the moment, didn't happen to notice the hand.

“How in the devil's name did you manage it?” queried Mr. Lamman.

“Well, luck favoured me. I knew that Armitage would have someone to meet the boat at Queenstown, and I guessed that Miss Myrl would be his messenger. She was so cleverly disguised as a Yankee old maid on board the Holyhead boat that for a full hour I did not recognise her. The rest was plain sailing, When I made up to her as Mr. Donnelly, the Irish M.P., I noticed that she was mighty particular about a little purse bag in which, as I guessed, she carried her credentials. I bought a facsimile bag in Dublin and had the same monogram, P. P., put on it. I

managed to substitute one for the other in the train down. Then I sent Miss Myrl's car-driver off to Cork with her, and with her credentials I met Thornton when the boat arrived at Queenstown. There's the whole story."

Lamman's exultation was boisterous and unbounded. "Never heard anything neater, on my soul," he cried. "That little devil Dora will be dancing mad. Are you sure the evidence is strong enough to convict?"

"Well, Miss Myrl says something about other documents she has in a safe in Armitage's place, where she masqueraded as a waiting-maid. A signed photo and a lot of letters to herself and others both before and after his transformation, documents which Armitage believes were destroyed."

"Trust a woman," said Lamman, sardonically.

"These would help," went on Mr. Beck, "if we could get them, which we can't. Indeed, they are strong enough by themselves to do for him. But then my proofs are also strong enough without hers."

"The sooner we get to work the better," cried Lamman. "He should be arrested at once to prevent accidents."

"A moment," said Mr. Beck. "I wanted to ask you a question or two first."

"Of course, of course; I shall be only too happy to help if I can."

"What advice did you give young Armitage when he came to you as a friend about this Amalgamated Gold fraud?"

If Mr. Beck had suddenly dealt him a violent blow on what pugilists call the "breadbasket," Mr. Lamman could not have been more utterly flabbergasted. He fell back limp in his chair, his eyes bulging, his ruddy complexion fading to a sickly yellow.

"What the blazes has that got to do with the case?" he gasped out.

"Only this," said Mr. Beck, suavely: "you cheated the young fellow who trusted you, who believed you to be his friend, and when he got back on you for that you try to shut him up in a jail and steal the girl he loves."

“A pack of cursed lies,” roared Lamman; “but if they were every word true how does it concern you? You do your work and take your money.”

“How does it concern me! Confound you for a contemptible scoundrel!” Mr. Beck broke into sudden wrath just for an instant. “How dare you try to make me—Paul Beck—a tool for your dirty work?”

“Do you want more money?” sneered Lamman. “Is that it?”

“I want none of your money,” replied Mr. Beck, softly, his placid dangerous self again. “I came here to-day merely to give myself the pleasure of telling you what I think about you.”

“Then you think I will let the young cub escape simply because you have sneaked out of the business?”

“I’m not out of it; I’m still in—on the other side.”

“I suppose all you told me about those documents was false?”

“Was true. They are all here in this letter-case.” He held it out loosely within reach of Lamman’s hand. Did he mean it for a bait? It acted as a bait.

With his left hand Lamman made a sudden grab at the pocket-case; with his right he struck full at Mr. Beck’s face. “I’ll have those papers if I murder you for it,” he cried as he struck.

But Mr. Beck’s left wrist caught the blow like a bar of steel. At the same moment his right fist met Mr. Lamman’s chin with a thud like the kick of a horse, and sent him across the room to pitch in a loose heap in the depths of his big chair.

Mr. Beck drew a deep sigh of relief. “That’s an ease to one’s feelings,” he said, as he took up his hat and quietly left the room.

Some hours later Mr. Lamman, still slightly perturbed from his interview with Mr. Beck, sat reading *The Winning Post* in the drawing-room of his spacious mansion in Park Lane. There was not much doing on “Change,” and a slight headache incapacitated him from work or social enjoyment. Mr. Lamman did not go in much for literature, but he admired the Editor of *The Winning Post* as a man who knew life and men and women as they really are.

“A lady wishes to see you on business, sir,” the butler said, and presented a card on a silver salver.

“Miss Dora Myrl,” Lamman read with sudden animation. “Show her up, Podgers, at once.”

Never did Dora look more attractive or desirable. She came like a gleam of sunshine into the big room, dressed, as was her habit, in fresh, bright colours. A light blue silk of the colour of the forget-me-not with touches here and there of fresh pink, and a dainty hat with clustering rosebuds that mimicked Nature delusively. Her eyes were of the delicious blue of the sky, her cheeks the faint red of the rosebuds. Every womanly curve of her perfect figure was hinted by the perfect fit of her gown.

Lamman looked at her with frank admiration, perhaps a trifle too frank.

“This is indeed a pleasure,” he cried enthusiastically.

“I don’t come for pleasure, I come for business,” retorted Dora. “You have seen Mr. Beck to-day?”

It wasn’t a question, it was a statement.

“About two hours ago. Curse him— I beg your pardon, Miss Myrl.”

“Don’t mind me,” said Dora, “if you want to curse. I feel a little that way myself. He has thrown up your case; he has gone over to the enemy.”

“How do you know?”

“How do I know!” she repeated mockingly. “Because he told me so himself. Because they have thrown me over at the same time.”

Her anger seemed to suddenly master her, and she went on impetuously: “Yes, thrown me over after all I have done, after I have baffled him half a dozen times, just because he tricked me once and stole my papers. I am dismissed like a servant without notice.”

“But why did Beck turn traitor?” queried Mr. Lamman, too absorbed in his own grievance to enter into hers. “I had promised him a big fee and he was in a fair

way to earn it.”

“Norma Lee’s baby face,” retorted Dora, contemptuously; “you are all in love with her—Mr. Beck, yourself, and—Mr. Armitage.”

There was a slight pause before the last name came out. Mr. Lamman was a shrewd man, versed in the ways of the sex, and he noticed it instantly.

“Jealous,” he thought to himself. “Can it be she is jealous of Norma and Armitage?” But his face gave no sign.

“Please scratch me for that race,” he said carelessly. “I have heard the young lady is engaged to that interesting young gentleman.”

“If it were so he might have told me sooner,” Dora broke out with an impetuosity that made Lamman’s doubt certainty.

She checked herself suddenly. “Not that I care two pins to whom he is engaged or whom he marries, but I like to be treated with common courtesy.”

Lamman smiled inwardly, while outwardly his face was solemn as that of a judge delivering a death sentence.

“What fools love makes of the cleverest women,” he thought.

“There is to be a dance tomorrow night at her aunt’s,” said Dora, “and I am not even asked. A week ago they could not make too much of me.”

“Will Armitage be there?”

“That’s a silly question. Of course he’ll be there, mooning and spooning all night with Miss Lee in the conservatory.”

Then Mr. Lamman saw his chance. He guessed the business on which Dora had come and resolved to make it easier for her.

“Miss Myrl,” he began—“I’m afraid to say Dora, much as I’d like to—Mr. Beck has gone over to the other side and they have cast you off. Is there any reason why you should not come over to me? You won’t find me ungrateful. It is possible we might be able to teach Mr. Armitage and the rest a lesson even yet.”

“It is certain we can.”

The terrible eagerness of the man showed in face and voice.

“Do it!” he cried, “and name your own price. Dora,” he protested, “I feel I behaved badly to you last time we met. Your beauty maddened me; that should be some excuse. I am willing to atone. Do this thing; get that young cur Armitage the punishment he so richly deserves, and the day he is convicted, by Jove! I’ll marry you straight.”

She looked at him curiously, shrinking away a pace or two. Plainly he meant it, plainly he never anticipated a refusal.

“You do me too much honour,” she said after a pause.

“Honour be blowed. I’m worth fifty thousand a year. You shall spend half of it.”

“How made?”

“We need not enter into that. You are a sensible girl and know the world. Is it a bargain?”

“If I were willing to agree what security should I have?”

“My solemn word of honour.”

She looked at him with such a mocking laughter in her blue eyes that he was forced to laugh himself in response—a little awkwardly, it is true.

“Well,” he said, “what other security do you want? What other security can I give?”

“If you wrote me a signed letter, putting your terms in writing, I might think over it. There is no hurry.”

“I’ll write anything you like, any time you like.”

“I will come to you again when I’ve made up my mind.”

“When?”

“In a few days—perhaps.”

Mr. Lamman felt his hopes ebbing away. It was quite plain she could not make up her mind even yet to sacrifice the fickle Armitage.

“Don’t go yet, please. Have tea?”

“No.”

“Well, sit there in that big chair; you know you are good to look at. Everybody is not as blind as Armitage. Are you quite certain you can do the trick if you want to?”

“Quite certain. Did Mr. Beck tell you of a signed photo?”

“That you rescued from him?”

“Precisely; and of Armitage’s diary when he was Thornton?”

“No, he said nothing of the diary.” Mr. Lamman was quivering with excitement.

“They think the photo and diary are destroyed.”

“And they are, I suppose?”

“Kindly suppose the contrary. Suppose they are not. Suppose they are locked up securely in a safe of which I alone have the key. No, no, my dear Mr. Lamman, sit quiet. I don’t carry that key round with me; besides, you remember.”

Lamman laughed frankly. “Did you think I was going to snatch it?” he said. “Not likely, after the lesson you taught me the last time we met. The papers, you say, are in a safe, and the safe is where?”

This time she laughed outright. “Oh, dear, you are too innocent for words! Do you forget the incidents of our professional acquaintance, Mr. Lamman? I don’t. Safes, as I have reason to know, are not exactly safe where you and your friends are concerned.”

He started as if some new thought struck him at her words. The keen eyes fixed on his face saw the birth of a project in his mind. But he answered lightly

enough:

“You are too hard on me, Miss Dora, you really are. Shall I never be able to convince you that this notion of yours about the safes was a delusion?”

His tone admitted the truth his words denied. “Well, keep your secret till our bargain is made. I have no desire to steal your secret or your papers.”

He did not tell her that he knew already the whereabouts of that safe from Mr. Beck. Perhaps he forgot.

“When shall I see you again?” he asked.

“In a few days; after the dance.”

“When is the dance to be?” He dropped in the question quite carelessly.

“Tomorrow night.”

“Well, you may get an invitation at the last hour,” he said with a provoking smile. “If not, may I hope to see you the day after?”

“Perhaps. Good-bye for the present. I have said all I wanted to say.”

“Good-bye, and I have to thank you sincerely.”

“For nothing so far. You may thank me when we meet again, if you feel so disposed.”

Chapter XXV

Trapped

“Are you sure he’ll come tonight?” asked Armitage. They were together by appointment in his study.

Mr. Beck looked at Dora with admiring confidence. “Of course he’ll come,” he said; “there never was a trap more cleverly laid. That bait”—he pointed to a safe in the corner of the room—“is not to be resisted.”

“Yes, I think he is pretty certain to come tonight,” Dora added sedately. “You see, Phil, he won’t want to disturb you, and he’ll time his visit when you are away ‘mooning and spooning’ at your aunt’s party.”

“No such luck,” said Armitage. “Thornton is to take her. I had to ‘go out of town on important business,’ and I’m still away. Did I tell you that while I was with Norma to-day explaining, a chap called here—a big chap, the girl says, well dressed. He came in and sat down for a while to wait, but refused to give his name, said he would call again tomorrow. There is nothing in it, I fancy, but I’m suspicious of everybody and everything just at present.”

“Friend of Mr. Lamman?” suggested Dora.

Mr. Beck nodded. “Precisely; wanted to reconnoitre, to find where the safe is and the easiest way to get at it. That saves us a lot of trouble. We have only to wait in the next room. That safe won’t take a professional twenty minutes to crack.”

Armitage’s study, in which the three of them were gathered, was in the front of the house and looked out into the street. It had two doors, one opening into the hall, the other into the dining-room at the back. In the door of the dining-room Mr. Beck had bored a couple of gimlet holes in the framework of the panels, through which it was possible to see all that passed in the study.

A gong sounded. “Supper,” said Armitage, gaily, “we have an hour to eat it. Your friend’s appointment is for after twelve, Miss Myrl?”

Dora nodded again. "Between twelve and one, I should guess."

Armitage flung open the door, letting his guests pass before him to his sitting-room, where a dainty little supper was laid. It was a merry meal, for the excitement enlivened the party more than the champagne.

"Here's to our visitors," said Armitage, filling his glass to the brim till the foam ran over the edge. "May their reception be worthy of their deserts."

Mr. Beck drank his wine as if he were toasting a dear friend. But Dora only touched the glass with her lips and put it down untasted.

"They are powerful and reckless men," she said gravely, "and they will come armed. They won't stop at murder."

"Oh, yes, they will," said Mr. Beck, "we will induce them to stop."

"But they may prove too strong for you," Dora suggested. "Why not make sure?"

"We will make quite sure, my dear. But you see this must be a friendly family party. We can have no strangers present; our business will not bear public discussion."

"Two strong armed and desperate men," she persisted.

"We will give them no chance to use their arms. It will be all over before it begins."

"Still—"

"You can trust me," he whispered under his breath. "I'll take care no harm comes to him."

"Or to yourself?" The light in her eyes, the faint flush in her cheeks pleased him hugely.

"Or to myself. There is not an atom of danger; you can depart in peace."

"Depart?"

“Why, certainly,” Armitage interposed. “My motor is at the door to whisk you home.”

She looked appealingly to Mr. Beck, but read no relenting in his face.

“You would only distract us from the work we have got to do,” he said. “I will call at your flat, if I may, with the good news tomorrow morning.”

Then she yielded with unexpected docility.

The motor whirled her away through the streets, silent or noisy, crowded or empty, with the same unrelenting speed. In half an hour the dexterous driver landed her at Queen Anne’s Mansions.

“That will do, John,” she said, “you need not wait,” and the chauffeur, with a hearty, “Oh, thank you, miss,” whirred away like a partridge on the wing. Dora waited on the doorstep, gazing out over the peaceful, moonlit park, till the whirr of the motor shrank into the faintest thread of sound and merged to silence. Then she came down briskly and hailed a motor cab. “To Tite Street,” she said. “Quick!”

She got out at the entrance of the empty street, sent the cabby off with an extra fare, and flitted noiseless as a shadow to the door.

Silently the latchkey turned in the well-oiled lock, silently the study door opened to her touch so silently that the keenest ears in all London listening close by heard no sound.

A half-hour passed and the marble clock on the parlour mantelpiece struck twelve clear notes. As the hour approached Armitage tingled with excitement. His voice dropped to a whisper; he could hardly hold himself still.

Mr. Beck, placid as ever, sipped his port wine appreciatively.

When Armitage would have lit a cigar, Beck laid a restraining hand on his arm. “No,” he said, “remember you are ‘out at a dance.’ Your visitors may want to know whose cigars they smell. We are taking no chances.”

“How do you think they’ll come?” Armitage whispered with unnecessary caution.

“Like gentlemen, through the door. It’s an easy job to negotiate with a skeleton key; the window would be more troublesome.”

Three minutes later the event justified his prediction. Listening with strained ears they heard the faint rasp of metal against metal at the hall door.

Beck instantly switched off the electric light in the room in which they sat, there was black darkness and dead silence.

The rattle came again, repeated two or three times with intervals between. Then they distinctly heard the shooting of a bolt and a faint swish of the air as the door was pushed open.

Movement rather than sound came to their ears as the intruders passed along the hall, and again they felt the faint stir in the air as the study door was in turn pushed softly open and closed.

“Now,” whispered Mr. Beck, and in a second he was across the hall with his eye to the auger hole, which had become a luminous speck in the darkness of the door.

One of the visitors carried a small electric lamp which lit the study. Mr. Beck was just in time to see this man stoop a few yards inside the door as if he were picking something from the floor, but the angle of the auger hole did not let him see more till the two men moved through an alley of yellow light to the safe at the far end of the room. Mr. Beck could tell they were big men—one almost a giant. Both were masked, but he thought he could guess what faces were behind the masks.

The first sound in the study was a low chuckle, partly of contempt, partly of delight, and a guttural whisper, “They call this blooming tin can a safe. Why, I could crack it with a sardine opener.”

“Then do it, you fool, and don’t talk,” growled the other.

“All right, boss; don’t snap a man’s head off. Surely a bloke may be glad of a soft thing.”

The huge man planted himself astride a chair opposite the safe door, which he completely obscured from the watchful eyes of Mr. Beck and of Armitage, who

was now beside him at the door with his eye to the second auger hole. The electric lamp was on the floor, and the shadows of the men—gigantic and grotesque—moved and mingled on the ceiling.

The watchers at the door could only judge the progress of the work from the sound. They heard the rasping of metal and the faint rasp of the drill. Then followed the hiss and blue flare of a blow-pipe as the eager point of flame impinged on the safe door. The motions and the sounds, though subdued, were incessant. The work went on with a fierce, impatient energy. Once or twice there was the noise of a stifled oath as one or other of the men bruised his finger with the drill or scorched it with the flame. But not a second's intermission of the work.

Presently the low chuckle was heard again.

“Ready!” whispered Mr. Beck in the darkness outside, his hand on the knob of the door.

“There you are, boss!”

The mutilated safe door sagged open with a dang, and there was the sound of rustling paper.

“Now!” whispered the detective.

Armitage was first into the room. Mr. Beck paused to switch on the electric light, but Armitage, darting recklessly in front in the darkness, struck a tangle of wire that had been spread on the carpet just beyond the sweep of the door. His foot sent it flying with a sudden jangle of bells as he tripped and pitched forward.

The burglars leaped to their feet at the alarm. But Mr. Beck had pounced upon Lamman before he had time to draw his revolver. The struggle was fierce and short. Beck's grip was the hug of a grizzly bear. He pinned Lamman's arms to his side and swung him from the ground; Lamman contrived to land on his feet, and Beck shifted his hold.

At the same instant, for the struggle was swift as the rush of an express train through a lighted station, Mr. Beck heard a cry behind him, and over his shoulder he saw Armitage on the ground, and the huge burglar, with a heavy “jemmy” in his hand, in the act of striking. Putting his whole strength into the

effort he hurled Lamman across the room, and with a quick side leap caught the wrist of the burglar just as the crowbar was descending on the defenceless head of Armitage, while his right hand gripped the brute's elbow with the harsh grip of a vice. For a second muscle strained against muscle. Then the big burglar's face whitened with intense pain, the crowbar dropped from his nerveless fingers with a flop on the carpet.

His grip still on wrist and elbow, Beck, without apparent effort, swung the giant round, easily as a man swings his partner to the first bar of a waltz, kicked his legs from under him, and brought him down with a crash on his back.

"Best lie quiet, Hackett," he said, feeling in his pocket for the handcuffs, and Hackett lay quiet.

Reeling backwards across the room Lamman had the luck to land plump in the depths of a big leather chair, where, for a moment, he sat breathless and bewildered, watching the struggle.

Then all at once he saw his chance and was out of the chair in a jump, his hand on the butt of his revolver.

Beck's broad back was turned as he leant over the prostrate Hackett when Lamman's revolver came up to line, his arm steady, his finger tightening on the trigger.

"Drop it or I fire!"

The words were sharply spoken close to his ear, and turning towards the voice he chilled with fear to find himself staring straight into the little black circle of a pistol barrel. Behind the pistol, just clear of the shelter of the window curtain, stood Dora Myrl, rigid as a statue.

"Drop it or I fire!" The whisper was sharper and more insistent than before.

He glanced at the pale set face, the blazing blue eyes. There was no need for a third warning; his revolver fell to the carpet and Dora vanished behind the curtain.

Before Lamman could move again Armitage was upon him with his fists. There was a short fierce rally; both men could box. Lamman met the rush with a heavy

body blow that staggered Armitage back a pace or two, but the next moment he responded with an undercut behind the ear that sounded like the clean clip of a driver on a golf ball, and toppled Lamman like a ninepin. The fight was over.

Ten minutes later Mr. Lamman, recovering from the effects of that knockout blow, found himself seated at the study table, his hand free but his ankles strapped. Mr. Hackett, with hands and feet secured, was lolling back in a big easy-chair, smoking placidly a pipe which had been filled and lit for him. Armitage paced the room impatiently. Dora Myrl had vanished.

Standing behind Lamman's chair Mr. Beck set a paper on the table with the polite request, "Will you kindly copy and sign?"

Lamman glanced over it. "I'll be blowed if I do," he cried.

"Not blowed perhaps," retorted Mr. Beck, "but something at least equally unpleasant if you don't."

"You cannot make me sign it," Lamman blustered, "if I don't choose."

"But I rather think you will choose when you remember what may happen if you refuse."

Lamman read the paper again. It was a brief confession that he, Lamman, had been guilty of the attempted robbery of important papers in company with a notorious burglar, Bob Hackett. That they had succeeded in wrenching open a safe when they were caught in the act by Mr. Paul Beck and Mr. Philip Armitage, in whose study the burglary was committed. Mr. Armitage had been persuaded to overlook the offence on account of his previous acquaintance with the offender, but had insisted on the confession as a security.

"I'm blowed if I sign it," snarled Lamman again, like a wild beast trapped.

"I'm rather glad of that," retorted Mr. Beck. "It was Armitage, not I, that wished to give you a chance. Your conviction for burglary will suit us better than any confession. Armitage, will you kindly put me on to Scotland Yard; say Paul Beck wants a word with the chief, immediate and important."

"Stop!" growled Lamman. "What do you mean to do?"

“That seems pretty plain.”

“They will never believe I committed burglary.”

“The evidence, you see, is rather conclusive.”

“I’ll swear it was a trap for me. So it was, a damnable trap.”

“And your friend Mr. Hackett?” suggested Mr. Beck.

“He must take his chance.”

Mr. Lamman’s voice was lowered to a mere whisper. But his friend Mr. Hackett heard and growled out an answer, mixed with tobacco smoke, “Not blooming likely. You tried that game before, Lamman; I’m taking no chances this time. If I go to the jug you go with me.”

“Why do you want me to sign this paper. Beck?”

“Oh, I don’t want you to sign it,” retorted Mr. Beck, cheerily, “it’s your own free choice; only you’ve got to choose quickly.”

“What security have I that the paper won’t be used against me if I sign?”

“None; you only know what will happen if you don’t sign.”

“Well, I’ll do it.”

“Of course you will.”

Lamman wrote hastily and signed, and Beck read it over. “Now,” he said, “you can go.”

Followed by Bob Hackett, Mr. Lamman skulked out into the night, growling impotent curses.

Beck handed the paper to Armitage. “You’d better get a new safe for that,” he said, “it’s a bit in the jaws of our friend Lamman. You can drive him on the curb if ever he becomes restive. But remember,” he added, “it’s to Miss Myrl you owe it. It was she arranged this little tea-party for Lamman, and but for her he would have paid his score with a brace of bullets.”

Chapter XXVI

In A Hurry

There are some who affect to believe that to all lives are measured out the same proportion of joy and sorrow. It is a consolatory theory for the prosperous. It enables the fortunate in the world to contemplate the griefs and pains of the miserable with philosophical complacency, in the assurance that they have some mysterious compensation, or at least in the full faith that the petty troubles which beset the happiest lives are as harassing as the real afflictions—poverty, misery, sorrow and sickness—which the majority must endure. But there is a conclusive refutation of this comfortable theory. Apart from commonplace joys and sorrows, prosperity or poverty, the fact remains that the great majority live their lives from cradle to grave unilluminated by love. For such privation life has no compensating gift. For love is a thing apart—a rapture without a rival. It is the crowning glory of our humanity. To man alone is true love given. Passion is not love, nor the ecstasy of the senses. It is something purer, deeper, closer to heaven. It is a widening and brightening of the current of life when two souls flow together in perfect sympathy. Love is the subtle alchemist that changes life's lead to gold.

Phil Armitage and his sweetheart, coming joyously forth from the shadow of a great danger, found life changed and lightened, as a landscape when a patch of blue opens slowly in the grey sky and lets the sunshine out, gloriously, scattering the clouds. They revelled in the warmth of their love; they lived to its music. They found a new meaning, a new delight in every trivial action of their lives. For her that delight was shot through with little thrills of rapturous fear. His kisses sent her pulses throbbing with delicious shame. In the sweet unconsciousness of perfect maidenhood she came body and soul, fresh as a half-open wild flower, to the arms of love. The vague mystery of marriage filled her with a strange mingling of fear and longing. She dallied delightedly on the flowery margin of the stream whose pellucid depths invited the plunge.

For she was contented and he was impatient, filled with a man's longing to make her all his own. In full enjoyment of the present, his thoughts and hopes were with the future, and he pressed and coaxed her to name the day that would complete his happiness,

Still she put his importunities aside with a winning playfulness that neither consented nor denied, and was a foil to the fervour of his love.

They saw little of Dora Myrl in those days. She was called away, as she told them, on an interesting case that absorbed her attention and left her little time for her friends. Paul Beck, it seemed, was similarly involved. But the lively, irresponsible Cyril Thornton played a pleasant part in their lives. Their love was not of the kind that mopes and moons. It lent itself readily to gaiety and junketing, and for all form of enjoyment Thornton had an aptitude eager and unspoiled as a boy's.

"I came here on business," he said. "I will stay a bit for amusement."

"Why not go back to your wife?" questioned Norma, severely.

Thornton specially interested her as a newly-married man. Waiting on the brink she watched, half curiously, half enviously, the swimmer in the water.

"Oh, my wife!" Thornton responded gaily. "she doesn't want me just now. There is a duke up for auction over there. Irene is auctioneer, and she means to knock him down to a friend of her own. I'd be in the way. When she wants me she'll cable, you bet. Till then—"

Till then he enjoyed himself. He was in love, he confessed, with both Norma and Dora. Paul Beck he proclaimed the smartest man he had ever met. "He fooled me," he said, "as easy as a nursery girl fools a two-year-old with candy. He knows more about Wall Street than Rockefeller. He is wasting himself on this side. It's up to him to run for the Presidency now that Teddy has refused a third spell. Beck would make things hum."

When he called to urge this notable project on the detective, Beck was out. But later in the day he found him in the drawing-room of Dora Myrl's flat in Queen Anne's Square Mansions, from which coincidence he concluded they were both engaged in the same case.

Moreover, Thornton mightily enjoyed the constant mistakes that everybody made of taking Armitage for him and him for Armitage, and played for them persistently.

"Come over to the States, old chap, for your honeymoon. We will have some

rare games with the boys. We might swop wives for a week or so and no one a bit the wiser, except our two selves.”

“But Norma says we are not in the least like each other,” responded Armitage, laughing.

“We’ll see. When is the happy day?”

“Don’t know—can’t coax her to name it.”

Thornton paused for a moment as if struck with a sudden thought. “Bet what you like I’ll coax her,” he said slowly.

“You?”

“Yes, I, as you. She says we are not like; I bet I can fool her if you give me fair play. Make an appointment and let me keep it. Bet a diamond ring for your girl or mine that I coax her.”

“But—”

“You’re afraid I’ll cut you out. Well, if I do get a kiss you may have one from Irene in return.”

“She will know you first look.”

“That’s my lookout. It means a diamond ring for your girl. Is it a bet?”

“I don’t mind; still—”

“Done; a bet closes with the word ‘done.’ Now when can I meet her?”

“Tonight if you like. I am to join her at a dance. I know the people well enough to get you a card. From eleven to twelve I’ll give you your chance—not a minute more, and if you vex Norma I’ll break your neck.”

“That’s a short time limit, but I take you. Vex her! there’s no fear of that. I mean to show her how love ought to be made.”

The voice was an echo of Armitage’s own, the very gesture was his. For an instant he flushed with a sudden fear that Norma might be deluded.

When Norma, with her aunt, arrived at the dance, radiant with the hope of a happy evening, Thornton met her at the head of the stairs with the white moss rosebud in his buttonhole that she had given Armitage at luncheon and claimed the first waltz. Her aunt greeted him unsuspectingly as Mr. Armitage, and no hint of suspicion showed in Norma's radiant face as he claimed the dance and as they swept away to the languishing swell of the music.

They chatted like lovers through the waltz and Thornton knew he was safe as he felt the timid hand pressure that was meant for another. When a partner came to her for the second dance her unsuspecting smile as they parted assured him of success.

The third dance they cut by mutual consent and sat out in the remotest corner of the conservatory. Then he played the accepted lover to the life; was Armitage's very self, and pleaded with a fervour not to be resisted. More eager and more ardent he grew in his triumph as downcast eyes and trembling voice told him she relented.

"Oh, my darling," he urged, "I cannot endure this uncertainty, I cannot feel you are all my own until I know the day that you will give yourself to me. Won't you whisper it to me now? The love and gratitude of a life will repay you."

There was a long pause. Twice she tried to speak and failed. Then in a whisper, through which ran a ripple of laughter, she said, "What would Irene say to the arrangement, Mr. Thornton?"

For an instant he sat utterly dumbfounded. Then the infectious ripple of her laughter tickled his sense of humour to keen enjoyment of the joke against himself.

"Of course I knew you from the first," she told him when they had their laugh out together, "and the rosebud told me Phil was in the joke, so I resolved to teach you both never to doubt a woman's eyes again."

"I will never trust yours again," he said; "a moment ago they looked so tender and confiding. Poor Armitage!" he added under his breath.

She caught the whisper. "Poor Armitage, indeed! Will you kindly tell him I want him? I have a word to say to him."

Thornton hesitated.

“Go!” she cried imperiously, “tell him I want him at once.”

Thornton went in search of his friend with the vague, uncomfortable feeling that he had played the mischief-maker. “Armitage is in for a lively time of it,” he thought.

But his muttered “Poor Armitage!” had touched the girl’s heart as no pleading could. “Poor Armitage, indeed!” She’d show him how much her lover was to be pitied.

So when he met his friend again an hour later Thornton found him in a very frenzy of delight.

“Congratulate me, old chap,” he cried, “she has made me the happiest of men. We are to be married in the first week in September and spend the fall in the States.”

That night two letters crossed each other in the post. From Norma to Dora went many pages, crossed and re-crossed with all the emphasis of italics, containing a full description of the ballroom episode and its results. “When can I see you, dearest?” the postscript asked. “It is impossible to say anything one really wants to say in a letter.”

From Dora came a little note, neat and brief, to say she was starting on a visit to the country and she hoped that Norma could come to say good-bye before she left.

Norma arrived next morning to find Dora in the drawing-room, dressed for a journey, with a big trunk and a travelling bag waiting in the hall.

When Norma, smiling and blushing, poured out her news, Dora caught her visitor to her arms and kissed her with a curious eagerness that was surprising in that self-possessed young woman.

“I congratulate you, my dear,” she said, “I know you will be very happy.”

“Oh, Dora, I’m so nervous since I fixed the inevitable day.”

“Nonsense, my darling; if you love a man you can trust him.”

“And you?” said Norma, as if she expected some confidence in turn.

“Oh, I’m all right,” responded Dora, briskly. “I’m off to the country for a long visit, as I told you in my note. You’ll have a cup of tea, of course?”

They chatted gaily as they sipped their tea, but a vague disappointment was in Norma’s eyes, which Dora affected not to notice.

“I start by the afternoon train,” she said. “It’s a beautiful old place in Kent. I was down to see it last week—a wonderful old place with a glorious garden full of great fruit trees and roses and old-fashioned sweet-smelling flowers.”

“I hope there is a pleasant hostess, that’s the chief thing. Do you know her well?”

“Pretty well.”

“And like her?”

“Very much. I think you would like her too, Norma.”

“Who does the place belong to? You have not told me that yet.”

“To Paul Beck.”

“What!” Norma’s face was full of surprise and dismay. She looked at her friend wistfully, the tears gathering in her eyes. But Dora smiled back radiantly. If she was hard hit she showed no sign.

“Paul Beck!” Norma faltered. “I did not know he was married.”

“Oh, yes, he is.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite sure,” responded Dora, cheerily.

“I had thought—I had hoped,” Norma began confusedly, strangling a sob. The disappointment was very bitter to the tender-hearted little matchmaker. But she

put it aside with a smile as only a woman can.

“I hope you will enjoy yourself, Dora,” she managed to get out.

“Oh, I’m quite sure I will,” said the inexplicable Dora.

“Will you be long?”

“Well, yes, I expect it will be a pretty long visit.”

“Well, anyhow, you must be back for September. I am going to have a splendid wedding, and I want you as my best bridesmaid, of course.”

“I fear that is impossible, darling.” Her voice softened, she caught her friend’s hand and held it. There were tears in her eyes, but a smile shone through them.

Norma looked at her bewildered, yet with some vague glimmering of the truth.

“But why impossible, Dora?”

“Because I’m a married woman. I was married this morning. Paul said he had waited forty-one years for me, and he was in a hurry.”

The End

E-text prepared by Joe Harvat

The Capture of Paul Beck