

# The Missing Angel

# The Missing Angel

by Erle Cox

“My Lords, there was an island of farewell,

Whence parted those things real

from those that only seemed to be.”

To

MOLL, KATH and HAROLD

All characters in this story, except that of Nicholas Senior,  
are fictitious.

## CHAPTER I

To-know all is to forgive all. So, therefore, if you would censure Tydvil Jones because of what happened when he made the attempt to recapture his lost youth, you should know why and how he lost his youth.

A biographical introduction to a story is always boring, but I cannot help that. You must know how Tydvil was brought up or it will be impossible to understand him. When you know he began life with a handicap that not one man in a million could carry to the winning post you will recognise that he might have been much worse than he was.

To begin with Tydvil was an only child. His father was middle-aged when Tydvil arrived, and was a man deeply absorbed in his business. His mother was a woman of iron will and an ultra pious disposition. That she insisted on calling her son Tydvil because his father had been born in Merthyr Tydvil, and had her way, is one proof of the inflexibility of her purpose.

It was the boy's good luck that with his mother's will he inherited the business ability of his father. As there was not room in one family for

two will-powers such as her own, Mrs. Jones, senior, did her best to eradicate that of her son in his infancy; but never recognised that, though suppressed, it remained latent.

Now, Mrs. Jones as the moving spirit in half a dozen societies for the moral improvement of everybody and everything, obtained an insight into aspects of life that are usually kept decently covered up. Not being as wise as she believed herself to be, and seeing results without understanding causes, she was firmly convinced that all men were brutes. She asserted her belief so often that the natural brutality of man became the basic axiom of her life.

She was determined, therefore, that her son would grow up an exception, and took measures accordingly. It was the boy's hard luck that; as an only child, she was able to devote her entire attention to him while she was not otherwise engaged in reforming society.

To give her her due, she was well equipped for the job. It would have been better for Tydvil perhaps had she not been entitled to sign herself M.A. By the time he was aged eighteen years he was better furnished educationally than thousands of public school boys. Otherwise the

results of his home training were deplorable beyond words.

He knew no other boys of his age except at long range. His only sport was tennis played with serious-minded seniors of either sex on the family court. On the rare occasions when he came into contact with youths of his own age, he could not understand them. He considered their outlook on life to be sinful. Their opinion of him, expressed with the freedom of youth, was far from flattering.

On one occasion, after reflecting on their manners and customs to two amazed boys, he only escaped gathering the full harvest of his temerity by one restraining the other on the plea that it was impossible to strike a lady. They parted with him after giving him a brief, but lurid, summary of his character that left him pink to the ears.

The truth was, that at this age, a more intolerable and obnoxious young prig than Tydvil Jones could not have been found outside the pages of "Sanford and Merton," a literary masterpiece that is, fortunately, forgotten by the present generation.

## CHAPTER II

To his father, Tydvil's belated arrival had been a cause of embarrassment rather than pleasure. He felt secretly relieved when his wife had undertaken to deal with a domestic problem with which he felt himself unable to cope. He had his doubts as to the value of the boy's education at home. But he concealed them from his wife. Thirty years of married life had made him a domestic diplomat.

It was a relief, too, when his wife decided that Tydvil had arrived at the age when he should enter his father's office. It was his unspoken fear that his wife would demand a professional career for their son.

Away back in the '50's of last century, there had been established the firm of Craddock, Burns and Despard. The firm had flourished exceedingly. Burns's daughter had married a Jones in the '70's. Subsequently, through a series of vital and commercial dissolutions, the father of Tydvil Jones became the sole partner and owner of the firm of Craddock, Burns and Despard. The head office was housed in a vast six-storied building, and the women of six States paid tribute into the coffers of C. B. & D.

For the first time in his life, Tydvil Jones came into direct contact with his father. It was a belated contact that led to a mutual respect, based, although they did not recognise the fact, on mutual suffering.

The loosening of the apron strings, however, by no means meant emancipation. In the warehouse, Tydvil experienced the isolation of “the boss’s son.” It was the isolation of the man who would eventually take the reins. Departmental heads who imparted information were courteous but restrained. The general staff, both office and warehouse, viewed his advent with suspicion.

The boy’s natural reticence increased, and, denied friendship, he threw himself wholeheartedly into his work. He had sufficient sense not to make his position too obvious to the staff. The natural ability he had inherited from his father found a proper outlet, and it was not long before Tydvil began to make his mark.

Gradually the staff recognised he was not presumptuous. Moreover, to their great and abiding joy, they discovered that he was innocent of the world and the flesh to an extent that was unbelievable to a horde of

average business pagans.

The typists found with delight that, on being spoken to by one of them, he would blush a rosy pink. Therefore, they made opportunities to approach him, and the eyes of a dozen other minxes watched for the tell-tale blush.

There grew up around Tydvil legends of his innocence, that lost nothing in the telling. “Have you heard Tyddie’s latest?” became a stock question. None the less, while the staff grinned joyously at his blameless life, they began to have a real respect for him as a business man.

Said one departmental head to another: “He may be a mug in many respects, but there was nothing of the mug in the way he handled that old swine Graham of Graham and Stone over those contracts. You know the old man’s gift of language when the spirit moves him?”

The other nodded, and laughed.

“Well,” the narrator continued, “he cut loose on young Tyddie. He had



hardly got his first ‘damn,’ when the lad pipes up, ‘You will be good enough not to use obscene and blasphemous language in my office. It does not impress me, and it is offensive. Kindly confine your remarks to business.’”

The listener laughed. “That must have improved the atmosphere.”

“A close-up of old G’s face would have been worth a fortune. He gulped out, ‘I’ve done business with this house for five and thirty years, and have never been spoken to like that.’ ‘Hump,’ snapped Tyddie, ‘then it’s about time someone took you in hand. If you don’t like the way I talk to you, you can get out and close the account.’”

“That, to old Michael Graham?”

“Just that! And believe it or not, he bullied the old devil till he didn’t know whether he was awake or enjoying a nightmare. He signed up for all the allowances we asked for and agreed to replace the defective stuff. Tyddie may be a perfect lady, but he is no mug.”

## CHAPTER III

In his twenty-fifth year, Tydvil Jones married. Had he been asked at the time, he would have said he had made free selection. Really, the choice had been his mother's. That matron was somewhat disappointed at the result of her matchmaking.

She knew Amy to be very pious and serious but she under-estimated her generalship and fighting strength. Amy suddenly developed a will that was more inflexible than her own. In the several ruthless but brief battles fought for the ownership of Tydvil Jones, Amy was signally victorious.

The bone of contention knew nothing of the war that had been fought. He found he had merely exchanged one domestic ruler for another. To him the gynecocracy that would have driven another man to drink or crime, was a normal state of affairs. The only effect of the change was that he noticed Amy talked a good deal more than his mother did.

After his marriage his home life took on a new aspect. Under his mother's rule Tydvil had been able to avoid taking part in her

activities for the reformation of society.

Amy had other ideas.

First, she waged war on her mother-in-law to obtain control of several of her pet societies. To give the elder woman her due, she put up a perfectly willing fight. Outside of actual physical violence, there was no limit to their endeavours. The war was waged under Rafferty's rules, and Amy was again victorious.

What Mrs. Jones, senior, said about Mrs. Jones, junior, though in the main true, was libellous and scathing. Indeed, there was no need to embroider the stories, the facts were more scandalous than anything she could have invented. Amy's methods were new and atrocious beyond the wide experience of her vanquished mother-in-law.

Who but Amy would have thought of telephoning to every one of her mother-in-law's supporters, on the morning of a vital meeting, that the meeting had been postponed? But Amy did that, and came down with her own gang and elected all her own nominees for office unopposed.

Partly to irritate his mother, and partly for her own convenience, Amy enlisted Tydvil for social service. Having no other interests outside his business, he found the work an outlet for his surplus energies. Amy found his clear judgment no small assistance in her campaigns.

Therefore, in certain circles, Tydvil Jones became a somewhat notable figure. He studied social questions and spoke from many platforms. He also subscribed to causes the value of which he doubted, though at that period his doubts were kept to himself.

## CHAPTER IV

At the age of thirty an avalanche smote the life of Tydvil Jones. In the one six months he lost both his parents. Early in the year, a moment of indecision settled the fate of his mother. The driver of the motor car was severely censured by the coroner, though the jury brought in a verdict of misadventure.

Just six months later, his father relinquished his life as unobtrusively as he had lived. Their actual loss had little effect on their son.

Neither had been demonstratively affectionate. None the less, the result was to sweep Tydvil from a harbour of comparative calm into an ocean of serious responsibilities.

He knew when he succeeded to the control of Craddock, Burns and Despard, that his father's death had made him a wealthy man. But when the figures relating to the estate were known, confreres of the deceased merchant opened their eyes with astonishment, and the State Treasurer of the day licked his lips over the death duties.

Thanks to his previous attitude towards his staff, the succession of

Tydvil Jones to the throne of C. B. & D. was accomplished without friction or unrest. Despite its great prosperity, the thirty years of conservative autocracy of the late ruler lay heavily on the warehouse. Without undue haste, and carefully feeling his way, the new ruler instituted reforms that sent a sigh of relief from basement to roof.

But, from the day he assumed the reins, Tydvil began to live a double life—but not in the usually accepted sense of the term. One was the domestic life in which he was the subject of an autocrat. The other, his real life, was as ruler of an establishment capitalised at three-quarters of a million, and controlling the destinies of some four hundred fellow beings.

From his elevated position his horizon was enlarged. He came into direct contact with his peers in business, who received him with some circumspection, having heard stories of his peculiar views. It was not long before they recognised that he was a man not to be despised in the game of buying and selling by which they all made a more or less honest living.

Outside their common interest, however, they were at a loss what to make

of him, and he could not understand them. But after relinquishing the first very natural idea that he was pulling their legs, they summed him up as a most amazing prig.

There was some justification for their verdict. He had been brought up to believe that a theatre was a vestibule to Hades, and shared with racecourses and hotels the distinction of wearing the hall-marks of depravity. If you hammer a doctrine, however fantastic, into a human being from childhood, it will take an immense amount of eradicating.

But, in these early days of his responsibilities, Tydvil did a lot of quiet thinking and observing. It did not take him long to arrive at the conclusion that it was he and not his business associates who were abnormal. Then the revolutionary truth gradually shaped itself in his mind, that all his life he had allowed others to do his thinking, and he awoke to the knowledge that all his ideas apart from his business, were second hand.

At home he allowed no sign of his changing ideas to be noticed. He entered into his social activities as an observer rather than a participator. His admiration for his associates faded when he noticed

how they fawned on Amy. He also awoke to the fact that it was the cheque book of Tydvil Jones rather than Tydvil Jones himself that commanded the respect given to him. He obtained a good deal of cynical amusement from watching how eagerly Amy lapped up the flattery of her friends.

It was about this time that Tydvil began to study his wife. But it was a study of her habits and customs and not a study of her comfort. Amy was good looking; there was no doubt about that. But there were lines about her mouth that were seldom seen by anyone but her husband. They showed up immediately he questioned any act or opinion of hers. When her friends complimented him on the unfailing sweetness of “dear Amy,” Jones agreed cheerfully and dutifully, but the thought of those lines was always in the background.

Few but he recognised the diamond hardness of the sweet nature of Amy. He had occasionally met other women who took the good things of life thankfully and graciously. They were women who laughed naturally and who did not want to reform society.

Once, experimentally, he suggested a modification of her Spartan hair dressing and more expensive frocks. After Amy’s first shock of surprise,



her discourse on frivolous dressing lasted for 45 minutes. Who had hinted she was unbecomingly clothed? Had she ever shown a tendency to extravagance? Nothing but her knowledge of his impeccable life saved him from a suspicion of having sideslipped from grace. Indeed, her insistence on returning to the subject of the reasons for his suggestion awoke in Jones the thought that she would find the pain of a misdemeanour eased by the joy of reforming him, if necessary.

However, as he listened to her homily, he tried, without much success, to reconcile her ideas of economy in dress with a twenty-roomed house, three motor cars and eight maids.

## CHAPTER V

However, Tydvil's study of Amy led him to the discovery that though he had been married to her for six years, he knew very little of his wife.

It was a little disconcerting at first to realise that she was no saint, and that in pursuit of her objectives her methods were, to put it mildly, peculiar. Recollections of passages between Amy and his mother, unnoticed at the time, strengthened this conviction.

Then the discovery of a letter from his mother to his father opened his eyes still wider. It narrated the episode of Amy's telephone tactics before referred to, and wound up with a summary of Amy's character as it appeared to the writer: "A more selfish, deceitful and hard-hearted woman never existed. I feel that her piety is the grossest hypocrisy, and that faith and charity are as far beyond her as my poor son is beyond hope in her hands."

Allowing for his mother's habit of emphasis, Jones was forced to conclude that there was something in the unflattering sketch of Amy.

Then he remembered his father's self-effacement, and he saw a light. As he ripped the letter viciously to pieces, for the first time in his

life, at the age of thirty-two years, Tydvil Jones swore. “No more! No more!” he said aloud, bringing his clenched fist down on the table before him, “I’m damned if I’ll stand it any longer!” The trouble was, that Tydvil learned he had been robbed of his youth and the joy of living it. That the robbery was committed with pious intent, was no salve to his feelings. Affection may have misled his mother, but Amy had been an accessory, not for love, but ambition. It was not sweet to realise that he was subject for amused pity among the men he met in business. The worst of it was he felt his case was beyond remedy.

Two incidents occurred about this time that made him resolve on emancipation. In both of these he was an unwilling eavesdropper.

One night, while returning home from a meeting, he entered an empty railway compartment. At the next station, two men, well known to him, took the adjoining compartment. When he recognised their voices, he was prevented from making his presence known by their first words, evidently the continuation of a discussion. “Tydvil Jones—heavens, what a name!—is a hopeless wowser. And I can’t stand a wowser.”

The rest of the conversation came in illuminating patches. “I don’t

believe he ever..." What it was, the angry listener could not catch, but the shout of mirth that accompanied the expression of unbelief, made Tydvil's blood boil. "McRae or Daglish should take him in hand and complete his education..."

"He would be an awfully decent fellow if someone would de-moralise him."

Fortunately, in the midst of ribald suggestions for the improvement of Tydvil Jones, the train drew up at a platform, and the subject of their speculations, stooping low, fled.

The second incident was far more pleasant, and gave Tydvil even more food for reflection.

One evening he was working back in his office some time after the staff had left. Through a mind concentrated on his work, he became conscious of voices near him, but for some time their purport did not sink in.

Then suddenly, without volition, he found himself alert and listening to the words, "Well, anyhow, Tyddie is a dear in spite of his innocence."

The voice was that of his senior typist. In a moment he realised that to

make his presence known at that juncture would be exceedingly embarrassing both to himself and the speaker. With a grim smile, he felt that, of the two, he would suffer the more acutely. He hoped the conversation would lose its very personal note.

But the next words convinced him that the hope was vain. "I'll bet," came a second voice, and he recognised the accents of that impertinent little Miss Marsden, "that no one has ever told Tyddie how good looking he is. I just love the way his hair waves, and those brown eyes of his. Did you ever notice what a kissable mouth he has?"

The listening man felt perspiration on his forehead. Then came the voice of the senior typist. "Why don't you tell him that, Jess?"

There was a ripple of happy laughter, and Jess replied: "Poor Tyddie! If I told him that I would be tried for manslaughter. Tyddie would perish from spontaneous combustion brought on by his own blushes."

Little Miss Jessica Marsden never knew how near she was to bringing about that catastrophe. "It's a jolly shame to think he's tied up to Amy," from the senior typist. "My sister, Jean, was at school with her,

and she says that Amy wasn't fit for human consumption." Jones started, and drew a deep breath. This was getting home with a vengeance.

"She is a beast," commented Jess simply and sincerely.

The senior typist took up the tale. "It gives me the pip to see her come sailing along with her condescending—'Is Mr. Jones in his office, my dear?'"

The words were such a perfect imitation of his wife's voice, that it took Jones all his time to keep still. "Pity she can't get someone to tell her how to dress herself."

Jessica echoed the wish, and went on, "I always call them the beauty and the beast. It's a reversal of roles, but it's accurate."

The voices died away down the empty warehouse. When he was sure they had departed, the sole partner of Craddock, Burns and Despard drew a long breath of relief. The next thing he did was rather unusual for him. He rose and walked across the room to the mirror that hung over the fixed basin behind the screen in the corner. Jones surveyed his reflection

long and earnestly. Whether Miss Marsden's judgments were right, he was too modest to decide. But he did think that thirty-three years of sober and upright living had left him looking curiously youthful. The discovery was not unpleasing.

On the following Friday evening when the senior typist and that impudent little Miss Marsden received their pay envelopes, they were amazed to find a wholly unexpected and totally unaccountable increase of ten shillings a week in their salaries.

Had they known that the portent announced the awakening of Tydvil Jones, they would have been still more bewildered.

## CHAPTER VI

So now we see why Tydvil Jones was ripe for rebellion against life in general, and his wife in particular. He felt he had had a raw deal. He did not quite know what to do about it, but he was determined to do something, and in the humour he was in, he did not care much what he did.

The overdue explosion occurred about a fortnight after the episode of the two typists. He entered his breakfast room, as usual, the first arrival. It was Amy's practice to appear at breakfast always, but unless she had something particular to say to him, usually annoying, she seldom arrived on the scene until a few minutes before he was timed to depart for his office.

She did not like early rising, but she did like to say to her friends, "I think, my dear, it is a wife's duty to give her husband her society at breakfast." She considered it marked her as a devoted spouse who was willing to sacrifice her comfort for her husband's pleasure. She certainly did sacrifice her comfort, but whether Tydvil found pleasure in it is open to argument.



The maid who attended to his simple wants found the master unusually unresponsive. He was as much loved by his household staff as Amy was disliked—which says volumes for his popularity. Tydvil had slept badly, and was still simmering from a domestic argument of the previous night.

There was, among others, an institution known as the Moral Uplift Society, of which Amy was president. Its aim was to assist unfortunate girls, who had run off the rails, back to the tracks of righteousness. Jones had, on several occasions, contributed lavishly to its upkeep. A quiet investigation, however, had suggested to him, that though its expenditure was real, the results accruing from its efforts were doubtful.

His insistence on being given some concrete evidence of its usefulness was met with replies so vague, and so conflicting, that he arrived at the conclusion that its secretary was a son of Ananias, and several of the helpers were daughters of Sapphira. Moreover, his requests for a balance sheet had been fruitless, though he admired the skill with which his curiosity on the subject was baffled.

For several days Amy had been angling for a cheque for one thousand pounds for the Moral Uplift Society. Usually he submitted to her exactions patiently. This time, however, she met with a flat refusal until he had seen a balance sheet prepared by his own auditor.

Amy was annoyed, but had no misgivings as to the outcome of Tydvil's extraordinary stubbornness. On the previous evening she had given up an engagement to devote herself seriously to the matter. From eight o'clock until ten-thirty, when he fled to his room, still recalcitrant, and locked himself in—and her out—she had wrought with him faithfully. He had remained silent, sullen and unyielding under the ordeal by tongue.

All this may explain, if it does not excuse, the outburst of Tydvil Jones as his eyes ran over the columns of the newspaper the maid had placed beside his plate. Suddenly he sat erect. He dropped his half lifted cup back into the saucer with a clash of china and jingle of silver that shattered the dignified silence of the room.

In both hands he grabbed the paper, and glared at it with incredulous

eyes. It was no wonder he doubted their accuracy, for he read, under triple and flattering headlines, the following paragraph: “Members and friends of the Moral Uplift Society passed a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Tydvil Jones, the well known philanthropist, at their monthly meeting yesterday afternoon. Mrs. Tydvil Jones, the president of the Society, read a letter from her husband in which he offered a donation of one thousand pounds to be used for any purpose the committee may direct. This is the third cheque for a similar amount which Mr. Jones has contributed to the funds of the society.”

“That well known philanthropist, Mr. Tydvil Jones,” read that paragraph three times before its enormity filtered thoroughly into his system. The third time, he read it standing up. The startled maid regarded her employer with wide-eyed concern. She thought he was choking, so suffused had his face become. Then the long suppressed volcanic eruption took place. Tydvil hurled the newspaper to the floor and ground it tinder his heel. This was bad enough, but his language...“It’s an outrage!” he shouted. “A damned outrage and a damned conspiracy! Not a penny! Not one damned penny!”

Fate decreed that, at that moment Amy entered the room and both saw and

heard her husband's demonstration. It was only when his wife had advanced towards the table that he was aware of her presence. Not that that made any difference, Tydvil was beyond caring two hoots for Amy or anyone else.

Scenting battle, the wide-eyed maid fled—but not out of earshot. Amy advanced, showing no sign of emotion, and, stooping down, drew the newspaper from under her husband's foot. Deliberately she smoothed out the creases of the torn page, and quietly placed it on the table. Then, as quietly, she walked round the table and took her seat. She leaned back in her chair with her cold eyes fixed on his flushed face. There was a long thirty seconds' silence.

Then Amy spoke calmly, "I am waiting, Tydvil."

"For what?" he snapped.

"For your apology." Her eyes never left his for a moment.

"Then you'll wait a dashed long time!" He had leaned towards her with both hands resting on the edge of the table, and his out-thrust chin

gave him an unusually bellicose air.

The lines about Amy's mouth hardened. Her lips compressed to a straight pink line, and there was cold fury in her grey eyes. Very few of her friends would have recognised "Dear Amy" at that moment.

"I think, Tydvil, dear," she said evenly, though the white knuckles clenched on the arm of her chair showed what it cost to control her voice—"I think, Tydvil, dear, that you have been overworking yourself. I will ask Dr. Morris to call this evening. Perhaps a holiday will be necessary.

"Morris, be hanged!" he snorted.

Amy raised her brows slightly. "Perhaps, my dear Tydvil," she knew of old how the reiterated "Dear Tydvil" grated, "you will explain the cause of your irritation. Your conduct may be, indeed is, unpardonable." She waved a hand slightly and went on, "I am quite unused, as you know, to hearing such language. Neither am I used to being sworn at before my servants."

The statements were unassailable facts. Usually she would have side-tracked Tydvil into a defence that he had not sworn at her. But he was too full of wrath to be distracted by minor issues. He snatched up the crumpled paper and, in a voice that she scarcely recognised, he read that outrageous paragraph aloud. “What’s the meaning of that infernal falsehood?” he demanded. “You know I have refused to subscribe to that den of racketeers. Eh? Eh?”

There was a nasty little smile on the corners of Amy’s lips as she answered.

“The paragraph is quite in order, my dear Tydvil. It states what actually took place at our meeting yesterday.” She paused, and the smile deepened. “Indeed, I handed the paragraph into the newspaper offices myself.”

“Meeting—yesterday—afternoon!” He gasped his surprise with each word. “You told me you knew I particularly wished to be present. You told me yourself it was—postponed.” Amazement struggled with his wrath.

Amy nodded slightly, quite unabashed. “I am quite aware of that, as I

was aware that you intended to make a very disagreeable fuss over a quite unnecessary balance sheet. I most strongly object to your interference in matters in any of my societies that do not concern you.”

Staring at her, open mouthed, Tydvil sank slowly back into his chair.

“But the letter!” he gasped, “the letter...”

“I saw to that, too.” She spoke as though humouring a petulant child.

Jones turned the revelation over in his mind. “Do you mean to tell me you wrote that letter yourself?” he said at last.

She nodded. “I typed it myself, and read it to the meeting. It was not signed, and no one saw it but myself.”

“And,” his voice shook with his rising wrath again, “you expect me to hand over that cheque!”

She nodded emphatically. “I most certainly do.”

“Then let me tell you this,” he shouted, thumping the table while

everything on it jangled to his blows, "I'll see you to Jericho before I give you a farthing; and you can explain why as you dashed well please."

"After the publicity the matter has been given, you will find it rather awkward to say that you have changed your mind." Amy smiled her derision.

Jones pressed his finger furiously on the bell button. The maid arrived with a rapidity that would have excited suspicion had either combatant been in a mood to notice trifles.

He turned to her. "Tell Carter to bring round the single-seater," he said abruptly. "Tell him I wish him to drive me to the office." The girl vanished on the word.

Meanwhile, the tension between the two increased. Up till now, Tydvil's actions, to use diplomatic phraseology, had been merely unfriendly. The ordering of the car had been a declaration of war. Like some other good people, Amy's self-denial extended only to others. She had laid it down that the exercise of the walk along St. Kilda road to the city was necessary for his health. Moreover, it set the staff an example of



unostentation. Now, his ordering of the car was flat and flagrant rebellion.

When the maid disappeared, Amy said acidly, "I think, Tydvil dear, we have already settled the question of your using a car to take you to the office."

"Well, I'm unsettling it," he snorted. He picked up the paper and, turning a most aggressive back on his wife, he pretended to read.

Five minutes passed in strained silence. The maid returned. "The car is waiting, sir."

Before Jones could move, his wife said quickly, "Oh, Kate! Mr. Jones has changed his mind. Tell Carter to take the car back."

This was one of Amy's choicest methods of management. She relied for its success on Tydvil's horror of scenes, even in private, and felt certain he would shrink from a brawl before the maid. But, for, once, she had misjudged the extent of the revolt.

Jones sprang to his feet, and arrested the maid as she moved, with a barked “Wait!” The girl stopped. “If you convey that message, both you and Carter will be summarily dismissed. Bring me my hat and coat.”

The girl hesitated, and looked at her mistress for guidance. She was between a horde of devils and a very deep sea. “Do you hear me!” thundered the voice of the master, and never before had she heard it with such a ring of fury. Suddenly she recognised that she was a spectator to a revolution. When, a minute later, she returned, Amy was sobbing, with her face in her plate.

“Oh, Tydvil! To think you would insult me before the maids!”

“I haven’t begun insulting you yet!” he growled truculently. “Just wait a bit!” and he left without even glancing at her again.

That he reached his office by car instead of using his legs, added one more link to the chain of circumstances. He arrived just twenty minutes before the time his staff had learned to expect him, and saw certain things that were as unexpected as he was.

## CHAPTER VII

Beside the door of Tydvil Jones's private office at the warehouse, was a railed enclosure containing a large writing table. This was presided over by Miss Geraldine Brand, who was a young woman of no small importance in C. B. & D. She was not only guardian of the door, but was Tydvil's private secretary and his link with the departmental heads.

The self-possessed and entirely adequate Geraldine knew as much of Jones's affairs as did his banker or his solicitor. Heads of departments paused at her desk and treated her as a fellow and an equal. From her they learned if their visits were propitiously timed.

Tydvil, who had tested her carefully, knew that she would correct lapses of English in his dictation, and that she knew how to keep silent in matters where silence was golden. She remembered nothing which she should forget and forgot nothing she should remember. Their relations were entirely impersonal. To him, she was a perfect instrument for his business needs. No one ever knew what Geraldine thought of Tydvil.

On the morning of the revolution, Geraldine arrived on the stroke of

nine. In the inner office she spent a few moments patting a helmet of hair, more red than gold, into order. Systematically she surveyed the great oaken desk, saw the date stamp had been altered, straightened the wide blotting pad and glanced over, the pen stand. Then she opened one of the two office safes, and took from it two basket of papers, one of which she placed on either side of the blotting pad. Satisfied that all was well, she seated herself opposite the leather padded chair for the first work of the day.

There was a long pause until she heard the sound of hasty steps approaching. A junior hurried in bearing a large bag, from which he sent an avalanche of letters on to the table in front of Geraldine. As the boy turned away, she halted him with a peremptory “Stop!”

He looked at her uneasily. “Listen, Jimmy,” she said decisively, “this is the third time in a fortnight you have kept me waiting. If it happens again you’ll be hunting another job—understand?” She cut short a glib explanation with, “No good, Jimmy! I’ve heard that yarn better told by a procession of your predecessors. Your job is to have the mail on this table at nine. Chase yourself!” The boy fled. With the deftness of long practice, Geraldine sorted the letters into piles. Some few she passed

untouched to the blotting pad opposite. Then, taking a long, pliant blade, she swiftly cut envelope after envelope along three sides, leaving the contents undisturbed. As she cut them she stacked them neatly at her right hand.

She was so intent on her work, that the new-corner who had entered quietly, had ample time to enjoy the picture she made before a movement on his part impelled her to turn. The slight frown at the interruption changed to a smile as he walked round the table and, without ceremony, seated himself in the chair sacred to Tydvil Jones.

After the first glance, the girl had turned to her work again without speaking. The man watched her for a while as one who gazed on something worth seeing. Presently he said, with mock ceremony, "Good morning, Geraldine."

Without pausing to look up, she said quietly, "Good morning, Mr. Brewer." There was just enough emphasis on the prefix to convey a rebuke.

The man smiled. "My name, Geraldine, happens to be William, but it's

generally Billy.”

“And mine,” the girl retorted, “happens to be Miss Brand. I wish you would remember it.’

“I’ve a shocking memory,” pleaded Billy, “and Geraldine is about the only name I think of.”

The letters passed swiftly through the slender white hands to the zip-zip-zip of the flying blade. If she had noticed what he said, she gave no sign. Brewer was silent, content in looking at her. Presently she glanced up. “Do you realize that you are occupying Mr. Jones’s chair, and that he is likely to be in at any moment; and also,”—she paused to draw a fresh pile of letters towards her—“you have no business in this room whatever.”

Billy looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. “Oh! That one so lovely should be so false.” He chuckled. “Tyddie will not be here for another thirty-five minutes, as you know better than I do. I consider looking at you to be most important business. As for the chair, it fits me admirably. So much for your objections to my presence.”

The girl gave a light laugh. “God gie us a guid conceit o’ orselves. You’re not nearly big enough to fit that chair comfortably, Mr. Billy Brewer.”

“If you would admit how extremely capable I am, you would not have said that. However, Geraldine, your attempt to hurt my feelings has failed. Flopped! My pride remains uninjured.”

“I don’t flatter myself that anything I could say would shake your colossal self-conceit,” she retorted.

Billy laughed heartily. “It is not often you are really complimentary, Geraldine...”

“Miss Brand,” she interrupted sharply.

“Geraldine,” he continued unmoved, “but when you are you make a man blush.”

“You blush!” she said scornfully. “The fact is that you think because

you are easily the best salesman in the city—I grant you that...”

“Please don’t!” he protested. “You make me feel dizzy.”

“You are an ass,” she said dispassionately. “Because no buyer, man or woman, can resist your insidious influence, you think you are big enough to run C. B. & D. But you’re not, my friend, not by miles.”

“Would that you were a buyer, Geraldine,” he said, grinning provocatively and leaning towards her. She prodded at him with the paper knife and returned to her letters.

“Perhaps,” she said presently, “you think you should be offered a partnership.”

“Would you accept a partnership if it were offered to you?” he asked, smiling.

“Rather!” she replied incautiously.

“Hooray!” he exclaimed. “Then I do offer you one. Let us go into



partnership as Brewer and Brand, doing business under the style of William Brewer—unlimited.”

Geraldine placed the last of the letters together and leaned back in her chair. Unabashed at the suggestion, she met his eyes steadily. For months there had been this sparring between them. The girl knew he was in earnest. Worse still, she had reached a stage where she scarcely cared to analyse her own feelings. She looked at him reflectively before speaking, and then said deliberately, “Indeed, and how many sleeping partners would there be in the firm?” There was no mistaking the intention or the innuendo. Billy flushed under her unwavering eyes, and tried to pass it off with a jest.

“Really, Geraldine, you shock me,” he said, half laughing. “If I am dumb, I am not deaf,” she went on. “You’re not dumb, Geraldine, I’ll swear you’re not. I heard you speak most distinctly just now.”

“You think,” she took up the tale, “that because people make no comment to you, that they are blind to the habits and customs of Mr. William Brewer. You might just as well disabuse your mind of the idea. I believe in saying what I think.”

“Yes,” he broke in, “I have noticed that.”

She went on without noticing the interruption. “And I’m not blind to the fact that you have seen fit to give me the benefit of a good deal of your society lately. If a fraction of what is said about you is true, if you have any regard for a girl, you can show it best by keeping away from her.”

Billy whistled softly. “Your hand is not nearly as light as it looks,” he said. “However, I suppose none of my kind friends has told you that I have cut out all that sort of thing these many moons.” He paused. “Just because I realised what you have just told me. Give me a chance,” he pleaded, and his voice was very soft.

She shook her head and stood up. “Billy Brewer, you have been a very bad boy, and I’d want to be very sure of you before I gave you a chance.”

“If you were sure?” he asked.

For the first time, her eyes fell. “Prove to me that I can be sure.”

She bent to pick up the letters from the table as he moved round beside her. Then, thinking that direct action might succeed where persuasion failed, Billy Brewer made a false move. As she bent, he swiftly flung an arm round her, pinning her arms to her side. Instantly she straightened and half turned. Billy took a complete tactical advantage of the unguarded lips.

With a little cry, she wrenched her arm free. As she did so, a strange thing happened. Brewer released her suddenly and stood with his eyes fixed on some object over her shoulder.

Blind with anger, Geraldine did not notice the change in Billy's attitude. "You brute! You utter brute!" she gasped, and, with all her force, she struck him in the face with her clenched hand. It was an active tennis and golf hand, and Geraldine struck to make her mark—and did. Three times that hand landed on the same spot before Geraldine awoke to the fact that Billy was staring over her shoulder, and made no effort to defend himself. He might have been cast in bronze for all the notice he took of her enthusiastic assault.

Then she, too, turned, and herself became frozen into one of a group.  
For, there in the doorway surveying the scene, stood Tydvil Jones. Aye!  
Tydvil, who by his self made laws, should not have arrived for another  
twenty minutes, at the earliest.

## CHAPTER VIII

It would be difficult to say which of the three was the most astounded by the episode. It was Tydvil, however, who first recovered himself.

“If, Mr. Brewer, you have all you needed, there is no reason for you to wait.” The freezing politeness of the words matched his manner. He stood aside, holding the door open for the exit of the culprit. And—Mr. Brewer went, but not gracefully. The flushed girl waited beside her chair as Tydvil hung up his coat and hat. He took his seat and motioned her to hers. As she sat down, Geraldine stammered, “Oh, Mr. Jones—I—I.”

He held up his hand. “I think, Miss Brand, that unless you particularly wish to discuss the—er—episode, which, I have no doubt, was extremely distasteful to you, we will not refer to it—for the present, at any rate. Let us get to our mail first.”

Geraldine murmured her thanks, and passed the piled letters across the table. In a few minutes they were deep in work. Long practice and a complete understanding of his methods made words almost unnecessary between them. Papers passed to and fro almost in silence. Occasionally

he paused to give her a note to be brought before him later. In a remarkably short space of time, the piled letters vanished, leaving only those that required his personal attention. As she took the last letter from his hand, she picked up her pencil. “Ready?” he asked. The girl nodded assent.

“First,” he said, “I wish you to look through all of the morning papers for a paragraph similar to this.” He passed her a cutting. “Then send this note to the editor of each paper in which it appears. I want this done at once, and sent out by special messenger.”

“To the editor.—Sir, my attention has been drawn to a paragraph in your columns this morning which stated that I have offered a gift of one thousand pounds to the funds of the Moral Uplift Society. I would be pleased if you would give similar publicity to my personal statement that I did not make any offer of the kind. Further, I would like it to be clearly understood that I do not intend in future to make any contributions to the society mentioned.”

Tydvil paused, and said smilingly, “What happens when one burns one’s boats, Miss Brand?”

Geraldine glanced up from her note-book. "I suppose you stay where you are, or swim home."

"Exactly," he replied, "and I cannot swim."

That morning Geraldine found a strange indecision in Tydvil's dictation. Usually her pencil had to fly to keep up with him, but now, for minutes at a time, she found herself tracing patterns with her pencil while waiting for him to continue.

The fact was that Tydvil had found that his skirmish with Amy, followed so closely by the Brand-Brewer episode, had thoroughly disjointed his normal orderly mind. For the first time since she had taken on her duties as his secretary, he recognised that Miss Brand was not only a young woman, but a positively beautiful young woman. It seemed as though Brewer, by some magic, had opened his eyes.

Again and again he found himself wondering how he had, until now, overlooked the beauty of that rich head of hair. Never, until that morning, had he observed those mischievous little curls that nestled

against her neck. Again, as he paused, his eye was taken by the delicate line and perfect colour of the half turned cheek.

Between two sentences in an important letter to the manager of his Sydney branch, Tydvil was staggered by the intrusion of an idea that, after all, Billy Brewer was not so much to blame for falling from grace. This was followed by a thought still more heinous. He found himself envying Billy's freedom to kiss a lovely girl without disturbing his conscience; and contrasting it with his own enthrallment. Billy had lived, but he—"Phoo!" The exclamation escaped him unconsciously.

At the sound, Geraldine glanced up. "I'm afraid I did not quite catch..."

"Nothing at all," replied Jones, more airily than he felt, "I did not speak."

At last it was over. "I do not wish to be interrupted this morning, as I shall be busy," he said, as Geraldine picked up her baskets full of papers and turned to leave the room.

At the door she hesitated and turned round. He looked at her



enquiringly.

“I would like to say...” Her face flushed divinely. “I mean, that so far as I am concerned—there will be no need to—” then, with a rush, “to say anything to Mr. Brewer about his foolishness this morning. I am able to look after my own interests.”

There was a quizzical smile on the face of Tydvil Jones as he answered, “Yes, I noticed that, too. However, I shall do as you wish, Miss Brand.” She went out and closed the door softly behind her. For a long time Jones sat staring at it in smiling thought. “Now, I wonder!” he said to himself. “Now, I wonder!”

## CHAPTER IX

Jones turned to his work with resolution, but again and again he found his thoughts wandering. Finally, he pushed his papers aside impatiently and, with his elbows on his table and his head in his hands, he surrendered to the mood of the moment. As moods go, it was a very unchristian frame of mind in which he found himself.

He knew Amy too well to flatter himself that the skirmish of the morning could be magnified into a decisive battle. In his mind he pictured her planning a counterattack in reply to his success. Through his mind ran a plan of forcing her into a position in which she would be compelled to accept a judicial separation. It was his one hope for a peaceful life. But, as the plan took shape, he realised that her tactics would be to throw the odium of the legal process on him.

His only means of defence would be to use the weapons that Amy would use without compunction—the stiletto and poisonous gas. Why should he not use them? Why not? Ethically, the suggestion might be untenable, but makers of ethics were not married to Amy.

Then his mind drifted off to the scene he had witnessed an hour earlier. It surprised him a little to think that, instead of being righteously wrathful against Brewer, his feelings were akin to envy. He had accepted Miss Brand's intercession as an easy way out of a situation in which he felt unsure of himself. After all, he thought, was he justified in judging Brewer, or any, man, by codes that were his mother's and Amy's?

He remembered his father's self-effacement. Would he follow his example and remain subservient under the domination of—a tongue? Yes, that was all it was a tongue! He, Tydvil Jones, head of C. B. & D., with an income of fifty thousand pounds a year, whom all his peers envied for his possessions! Yet, he realised that not all his wealth nor all his power had given him as much of liberty as any one of the men who did him service.

The thought that the two women who might have helped him were the ones who had led him under false standards, was very bitter.

Billy Brewer would have been astounded had he known how much of his private life was an open book to Tydvil Jones. More than once he had been called on to "the carpet." He had come each time with such an airy

grace of gracelessness, that it disarmed justice. Jones knew that whatever his peccadilloes, he had never let them interfere with his work. While he did not feel inclined to copy Billy in manner or morals, Jones recognised that Billy knew more of life and living than an army corps of Tydvil Joneses.

“Was it,” Tydvil asked himself, “such a sin to kiss a pretty girl?” He, himself, had never kissed anyone but Amy; and kissing Amy was rather less stimulating than drinking iced water in winter. Apparently, despite her active indignation, Geraldine Brand did not consider it a capital offence, or she would not have interceded on behalf of the culprit. True, Geraldine had blushed, but he had no recollection of seeing Amy blush even as a bride.

The memory of his courtship came back. His courtship! The farce of it! He had to thank his mother for that. He remembered how, a few days before his marriage, his mother had told him, that if ever there were a saint, Amy was one. Saints! These saints had stolen his boyhood and his youth. These saints had bound him hand and foot. “If these be saints,” he muttered aloud, “may Satan himself come and free me from their works.” He bowed his head forward on his hands until it rested on his

blotting pad.

## CHAPTER X

Minutes passed before he moved again. At last he leaned back with a sigh. As he did so, he started erect with an exclamation of astonishment. In the armchair reserved for visitors at the end of the table, sat a stranger. For a moment anger got the better of his surprise. How could Miss Brand have dared to admit him after the order he had given? Never before had she so lapsed from duty. Then anger and surprise gave way to curiosity. Although Tydvil stared in a manner in which he would scarcely have permitted himself in ordinary circumstances, the stranger seemed quite unabashed. He met the questioning stare frankly, with just a flicker of amusement in his eyes.

The intruder was apparently tall, and slender without being thin. As he leaned back in his chair, perfectly composed, Tydvil was struck with a sense of latent power and authority in the man, although there was nothing in the pose to suggest it. Tydvil seldom took particular notice of another man's appearance, but the distinction of his visitor's person forced itself to his attention. He might have been anything between thirty and sixty years of age. There was youth in the smooth and nobly formed forehead and in the clear, olive cheeks. There was youth, too,

and boundless vitality in the dark, flashing eyes, and in the straight, shapely mouth.

But then, again, there was age in the powder of grey on either temple, that seemed the finishing touch to his distinguished head. But there was something more than age—something that spoke of tremendous experience. His poise and self-assurance could be guessed at rather than seen. His dark grey tweed coat was perfect without the blunder of being too perfect. From the sleek, black head to the polished shoes, there was no discordant note. One hand held his hat, and the other, brown, but well cared for, rested on his knee.

As Tydvil took in these details, it dawned on him that, though the stranger might be an uninvited intruder, his whole appearance and bearing bore testimony that he was one to be treated with deference.

During the long minutes of Jones's survey, the stranger sat motionless, almost as motionless as Jones did in his amazement. At last, the head of Craddock, Burn, and Despard found his voice. "I really beg your pardon," he said, "I had no idea there was anyone in the room. I certainly did not hear you enter."

The dancing lights flickered for a moment in the stranger's eyes. "And I, too, must ask your pardon for coming unannounced, but, as it happened, I had no option."

"Oh! I understand; my secretary was not at her post?" queried Tydvil.

"On the contrary, she was," came the answer, simply. "I did not consult her because I felt sure she would refuse me admission. I was obliged to take other steps."

There was a trace of annoyance in Tydvil Jones's face. He felt that the reply was tinged with impertinence. His response was rather stiff. "Then I have no doubt that since you took such unusual steps to obtain an interview, your business is of some importance."

The dark, finely arched eyebrows lifted slightly. "I am really sorry if my action has caused you any annoyance, Mr. Jones..."

"You have an advantage of me in knowing my name," interrupted the other crisply.



His visitor waved a deprecating hand, but paused a moment before answering. "I am afraid," he said, "that I shall have some trouble in explaining myself. But as you so urgently and expressly sent for Me, I trust, as I said before, that my coming has not inconvenienced you."

"I sent for you!" There was no mistaking the genuine astonishment in Tydvil's voice. "Why, my dear sir, I am perfectly sure I have never seen you before."

The other nodded. "Quite so," he said. "Until now you have only come into contact with my agents."

Jones mentally ran over in his mind the names of any of his overseas business connections who might, by any chance, be visiting Australia, but none occurred to him. "I am afraid I must ask you to explain yourself more clearly," he said finally.

His visitor looked at him thoughtfully a moment before replying. "As I said before, I am afraid I will have some little trouble in making myself clear. I can perhaps best explain my presence by asking you to

recall to your memory a wish you expressed aloud some five or ten minutes ago.”

Tydvil reddened to the roots of his hair. Had the man been in the room all that time? he wondered. And being there, had he the audacity to refer to what he might have heard? For the moment Jones had forgotten exactly what he had said, but he felt sure the words were not such as he would care to have overheard. “I have no distinct recollection of having said anything that might interest you,” he replied coldly. “As you apparently overheard my words, there will be no need for me to repeat them.”

The stranger received the rebuke unmoved. He passed his hand to the inner pocket of his coat and produced a flat leather wallet. He placed his hat and glove carefully on the table, and drew from the wallet a card about six by four inches in size. To Jones, it looked like a ledger index card. This he consulted carefully for a moment, and then looked up. “The exact words you used, Mr. Jones, were, ‘If these be saints, may Satan himself come and free me from them!’ And, therefore,” he continued, “I feel myself justified in reiterating that I am here at your express and urgent invitation.”

Again Tydvil's face flushed from a mixture of shame and anger. It was bad enough that his words had been overheard, but worse still that this quiet and impressive stranger should see fit to make a jest of them.

“Sir!” he insisted angrily, “you have apparently listened to something that was not intended for other ears than my own. You have seen fit to use those words against me in a spirit of ill-timed levity and banter. I find your behaviour intolerable, sir, and I must ask you to leave this room, instantly!” He emphasised the last word so as to leave no room for argument.

Instead of being abashed or annoyed at the outbreak, the visitor settled himself coolly back in his chair. With an elbow on either arm, he joined the outspread tips of his fingers and thumbs and regarded Jones above them with a smile twitching at his lips.

“My friend,” he said with gentle suavity, “you will find, as many others have done before you, that it is far easier to call me up than to dispose of me. I did not think it likely that you would accept my claim to the personality, which, for the present, we may define as ‘Satan,’

without hesitation. Still, on reflection, you may not find it so preposterous after all.”

Tydvil stared at the speaker, with not only wide open eyes, but a slightly opened mouth. His feelings were a blend of anger and curiosity. Of course, one could never tell, but insanity takes such strange forms. The man did not look mad. But it might be as well to humour him.

“Do you mean to affirm,” he asked severely, “that you claim to be the Prince of Evil in person?”

The other pursed his lips slightly and answered. “Well, I cannot say I am altogether in love with the title, Mr. Jones, it is not flattering, and of the two I almost prefer the word ‘Satan,’ but since you choose it, it may do as well as another. I repeat that you see before you His Highness in person.”

Jones moved very uneasily in his seat, then his eyes and hands both sought the button on the table beside him. Before he could press it, the other intervened, “That line of communication is closed—temporarily.” He spoke a little incisively.

Then Tydvil began to lose his temper. “Sir!” he said angrily, “I am very busy and this absurd interview has already lasted too long. I must again ask you to leave—instantly!”

Had he expected his amazing visitor to obey him at all, he expected him to do so in a conventional manner, and through the door. His method of leaving, however, left Tydvil staring blankly at the empty armchair from which the stranger had vanished as he spoke. He did not fade out; he just went out like the flame of a candle, leaving no trace of his presence. Stay, though! There was an expensive, new hat with a glove lying beside it on the corner of the table to impress upon Jones the fact that the amazing interview had not been the outcome of an overwrought nervous system.

Tydvil half rose from his chair and stared around his room, and then at the empty chair and very inexplicable hat and glove. Then he said, slowly, and in an awed voice, “Well, I’ll be...”

“Softly! Softly! All in good time, my dear Mr. Jones! All in good time!” came a mocking voice from the chair, and with the words the stranger

re-appeared as suddenly as he had vanished. Apparently he had never moved from his place.

“The Duce!” exclaimed Tydvil.

“Precisely!” smiled the claimant to the title.

“You were there all the time?” demanded Jones, sinking back in his chair.

“Exactly,” the other replied. “Mere gallery play, you know—but—nothing else would convince you that I had at least some ground for my claim.”

Jones pressed his hand to his head. “Am I losing my reason?” he muttered.

“Not at all, my friend, not at all!” came the quick answer, though the muttered words were scarcely audible. “You are certainly undergoing a most unusual experience for these days. None the less if you will listen to me for a few moments I think I can convince you of my bona fides.”

“You wish me to listen to you, assuming your claims to be genuine?”

The other nodded. “Why not? Does not what you have just seen convince you that I am no ordinary human being?”

Tydvil waved his hands helplessly. “Go on then! Go on!” he said weakly.

“My dear sir,” commenced the claimant to the throne of darkness. “I do not blame you in the slightest for your scepticism. I must admit that I have neglected your world very much for the last few centuries, and it is but natural that you should doubt my existence. You see, I recognise it is all my own fault. My work has been going on so well without my personal attention. However, here is the position.” He settled himself down more comfortably as he spoke.

Jones felt there was no comment he could make.

“It has lately been borne on me,” continued the visitor confidentially, “that I have become too conservative in my business policies. My methods of administration of home affairs are rather out of date. I feel I

should move with the times.”

“Of late years there has been a distressing and disturbing intrusion of terrestrial politics into my kingdom. The new element of Communism is now almost more numerous than the old aristocracy of my kingdom. My gentlemen are rather proud and they resent association with these Communists.”

Jones nodded. There seemed nothing else to do.

“I warned Judas Iscariot,” said the visitor reflectively, “that he was making a mistake in inventing the Marx doctrines. He thought he was causing something smart in the way of trouble. He did not see the probable reaction on our politics as I did. However, the fact remains and the situation has to be met. You follow me so far?” he enquired.

Jones nodded again. He considered the man, or whatever his visitor was, was doubtless in earnest. If he were insane, he was an interesting bird. If, on the other hand, he were what he claimed to be, then he was worthy of sympathy.



“Well,” continued the stranger, “after turning the matter over, I thought I could obtain a better grasp of the situation by visiting the earth and looking into things for myself. There was one difficulty, however.”

“I should not have thought,” put in Tydvil, “that you would find any difficulty insuperable.”

“Usually, no,” he replied. “In this instance, however, I was under a certain disability in that I am unable to make a visit unless especially called upon by one of the inhabitants; and I have been waiting a considerable time for the invitation. That alone ought to convince me times have changed. A few centuries ago there was always some churchman or scientist invoking my aid. So, my dear Mr. Jones. I am indeed in your debt for your assistance.”

“I’m afraid it was a quite unconscious service.” In the circumstances Tydvil was not anxious to assume the credit for his visitor’s presence.

“Nevertheless, my obligation remains,” said the stranger civilly.

## CHAPTER XI

Tydvil's head was whirling with bewilderment. Perhaps, the thought occurred to him, both he and his visitor were non compos mentis.

However, if the strange creature were a product of a prostrated nervous system it might be better to play up to him. Especially as the next question was, "By the way, my friend, will you tell me where on earth I am?"

"You are, at present," he replied, "in the city of Melbourne, which is the capital of the State of Victoria in the Commonwealth of Australia."

"Melbourne—Australia," murmured the other thoughtfully. "Er really, Mr. Jones, you must forgive me, but I do not seem to remember the names. Have you altered your European or Asiatic nomenclature by any means?"

It was Tydvil's turn to stare. Strange to say, he felt a little nettled that, if his visitor were what he professed to be, he should be ignorant of Australia and, more particularly, of Melbourne. Then he saw a light.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "your long absence from the world accounts for your difficulty. You see, the continent has been known to Europeans for

only about two hundred years, and has been occupied for no more than one hundred and fifty years. Still, it rather surprises me that you have not heard of it.”

“That would hardly account...” said His Highness thoughtfully. “But— one moment! Is there a place called Sydney in it!”

“That’s right!” exclaimed Tydvil. “A place with a wonderful harbour!”

“Now I recollect. They do talk about Sydney Harbour in Hell. It is one of the minor punishments. Yes, we did have some people from Sydney, but they caused so much trouble that the migration department deported them and prohibited further imports. I confused Australia with Austria for the moment. Ah, well! I am sure your country will provide an interesting study.”

He again consulted the card to which he had before referred. It excited Tydvil’s curiosity as a businessman. He summoned up his courage. “Would I be in order,” he asked, “if I enquired the nature of that card you have twice consulted?”

“Most certainly, Mr. Jones, most certainly!” he responded politely.

“Indeed, as a businessman, I have no doubt you will find it interesting.

One of my recent innovations is a card system for keeping State accounts. It is necessary for record purposes to keep an account of all human actions. This is the master card. An improvement of my own. On it, every record I desire to examine appears immediately. It fades when I have finished with it.”

Tydvil sat erect. “You mean to say you have a record of the lives of all living people?” he asked in amazement.

“Well, not exactly. Our records apply only to deeds which should not have been committed. And, of course, to words and thoughts also. They are kept to establish our claims when the inevitable occasion arises.”

“I suppose, then,” said Tydvil hesitantly, “you have a card for me in your system, then?”

“Undoubtedly, my friend.” He had been holding the card in his hand. Then he looked up, smiling pleasantly. “Just for the sake of curiosity, we will see how our account stands.”

He turned the master card over and ran his eyes down its columns. Then a queer expression came over the lean intellectual face. It combined astonishment with mystification. He stared at the card, then at Jones, and again at the card. Then he shook it tentatively, as one shakes a troublesome telephone. Finally he sat up and stared at Tydvil. There was no mistaking the astonishment of his expression.

“I hope,” he faltered anxiously, “it is not so bad as your looks indicate?” His Highness paused before speaking. “Whether good or bad, Mr. Jones, depends on the viewpoint. I am not often surprised at anything, but I must admit your record is almost unique. I have seldom, in a long experience, seen anything similar. My dear sir, what a very dull time you must have had.”

Tydvil’s curiosity became insupportable. He looked at his visitor appealingly. And then said anxiously, half holding out his hand, “Might I?”

“Well, Mr. Jones, it is most unusual, and I scarcely care to create a precedent. But the present circumstances are exceptional. So we will

stretch a point in this instance.” And he passed the card into the eager hand.

Tydvil’s hand shook as he glanced at it. “Why!” he exclaimed, looking up, “there is scarcely any thing on it.”

“That, my dear sir, is the remarkable point. Most remarkable! I assure you! Why, do you know that for a man of your age the average number of entries would be from twenty to thirty thousand? And of those, at least fifteen per cent would be red. We put the more heinous entries in red so that they can be more easily noted. You, as you will notice, have not a single red debit against you but the last—the one that is responsible for my being here.”

Tydvil was reading his card with concentrated interest. Suddenly he half stood up and ejaculated, “Oh! I say, this is not fair! I didn’t, I’ll swear I didn’t!” His face reddened perceptibly.

“Surely you are mistaken. I assure you, Mr. Jones, our book-keeping system is infallible.”

Jones handed back the card, and pointed to it with a finger that shook.

“That entry, dated August 7. The one in the pale blue ink.”

His Highness took the card and glanced at the entry. Then he shook a playful finger at Tydvil. “Come, come, my friend! The girl in pink with the dark eyes, on the Sydney railway platform! That is correct!”

“But I can’t admit it,” retorted Jones, a good deal nettled.

“My dear fellow,” came the suave reply. “Your memory must be betraying you. You did not take delivery, certainly, but that does not cancel your obligation.”

“Still,” protested the delinquent, “there should be some allowance for a mere passing thought.”

His Highness shook his head. “Impossible, my friend! Quite impossible! Still, it is only a trifle. These blue ink records are merely formal.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Tydvil, struck by a bright idea. “Would it be possible to see my wife’s account?”

Mirth and gravity fought in the dark eyes, and mirth won. He laughed heartily and replied, "Oh, my friend! Consider a moment! What is your colloquial expression? Be a sport, eh? That would be hardly playing the game. As a matter of business, I ought to let you see it, but still..."

He waved the thought away with his hand.

"Well, I don't know," replied Tydvil. "I am sure Amy would have no nice feelings about inspecting mine."

"Doubtless! What woman would hesitate if she had a chance of examining an accurate and impartial statement of her husband's little lapses?"

Jones chuckled at the idea. Much to his own surprise, he found himself accepting his visitor at his face value, and was also actually enjoying the unconventional interview. "If such a thing were possible, ennui would vanish from the world."

"And so would the human race," laughed His Highness. "No, it would not do at all."



Then he sat up and spoke seriously. “However, this is not business, is it? And I am afraid I am taking up a good deal of your valuable time. Now, what can I do for you?”

The abrupt question sobered Jones immediately. The idea that his visitor could be of any assistance to him had never entered his mind. Now the idea was implanted there, the thought of accepting anything from such a quarter shocked him. Doubtless his look betrayed the thought.

“Of course, Mr. Jones,” said His Highness earnestly, “there is no compulsion on you to accept the specific service you mentioned when you asked for this interview. I would be very sorry to hold you to the letter of your word. Any man in your position may easily be excused for what he might say in a moment of irritation. Still, my obligation is very great, and I would like to show my gratitude.”

There was no mistaking the sincerity of the words. The saying that his visitor was not so black as he was painted, flashed across Tydvil’s mind. The other, watching, answered the unspoken thought. “There is a good deal of truth in that old saying,” he said. “I suppose no one has been more maligned than I with less chance of defending himself. I am

grateful even for that small concession.”

As he spoke he drew a handsome cigarette case from his pocket. “Do you mind if I smoke?”

“Not at all,” answered Jones politely.

His Highness held out the open case. “You will join me?” he said pleasantly.

Jones shook his head. “Thank you, but I never smoke.”

The other smiled quizzically. “Ah, my friend! You would be far better able to bear your troubles if you did. Self-denial comes to a point where it becomes self-righteousness—an unpleasant characteristic. Let me press you!” He again held out the case.

Jones looked at it indecisively. “I have often thought of beginning, but my wife detests the habit.” His Highness raised his eyebrows in gentle mockery. “And,” went on Jones, “it might make me sick.”

The other laughed lightly. “Not one of these. Among other virtues, they have the quality of converting anyone who uses them into an habitual smoker, whom no tobacco, however strong, can upset.”

Tydvil hesitated no longer, and placed one of the white cylinders between his lips. His Highness followed suit and, to Tydvil’s astonishment, the moment it touched his lips it became alight. Then he bent forward, offering the glowing tip to his host.

Jones had no objection to tobacco, indeed, he really liked the aroma. Only the fear of Amy had kept him from indulging earlier. Now, as he drew the first fumes into his mouth, a delicious sense of contentment came over him.

“Well?” queried his guest through the blue smoke.

“Splendid!” quoth Tydvil.

“Good!” smiled His Highness. “And now we can resume our talk. I really hope that you are not going to refuse my offer,” he went on persuasively.

“Well,” said Tydvil reflectively; the first hesitation had vanished with the first cloud of smoke. “I really don’t see what there is that you can do for me.”

“There is very little I cannot do for you,” came the suave answer. “One hesitates to say such a thing, but really, Mr. Jones, you have made singularly little use of your great opportunities. You have lived and so has a jellyfish. I’m afraid the analogy sounds rude, and I can readily excuse you for taking exception to it, but you must admit its justice.”

“I admit I find life rather dull,” conceded Tydvil a little ruefully.

“Perhaps I would be more content with a little enjoyment.” He stared at the smoke spirals from his cigarette without looking up.

“Well, it is all at your command. What would you have. Wealth?”

“I already have that.”

“Health?”

“I am as sound as a bell and tough as hickory.”

“Power?”

“I have sufficient.”

“Ambition?”

“I have none that I have not already satisfied.”

“Love of women?”

Jones looked up sharply. “I have had one experience in that direction,” he said dryly, “and I am not hankering for any more, thank you.”

“Oh! I mean the genuine kind,” laughed His Highness. “Once bitten...” quoted Jones sourly. “I wouldn’t take the risk.”

“Pessimist!” chuckled the other.

“Maybe,” came the short answer. “But if you had lived with Amy for ten

years I know which of our residences you would prefer.”

“What about the lighter side of life?” asked His Highness. “The joy of living.”

Tydvil knitted his brows. “Yes,” he said slowly. “I admit that appeals to me. But look how I am tied up. I am an example. A pious pattern. A guiding light. How could I break away from the family tradition? Sheer hypocrisy, I suppose! I am so used to being looked up to that it takes an effort to come down from my pedestal. I cannot have the fun in someone else’s name.’ He sighed a little in self pity.

“Quite possible, my friend,” came the prompt answer. “Eh!” Jones looked up, startled.

“It would be easily possible for you to assume another identity for your enterprise,” said His Highness, smiling.

“You don’t mean to say...” The question stuck in Tydvil’s throat.

“Exactly! But it rather complicates matters. You see, so long as the

service you ask is an every day matter, I would give it gladly and without condition. The other would be subject to some restrictions which, I regret, are unavoidable.”

“If you could guarantee individuality for my amusements, I don’t think you would find me haggling over the terms,” said Tydvil decisively.

“Of course,” said His Highness, “it would be a mere formality. Allow me to give you another cigarette. A mere formality! I should have to ask you to give me a promissory note—for any term. The consideration being,” he fixed his luminous eyes on Jones, “that you assume any individuality you desire, and call upon me for any service you desire, during the currency of the note. The note to be void if I fail in my service. I think that is generous enough.”

“Undoubtedly,” conceded Tydvil. “But,” he went on hesitating, “what amount will be involved? I am willing to pay anything in reason.”

“Oh, don’t let us talk of money between friends!” said the other hastily. “We must put something in, of course. Say, for example—no! Let us go back to the old tradition—your soul it means nothing and

makes the thing legal.”

Tydvil looked at his visitor intently, and his gaze was met by another of disarming frankness. “Signed in blood and all that sort of thing?” he asked.

“Bosh! Ink is quite good enough,” came the answer. “But,” temporarised Jones, “would such an instrument be binding?”

“As doyen of the legal profession, my dear Mr. Jones, you may accept my assurance that it would be,” answered His Highness easily.

“I didn’t think the law would admit there would be property in a soul,” said Tydvil thoughtfully.

The other blew a long, fine stream of smoke from his pursed lips. “I think,” he said significantly, “that I could very easily convert anyone who adopted that view. However,” he laughed slightly, and went on airily, “it is a mere formality and means nothing.”

Jones sat thinking deeply. The idea was alluring. It gave him a chance



to break from his rigid environment. Still he hesitated. Could this being be what he professed to be? There was still doubt in his mind. He looked up at his visitor, who was watching him intently.

“Mr. Jones,” he said, “I can easily excuse your doubts in the circumstances, and am willing to submit to a test, anything you choose, before pressing you to take my offer.”

Jones looked around the room. His eye lighted on the three-ton door of the strong-room. He alone held its keys. He turned to his friend. “Would it be possible for you to open that door without moving from your seat?”

His Highness nodded. “I will do more than you ask—watch!” As he spoke, the great door swung slowly and noiselessly out on its hinges. As its broad edge turned towards him, Jones gave a little cry of astonishment. He saw that, though it had opened, its twelve wrist-thick bolts remained shot. They must have been torn through the frame, but the frame remained intact.

“Je-ru-salem!” whistled Tydvil.

“Wait—I promised you something more.”

As Jones looked back, something fluttered through the air and landed on the blotting pad before him. He gasped as he saw it was his private cheque book. That book, he knew, was locked in a smaller safe in the strong-room.

Jones looked an enquiry at His Highness, who nodded assent. Then he walked over to the open door and examined the bolts. Entering the strong-room, he unlocked the smaller safe. His cheque book was not there. Convinced, he returned to his chair. At a wave of the thin brown hand, the door closed as quietly as it had opened.

“You forgot to put away the cheque book,” laughed Tydvil.

“Pardon,” murmured His Highness. Leaning forward, he picked up the book and tossed it towards the steel door. It disappeared in mid flight.

Jones stood up and opened the door with his keys and the combination. In the strong-room he found his cheque book back in its place.

Returning to his chair once more, he sat with his hands on the edge of

his table, staring blankly at the blotting pad for a long minute. Then he came to swift decision. "I'll do it!" he said abruptly.

His visitor nodded, smiling. "I am really delighted to hear it. I assure you I take a great personal interest in you, Mr. Jones, and I feel certain you will have no cause to regret your determination. Now, let us arrange the formalities, and I will be in a position to take your instructions. Have you a promissory note form?"

With the air of a man who has burned his boats and enjoyed the process, Jones opened a small cash-box, from which he drew a small wad of stamped forms. Bending to select one, he hesitated. "By the way," he asked, "what stamps will be necessary?"

His Highness shook his head. "I scarcely follow you. Is a stamp necessary?"

"Decidedly! Under the Act," explained Tydvil, "it is necessary to have a duty stamp valued at sixpence on each note up to twenty-five pounds in value, one shilling up to fifty pounds, and an additional shilling for each further fifty pounds, or part of that amount. I would prefer to

have the note unassailably legal.”

The other waved his hand largely. “Why go to unnecessary expense—make it a sixpenny stamp, my dear fellow.” Then, observing the flush on the face of Tydvil, he continued, “However, decide for yourself. I am afraid I was looking at it from my viewpoint rather than yours.”

Jones still hesitated.

“You see, my friend, I am apt to regard a commodity as of low value when I can obtain millions of it for nothing—the world market parity for souls. Still, I see your point of view. Decide for yourself, my dear sir.”

Jones chuckled. “I see, a purely commercial proposition, at ruling prices. It is not what I value it at, but what it would bring?”

“Precisely,” answered his visitor cheerfully.

Tydvil drew a form with a sixpenny stamp on it from the wad, and laughed. “Here goes!” Preparing to write, he said, “Now, this is the

first day of August—shall we say at three months?”

The other bowed. “I leave the details entirely in your hands, and with complete confidence.” A very handsome testimonial coming from such a quarter.

Tydvil blushed with pride. “Very well! Three months, then. That will make it due on November fourth, allowing for the formal three days’ grace.” He wrote for a moment, and then looked up with a puzzled expression. “To whom shall I make it payable, you see...” he paused awkwardly.

His Highness smiled. “Of course, it would be hardly—well, a little unusual to make it payable to the Devil.”

Jones nodded. “My idea exactly. And since we are likely to see a good deal of one another during the next three months, it might be as well to arrange for some conventional form of address at the same time.”

His visitor reflected a moment. “There are so many names—Satan, The Devil, Lucifer, Ahrimanes, The Tempter, Prince of Darkness, of Evil—

all very uncomplimentary, and even more inaccurate, and quite unsuitable for modern use, at any rate. Can you suggest anything yourself?”

Tydvil tried, but not hopefully. “The Dickens,” he paused and, receiving no answer, went on, “Old Scratch, Old Nick...”

“All most offensive and familiar,” retorted His Highness, somewhat nettled.

“Might I venture to suggest,” Tydvil returned, “that we could use the last name I mentioned by paraphrasing it. We could change ‘Old Nick’ to Nicholas Senior. I think Mr. Nicholas Senior would be most suitable.”

“Excellent, my friend, excellent!” agreed His Highness. “We will certainly make it Nicholas Senior.”

“How about a title,” put in Jones, persuasively. “Say, Sir Nicholas Senior, K.B.E.”

“No,” replied his friend. “On the whole I prefer to remain completely incog. Put it down to a natural humility.”

Jones apologised. He felt there was a rebuke behind the words. Presently he paused again in his writing.

“Provided, when the note falls due, you have fulfilled your side of the contract, do you take immediate possession of the security?” he asked a little uneasily.

“Not at all! Not at all!” answered Mr. Senior hastily. “The usual terms apply in full. You retain a life interest in your soul, which I inherit on your death—that is, when you have no further use for it.”

“Very generous,” said Tydvil, looking relieved. Presently he looked up, and read from the form before him. “Dated August 1st, 1904. Due, November 4th, 1904. In place of the usual sum in figures I have written ‘Soul.’ Will that suffice?”

Mr. Senior nodded agreement.

“Three months after date,” continued Jones, “I promise to pay Nicholas Senior, or order, my Immortal Soul for services to be rendered during

the currency of this note. Payable at my offices in 3973 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Signed, Tydvil Jones.”

He handed the note across the table to Mr. Senior, who read it carefully. Then he turned the note face down, and, after writing on the back of it, he returned it to Jones for inspection.

This is the endorsement Jones read. The handwriting was exquisitely neat and clear. “If, during the currency of this note, I fail to perform any task or service of any description which I may be called upon to perform by the maker thereof, I agree that the note shall become automatically null and void. Nicholas R., et I.”

“Very handsome, indeed, Mr. Senior,” said Jones, handing back the note, “but I assure you, quite unnecessary.”

Mr. Senior folded the document carefully, and placed it in his wallet.

“We are both businessmen, my friend, and it is only right that my obligation should be set out in writing.”

Jones stared at him a moment thoughtfully. “I suppose it is entirely



legal. Not that I would think of trying to upset it.”

There was a grim smile at the corners of the clean-cut mouth. “Not all the children of my very numerous family known as the Legal Profession, together, could upset it.”

“It would be interesting to hear it argued,” smiled Tydvil.

“Perhaps,” from the still smiling lips. “But, as from the County Courts to the Privy Council I am represented on every bench...!” He flipped his fingers carelessly.

Then his mood changed. “And now, my friend, I am entirely at your service. Command me.”

“I must think things over a little,” replied Tydvil. “You see, this has come so suddenly and unexpectedly...” He was interrupted by the telephone bell.

“Excuse me one moment.” He raised the receiver to his ear and listened a moment. Then he snorted out a curt “Very well!” and slammed it down

again.

Then he turned abruptly to Mr. Senior. “My wife will be here in half an hour. I have no desire to meet her just now. Could you arrange some means of altering her intention?”

“Most certainly. A pleasure indeed,” replied Mr. Senior lightly. “I will be most interested to meet the lady, who, I feel sure, is responsible for your own remarkable record—to a great extent. But after?”

Jones thought for a moment. “Can you meet me here about seven-thirty this evening?”

In answer to a nod of acquiescence, he went on, “That will suit me admirably, so, until then, I need not trouble you.” He rose and looked at the door. “If I let you out by the door, it may cause comment. Miss Brand is not aware of your presence here.”

“No matter,” said Mr. Senior, “my goings and comings may be arranged otherwise.”

“There will be no trouble about my wife?”

“Not the slightest! I will arrange to have her fully occupied for the remainder of the day.” He held out his hand, which Tydvil shook warmly, and as he released it, Mr. Senior was not. He vanished.

For a long time Tydvil sat thinking. Then he took his hat, and leaving the warehouse, he turned into Elizabeth Street, there made certain purchases, and returned to his office.

## CHAPTER XII

While Tydvil Jones was undergoing the experiences of the most unsettling morning of his life, Amy was as busy as a nest of hornets planning reprisals. For the first time during their married life, Tydvil had out-fought her. His revolt wounded her pride. She was too clever not to recognise that a few more victories such as that of the morning—that Battle of Breakfast would shake her domestic throne.

How very tiresome men were, thought Amy. But Tydvil's tiresomeness had to be stopped. After careful reflection on the situation, she decided that a fight to a finish in his own office, where he could not afford to make a scene, would be all to her advantage. It was this decision that impelled her to ring Tydvil to notify him of her intended call. She decided against descending on him unannounced. She had backed her challenge with the warning, that if he were absent when she arrived, she would wait for him in his office all day if necessary.

Her car was already waiting at the door when a mighty limousine Rolls Royce swung from St. Kilda Road into the drive. With all the majesty of a battleship, it came to anchor just astern of her own car as Amy was in

the act of stepping in to it.

Amy stepped back under the colonnaded verandah. The chauffeur of the shining monster sprang from his seat and swung open its door almost reverently, and from the door stepped a stranger.

The car had impressed Amy. A limousine of that make meant no ordinary mortal, and Amy did not care much for ordinary mortals, except as objects of patronage. But the stranger, as he approached her, impressed her more than the car. There was a distinction in his bearing that was worthy of the entwined red R's on the radiator.

He mounted the steps and stood bareheaded before her. "May I enquire," he asked deferentially, "if I am speaking to Mrs. Tydvil Jones?" and there was a delicate flattery in the deference.

She bowed graciously.

He looked a little embarrassed. "I am afraid," he said, glancing at the waiting car, "that I have chosen an awkward moment for my call. Perhaps you will permit me to return at a more suitable time."

Amy wreathed her face in her best samples of “Dear Amy” smiles. Her mission, she assured him, was of little or no importance. Would he kindly come inside. As they entered the reception room she turned to him. Her curiosity almost was visible as it oozed from her.

He drew a gold case from his vest pocket. “My name,” he said, as he handed her the card, “is Nicholas Senior, though it is probably quite unfamiliar to you, if I may venture to say so, it is not altogether unknown in England.”

Amy felt she ought to know the name of one so distinguished in appearance. She felt almost guilty that it conveyed nothing to her mind. She shook her head. “I must confess that I have not heard it.” She smiled graciously to reassure him that her ignorance was no reflection on him.

“I have come to Australia,” explained Mr. Senior, “with the object of studying your social problems. I desire to compare them with those of Britain and the United States.”

Amy brightened. “Are you representing any particular society or interested in any special branch?” she enquired with rising interest.

Her visitor shook his head. “I am entirely a freelance, but I was informed both in England and America that Mrs. Tydvil Jones of Melbourne was pre-eminently competent to act as my mentor and guide. It is to that you owe, what I am afraid is, a somewhat untimely call.”

Warm and glowing satisfaction pervaded Amy’s entire system. “I did not know,” she replied with smiling modesty, “that my poor little efforts were known outside the circle of my immediate associates—an enthusiastic group, Mr. Senior.”

“Ah! Dear lady,” he responded gently, “you do yourself far less than justice. Believe me, the name of Mrs. Tydvil Jones stands high, among those who know, on the list of the world’s philanthropists.” The ring of sincerity in his voice was faultless.

The words were as oil on the troubled spirit of Amy. What ammunition to use on Tydvil! “Still,” she protested, “I cannot think of anyone in England who knew of my work.”

He smiled. "When I decided to come to Australia, I had the honour and privilege of lunching with the Archbishop of Canterbury. I discussed with him the object of my visit, and it was from him I first learned your name. It appears that a former Archbishop of Melbourne had given him a most glowing account of your work; and"—here he felt in his pocket—"His Grace was kind enough to procure this letter for me." He handed her a dignified looking missive.

Amy took it and glanced at the address and the mitred flap. "I am delighted you have called, Mr. Senior, and you can trust me to assist you in every way I can."

"I felt sure of that." He bowed his gratitude. "Indeed, the Archbishop informed me that in making your acquaintance, I would be opening every avenue of social effort I wished to explore. It is for that reason I have taken the earliest opportunity to call."

Never before in her life had Amy felt so important or so perfectly satisfied with herself. She would let Master Tydvil know exactly where she stood. It did not occur to her to doubt for a moment that the



Archbishop of Canterbury was alive to her good deeds. Although she did not belong to the Anglican church, her acquaintance with the clergy was like Sam Weller's knowledge of London, "Extensive and peculiar."

She assured Mr. Senior that she had nothing to do that might not be deferred, and readily placed herself at his disposal.

It was then that her fascinating visitor suggested the plan of her lunching with him, that they might devote the afternoon to the inspection of her endeavours. He apologised nicely to her for inviting her to Menzies, where he was staying. He expressed his own distaste at patronising an hotel, but regretted that he could not elsewhere obtain accommodation suitable for his needs.

Mr. Senior assured Amy that he was an ardent advocate for prohibition, and hoped that before he left Melbourne, his voice would be raised on that subject from some public platform.

Amy hesitated. Never in her life had she set foot in an hotel. Never did she think it possible she would be guilty of such an action. Then she remembered the Rolls Royce. It occurred to her that if a man who had

lunched with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and who was a prohibitionist, did not think it wrong to stay at an hotel, surely it would not be wrong for Amy Jones to lunch there with him.

So, in the end, she dismissed her own car and stepped into that of Mr. Senior, as proud a woman as ever accompanied that gentleman anywhere—and there had been very, very many before her.

## CHAPTER XIII

Meanwhile, in his office, Tydvil Jones had fanned his own plans. A touch on his bell called Miss Brand to the presence. "If Mr. Brewer is about the office, will you kindly let him know I require to see him," was the message he delivered to his secretary.

Geraldine looked at him uncertainly. He read her unspoken uneasiness. "It is another matter, Miss Brand. I will respect your wishes about this morning's affair."

Reassured, Geraldine returned to her desk and sought Billy on the warehouse extension lines. She delivered her message with a wicked little smile, hanging up immediately to prevent the enquiry he would be sure to make.

A few minutes later, the culprit answered the summons. She heard his approach, but kept her eyes resolutely on her work. She knew he paused for a moment beside her, and anathematised her heart for its rebellious response to his nearness. She heard him enter the room behind her, and her work suffered because she could not keep her thoughts from what was

going on behind the closed door.

All the morning Billy had been awaiting the summons. He anticipated, and regretted, the prospect of a summary dismissal. His only regret for his conduct lay in the thought that his folly had made the task of winning Geraldine trebly difficult. Being sacked was a comparatively small price to pay for the glory of holding her in his arms. He had paused for a second to gratify his eyes with a glimpse of that golden helmet—or was it copper? Then he marched grimly to what he believed was his official scaffold.

Tydvil Jones waved him to a chair with a smileless face. The face was a sign of ill-omen that was balanced by his offer of the chair. Execution, he thought, would be carried out standing. Billy felt he cut a very poor spectacle. Since the morning the rich colouring of his left eye had had time to develop. Its swollen lid drooped until it almost shut out the light. No man could feel dignified with such an eye, especially in the presence of one who had seen how he attained to it.

He began to speak, but Tydvil, recognising his intention, cut him short.

“Do not wish to refer to that matter, Brewer, if you please! Miss Brand

has, very magnanimously, I think, interceded on your behalf.” Billy’s heart gave a jump.

Then, with a very meaning look at the polychrome eye, he went on. “We will regard the incident as also closed.”

“That’s a nasty one,” thought Billy. But the fact that Geraldine had interceded took the sting from Tyddie’s irony. If she had turned aside the wrath of justice she might...

Here Tydvil cut into his golden hopes. “I understand, Brewer, that you are addicted to gambling in fact that you are in the habit of playing a card game known as draw poker.”

Billy gasped from the jolt. “Who,” he wondered, “was the kind friend who had handed that item of news to Tyddie?” Truly, it was his day of atonement. It seemed as though the bill for the total of his peccadilloes was being presented at once. “Let ‘em all come,” he murmured to himself hopelessly.

He admitted the charge, and added, “At the same time, I have never

regarded it as a heinous offence.”

His judge pursed his lips. “Perhaps not, Brewer—that is, compared with some others I know of, but on which I will not dwell.” The voice was as dry as a summer’s throat. “However, I did not send for you to censure you, however much I disapprove of certain of your actions. I wished to know if you would be good enough to teach, me that game?”

Billy thought his ears had been bewitched. Tyddie asking to be taught how to play “draw!”

“He’ll be taking me out for a snifter yet,” reflected the senior city representative of C. B. & D. His expression revealed his amazement to Tydvil more completely than words could.

“I can understand your astonishment,” said Mr. Jones, “but the fact (Oh! Tydvil!) is, I am making a study of the gambling evil. I find I am handicapped in my investigations by a need of a practical knowledge of the subject. I am, therefore, looking to you for enlightenment.”

Billy breathed deeply. Two reprieves in ten minutes were rather too much

for him, but he pulled himself together. Billy never questioned for a moment that Tydvil's statement was anything but the truth. It proved again that a reputation for a blameless life is a perfect cloak for a lapse therefrom. Billy hastened to assert his willingness to oblige, but suggested the necessity for a pack of cards.

Tydvil nodded. "That has not escaped me," he replied. Opening a drawer in his table, he handed his recent purchase across to Billy. "I presume those will do."

Billy snapped the twine and, opening the box, slid the cards on to the table and ran his fingers through them with an expert's touch. "Of course, you understand that we must play for some form of stakes?" he queried.

"I presumed that it would be so," Tydvil acquiesced sourly, "but I suggest we play for something of no value—pins, for instance."

Billy smiled. "They will do for a start, anyhow," he replied cheerfully.

"My interest is, of course, purely academic," insisted Mr. Jones.

“Quite so,” admitted Billy as with deft fingers he shuffled cards so easily as to draw an admiring comment on his dexterity. “Merely a matter of practice,” Billy said as he dealt each five cards, cleanly and swiftly.

Then, facing them up, he gave Tydvil his first lesson in the gentle and unhallowed art of “draw.” It is a game in which the elements are easily grasped. In spite of its simplicity, however, there is no game demands a more skilled technique. Nature had richly endowed Billy Brewer with that brazen sang froid which is a poker player’s best asset.

Billy dealt half a dozen hands face up, and explained the mysteries of pairs, threes, straights, flushes and fulls, and the chances of improving on the draw. Then, after dividing the contents of Tydvil’s pin tray between them, he began a practical demonstration. Tydvil quickly grasped the essentials, and, before they realised it, the two were deep in the simple pastime. Single handed “draw” for pins did not appeal to Billy very strongly, but to Tydvil, it opened up a new and fascinating avenue of amusement.



In less than half an hour, beginners' luck and the absence of risk enabled Tydvil to completely relieve Billy of his stock of pins.

Noting the smile of satisfaction on Jones's face, Billy suggested that, had the pins represented cash, his opponent would not have been quite so venturesome.

The imputation touched Tydvil's pride in his new found knowledge. It pricked him into replying. "Well, I would be prepared, for once, to prove my competence to play for money—a small amount, say?"

It occurred to Billy, that since his employer was paying him for his time, and would probably pay more for his daring, the arrangement would be most satisfactory.

"Good," he challenged, "we'll make the pins worth threepence a dozen." So, with pins to the value of half a crown each, they recommenced.

For an hour nothing disturbed the silence of the sanctum but the murmur of the two voices. Outside, Miss Brand, denied admittance to caller after caller, including two departmental heads. These, hearing that

Tyddie had been in conference with Brewer half the morning, earnestly discussed what campaign the Chief could be organising. Lunch time came, but there was no sound of movement behind the frosted-glass door.

Inside, Tydvil was backing amazing luck with improving technique. Again and again he sent Billy to the pin tray for more ammunition.

Determination to come out victor led Brewer into taking risks that he could not afford with the astute Tydvil. Finally, after throwing in his hand rather than risk “seeing” the victorious Tydvil, he leaned back and said, “I have no right to ask, but what did you hold then? I drew a flush.”

There was a little smile on Tydvil’s face as he confessed to a pair of threes.

Billy put the cards down. He looked at the pile of pins in front of Tydvil, and said, “Your education is complete. A man who looks like a full hand holding a pair of threes needs no further instruction. I’ll cut my loss.” He dug his hand into his trouser pocket.

For the first time during the session, Tydvil looked at the clock. “Good

gracious, Brewer!” he exclaimed. “It is half past one o’clock! Dear me! I’m sure I had no idea of the time.” Then, glancing at the silver, he said, “I couldn’t think of letting you pay, Brewer. I am much obliged for the trouble you have taken.”

Billy shook his head. “Had I won I would have expected to be paid,” he said decisively. “I consider myself very lucky it was only three pence a dozen.”

“It is a most demoralising game. Most demoralising!” said Tydvil gravely. “I admit that I became most fascinated with its possibilities. Nothing could have brought home to me more clearly how the evil of gambling could take hold of one. I would rather we considered the matter settled.”

Leaning across the table, Brewer drew the pad with its pile of pins towards him. Swiftly his deft fingers separated the pile into dozens. Presently, Billy looked up. “I make it thirty seven dozen and four. Threepence a dozen lets me down lightly. I owe you nine and fourpence.” He sorted out four florins, a shilling and threepence. Adding a penny from his vest pocket, he handed the loot to Tydvil, who accepted it

reluctantly.

“At any rate,” he said, “in future I shall be able to speak of gambling with some experience.”

Billy stood up. “I think it lucky for the community that you will make nothing but academic use of your knowledge. I should hate to sit in with you in a game of half-crown rises. You have been too good a pupil.” He grinned.

“I’m afraid my friends would be terribly shocked if they knew how I have spent the last two hours,” Jones said.

“Well,” said Billy from the door, “they are not likely to hear it from me. Would one of them believe you had won nine shillings and fourpence from me in your own office?”

As he passed Geraldine’s table he looked towards her. His one eye met her two fixed on him in real consternation at the havoc she had wrought. In spite of herself, a dismayed “Oh!” broke from her lips.

Billy, the unregenerate, smiled cheerfully. “It was coming to me, Geraldine—and it was well worth the getting. Isn’t it a beauty?”

His utter impenitence froze her sympathy. “In future,” she said with crushing dignity, “I do not wish you to speak to me.”

With his head on one side Billy surveyed her with a twinkle in the undamaged eye. “I hear and obey, O Queen! But there’s no law agin’ lookin’ at ye, Geraldine, me darlint.” He kissed the tips of his fingers to her and went on his way.

As she watched him go the uncertain little smile on her lips grew to a little laugh as he disappeared from sight.

In his room Tydvil gazed at the coins in his hand with a certain amount of pride. Taking his hat he apologised politely to Geraldine for having detained her. He passed the restaurant where he was in the habit of spending a midday two shillings. Turning into Collins Street, he entered one over the threshold of which he had never yet set foot. Here he ordered a lunch that, when he had given the waiter two shillings, left him with fourpence of his winnings. Tydvil Jones felt much better for

his lunch.

## CHAPTER XIV

It would have astonished Tydvil Jones considerably had he known that his wife, also, had departed from the rules of her rigorous upbringing. With fluttering excitement at what she considered a far more heinous lapse than that of the curate who finished a day out by returning home in a smoking carriage, Amy had accompanied her new and distinguished acquaintance to Menzies.

During the time they, waited in the lounge, and afterwards in the great dining-room, with its gaily plumaged women and their squires, it gave her a thrill of feline satisfaction to observe the admiring eyes that followed her escort.

But there was one thorn in her bouquet of roses. For the first time in her life, she was conscious that her Spartan simplicity of dress made her feel there was no other word for it—dowdy. Yesterday she thought it would have given her a sense of pride. Today, well! There was that woman's hat, for instance, that somehow seemed to lend a vividness to a not very attractive face. Amy felt that if she wore such a hat it would take on an extra importance. "After all, why not make the best of one's

looks,” she reflected. “Perhaps Tydvil was right, after all.”

Apart from that she felt perfectly happy. Mr. Senior proved a fascinating companion. He was both witty and understanding, and won her confidence completely. Indeed, she found herself thinking how pleasant it would be if Tydvil possessed such graceful self-assurance combined with Mr. Senior’s undoubted intellectual attainments.

Tydvil never listened to Amy with such courteous and genuine interest, or deferred so respectfully to her opinions. A far less conceited woman than Amy would have found Mr. Senior’s attention very flattering.

They exchanged low voiced censure on two women at a neighbouring table who drank hock with their luncheon. Mr. Senior gently deplored the state of a society in which such a spectacle could be tolerated.

Amy assured him that not only she, but her husband, shared similar views, and she hoped that she could arrange an early meeting between the two men. “You have so much in common in your principles,” asserted Amy, that she was sure they would get on well together.



Mr. Senior, who was sipping mineral water, expressed a fervent hope that a meeting with Mr. Jones would not be long delayed. He also looked forward to the day when total prohibition would make the spectacle of women consuming alcoholic beverages at any time, much less in public, would be a thing of the past.

It was in their excursion round her societies afterwards that filled Amy's cup of happiness to overflowing. They spent a rapturous half hour at the League for the Suppression of Alcohol. Mr. Senior listened with profound interest to the Secretary's statistics. His eyes took on the expression of one listening to inspired harmonies. Then he capped all by, without prompting, handing a cheque for twenty-five guineas to the Secretary, becoming, thereby, a life member of the League.

At each office at which they called, its funds were from five to ten guineas better for the coming of Mr. Senior.

But he was at his best at the rooms of the Moral Uplift Society. He made innumerable enquiries as to its aims and the methods employed by its officers. When Amy was moved to tell him how Mr. Jones was rather like warm in his interest in this work, Mr. Senior was almost incredulous. He

agreed with her that Mr. Jones must have failed to grasp the importance of the work being done. And when he passed over a pink slip empowering his bank to pay “Moral Uplift Society or Bearer” one hundred pounds, Amy exclaimed with gushing sincerity, “Oh, you must be a saint, Mr. Senior!”

That gentleman gently, and very modestly, disclaimed any right to such a distinction.

Afterwards, on her way home, Amy, by some earnest mental calculation, estimated that their outing must have cost Mr. Senior something like two hundred and sixty pounds.

Before stepping in to her own car, which she had ordered by telephone to meet her, Amy had extracted a promise from her friend that he would dine with her and meet her husband. “Tydvil is a tower of strength to me,” she assured him.

Standing bareheaded at her car door, he thanked her for an educational and inspiring afternoon, and told her how much he was looking forward to meeting Mr. Jones, and any others of her co-workers as well.

Amy was late in arriving home that afternoon, although she had left Mr. Senior with ample time at her disposal. The delay was caused by nearly an hour spent in trying on hats at one of those retiring little shops where the most becoming headgear could be purchased—at a price.

Even the message by telephone with which her maid met her, to the effect that Mr. Jones was delayed at the office and would not be home to dinner, did not upset her genial mood. A royal row with Tydvil after dinner would be packing too much joy into one day.

She dined alone in solitary state. The maid who waited on her came to the kitchen later with a tale passing all comprehension. She related to her frankly dubious colleagues that Amy had kept dinner waiting while she changed her frock and put on a dinner gown, just to feed by herself.

“Amy’s going gay,” chirped the cook, pirouetting about her domain. “What a lark!”

## CHAPTER XV

Tydvil Jones passed the afternoon in an intensive concentration on his work. Only by so doing could he get through the long hours before the evening. He gave Geraldine very little time to consider her own worries, for which she was inwardly gratified.

Leaving instructions that he might be back to work during the evening, Tydvil left his office at five o'clock. His unusual lunch and his excitement combined to make dinner unthinkable. To fill in the intervening time, he walked through the Alexandra Gardens—and, without knowing it, was passed by Amy in her car as he crossed Princes Bridge. Fortunately, Amy also, was too much occupied with her own thoughts to be alive to anything mundane.

Then, after spending an hour in the library of the Y.M.C.A., he returned to his office at the appointed time. In compliance with his orders, a few lights had been left burning on the ground floor. When he gained his office, he found Mr. Senior already awaiting him.

That gentleman received his warm thanks for averting the calamity of

Amy's descent on the office with a smile. "You have no idea what an agreeable afternoon I have spent. Really, I find I have a great deal to learn from your world today."

Tydvil looked a little surprised. "Can we teach you anything at all?" he asked.

"Well, of course, the broad principles are always the same," answered Mr. Senior, "but in technique and finish, some of your methods promise an interesting study. Oh, by the way, I have had the pleasure of Mrs. Jones's society all the afternoon. We lunched at Menzies..."

"What?" The question fairly exploded from Tydvil's lips. "Say that again!"

Mr. Senior looked embarrassed. "I trust that in taking Mrs. Jones to Menzies I have not committed an indiscretion."

"My wife had lunch with you at...?"

Mr. Senior nodded. "You see..." he began to explain.

But what he would have said was cut short by an outburst of mirth from Tydvil, who lay back in his chair the better to absorb the idea. “My dear sir,” he said, only partially recovered, “please forgive my rudeness, but you took me by surprise.”

“So long as you are not annoyed,” replied his friend.

“Annoyed!” and again Jones gave way to his mirth. “Why, your news enchants me. If I had any reason to doubt your bona fides, that alone would prove your case. Only Your Highness could have achieved such a feat.”

“To be frank,” replied Mr. Senior, “I was rather flattering myself on the performance. But actually the credit is due to the Archbishop of Canterbury.”

“He would be proud if he knew,” Tydvil chuckled. “I will not enquire how he came into the picture, but I am most grateful to him.”

“Perhaps I should tell you,” Mr. Senior said, “that since we parted this

morning I have been enquiring into your affairs, and have ascertained the reason of your disinclination to meet your wife.” Then he added hastily, “Believe me, it was not impertinent curiosity that prompted me. I felt that an understanding of the situation would be mutually helpful.”

Tydvil waved away the apology as unnecessary. “As a matter of fact, I am glad you know all. It will save explanations.” Then, after a pause, “Since you know all, you understand?” There was enquiry in his voice.

“Everything!” the other said earnestly. “And I hope you will believe me when I say you have my profound sympathy.”

“Thank you,” said Tydvil, more earnestly. “I heard a Russian proverb once, that ran, ‘Only their owner knows where his fleas bite him.’”

“There is an Oriental proverb also,” responded Mr. Senior, “that says ‘The husbands of talkative wives shall have great rewards hereafter,’ and that is as true as many other wise sayings. And now,” he said, standing up, “about your own affairs, Mr. Jones.”

“Suppose you drop the ‘Mr.’,” said Tydvil tentatively. “It seems very formal since we are to see so much of one another.”

Mr. Senior smiled a big, friendly smile. “Gladly, provided you reciprocate and call me Nicholas.”

“Oh!” The idea seemed to Tydvil to border on impertinence.

“But I would like it, really,” replied his friend reassuringly. “Do you know, since I met you, and then Mrs. Jones, I feel it would be a pleasure to help you to make up for lost time.”

“Well, in that case, we’ll make it so,” and the two shook hands.

“Now tell me,” asked Nicholas, “what form do you propose to adopt?”

Tydvil thought a moment. “Am I in any way limited in my choice?”

Nicholas shook his head. “The whole world is yours.”

“Well, I have a young man in my service named William Brewer. Do you



know him?”

Senior drew his ledger card from his pocket and studied it carefully. Then, regarding Jones with raised eyebrows, he emitted a long whistle. “An ideal model for a night out,” he said with a light laugh. “Your Mr. Brewer has quite a record, although he seems to have been spoiling it lately, apparently because of some sentimental attachment.”

He waved his hands over Mr. Jones, and that gentleman vanished and William Brewer stood in his place.

Tydvil started in astonishment. A moment earlier he had been wearing blue serge. Now, his outstretched arm showed grey tweed. With a bewildered look in one eye, he turned to the mirror and gasped. There, looking back at him, was Brewer to the last hair. The multicoloured eye that so distinguished his prototype was there to its ultimate shade of blue—a contingency that he had overlooked.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, “I had forgotten that eye. Could you...?”

For answer, Nicholas pressed his fingers to the swollen face and all

trace of swelling and discolouration vanished. “How’s that?”, he asked.

The more Tydvil examined his new individuality, the more satisfied he felt. With a grin on Billy’s handsome face, he turned to Senior. “True, O friend, I am feeling a new man. Ethically, I’m afraid my action is indefensible. I feel like a forgery.”

“Pah!” Senior said. “Ethics, my dear Tydvil, are no more than a moral loincloth. Get back to Eden and live your life unashamed.”

Jones stared at him a moment. “I wonder...?” He paused, a little embarrassed.

“Well?”

“It was your mention of Eden,” went on Tydvil. “Was there any truth in that story?”

“About my first appearance on the stage as a serpent?” queried the other with a smile, “before ethics and loincloths were invented.”

Tydvil nodded.

“Just consider the probabilities, my friend,” replied Senior seating himself on the corner of the table and lighting a cigarette. “Is it likely that any being, human or otherwise, who wished to win a woman’s confidence, would attempt to do so in the form of a snake? A snake, mind you! Why, it would scare her into hysterics for a start. The thing’s childish.”

“It does seem hardly feasible,” Tydvil admitted.

“Mind you,” continued Nicholas, “there is ground for the story, but not for the published details. It is just a sample of the injustice done me for ages. The fact was, it was just female cussedness; There was Eve, with no housekeeping; no dress to occupy her mind; with no man to flirt with or woman to gossip with; and, of course, she discovered and committed the only mischief there was to commit. Serpent be hanged!” he finished with a gesture of disgust.

““Satan finds some mischief still,”” Tydvil quoted absently, and then broke off as he realised what he was saying.

“That’s another!” said Nicholas bitterly. “I find mischief! Umph!

There’s no need; they find it themselves and then blame it on to me.

Confounded injustice! However, let’s forget it. You’ll need some money if you’re going to have a night out.”

“Almost forgot!” said Tydvil, going to his private cash box. From this he took three five-pound notes, and five ones, and placed them in a wallet he found in his pocket. Then he turned suddenly. “Oh, look here! Suppose I wish to return to my own shape, what do I do?” he asked anxiously.

“I’ll be at your instant call,” replied Senior. “No need to worry. If you get into difficulties of any kind, just call. Remember our bond.”

“Excellent!” said Tydvil glancing at the clock, which showed it wanted but ten minutes to eight. “And now, I’ll move off.”

“Have you any plans?” asked Nicholas.

Jones shook his head. “Not a plan. I intend to let events shape

themselves. I've no doubt that a man who looks for amusement in the city will find it."

Senior laughed shortly. "From the little I have seen of it, I have no doubts whatever."

Tydvil paused a moment and then said a little doubtfully, "Do you know, Nicholas, it has just occurred to me that I wouldn't know how to get into mischief."

Rubbing a shapely chin with his forefinger, Nicholas reassured him. "My dear fellow, you will be astonished at the ease with which you will succeed, even without trying. That should be the least of your worries. Well, I'll leave you now. But remember, you've only to call." The next moment Tydvil was alone in his office.

## CHAPTER XVI

Tydvil took one last look at Billy's face in the mirror, then, taking his hat, he let himself out of the warehouse into Flinders Lane. Slowly he strolled towards the corner of Swanston Street, where he stood for a while. The inward human night traffic was at its flood. The footpaths were thronged with the theatre crowds and the swift procession of motor cars and trams sped past him going north. As they passed him, Tydvil caught glimpses of dainty and beautiful women, part of a life of which he knew nothing.

A flaming sky sign caught his eye, lettering in white against a black cloud background the words, "The Red Haired Girl. His Majesty's Theatre." The words winked and disappeared, and returned in a moment, leering invitation.

Then Tydvil really began to think. He had remembered reading letters in his morning paper signed, "Shocked" and "Not a Puritan." They suggested to him that "The Red Haired Girl" ran true to the tradition of red hair. Tydvil squared his shoulders and decided that he, too, Tydvil Jones, would see "The Red Haired Girl" and be shocked also. He had never been

properly shocked in his life, and imagined the experience might prove interesting.

He turned, and as he did so, another idea struck him. He had never tasted alcohol. “Why not?” Oh, there were so many things he had never done! There was a brass plate on a nearby door labelled “Saloon Bar.” Tydvil had no idea what a bar, either saloon or public, looked like. Now was the time to learn.

He took one step towards the door when a mighty hand fell on his shoulder and a mighty voice, undoubtedly breathing goodfellowship, thundered, “Billy! Billy, you old kerfoosalem! How are you?”

“The old kerfoosalem” turned round to face a large stranger, by no means sharing the delight of his greeting, though he tried hard to give the impression that he did.

“Halo, old chap!’ he said with enforced heartiness. This, he thought, was non-committal.

“Billy, you dear old blighter,” exclaimed the other warmly, “I knew I

would butt into you somewhere among the bright lights. Biggest joke in the world. Thought I saw you crossing Flinders Street just now carrying a dandy black eye. Dashed traffic blocked me, and I missed whoever it was. Dead spit of you. Funny, wasn't it?"

Tydvil succeeding in making himself grin to register amusement. "Very funny!" he said dryly. His mind was whirling with plans to shake off this exuberant friend, who, he discovered was, if not quite intoxicated, well on the way, and sufficiently so to have reached the stage at which appearance and conventions were of no account.

"Wouldn't have missed you tonight for the world," announced the unsober one in loud-speaker tones. He let go Tydvil's arm and felt in his pocket, "King Rufus led all the way. Here you are." He drew out a roll of notes and peeling off five fivers, he pressed them into Tydvil's unwilling hand.

"Said I'd pay you back tonight, now, didn' I? Didn' I say, alive or dead, Jerry McCann would pay you back that twenny-five quid? Eh?" he insisted.



“Of course you did, Jerry,” Jones admitted, thankful to have discovered a name if not an identity. “But, look here,” he protested, “don’t give it to me now. Keep it till we meet again.”

The other blinked at him. “Don’ be a bloomin’ fool, Billy,” he urged. “Don’ act the goat. Take it. If you don’ I’ll only get blithered and it will go.” He raised his voice so that a passing policeman turned a searching eye on the two. “Good ole Billy. Allers did help a pal.”

To Tydvil, the situation was impossible. He felt hot flushes crawling all over him. He felt he had narrowly escaped meeting the genuine Billy Brewer. Now, at all costs, he must shake off Billy’s beery friend. “Look here, Jerry,” he said firmly, “I’ve got an appointment I must keep. Thanks for the money, but I’ll just have to go.” He jerked his sleeve from the hand that held it with a curt “Good night!” and walked swiftly towards Collins Street.

The other stood watching the retreating hat bobbing above the crowd. His world had crashed on him. He had just paid Billy Brewer a debt that was six months overdue and Billy, who in normal circumstances would have helped him make a night of it, had walked off and never even asked him

to have a drink—and a bar door within twenty feet of them.

Jerry watched Billy till he disappeared, then, still wondering, he stepped back off the kerb into the roadway where his fate was accomplished by a heavy limousine. Tydvil Jones was too far off to hear the cry, or to see the crowd that gathered as the limp figure was lifted from the blocks.

Little dreaming that Jerry had been gathered to the Mercy of Allah, Tydvil turned into Collins Street in order to avoid pursuit. It had come home to him with some force that in adopting Billy's person, he was adopting with it some no slight risks. However, the risk, whatever it might be, added spice to the adventure—after all, was he not seeking adventure?

Tydvil had reached Elizabeth Street and turned towards Bourke Street, when again the words "Saloon Bar" arrested his attention. Then, since there was no Jerry McCann to intervene, without hesitation he passed through the multicoloured glass door and along a heavily carpeted corridor into a small but brilliantly lighted room at the end.

To Tydvil's relief there were no customers at the counter that ran along the whole of one side. At the further end from where he stood, behind the counter, were two girls in deep converse. One, with a sleek, black head, was seated, the other, a blonde of surpassing bloneness, was standing before her. They were quite oblivious of Tydvil's presence, so he had ample time to take in the details at his leisure.

The mirrored walls and the close array of bottles and cut glass flashed under the electric light. So this was the abode of sin against which he had raised his voice so earnestly on numberless occasions. As he gazed, the blonde moved slightly and gave him a better view of her companion. Jones wondered how one so petite could possess such amazing eyes and such a pink bud for a mouth. Had he but known it, his admiration of the two presiding angels at the Carillion bar was heartily endorsed by the leading authorities of the city.

Tydvil inwardly raged at the shyness that kept him glued as he stood staring at the two damsels. It needed all his strength to save him from taking flight. Then, suddenly the two dazzling eyes of the brunette turned full on him. As they did so their expression of indifference turned into evident surprise and pleasure that had a magical effect on

Tydvil's nerves. His heart gave two big, bumps, and his bashfulness vanished.

The brunette had risen to her feet. "Connie, look!" she exclaimed. "Look at the villain of the piece."

Then she of the massed blonde hair turned on Tydvil two of the softest blue smiling eyes he had ever seen, or, at any rate, had ever noticed.

"Billy," she said gently as he stood before them (he never knew how he crossed the room), "Billy, you're the quintessence of a disagreeable piggy. Where have you been all these centuries?" The unflattering epithet, falling from a perfect cupid's bow mouth, seemed almost a caress.

"Dooce of a lot of work," said Tydvil, off-handedly. "Positively could not get round."

The two exchanged glances, and the smaller shook a white, pink-nailed finger at him. "Dooce of a lot of work!" she mimicked derisively. "Do you think we never hear anything? Dooce of a lot of redheaded typist!

That's your work, Mr. Billy Brewer."

The charge, unexpected as it was, made Jones forget for the moment his borrowed individuality. He disgraced Billy Brewer by a rich, all-embracing blush. The two stared at the mounting colour with amazement, and peals of merry laughter filled the bar. "Billy, you've blushed! Connie and I will get in our breach of promise writs before the rush sets in. Oh, Billy! You swore you would never love anyone but us."

"Look here!" he objected indignantly, "it's not true..."

"The Lord don't love liars, Billy," said Connie shaking her head. Then, turning, she placed a bottle of whisky and a glass before him. Those were the days when the customer said "When."

Tydvil had scarcely bargained for that. He was doubtful if Billy Brewer's body carried that gentleman's capacity for absorbing whisky without calamitous results, or his own incapacity. He determined to play for safety. "Not that," he said, glancing at the bottle, "I'll take claret and lemonade." Again the bar rang and rippled with laughter.

“Sure you don’t mean milk and soda?” giggled Millie. “You are a break-up, Billy.” As she spoke, she poured a generous first mate’s snifter into the tumbler and passed it across to him. At the same time Connie placed a bubbling bottle of soda water beside it.

“Lap it up like a good boy,” Connie laughed, “and forget the redhead a minute. Jerry McCann was in looking for you a little while ago.”

Recognising that the claret and lemonade position was untenable, Tydvil filled the glass with soda, determined to play his part for the honour of Billy Brewer—he owed him that much.

“I saw Jerry just now in Swanston Street,” he said as he took up his glass. “I should say he had been here,” he added with meaning.

Millie nodded. “He was a bit damp round the edges,” she commented, “so Connie wouldn’t give him any whisky. You’d have laughed to hear her ‘kidding him to be good and go home. Talked sister stuff to him and managed to make him swallow two glasses of Spa water.”

“He wasn’t too bad when I saw him,” said Tydvil, inwardly amazed that

the girls he thought would be sirens would go to the trouble to protect Jerry from himself. This was a new angle on barmaids.

Connie laughed. "He would have been worse if I hadn't squeezed out two big tears and pleaded with him. It was the tears that did it. Look, Billy." She blinked her heavy lashed lids quickly and looked into Tydvil's eyes. As she did, the big blue orbs swam with an appeal that might have softened the heart of the Commissioner of Taxes. A little soft hand fell on the big one of Tydvil that rested on the counted. "Billy," she murmured, "lap it up for my sake."

Tydvil, under those appealing eyes, began to feel queer. He, Tydvil Jones, of all men, felt an irresistible urge to kiss the owner of those blue eyes. But Connie, evidently diagnosing the symptoms from experience, withdrew from the danger zone.

"Little kidder, isn't she?" laughed Millie.

"Little devil!" retorted Tydvil, and raising the glass to his lips he sent the C6 0 H + Soda to the ultimate destination of all such mixtures, in two gulps. The spirit caught his throat and made him feel for the

moment as though he had swallowed a jazz band wrapped in barbed wire. He concealed his emotions admirably, and replaced the glass on the counter as though the rite were mere routine.

“Good boy,” laughed Connie. “Took his medicine like a little man. Now he’ll have strength enough to pay over that eleven quid.”

Jones gasped. “Eh! Eleven—eh—for a drink! Why I paid you...”

“Don’t be silly! Why, you promised you would put that pound on King Rufus for me...”

Jones was no fool, and hastily recognised that with Billy’s individuality he had assumed his liabilities, and he must meet them so as to leave no reflection on Billy’s good name. The transaction evidently demanded immediate settlement. Without a moment’s further hesitation he pulled out a wad of notes and paid over.

“Lucky wog, Connie! Wish I’d invested, too,” remarked Millie.

Connie turned aside and lifted a tiny suede-cased foot to the chair.



There was a flirt of skirt, a flashing glimpse of deep red garter, a snap of elastic, and the notes disappeared.

“Huzzy!” said Tydvil, playfully; rather more moved than he had been by the whisky.

The girl’s eyes twinkled with amusement. “Shouldn’t have looked, Billy,” she said. “I notice you didn’t blush that time.”

There came a sound of voices from the corridor. Tydvil took fright. “I’m off,” he said. “Goodnight, girls.” But it was too late. Entered three jovial souls who hailed him as a brother.

Tydvil thought swiftly. “No good, you chaps. One more and I’m off. Got an appointment; positively! Can’t wait, a fact!” He spoke convincingly.

Loud were the protests. They were looking for a game of “draw.” But Jones did not dare risk more than two drinks. The one he had already was feeling its way round happily. He paid for one more and, despite their chaff which imputed scandalous motives for his desertion, he turned and fled.

## CHAPTER XVII

Out in the street again, Tydvil felt a hitherto unknown sense of exhilaration and courage. The world looked brighter. With two whiskies under his vest he squared his shoulders and made his way up Bourke Street with one object in view, "The Red Haired Girl."

As he went he pondered on the coincidence that mixed Billy, Geraldine Brand, and the show he hoped to see. On his way he was saluted by name several times by unknown men, but he flung them a curt "goodnight," without pausing.

He had turned into Exhibition Street. Another twenty yards would have brought him to the door of the theatre, when a light touch fell on his arm, and a soft voice murmured, "Billy! O, Billy! At last!"

Jones looked down at the owner of the voice, and for the second time that night his heart gave an unaccustomed jump.

She was something like that lovely little Millie he had just left.

Though it were hardly possible—prettier! Her eyes were as big and

bright, but they held nothing of Millie's reserve. As they looked up into Tydvil's face they were frankly adoring eyes. Jones began to think that Billy Brewer's reputation had been scandalously under-estimated.

He realised that he was on ground that was both hazardous and delicate. Unless he moved with circumspection, he might come a cropper of colossal dimensions. However, thanks to the two snifters of Scotch, he felt equal to any emergency.

"Hallo, little girl!" he smiled back into her eyes, "where were you off to?"

Two red petals pouted at him, and there was just a hint of storm in the big eyes. "Billy, you know quite well I was just getting home. Don't be silly and pretend. Why didn't you come when I wrote?"

"Wrote!" protested Tydvil, playing for time and enlightenment. "Honest, I never got the letter."

"Now, Billy," she persisted suspiciously, "I wrote twice."

“I’ll swear on my honour, I never got any letter,” he asserted virtuously.

“Well, I posted them...” she began.

“Look here!” he interrupted, “what’s the use of wrangling. I was just going to the show. Come in with me.”

She shook her head. “What’s the use? I’ve seen it twice already, and I want to talk to you. Take me somewhere to dinner, Billykins!” she coaxed.

Tydvil did some more swift thinking. True, he had sought adventure. Again, why not? “All right,” he yielded. “Where’ll we go?”

She mentioned the name of a restaurant the fame of which had reached even the virtuous ears of Tydvil-Jones-before-the-fall. The new Tydvil agreed without hesitation.

The driver of a hansom, wise in his years and his calling, had his eyes on the pair as they talked. He sent out a swift “Keb, sir?” Tydvil

nodded, and the cab drew to the kerb. She put her hand on his arm, about to step into the cab, when Jones happened to glance over his shoulder. He had suffered a succession of shocks that night. But when he looked into the hostile blazing eyes of Geraldine Brand, who was passing not six feet away with two other girls, his nerve almost failed him.

For a second, he forgot he was Billy Brewer. It 'was Tydvil Jones, who, in such a compromising situation, wilted under the relentless judgment of those eyes. It was only for a second though. His hand went to his hat, but Geraldine, with her head high, turned haughtily away. Tydvil whistled softly to himself.

His companion, who had missed not a detail of the encounter, entered the cab without a word. Jones named his destination to the driver and took his place beside her. The moment he was seated she turned on him. "Now, Billy, who was that redheaded she cat?"

"What do you mean?" asked Tydvil with an air of engaging innocence.

The woman beside him bit her lip. When she spoke he felt that tears were very near the surface. "Oh, Billy, I used to think you cared, and

that you were something better than the rest! Who is she?" The last words were a demand not to be denied.

Almost like Amy, reflected Jones. Then he said, "The girl who passed just now was only one of the typists from the office."

She was silent a moment, and then said with deep conviction, "Billy, I think you are the most brutal, callous, hard-hearted devil that ever lived."

"Just because a girl looked at me," he said in an injured tone. "I couldn't help her looking at me."

She laughed shortly. "That wildcat didn't look at you as though she would like to scratch you, for nothing." She paused, and then went on. "I wonder how many others there are as well. I positively, know five now. There are Alma, Joyce, Clara Butler, Vivian Granger, that redheaded fury—and—I might as well add my own name, Hilda Cranston, a fool, and at your service."

The name gave Tydvil a jolt, for he knew there was a Cranston on the

pay-roll of Craddock, Burns and Despard—and he wondered. But he had small time for wondering. He was busy making Billy Brewer's peace with an angry woman, though he had his suspicions that Billy would not thank him for the service. By the time they reached their destination, he had succeeded in establishing a truce.

Here a new problem presented itself. He managed to secure a quiet and unobtrusive table in a corner of the crowded room. When she peeled off her gloves and passed them over to him to put in his pocket, he noticed that the fourth finger of her left hand was encircled by a plain thin gold band.

Hilda took the menu card Tydvil handed to her and glanced at him over its edge. "Let's do the ordering, Billy," she asked. Anxious to do anything that might conciliate her, he acquiesced. All the more gladly because he was himself uncertain what would be the correct thing to offer his partner in the circumstances.

"Can I make it willing, dear?" That "dear" was an emblem of peace. "How's the exchequer, boy?"

“Go to the limit,” Tydvil agreed, secure in a well-filled wallet. “The exchequer is not only healthy, it’s robust. I backed King Rufus today.” He felt almost proud of the way the name of a horse, the existence of which he had been ignorant of an hour earlier, slipped off his tongue.

“How glorious!” Her eyes sparkled. “We’ll have a big bottle of bubbles, too.”

The waiter was standing beside her, and Jones watched in no little amazement her assured and self-possessed air as she enumerated her requirements. There was only a little hesitation when she came to the wine. “Which, Billy?” she said, glancing over at him.

He laughed. The names were Greek to him. “You said you were giving the order, and I’ll take you at your word.”

She named the wine and the man enquired, very respectfully, “Vintage, sir?” Tydvil had no idea what the word implied, but nodded, and the man went on his way.

The next two hours of Tydvil Jones’ life remained afterwards as a blurred



impression of soft music, white arms and shoulders, shaded lights, strange and delectable food and stranger and more delectable drinks. He did not know what was in the cocktail with which that repast commenced, but it tasted like liquid happiness. When he swallowed it, it obliterated all care of past or future from his mind. Tydvil lived in the present only. A glowing present of a heady illusive perfume that drifted across the table to him, and of eyes that told things of which Tydvil Jones had never dreamed.

He took his fair share of the wine that sparkled, and found it good. After the first glass he found himself saying things that could only have obtained their brilliance from “beaded bubbles winking at the brim” of the long-stemmed glass beside him.

“Billy,” she said at the last, “you’ve been delightful tonight. I’ll forgive you even that redheaded cat, but you’ll have to see me home.”

Tydvil Jones, the once Tydvil Jones, faintly, whispered caution. Two robust Scotch whiskies, a sidecar, a glass of sherry, three glasses of vintage wine and a benedictine all shouted, “Why not?” and all cheered together when Tydvil Jones threw his life’s training and all discretion

to the winds, and told her he would see her to the end of the world and beyond, provided she brought her dimples with her.

In Collins Street as they stood on the footpath, she said, “Don’t take a taxi, Billykins, get a hansom, taxis are too quick,” and as she commanded, so it was done. There was one anxious moment, however, when the cab drew up. To where was he to tell the man to drive? But Tydvil found himself as full of devices as he was of high spirits. “Don’t you think we had better not drive to the house?” he asked.

“Perhaps not, dear,” she conceded. “No use attracting attention. Tell him to put us down at the corner of Fitzroy and Acland Streets.”

Jones gave the man his sailing orders and took his seat. It was not until they had crossed Princes Bridge that she spoke again. “There’s not much need to worry, though. He’s in Sydney.”

Tydvil gave an interrogative, “Oh?”

“I thought you would have known he had his holidays. That’s why I wrote.”

At that moment two and two added themselves together in Tydvil's mind. Cranston, the head of the Manchester Department, was on his annual leave. He recollected that Cranston, whom he liked least of his staff, had mentioned he was going to Sydney. When in the friendly obscurity a soft arm stole round his neck, it suddenly occurred to Tydvil that Cranston must have treated this little woman abominably; aye, and neglected her, too. How else would she so crave love and sympathy. He felt it almost a duty to comfort her.

Let us not hold a brief for Tydvil Jones, but let us be just, and let him, who says he would have resisted where Tydvil fell short of his early standards, remember the fate of Ananias. The hansom rolled along St. Kilda Road, and as it rolled, Tydvil started in pursuit of those dimples. But in spite of strict attention to the business in hand, he had not captured one by the time the cab stopped. Unnoticed, he had passed his home where he had fully intended to escape.

He could scarcely believe that the five miles had not been done at a speed of twenty miles an hour, so brief had been the journey. He assisted Hilda to alight. Absently he gave the cabby the note that was uppermost in his wallet, and told him to keep the change—which amounted to four

pounds twelve shillings and sixpence. Tydvil's troubles!

Taking her arm and shortening his step to hers, they turned into Acland Street and presently, turned again down one of the side streets leading to the esplanade. At the gate Hilda paused. Jones opened it and stepped into the little garden. "Goodnight, little girl," he said, "I'll have to get home. It is nearly eleven."

She put her hand on his shoulder and looked up at him. "Oh, Billykins, just half an hour. Come in with me. There's not a soul in the house."

Again we can hold no brief for Tydvil, and can make no concession to his weakness. His behaviour was deserving of the severest censure. Still, perhaps Amy and Hilda were not altogether blameless. Mr. Nicholas Senior might apportion the blame fairly.

Hilda opened the door with a latchkey, and switched on a light in the passage. She led Tydvil to a small room half way, down it. There was a large, heavily-shaded kerosene lamp on the table, which she lit, and then switched off the electric light. Turning to him, she said, "Wait a little, Billy, I shan't be long," and he found himself alone.

It was a dainty and cosy apartment, and Tydvil sank into an armchair with a feeling of intense well-being and comfort. The silence was only broken by the busy ticking of a travelling clock. Minutes passed. Then he heard a door open down the passage. Then a “swish, swish,” which made his heart go faster.

She stood in the doorway smiling at him. It must have been a lightning change, for, in place of the walking frock, she was wearing a long, soft, neckless, sleeveless robe that suited and fitted her to perfection. How it retained the status quo in defiance of the laws of gravity was a mystery to Tydvil. She kissed the tips of fingers to him, and with her hand motioned him not to rise.

There was a little cupboard in the corner, and to this she went. From it came a cheerful clinking, and when she turned she bore two glasses and a small foiled bottle which she placed on the table. “Billy,” she said, “one more little one won’t do us any harm. I’ve been keeping this for you.”

The original Tydvil had considerable doubts on her optimism. The present

emancipated Jones agreed heartily. He had never seen, he thought, a more charming picture than she made in her new robe. Tydvil put the thought into words as he watched her deftly unwire the bottle. She positively refused to allow him to assist. With a table napkin to act as silencer and splashboard, the cork came out with a friendly “pop.” Then she sent the wine creaming into two glasses without losing a precious drop. One she handed to him, and, taking the other, she perched herself on the arm of his chair.

“So you like my frock,” she said as she leaned over him.

He placed his glass on the table and looked up at her. “What there is of it is perfect,” he said, “but I think I like what there isn’t of it better.”

She took a sip from her glass and held it to his lips. “That’s for paying pretty compliments...”

Of what happened next, Tydvil was never quite sure. There was a sudden crash of glass and rending of curtains, and across the table he saw three men confronting him, and the leader and most conspicuous was Mr. Samuel

Cranston, who, according to his own story, should have been six hundred miles away in Sydney—but who evidently was not.

Hilda emitted a startled cry, but Tydvil was, for the moment, too overcome by the catastrophe to move.

The expression of Samuel Cranston was hostile in the extreme. He glared ferociously as, with two hands clenched on the table, he leaned forward to deliver himself of speech. Behind him, two unpleasant looking men, evidently private detectives, stood in support. There was a ring of triumph in the rage that shook Cranston's voice. "Got you!" he snarled. "Got you at last, Mr. so-and-so Brewer! And you'll pay for it!"

Two thoughts flashed through Tydvil's mind. One was that the situation presented more grounds for action than argument. There was simply nothing to be said. The other was that every circumstance of the case demanded swift and, if possible, masterly retreat. It meant a retreat, too, encumbered by his baggage, though he, himself, did not regard Hilda in exactly that light.

He sprang to his feet. The whole scene was a matter of seconds from the

moment of the explosion. Hilda, he noted with satisfaction, had slipped through the door. As Tydvil moved, the two detectives started round the table with bellicose intent, and Cranston, seizing the empty bottle, hurled it at his head. Jones ducked with a celerity that surprised even himself, and the bottle shattered a picture on the wall behind him. An instant later a glass buzzed past his ear.

Attacked in front, and with both flanks menaced, as in all master minds, thought and action were coincident with Tydvil. He reached forward and, picking up the lamp, sent it flying at the infuriated Cranston. There was a crash and a blaze of flame as he turned and reached the door a hairsbreadth ahead of the nearest man. Swiftly he pulled it to behind him. He muttered his relief when he found a key on the outside, and the bolt shot as he turned it. From the sounds within, the inhabitants of the room were evidently busy beating out the flames.

Hilda ran before him and opened the front door. "Don't mind me, Billy," she gasped. "He's frightened of me. I can manage him easily and am quite safe. Go quickly!"

Tydvil paused a moment to listen to the clamour behind the locked door.



“Sure you will be all right? Better come with me!”

“Madness, Billy,” she answered. “I know best. Go!” He stooped and kissed her on either cheek, and she laughed lightly as he turned and fled, heading towards Acland Street.

Tydvil made the pace fairly smart, but kept something in reserve in case of pursuit, though he felt sure that the trio would be delayed long enough to give him a good start. In this, however, he proved a bad judge. He was within fifty yards of Acland Street when excited noises behind him warned him the hunt was on.

Concealment was out of the question. Both moon and street lights were against him. There was a shout of “There he goes!” and, with the enemy on his track, he began to sprint, still feeling confident of escape. But his confidence received a shock when, as he had almost reached the corner, two men turned out of Acland Street and came towards him.

As they came into view a cry came from his pursuers of, “Stop thief! Stop him!” and at the cry the newcomers prepared to bar his progress.

Tydvil's thoughts worked even more swiftly than his legs. In the brief seconds before the impending collision, he measured his chances. The new forces were apparently both young, and their open coats displayed evening dress. Their attitudes bespoke determination. Shock tactics were the only hope, and he charged straight at them. Seeing this they closed. As their hands shot towards him, he hacked one savagely on the shin—a primitive and barbaric attack, but effectual. Then he snatched off his hat and hurled it in the face of the other, and followed it swiftly with his fist.

The momentary dislocation of their line gave him an opportunity to burst through, and before they could turn on him he was round the corner and pelting towards Fitzroy Street. He knew from the crude and personal remarks that reached him, that though he had gained another start, he had earned the uncompromising hostility of two more pursuers. There was no mistaking the zeal that urged the footsteps that were pattering swiftly behind him. Worse still, two other figures detached themselves from the shadows on the opposite side of the street and joined the hunt, apparently on general principles.

Tydvil's heart began to fail. Not only were the newcomers gaining, but a

glance over his shoulder showed him that they had been overtaken by Cranston and his unlovely satellites. Now, the pack, grown to seven, was pounding along behind him, giving tongue as they ran.

Knowing the locality well, it was a plantation on the other side of Fitzroy Street, that Tydvil made his objective. When he reached the corner from which his hoped for sanctuary, came into view, the chase was not much more than one hundred feet behind him.

Here, the lights on the corner which revealed him plainly to his pursuers, showed Jones something that chilled his heart. The corner of the street had been torn up for some municipal work, and the piled earth was fenced with hurdles.

Standing by them was what appeared to the flying man as the most gigantic policeman he had ever laid eyes on. Moreover, the approaching riot had evidently put him on the alert.

As Tydvil reached the edge of the upturned earth round which he must race for the chance of safety that was now in view, the policeman roared a command to halt, and made at him. Necessity was the mother of Jones as

well as of invention in his hour of peril. Safety or ruin was a matter of seconds. He dropped to his knees, and as he did so his hand found something comforting: something cubical and heavy. As the approaching figure towered over him, Tydvil's hand shot forward. There was the sound of an anguished grunt, and the Law incarnate crumpled up and crashed almost on top of him.

At the same instant the chase raged round the corner. Tydvil started up and fled like a scalded cat across the street to the shadow of the trees of the plantation, with the howling crew almost on his heels. Leaving the path, he dashed among the shrubs and sprawled full length over a surprised couple who were whispering sweet nothings in the privacy of the shrubbery. The man seized his foot with an exclamation, highly improper at any time, but unpardonable in the presence of a lady.

Tydvil kicked desperately and wrenched his foot free. The girl screamed, and the two men struggled to their feet. The sound of crashing among the shrubs told Jones that the scream had brought the pursuit on his track again. Tydvil drove a purposeful knee to his opponent's waistcoat, and the man went to the grass like a log. Again a scream from the girl brought an answering cry from the hunt. In another moment they would be

on him. In his desperation Tydvil remembered. “Nicholas, help! Help me!” he gasped.

The words were still on his lips when Jones felt himself wrenched from his feet and swung into the air. There was for a second, a sensation of breathless flight and he found himself sitting somewhere, high above the earth, and, he felt assured, in safety. Where he was he neither knew nor cared. Drawing labouring breaths, he sat with his face in his hands, listening to excited voices in the distance. Presently he recovered himself slightly, but still panting from his flight he sat up and looked round.

Had it not been that any refuge was better than capture, Tydvil would have been rather scared at the situation in which he found himself. The first glance showed him that he was sitting on the parapet, some fifty feet from the ground, of a long range of terraces overlooking Hobsons Bay. His feet were resting on a ledge about two feet wide that formed the cornice of the building. Beside him was a large, ball-shaped cement structure that formed one of the architectural adornments. On the other side sat, regarding him with a smiling countenance, Mr. Nicholas Senior.

The moon that had betrayed the fugitive, had disappeared under a friendly cloud, but Mr. Senior's countenance was plainly visible. Jones took in his surroundings for a moment before speaking. Then, still gasping, he said, "Close shave! Thank goodness you were at hand. I thought I was gone."

Nicholas laughed. "Goodness had very little to do with any part of it, I'm afraid. But it was a close shave, as you say. Why didn't you call sooner?"

"Forgot!" said Mr. Jones shortly. Then he added, anxiously, "I suppose we are quite safe here?"

"Quite," replied Mr. Senior. "Any port in a storm, you know, my friend. Of course, I do not wish in any way to interfere in your amusements, but you seem, for a beginner, to have had a fairly lively night out. That crowd seemed as angry as a nest of hornets."

Jones paused to listen to the calls that still rose from the plantation in the near foreground. Then he gave his friend a swift outline of his adventures.

“Not too bad!” commented Nicholas appreciatively. “Not bad at all—rape, arson and murder, but I’ve known a fourteenth century Archbishop to do better before breakfast.”

“Oh, you know,” protested Tydvil indignantly, “that’s hardly a fair statement, at all!”

“But, don’t you see, Tydvil, in these cases it is the principle that counts? The intention, rather than its fulfilment.”

“But I cannot admit it,” argued Jones a little warmly.

“I was certainly injudicious, but the fire caused by the lamp must have been extinguished without trouble. And the policeman...” He paused a little doubtfully.

“The least of your lapses,” said Nicholas. “You say you only threw a lump of clay at him. That would not have caused any but a temporary inconvenience.”

Tydvil cleared his throat. “Hum—yes,” he said slowly. “But, unfortunately, that lump of clay had been baked. In fact, it was half a brick that checked his advance.”

Nicholas Senior chuckled. “Really, I must congratulate you. You have met serious emergencies with prompt and effectual methods. Don’t worry about the policeman. Risks of the kind are inseparable from his calling.” Here he paused, for the tumult and the shouting that had died away were resumed with renewed vigour. There was a stampede below, and the uproar broke out again, apparently directly below their perch. Looking apprehensively at Nicholas, Tydvil’s arm encircled the concrete ball beside him.

Leaning forward, Nicholas listened intently. “They seem to have found someone. Wait! I won’t be long.” He disappeared as he spoke.

The last injunction was unnecessary. Tydvil had not the slightest intention of moving. He clung affectionately, to the concrete, and stared out across the dark waters of the Bay, to where the Gellibrand light winked a knowing and wicked red eye at him.



Five minutes later, Mr. Senior was beside him again. He was laughing heartily, though quietly.

Tydvil turned an enquiring eye on him.

“Upon my word,” said Nicholas, “had I planned it myself, I could not have done better. Your late pursuers have found the real William Brewer who was passing with two friends.”

No words came from Tydvil. He was beyond speech, but his face was a note of anguished interrogation.

“I left him trying to explain himself, and no one will believe him. He has been arrested for using abusive language to the policeman. That policeman is very angry,” added Nicholas as an afterthought.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Tydvil felt that, at this juncture, the rescue of Billy Brewer was the paramount consideration, and said so. Mr. Senior, however, urged caution.

“I can take him from that policeman without any trouble,” he said, “but remember, he is known. That will mean his re-arrest on another charge.”

“But I must do something,” Tydvil pleaded. “It is all my fault, and he is innocent.”

“Don’t worry,” Mr. Senior reassured him. “I will bail him out tonight and appear for him in court tomorrow. You can come along and give evidence if you like.”

“That,” said Tydvil, “would be very satisfactory, but for the fact that you and I have not yet met one another.”

“Uh,” concurred Nicholas.

“The case might reach the papers,” Tydvil explained, “and my wife might wonder—she’s pretty good at wondering.”

“Well,” Nicholas said thoughtfully, “we must have an impressive looking counsel—let me see—we’ll call him Mr. Olden, K.C. I will contrive to look legal and will arrange it so that the Court accepts me at face value.”

“Good.” Tydvil’s confidence returned. “But I’m afraid that in future I must assume a character of my own creation. Duplicates are likely to be troublesome.”

“You must admit, though,” laughed Mr. Senior, “that you are indebted to Brewer for an excellent night’s entertainment.”

“All the more reason why I should not let him suffer for it,” retorted Tydvil. “You see, he’ll have to do the explaining to Geraldine Brand and that very insinuating Hilda—I’m afraid he will find it rather difficult, too,” he added thoughtfully. Then, with a shiver, for a cool wind was blowing in from the Bay, “I wish I could have another drink.”

Senior immediately produced a silver flask into the cup of which he poured a liberal dose. Swallowed at one gulp, the alluring fluid seemed

to drench Tydvil's system with courage, optimism and happiness. He felt that tobacco was the one thing left to complete his satisfaction with life.

In answer to his request Mr. Senior, the obliging, handed him a cigar. Forgetting his unusual situation on the housetops, and careless of consequences, Tydvil struck a match that illuminated the two figures on the parapet.

From the street below came an excited voice, "Hi, look!" quickly followed by another, rather more excited, "What are you men doing up there?"

Earlier in the night, the evidence of his discovery in a compromising situation would have terrified Tydvil Jones. Now he only felt annoyance at the challenge to his liberty of action as a citizen. Cupping his hands to his mouth he responded. "I'm the Queen of Sheba with King Solomon, and we're taking the air—you mud-headed flat-fish!"

"I doubt if they'll accept your explanation," remarked Mr. Senior judicially.

Evidently he was right. One of the voices shouted, “Police! Police!”

Mr. Senior’s beverage must have been fairly potent, for it was doubtless that and not Tydvil Jones that replied to the call with a series of insults, barbaric in their splendour, that could be heard for hundreds of yards. In a few moments it peopled the quiet of Beaconsfield Parade with enquiring residents.

“I think,” remarked Mr. Senior as the clamour below grew louder, “that we would be wiser to leave.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” conceded Tydvil, “those people don’t seem to like us.”

“Where to?” asked Nicholas.

“I think I’ll call it a night—take me home, Nicholas,” replied Tydvil.

A second later Tydvil found himself in the drive before his house on St. Kilda Road. He was ignorant of the fact, that for nearly two hours afterwards, police and citizen helpers swarmed over the roofs of terraces

on Beaconsfield Parade, searching diligently for two mysterious malefactors.

Promising to meet him at the court next morning at ten o'clock, Nicholas left Tydvil to his own devices. He marched lightheartedly to his own door. His mood was one of genial satisfaction and peace and good will. His resentment against even Amy had vanished. He felt for his latch key, but his pocket was empty. A moment later he pounded the door vigorously, with the bronze knocker.

Amy had dismissed the maids for the night and was awaiting Tydvil's arrival. She, too, for her own purposes, had decided not to re-open hostilities for the moment. The spell of that charming Mr. Senior was still strong upon her. Rather surprised at a caller at nearly midnight, she hastened to answer the summons at the front door.

She was still more surprised when she found standing on the mat, none other than that handsome young Mr. Brewer from the warehouse. Whisky, cocktails, champagne, liqueurs and then Mr. Senior's contribution to the mixture, had conspired to make him entirely oblivious to his altered identity.

Amy gazed at the figure, for once in her life—short of words. Tydvil accepted her silence as an olive branch. That was why, a moment later, Amy Jones found herself in the arms of Mr. Brewer, who fervently kissed the upturned face.

Amy struggled loose and gasped. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself!”

Tydvil, still innocent of the enormity of his offence, smiled. “Don’t be angry with me, dear! Why should we quarrel?”

“Mr. Brewer! How—oh, how could you!”

Enlightenment crashed into Tydvil’s mind. The flushed face expressed more astonishment than anger. His mind registered the fact automatically, but for the moment he knew he must carry on.

“I—I couldn’t help it!” he stammered apologetically.

“I’m astonished, Mr. Brewer! Apart from anything else, what would Mr. Jones think? He might be home at any moment.”

“I left him working at the office.” Tydvil suddenly recognised that he had registered a water-tight alibi.

“But,” Amy insisted, “how could you do such a thing as come here like this.”

“I was walking home, and felt ill—I did not think really. I think it must have been a heart attack—I...”

She looked at him intently. She did not recognise that the cigar in his hand hardly bore out the statement. “Would you like me to ring for a doctor?” she asked.

Tydvil began to back out. “No, please, no,” he said. “Please forgive me—I feel better—I must go.”

But Amy would not hear of it. “Wait, you must let me get you a little stimulant—I insist.”

Tydvil surrendered. He saw his way out. Amy led the way to the reception



room. “Now just sit down, Mr. Brewer. I won’t be a moment,” and she bustled away.

The instant she disappeared, Tydvil whispered an urgent “Nicholas! Nicholas!” In a moment Mr. Senior stood before him.

“Get me out! Quick! Out into the street.” Curtains parted, a window opened and closed behind them. And Tydvil found himself in St. Kilda Road.

“Whew!” he gasped breathlessly. Then, “Why on earth didn’t you remind me I hadn’t changed over?”

Mr. Senior raised his brows. “My part, my dear fellow is not advisory. You must remember. Still, there is no harm done, is there?”

After a moment’s reflection, Tydvil admitted that things might be worse. The change from Billy to his rightful self was effected in a moment.

“Sure you’re all right, now?” asked Nicholas. “Absolutely,” replied Mr. Jones emphatically, turning to his gate.

Again he walked swiftly up the drive, and let himself in with his latch key to meet Amy in the wide hall carrying a tray on which was a glass and a jug and the bottle of whisky that was kept in the medicine cupboard for emergencies.

Amy's face expressed consternation rather than welcome. Tydvil pretended not to notice her uneasiness. "Good gracious! Amy, what are you doing with that?" he asked.

"I felt ill! I was waiting up for you! I..."

"By Jove, you do look pale! Come into the sitting-room and I will give you some of that." He made as though to take the tray from her hands.

"No, no, Tydvil" Amy protested anxiously. "You must be tired. Go up to your room. I will be quite all right."

But Tydvil insisted. He took the tray from her and, entering the room, placed it on a table and turned towards her. Amy was standing in the doorway looking round the room in utter bewilderment.

Picking up the bottle and the tumbler, Tydvil paused and sniffed. “That’s strange!” Another sniff. “Do you know, Amy,” sniff, “this room smells as though of cigar smoke.” He looked at her enquiringly.

“Nonsense, Tydvil!” she said, advancing into the room. “You must be dreaming. I cannot smell anything unusual.”

He poured some whisky into the glass and, adding water, handed it to her. “Of course I must be wrong,” he admitted, “but I really thought for a moment that there was an odour of tobacco. Stupid, wasn’t it? Now drink that at once.”

Amy obeyed. For the first time in her life she felt she needed a stimulant. “Now,” he said, taking a glass from her, “you get along to bed. I’ll put these things away and put out the lights.”

She felt no inclination to argue. The situation was beyond her. There was as much of relief as of bewilderment in her mind.

As for Tydvil, he went about his tidying up cheerfully. But when he

reached his bedroom, he seated himself on the side of his bed and lapsed into long but silent laughter.

## CHAPTER XIX

Next morning saw the phenomenon of Amy being first at the breakfast table. She had decided on a truce, but her decision was almost shattered when, looking over her paper, the paragraph that Tydvil had dictated to Geraldine met her eyes. Amy, not only boiled with wrath, she almost exploded. Fortunately, she had five minutes in which to recover before a composed and impenitent husband wished her a polite “good morning” as he took his place.

Although Tydvil was not aware of the blessing, nature had gifted him with one of those rare but priceless heads that do not impose a drastic penance for a night out. He was feeling as fit as he looked, and helped himself generously to grilled kidneys and bacon.

Amy watched him sulkily, and then said sourly, “I think, my dear Tydvil, you might have refrained from insulting me publicly.”

Waiting to swallow his first mouthful, Tydvil made no pretence of misunderstanding. The paper beside her told its tale. He shrugged his shoulders as he spiked another piece of kidney with his fork. “You asked

for it!” was all he said.

She was puzzled at his manner. This new Tydvil required study. Evidently caution in handling him was demanded. Amy went on, “However, I do not propose to discuss the matter now...”

“That’s good!” interrupted Tydvil.

“But we will go into it at another time,” Amy concluded without noticing his interjection.

“Well, if you like rows so much as that, don’t let me stop you,” he answered.

Amy declined the challenge. “I have some rather important news for you,” she announced.

“Shoot!” Tydvil was evidently far more interested in the kidneys than Amy’s news, and his indifference annoyed her.

“What is the meaning of ‘shoot’?” she demanded.

“It’s a shorter word than proceed, and means the same thing. ‘Shoot,’” he added, “is a synonym for ‘get it off your chest.’”

“One is vulgar, and the other is coarse, and both are offensive,” retorted Amy. “You know I detest slang.”

“Quite so,” said the imperturbable Tydvil.

“Then perhaps,” she came back very, acidly, “you will condescend to speak English to me.”

Still deeply engaged with his plate, Tydvil said, very politely, “Very well, my dear, I repeat, it will give me unfeigned pleasure to hear your news.”

Amy accepted the words at their face value. “I had a visit yesterday from a most distinguished gentleman, a Mr. Nicholas Senior, who is in Australia enquiring into our social work and conditions.”

“Ur!” came the non-committal comment from the kidneys. “I spent the whole

afternoon with him, inspecting our institutions.”

“Ur!”

“He was most intensely interested.”

“After subscriptions, I suppose,” commented Tydvil.

“There you are entirely wrong. Indeed, he subscribed to ours with most princely, generosity. It may interest you to know that he gave a cheque for one hundred pounds for the Moral Uplift Society.”

“Mug!” murmured Tydvil.

“What did you say, Tydvil?” she demanded. “I said ‘good,’ my dear.”

She looked at him suspiciously a moment. “You cannot think why he called on me.” Amy purred.

“I was wondering,” Tydvil admitted.



“Well, he had heard of my work from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he had a letter of introduction to me from dear Archbishop Pottinger.” There was exaltation in her voice.

Tydvil did not respond to the invitation for congratulations. Instead, he reminded her that he had put himself to the inconvenience of waiting for her in his office all the morning, and that she had not come. He submitted his remark as a justifiable grievance.

“I know,” answered Amy, “but I really could not come, Mr. Senior took me to lunch.”

“Where?”

Amy paused, and then said hesitantly, “Well, Tydvil, Mr. Senior is staying at Menzies, and we went there.”

Tydvil Jones put his knife and fork gently on his plate and said in pained amazement, “Amy, have you forgotten that you are one of the vice-presidents of the League for the Suppression of Alcohol.”

“That makes no difference whatever, Tydvil. If Mr. Senior can stay there, and he is a friend of the Archbishop of Canterbury, I don’t think anyone could take exception to my lunching with him.”

“I am astonished, Amy! Astonished!” commented her husband with virtuous censure.

“There was really nothing at all objectionable,” she protested. Then, hurriedly, to stop further argument, “I am asking Mr. Senior to dinner, Tydvil. He is most anxious to meet you.”

Mr. Jones glanced at the clock and stood up. “I cannot help feeling surprised and grieved at your indiscretion, Amy. Of course, I will meet Mr. Senior. I feel quite justified in acquainting him with my disapproval. Have my car sent round,” he directed the maid.

Somehow, Amy felt that Tydvil had forced her into a corner from which she could protest neither against the strictures on Mr. Senior nor his ordering the car.

Pausing at the door as he left the room, Tydvil announced that he would

be working late at the office again, and Amy made no comment.

That morning, when, shortly before ten o'clock, Mr. William Brewer presented himself at the St. Kilda court to answer a charge of assault on a police officer and insulting behaviour, he was the least happy and most bewildered man in the Metropolitan area. He found that he had an unexpected capacity for a further depression of spirits when, a minute or two later, no less a person than Tydvil Jones appeared and took his place in front of the bench. He was accompanied by a tall and very distinguished looking companion of legal aspect.

“That has torn it,” Billy reflected, though Tydvil apparently took no notice of Mr. Brewer’s presence.

Tydvil himself was interested to note that “among those present” were Mr. Cranston and his two unpleasant looking friends, the large policeman whom he had treated so promptly and effectually the night before, and four young men who were, he supposed, the rest of the hunting pack.

The police magistrate who presided on the bench, disposed of three drunks in five minutes, and one minor assault case in less than ten. Then the

case of William Brewer—insulting behaviour and assaulting a constable—was called.

Immediately Mr. Olden rose to his feet and announced that he appeared for the defendant. Then he slipped across to the astonished William who had taken his place in the dock, and whispered he was not to worry, but not to give evidence on his own behalf on any account.

Used as he was to hard swearing and the complication of police court evidence, Mr. J. J. Arty, M.P., remembered the case of William Brewer in after life as the most remarkable in a long experience.

All the morning the legal battle raged round the defendant's black eye. Mr. Olden nailed the witnesses for the prosecution down to that eye. The large constable swore positively that, black or no black eye, it was the defendant who had hurled half a brick at his outraged person. He was warmly supported by Mr. Cranston and his two unpleasant friends, who all told a tale of infuriated intoxication, murderous assault with a kerosene lamp, and outrageous language, but all agreed that the defendant had no black eye. They had all witnessed the assault on the constable in the execution of his duty. The four young men were weak in detail but strong

in their belief.

On the contrary, two indignant friends of Billy, and the wife of one of them, swore just as positively that the defendant had spent the evening playing cards at their home and that the black eye was properly ripe when he had arrived at their home.

Mr. Arty began to lose patience and remarked that he had listened to more perjury that morning than he was accustomed to hear in six months of police court practice, and that was a great deal. Then Mr. Olden called Mr. Tydvil Jones, who entered the witness box and bowed politely to Mr. Arty, to whom he was very well known.

Sworn, Mr. Jones deposed that he was entirely at a loss to understand the evidence he had heard from either side. The defendant was in his employ. On the previous evening Brewer had worked back with him at his office until somewhere near eleven p.m. He was not sure of the exact time Mr. Brewer left him, but he could not possibly have been embroiled with the police or Cranston, neither was it possible he could have played cards with his friends—as alleged.

He was also positive that the black eye, round which the case centred, was obtained by the defendant on the previous morning while he was assisting his (Mr. Tydvil Jones') secretary with her work. He had been present when the accident occurred. He felt sure that Brewer would not have been able to reach St. Kilda by the time the assault was alleged to have taken place.

Mr. Arty questioned Mr. Jones closely, and received instant and frank replies to all the questions which he put to the witness.

Mr. Arty then sat back in his chair and told all the witnesses except Mr. Tydvil Jones, whose high standing and well known integrity placed him above suspicion, that for some reason best known to themselves they had come into court and sworn to what he regarded as a "fabric of unmitigated falsehood." He could form no idea of the reason for the evidence they had given, but there was evidently something behind the case that had not been disclosed.

He concluded by telling the witnesses that if he could make up his mind which were the liars, he would gladly commit them for perjury. Then he discharged William Brewer as the victim of a manifest conspiracy.

Ten of the witnesses and Billy Brewer left the court in bemazed indignation. Pausing to tell Brewer to see him in his office as soon as he arrived at the warehouse, he rejoined Mr. Olden and the two, entering Tydvil's car, drove off citywards.

For the first five minutes Tydvil was silent and very thoughtful. His reverie was interrupted by Nicholas. "That, my dear Tydvil," he said with a smile, "is where you draw your dividends on your blameless past."

"Hump!" Tydvil growled. "You were right when you said how easy it was to get into mischief. Still, I had to give that evidence."

"I don't know that it was imperative," commented Mr. Senior, "but you made a great job of it."

"It was necessary," replied Tydvil. "You see, I told my wife last night Brewer had been working back with me." He outlined his encounter with Amy and added, "So, you see, I had to back in the witness box what I had told her."

“Yes, I see,” commented Nicholas. “But it just proves that a man with a first class reputation can get away with practically anything. Every one of those ten witnesses told the truth as he saw it. But the whole mass of their evidence was blown out by your wholly fictitious statements.”

Arranging to meet in his office that evening, the two parted when Tydvil dropped Nicholas on Princes Bridge.

Twenty minutes after Tydvil had arrived at his office, Brewer knocked and was admitted. Billy, angry and bewildered, was glad that Geraldine was not at her table when he passed it.

His reception by Tydvil was somewhat cold, but not hostile. Said Tydvil, “I will not enquire into the unfortunate circumstances which led you into the unpleasant position in which I found you this morning. I accepted unreservedly the assurance of my friend, Mr. Olden, that you were guiltless, and was very glad to be able to do so. I am afraid I adopted a most reprehensible course in giving the evidence I did...”

Billy made as though to speak.



“No, Brewer, there is no need to thank me. It would have been a miscarriage of justice had the bench believed the evidence against you. We’ll say no more about it.” Tydvil smiled and held out his hand.

Billy took it warmly and stuttered his gratitude. As he turned to go, Tydvil stopped him. “Oh, by the way, Brewer, this business of this morning almost made me forget. Do you know a man named Jerry McCann?”

Startled, and wondering what more was in store, Billy admitted the acquaintanceship.

“Well,” replied Tydvil, “last night about ten o’clock, when I was working here, I heard a hammering on the front door of the warehouse. I opened it, and there was a man on the doorstep who gave the name of Jerry McCann...”

“Impossible!” gasped Billy.

“Not at all,” continued Tydvil. “He was, I am afraid, somewhat under the influence of liquor...”

“But...” Billy tried to break in.

“Wait, wait!” Tydvil silenced him. “He wanted to see you. He was a little troublesome, so I humoured him. He said he owed you some money and he had promised to pay you last night—dead or alive—that was the exact term he used. So I agreed to take charge of the money for you. Here it is,” and Tydvil held out the twenty-five pounds.

While he was speaking, Billy stared at Tyddie with something like awe on his face. He looked at the money, scarcely daring to touch it. “Are you sure it was ten o’clock, sir?” he almost whispered.

“Quite,” responded Jones. “I remember the time and the words most distinctly. Why?”

“Jerry McCann was killed by a motor car just before eight o’clock, in Swanston Street. All the papers have it this morning.”

Tydvil Jones had no need to act the astonishment and shock that he felt from the announcement, though they arose from causes other than Billy Brewer supposed. “Impossible! I...” He stopped and stared, too, at the

money in his hand.

“Amazing!” muttered Billy. “He actually said, ‘dead or alive’?”

“Beyond a doubt,” said Tydvil.

“Do you think...?” Billy paused, staring at Jones.

He shook his head. “I don’t know what to think, Brewer,” he said. “Best take this and say nothing about it. He owed it to you, I suppose?”

Billy nodded, taking the notes. “Yes, and that is what he said to me last week—‘Dead or alive’!”

Slowly, and with bent head, Billy walked down the warehouse towards the main entrance. He felt a drink was essential to his sanity. As he reached a huge stack of Manchester goods at the foot of the staircase, he almost ran into Amy in his abstraction. Startling, he raised his hat respectfully. But Amy paused and shook a gloved finger at him playfully. “Oh, Mr. Brewer!” she smiled. “I’m afraid you are very, very naughty. You quite frightened me last night.” She passed on, still smiling.

Unseen by either, Miss Geraldine Brand, who was coming down the steps, had seen and heard the encounter. Billy, wondering if he had heard aright, or if he were mad, stood with his lips apart, not seeing Geraldine until that young woman made him aware of her haughty presence by saying, "So! It is not only Hilda Cranston, but Mrs. Jones!"

Billy came to earth from the clouds that enveloped him, "What were you saying, Geraldine?" He strove to pull himself together.

"I heard what Mrs. Jones said about your frightening her last night. I suppose you'll say I didn't!"

He waved his hands feebly. I don't know what she was talking about..."

"And," she went on with steam-roller scorn, "I suppose you were not talking to Hilda Cranston outside His Majesty's Theatre last night just after eight o'clock."

"Geraldine!" he protested. "I swear I haven't spoken to Hilda Cranston for nearly three months. I told you I had cut out that sort of thing."

“I prefer,” she shot at him, “to believe the evidence of my own eyes. I saw you—you...!” Words failed Geraldine, and she swept past him.

But Billy’s cup was not yet full, though it overflowed ten minutes later in the Carillion bar when he offered the blonde Connie eleven pounds in notes.

“Don’t act the goat, Billy!” she laughed, pushing the money aside.

“But King Rufus won!” he insisted.

“Look here, Billy!” the girl said seriously. “Judging from that lovely eye you have, you must have had a fair load on last night, but you were quite sober when you paid over that money to me; you couldn’t have forgotten it.”

“I was here last night, and paid you?”

She nodded.

“And without this eye?” He indicated the dark purple decoration.

Again she nodded. “Here, quit fooling and put this down your neck.” She pushed a whisky and soda across to him. “You must need a reviver.”

Billy shook his head and pushed it back again. “Not me, Connie! Not me!” he muttered. “I’m on the water-waggon for the rest of my life.” He turned and almost tottered into Elizabeth Street. Life was too much for him, he felt.

## CHAPTER XX

But Billy Brewer was not the only, one to whom the day brought problems. When Geraldine Brand's were presented to her, they came from her evening paper which she read on the way home. No king had died. No murder had been committed. No political crisis had occurred. Space was plentiful, and news had been dull until the story sent in by a district correspondent from the St. Kilda court had gladdened a news editor's heart. It went on to the front page, headed "Black Eye Comedy," and the story, with an almost verbatim report of the evidence, lost nothing in the telling.

Geraldine read that damning story of the alleged activities of one, William Brewer, on the previous night, with ever-increasing indignation. But her indignation was levelled not at the culprit, so much as at his detractors. She was a wise, competent and level-headed young woman. She read and re-read the evidence, and more especially the evidence which touched on the decoration she had bestowed on Billy, until she almost committed it to memory. And Geraldine thought and thought all that evening. Long after she had retired for the night, she lay awake trying to make sense of what she had read and that which she knew, herself, to

be true. But none of it made sense.

It was only when she was reading the story, that there flashed into her mind inexplicable truth that she had overlooked in her anger against Billy on the previous evening. The Billy who had been talking to Hilda Cranston outside of His Majesty's Theatre had not a black eye! Of that she was now certain. Yet, both she, and apparently that Cranston woman, had accepted him unreservedly as Billy. So, according to his evidence, had Cranston, who, as Geraldine virtuously reflected, deserved that sort of wife.

It was difficult enough to accept the suggestion that that Billy was not her Billy—she had unaccountably, found herself thinking of him as her Billy, and liked the idea immensely. But there was something else, known only to herself. The evidence of Mr. Tydvil Jones was almost more astounding than the problem of two Billies.

She, Geraldine Brand, was prepared to swear and take oath that, despite his sworn evidence in the St. Kilda court that day, Tydvil Jones had not worked back at the office on the previous night. Therefore, it followed logically that the Tyddie she believed to rank among the most virtuous of



men had gone into the witness box and had sworn deliberately to some most tremendous fibs—whoppers! Somehow she liked him better for the knowledge, especially so as the fibs had cleared—more or less—Billy's character.

Of one thing she felt sure, and only one. Billy, where ever he may have been that night, was innocent of wrong doing. She reasoned that somehow Tyddie was sure of Billy's innocence. Had he not been, he would most certainly have sacked him. It seemed inconsistent that Tyddie would commit perjury himself and execute Billy for a lesser offence, but she felt she was right.

But then, how did Amy come into the picture? Geraldine had seen her shake her finger at Billy and had heard every syllable of that slightly gay reprimand. She remembered Billy's—her Billy's—utter astonishment and consternation at the time. Evidently, she concluded, Amy had been barking up the wrong Billy and did not know it. The activities of the false Billy must have been as prodigious as they were incomprehensible. They certainly reflected adversely on his taste in feminine friends.

Then there was that perplexing and flagrant perjurer, her employer. What

had he been up to?’ Here, Geraldine’s usually clear, incisive mind refused to reason. Had it been any other man, Geraldine would have jumped to the only reasonable conclusion, that he had been running wild.

Geraldine knew as much of Tydvil’s business as he knew himself, and she was positive that there was nothing that could have kept him back at the office on the previous evening—not business, anyway. Could Tyddie...?

No, impossible! Her mind refused to put such a thought into form.

Geraldine stopped the vigorous brushing of her hair and stared at herself for a long time in the mirror, but she did not see herself. Her abstraction made her miss a charming picture.

Much later that night, before she slept, Geraldine made two resolutions.

One was, that Billy Brewer needed a woman, preferably, much preferably, herself, to look after him and keep him out of mischief. The other was, that in the very near future she would be very much less hostile in her manner to Billy, and further, that having won his confidence he would be called upon to answer a lot of questions—quite a lot of questions. But her last and dominant thought was one that would have compensated Billy for all his trials had he but known of it.

Amy, also, had read of the “Black Eye Comedy.” The unexpected appearance of Mr. Brewer and his still more unexpected disappearance, had caused her a great deal of very mixed emotion. That kiss! Amy was not quite sure whether she was more angry with herself or Mr. Brewer. Yes, Mr. Brewer, who had no black eye. She read Tydvil’s testimony to the effect that his Mr. Brewer did have a black eye. Yet her Mr. Brewer, whose eyes were both normal and both bold, had told her he had been working back in the office with Tydvil.

Knowing least of anyone of the events of the previous night, Amy could only decide that it was all very, peculiar. It was more peculiar that Tydvil had not mentioned the matter at breakfast that morning. She felt an urgent need for enlightenment, but felt more urgently still that such investigation as she embarked on through Tydvil would require much circumspection and diplomacy.

Meanwhile, the joint causes of all these perplexities were comfortably in conference in the office of Tydvil Jones. Tydvil had indulged in a very good dinner, it would have been better, he thought, if he had had the courage to order a small bottle of wine—but he was still Tydvil Jones. But the cigar he was now smoking compensated to some extent for the

omission.

Nicholas had listened in amused silence to Tydvil's account of the final episodes, in his own home, of the previous night's excursion. Said he, when the tale was told, "Does it occur to you, Tydvil, that Brewer's black eye has become the pivotal point for some difficult explanations?"

Disregarding the question for the moment, Tydvil, from the depths of his chair, chuckled happily. "It was a most successful night for a beginner." Then, thoughtfully, "I'm afraid, Nicholas, I shall have to abandon adopting a known individuality for a creation of my own."

Said Nicholas dryly, "If Brewer were fully informed on the matter, I should say he would be among the first to applaud your decision."

"Yes," admitted Tydvil, "it never occurred to me that I would put him into such a hole. By all the laws of decency, I am bound to help him out."

"He is going to need help, too," responded Nicholas. "The husband of your lively young friend of last night spent this afternoon arranging for a

divorce with Brewer as the contributing factor.”

Tydvil sat erect. “Great Scot!” he groaned. “I never thought of that, either; what on earth can we do?”

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders. “The least of your troubles, I think. If a judge in divorce can make anything out of the same evidence as was given at St. Kilda this morning, he will be a very astute man. No,” he went on, “your immediate problem comes from a different source.”

Tydvil stared an interrogation.

“I’ve been keeping an eye on that secretary of yours. You should know better than I that that girl is no fool.”

“Hump, and what then?” Tydvil asked curiously. “Have you seen the evening papers?”

Tydvil shook his head.

“Well,” Nicholas smiled, “there is a full and fairly accurate account of

the court proceeding in them.”

“Still, I don’t see...” Tydvil began.

“Two things,” Mr. Senior interrupted. “First, she has just discovered she is really in love with Brewer. Second, she has read the papers and at this moment she is trying to reconcile your evidence with the fact known to her that you most certainly did not work back in the office last night.”

“Holy Moses!” Tydvil interjected. “Of course, she would know that from my table.”

“And,” continued Nicholas, “she is this moment trying to work out a solution of the black eye problem—and so is your wife!”

Tydvil ran his hand through his hair. “Two of ‘em!” Then amusement got the better of his anxiety, and he laughed heartily.

“Exactly,” nodded Mr. Senior. “Two of ‘em! And that is why I said just now that Brewer’s eye was a pivotal point for some explanation.”

“Anyway,” Tydvil said, “they can’t do much more than wonder, and they can wonder as much as they like.”

“Um,” Nicholas replied. “They’re wondering all right. In the circumstances, your wife is a bit handicapped because her explanation would be rather more difficult than yours.”

Here Tydvil again sat erect, staring in front of him. Then his eyes brightened and a smile of happiness spread over his face.

Watching him intently, Nicholas lay back and laughed softly. “Tydvil,” he said, “I’m no moralist, but would that be wise?”

“What do you mean?” asked Tydvil, surprised at the question.

“I read your thought. Forgive the intrusion, it was only a natural curiosity.”

“Well,” answered Tydvil defensively, “Amy owes me a good deal, and...”

“I see,” Senior grinned. “If anyone is going to alienate your wife’s affections, you would rather do it yourself—and know exactly what is going on.”

“Ethically...” began Tydvil.

Again Nicholas laughed heartily, waving his hand. “No, no, please, no, Tydvil! No ethics!”

“All right,” Tydvil conceded, “no ethics. But if I bring a new interest into Amy’s life, it might keep her out of mischief.”

“Oh, please yourself!” Nicholas said. “I admit the idea appeals to me as something new for both of you. A good deal depends on what you mean by ‘mischief.’”

“Look here!” demanded Tydvil virtuously. “If a man cannot make love to his own wife, whose wife can he make love to?”

“Better, I suppose, than becoming involved with Mr. Cranston’s,” Senior admitted. “However, have it your own way.”



“My plan’s worth considering. It has the virtue of novelty,” said Tydvil.

“Well, if you can reconcile it with any form of virtue, don’t let me interfere. But, remember this,” Nicholas added, “that will not dispose of your secretary.”

“If Brewer were not such a good chap, I might dispose of her in the same way,’ Tydvil suggested.

“Quite a good idea!” laughed Nicholas. “Considering your upbringing, Tydvil, your capacity for very original sin amazes even me.”

“Ah, well,” Tydvil said, a little regretfully, “Brewer deserves better treatment. I owe it to him, anyway. I’m afraid that Geraldine Brand is beginning to think that I am not quite the pattern of virtue she imagined me to be.”

“Exactly!” Nicholas agreed. “That is a very, unusual young woman, Tydvil. She has brains, and knows how to use them. And if you don’t watch your step, my friend—well, ‘ware red hair.”

“Still, I don’t see that she could do much,” contended Tydvil.

“Don’t under-rate her,” warned Nicholas. “That girl has got hold of one fact—that you were not telling the truth in the witness box—and several suppositions. Now, give a redheaded girl, who is in love and defending her lover, that much to work on and you, or I, may be astonished at the things she can do. Believe me, Tydvil, I speak from a long experience. A brunette on the warpath is bad enough—but the redheads! My boy, a sack full of wild cats would be more tractable.”

Tydvil looked thoughtful. “Suppose,” he asked, “we gave her Billy Brewer free of encumbrance, so to speak?”

“Professionally,” replied Mr. Senior, “it would be against my interests. Brewer is heavily mortgaged to me. If that girl gets hold of him, he’ll pay off the mortgage in the first year he’s married. You can’t beat redheads either as reformers or the reverse when they set about it. Still, in the circumstances, I would be willing to waive my claim.”

“They say marriages are made in heaven,” remarked Tydvil reflectively.

Mr. Senior grinned derisively. “That one was started by a bachelor. If Brewer marries your Geraldine Brand, and does not behave himself afterwards, you’ll find it difficult to persuade him that his marriage was made in heaven.”

“Well,” said Tydvil, “that’s his risk.”

“Oh! Talking of Heaven, that reminds me that I am to have the pleasure of dining at your home tomorrow evening—to meet Mr. Jones and a few of our leading social workers.”

“You have my deepest sympathy,” Tydvil replied, lighting another cigar.

“Really, I am looking forward to it,” Nicholas assured him.

“Well, don’t let me discourage you, but I happen to have seen the list of guests, and an innate sense of hospitality makes me feel rather guilty.”

“You need not worry, for I feel sure it will be an enjoyable evening.”

Tydvil smiled through the smoke. “If I hear you say that afterwards, I shall feel greatly relieved.”

“And now, what about your own affairs?” asked Nicholas.

“I’ve been thinking it over,” Tydvil replied, “and recognise that we cannot risk a known individuality. Can you turn me out as something new?”

“No difficulty whatever,” Nicholas assured him. “Just what would you like to be?”

“Oh, say something fairly good looking and robust. Plenty of self-assurance. Not exactly entirely a sporting man, but a good all-round type. Oh, and able to use my hands if necessary!”

“Attractive to women,” Nicholas suggested.

Tydvil hesitated a moment. “Well, yes, but within reasonable limits. I suppose that is one highroad to adventure.”

“One of the best,” Mr. Senior conceded. “Status? I can put you into the

Metropolitan or the Continental Club if you like.”

Tydvil shook his head. “No, I think not,” he said. “I’m afraid they would cramp my style—make it something prosperous, but not too conspicuous.”

Mr. Senior stood up and looked Tydvil over with speculative eyes for a few moments. Then, after a wave of his hands, “Now look at yourself...”

Tydvil rose to his feet and approached the mirror. Looking back at him was an attractive stranger, about two inches taller than Tydvil Jones, and broader. Under the sleek, black hair was a shapely, square-chinned face. The grey eyes above a slightly aquiline nose, had a merry twinkle, and the rather large, but well-shaped mouth, had a smile an either corner. Tydvil felt quite pleased with himself.

The smile broke into a laugh as he turned to Nicholas. “Ideal!” he thanked his friend. “The remodelled Tydvil Jones is proud of himself...”

“Better give him a remodelled name,” Nicholas suggested.

Tydvil picked up the telephone directory from his table and opened it at

random. Running his finger down the page, he looked up. “More than a page of Williams,” he said. “A nice non-committal name. We’ll make it—let me think—Bertie—Bernard—no—say, Basil. Yes, permit me to introduce myself—Basil Williams.”

Mr. Senior took the outstretched hand. “I trust, Mr. Williams, you will have a pleasant evening.”

“Too right I will!” grinned Basil Williams. Then his smile disappeared.

“Oh, dash it all, I forgot!”

Nicholas raised an enquiring eyebrow.

“Amy,” explained Tydvil. “She came in this morning to tell me about our dinner tomorrow night, and I promised I should be at home this evening. I wouldn’t put it past her coming to look for me if I didn’t show up.”

Then his face brightened. “Nicholas, could you act as a deputy Tydvil Jones. It’s rather tough on you—but...”

“My dear fellow, my bond apart, it will be a pleasure.” Mr. Senior spoke

sincerely.

“Well, all I can say it,” said Basil Williams with deep feeling, “that your conceptions of pleasure are peculiar. Amy has something on her mind—that Brewer affair I expect—anyhow, I assure you that you will know all about it before the night is over.”

“How is this?” asked Nicholas, and as he spoke a replica of Tydvil Jones stood where Mr. Senior had stood.

Tydvil inspected his deputy, carefully, and admitted he was perfect. “A word of advice and help,” he said. “When she makes the going too hot for me, I always make for my own bedroom and lock the door. You may need sanctuary before the night is over.”

Nicholas—Tydvil smiled a superior smile. “My friend. In adopting your identity I retain the powers of endurance belonging to my office. Your solicitude is pleasant, but quite unnecessary.”

“Maybe,” Basil Williams replied. “But I know Amy, and you don’t.” Then, remembering, “About my change back to Tydvil?”

“Leave it entirely, to me. Just call when you need me, and I will arrange everything.”

“Well, I think that is all,” Tydvil said, helping himself to the contents of his cash box.

Nicholas bade him good luck and good fun, and disappeared about his business in hand. Basil Williams, taking a hat from its peg, sallied out into the city, light of heart and full of hope.



## CHAPTER XXI

When Nicholas let himself into the Jones mansion on St. Kilda Road with the assistance of Tydvil's latch key, Amy, who had kept dinner back for three-quarters of an hour, was just leaving the dining-room. As she saw him enter, she glanced at the dial of the Spanish mahogany grandfather clock that stood in the wide hall. Its hands showed that the time was twenty-five minutes to nine o'clock.

She opened fire as the sights came on. "This is a nice time to come home, Tydvil, I must say! Especially as you promised me faithfully you would be back to dinner."

Nicholas had placed his coat and hat on a high, carved chair—a Restoration piece. "Are you doing that to provoke me deliberately, Tydvil?" she asked acidly. "Ellen, remove those things!" She pointed to the outraged chair, and glared at the maid who was passing. So had Oliver Cromwell spoken when he ordered the removal of the Mace from the table of the Commons.

"Now," as she followed her supposed husband into the room nominally

reserved for his own use, “perhaps you can explain” Her voice was that which she kept for domestic use only.

Mr. Senior, as Jones, spoke conciliatingly. “You know I have been busy—very busy. I left work I should have done, and came as soon as I possibly, could.”

“Apparently, my dear Tydvil, you consider your work far more important than your wife. Her interests are not worth your consideration. Here I am, all day, labouring for your comfort, and this is all the thanks I get.”

“Amy,” said Mr. Senior a little tartly, “I do not interfere with your domestic arrangements. You must leave me to judge the necessities of my office work.”

And that—to use an expressive colloquialism—tore it completely.

“You—you don’t interfere with my domestic arrangements?” She almost gasped at the enormity. “You keep dinner waiting, spoil my meal, and upset the whole house routine—and you say you don’t...” She paused for

breath. "I was going to say I was astonished. I am not! It is just what I might have expected from your scandalous conduct lately. You swear at me before my servants, insult me publicly in the newspapers. Perhaps you'll strike me next."

Had Mr. Senior not been a gentleman by birth and instinct, the suggestion might have come into effect at that moment. Mr. Senior felt that Amy might be a much better woman and wife for a good sock on the jaw. He recognised, however, that, his instincts apart, he could not commit Tydvil to corrective treatment of Amy. He began to feel a great respect and a greater sympathy for his friend.

However, Amy had not paused for one second. "Talk about your being judge of the necessities of your office! You, with your name spread all over the paper in connection with some disgusting brawl in the street last night. It seems to me that office of yours houses some queer people. Nice thing for me! What will our friends think? That man Brewer and his black eye and disgraceful associates! Will you be good enough to tell me why you did not mention that revolting business at breakfast this morning, instead of leaving me to find out from the newspapers?"

Nicholas paused to gather his thoughts before replying. “Ump!” Amy snorted. “Sulking again, or are you ashamed to speak? You should be!”

Hoping amiability might still the tempest, Nicholas said gently, “My dear, I am sorry I could not mention the matter this morning, because I heard nothing of Brewer’s difficulties until I reached the office.”

“You knew it when I saw you at the office afterwards,” she retorted.

“Yes, and that is another thing. That dinner tomorrow night! What will Mr. Senior think of us? And I was so anxious to create a good impression. You had no right to go to that court and involve yourself in such a loathsome affair—that Cranston woman should be flogged; but you rush in, without thinking of me, and become associated with such a creature.”

“But,” Mr. Senior put in desperately, “knowing Brewer was innocent, because he was with me all the evening, I had to go.”

“Had to go! Is this Brewer man more important than your wife’s peace of mind? If he gets himself into brawls he should get himself out of them. I suppose you sympathise with men of that type. Mr. Tydvil Jones and mixed up with a gang of the most disreputable people in the city—a gang that

the magistrate said were the worst and most unprincipled liars he had ever encountered.”

Mr. Senior began to feel that self-restraint was almost an heroic virtue with Amy as a domestic companion.

“Yes,” she went on, unrelenting, “and I feel there is something behind that affair. Did that man actually have the black eye when he was working with you?”

Mr. Senior rose to the occasion, and most emphatically asserted that he had. “Besides,” he added, “Mr. Arty was in the best position to judge from the evidence, and he accepted my evidence as conclusive.”

“I notice,” Amy came back acidly, “that seven people swore that he had not. Perhaps Mr. Arty does not know you as well as I do.”

Nicholas tried a stopper. “Anyone would think from what you say, that you knew he had not a black eye,” and he looked straight into Amy’s as he spoke.

Amy back-pedalled rapidly. “There is no need to be offensive, Tydvil, dear,” she said. “Since the subject is so distasteful to me, I will say no more about it. What I really wished to discuss with you is that really, abominable letter of yours to the papers.”

“What of it?” demanded Mr. Senior, a trifle truculently.

“You will be good enough, Tydvil dear, not to adopt that very vulgar tone towards me. I am not one of your police court associates. Kindly remember that, though from your behaviour since yesterday morning, you make me think you would feel more at home with people of that kind than in a decent, Christian home. I think, Tydvil dear, that it is time we settled this question about the Moral Uplift Society—definitely.”

Mr. Senior took his cue from Tydvil’s settled policy. “The matter is settled,” he announced uncompromisingly.

“A matter in which you have chosen to brand me publicly as having told a falsehood, is not settled so simply,” Amy bit back.

“Well, didn’t you?” It was not a tactful retort, and Mr. Senior had cause

to regret it.

“I admit I was foolish enough to trust in my husband’s honour to support me in the public work to which I have devoted my life. I believed in your decency, and your charity and your public spirit—and you betrayed my trust and confidence. You have held me up to ridicule. There is only one way out, Tydvil, dear,”—and there was frozen vitriol in that “Tydvil, dear”—“to rehabilitate me in my own self-respect and in the eyes of my friends. You must pay that thousand pounds I promised in your name.”

“I’ll see you in Jericho first!” was Mr. Senior’s warm response. He stood up, remembering Tydvil’s advice to make for sanctuary, he thought the time had arrived at which to put it into practice.

But Amy beat him to it. Experience had improved her strategy. Instead of his locking the door of Tydvil’s bedroom, Amy was inside—a dead-heat—and secured the key before he could reach for it. Mr. Senior found himself locked up with Amy’s voice and without any possibility of escape in his guise as Tydvil Jones.

Amy occupied the only chair. Mr. Senior sat on the edge of the bed, a

situation that did not add to his dignity. Amy talked.

For nearly two hours that soul-scouring flood of eloquence swept over him. He felt as though his nerves and spirit were being scarified with a nutmeg grater. Slowly, the proud spirit of Mr. Senior wilted. He who ruled his own Empire unchallenged felt himself incompetent to cope with this relentless flood of bitter, biting verbiage. Every attempt at reprisal became more feeble and more hopeless. Amy felt round deftly for the weak places in his armour, and emplaced poisoned darts. She passed the years of her married life with Tydvil Jones in review—it was a pageant of her own sufferings gallantly hidden, and of Tydvil's contemptible shortcomings. She pleaded and twisted on his raw nerves alternately. In those hours Mr. Senior learned something in the gentle art of scientific torture that had hitherto been beyond his imaginings. With a mind centred almost entirely on his own torments, Mr. Senior marvelled vaguely how Tydvil could have stuck it out for years.

At last the strain broke even Mr. Senior's iron will. Once more they stood in Tydvil's den. Mr. Senior tore a cheque he had filled in for one thousand pounds from the book and handed it to her.



Amy folded it carefully. "I cannot thank you for this, Tydvil," she said coldly. "It was nothing but your duty to give it to me. I can only hope you can feel regret for your own behaviour. I cannot hope that you will regret the pain you have caused me. This discussion we have had has upset me terribly. A man such as you cannot understand how heartbreaking it is for a woman who has to plead, as I have had to plead, for simple justice. I feel I must go to bed—not that I will sleep, my tears will keep me awake. Goodnight, Tydvil dear."

Mr. Senior looked after her, a sore stricken man. Presently he stood up and returned with bowed head to Tydvil's bedroom, awaiting his summons. There, again on the edge of the bed, he sat with his face in his hands. His thoughts were bitter because he felt he had betrayed a friend. How could he face Tydvil with the story of his defeat?

When at length the call of Basil Williams for Mr. Senior's aid came, it came with a note of desperate urgency that spurred Mr. Senior into flashing action. He had divested himself of his likeness to Tydvil and disappeared in a fraction of a second. By his own means, in another fraction of a second he was in Exhibition Street, looking down unseen on as willing a street riot in which any seeker after joyous adventure could

wish to participate.

Nicholas's swift survey showed him some sixty citizens, nearly half of whom were women, who were engaged in ardent but apparently aimless combat. Those not entwined with their fellows were mixing it eagerly with some half a dozen policemen, who were scattered through the crowd, and who were trying, with some success, to use their batons on everyone not wearing uniform. Approximately in the middle of the event, which spread from kerb to kerb and overflowed on the footpaths, was a knot of six policemen who were more busy than any of the other members of the force. The language that arose from the spectacle was worthy of the occasion.

As Nicholas took in the situation, two of the close knot of police were shot from the bunch by some unseen force. Where they fell they lay. The diversion showed Mr. Senior that the nucleus of the excitement was none other than Mr. Basil Williams. Although the remaining four members of the force afterwards discussed long and earnestly what happened next, they were never able to arrive at any definite conclusion. At one moment the four were endeavouring to slip the bracelets on fourteen stone of human wild cat, and the next he had gone from their midst as though he had evaporated. Were it not for torn uniforms, abraded skins and sundry

bruises, they might have persuaded themselves that they had imagined the fight.

All that was tangible of their assailant was a hat. One of them pushed it under his tunic and the rest turned to deal with the other combatants. It was not until fourteen of the rioters had been booked at Russell Street that the hat was remembered. The sergeant in charge examined the grey felt hat outside and then inside. "Cripes!" he cried in astonishment.

"This lid belongs to Tydvil Jones the Flinders Lane wowser!" It says much for Tydvil's public reputation that the discovery, gave rise to no other comment than an exchange of ribald jokes on the possibility of his being concerned in the proceedings in Exhibition Street. Suspicion of his participation there was none.

The sergeant in charge listened to the discussion on the escaped prisoner with official wrath. "Six of you," he growled, "and you let him make a get-away. Cripes, what's this? A police force or a blinkin' boarding house for maiden ladies? Any of you seen him before?"

There was no reply, and he went on, "I suppose it is too much to hope that any, genius among you would know him again."

Six feet three inches of indignant muscle in uniform, who, with one foot on a chair was tenderly examining a blue and swollen shin, looked over his shoulder and said, "I'd pick that blighter out of an army corps, and if I come across him again, I'll..."

"Yes, I know," broke in the sergeant savagely, "you'd chew him up and spit out the bones. Well, this lid's been pinched from Jones," he tossed the hat across the room, "take it down to his warehouse in the morning and enquire if he knows anyone answering the description." Then, looking coldly over the others, he went on. "If you're not all too weary you might get on the job again. Oh, one moment! Don't forget to powder your noses."

The group went their way, making insubordinate but heartfelt comments on the manners and customs of sergeants.

Meanwhile, Tydvil Jones, alias Basil Williams, was in his own proper person seated in the chair in his bedroom offering profuse thanks to Mr. Senior in a subdued voice lest he attracted attention from the outside.

He was very glad to become Tydvil Jones again, because Basil Williams had

been very much the worse for wear, and not remarkably sober.

Then he pulled himself up, noticing for the first time the dejected air of his friend. Nicholas was again seated on the edge of the bed, melancholy in every line of his pose.

“By Jove! Nicholas,” he enquired anxiously, “what’s happened? You look done in.”

Nicholas straightened himself. “Tydvil,” he answered miserably, “I’m too ashamed almost to face you. I have fallen down on my job.”

Enlightenment came to Tydvil. “Amy?” he asked. Nicholas nodded. “She talked...”

“Ah! Buck up, Nicholas, and forget it. I’m terribly sorry. It wasn’t fair to ask you to carry on with a job like that.”

But Mr. Senior was not consoled. “You haven’t heard the worst,” he went on.

“What was it? The court affair?” asked Tydvil curiously.

“Oh, I bluffed her off that,” replied Nicholas. “It was really the Moral Uplift Society and your letter to the papers that caused it.

She’s—er—well, annoyed—and I—I...” The confession would not come.

“Holy Wars! Nicholas, did she get that cheque?” Tydvil whispered in dismay.

Nicholas nodded. “Oh, Tydvil, I am ashamed, but...”

“Couldn’t you have done a bunk up here as I told you?” he asked.

“That is what caused the trouble,” explained Mr. Senior. “She got in, too, and beat me to the key.”

“You were locked in with her?” Tydvil’s dismay changed to heartfelt pity.

“For two hours nearly,” admitted Nicholas, “and she talked...”

“She would,” agreed Tydvil, with deep understanding. “Nicholas, I

apologise with all my heart. It was not fair to you to let you run such a risk.”

“But I failed. I betrayed your trust, my friend.” Nicholas took his wallet from his pocket, and drawing out the promissory note, offered it to Tydvil.

Tydvil waved it away, smiling. “Dash it all, Nicholas! Ours is a gentleman’s agreement. Do you take me for a usurer? The fault was mine entirely. You should be the one to complain.”

“By Jove, Tydvil, you’re a sportsman! But you must let me reimburse you for the cheque...”

“I don’t deserve it, but if it’s on your conscience you may do so.” Then he laughed wryly. “Amy will gloat, I’m afraid.”

“It puts you in such a hole over that letter,” Nicholas sympathised.

“Yes,” admitted Tydvil, “she’s got me there, but...” He broke off suddenly. “Listen, Nicholas! Do you think you could arrange an accidental

meeting between Amy and me, as Billy Brewer, in a way that would make her feel grateful to Brewer—that's me?"

The face of Mr. Senior grew brighter. "Yesterday," he replied, "I would have protested that the idea was not sporting. Now," and he smiled a sour smile, "I feel that your plan involves less than retributive justice. I'll take care, too, that there are no complications with Brewer."

"Good!" replied Tydvil with sinister emphasis. "And then we shall see what we shall see. Let me know when you're ready, but not until Brewer's eye is normal."

"Talking of eyes," said Nicholas, "I noticed one of those policemen you were engaged with, had a beauty."

Tydvil chuckled reminiscently. "Phew! That was swift going while it lasted..."

"You seem to have quite a flair for mixing it with the law—what led up to that picnic you were having?" Senior asked curiously.



It appeared that Tydvil had met a charming young woman named Elsie. He was rather indefinite as to how or where the acquaintance was made, and Nicholas, recognising his embarrassment, forbore to press for details. Anyway, Elsie suggested that there was plenty of fun to be had at a night club she knew of in Little Collins Street, just off Exhibition Street.

“It was quite a pleasant place,” Tydvil explained, “with a Bohemian atmosphere. We had supper, at least, Elsie had supper, but I joined her in the wine.”

“I should say you did,” commented Nicholas.

Tydvil nodded a plea of guilty. “You see, Elsie knew nearly everyone in the place. She seemed very popular. She introduced me to a lot of people...” He paused.

“And the night grew wet,” Nicholas suggested.

“Not at first,” Tydvil explained. “Among them was a man I knew, Archie Graham, of Graham and Stone—they have a place in the Lane. He joined us with a large blonde named Minnie. When I told him I was Basil Williams

and came from Castlemaine, he said he knew my father.”

Nicholas, who was consulting his master card, looked up. “If it is I he means, I’ll say he does know me. But not as well as I know him.”

“Well,” continued Tydvil, “we had a few bottles of champagne, and Graham said there was nothing in it, and called for burgundy. And then two or three of Graham’s friends joined us—there was an orchestra—and Elsie and Minnie tried to teach me to dance.”

“Seems innocent enough so far,” commented Nicholas.

“Yes,” admitted Tydvil, “it was not until we turned over the tables and made a steeplechase course, that it began to get really lively.”

“Bright idea,” smiled Nicholas.

“It was a lot brighter when Graham proposed fox hunting with Elsie and Minnie as foxes. The men had to go over the jumps, but the foxes could go round them. Then most of the men joined in, and all the girls wanted to be foxes, too.” Tydvil paused reflectively. “I think that the trouble

began about then.”

“You certainly had the material for it,” smiled Nicholas.

“You see,” Tydvil explained, “clearing the jumps was not so easy as you’d think because of the champagne and burgundy, and we were a bit crowded. I was going strong after my fox, Elsie, when some fellow got ahead of me and caught her. I came up and explained that the game was for hunters and not for hounds...” He paused a moment, and went on, “You know, I thought at the time that sounded funny. He didn’t seem to like it, and tried to hit me.”

“Well?” queried Nicholas.

“That started it all,” Tydvil explained. “He was standing in front of a hurdle, and when I slugged him he went over backward, and then his fox, a dashed little Jezebel, took a swipe at me with a bottle. So Elsie tried to strangle her, and then everybody, seemed to join in at once. All I know is, I was trying to get Elsie away when someone threw a handful of spaghetti in my face, and I pulled a leg off one of the tables and went after him.”

“By Jove! Tydvil,” laughed Nicholas, “considering your lack of experience, you displayed excellent technique in an emergency.”

“Not at all,” disclaimed Tydvil modestly. “It was just instinct. That spaghetti roused my worst feeling, and I wanted to do something worth while to the man who threw it. He reached the door about two jumps ahead of me, and then someone switched off the lights. A lot of good that did,” he laughed, “because they all came out into the street and carried on.”

“And then?” Nicholas asked.

“To tell you the honest truth, I don’t know much about it. I was trying to knock out the spaghetti man when the police arrived, and I had to leave my man to attend to them. They had about got me done up. I was on my back and just managed to let out with both legs and get two of them, when you arrived.”

“Well,” came Mr. Senior’s verdict, “all I can say is, that for a man of your limited training, your success has been phenomenal.”

“You are proud of your pupil?” Tydvil laughed.

“Pupil, indeed!” Nicholas replied. “You don’t want any teaching; your capacity for finding trouble is native genius. But I think you had better get to bed.”

Tydvil stood up. “I think you’re right. Oh, by, the way. I have an appointment to meet Archie Graham at his place for a game of poker in a night or two.”

“Well, try not to bring in the police force again,” was Mr. Senior’s friendly advice.

“See you tomorrow—no, tonight at dinner,” said Tydvil glancing at the clock.

Mr. Senior left him to his well-earned rest.

## CHAPTER XXII

Geraldine Brand sat in her place at the table of Tydvil Jones, just as she had sat two mornings earlier, swishing the blade of a paper knife through the envelopes of the morning mail. But her mind was not on her work. Geraldine was listening, and was beginning to fear she would listen in vain. She had almost lost hope when she heard an uncertain step approaching the door of the office. It was a step she could have picked out from an army, despite its hesitation. If Billy Brewer could have seen the light in Geraldine's eyes as she raised her head at the sound, he would not have delayed his entrance.

When he did summon up courage to cross the threshold; her head was bent intently over her work. His eyes were so absorbed in the general beauty of the girlscape, that they missed the important detail that the shapely, capable hands were a little unsteady in their movements. It was remarkable that the two so usually self-assured and self-possessed young people were at the moment feeling just a little scared. To both, the experience of feeling scared was novel and unsettling.

Although she had given no sign of knowledge of his presence, Billy knew

she was aware of it. He waited a moment in trepidation, but when the expected order of eviction did not come, he took courage. He moved quietly round the table and seated himself in Tydvil's chair. As he did so her lashes flicked upwards for a fraction of a second, and then went on with her work. To Billy, the reception was not encouraging, but then he did not know that Geraldine, at the moment, was almost afraid to let him see her eyes.

Mr. William Brewer was not looking his best, or feeling his best.

Although much of the swelling had left his eye, its colour was still rich and variegated. Moreover, he had had a sleepless night trying to solve the mystery of the calamities that had befallen him, but it was an instance in which night had brought neither counsel nor consolation.

At the moment he never in his life had felt the need for sympathy and understanding more acutely. Instinct had drawn him to Geraldine against the better judgment of his reason.

Then the sight of her and her silence gave him daring. "Gerald—I mean," he cut the word short, "I mean, Miss Brand."

Geraldine's heart was chanting "Te Deums," but all she said was a non-committal and interrogative, "Well?"

"I wanted to ask you something."

Again, "Well?"

"Did you..." Billy's words stumbled. "Have you read last night's paper? I mean that stuff about me."

"I did," murmured the bent head, "and this morning's papers also."

Billy flushed uncomfortably. He had become "news," and the morning papers had "done him proud." One of them had found room for a shocked sub-leader on the prevalence of perjury in the courts of justice. However, Billy was determined to have his say.

"I want to tell you this, and please believe me, it is true, I never was near Hilda Cranston that night. On my word of honour." The memory of his wrongs drowned his hesitation. "You think you saw me speaking to her. I swear I was not. I haven't seen her for months. And I haven't the vaguest



idea what Mrs. Jones was talking about. Please believe me, Geraldine.”

Geraldine laid down the paper knife and, for the first time, looked Billy in the face. At the moment she did not care what he could read in it. The misery in his voice hurt. Then, as calmly as her voice would permit, she said, “I know now that it was all some dreadful mix up. And I want to apologise for what I said—I am sorry, really—Billy.” That “Billy” slipped out before she could stop it.

In the one active eye of Billy Brewer, rose a sudden light. He half stood up, but a peremptory gesture of her hand sent him back to the seat.

“But,” he exclaimed breathlessly, “you called me Billy!”

Geraldine’s attempt to compose her face into lines of severity was not altogether successful. “That slip was no reason for you to be silly.” But she knew she had lost her grip.

“Call me Billy again,” he demanded.

“I’ll call you something that will astonish you in a moment if you’re not serious. Don’t you see we have to talk this thing over?”

“But...”

“No, stop!” she half pleaded. “You must tell me everything, can’t you see how important it is? Please—Billy!”

Billy resigned himself to her voice. There was a note in it that made him feel a little dizzy. “All right, I’ll be a good boy, mamma. What do you want to know?”

“Everything,” she insisted.

“It’s all so crazy,” he said a little doubtfully. “That I’m afraid you’ll think I’m the world’s Olympic liar.”

She laughed. “Not this time, Billy. Come—everything!”

“Well, here goes!” he said. “But, remember I warned you it’s absolutely barmy.” And Billy unfolded his story as it appeared to him.

Geraldine listened intently. She was one of the rare women who could

refrain from interruption. It was only when he had described Tydvil's surprising appearance in court that she said emphatically, "And that evidence was flat perjury."

"You knew that?" Billy asked in wonder.

"Of course I did. I knew as well as you did he was not working back. I can always tell from his table. This man Mr. Olden, who is he?"

"Don't know him from a bar of soap. A most impressive looking bird. But Tyddie..."

"No—don't stop," she insisted.

She heard the Jerry McCann episode with a little wrinkle in the smooth forehead. "You're perfectly sure he said ten o'clock?" she asked.

"Absolutely," Billy asserted. "And the amazing part of it is that Jerry knew his reputation as a wowser too well to go near him, dead or alive."

When Billy had closed his narrative with an account of the eleven pounds

that someone had paid on his behalf, he continued with a sigh. “All I can make of it is that I must have a double. What do you think?”

“Double!” Geraldine sniffed. “It would take a treble to account for all that. Billy, there is only, one thing about it I am sure of, and that is that Mr. Tydvil Jones is the most unmitigated fibber on earth—and that is understating it.”

“But,” protested Billy, “he only did it to get me out of a mess.”

“Um-m!” murmured Miss Brand. “That doesn’t account for that Jerry McCann whopper.” Then she smiled at him. “Tell me, Billy, you ought to know, why do men tell their biggest fibs?”

“Firmly disregarding the implied libel,” said Billy, “I should say it is because they have something to hide.”

“Yes...”

At that moment a knock at the open door cut her short. Both stared towards it. Framed in the doorway, and occupying most of its space, was a

policeman.

“Mr. Tydvil Jones?” enquired the apparition that made Billy wonder if some fresh calamity were about to overtake him.

Geraldine stood up. “This is his office, but he has not come in yet. Is there anything wrong? I am his secretary.”

Constable O’Connor advanced two steps into the room. His official voice lost its edge as he met the frank eyes of the tall damsel who spoke.

“I’ve been sent down from Russell Street about this hat, Miss.” He held out a grey felt to her.

Taking it, Geraldine turned it over. “Why!” she exclaimed, “this is Mr. Jones’s hat! Where did you get it?”

“Exhibition Street, last night. Eleven forty-five p.m. Believed to be stolen.” He spoke as though from the witness box.

“But how...?” Her voice trailed off as she looked from the hat to Billy, who was now on his feet.

“There was a big brawl, Miss. You might have seen about it in the papers. We arrested fourteen of them. The man who was wearing the hat seemed to be ringleader—he escaped. We thought Mr. Jones might be able to identify him.”

“Do you know what he was like?” asked Billy, taking the hat from Geraldine.

“About six feet or a little more. Dark suit, black hair, broad shoulders, rather prominent nose. When I saw him first he was trying to out another man with a leg of a table. Fought like a bear cat. Got away from six of us. Just vanished!”

Seeing the astonishment in Billy’s eyes, he went on. “Just as I said, sir. Just vanished. We thought you might have seen someone like him hanging round the place.”

The eyes of Geraldine and Billy met in bewilderment over the grey felt. “Have you?” she asked.

Billy was equally mystified, and said so.

“We’d be glad to get him,” the constable said with some feeling.

“Well,” said Geraldine, “if you like to leave it here I’ll enquire from Mr. Jones as soon as he comes in.” Constable O’Connor left with the assurance that if Mr. Jones could throw any light on the matter he would communicate with Russell Street at once.

When the uniform had disappeared, Geraldine placed the hat on the table, and the two stared at it as though at some strange portent.

Said Geraldine, “Queer? That hat was hanging on its peg when I left the office last night.”

“Well, that’s queer,” was all Mr. Brewer could find to say.

“Must have been pinched,” ventured Billy. Then, after a moment, “It doesn’t seem to make sense.”

“It makes as much sense as the Jerry McCann business and all the rest of

it. I wish the thing could speak,” she said, taking up the hat again.

“But surely you don’t think...?” Billy did not like to put the amazing question into words.

“That Tyddie has taken to rioting and assaulting the police?” Geraldine had not such fine scruples. “The other Billy Brewer did,” she added.

“It’s mad—mad!” insisted Billy.

“So’s the whole business,” averred Miss Brand, “but I’m perfectly certain, without any evidence but his preposterous stories, that he could explain everything.”

“And what then?”

She tossed the hat back on to the table. “I don’t know. But,” and her voice took on a note of determination, “I’m going to find out.”

“But Tyddie—impossible!”



“Why impossible?” she demanded. “He’s a man, isn’t he? Where was he the night before last? He was not here.”

“But Geraldine,” he persuaded, “why should you get yourself mixed up in it?”

“If it comes to that,” she answered, not looking up, “why should you be blamed for something you didn’t do?”

Billy was standing beside her. “Geraldine—do you really care if I am unfairly blamed?” he almost whispered.

Then Geraldine Brand, very incautiously, looked up. He gave her no time to reply. She did not know how it happened, but the next moment she found herself in his arms, feeling quite at home and deliriously happy.

When, perhaps thirty seconds later, Mr. Tydvil Jones entered his office, he stopped abruptly. The spectacle that greeted his eyes was that of his senior city representative standing with one arm round the waist of Miss Geraldine Brand, and the other about her shoulders. Miss Geraldine Brand’s very conspicuous head was resting on the shoulder of Mr. William

Brewer and both her arms were round his neck. The two were evidently utterly insensible to any outside impressions.

Tydvil felt slightly embarrassed, but, after all, it was his office.

After giving them what he considered ample time to come out of their trance, he said, a little apologetically, "Pardon me, if I am intruding."

The only effect of his voice was that the group relaxed slightly. One of Billy's arms fell from her shoulder, and one of Geraldine's came from his neck. Her head remained in situ, though she turned it slightly to look at him.

There was that in her eyes which made Tydvil Jones envy William Brewer. That they had settled their differences gave him a feeling of satisfaction. Billy, deserved some compensation, and he felt that this was ample. A wide smile broke on his face. Said he, "Guard with your left, Brewer, or you'll have a pair of them."

The only response of the unabashed Geraldine was to turn her lips deliberately to Brewer's.

Mr. Jones threw back his head and laughed heartily at the gesture of defiance. “You win, Miss Brand. Congratulations, Brewer!” He held out his hand.

Billy’s spare hand took it and shook it warmly.

“What are you going to do about it?” asked Geraldine uncompromisingly.

“I?” laughed Tydvil. “Nothing! I should say that Billy has done everything necessary.”

It was the first time either of them had known Tydvil so far unbend as to use the Christian name of one of his staff. It made them both realise that all was well.

“But still,” Tydvil went on, unfastening his overcoat, “if you could possibly unwrap yourselves, we might think about the mail. I only offer it as a suggestion.” He wriggled himself out of the coat.

Geraldine’s arms relaxed slowly, and she smiled. “Thank you, Mr. Jones.” Then, after a pause, she added, “But it would have been nicer if you had

come in a little later.”

Geraldine’s contribution to the conversation rather startled Billy, who did not quite know whether he stood right side up or inverted. Tyddie did not usually take kindly to airy persiflage.

But Tydvil looked from one to the other in evident amusement. “Don’t take any notice of what she says, Brewer. You know, when people are coming from under an anaesthetic they often talk queerly.”

She patted her somewhat disordered copper helm, now perfectly self-possessed. “I don’t like you to call him an anaesthetic,” she smiled at Tydvil. “I find him a stimulant.”

“Oh,” he held up his hands, “have it your own way! I am not going to argue.” Then, in mock anger, “Are you, or are you not, going to begin work this morning.”

Here Billy found his voice for the first time. He felt some sort of apology or explanation was due to Tydvil. “I would like to say, sir...”

Tydvil cut him short with a laugh. "Save it, Brewer, you duffer! Let us get on with our work now, and come back and take her to lunch. If you don't, I will."

Billy caught Geraldine's eye and obeyed without further attempt at explanations. Geraldine's thoughts had been working at something like three thousand revolutions a minute. As the door closed behind him, she turned to Tydvil who was putting his coat on a hanger. "Can you tell me anything of how your hat was stolen, Mr. Jones?" she asked. "A policeman brought it back this morning and made enquiries."

Although Tydvil's face was quite composed as he turned round, Geraldine had not missed the start he had given at her words. "Dear me, so that is what became of it!" He stared curiously at the hat, and there was uneasiness in his voice. It was too casual, and Geraldine recognised the fact.

"Where was it found?" he asked.

Geraldine gave a dramatic and highly coloured account of a dreadful man who was attempting to murder another with a club, and who had wrought

fearful havoc among the police. “Isn’t it awful, Mr. Jones,” she added, “he must have been in here.”

“Oh, no!” he smiled, “not here. I was having dinner at the Carlton, and it was taken by someone.” Tydvil was quite pleased with his fertility of imagination. “I hope they captured the man,” he added.

“No,” replied Geraldine. “The brute escaped. The policeman said he just vanished, but that’s absurd. However, they have a good description. They say he is a horrid, dark man, with a big nose and broad shoulders.”

Mr. Jones shook his head. “Dreadful,” he said. “Drink, no doubt!” But somehow Geraldine sensed, with that sense that the Creator has given to women to allow her to bowl out iniquitous man, that the impeccable Tydvil Jones was fibbing like all his sex, and was just slightly over-acting a part.

“The policeman asked me to ring up Russell Street when you came in, if you could help at all. They’re very anxious to get that ruffian.”

“Urn,” said Tydvil. “Better explain that it was taken from the Carlton,

and express my regret that I cannot assist them.”

He had taken his seat, and as he spoke he glanced across the table at the mail. About one quarter of the letters were still unopened. He pointed an accusing finger at them. “Oh, Miss Brand! Miss Brand!”

Geraldine flushed guiltily. For the first time since she had been his secretary she had failed him. She began to stammer an apology. But he only laughed. “Guilty with extenuating circumstances. Now you listen to me, young woman. You tell that William Brewer of yours to keep out of this room—at least until the mail is sorted. He’s a disruptive element.”

“He’s nothing of the kind,” she answered warmly.

“If I say he is, he is!” Tydvil insisted. “He’s worse than that. He’s a pestilent secretary stealer. That’s what I think of him. But it’s no use doing anything now since the damage is done.”

That morning when she returned to her desk in the outer office, Geraldine found a pencil scribbled note on her table. Shorn of the florid opening lines, which Geraldine thought were the best part of it, it ran: “Look at

page three, The Age, I've marked the column. W." Turning to the place, Geraldine read with absorbed interest half a column of lurid narrative of certain happenings in Exhibition Street on the previous night. When she had finished she decided that if Tydvil were even remotely associated with them, it would not be surprising if he were unwilling to allow the fact to become public.

Still later in the day, she was given new, but not altogether unexpected, food for thought. Tony, the night-watchman of the warehouse, came to hand in his weekly report, which always passed through Geraldine's hands. Tony was one of her very numerous admirers. She knew all about his family, and their ailments. She was running her eye over the report when he volunteered, "Governor's been back late this week, Miss Brand."

"Oh!" she said, without looking up. "Of course, you'd notice him."

"I'd be able to pick the Governor by his walk from a thousand. Spotted him last night as soon as he turned out of Swanston Street."

Geraldine pricked up her ears. Still looking at the report card, she said, "Yes, I wonder he didn't get his death of cold, without his hat."



“Without his hat!” Tony’s surprise was unmistakable and genuine. “Him without his hat! Someone must have been pullin’ your leg, Miss Brand. I seen him as he passed as close as I am to you. It was just ten past eight, and he was wearin’ a grey felt.”

She smiled up at him. “I must have misunderstood, Tony. Of course it wouldn’t be likely, would it?”

“Not him, Miss. The governor ain’t that sort,” Tony agreed.

When Tony had departed, Miss Brand was deep in thought as Tydvil passed from his office into the warehouse. Her eyes followed him as he went.

“Tyddie,” she addressed the straight back in her thoughts. “I’m beginning to think you’re a worse fibber and a better man than I ever dreamed you could be.” Deciding that it was more material for herself and Billy to discuss, she turned to her work.

## CHAPTER XXIII

When, acting under his wife's most explicit instructions, Tydvil had dressed early that evening, he found Amy was earlier, and was awaiting his arrival in the drawing-room. As he caught sight of her, Tydvil's eyes opened widely. Never since he had known her had Amy worn anything but some shade of grey. Amy appeared to think it was the chosen colour of the virtuous—something that marked her as one apart from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Now, she was wearing mauve—mauve relieved by violet. Moreover, it was cut at the neck quite two inches lower than anything that Tydvil had even seen on her. But, even so, the strictest critic could not have classed the revelation as daring. Great as was Tydvil's surprise, it would have been greater had he known that a harried dressmaker had kept four girls at work all night so that it would be finished in time for that night's dinner.

Tydvil mentally admitted that he had never seen her look more presentable. The frock had been compiled by an artist. The compliment he paid her was not very well received. Amy said that she was sorry she had bought it. It made her look rather more conspicuous than she cared to be. It was a concession to fashion that she should not have made. Having put

Tydvil in his place, she looked him over critically, straightened a tie that did not need straightening, and suggested it was about time he procured another dinner jacket. A man in his position should be well dressed. For her part, her dress was never more than a secondary consideration. "I always say, that if a woman respects herself, others respect her. Dress does not matter." Tydvil reflected that it was quite true that she always said that. He had heard her say it two or three times a week for ten years or more.

"Who are you putting at my end?" he asked when the inspection was over. To him, his neighbours at the table were a matter of importance.

"You will take in Mrs. Blomb." Tydvil gritted his teeth. Mrs. Blomb had very large teeth, a scraggy neck, a reputation as a platform speaker, and she gushed. "On the other side you will have Mr. Arthur Muskat." This announcement caused Tydvil some difficulty in suppressing a word that would have startled Amy. It was one he had heard in the thick of the previous night's finale in Exhibition Street, and its force was only exceeded by its extreme vulgarity. Muskat was his second best aversion, and the Secretary of the Moral Uplift Society. He was large of face and body, spoke in grunts, ate largely, and made unpleasant sounds during

mastication.

He detested only one man more, and that was Arthur's brother Edwin, who was a fanatical prohibition advocate. Edwin and Arthur were much alike, only Edwin added to the other's lack of attractiveness a smugness and a pose of righteousness that always gave rise in Tydvil to a longing to assault him. So that when Amy said, "I am putting Mr. Edwin Muskat opposite Mr. Senior, because they are both so devoted to the one great cause," Tydvil found himself both sympathetic on Senior's behalf and at the same time grimly amused. He became still more amused when he heard that, beside having his hostess to talk to, Mr. Senior would make the acquaintance of Mrs. Caton Ridgegay. She was a lady whom Mr. Ripley would have rejected as impossible and unbelievable, both in aspect and for a capacity for sustained speech composed of windy inanities.

"And now, Tydvil," went on Amy, impressively, "I wish you to show the very greatest consideration to Mr. Senior. He is not only a man of remarkable attainments and distinction, but he has most constructive plans for a prohibition campaign. I need hardly remind you that at Home a man with such friends as the Archbishop of Canterbury must be a personage of considerable importance. I feel sure you cannot but benefit by

cultivating his acquaintance and friendship.”

“Very well,” Tydvil agreed. “I have no doubt he is all that you say.” His feeling of depression regarding his prospects for the evening ordeal increased in intensity as it drew nearer. Mentally he reviewed the other guests.

There was the Rev. George Claire, who had the gift of making every topic on which he conversed intolerably boring; his wife, Augusta, whom twenty years of married life with the Rev. George had bereft of speech and reason, if she ever possessed any, and Mrs. Claire’s sister, Miss Eva Merrywood. Apart from Nicholas, of their eight guests the only one who offered any prospects but exasperation was Miss Merrywood. She was a determined female whose hobby, was slums. Her theory was that the only way to awaken the public conscience was to tell the unvarnished truth about slums. This she did, and did it frankly. Her uncensored gleanings, described in plain language with blank unconcern, had staggered many a pious gathering. Tydvil was wondering if he could, by some happy chance, draw her out.

Sometimes he felt that Amy could read his thoughts, for at that moment

she broke in on him. “I wish you particularly, to watch Eva Merrywood, Tydvil dear. I would not have invited her, but I wanted the vicar and Augusta, and could not very well leave her out.”

“Do you expect me to gag her?” asked Tydvil truculently.

“That is both absurd and vulgar, Tydvil,” Amy snapped. “Eva means well, but you know how indiscreet she can be. Just try to change the conversation if necessary. Dear Eva is so very earnest that I am afraid Mr. Senior might not understand.”

“Ump!” Tydvil reassured her. “Anyone who can fail to understand Miss Merry wood’s stories would need to be pretty dull. Your Mr. Senior would be lucky if he could misunderstand them.”

“Sometimes, Tydvil dear, I think you try to provoke me purposely. I have been trying to forget your conduct during the past few days...”

“Mrs. Blomb,” announced a maid from the door.

For the first time since he had met her, Tydvil welcomed the presence of

Mrs. Blomb. He returned her greeting politely and stood aside watching her take in Amy's costume in gulps. She grasped a hand of Amy in each of her own, and exclaimed in her platform voice, "Amy!—dear! How truly charming. Quite Parisian, really!" Turning her face to Tydvil, "You must be proud of our dear Amy, Mr. Jones, now, confess!"

Tydvil modestly admitted the impeachment and was relieved from further violation of his conscience by the arrival of the two Muskats. He was well out of the frying pan into the middle of the fire, because Arthur Muskat deftly cornered him and, in a series of throaty and nasal sounds, poured out his gratitude to Tydvil for his truly Christian beneficence in the cause of the Moral Uplift Society. "My Dear Sir," he rumbled, "I trust you will take most severe steps against the scoundrel who forged those insulting letters to the papers."

Tydvil attempted to protest, but he may as well have tried to oppose his strength to a road roller.

"Your disinclination to punish the affront is in keeping with your own high standards of Christian forbearance. But is it wise, my dear Mr. Jones? No, pray do not deny it! Our dear Mrs. Jones has told me

everything. How the moment you saw those letters you determined to give them the lie direct with your gracious gift. It was a splendid gesture, splendid!”

The revelation of Amy’s tactical move sent a surge of anger through Tydvil.

“Ah! There is no need to blush, Mr. Jones,” grunted Arthur Muskat. “In my own poor efforts in the cause of Moral Uplift I sincerely trust that the cause is worthy of the source of the gift.”

“In that, I feel you are right.” Tydvil spoke with profound conviction. It was the first time for many months that he had felt in complete agreement with the secretary of the society.

“Now,” continued Mr. Muskat, “I have been given the privilege of letting you into a little secret. It was, indeed, your dear wife to whom I am indebted for it. We have arranged for you to be present at a meeting of the members at which we may, be able to express our gratitude. Inadequately, I am afraid, my dear sir, but we will do our best.”



During Mr. Muskat's outpourings the remainder of the guests had arrived, the last of who was Mr. Senior. It was the stir caused by his entrance that enabled Tydvil to escape from his tormentor, and to suppress an explosion that might have astonished the secretary of the Moral Uplift Society.

As he and Muskat moved to the group surrounding Amy, she was presenting her friends to the guest of honour. The wrath of Tydvil was almost forgotten as he saw the perfect ease with which Nicholas received the tributes with which the very proud and somewhat flustered Amy conducted the ceremony. He hung back to give the others precedence.

"And," gushed Amy finally, placing an affectionate hand on Tydvil's shoulder, "this is my husband!" There was no need for Tydvil to feign his pleasure at the meeting. For him it had been a case of "Blucher or night." Only the strength of Nicholas as a reinforcement saved the day for him. Mr. Senior evinced a pleasure equal to his own as they shook hands. "Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Senior, "I almost feel I have already met you, Mr. Jones. In the short time I have been in Melbourne I have come across evidence of your good works everywhere."

Tydvil accepted the compliment blandly. “And I have already heard so much of you, Mr. Senior. You have one very staunch admirer that I know of.” He inclined his head towards the smiling Amy. His eyes twinkled as he added, “I feel I have met a kindred spirit.”

It was then that Arthur Muskat, oozing unction, broke in, “There is something that you will all be pleased, but not surprised, to hear...”

A desperate attempt to stave off the revelation by Tydvil failed dismally. He felt that at this juncture it would be rubbing salt into Nicholas’ wounded feelings.

“That infamous letter in the papers regarding the Moral Uplift Society proves to be a forgery. I feel that none of us could believe for a moment that Mr. Jones wrote it. But...” and Mr. Muskat beamed largely on the circle, “he has given it a defiant and purely Christian denial by handing us a cheque for one thousand pounds.” He rolled out the figures triumphantly.

In the outburst of admiration that followed the announcement, Tydvil alone noticed the flush on Nicholas’s face. There seemed to be something

in that tag, "Tell the truth and shame the Devil." Then inspiration came.

"One moment!" he interposed. "Just before you arrived, my wife and I had reached an agreement that to contradict that letter publicly would be merely drawing attention to it. She feels as keenly as I do that my little contribution must be kept secret. Don't you, Amy?" he asked with malicious meaning.

Under the gaze of all eyes Amy had no option but to agree, but only Tydvil, who knew her so well, was aware of the acid behind her smile.

"That," said Mr. Senior, "is what I should call spiking the guns of the enemy. An idea worthy of you, Mr. Jones." Only Tydvil was able to read the glance of amusement in his eyes.

"A concession to evil, I am afraid," was Mr. Edwin Muskat's contribution.

"I cannot agree with Edwin," the vicar spoke judicially. "I regard Tydvil's course as both Christian and dignified."

But the conscience of Edwin Muskat was not appeased. Forgery was a sin

against society, and one that demanded retribution.

The argument that ensued gave Tydvil the chance he was looking for. He drew Nicholas aside for a moment. “Listen, Nicholas,” he whispered, “I can’t stick this out. You must liven things up.”

Nicholas’ eyes danced over the group and met Tydvil’s again. “But our hostess, Tydvil?” He shook his head. “Is it fair?”

“Dash the hostess,” retorted Tydvil, shedding both chivalry and loyalty to his spouse. “Doesn’t the host deserve some pity?”

“Well, I’ll do my best,” Nicholas chuckled.

“Do your worst...” Tydvil insisted emphatically. “Tydvil dear,” broke in Amy, who had approached unnoticed, “you must not monopolise Mr. Senior.”

“Your husband is enlisting my assistance in a cause very dear to his heart—and mine,” Nicholas added, smiling at her.

Amy nodded brightly. "He and Mr. Edwin Muskat are both enthusiasts in your own cause of prohibition. You will excuse Tydvil for his zeal."

"I am afraid," laughed Mr. Senior, "that I am as bad as he is. Do you know, Mrs. Jones, even after so brief an acquaintance I feel I know your husband almost as well as you do. We seem to have so much in common."

"I fear you are flattering Tydvil," Amy protested gaily. "You see, he has not had your advantages of travel, Mr. Senior."

"Ah! My dear lady," Nicholas responded, "it is not a question of travel. Men like your husband are a product of environment."

"Believe me," said Tydvil sincerely, "I owe everything to my wife, Mr. Senior."

"That, I do not doubt for a moment," conceded Mr. Senior gallantly.

At this moment Amy's eye was caught by that of the maid at the door.

"Come, Mr. Senior," she said. "Dinner is waiting, and you must not flatter me so. Tydvil dear, you will take Mrs. Blomb."

Amy's dinners were famous among her friends. In none of them was the principal of temperance in beverages extended to food. Amy's cook was an artist. As they settled into their places, Mr. Arthur Muskat unfolded his table napkin as though he were performing a rite. Mrs. Blomb raised her eyes from her plate and confided in Tydvil that she was afraid she was greedy because dear Amy's devilled oysters had become almost an obsession with her. Even the voice of the vicar, who, at a nod from Amy, had recited grace, seemed richer with a note of anticipation.

But, for the first time in his life, Tydvil regarded the table with real distaste. He had come to feel that the iced barley-water and fruit cup that accompanied the meal were a poor substitute for something with more kick and inspiration in it. He thought of his dinner with Hilda Cranston with regret for its gaiety, and he almost groaned over the memory of the burgundy of the previous night.

Mrs. Blomb, however, gave him scant time to regret anything but her existence. She had been speaking at a meeting of the Women's Liberal Union that afternoon, and Tydvil heard first of the odious apathy and indifference to great political issues exhibited by the majority of the

sex, and then she began to inundate him with a generous resume of her address. On the other side, Mr. Arthur Muskat was so profoundly absorbed in beche-de-mere soup that the last trump would not have stirred him. Though, Tydvil, through the momentary pauses in Mrs. Blomb's monologue, could distinctly hear his appreciation of it—the soup, not the monologue.

Years of experience of Amy's habits of speech had endowed Tydvil with the priceless gift of apparent courteous attention while his mind was set free to follow its own vagrant devices. He could follow Mrs. Blomb's arguments on the necessity for the reform of arbitration legislation, for which he did not care one hoot in Hades, and drop an intelligent comment into its proper place, while at the same time he was following intently the features of the social circus.

Amy was not looking pleased, because Mrs. Ridgegay had cut into her conversation with Mr. Senior with an apparently interminable account of a niece, aged seven, who read and took an intelligent interest in Browning, or was it Wordsworth. She always got Browning and Wordsworth mixed up, she confessed. But she felt sure that Mr. Senior shared her love of poetry because it was so uplifting. Of course, he, Mr. Senior, would not

know that her niece was the daughter of her sister, Emily; Mr. Senior should really meet Emily because she was so interested in dogs.

As he grasped these fragments of Mrs. Ridgegay's conversation, Tydvil gathered from the expression on Nicholas' face that his desire to meet Emily was non-existent. Amy looked as though failing the pleasure of strangling Mrs. Caton Ridgegay, nothing would give her greater satisfaction than to vent her displeasure on the sister. It was clear at the moment that Amy simply hated the whole Ridgegay family.

Neither did Amy, seem at all interested in the vicar's views on the subject of condoning forgery. It was just then that Tydvil caught his wife's eye, that directed him urgently to Eva Merrywood. Mrs. Blomb's voice blanketed that of Eva, but the expression of outraged modesty on the face of Edwin Musket beside her told its own tale, if it did not tell Eva's. But Tydvil judged from Edwin's blushes that it must have been one of her best. He was sorry he had missed it, and had no sympathy for Edwin. Deliberately, and with malice a forethought, he calmly disregarded Amy's S.O.S. Who was he that he should discourage the good works of Eva Merrywood?



Almost immediately Mrs. Blomb claimed his entire attention with a sudden exclamation of joy. She was holding a partially emptied goblet of fruit cup in her hand. As he turned, she said, “Oh, Mr. Jones, our dear Amy has given us a delightful surprise! A new fruit cup! Oh, most delicious! I must get the recipe from her. How does she think of these wonderful things?”

Tydvil, who had heard nothing of any new excursions by Amy into the concoction of temperance beverages, lifted his glass to his lips. The first sip halted him. He took a second and glanced up the table. As he did so he caught a flicker of light in Nicholas’ eye, and understood. Then he swallowed several appreciative mouthfulls. He was too new in his knowledge of alcohol to recognise the source of that rich aroma of soft alluring flavour that blended so well with the fruit, but it dawned on him that, whatever it was, Nicholas had been more than generous.

Mrs. Blomb’s enthusiasm had, for the moment, silenced the table. One and all were tentatively supping from their glasses. One and all re-echoed the praise of Mrs. Blomb. Edwin Muskat and the vicar were drinking barley-water. But the vicar, after half emptying his glass, replaced it on the table and remarked, that, though he was, alas, unable to drink

sweet beverages because of his digestion, he had never tasted barley-water that was so “comforting,” if he might use the term. Again Tydvil’s eye sought that of Nicholas, from whom he received a confirming but almost imperceptible flicker of his eyelashes.

Amy sipped bird-like from her goblet and smilingly accepted the applause of her guests. Although she ‘Was really at a loss to account for the attractive flavour, she said, “I’m delighted you like it. It is just a little idea of my own.”

“Please, Amy, tell us?” pleaded Mrs. Caton Ridgegay, for the moment forgetting her niece. As she spoke, Tydvil noticed with a fearful joy that Arthur Muskat had nodded to the maid to refill his goblet.

Amy shook her head at both Mrs. Ridgegay and Mrs. Blomb. “No, my dears,” she smiled, “you must let me keep my little secrets.”

For the moment the conversation was resumed. Warned, Tydvil dealt circumspectly with what he suspected was something more potent than his brief experience of bottled joy producers had encountered. He recognised its effects in the rising voices. Mrs. Blomb warmed to her denunciation

of the Arbitration Act. She held all Tydvil's attention that he could spare from the others.

"You have met Mr. Garside, have you not?" she asked Tydvil, naming the Federal Attorney-General.

Tydvil disclaimed the honour.

"Well, believe it or not, that man's a pig," Mrs. Blomb affirmed. "I've talked to him about clause four till I was sick..."

"Till he was sick, you mean," came surprisingly from Arthur Muskat as he paused in his operations on a cut from a saddle of lamb.

Mrs. Blomb gazed at him thoughtfully a moment as though she had not heard aright. Then she laughed loudly and patted Tydvil's arm. "Listen to him. He thinks I said Mr. Garside was sick."

"No, I didn't." Muskat put down his knife and fork and replied argumentatively. "What I meant was you must both have been sick. You'd make anyone sick," he grunted.

“I think that is very rude of you, Mr. Muskat,” protested Mrs. Blomb loudly.

Entirely disregarding the protest, Arthur Muskat hiccoughed violently, and resumed his knife and fork. So far as he was concerned, Mrs. Blomb had ceased to exist.

Tydvil, struggling with an urge to laugh, noticed the working of an agitated Adam’s apple in Mrs. Blomb’s stringy throat. Lowering his voice, he said soothingly, “I don’t think he understood what you were saying.” Then, to distract her attention, he went on, “You were saying you did not like Garside.”

“You’re right, Tydvil, I don’t—Oo—I called you Tydvil.” She laughed loudly again, and slapped his shoulder. “I tell you this, when Julia Blomb says a man’s a pig, he is a pig. Do you understand what I mean?”

“Did you call me a pig?” Again Arthur Muskat rumbled into the conversation. His face was flushed and he eyed her malevolently.

“I did not,” she returned with spirit. “But since you ask, I do think you’re a pig, Arthur Muskat.”

Her platform voice rose high over the now lively noise from the other end of the table and momentarily stilled it. Then, very distinctly in the silence, came the voice of Mrs. Claire. Her face was flushed and her eyes were bright. Addressing her husband, she said, “George, you preach the worst sermons and talk the worst nonsense I ever heard.”

There was a general gasp of surprise and Mrs. Ridgegay giggled hysterically.

Then Mrs. Claire observed, apparently unaware of the sensation she had caused, “I’ve been wanting tell you that for years, an’ now I’ve tol’ you!” She turned away and lapsed into silence.

It was not until later when he learned from Nicholas that that gentleman had, by his own peculiar methods, introduced a charge of fifty per cent. benedictine into the fruit cup, and a similar proportion of proof gin into the barley-water, that Tydvil fully, understood the unusual demeanour of Amy’s guests. Under the genial influence of the fruit cup,

inhibitions, that had congested the brain of Mrs. Claire over twenty years of married life, melted like ice.

Even had he understood the psychological cause of his wife's untimely candour, the shock to the vicar's amour-propre would not have been mitigated to any great extent. His face, already flushed, became suffused. He endeavoured, however, to pass it off as a not too successful effort at humour on the part of his partner. His laugh was rather hollow as, addressing the table generally, he said, "A man is fortunate who can find a frank and sincere critic in his home. It is, I feel, a salutary moral tonic."

Mrs. Ridgegay, who had continued to giggle, succeeded in emitting, "Well, if it is a tonic, vicar, you should feel much better after that dose."

But, indeed, the expression on the vicar's face was such that it indicated if his wife's intention had been benevolent, she had prescribed the wrong mixture. He, however, muttered that fortunately it was his nature to accept all criticism meekly.

Here, reminiscence awoke in Miss Merrywood. Expressing regret that all

men were not endowed with the vicar's saintly philosophy, which was a product of education and environment, she related how, only on the previous day, she had assisted in dressing the injuries of a wharf labourer's wife. She specified their nature and locality so explicitly that Mrs. Blomb exclaimed a scandalised "Oh! Eva!" and Amy flushed crimson. Whereat, Miss Merrywood asserted that it was false shame not to treat these affairs from a detached sociological aspect. The woman had done no more than call her husband a so-and-so loafing son of a such-and-such, which Miss Merrywood felt sure he was.

Inspired perhaps by the fruit cup, Eva had quoted the injured lady verbatim, in both adjective and noun, to an audience that gasped.

Mrs. Ridgegay, quite unable to adjust her mind to the relative value of words, protested in a shocked voice, that Mrs. Claire had said nothing like that to the vicar.

But Eva would have none of her. She insisted that, judged from their respective environments, the two criticisms were comparative equivalents.

Then, as Eva was apparently about to enlarge on the topic and fearing the

worst, Edwin Muskat broke in. “Did you read that account of an appalling fracas in the city last night, Tydvil?”

Welcoming the diversion, Amy, who by this time was wondering what had happened to her party, seconded his endeavours by saying that she was afraid Mr. Senior would receive a shocking impression of the city from such terrible episodes.

“But,” Edwin put in, “we can assure Mr. Senior that the very unsavoury episode at St. Kilda, followed by the deplorable evidences of iniquity of last night can not be taken as altogether normal. I appeal to you, Tydvil.”

Responded Tydvil piously, “I can assure you, Mr. Senior, that in all my experience I have never seen anything like them.”

“No doubt they all were caused by drink,” Amy suggested.

“Spaghetti,” put in Tydvil absently. Though he had been careful of the fruit cup, he was feeling its influence.



“Tydvil dear,” Amy admonished down the table, “do you think it is wise to treat these things lightly?”

Arthur Muskat turned his small eyes on Tydvil. “I think, Jones, the ruffians who were involved in that dreadful affair will have some difficulty in proving to the bench that spaghetti was the cause of it.”

He emphasised his observation with a hiccough that seemed to disconcert him, as much as it surprised the table.

“On the contrary, Mr. Muskat,” Nicholas replied, “Mr. Jones’s suggestion has grounds in fact. I, myself, have seen serious and most distressing effects from a plateful of spaghetti after alcohol.”

“What I say, is...” began Arthur argumentatively, but was cut short with another resounding, “Wurroop!”

This was too much for Mrs. Blomb, who was seized with almost hysterical laughter. “Oh!” she gasped, pointing a shaking finger at the heavy, perplexed face. “He’s been—he’s been—eating spaghetti, too!”

Arthur Muskat’s face grew purple. “You shut up, you old hen!”

“Muskat! Muskat, I really must protest!” exclaimed Tydvil, placing a restraining hand on Arthur’s arm. But his heart sang with unregenerate joy. He had often wanted to tell Mrs. Blomb she was an old hen himself.

But Arthur would not be pacified. The fruit cup was in full command. “I’ll not stand it, Jones! I’ll not—wurroop! She’s been picking on me all the time. She called me a—wurroop—pig.”

“I’m ashamed of you, Arthur!” came a brotherly rebuke from Edwin.

Arthur turned on him fiercely. “Go and bag your dashed head, and mind your own dashed business,” he shouted.

Rather more than half a large goblet of proof gin had loosed some of Edwin’s inhibitions. He came back with a pugnacious chin stuck out. “You talk to me again like that, Arthur, and I’ll slam you one on the jaw!”

The only one among the company who was not staggered by the outbreak of hostilities was Mrs. Claire, who, having drained a second glass of fruit cup, sat with her face in her hands, and her hands in a plate full of

asparagus, in happy oblivion.

Amy, her face red and white by turns uttered a despairing, “Oh, Tydvil! Stop them!”

“It’s all Julia’s fault!” was Mrs. Ridgegay’s contribution.

Julia Blomb took up the challenge with enthusiasm. “If you think I’m going to let that fat idiot call me a hen, you’re mistaken. I said Arthur Muskat was a pig—and he is.” Here she pointed a derisive finger across the table, and babbled, “Pig—pig—pig!”

“My dear Mrs. Blomb...” began the vicar in a deep clerical voice of protest.

“I’m not your dear Mrs. Blomb,” she retorted with spirit. Then she added as an afterthought, “That’s one thing I have been spared.”

Before the vicar could speak again, Eva Merrywood’s voice cut in. “I’m sorry to have to say it, Julia, but your speech is more like Fitzroy than St. Kilda Road.”

“And yours is more like a muck heap than anything else, and I’m not sorry to say it.” Mrs. Blomb’s voice had a ring of battle.

At this juncture, Tydvil alone noticed that Amy had scowled the two maids out of the room. Then she turned bewildered but appealing eyes on Nicholas. In a moment he responded by rising. But in the brief interval the voices round the table were blended in vociferous turmoil. The vicar was trying vainly to thump the gathering to order. The two brothers were glaring at one another, exchanging unbrotherly amenities. Mrs. Blomb’s platform experience gave her a considerable advantage over Mrs. Caton Ridgeway, drowning her ineffectual retorts with vigorous, and not exaggerated, reflections on Mrs. Ridgeway’s lack of intelligence and inane conversation. Eva Merrywood was saying things to Mrs. Blomb that it was just as well that that lady was too busy at the moment to assimilate. With the bonds of convention relaxed, the mutual exchanges were sincere, but primitive in verbiage and entirely lacking in subtlety.

Then the clear voice of Nicholas cut into the riot. He did not raise it, but his, “My friends! My friends!” stilled the riot as water drenches a fire. The last distinguishable word was “nitwit,” from Mr. Edwin Muskat

to his purple-faced brother.

“My friends!” continued Nicholas calmly to the faces turned towards him. “I am afraid we have all become a little overwrought. I feel,” his voice grew very persuasive, “that you will forgive me, a stranger among you, for reminding you, that perhaps we have forgotten for the moment the feelings of our kind hostess.” He smiled towards Amy’s flushed face. “Let us all, without exception, assume the others have expressed regret for what might have been said in an unguarded moment.” He paused, and his deep luminous eyes passed from one to the other. “Will we not?”

Julia Blomb drew a deep breath, and it looked for the moment as though she would not accept any, overtures for a collective peace. Then she caught the eye of Nicholas on her. There was something in the glance he turned on her that sent a very cold shiver from the base of her skull to the furthest extremity of her spine.

Hastily she looked across to Arthur Muskat. “Oh, Arthur, let’s forget it all, I was silly!” There was a general murmur of acceptance, as the smiling Nicholas resumed his seat.

“You know,” he took the table in as he spoke, “I was just saying to our dear Mrs. Jones, how fine it was to think...” He paused again. “I am afraid, Vicar, that Mrs. Claire...”

In the excitement, that silent figure had been forgotten. In an instant Amy and the vicar were on their feet.

Anxiously they raised her head. Mrs. Claire, roused from her doze, regarded the table with sombre eyes and said thickly, “Parcel o’ fools!” and her head sunk forward again.

Amy and the vicar together raised her from her chair. “I can’t think...” Amy began.

“I’ve known that for years, Amy,” said the surprising Mrs. Claire, gazing owlshly at the assembly.

“Oh, my dear, my dear!” bleated Amy. “What has happened to you?”

““Runk—blinkin’ ‘runk,” murmured Mrs. Claire drowsily.

“Gwendoline!” The vicar shook her shoulder, none too tenderly. “How can you say such a thing?”

“Dunno!” his spouse replied, twisting her head to look at him. “‘Cause I’m darn near speechless.” Her head sunk forward again, and she added, “You ol’ buzzard!”

“Perhaps she had better lie down, Vicar,” Amy suggested. Mrs. Blomb and Mrs. Ridgeway rose as though to assist. But Amy waved them back. “Don’t bother, please, the Vicar and I will manage.”

Between them they turned the afflicted guest towards the door. Before she passed through, she turned again. “All rotten but Tydvil,” was her Pathan shot.

There was an uncomfortable silence. In the absence of Amy, Tydvil felt that the mantle had fallen on his shoulders and had no scruples about transferring it to those of Nicholas.

“You were saying, Mr. Senior,” he sent an S.O.S. to Nicholas, “that you were interested in something?”

“Ah, yes! It was that I was saying to Mrs. Jones how fine it was to be one of a gathering of such enthusiastic and disinterested workers for noble causes. But sometimes I think we take life too seriously.”

Eva Merrywood, with her arms folded on the edge of the table, leaned towards him. “D’you know,”—her speech was not quite clear—“I think you’re right. Lil bit o’ fun sometimes—like dancing. Haven’t danced for years.”

“Dancing! Miss Merrywood!” Arthur Muskat looked like a shocked Silenus.

“Why not, Mr. Muskat?” asked Nicholas gently. “In the proper spirit, I think dancing may be a most admirable medium for social relaxation.”

“My dear sir!—Wur-ooop! Pardon!” as the fruit cup intervened, “I have always learned that dancing is mos’ rep-reprehensible, Sir—most unchristian.”

“Bunnies, Arthur! How do you know?” demanded Eva. “Did you ever dance?”



“Mos’ certainly not!” replied Arthur with extreme gravity.

It was Mrs. Blomb who took up the discussion. “Then how the...” She checked herself deftly. “I mean, how do you know?”

Before Arthur could reply, Nicholas again intervened. “I sometimes think, Mr. Muskat, that the only way we can really inform ourselves on these social problems is by actual experiment.” He looked meaningfully at Tydvil. “Have you ever danced, Mr. Jones?”

“I’m afraid,” admitted Tydvil, “that, like Arthur, my views are not based on experience.”

Then Mrs. Ridgegay awoke to the trend of the discussion. “Why not try then, just to see.”

“Yes, yes, let’s all dance!” exclaimed Eva Merrywood pushing back her chair. “Come on, Edwin, I’ll show you.” She grasped Edwin Muskat’s arm as much as to steady herself as to urge him to join her.

“Go on, Edwin,” prompted Tydvil. “What about it?” he turned to Mrs.

Blomb.

Eva had pulled the unwilling Edwin to feet that were not conspicuously steady, and put her long, thin 'arms around him. Edwin yielded passively. Fortunately there was ample room for manoeuvres, and it was needed. Tydvil almost choked as the determined Eva and the reluctant Edwin began a wobbly oscillation on their united axis, of which she was the directing force.

Mrs. Blomb turned in her chair, took one glance at the amazing spectacle, and with a squeal of laughter reached for Tydvil. "Come on, Tydvil, we'll show them how," she gasped.

"But I don't know how," protested Tydvil. "Aren't there steps or something, and shouldn't we have music?"

"Oh, hang music! Wait, I'll show the waltz steps. Learned them at school." She backed away. It was in the days when legs were "limbs." Legs were seldom mentioned, and more seldom seen. But Julia Blomb took a double reef in the mainsail, displaying a white embroidered underskirt, six inches of red flannel petticoat (the badge of virtue) and a

considerable length of pipe stem undercarriage terminating in large feet.

“Now watch,” she said, poising with her right foot pointed.

There was no need for the injunction to watch. Eva and Edwin had come to a standstill by cannoning against the wall, against which they leaned for safety. A strand of Eva’s hair had worked loose on one side, giving her a rakish and bacchanalian aspect, and she still clung to Edwin. Arthur rose like a walrus, clutched for the back of his chair, missed, and came down “as falls on Mount Avernus a thunder stricken oak.”

It was at this moment, as Mrs. Ridgegay squealed, “Go it Julia,” that Amy re-entered the dining-room.

“Oooh! Julia Blomb!” Then as her eyes swept round the room, “Eva! Are you mad?”

“Just showing Tydvil how to waltz,” announced Mrs. Blomb, losing her balance and regaining it by a miracle.

“She’s a scarlet woman! I saw it; scarlet!” grunted Arthur Muskat from

the floor.

“In my house! Dancing...?” Words again failed Amy.

Then her gaze turned to Nicholas, who stood surveying the scene with an expression of pained embarrassment. “What will Mr. Senior think?”

Mr. Senior left his place and advanced towards the stricken Amy. “My dear lady, this is most distressing,” he said.

“But what is it?” gasped Amy. “Oh, what is it? The Vicar says his legs are paralysed. Go to him, Tydvil.”

“I am afraid, Mrs. Jones, that it is some form of food poisoning,” said Nicholas soothingly. “Perhaps the oysters. I have heard of this, but have never before seen the effects.”

As he spoke, Eva and Edwin Muskat subsided slowly down the wall until they came to rest together on the floor. Then, with a quick move, Nicholas caught Julia Blomb and placed her in the chair from which Tydvil had risen. Julia showed a decided tendency to sag.

“Oh, we must have a doctor!” exclaimed Amy, with her hand to her head.

“I’m afraid I have it, too! My head’s reeling!” So was her body, but

Tydvil rescued it manfully. Gently he lowered her to the floor where Amy gurgled and passed out.

Tydvil looked round the room. Mrs. Caton Ridgegay had disappeared—under the table.

He looked up at Nicholas, who regarded him with a sardonic smile. “You?” he queried.

Tydvil grinned. “I’m all right. Just a bit damp round the edges.” Then, as he surveyed the battlefield, “Jove! Nicholas, you did them proud. I wouldn’t care to risk another go at that fruit cup, though.”

“You could,” Nicholas smiled. “Try it.”

Taking a jug and goblet from the table, Tydvil sipped the mixture cautiously. Then his eyes met those of Nicholas with astonishment. “Why, it’s all right!” he exclaimed.

Nicholas nodded. “Exactly, so, you see, it must have been the oysters.”

“Of course, the oysters. That’s what paralysed the vicar’s legs, too.”

The two looked round them in silence for a moment, then Nicholas spoke, his hands deep in his pockets. “You know, Tydvil, I suppose there are a good many people who would think we have not played the game, but,”—he looked distastefully at the prone Arthur—“while I have sympathy for most human failings, I have never been able to overcome my repugnance against self-righteousness.”

Tydvil nodded his understanding. “I’ve lived among it all my life—I know.” Then he added, “Perhaps this will do them good.”

Nicholas shook his head. “Not unless they know the truth—and I’m afraid that would be difficult...”

“Then it must be the oysters.” Then he chuckled. “There’ll be some pretty sore heads in the morning. The question is, what are we to do with them?”

“I have my car,” Nicholas said, “and might take some of them if I knew where to drop them.”

“Over the parapet of Princes Bridge would be a good place,” laughed Tydvil.

“Is that an injunction or just a pious wish?” asked Nicholas hopefully.

Tydvil shook his head regretfully. “I’m afraid it will have to remain a pious wish. It might cause too much comment the other way.”

“Well?”

“Best thing is to keep them all here for the night, there is plenty of spare room in the house. I’ll get the maids in to look after the women—wonder what they’ll think? We’ll have to give them a hand to carry them upstairs. Then we can fix up the men ourselves.”

“What about the morning?” Nicholas suggested.

“Pah! They will have forgotten most of it. Anyway, they’ll accept my

explanation. Seems to me we're playing it pretty low down on the oysters."

Tydvil left to summon an already perplexed and whispering household staff, who rallied loyally to Tydvil's tale of sudden illness. To one and all Tydvil had been a friend in need. Beds were hastily prepared and the stricken guests were one by one laid to rest. It took the united efforts of Tydvil, Nicholas and four maids before Mrs. Ridgegay was lowered on to a bed and left to the ministrations of the maids.

In the drawing-room they found the Vicar, whose paralysis had become general, lying on the hearth rug. Mrs. Claire lay on a couch. Nicholas looked down at her. He turned to Tydvil. "The only one of them that is worth a hoot!" he said. Then he bent over and stroked her forehead with his long, slender fingers, saying as he did so, "I'll see to it that she, at any rate, will wake up without a headache."

It was more than an hour before a maid reported that the invalids were all accounted for. The men had been less carefully disposed of. Tydvil and Nicholas were seated in Tydvil's den. There was a flicker of surprise in the girl's eyes as she saw the cigar that Tydvil was enjoying. "Wait!"



Tydvil spoke as she turned to leave. “Emily,” he said seriously, “I know you and the others will realise how distressed I am, and Mrs. Jones will be over this affair.”

“Yes, sir, of course, sir.”

“Mr. Senior, who has had medical experience, is sure that their illness has been caused by the oysters, and that they will all be quite well in the morning.”

“Yes sir! We hope so, sir.”

“Still, I know you will not talk about it,” Tydvil went on, taking eight one-pound notes from his pocket. “Take one of these yourself and give the rest to the others with my thanks.”

The girl murmured her thanks and departed to find her colleagues discussing the amazing happening. Because, as the cook, indignant at the impeachment of the oysters, said, “If I didn’t know it was impossible, I’d say the lot of them were dashed well shickered.”

“Do you know, Nicholas,” said Tydvil, as he helped his friend into his overcoat, “I had no idea until the last few nights that the way of transgression could be so strenuous.”

“Don’t you find it worth the effort?” asked Nicholas.

Tydvil smiled reminiscently. “If only for the heads that Edwin and Arthur Muskat will have in the morning, the price is ridiculously, inadequate.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

It was Tydvil's fate, however, not to witness the morning awakening of his guests. Though he, himself, awoke much later than usual, from his personal inspection of the men, and from the reports of the maids on the others, none of them seemed inclined to awake, much less to get up. So Tydvil breakfasted alone, telling the maid who attended him that he doubted if any of the visitors would care to breakfast; but recommended that the cook should prepare large quantities of coffee—black.

But it was after ten o'clock when he reached his office, a departure from normal that Miss Brand added to her other evidence of Tydvil's recent peculiar behaviour. She and Billy Brewer had taken advantage of Tydvil's delayed appearance to discuss many things, though much was purely personal; because on the third finger of Geraldine's left hand there now flashed and sparkled a stone that almost rivalled the light in Geraldine's eyes.

“But darling,” Billy protested when Geraldine had repeated Tony's account of Tydvil's movements, “Tony must be haywire.”

“Look here, Billy,” she contended, “You and I and everyone else look on Tyddie as the best boy in the class, who always knows his lessons, keeps his hands clean and who was never a naughty boy in his life.”

Billy grinned. “Portrait of a pious softgoods warehouseman by his secretary. But that’s about it. We all do.”

“But it’s not natural for a man to be as perfect as he appears to be.”

“For that matter, no one would believe there was such a creature as the platypus—but there is,” was Billy’s comment.

“Well, I doubt if Tyddie is as innocent as he seems.”

“Oh, rats, Gerry!” laughed Billy. “You ought to know better than anyone. Surely he has not been trying to put anything nefarious over you.”

“Like to see him try!” said Geraldine, straightening up. “But really, Billy, so far as that goes I don’t exist. I don’t believe he could tell you the colour of my eyes.”

“Pooh, that’s nothing! I can’t either, and the good Lord knows I’ve studied them closely enough these last few months. But anyway, if a man could be with you twenty times a day for years and still doesn’t know you exist—that proves he’s either nutty or abnormal.”

“I don’t care what you say, Billy,” Geraldine stuck to her guns. “He’s changed. Plenty of men have been proved pious frauds.”

“But, best beloved,” Billy argued, “you don’t mean to tell me you think that Tyddie has suddenly taken to heaving bricks at cops, or has gone berserk, painted the town red and then tried to clean it up with a club. It don’t make sense.”

“Oh, I know! It does seem crazy; but why has he become such an appalling fibber?”

“Aren’t we all?” Billy philosophised. “Didn’t one of the Old Testament chaps say ‘All men are liars’?”

“Speak for yourself, Billy boy! Anyway, Tyddie seems to be out to break records.”

“Making up for lost time, perhaps! Still, that one about his hat being pinched at the Carlton seems a bit thick. That is, if Tony is right.”

“You can take it from me, Billy,” Geraldine asserted, “Tony may not be intellectual, but he is absolutely honest, and in his job he misses nothing.”

“Well, even if he is right, I don’t see that it proves that Tyddie has suddenly gone off the deep end to qualify for the laurels of village reprobate.”

“Maybe, but it does prove he has been up to some pretty steep mischief. A man like Tyddie does not step into the witness box and commit flat perjury unless there is something to make it worth while.”

“Urn,” mused Billy, “don’t think it’s a fellow feeling, but if he has gone a bit off the rails, I like him the better for it.”

“I’m as bad as you are, Billy,” admitted Geraldine. “He’s been less saintly and more human these last few days.”

“Gerry, dear,” Billy became very serious, “there’s something I have to tell you. It may hurt.”

She held out her hand to him. “I’ll help! What is it, Billy?”

“Cranston’s issued a writ against his wife, and named me co-re.”

“I always did hate that man,” Geraldine said with deep conviction.

“I’m going to defend it, d’you mind?” He looked down at her.

“Billy, dear, if I must marry a sinner, and I know you haven’t been exactly a saint, I’d sooner marry one who gets through with his sinning before marriage.”

“You trust me, Gerry?”

“There’s the proof, boy!” She held up the third finger of her left hand.

Billy bent forward and swept her up in his arms and the remainder of

their conversation became irrelevant, disconnected, and, to tell the truth, just a little mushy. But that was their business and none of ours.

Whether Tydvil's conscience was black, grey or spotted, he gave no signs of that during the morning. To all who encountered him, and especially to Geraldine, he was more genial than usual. To Miss Brand, it seemed as though he tackled his work almost gaily. His eyes caught the sparkle of the stone on her finger the moment he took his chair.

“So!” he said, “that tonic, no, I think stimulant was the term you used—that stimulant of yours has lost no time in asserting his pre-emptive right. Do you believe in long engagements, Miss Brand?”

Miss Brand admitted demurely that she had heard they were unwise. The colour that rose to the creamy skin at the admission delighted Tydvil's artistic eye.

“For competent secretaries I think the ideal length of an engagement is ten years,” suggested Tydvil.

Still keeping her eyes down a very dainty nose, Miss Brand agreed, but



added, "At the same time, Mr. Jones, as a member of the warehouse staff, I suppose you will allow ninety-five or ninety-seven and a half per cent discount in time."

"That's not business, Miss Brand," Tydvil chuckled. "That's nothing but sheer banditry."

"I've always thought I'd like to be a bandit," replied Geraldine.

"Do you know what I think?" asked Tydvil.

Geraldine raised her eyes. He was leaning back in his chair regarding her quizzically, with his head on one side.

"I think," Tydvil went on, "that Geraldine Brand is a shameless young baggage."

The girl laughed happily.

"But," he continued, "when the time comes the gift of Craddock, Burns and Despard to the bride will be her trousseau and her entire requirements in

household linen.”

He cut short her thanks with a laugh. “I can see that he has been here again this morning.”

Geraldine looked round for some trace of Billy’s presence.

But Tydvil, still laughing, said, “Elementary, my dear Watson! Go and look at your hair in the glass.”

With flaming cheeks, Geraldine hurried to the mirror to repair the disorder wrought by Billy, and Tydvil, watching her over his shoulder, observed: “Personally, I like it that way, but should you go out into the warehouse with it like that, someone might obtain an entirely erroneous impression of me.”

“Ump!” replied Geraldine Brand, with a new found audacity, as she busied herself with her hair. “I wonder!”

But Geraldine would not have wondered had she been able to follow the workings of the mind of Tydvil Jones. As the days passed she, more than

anyone else, even in the police force, was occupied with the doings of one Basil Williams, a mysterious roysterer who became notorious for extravagant amusements and extravagant audacity. Basil Williams sprang into fame two nights later when, at eleven-thirty, he, with two companions who had dined as amply as he had, was moved to serenade the east end of Collins Street generally.

Remonstrance from a constable on duty led to his referring in approbrious terms to the constable in particular and the police generally. When the constable found he was too strenuous a job to handle singly, he called for assistance. One of the reinforcements was Senior Constable O'Connor, who welcomed the opportunity to renew an already warm acquaintance. It took five athletic members of the force to effect the appearance of Basil Williams at the Watchhouse in Russell Street.

Here the captive admitted that his name was Basil Williams. He also gave names to the Sergeant on duty that that officer did not consider complimentary. Finally, after a strenuous ten minutes, he was lodged in a cell with seven charges against his name in the charge book—all of them serious.

That was at five minutes to midnight. Half an hour later when the cell was opened for the admission of another guest, it was learned with dismay that Basil Williams had vanished. All that was left to explain his absence was a note, couched in facetious but opprobrious terms, asking if the sergeant thought that he, Basil Williams, were a canary to be caged in such a manner. There was no indication that the lock on the cell door had been tampered with. The amour propre of the police was not soothed when they learned that the address given by Basil Williams was that of Mrs. Julia Blomb, the well known feminist, and a leading figure in women's political circles. Mrs. Blomb was not pleased when she was aroused at four-thirty a.m. by a policeman who demanded the body of one Basil Williams. It appears that she took no pains to conceal her displeasure from her visitors.

The man who regretted most the absence of Mr. Williams from his cell was the sergeant in charge of the watchhouse. More so when Senior Constable O'Connor reminded him in friendly terms of his remarks when the former captors of the outrageous prisoner had explained he had vanished from their gaze, also. Never did lover sigh for a maid as that sergeant sighed for one more glimpse of Basil Williams.

All the more so, when he remembered some of the epithets the dishevelled captive had hurled at him in the presence of subordinates, who only retained a becoming sobriety of expression by the exercise of desperate self-constraint. If you call an efficient and conscientious sergeant of police a drunk-robbing, beer-soaked buzzard; a silver-striped and pop-eyed son of the public executioner; if you assert that his appearance is more nauseating than a bucketful of emetic, you may achieve many things, but popularity will not be among them.

All these phrases had Basil Williams addressed to the sergeant, and many more even less truthful and far more reprehensible.

As Mr. Senior remarked to Basil Williams at the first convenient opportunity, it was surprising where he learned such expressions.

But Mr. Williams proudly claimed that he had not learned them at all. He made them up as he went on. He thought it was a gift.

Meanwhile, the more serious bodies of the city of Melbourne were enchanted by the advent of a new and dazzling light among them—Mr. Nicholas Senior. His generosity was as great as his popularity. Amy

soaked herself happily in the effulgence that shone from him. Mr. Senior's striking individuality, his brilliant conversation, his undoubted intellectual attainments, won him immediate recognition among the very nicest people. It was a speech he delivered at an anti-gambling gathering, however, that made Mr. Senior a public figure.

There was a Bill before the Legislative Assembly to extend the scope of racing throughout the State. The Churches were in arms, and a meeting was called at the town hall to protest against the iniquitous measure. It was to be presided over by a provincial bishop. Him, Amy invited to dinner—an intimate dinner at which devilled oysters were not served—to meet Mr. Senior. The bishop was so struck with his earnestness and lucid reasoning on the evils of gambling that before coffee had made its appearance, he had wrung a modestly reluctant promise from Mr. Senior to speak at the meeting. The privilege of introducing his friend was graciously conceded to Tydvil by his Lordship.

To the new Tydvil the privilege was one that gave him peculiar satisfaction, and it could only have been wrested from him by overwhelming force. To the crowded hall Tydvil announced that he had gladly waived his intention to address the gathering in favour of a

friend whom he was proud to introduce. He did not feel he was overstating the case when he asserted that Mr. Nicholas Senior, from his wide experience and personal investigations, was more familiar with the evils of gambling than any man on earth. That view was not only his own; it was shared by their Right Reverend Chairman.

The smile that Mr. Senior turned on his sponsor was born of the knowledge that, on the previous night, Tydvil had won fifty-four pounds from Archie Stone and two of his friends at “draw,” and further, that most of it was in Tydvil’s wallet while he was speaking.

Next morning the eloquent appeal made by Mr. Nicholas Senior was printed verbatim in all newspapers. For twenty-five minutes he held the gathering enthralled by the magic of his quiet persuasive eloquence. He spoke without fireworks or fulmination. With a merciless logic he tore the Bill to pieces. With exquisite skill he vivisected the motives of the Government and displayed them, raw, from the platform. In swift, masterly sentences, he portrayed the consequences that would accrue from the Bill becoming law. When he was finished it took three stiff whiskies to settle the nerves of an eminent member of the committee of the Racing Club, who had dropped into the meeting for half an hour’s entertainment.

But the Bill was dead.

Said Tydvil, as he and Nicholas walked homeward after the meeting, “But dash it all, Nicholas, what did you do it for? Why, you almost converted me!”

“Policy, my friend, policy!” laughed Nicholas lightly. “Man is naturally and ineradicably an adventurous animal. Civilisation cramps his means of satisfaction of his hunger for adventure. Its only escape valve is gambling. Sit on that safety valve and he will blow up. He is bad enough when he is allowed to gamble, but when force of any, kind is used to prevent him, my harvest is redoubled.”

“Well,” commented Tydvil, “don’t carry your reforming zeal too far, because another speech like that and you’ll close every racecourse in the State. It’s like killing the auriferous goose.”

“You can insure the life of that bird with perfect confidence,” grinned Nicholas.



“I’m glad to hear it,” responded Tydvil, “because I have not yet seen a Melbourne Cup, and I don’t want to miss the next.”

But Nicholas had become a personage overnight. About the only doors in the State that were not open to him were those of the Racing Club and the Amateur Turf Club. But, as Nicholas told Tydvil, he was sure of all the numbers of both of those institutions for the propagation of experience and of horse, so his exclusions from their circles did not matter.

## CHAPTER XXV

There had been only one shadow on Amy's happiness—the strange disaster that had befallen her dinner to Nicholas. But her new friend had erased the deeper tones of that shadow during a call he had made on her on the following afternoon. He explained to an Amy, whose head was throbbing with what, had she only known it, was a perfect example of hangover, that he was so anxious about her health and that of her friends he felt it his duty to enquire.

Amy explained that the worst of it was, that neither she nor her friends could remember very much of what had happened. Was it true, she asked, as Julia Blomb had asserted, that Eva Merrywood had danced in an unseemly fashion with Edwin Muskat? Both Eva and Mrs. Ridgegay denied it strenuously. But she, Amy, seemed to remember something of the kind.

Mr. Senior assured her earnestly that nothing of the kind had occurred. No doubt the insidious nature of the poison, which was undoubtedly derived from the oysters, was responsible for hallucinations. Similar instances were fully authenticated.

Amy was extremely relieved by his assurance, and she was sure the Vicar would be, too. Poor Vicar! He was terribly troubled by some remarks that poor dear Mrs. Claire had made—or rather which he imagined she had made. What she could not understand, however, was how he (Mr. Senior) had so fortunately escaped from the trouble. Mr. Jones, also, had been marvellously preserved.

Mr. Senior could only suggest that they possessed some natural constitutional immunity from the poison.

But it was two days before Amy shook off the effects of her party. She was a little annoyed, though, that both Julia Blomb and Eva Merrywood seemed to hold her somehow responsible for the appalling headaches from which they suffered. A little inconsiderate and unkind, since she felt that their heads, for throbbing anguish, could not have compared with her own.

However, the success of Mr. Senior as her guest, and her triumph over Tydvil in the matter of the cheque, consoled Amy for the minor disaster of the party. Only one thing that troubled her was the recollection of the visit of that attractive but really impertinent Mr. Brewer—the Mr.

Brewer who should have had a black eye but did not. That eye puzzled Amy. She was convinced that her Mr. Brewer was the office Mr. Brewer. If that were so, and she had but little doubt it was—"Then—then—why had Tydvil said...?" Here her thoughts paused. How could she tackle Tydvil on the grounds of wilful falsehood calculated to deceive his wife, without disclosing the unceremonious visit of Mr. Brewer? Amy felt she had a grievance against someone, probably Tydvil, that she was not quite in a position to air.

Somehow the memory of Mr. Brewer's visit dwelt in her mind. It kept recurring at intervals. Then, one afternoon about ten days afterwards, she felt an unaccountable urge to take a long walk. That was most unusual, because as a rule Amy was not prone to exercise. For a time she hesitated. Then there came the longing for a stroll under the trees along Alexandra Avenue. There seemed a strange fascination in walking quietly and alone through the sunlight and shade of the wide elms and planes.

She dressed carefully and by a sudden impulse she put on that new hat—it had cost five guineas—that she had bought on the memorable afternoon of her meeting with Mr. Senior. Standing before her mirror its chastening influence on the usual severity of her frocking gave her a warm feeling

of satisfaction. Ordering her car she directed the chauffeur to drive into town, but as she approached Alexandra Avenue, she changed her mind. She commanded Carter to stop. Alighting, she said that she thought a walk would do her good. He might return home. She would, if she required it, take a taxi back.

Carter, whose love and respect for Amy might have been represented by minus signs, wondered, in very unseemly thoughts, what the dashed hen-wowser was up to. Registering an impious hope that she would drown herself in the river, he drove away.

Amy turned away and walked slowly along the avenue towards the Botanic Gardens. She had not been there for years, and determined to make them her objective. With her bag held loosely under her arm, she strolled along the tan path, wondering vaguely why she had not recognised the pleasure of pedestrian exercise earlier.

Suddenly her reverie was shattered by violence.

A man who had approached her from the opposite direction, suddenly lurched against her with his shoulder. As he did so, he grabbed at the

handbag beneath her arm. Almost off her balance, Amy was unable to protect her property except by screaming. This she did in a manner that would have done credit to a locomotive.

Turning as she squealed, she saw the flight of the thief arrested by a tall athletic figure. There was a brief scuffle, from which emerged a clean and nicely placed uppercut to the jaw of her assailant, who lapsed supine into instant oblivion. The tall figure stooped and retrieved Amy's property, which not worth anything like the punch in the jaw that was the bag-snatcher's sole reward for his enterprise. Its contents were a tube of peppermints and a handkerchief.

The tall figure stood beside his captive awaiting the now silent Amy's approach. The recognition was mutual and astonished.

"Mr. Brewer!" exclaimed Amy.

"Why! It is Mrs. Jones!" gasped Mr. Brewer.

"Oh! I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Brewer." Amy was really somewhat upset by the suddenness of the attack.

“Of course, I’m only too delighted to be of any service, Mrs. Jones,” William replied. “It was providential that I happened to see this scoundrel attack you.” He looked down at the upturned face of the malefactor, which was showing signs of a return to the realisation of earthly things. “I’ll wait here and try to get a lift from someone, and take this brute to the watchhouse.”

Amy glanced down at the unpleasant spectacle. Inwardly she thought gaol was too good for him, but she was Amy, and magnanimity was her long suit at the moment. “Poor creature!” she sighed. “Perhaps he has a mother! Please give him his liberty, Mr. Brewer.”

William bent over and jerked the deadbeat to his feet by the scruff of his neck. “I’m afraid your heart is too kind, Mrs. Jones,” he protested, “but, of course, your wishes are law to me.” There was a gallant deference in his voice. “Still, I think some punishment is indicated. Will you kindly look the other way for a moment.”

“Oh! Please, Mr. Brewer, don’t hurt him, too much,” murmured Amy, inwardly wishing that Mr. Brewer would not take her plea for mercy too

seriously.

As she turned away, Billy thrust a one pound note into the hand of the culprit. Then, with a scowling face, he swung the bewildered man round, and administered a hearty kick where it would do him the most moral good and the least physical harm. It was a very astonished bag-snatcher who moved with unwonted speed towards Princes Bridge, wondering at an inconsistency which could reward and punish so liberally.

Billy turned to Amy, gravely solicitous about the shock she had received. He begged that she would permit him to see her to the kiosk in the gardens and give her a cup of tea.

After a little hesitation, Amy allowed herself to be persuaded. She felt a warm glow at the flattery in his respectful but earnest consideration for her well being. As they passed through the gate into the gardens, she said, "You know, Mr. Brewer, I am really afraid that I should not have allowed you to persuade me. Your behaviour was so very unceremonious on our last encounter."

Mr. Brewer hung his head and murmured a humble apology for his



unpardonable presumption, and begged her forgiveness.

“I don’t think I should forgive you.” Her smile belied her words. “I cannot think what prompted you.”

Greatly daring, Mr. Brewer said, “Please, Mrs. Jones, don’t force me to tell you. I know I ought to be ashamed of myself, but I couldn’t help it, you looked so…” His pause invited her curiosity.

“So what? Mr. Brewer,” Amy insisted gently.

“Lovely,” breathed the wicked Mr. Brewer.

“Mr. Brewer…!” Amy’s heart danced as it certainly should not have danced. “You must never, never say anything like that to me again.” She tried hard, but the shocked rebuke she intended to convey somehow fell short or missed its mark.

“I promise I will try not to,” conceded the graceless but graceful Mr. Brewer.

Amy accepted the compromise.

At the kiosk Mr. Brewer fussed assiduously over Mrs. Jones's tea and comfort. When they were settled, Mr. Brewer's cheery talk made Amy feel they were almost old friends. They fed the sparrows with their crumbs and then dropped into friendly discourse on "ships and shoes and sealing wax." And when Mr. Brewer assured Mrs. Jones that he almost felt grateful to the bag-snatcher for the pleasure of their meeting, she allowed the admiration in his voice and eyes to pass without rebuke.

Indeed, time passed so swiftly, that Amy was astonished to find that it was half past five and they had been together for nearly three happy, hours. 'As she arose, Mr. Brewer expressed a deftly modulated regret that such afternoons could not be repeated.

"Would it not be possible...?" He stopped as though embarrassed.

"Would what be possible?" She smiled encouragement. "To have tea here again," dared Mr. Brewer.

Amy really hesitated this time. But she hesitated. Mr. Brewer urged with

respectful warmth.

Amy murmured, "Well, only once more. Once, mind—Mr. Brewer."

"Next Wednesday" Mr. Brewer pleaded.

"No. Thursday." Amy felt she should not make things too easy for Mr. Brewer.

Forbidding him to accompany her, Amy made for the river gate.

Now there is little in this rather dull encounter, in itself, to make it worth recording. But there were two circumstances that made the meeting memorable.

The first, and most important, was that while Mr. Brewer and Amy were enjoying their tea at the Kiosk in the Botanic Gardens, Mr. Billy Brewer was also going about the business of Craddock, Burns and Despard in the city. Moreover, at the time Mrs. Jones and Mr. Brewer were leavetaking, Billy Brewer was perched on the corner of Geraldine Brand's writing table exchanging lively and airy persiflage with his fiancée, while awaiting

the arrival of Tydvil Jones, who, Geraldine assured him, had been absent all the afternoon. Explain them as you may, but the circumstances were as related.

The second circumstance that marked the meeting of Amy and Mr. Brewer was that at dinner that night, Amy said nothing to Tydvil about the bag-snatcher and less about her meeting with Mr. Brewer. Indeed, without actually committing herself to an untruth, Amy led Tydvil to believe that she had spent the afternoon at the office of the Moral Uplift Society.

It was rather remarkable, too, that Tydvil accepted her implied movements without question; but Amy would have been staggered had she been endowed with the gift of reading his thoughts. These were uncomplimentary, amused, and ribald.

Fortunately, too, for Amy's peace of mind, she was spared the knowledge of the discussion of her afternoon's encounter between Nicholas Senior and the notorious Basil Williams. With his hat at a rakish angle and a cigar in the corner of his mouth, Basil Williams sat on the edge of Tydvil's writing table, swinging his legs as he spoke.

“It worked perfectly, Nicholas,” he said. “You timed everything to the moment. But, why didn’t you tell me you had planned the bag-snatching episode?”

“Better to have it spontaneous,” Nicholas chuckled. “Your gallant intervention would have carried conviction to any woman’s heart.”

“Really,” Basil Williams smiled with inward satisfaction, “I felt quite proud of that upper cut. But it was pretty rough on the bag-snatcher you selected for this job.”

“I agree heartily,” replied Nicholas, rubbing his jaw softly. “I deserved the pound note you gave me, but you might have spared me the parting benediction. You kick like a war horse.”

“You?” exclaimed Basil Williams in a startled enquiry. Mr. Senior nodded his affirmation. “Personal supervision is essential in delicate plans such as yours.”

“Oh! By Jove! I’m sorry,” Basil said contritely. “I never dreamed...”

Nicholas waved aside the apology airily. “Don’t worry. I’m inclined to think you’ll get even a greater kick out of, the affair than I did.”

“You know,” Basil Williams remarked thoughtfully, “it’s a queer thing that a man can be married to a woman for years and know so little about her.”

“Umph!” chuckled Nicholas, “a recognition of the fact is the beginning of wisdom in a married man.” Then he went on in a reminiscent tone, “Listen, my friend. Since the day I met Eve, I have met and known millions and millions of women. Women have sent me millions of men, and I have heard their stories. Millions of women have come to me of their own accord, and I have heard their stories...” he paused a moment, and added, “and I have never believed one of them. I have studied women intensively, I have studied them derisively, and I have studied them seriously. But Tydvil, believe me, I know I am no nearer to an understanding of them than when I began.”

“And so?” Tydvil queried, as he paused.

“I’m a bachelor.” Nicholas shook his head slowly. “Aye, my friend, that

is the sole grain of wisdom I have garnered from my studies. Of knowledge, they brought me nothing.”

“Then!” exclaimed Tydvil—Basil Williams “if you can’t understand ‘em, how the heck can we be expected to know anything about ‘em.”

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders. “One of the Divine mysteries. The book is sealed to me and mine and man.”

For a while they smoked in silence, then Tydvil asked tentatively, “Do you think they understand themselves?”

Nicholas laughed shortly. “Completely—as completely as they understand men. And a major feature of their incomprehensibility is their brazen pose of not understanding themselves. I’ll tell you something I have never admitted to anyone else. Since men walked on earth no man has been able to fool me for a minute. But, Tydvil, it makes me blush all over to remember how often women have deceived me—me! Mind you, I have learned from sore experience never to trust one of them for a moment. I am always on my guard. But over and over again some insinuating white skinful of guile has snatched a man, who was absolutely mine, right out of my very

hands. Pha!”

“I understand your feelings,” said Tydvil sympathetically.

“Ah, well,” Nicholas sighed. “I suppose it evens itself. I have the statistics and find that, year in and year out, they send me as many men as they cheat me of. I ought to think myself lucky it’s no worse.”

There was another silence that was broken by a laugh from Nicholas. “That reminds me,” he said, “I had a very pressing offer of two policemen from your friend Julia Blomb the other morning. Your doing,” he added.

“How?” demanded Tydvil.

“You gave her address as that of Basil Williams to the police. They got her out of bed before daylight, searching for you. She wound up a five minutes’ oration by consigning the two victims in particular to me, together with the entire force generally, from boots to helmet.”

“Wish I’d been there,” smiled Tydvil happily.



“Since then,” Nicholas continued, “she has written to the Chief Secretary—that woman has a stirring literary style, and a gift for invective—and he passed his tribulation along to the Commissioner of Police, with annotations and caustic decorations.”

“There’s gratitude,” grinned Tydvil. “I voted for that man last election.”

“I am only telling you this,” went on Nicholas, “to remind you that Basil Williams is not very popular with the police force at the moment.”

“And that, after all the publicity I am getting for them,” said Tydvil in an injured tone. “Did you notice those letters in the papers this morning about my escape from custody, and police inefficiency?”

Nicholas nodded. “It may interest you to know that the Commissioner has also passed on the ukase, even more emphatically than the Chief Secretary, that Basil Williams must be recaptured.”

“Poor chaps! They didn’t need bawling out on my account. I’ll bet every one of them, from the Sergeant at the watchhouse down, is more anxious to

get hold of me than the Chief Secretary or the Commissioner.”

“Precisely!” Nicholas nodded. “At the present time there are fifty large and angry men raging through the streets and night resorts, all with the one thought in their minds. The sermon the Commissioner preached to a special parade has hurt their feelings.”

“That makes it rather awkward,” said Tydvil reflectively. “I was promising myself a treat for this evening.”

“Now what?” There was amused interest in the interrogation.

“Well, you see,” Tydvil explained, “it’s the night of the monthly meeting of the Committee of the Society for the Suppression of Alcohol, and I was thinking...” He hesitated.

“Go on,” prompted Nicholas. “Let’s have it!”

“Well, I was thinking how pleasant it would be to meet Edwin Muskat in the street after the meeting and punch his nose—just once.” Tydvil hastened to add.

“Puerile, but pardonable,” Nicholas smiled.

“I know it’s puerile,” Tydvil pleaded. “But remember, Nicholas, I never had a chance before of being a boy, and besides, that nose is begging to be punched.”

“Looked at in the light of a pious duty, the project is excusable,” Nicholas conceded. “I hold no brief for that nose, believe me. It only occurs to me that with all those plain-clothes and uniformed men at short call, Edwin Muskat’s might not be the only nose to be wrecked this fine night. Think it over.”

“No!” Tydvil’s voice took on a ring of determination. “Hear me, Nicholas!” He declaimed:

Breathes there a man with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
I’ll punch that nose till it runs red.

“Two of those lines are by a patriotic poet named Scott. The last and, and

I think, the best, is my own.”

“The sentiments are admirable,” Nicholas agreed. “But I suggest you adopt another individuality for your pilgrimage.”

“Never!” exclaimed Tydvil defiantly. “I am proud of Basil Williams, and I will fight under no other or lesser banner.”

Nicholas looked up at Basil Williams from his armchair reflectively. “Do you know, Tydvil,” he said, “for a man of your cloistered upbringing, your capacity and appetite for lawlessness are most refreshing. From your past record I did not think you had it in you. And I am not easily surprised.”

“Cloistered upbringing is right,” sniffed Tydvil. “Jove! Nicholas, can you realise what it means to me to cut loose? From the day I was born till the day we met, I have been ruled by a despotism of Don’ts—Women’s Don’ts at that. You’re right! It is puerile to go out and sock Muskat on the nose. But if I had had a normal boyhood I would have been able to slam him on the jaw when we were both kids, and we both would have made better men for it. Now I have to get it out of my system as a man.

Lawless is right!” Then he went on, “Believe it or not, but if a cop or two should show up, I’ll feel better for having a turn up with them.”

“It looks as though I am in for a busy night,” was Nicholas’s comment.

“One thing,” Tydvil protested as he slipped off his perch on the table.

“I don’t want you to dry nurse me this time. You needn’t trouble to keep my friends off the track. I’m willing to take the risks.”

“The risks will be there, my friend,” warned Nicholas. “The sergeant has offered a reward of five dozen of beer for the man who brings you in. He’s in a vindictive mood.”

“Let ‘em all come,” Tydvil replied. “You see, Nicholas, swatting Edwin Muskat’s nose, per se, will provide more satisfaction than excitement. Dodging the cops, if any, will add the essential ginger.”

“Good!” laughed Nicholas. “I will adopt a policy of strict neutrality.”

“I want to see if I cannot pull through without help,” said Tydvil as he turned to the door. “I won’t call on you unless I am in extremis. The

meeting should be nearly over by now.”

Although Basil Williams was determined, he was by no means reckless. From the entrance to the warehouse he made a careful reconnaissance of Flinders Lane before he stepped on to the footpath. Then he turned west towards Queen Street keeping well in the shadow, but carefully avoiding any appearance of stealth. He knew that, though the search would be mainly confined to the east side of Elizabeth Street, Basil Williams was not safe anywhere in the Metropolitan Area that night. Still, the almost deserted business side of the city offered the best protection. Its devotion to high finance and high buildings provided no attraction for roysterers.

Twice, before he reached Queen Street, he blessed the system that put the police in shiny helmets from which the street lights gleamed, and made them a beacon for evil doers to avoid. Each time he had sufficient notice in which to pull himself together and pass the danger spot with serene and unhurried stride that disarmed suspicion.

Turning into Queen Street, he crossed Collins Street, where he slackened his pace and carefully observed a building on the opposite side of the

street near Little Collins, Street. In three windows on the third floor, lights were burning. Basil Williams stepped into the shadow of a convenient doorway, and waited. During the ten minutes he waited, speculating on the ownership of two cars parked across the road, not more than three people passed his shelter. Then a policeman on his beat went by in measured dignity towards, Bourke Street. Basil Williams breathed a blessing on him as he crossed Little Collins Street, as the lights he was watching on the third floor opposite vanished.

Two minutes later from the door of the building opposite a group of people stepped into Queen Street. As they did Basil Williams moved from his lair and crossed the wide thoroughfare. The group, which consisted of five men and two women, the Executive Committee of the Society for the Suppression of Alcohol, paused to say their farewells before separating. One of the women was Mrs. Tydvil Jones, whom Basil Williams did not expect to see there because of the absence of her car. More so, as at breakfast that morning, she had expressed her intention of not attending the meeting. He was unaware that her colleague, Mrs. Farley, had picked her up at the last moment, as the meeting threatened to lapse for want of a quorum.

Her presence added to the joy in the heart of Basil Williams as he approached the group. A swift glance in either direction showed him that Queen Street was empty of all but himself and the Committee, except for a man standing on the corner of Bourke Street, about one hundred yards away. Every member of the committee was an old and unvalued friend. The more he saw of them the less he valued their acquaintance, until his esteem for them had almost reached vanishing point.

The chattering group became silent as a large stranger joined it. Basil Williams raised his hat courteously and enquired, "May I ask if one of you gentlemen is Mr. Edwin Muskat?"

"That is my name," replied the secretary for the Society for the Suppression of Alcohol, with an oily smile.

"I have been keeping something for you for a long, long time, Mr. Muskat," said the stranger with deceptive gentleness, "and this is my first opportunity to hand it over."

"Indeed!" replied the now deeply interested Edwin. "That is very pleasant of you, sir. I will be glad to receive your gift."



“I sincerely trust and hope you benefit from it.” The voice of the stranger was still very gentle. “Here it is.”

Wham!!!

Basil Williams had withdrawn half a pace as he spoke. The distance and direction of his aim were calculated with loving fidelity. It was more than fifteen minutes before Edwin Muskat returned to a knowledge of things mundane. When he did the throbbing anguish of a devastated proboscis made him wish, very heartily, that he could lapse into unconsciousness again.

But during that fifteen minutes things had been happening things that Edwin Muskat would have deplored deeply, but things which one less regenerate than he would have enjoyed immensely.

For a few brief seconds Mr. Muskat’s six colleagues stared uncomprehending at the collapsed form on the pavement. For the moment they were, although on their feet, as stunned as Edwin Muskat. It was Mrs. Farley who first recovered from the trance. Through her dizzy brain

arose to the surface the thought that the occasion demanded screaming. So she screamed. Mrs. Farley had a good screaming voice, and the sounds she emitted, confined in the high-walled canyon of the empty street, were of a good 500 parrot power.

Amy's contribution was, "Oh! You—you—horrid brute!"

What was of more interest to Basil Williams, however, was the "Infernal scoundrel!" from one member of the committee as he flung himself on the assailant with intent to do grievous bodily harm. Spurred on by his example, the other three barged in, fortunately getting very much in one another's way.

Four very unathletic men, unpractised in street brawling would, in ordinary circumstances, have been small odds against Basil Williams. But he had noted that the figure at the corner of Bourke Street was bearing down on the scene at speed that suggested both youth, strength and endurance. It was for this reason, and somewhat against his better feelings, that he was obliged to deal swiftly, and in a highly unorthodox manner with the four old and unvalued friends of Tydvil Jones. He reinforced his lashing right and left fists with knee action that would

have ensured his disqualification for life from any, boxing stadium. In as many seconds he had skittled his four opponents across the pavement. Then he turned and departed—in haste.

There was good cause for his haste.

Mrs. Farley's vocal efforts continued unabated and had drawn several more figures from Bourke Street, as well as two from Collins Street. Basil Williams's suspicion that the man on the corner was a plain-clothes constable was only too well grounded. Already he had covered half the distance and was a bare fifty yards behind when Basil's flight began, while his one-track mind made him disregard totally the shrieking woman and the sprawled group on the footpath to concentrate on the pursuit.

Basil Williams thought as swiftly as he moved. As he met the two men running towards him from Collins Street he pulled up and panted. "Man murdered—hurry—I'm running for the police." He ducked on, and the two night prowlers increased their pace in a lively curiosity to be among the first to inspect the corpse.

Luck he did not deserve saw Basil Williams safely across Collins Street,

but here it deserted him. Two uniformed men, attracted by Mrs. Farley's high C's, and who glimpsed the flying figure from Collins Street, sprang into action. They rounded the corner into Queen Street only a few yards ahead of the plain-clothes man, and little more than twenty yards behind Basil Williams. One shouted a peremptory command to halt—a command which the fugitive was in no mood to obey. Basil thought he was moving on top gear at the moment, but he almost redoubled his pace when he heard behind him the vicious report of a revolver and instantaneously beside him, the more vicious pin-n-g of a bullet striking the pavement.

His long association with Flinders Lane had given Tydvil Jones an intimate knowledge of the less known geography of the locality. All its side lanes, dead ends, and bolt holes were clear in his mind; and well they served Basil Williams in his hour of tribulation. Nevertheless, he swore fluently and wholeheartedly when he recognised that the knowledge of his pursuers was equal to his own.

By desperate and devious windings he finally reached Elizabeth Street, crossing in a flash under the nose of a tram, and expecting every moment to hear another shot from behind him, where he knew his pursuers now numbered eight or ten. The risk he had taken with the tram gave him a few

yards extra margin. He darted up Flinders Lane in the hope of reaching the warehouse.

Then fell calamity.

Not more than twenty feet from the corner he charged fairly into Senior Constable O'Connor. The recognition was mutual. Basil Williams had a split second in which to draw up and execute a tactical plan. He slugged mightily with his left and kicked simultaneously with a hearty right foot. The two came down in a heap on the narrow footpath. Senior Constable O'Connor reached out a purposeful hand for the wriggling Basil Williams, who promptly bit it vigorously.

The constable spat out a three-word character sketch of Basil Williams that could not be printed even in these liberal days.

Basil was on his feet before the last word was uttered, and, aiming a hearty kick at the ribs of the half risen O'Connor, sped on his way. But the game was nearly up, and so were O'Connor and the rest of the hard-bitten crew of pursuers. Basil Williams felt his legs were losing their spring while those of O'Connor at least were fresh, and were also

spurred on with not unrighteous wrath.

As he swung into the Centreway with the leading hound not twenty feet behind him he gasped out an appeal to Nicholas. As he did so he tripped and fell. The next instant his pursuers were round the corner and on him.

Lying face down as he had fallen, he heard the chase stop beside him.

Then came a voice—an astonished voice: “Cripes! This isn’t the bloke we were after.”

Enlightenment and gratitude flashed into Tydvil’s mind.

Not unkindly hands turned him face up. He kept his eyes closed and assumed an expression that he hoped would register pain.

Then came another and solicitous voice: “By Jove! It’s Mr. Tydvil Jones. That swine must have knocked him out.”

A strong arm went under his shoulder and raised him up. Tydvil’s dazed eyes looked up into the face of Senior Constable O’Connor.

“What happened, sir?” asked O’Connor.

Tydvil’s pause before answering was deftly prolonged. Then he gasped weakly, “I was just returning to my office when a tall man turned the corner. He struck me in the chest—I...”

Anxious voices cut him short. “Which way did he go?”

“Straight on I think,” replied Tydvil, still weakly, “at least, I suppose so.”

The group of men looked from Tydvil along towards Collins Street. The Centreway was manifestly empty but for the group round Tydvil, who was making shaken attempts to get on his feet. Three or four ran along to the side lane and reported it empty.

“Got clean away!” snorted one of the uniformed men. “Wonder who he was?”

Senior Constable O’Connor, who had helped Tydvil to his feet, glared round the group. “In case you’d like to know, it was that so-and-so,

Basil Williams—and,” he added, “he’s done us again.”

He turned again to Tydvil. “Do you think, sir, you could recognise that man again?”

Tydvil shook his head doubtfully. “You see, constable,” he said, “it was all so dreadfully sudden. I scarcely caught a glimpse of him. All I remember is that he was taller than I, and that he was wearing a dark double-breasted suit. Probably blue serge.”

Tydvil, himself, was wearing a single-breasted grey worsted, for which he inwardly and piously thanked his luck.

Senior Constable O’Connor, who was engaged in tying a handkerchief round a bleeding wound on the edge of his palm, expressed sympathy for the shaking Mr. Jones had received, and promised that in the near future he would settle all outstanding accounts with Basil Williams. His offer to assist Mr. Jones as far as his office was accepted gratefully and courteously.

Beyond what the plain-clothes man could tell, that there had been the



deuce of a brawl in Queen Street, the cause and extent of which he was unaware, none of the pursuing group could inform Mr. Jones of the earlier activities of the now notorious Basil Williams.

Parting from O'Connor at the warehouse, Tydvil rang for a taxi in which he reached home, he was glad to learn, before Amy. For reasons particularly his own, Tydvil went to bed immediately.

Next morning he delayed his breakfast while he searched two morning papers. Both gave lurid, but varied and not altogether accurate accounts of the dastardly assault on Mr. Edwin Muskat by a man who was undoubtedly, Basil Williams. Amy's name was conspicuous among those present. Neither paper referred to his own mishap.

By the time Amy arrived at the breakfast table, almost bursting with the story of her night's adventure, Tydvil was prepared to nip her narrative in the bud. He received her formal "Good morning, Tydvil dear," with an icy stare. Then, in shocked surprise, he told her that her name was blazoned in the papers in connection with some very disreputable brawl in which Edwin Muskat was concerned, also.

“Of course, Amy, I acquit you of personal blame,” he said coldly, “but I do think, considering our standing in the community, that you have been indiscreet, and that such a deplorable association could have been avoided.”

Amy almost choked under the attack. “Don’t you understand, Tydvil, that the assault on Edwin Muskat was cowardly and utterly unprovoked,” she protested.

“Amy,” he asked in a pained voice, “do you mean to tell me that a perfect stranger walked up to Edwin Muskat and struck him violently in the face, and without provocation?”

“That’s just what happened, Tydvil,” she snapped.

Tydvil’s lips assumed a severe judicial line as he looked coldly at his wife. “Of course, Amy, I must accept your explanation. I hope other people will be as generous to you.”

“But...” He waved aside her further explanation with an airy gesture.

“I am very much afraid, my dear, you will find that most people will assume that Edwin Muskat, or someone on the scene, must have given some cause for offence. Men do not commit such assaults as the whim of a moment.” He stood up and walked to the door. “I would rather not discuss the matter further,” he said, turning round, “but you may rely upon me to support your version of the fracas loyally.”

He departed as one who has sacrificed the principles of a lifetime to save the honour of his house. Amy stared after him, hot under the injustice of his aspersions and innuendoes, but feeling helpless to retaliate. By some unaccountable means, Tydvil had deprived her of her prerogative of rebuke. She recognised also, that, for the second time, he had defeated her in a breakfast-battle.

## CHAPTER XXVI

That morning Geraldine Brand entered the portals of C. B. & D. a very pre-occupied young woman. She had left her home somewhat troubled that the case of Cranston v. Cranston, Brewer CoRespondent, had been listed for hearing sooner than she or Billy had anticipated. Though she was concerned more with the possible unpleasant publicity than with the outcome of the case.

Billy, however, was driven completely into the background of her thoughts when, in the train on her journey to the city, she read an account of Basil Williams's activities of the previous evening. Her's was a morning paper that Tydvil had not seen. In addition to the story of the dastardly assault on Mr. Edwin Muskat, whose nose was, fortunately, not broken, but very painfully injured; her paper also told of a cowardly attack on Mr. Tydvil Jones, the well known merchant and philanthropist.

Geraldine's head was buzzing with mixed surmises and preposterous ideas as she walked through the warehouse. She was too absorbed to notice her surroundings until, passing through the railed enclosure, she found the door of the office of the well known merchant and philanthropist closed.

This was unusual, because by her orders to the office cleaners it, and the windows, were always left open until her arrival.

She opened the door, took one step across the threshold and stood motionless, sniffing fastidiously at a close atmosphere that was saturated with the odour of stale cigar smoke. As she sniffed, her eyes took in every detail of untidiness that denoted the room had been untouched by the cleaner. The char-lady, she learned later in the day, was suffering from influenza.

Swiftly she crossed the floor, let up the blind and raised the heavy window; not until she had removed her hat and tidied her hair did she make a closer and methodical survey of the room. Never did Sherlock Holmes examine cigar ash, that liberally sprinkled the carpet, so scrupulously as did Geraldine Brand. The carpet also yielded two gorgeous cigar bands, and the waste-paper basket two more. For some moments she examined from a respectful distance one cigar butt in the grate and three in the fender. These, presently, she placed with reluctant fingers into an envelope which she sealed, and then, still more reluctantly, placed in her handbag.

Two tumblers beside the water bottle on the table next attracted her attention. Geraldine raised them to her nose and sniffed each one. Then she said aloud, "Well! I'm blessed!" Since the drains of fluid in the tumblers smelt strongly of whisky it was only logical to assume that the tumblers had been filled and had been emptied. There was no evidence to suggest they had been emptied on the floor.

Then for nearly fifteen minutes Geraldine worked vigorously to obliterate all traces of proceeding foreign to the known abstemious habits of Mr. Tydvil Jones. By the time she had finished and busied herself with her mail, the room and the atmosphere were restored to their normal ascetic purity.

But Geraldine's mind, as her hands worked swiftly over the correspondence of C. B. & D., was anything but normal. She had secured what she believed to be presumptive evidence that the impeccable Tydvil Jones not only smoked, but drank. Therefore, obviously, Tyddie was a fraud. But these were minor matters. Her mental perturbation was reflected in the viciousness with which she slashed the envelopes as she tried to arrive at the identity of Tyddie's drinking and smoking companion. He may have smoked four cigars, but, even he, was unlikely to have used two tumblers

for his potatoes.

But the major problem was the inexplicable relationship between Tyddie and the movements of Basil Williams. It might have been coincidence that prompted Basil Williams to take Tyddie's hat from the Carlton—if he did take it, which Geraldine very much doubted. But, thought Geraldine, what kind of coincidence was it that led Basil Williams, after assaulting Edwin Muskat in Queen Street, to commit another assault on Tydvil Jones close to his own warehouse? Summed up, that would make two highly improbable coincidences. In trying to fit together the pieces of the puzzle, Geraldine was inclining to the view that Basil Williams was Tyddie's unofficial guest.

What then?

After all, Tyddie's morals were not her affair, she reflected. Still, if Williams were Tyddie's secret partner in sin, why should he knock Tyddie out? As a figure of rectitude, Tyddie was tottering on his pedestal. But Geraldine decided that her discoveries were part of her job as his secretary, and therefore sacrosanct, even from Billy. No! Decidedly, she could not tell Billy either of her discoveries or her conclusions—not

yet, at any rate.

So, when that eminent warehouseman and well known philanthropist, Tydvil Jones, breezed into his office with a cheerful “Good morning, Miss Brand,” that suspicious young woman, while responding politely, inspected her employer with very critical eyes. Certainly, she thought, Tyddie did not look like a reprobate, but there was something about him that made him different from the Tyddie of but a few weeks gone.

She stared reflectively at the straight back as he hung up his hat, and through her lashes she took him in as he seated himself on the opposite side of the table. Then sudden enlightenment came to her. The new Tyddie radiated that same something of confidence and experience that was part of Billy Brewer’s charm. So had Billy, looked when she knew he had been in mischief, and had enjoyed it. She recognised the symptoms with that infallible certainty of intuition with which Providence has endowed woman for the better ordering of man.

As Tydvil settled himself, she looked up and said with grave concern, “Oh! Mr. Jones, I do hope you are none the worse for that disagreeable experience of last night.”



Tydvil, who, knowing two papers had overlooked his share in the Basil Williams episode, concealed his surprise admirably. But not admirably enough to escape the steady grey eyes across the table. Swiftly recognising her knowledge and its probable source, he replied, “It was really nothing to make a fuss about, Miss Brand. The papers have exaggerated a trifling incident. A man, who was probably intoxicated, ran into me and knocked me down. I think the poor creature was unaware that he struck me.”

“Fibber!” breathed Geraldine silently to her blotting pad. Then, aloud, “But is it not strange that it was that awful man Williams who assaulted you?”

“Williams?” The studied incomprehension was too well done.

“Yes, Williams. The same man who took your hat from the Carlton that night. The brute that the police are hunting for.” The innocent looking eyes were full of sympathy that she did not feel.

“Really? Was it the same man? I had almost forgotten him.” Tydvil’s voice

expressed mild interest only.

“Liar!” retorted Geraldine in her heart. But there was no trace of her unbelief in her voice as she went on. “It seemed to me such a strange coincidence that on two occasions your name, of all people’s, should be associated, even remotely, with that of such an awful creature.”

Tydvil took the letters she passed across to him, and as he unfolded the first, he shook his head and smiled gently. “Ah! My dear Miss Brand, we do not know enough about that poor fellow to judge him hastily.” The old sanctimonious Tydvil was speaking. “Perhaps if we knew the truth we would find he was more sinned against than sinning. Let us be charitable.”

“Hypocrite!” hissed Geraldine to her inner self. Then, with a toss of the shining head, she came back, “Well, in that case, all I can say is, that if half what the papers say about him is true, he must be frightfully sinned against.”

Tydvil looked at her reflectively, and remarked, “In considering such cases, Miss Brand, I always say to myself, ‘There, but for the Grace of God, goes Tydvil Jones!’” He bent over his letter with a pencil in his

hand.

For days past Geraldine had been manufacturing a bomb for Tyddie's sole benefit. Now she landed it on the bent head, where it exploded. "I feel strongly, Mr. Jones, because I can't help thinking that, somehow, this man Williams was responsible for the scandal in St. Kilda for which Mr. Brewer was blamed."

Tydvil's head never moved, but the pencil dropped from his right hand and rolled off the table to the floor. For a second the fingers of the left hand closed on the letter he was holding with a pressure that almost tore one corner of it away. Had Geraldine's gaze not been so intense she might have thought that he was too intent on his letter to hear her. But Geraldine saw and Geraldine knew, and her heart sang carols.

There was a long pause before Mr. Jones bent to retrieve his lost pencil. When he sat up again, his face was slightly flushed, as though from the exertion of stooping. He said, looking innocently across at her, "I beg your pardon, Miss Brand, but I'm afraid I was not listening to what you said."

Miss Brand repeated her words slowly and distinctly, and added, “And, of course, you and I know that Mr. Brewer could not have been involved in that disgraceful affair.”

Tydvil’s eyes were disarmingly frank. He smiled with kindly indulgence. “Of course we know it. I’m afraid you worry too much about that rather unfortunate affair.” He laughed lightly, and went on, “It is natural that our Mr. Billy looms so large just now with you—but a little out of proportion.”

The paternal and almost condescending tone of his voice so exasperated Geraldine, that her hands itched to fling everything movable on the table at the complacent head.

“I may be right,” she persisted. “In any case, I think it would be foul of one man to let another suffer for his misdeeds. That Williams man is just the sort to do it, I think.”

“It would be very shocking,” commented Mr. Jones unctuously. Then he terminated the discussion by writing a few words on the letter on his blotting pad and busying himself with the next.

That morning as Geraldine left his room, Tydvil watched the disappearing figure with speculative eyes. He was wondering very profoundly, and somewhat profanely, by what process of feminine devilry her mind had come to associate Williams with the St. Kilda affair. There was, too, in his thoughts, an unselfish envy, of Billy for the firm and pugnacious loyalty of Geraldine's love.

At her own desk, the subject of his speculations was thinking things about her employer that would have startled Tydvil. She was so deep in thought that she did not notice that someone was standing beside her until a soft but appealing little cough drew her attention. Geraldine looked up to see regarding her, with luminous eyes alight with amusement, the most handsome and distinguished looking man she had ever seen.

Her swift return from abstraction and the unexpected presence of the stranger drew from Geraldine a startled little "Oh!"

The smile spread from his eyes to his lips. "I am sorry. I'm afraid I surprised you." There was courteous concern in the voice.

“I—I...” Geraldine floundered and blushed. She would have been far more embarrassed had she known that the smiling stranger had read her thoughts on Tydvil as distinctly as though they had been spoken.

“Could I see Mr. Jones, please?” The quiet voice put her at her ease again.

“Have you an appointment?” asked Geraldine.

“No,” he shook his head. “But I think Mr. Jones will see me. My name is Nicholas Senior.”

That name, which had become known far and wide, brought another embarrassed “Oh!” from Geraldine. She fumbled for her extension phone and gasped “Mr. Nicholas Senior,” then, still flustered, “Yes, of course, Mr. Senior, Mr. Jones will see you at once.”

Mr. Senior bowed his thanks to Geraldine as kings bow to their feminine peers, and passed into Tydvil’s room. As the door closed behind him she drew a deep breath, and murmured in an awestricken voice, “Jerusalem! What a man! What a MAN!”

In Tydvil's sanctum, their greetings exchanged, Nicholas sat opposite his friend, whom he regarded with such evident amusement that Tydvil asked to share the jest.

"I doubt," replied Nicholas, "if you will find it as entertaining as I do." He nodded his head in the direction of the outer office, and went on, "I was smiling about that redheaded Cerberus of yours. You will remember, Tydvil, that I warned you she was dangerous."

Tydvil nodded thoughtfully. "She has me a bit worried, Nicholas."

"She will have you much more worried unless you are careful," Mr. Senior replied thoughtfully.

Tydvil recounted his morning's conversation with Geraldine and her unsettling suggestion of Basil Williams's connection with the Brewer scandal. "Now how on earth," he asked in an aggrieved voice, "could she have come at that idea?"

"My dear Tydvil," Senior grinned, "you impinge on matters beyond our ken.

I have never been able to fathom the workings of a woman's mind. Indeed, I doubt if Providence has been any more successful than I." He paused, and went on, "Would you like to know just what she was turning over under that red thatch as I came in?"

"I'd best know as much as possible," Tydvil muttered.

"Well," reported Nicholas, "I was beside her for several minutes before I made her aware of my presence. During that time she was busy persuading herself that it was not crazy to imagine Basil Williams and Tydvil Jones being one and the same person, but she was also recognising the sheer impossibility of enunciating such a thing, let alone of proving it."

"Hell's bells!" ejaculated the astonished Tydvil.

"Aye!" Nicholas laughed, "and they'll ring a peal for Tydvil Jones if that damsel can manage it."

"She's a witch," growled Tydvil.

"No! No, my friend!" Nicholas was still chuckling. "Just a woman—a



clever woman. You see how her mind has sliced clean through all improbabilities and cut straight into the truth, where a man's would have worked round and never come near it."

"And to think," Tydvil stared blankly at the wall over Nicholas's head, "that young baggage sat where you are sitting. She looked at me with those innocent grey, eyes. She took all my dictation—and all the time she was thinking that—that!" His fist came down hard on the edge of his table. "'Pon my word! Nicholas, it's enough to destroy one's faith in women."

"When you've had as much to do with them as I have," Nicholas smiled, "you will be far less credulous and far more cautious."

"By Jove!" Tydvil's voice was anxious. "She'll tell Brewer."

"You don't know that girl, Tydvil," Nicholas reassured him. "Neither her conscience nor her essential loyalty will permit her to discuss your affairs with him."

"What am I to do?" Tydvil appealed.

“Sit tight,” Nicholas advised. “Let her guess what she likes. She is too clever to put her suspicions into words—unless...!” He paused.

“Unless what?”

“At an unlikely juncture where she needs to defend Brewer—and I can guard against that,” Nicholas said.

“Sometimes I think the world would be better without them,” Tydvil reflected.

“Perhaps,” conceded Nicholas, “but very, very dull.”

“Oh! That reminds me—it was what I wanted to see you about. I would like you to keep a close watch on Brewer this afternoon,” Tydvil said.

Nicholas raised an interrogative brow.

“One William Brewer,” Tydvil grinned, “has an appointment in the Botanic Gardens at three o’clock this afternoon, and he does not wish to risk any

intrusion of the other.”

Nicholas nodded. “And how goes the romance? If the question is permitted.”

“We call each other Amy and William.”

“Not so bad,” Nicholas nodded with interest.

“And I have raised her hand to my lips without rebuke,” Tydvil added.

“Better still.”

“Well,” Tydvil spoke judicially, “I bow to your riper experience, but I should have put it ‘Not so good’ and, ‘Worse still’.”

“One thousand pounds for the Moral Uplift Society,” prompted Mr. Senior.

“Yes,”—Tydvil’s voice grew hard—“One thousand pounds!”

“And that address of thanks the society gave you.” Nicholas turned the

knife in the wound.

Tydvil's jaw set harder. "See here, Nicholas! I don't want to be greedy. Would you like to act as locum tenens for me this afternoon?"

Nicholas's eyes danced. "Get thee behind me, Tydvil!" he replied with mock severity. "No, the plan is all your own and all that goes with it."

"It's a queer experience," Tydvil said thoughtfully, "to find Amy pleasant and quite charming in her manner. I have heard that she has a frustrated life because of a husband who does not understand her. She tells me she needs sympathy and cherishing to express herself fully. It appears that Mr. Jones is out of harmony with her higher life."

"Umph!" commented Nicholas. "My own limited but sufficient experience suggests that she does not need extraneous aids to help her to express herself fully."

"Same thing occurred to me," agreed Tydvil. "If I've only heard her on second gear, I hope I'm not about when she is going flat out."

“It all seems very familiar to me,” Nicholas said reminiscently. “Let me see! That bit about the need of sympathy and cherishing was not new when Venus fed it to Mars—poor chap! I was at Olympus for a week-end when that scandal broke. Thought it pretty poor sportsmanship of Vulcan making the affair public. We went along to a cocktail party with Bacchus afterwards. Juno was there and blamed Mars for everything.”

“Seems to me they are not very original then,” Tydvil said.

“No need—not the slightest. They know jolly well that a man will believe anything they tell him. Men ask for it—and they get it.” Nicholas spoke a little resentfully.

There was a pause that was broken by Tydvil. “Tell me, Nicholas, are you worried about anything?”

“Nothing that can be helped, I’m afraid,” Nicholas admitted.

“Anything I can do?” Tydvil asked solicitously. Nicholas shook his head.

“Nothing—the truth is that things are in a far worse mess here than I anticipated.”

“Cheer up!” Tydvil smiled. “They’ve been bad before, and mended.”

“Never like this,” Nicholas answered ruefully. “And the worst of it is it is my own fault for lack of foresight. Serves me right for listening to Judas Iscariot.”

“May I hear...” Tydvil hesitated.

“Of course.” Nicholas smiled. “No reason why you should not. It began less than a century ago only. Our immigration department noticed a decline in figures. They reported it was due to distinct mitigation of the old religious animosities, and the growth of sentiment against war—both serious factors from our point of view.”

“They would be,” commented Tydvil.

“Well, I appointed a Royal Commission to enquire. But you know what Royal Commissions are. They sent in a report of one hundred and thirty-five thousand volumes. The only value it had was a punishment to Royal Commissioners from earth. I made them read it. But Judas Iscariot, who

was chairman, sent in a minority report on one sheet of foolscap. I read it, and that is where I made the blunder.”

“I shouldn’t think one sheet of foolscap could offer more than one hundred and thirty-five thousand volumes report,” commented Tydvil.

“You don’t know Judas Iscariot,” answered Nicholas grimly. “Mind you, it was a magnificent piece of constructive hellishness. I admit that. It was such a thoroughly damnable idea, that I accepted it without weighing the consequence to ourselves. It backfired.”

“It must have been a nasty piece of work,” Tydvil said sympathetically.

“It was,” Nicholas continued. “He planned nothing less than a second great betrayal. In his preamble he emphasised the necessity for a doctrine that would not only turn race against race and nation against nation, but one which would also create internecine strife and inflame fratricidal hatred.”

“A pretty doctrine,” commented Tydvil dryly.

“There was more in it than that. The creed had to be, apparently, simple to gull fools and superficially beneficial to blind wiser men. Aimed at the destruction of religion, it had to win the support of churchmen—or some of them. But it had to be strong enough to wreck civilisation in a tempest of bloodshed.”

“Pleasant mind your friend Judas must have.” Tydvil was profoundly interested.

“Yes,” Nicholas admitted, “and he built better than he knew. In half a dozen lines below the preamble, he set out the doctrine of Communism. And I—may I be pardoned for it—let him do it.”

“So that is how it began.” Tydvil was awestricken.

“That is how it began,” Nicholas echoed. “Judas claimed that it needed his personal attention for propagation, so I let him loose on earth. He took the name—let me see—the name...” He drew his master card from his pocket. “Yes, that’s it—the name he took was Karl Marx.”

“What! Karl Marx was...” gasped Tydvil.



Nicholas nodded. "Judas Iscariot none other. As we expected, the creed spread like a disease. Look at the state of the world today because of it. And this is only the beginning."

"But," Tydvil was puzzled, "isn't that what Judas and you planned?"

"True," Nicholas sighed, "but we did not foresee the effects on our own Empire. For years now eighty per cent of our new population has been Communists, and they are keeping my dominions in a state of turmoil. We are never exactly peaceful, but our gentlemen have always observed certain decencies. These fellows don't recognise any, and are demanding a republic not that they have any chance of getting it."

Tydvil laughed.

"Nothing to laugh at," said Nicholas a little sourly.

"Forgive me," Tydvil said contritely, "I was merely thinking there was something of poetic justice in the reaction."

“Nothing poetic in it, believe me,” growled Nicholas. “You see, we have a very largely Conservative population—the fox hunting and old port type; to say nothing of a very populous colony of Royalties. You cannot expect gentlemen to tolerate these fellows. They don’t either,” he added.

“Ructions?” asked Tydvil, still amused.

“There are, and believe me, civil war in Hell is no joke.” Nicholas spoke as one with a genuine grievance.

“Hard luck.” Tydvil felt that his friend deserved sympathy;

“The trouble is, too, that my people are inclined to blame me, and I have to recognise they have cause for their loss of confidence.” Nicholas spoke glumly. “Would you believe it! Just before I left home some new arrival organised a sit-down strike.”

“Characteristic,” Tydvil observed.

Nicholas nodded. “But I soon settled that. I sent a five million volt charge through every fire-bar in Hell, and there will never be another

sit-down strike at any rate—for obvious reasons.”

“There does not seem to be any remedy for your trouble,” Tydvil said thoughtfully.

“There is,” replied Nicholas decisively, “and I am going to enforce it the moment I return home. You see, Tydvil, a Communist is not worth damning even, and I am not going to have them cluttering up Hell and creating a nuisance. Not only that, but they are going to suffer the punishment they deserve—and so is Judas Iscariot. He has it coming to him.”

“Is this going to be poetic justice?” Tydvil asked, laughing.

“It is,” Nicholas responded. “I am creating a new Dominion to which every Communist will be transported. In it the Communists will live with all their Communist doctrines rigidly enforced—and if that will not be a merry Hell, my name is not Nicholas Senior.”

“And Judas Iscariot?” asked Tydvil curiously.

“He will be my Viceroy and will administer the doctrines he created. Don’t think I am vindictive, my friend. It is my duty to administer impartial justice in my realms, and the fact that Judas is an old and valued friend is no reason for mitigation of his punishment. Eternity with Communism is the worst I can think of.”

It was Tydvil who broke the silence in which Nicholas sat brooding.

“Look, Nicholas,” he enquired hesitantly, “would there be any objection to my repeating what you have told me?”

Nicholas came out of his reverie. “No—none,” he said after a moment’s thought. “But it will be too late to do any good. That infernal doctrine of Iscariot’s has too strong a hold. But tell the story if you like.”

“Tell me,” asked Tydvil, “are Parlour Pinks included with the Communists?”

An expression of disgust came into Nicholas’s eyes. He waved his hand curtly. “I’m not interested,” he said shortly. “A Parlour Pink is a lower creature than a Communist.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

Tydvil had gained his heart's desire with Edwin Muskat's nose, but he had to recognise that his adventure had not improved the standing of Basil Williams in the community. In reporting the story the morning papers unanimously demanded the suppression of the now notorious roysterer. Their criticism of the police for another failure to lay their hands on him stirred Russell Street to its depths. Several scalp hunting members of the Opposition ragged the Chief Secretary in the Legislative Assembly on the way in which his department was mismanaged. Next morning he had a heart to heart talk with the Commissioner of Police. The Commissioner left the Ministerial presence with thoughts as red as his close shaven cheeks.

That heart to heart talk, as it filtered down to the lower ranks of the Metropolitan Police Force, lost nothing of its scathing satire. Each subordinate as he received it from his immediate chief added to and embroidered it as an outlet for his own bruised amour propre. By the time it reached the rank and file, both uniformed and plain-clothed, it had assumed the proportions of a hurricane of vituperative malediction.

Boiled down, however, it amounted to only three words: “Get Basil Williams!”

All this was reported faithfully to Tydvil by an amused Nicholas, who pointed out that he thought that there was not sufficient room in the Commonwealth of Australia for both the Commissioner and Basil Williams. “You know, Tydvil,” he added, “giving good advice is not my forte, though I indulge in it more often than churchmen would allow. Still, I do think you would be wise to adopt some less conspicuous individuality. I’ll admit, of course, that Basil Williams becomes an increasing source of high enterprise, but you will always be liable to have your amusements curtailed by a brawl. Besides, there is always the risk of a bullet.”

A stubborn expression came into Tydvil’s eyes. “Dash it all, Nicholas,” he exclaimed, “why should I be driven off the streets? I like Basil Williams. He has some jolly good friends, too. I’d lose them all as anyone else.”

A slow smile spread from Nicholas’s clean-cut lips. “Cherchez la femme,” he murmured.

“Nothing of the kind, you wicked old ruffian,” Tydvil laughed. “Except for his relation with the police, Basil Williams is eminently respectable.”

“You may not be aware of it, Tydvil, but that festive young woman named Elsie, who introduced you to the night life of the city, would be very sorry, to hear that assertion.”

Tydvil looked up sharply. “Nonsense!” he said. “She’s quite a nice girl.”

“Much more so than some of her more conventional sisters,” Nicholas agreed. “But at the present moment the police are using her as bait for you, my boy.”

Tydvil expressed an opinion about the police in terms that he would not have dreamed of using a few weeks earlier. They were ripe, fruity and concise. He was sitting at his table and, cupping his face in his hands, he stared at the wall opposite, his brow wrinkled in concentrated thought.

Nicholas from his armchair sat watching him. Presently the smile he wore

broke into a hearty laugh. “Magnificent, Tydvil! Magnificent! You’re a credit to me.”

The words brought Tydvil erect. “You...?” He broke off, staring at Nicholas.

“Understand? Yes!” Nicholas was still laughing. “I was wondering if you could find a way out.”

“Did I really think of that myself, Nicholas,” he asked, “without your prompting?”

“Word of honour, yes,” Nicholas replied. “I’m proud of you, Tydvil.”

“But can it be done?” Mr. Jones asked anxiously.

“It can be, and will be,” Nicholas assured him. “How many will you want?”

“I think a dozen would be enough,” said Tydvil after a moment’s thought.

“Twenty if you like,” Nicholas promised.



“Keep them in reserve. If I need more than a dozen I’ll call for them.”

“Are you going to be in it yourself?” enquired Nicholas.

Tydvil nodded. “The first I think. It should be perfectly safe. You can send the others along at about three-minute intervals.”

“Good,” Nicholas replied, “depend on me.”

Tydvil glanced at the clock on his desk. “Nine fifteen,” he said. “I’ll make straight for the Casino Club. Is Elsie there?” he paused to ask.

“Expecting you.”

“Right!” Tydvil responded briskly as he stood up. “Keep them away from me till I get there. They can pick me up at the Casino.”

Two minutes later, Basil Williams, with his hat at its usual insolent angle, was striding along Swanston Street. He had the bearing of a man who was going places to do things.

At nine forty-five all was quiet at the Russell Street Police Station. A few minutes earlier Inspector Kane had dropped in. Inspector Kane was a sore man. He knew Basil Williams only by name, but there was no man in the city whom he disliked more. Inspector Kane had thirty years of blameless service behind him, and Basil Williams had clouded its brightness. His sentiments towards Basil Williams at the moment were positively ferocious, but as he discussed that dissolute ruffian with the senior constable on duty his voice and bearing were coldly official.

The watchhouse at Russell Street can hardly be described as cosy. Those of my readers who have been arrested will remember that after staggering up the steps into a cheerless vestibule, they turned down a corridor to the left, to arrive before the counter of an office at its end. If it was not their first appearance they, of course, received a more or less cordial reception from behind the counter, where a face was never forgotten.

The furnishing of the charge room is neither lavish nor tasteful. Besides the counter there is one large plain deal table, and one unsympathetic chair. On the wall opposite the door is a clock. On the counter is a

telephone, a type-writer, and the charge book. The wall on the right as you face the counter is hidden by shelves that hold a large library of photograph albums. The department makes a hobby of preserving the portraits of all its visitors. They are kindly folk. Fortunately, one is not detained there long before being conducted to the more homely comfort of the cells.

The visit of Inspector Kane was by no means usual. Of the two seniors on duty, one was wondering what the heck he was snooping round for, and the other was wishing to heck he would clear out. He sat on the corner of the table whence he had an uninterrupted view down the corridor of approach. His aspect was sombre and his speech matched his aspect.

“You both should be proud, as I am,” Kane was saying to an inwardly fuming audience of two, “to belong to an organisation which permits a common drunk and disorderly to walk out of his cell, to paint the town red, and to make monkeys of the whole force.”

“I was not on duty when he escaped,” protested one exasperated subordinate.

The voice went on without heeding the interruption. “And the newspapers! How they flatter us! How they enjoy Mr. Basil Williams! I don’t know whether we are more deeply indebted to them or they to us.”

There came the sound of scuffling feet and angry voices from the unseen vestibule. As the sound was normal none of the three took any notice of it.

“But perhaps we both should regard your Mr. Basil Williams as our benefactor. Should you ever see him again...”

The moody monologue was broken by a startled exclamation from one of the receiving officers.

“Holy smoke! It’s him!”

As he spoke there was propelled into the room, before a large plain-clothes man, a writhing, dishevelled and protesting figure. At the sight of him the eyes of the senior constable lit with a savage welcome.

“Basil Williams!” he almost shouted. Then, to the propeller, “Where did

you pick him up?”

“Down at the Casino Club with that redheaded tabby, Elsie Wilson—knew he’d come back there,” responded the guardian of the captive triumphantly.

“I insist on knowing the meaning of this outrage?” demanded the capture.

“I protest...”

“Cut that fooling out, Williams,” snapped the senior constable. Then, over his shoulder to Kane, he added, “This is Williams, sir.”

“How dare you say my name’s Williams,” barked the indignant captive. “My name is Mark Harding.”

Inspector Kane rose from his seat on the table and, leaning on the counter, inspected the prisoner with cold satisfaction. “So, you’re not Mr. Williams, you’re Mr. Mark Harding.”

“Yes!” asserted the prisoner furiously, “and who the (censored) are you?—you bladder-headed bun-faced son of a gun!”

Kane disregarded the personality and the question, and turned to the senior. “Quite sure?”

“I could pick him out, and swear to him from ten thousand,” asserted the senior.

“So could I, sir,” insisted his colleague. “Why, he’s wearing the same clothes!”

“I tell you my name’s Harding!” shouted the captive. “I protest. I demand to see a lawyer. You thick heads! How dare you arrest me, you blundering gang of double-ended baboons?”

“Such language, sir,” put in the senior. “Last time he was here he said I was the last of a long line of bachelors.”

“Indeed!” commented Inspector Kane, with interest. “I wonder how he found that out. Still,” he turned to the prisoner, “I think it only fair to advise you that the bench will not take a lenient view of your reflections on either my ancestry, which, I assure you, are baseless, or

on that of the senior constable on which I have no information.”

“Oh, shut your head and tell me why I am arrested!”

Kane leaned over the charge book. “Well,” he smiled, “Mr. Williams, for a start there are charges here of drunk and disorderly, assaulting six constables, damaging three uniforms, bad language, insulting behaviour, absconding from custody, destroying government property.” He turned over a page or two. “Here is another drunk and disorderly, insulting behaviour...”

“You’re talking absolute rot!” interrupted the captive. “I tell you I only landed here from Adelaide this morning. I’ve never been in Melbourne before in my life.”

“Dear me!” responded Kane tartly. “No doubt the bench will be interested to hear that tomo—.”

The word was snapped off on his lips, and Inspector Kane stood glaring at the doorway. There, framed, as a picture, stood a large uniformed man holding in check, with some difficulty, an exact replica of Mr. Mark

Harding.

Taking the staring silence of the group at the counter for delight too deep for words, the constable announced proudly, "I've got him! Senior, I've got him! Picked him up in Swanston Street."

As he spoke his captive broke from his grasp and hammering an angry fist on the counter, demanded an explanation for "a preposterous and unheard of outrage."

For a moment no one spoke. The three men behind the counter stared from one prisoner to the other. As they did, the newcomer made a rapid survey of Mr. Harding and blurted out an astonished, "Who the blazes are you, sir?"

Mr. Harding returned the stare with a slow "Well—I'm—blowed!"

Kane found his voice. "There seems, Senior, to be some element of doubt." Then, to the newcomer, with frozen politeness, "May I venture to enquire if your name is Basil Williams?"



“No, sir! It is not!” thundered the man.

“I was afraid so,” muttered Kane.

“I, sir, am Norman Gore, of Invercargill, New Zealand—and,” he shook a finger in Inspector Kane’s face, “perhaps you, sir, you will be good enough to tell me why the blue blazes I’ve been dragged by that walking lump of putty”—he pointed to the constable—“to your infernal police station. Tell me that!” His open palm smashed down on the charge book.

“Perhaps you can enlighten the gentleman,” said Kane, glaring at the senior beside him.

“I—I...” What the senior might have said was interrupted by a loud, commanding voice from the corridor.

“Keep your filthy hands off me, sir! How dare you touch me! By Gad, sir! I’ll have you broke for this!” The uniformed man by the door was thrust unceremoniously aside as a third edition of Basil Williams strode into the room, followed by Senior Constable O’Connor.

Number three raged up to the counter: “Who’s in charge of this lunatic asylum?” he demanded.

“Of course, you’re not Basil Williams, either?” Inspector Kane felt that his sunny disposition was becoming overclouded.

“Basil—Damme, sir! What do you mean?” Then, as O’Connor laid a detaining hand on his arm he swung round on him. “Take your hand off me! How dare you touch me! Damme! Stand to attention when you speak to me ‘Shun!’”

The savage ring of command in the voice brought O’Connor to an involuntary obedience.

“No,” murmured Kane to himself, “I fear this is not Basil Williams.”

“Now, sir! Who commands here?” He shot the words at Kane’s head.

Kane looked from the volcano to his two predecessors and waved his hand in introduction.

For the first time number three glanced at his companions in captivity.

“What the dooce is the meaning of this—this, er—beastly masquerade—this is a plot! A plot! I say!” Then, even more furiously, to Kane, “Do you know who I am?”

“If you are not Basil Williams,” Kane responded, “I will be pleased to hear it.”

“My name, sir, is Oliver.” His fingers dived into his vest pocket and drew forth a gold card-case. “Cyril Courtney Oliver—Sir Cyril Oliver, late Colonel of His Majesty’s Eighteenth Dragoons.” He thrust a card at Kane as though presenting an automatic pistol.

“Don’t believe him, sir,” O’Connor intruded excitedly, “he’s nuts. I know he’s Williams. I found him at the Casino Club talking to that Wilson dame. She called him Basil.”

“By Gad, sir!” shouted the infuriated Oliver. “You’re mad! You’re not fit to wear a uniform, sir!”

“Ah! Can it!” growled O’Connor. “You can’t fool me—why, you flaming cannibal, there’s the mark where you bit me the other night...”

Before his prisoner could retort, he moved aside and O'Connor caught his first clear view of the two other prisoners. As he did so he stopped speaking, his jaw stuck on a dead centre. He glared at Messrs. Harding and Gore and then transferred the glare to Sir Cyril Oliver. There was an evident attempt on his part to put his thoughts into words, but the only sound he emitted was something akin to that made by the plug hole of a lavatory basin as it empties itself.

Said Inspector Kane, very gently and patiently, "Are you prepared to swear your man is Williams, O'Connor?"

"I—I..." began O'Connor desperately.

"Precisely! O'Connor," Kane's smile was neither happy nor amiable.

"But, sir!" O'Connor found his voice. "There's something crook about this. One of them's Williams."

"Well, since you know more of Mr. Williams than anyone, perhaps you will pick him out. I may be pessimistic," Kane paused to wipe his forehead

with his handkerchief, “but it is a matter on which I would not care to dogmatise.”

At this juncture the three captives, pressing towards Kane, raised their voices in vigorous and vituperative protest on the indignity of their position. The three arresting constables joined the group, from which rose an acrimonious clamour, which was augmented by the earnest endeavours of the senior constable to silence them.

None noticed for a moment that the riot was smothering a smaller outbreak at the door. It was the plain-clothes man who announced its advent by a shout of, “Cripes! Here’s another ruddy Basil Williams!”

And there was.

The new-corner was not taking the situation kindly, for his advance to the counter, where the spectacle had stilled the tumult, was caused by his captor urging him forward with one hand grasping his collar and the other the seat of his pants. He brought up against the counter with “a dull, sickening thud.”

His face was crimson with fury as he yelled. “Bunch of wise guys, eh! I want the United States Consul! I’ll show you guys you can’t railroad an American citizen.”

Inspector Kane raised a restraining hand and interposed soothingly, “You are not by any means the Duke of Norfolk?”

“Quit kidding, flatfoot!” snorted the latest model of Basil Williams.

“Nor Basil Williams?” Kane’s voice was composed, but a little frayed at the edges.

“Look yeah! Which of youse guys is the big noise here, or are you all haywire?”

“Perhaps,” Kane suggested, “an inspection of your three friends will explain the situation.”

The citizen of “God’s Own Country” goggled at the other three captives, and shouted: “Frame up! I want the American Consul!”

No one heard Mr. Mark Harding murmur, “Three in a bunch, Nicholas.”

All were too intent on Sir Cyril Oliver, who evidently resented being classed as the newcomer’s friend, for he exploded in a blazing string of profanity that more than maintained the traditional reputation of dragoons for language.

“Hi!” shouted the senior constable. “You can’t talk like that here.”

“By Gad, sir! Can’t I?” snorted Oliver. “— — — — —.”

The effort wrung an unwilling gasp of admiration even from the senior constable, who imagined until that moment that he had nothing more to learn in graphic malediction.

But duty is duty. “I’ll book you for that—Colonel or no Colonel,” he declared grabbing his pen. Then, over his shoulder to his subordinate, “Answer that phone.”

Inspector Kane was feeling at the moment that his cup was too full to hold another drop of anguish. But the announcement that the Commissioner

was enquiring if Basil Williams had been caught made him feel that he had been inflicted with an unfair share of tribulation. As he took the receiver, the argument between officials and captives broke out with renewed strength.

Three times did he try to make the irascible voice from wires understand that four men, identical with Williams, had been brought in. Then, while he was spelling the word f-o-u-r to an uncomprehending chief, he suddenly looked towards the door and gasped, "No. I mean seven." The voice enquired with freezing sarcasm if he were quite sure he had not overlooked a few more Basil Williamses. It went on to assure Inspector Kane that only one Basil Williams was required—the right one. He appreciated the zeal that had collected seven, but—it went on—doubted if either the bench or the press would be so favourably impressed by the industry of the police. The voice would accept it as a kindness if Inspector Kane would report in due course if Basil Williams should be arrested, an achievement which seemed at the moment highly improbable.

Gently, replacing the receiver, Kane looked at it with a malevolence it did not deserve. Softly he repeated what he could remember of Sir Cyril Oliver's final outburst, then, feeling a little relieved, he turned on



the riot that raged across the counter. “Silence!” His voice crashed in on the uproar to which three newcomers were adding their quota.

“Take those men into the inner corridor and shut the door,” he ordered.

“You wait, O’Connor!” he added.

Seven protesting captives and six constables filed out of the charge room into the gloomy, bare corridor that led to the cells.

Kane watched them until the door closed. Then, hands deep in his trouser pockets, he paced to and fro with his head bent in thought. Neither the senior constable in charge nor his colleague cared to break into that reverie. The silence was broken by another shuffle of steps from the outer world. Kane paced on unheeding. Then a bright voice broke into his thoughts. “The beer’s mine, Senior! I’ve got him! I’ve got him!” From the pitying eyes of the two men behind the counter that juicy young constable met the basilisk glare from the pale countenance of Inspector Kane.

“Beer—beer—” the voice grated at him, “you’ll get—beer!” There was a pause between each word as though it were wrenched out. Then, “Take that man into the corridor,”—the trembling finger pointed—“and stay there

with him.”

He stood while the staggered constable removed his obnoxious presence and more obnoxious charge. Then he turned to O’Connor.

“O’Connor,”—the Inspector had himself under control—“you saw Williams on the night of the first riot. You arrested him the time he escaped from custody. You saw him the other night when he escaped arrest. Is that not so?”

“Yes, sir!” replied O’Connor.

“Do you honestly think you could pick him out of that gang of humming birds?” Through the closed door the murmur of voices indicated that the captives were still protesting.

“I thought, sir,” answered the stolid and bewildered O’Connor, “that I could swear to him anywhere, but now...” He paused.

“I understand.” Kane nodded with pursed lips. “What about you?” He turned to the senior and his subordinates.

“No hope, sir,” said one. “Same here,” replied the other.

“If you ask me, sir,” O’Connor ventured, “that Williams bloke’s put something across us.”

For once the sharp edge of adversity had taken the sting from Kane’s temper. He looked at O’Connor thoughtfully. “I’m crazy enough to agree with you, O’Connor, but...” He paused, and almost wailed. “Dammit all, how could he? Eight of them...”

“Nine!” said the senior, who was looking down the corridor. “There’s another coming.”

The four watched the entrance of a new candidate in silence; as a plain-clothes man led him to the counter. Entirely disregarding the pride of his captor and the wrath of the captive, the four officials examined the man with eyes trained to miss nothing.

“The dead spit of him, sir!” O’Connor spoke, “and the dead spit of every one of the others.”

Kane ordered the astonished couple to join the menagerie in the corridor.

“Do you men recognise what this means?” asked Kane as they disappeared.

“Williams had diddled us,” said the senior.

“That’s one way of putting it,” Kane agreed. “But how? It’s preposterous!”

“Can’t make me believe it’s coincidence,” the senior growled. “Nice fools we look.”

“And—look here, sir,” O’Connor broke in. “You can bet your life that swine Williams knows it, and he’s one of them.”

“Hopeless!” muttered Kane. “There isn’t a magistrate in the world who would convict.”

“It’s a put-up job, all right,” the senior muttered. “Prove it!” snorted Kane. “I suppose you did not finger-print Williams.”

“Never do it until the morning, sir,” the senior replied.

“Then we’re scuppered!” Kane’s voice almost broke. “And see what a hole we are in. We can never dare to try to arrest him again that is, unless he commits another offence and we get him red-handed.”

The others nodded a bitter acknowledgment of the truth. “What’s to be done, sir?” asked the senior.

“Nothing, it’s a washout! Lord send the press don’t get hold of the story. Kane walked from behind the counter and followed by O’Connor, passed into the inner corridor to be greeted by a storm of abuse and demands for immediate release.

“Line those men up!” Kane ordered.

Nine Basil Williamses shuffled into line and faced him defiantly.

Kane and O’Connor walked slowly down the line in the hope of a possible clue, but there was none.

He stood before them at last. “One of you,” he said, “I am convinced, is Basil Williams. It is with profound regret that we cannot positively identify him. To the other eight, I offer apologies for a mistaken identity, which any honest (he emphasised the word) man will pardon. You may all go, as there can be no further reason for detaining you. Though I am convinced that some of you at least are associated with Basil Williams. Go!” he hooted, as they paused as if to argue.

Kane watched them till they filed down the entrance corridor into freedom. Then he addressed the waiting constables: “Don’t bring in another Basil Williams unless you actually catch him committing an offence. Warn all other men you see.” Then he, too, departed.

That evening, before midnight, three more samples of Basil Williams were brought into the watchhouse. They were all rejected as though plague-stricken by the charge officer—especially the one, Sir Cyril Oliver, who was arrested for the second time that night. The senior constable in charge suffered the orderly room dressing down he received from the Colonel in a seething silence.

One Basil Williams spent what was left of the night at the Casino Club, enjoying the society of a lively and openly adoring partner whom he addressed as Elsie.

As Basil Williams said much later that night, in his bedroom, to Nicholas Senior, he had been given “the freedom of the city.” He went on to relate that during the evening O’Connor had returned to the Casino and had glared balefully at Basil Williams, but without attempting to hinder his movements. “I think,” Tydvil observed, “O’Connor would have given a month’s pay to bite me. He looked like it, anyway.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

For a few weeks Tydvil's days and nights passed in uneventful happiness. August had passed into late September. Although he by no means neglected his empire in C. B. & D., there were afternoons during which he did not appear at the office. The widening circle of friends made by Basil Williams were making some demands on the daylight hours as well as those of darkness. He was aware, but made no sign of his awareness, that Basil Williams was under close observation by unobtrusive men. In police quarters he was a subject of occasional heated argument, because, on comparing notes, different officers claimed to have watched him in diverse activities in diverse places. Inspector Kane himself had read a detailed report on a merry picnic Basil Williams had adorned one Saturday at Beaumauris. At the time the picnic was in progress he had been introduced to Sir Cyril Oliver by their mutual friend Archie Stone on the Moonee Ponds racecourse. Sir Cyril had been in a genial mood and freely forgave Kane for the inconvenience of his arrest.

Kane had also unprofitable consultations with Senior Constable O'Connor on the subject of the place of abode of Basil Williams. Every attempt that had been made to trace him, or anyone resembling him, to his lair,



had been a dismal failure. Williams or his doubles seemed to have an uncanny power of vanishing into thin air if he turned a corner or entered a building. Unfortunately, also, no Basil had committed any act that could be construed into a breach of the law.

“But, dash it all!” Kane spoke fretfully after the report of still another failure, “he must live or sleep somewhere.”

O’Connor looked glum. “Martin swears he never lost sight of him for a moment from the time he got into a train at Sandringham. He left the station by the Elizabeth Street entrance, crossed Flinders Street and walked slowly until he turned into Degraeves Street. Martin was not one hundred feet behind him, but when he reached Degraeves Street the brute had disappeared—not a sign of him.”

“Must have dodged into a shop. It’s not one hundred yards long, anyway!”

“Too late for that. They were all closed,” O’Connor assured him.

“But was there no one in the street?” demanded Kane. “Martin swears that the only soul in it was that wowser chap, Tydvil Jones, walking

towards him.”

“Rot!” grunted Kane. “Martin’s a dashed idiot. Did he question Jones?”

O’Connor nodded. “Jones said he hadn’t seen anyone pass him.”

Kane stared at his subordinate. “Well, one of them was a liar,” was his uncompromising retort. Then, sharply, “Didn’t you tell me Williams was wearing Jones’s hat on the night of the first brawl?”

“Oh! Jones explained that. The hat was stolen from the dining room at the Carlton,” O’Connor replied.

“Dashed queer,” Kane murmured thoughtfully, “that Jones was the only man in the Centreway the night you let Williams bite you and get away.”

The senior constable reddened at the memory and the taunt. “Jones wouldn’t say ‘Boo!’ to a goose. His missus allows him a bob a week pocket money, and washes his face and hands before she puts him to bed every night. Besides, there’s three inches difference in height and build.”

“What I mean is,” Kane waved an impatient hand, “that Jones might know more than we think he does.” But he added, “Though what that ginger-beer-swiggling pipsqueak would be doing with Williams is more than I know.” He glanced at a paper before him. “I see some Williams has thrown three hot parties this week—and two on the same night at different places.”

“That’s just it, sir,” O’Connor said glumly, “and neither of them may have been Williams.”

Kane waved him from the room with a gesture of mingled despair and disgust. As O’Connor reached the door, however, he called him back. “Put a couple of men on to watch Jones for a week or two,” he ordered. Then, seeing the expression on the senior’s face, he added, “And tell them to be dashed careful they’re not noticed.”

But Tydvil’s shadows drew a blank. Mainly because when Nicholas warned him of his followers, Tydvil was, to use his own expression, dashed careful there was nothing to notice.

But while Basil Williams was living a sinfully gay and happy life, Tydvil

Jones had a matter in hand that was rather more complicated than troublesome. Billy Brewer had asked for an audience with his chief, and had somewhat nervously informed him that Cranston had cited him as corespondent in a case that he, Brewer, intended to defend.

Tydvil's well acted dismayed surprise on a subject on which he was fully informed, added to apprehension. The Chief was inexpressibly shocked at the tidings. He pointed out to Brewer that he was facing the inevitable results of his reckless past. "It is a personal matter, Brewer, on which perhaps, I have no right to dwell! But I cannot help thinking that such a distressing affair must be extremely distasteful to Miss Brand."

Billy admitted that Geraldine felt the publicity would be extremely distasteful, but that she was in agreement with him that he should defend the case.

"You will perhaps recognise, Brewer," Tydvil said stiffly, "that while I think you may be taking the right course, I find myself in a somewhat difficult position. You will remember that in the police court proceedings I defended you effectually, but very unwisely, by giving evidence that was not based—er—on fact."

“I was very grateful, sir!” Billy conceded. “But I don’t think I will need your evidence. I have another witness in Geraldine, who saw Cranston’s wife that night.”

“Well,” said Tydvil at length. “Of course, you have a right and a duty to clear yourself from Cranston’s assertions. But should the Court find against you, I am afraid I shall have to reconsider our association. You will, I think, see for yourself, that such a scandal associated with C. B. & D. would be almost impossible for me to overlook.”

Billy bowed to the decision. He had expected that much, at least, and thought himself lucky that Tyddie did not rule him out on the sole ground of being named co-re.

Meanwhile, Tydvil sent for Cranston and diplomatically suggested that he should withdraw his petition on the grounds of reasonable doubt. But he found his man maliciously determined on vengeance on his wife and Billy Brewer. Tydvil, the head of C. B. & D., was obliged to recognise Cranston’s right as a husband. Tydvil, the sinner, knowing his own share in the affair, felt an unrighteous longing to punch the sneering

vindictive face across his desk. He knew, or felt he knew, that Hilda Cranston was as much sinned against as sinning, and that Cranston was actuated by cold-blooded malevolence rather than by righteous wrath.

Finally, having learned that Hilda Cranston had left her husband and obtained employment, he told the more or less injured man that he intended to dismiss Brewer should Cranston obtain his decree. “On the contrary,” he added, “should the Court decide against you, you must look for another position. I have not been aware, until now, of the cause of the friction in the warehouse between yourself and Brewer. I cannot have the place disorganised through your private quarrels.”

But a day or two later Tydvil had more cause for concern than he dreamed. Always generously concerned with the welfare of his employees, Tydvil noticed one morning that Geraldine was suffering from a slight cold. When they had finished with the mail, he said, “And now, the moment you have finished typing those letters, put on your hat and go home.”

“But...!” Geraldine began to protest.

“No ‘Buts’,” laughed Tydvil. “Brewer might get that cold and that would

be a nuisance. You might get worse and be laid up, and that would be a still worse nuisance. I might get it from you, and that would be a catastrophe. Tell Miss Marsden to take your work—and give her a dictionary. Her spelling is fearsome.”

Later that morning as Geraldine was tugging her hat on to the correct angle, Tydvil looked up. “Keep in the sunshine, Miss Brand,” he advised, “and don’t let me see you again until you’ve ceased being a walking menace.”

Geraldine bade farewell to Billy in a sheltered corner of the warehouse, where Billy recklessly defied the risks of infection, despite her laughing protests, and departed. Next day she felt better. It was a day that would make anyone feel better—pure unclouded sunshine with the first hint of Spring.

She rang Billy at the office and commanded that he should spend the evening with her. She also heard of his intentions for a busy day and other small, but to both, matters of prime personal importance, such as that she had not sneezed once, he had no trace of a cold, she hated missing their morning greeting in Tyddie’s office, he was feeling

miserable to see that Marsden kid in her throne, and that the flowers he had sent her were glorious and that she was wearing one at the moment of speaking.

The morning passed slowly. After lunch Geraldine reflected that it would be nearly eight hours before she could see Billy again and that each hour had sixty slug-like minutes. How to kill those slugs? Geraldine stood in her garden and surveyed the blue sky. Then her feet danced her into her bedroom, where she chose a soft green hat that-enhanced the gold of her own bright helmet, because Billy liked that hat. Then she sought and found a magazine and sallied forth. At her gate she paused and reflected again. Then her face lit up and, humming softly to herself, she made her way to the nearest tram line.

Fifteen minutes later a tram deposited one tall, lovely, grey-eyed, demure and redheaded damsel, wearing a very becoming green hat, at a corner near an entrance gate to the Botanic Gardens.

Unhurriedly, Geraldine strolled slowly towards the Gardens. One long golden afternoon was hers to waste. Luxuriously she sniffed the soft air. Appreciatively her eyes gathered in the signs of coming spring, followed



the wonderful wide sweep of lawns, and sparkled more brightly than the sun on the still lake waters.

At the lake's edge, she held converse with a sooty black swan, unaware that of the two she was the more graceful. For a while she sat dreaming, her magazine unopened in her lap. Then a thought of tea intruded itself into her mind. Still slowly she idled her way along winding paths until she reached the kiosk under its wide shelters of green.

There were not a dozen people at the scattered tables overlooking the lake. Geraldine drank her tea and ate scones with a healthy appetite, lingering after she had finished, gazing at the haze of the city above the tree tops in the distance. Somewhere under that haze was Billy, going on his lawful occasions. He seemed nearer for the knowledge.

Her gaze lowered to the drive that led from the river gates. Anyone watching her would have seen the dreaming look in her eyes change swiftly to wide stare of bewilderment, that changed as swiftly to excitement. Strolling along the wide path towards the kiosk, and deeply immersed in themselves, came William Brewer and Mrs. Tydvil Jones.

There was no indecision in Geraldine's movements. Swiftly she stood up and, watching the advancing couple, she stepped behind the shelter of a shrub. Then, screened by it, she walked slowly backward, dodging carefully, keeping her prey under observation as she reached a clump of bushes far enough away to cover her retreat if necessary, but close enough to observe all she desired to observe.

Unaware of the wide, grey eyes that watched their every movement from beneath their long, curved lashes, Billy Brewer and Amy appropriated a table for themselves and settled down—Billy most obviously solicitous in his gentle attentions to his surprising partner.

Every movement they made she followed with intense interest. She was close enough, almost, to read the expressions on the two faces. A score of emotions flashed into Geraldine's eyes, but among them there was no trace of anger. Bewildered curiosity predominated. It says much for Geraldine's perfect and unquestioning loyalty to Billy, that not for one second did she believe the evidence of her startled senses. There, before her eyes, was Billy Brewer flirting outrageously with Mrs. Tydvil Jones—flagrant devotion in his eyes. Yes, beyond doubt, it was Billy, but—that sense that women possess that is beyond the ken of man, assured

her heart and soul it was not her Billy. Just so, was she sure that his partner was Amy Jones.

Only Geraldine herself knew the happy response of her heart to Billy's presence. But from the moment of her first glimpse of him her heart scorned the impostor. Had it been her Billy, she knew that the steady, unhurried pulse would have been raging with anger and jealousy, and prompting her to shred the raiment of Amy Jones far and wide across the green lawns.

Slowly, as the riot in her mind subsided, there emerged the fact that her crazy guess at there being two Billy Brewers was true. Back to her mind flashed the scene in the warehouse on the morning when her Billy had been so gaily greeted by Amy—the reason for which he had since so strenuously denied all knowledge. So, thought Geraldine, Amy had been barking up the wrong Billy that morning...

Womanlike, all her scorn turned on the peccant Amy, who was so obviously lapping up the devotion of the man opposite her. "To think," Geraldine reflected, "that poor Tyddie believes in that hypocritical she-devil."

Another problem came into her mind. "Did Amy believe that her partner was

Billy Brewer—or...?” Geraldine could follow that line of thought no further. Despite the mystery that had lately surrounded his life and morals, she had a very deep liking for Tyddie, to whom she had been indebted for much thoughtful kindness—her present afternoon’s holiday, for example. She liked him so much that the thought of Amy’s gross disloyalty to a man, who was far too good for her, excited contempt for, and righteous wrath against, his betrayer.

It would have given her intense satisfaction to walk across to their table and tell Amy exactly what she thought of her behaviour. But her commonsense forbade. Tyddie’s secretary had no right whatever to crash into his domestic affairs, however scandalous they might be. Besides, she had a more urgent duty of love towards her own Billy. As she watched she determined to find out if possible the real identity of his scandalous double. Her heart hardened as she considered his disgraceful manoeuvres with Amy. “That,” she thought, “was undoubtedly the man she had seen with Hilda Cranston near His Majesty’s Theatre that night. That, too, was the man who had involved Billy in all his unmerited tribulations.” There grew up in her a fierce determination to make the duplicate of Billy Brewer wish he had never been born.

The hour and a half before the two showed signs of separating, passed without notice by the excited girl. After they had had tea they had wandered, and Geraldine blessed the luxuriant growth of the gardens that provided such ample cover for her spying, for which she felt no compunction.

It was nearly five o'clock before they separated near the bridge over the lake. Geraldine watched the leavetaking, that they supposed to be unobserved, with an exclamation of virtuous anger. Then Amy turned towards the south entrance. Watching her go, the false Billy crossed the bridge leisurely and made for the north-west gate. Well under cover, Geraldine followed him, determined to confront him before he left the gardens. While the false Billy idled, she manoeuvred swiftly ahead across lawns, till she found shelter on a seat behind a flower bed near the path he must take. Here, unseen, she watched his coming. As he advanced towards her, she saw him glancing round the deserted paths and lawns. Evidently he was ascertaining if there was anyone in sight. His patent uneasiness puzzled her.

Some twenty feet from where she sat concealed, a great elm flung out its wide network of leafless branches from a two-feet thick bole. Towards

this the figure she was watching so intently, advanced. He passed behind the bole, hidden for the fraction of a second—but there appeared on the other side, not the false Billy Brewer, but Tydvil Jones!

Geraldine had been on the point of rising to her feet to step from her hiding place to confront the impostor. The shock of astonishment she received was almost physical in its impact. It was with a desperate effort she checked the cry that would have betrayed her presence.

Crouching low, through the leaves she saw Tydvil pass within ten feet of her hiding place. The laggard pace of the false Billy had changed to the swift, jaunty step she knew so well. Petrified, she saw him pass.

Petrified, she watched the retreating back until it rounded a curve one hundred yards away, and was hidden behind the foliage. Even then she did not move more than her head as she turned to examine the scene of the transformation to make sure her eyes had not disgraced themselves. No! A mouse could not have hidden itself just at the spot, much less the bulk of the false Billy.

Presently Geraldine stood up. She walked on to the path, walked round the tree, examined it from every possible angle, muttered to herself, “Geraldine Brand, you are going barmy,” then she returned to her seat.

She felt her legs were insisting on a sit-down strike. The situation was too much for them. When she tried to think, she found her head not much more tractable than her legs.

Had anyone been near enough to see Geraldine as she leaned back in her seat, he or she might have been excused for thinking that she had bats in her attic. For she sat there alternately staring ahead, wide-eyed, and then, apparently, counting and recounting her fingers. Then there were not two Billies—there were—but one was Tydvil Jones—or Tydvil Jones was Billy Brewer. But supposing Tydvil Jones was Billy Brewer, why did he meet clandestinely, and flirt with, his own wife? Geraldine had a fairly comprehensive knowledge of life, if her actual experience was somewhat limited. She felt perfectly sure, however, that married men did not meet their wives furtively to flirt outrageously with them. Tydvil had a reputation for being a mutt, but even he was not mutt enough to flirt...Her thoughts checked with a crash that almost disintegrated their gears. Or was he? No, not a mutt! Slowly she turned that thought over in her mind. She listened to it. She sniffed at it. She tasted that thought.

She, who had been for so long closer to Tyddie than any other being, had guessed that Amy had made his life pretty tough going. Not that hint or

sign of it ever dropped from Tyddie. Suppose—suppose—Tyddie had—deliberately trapped Amy—Geraldine's set face relaxed, and a gurgling laugh escaped her. Would it be possible? He, Tyddie—if that other Billy had been Tyddie...He was, if she had not completely lost her reason—perhaps she had...It was obvious that Tyddie would not flirt with Amy for the pleasure of it—therefore—that darned, wicked, unscrupulous little ruffian had tied dear Amy in a knot from which a Houdini could not escape.

Geraldine did not love Amy. She had suffered Amy's insufferable patronage too often on that reformer's visits to the office not to detest the very sight of that superficial, smiling, exasperating face. Often in her heart she had felt profound sympathy for the bedevilled Tydvil. Geraldine was neither malicious nor vindictive, but as she turned over the preposterous idea that had come into her mind, she felt that if her crazy guess were correct, she could forgive the culprit everything—even the wrong done to her Billy.

The fading light and the cooling air recalled her to actualities.

Hurriedly she rose to her feet and made for the Domain. As she walked another idea came to tantalise her. If Tyddie were the false Billy, then



equally, so might he be the notorious Basil Williams. The whole thing was crazy. No man could transform himself she assured herself. But she had seen it done. If these things happened, what mischief had Tyddie been up to? A cold shiver passed through her. Her own clean, logical mind rejected the thought of anything outside of natural laws.

In her heart she knew that her senses had not betrayed her over the queer transformation she had witnessed. Her wholesome nature had always rejected the possibility of things supernatural in daily life. She scorned small superstitions. But she felt that what had occurred could only be associated with something that was repugnant to every fibre of her being. The thought that Tydvil Jones was involved with anything of the kind came as a positive shock.

Swiftly her mind reviewed the past few weeks. She could definitely place the change in Tydvil from that morning of his unexpected appearance on her encounter with Billy. Everything dated from that day. His lies in the St. Kilda Court next morning. Billy's amazing tribulation. The appearance of Basil Williams, and Tyddie's further falsehoods about his hat—"Oh, everything!" she concluded to herself.

That night on his arrival at her home, Billy found Geraldine boiling with suppressed excitement. There was something exquisitely tender and protective in her greeting of him that made Billy almost dizzy with happiness. However, when she released herself reluctantly from his arms, she led him to a couch and seated him at one end of it. Turning, she gathered three large cushions which she piled in the middle of it, and seated herself at the other end.

Billy, watching her preparations with amused interest, demanded with a laugh, "Why the fortification, darlint?"

"Billy," she responded, "there is going to be a long and serious pow-wow, and neither of us can be serious closer than we are now."

"Hang it, Gerry," said Billy, eyeing the barrier distastefully, "if it is to be that serious, you should have installed a telephone so as I could not see you."

She laughed happily. "Boy, I don't want the barrier there any more than you do, but we must talk. It's terribly important."

The earnestness in her voice satisfied him. “Well, I’ll promise to be as serious as any man can be while he’s looking at you. But, please, mamma, get it over quickly. Those cushions are suffocating me.”

“First, Billy,” she asked, “I want you to tell me everything you did and everywhere you went between two o’clock and five this afternoon?” Then, in answer to the questioning eyes, “It’s not a third degree, and I am not being catty.”

Smiling and without hesitation, Billy gave an account of himself. Twice only Geraldine interrupted, to fix the time of a movement on an interview, as Billy recited the routine of his afternoon’s work.

Geraldine nodded her understanding, and, as he concluded, again asked, “And every one of those men you saw and spoke to could swear to it if necessary?”

“Of course,” agreed Billy, “but what on earth’s the matter? Not more trouble, I hope?”

“There is more trouble—plenty of it. But not for you, Billy, thank

goodness.”

She paused, and went on gravely, “Boy, tell me if you think I am quite sane, because what I am going to tell you will sound absolutely crazy—so crazy as to be normally impossible. No!”—she put out an imperative hand—“you must stay where you are.”

“All right,” he said resignedly, settling back in his corner. “But I am not going to allow even you, Geraldine Brand, to make insulting suggestions about yourself.”

“Well, I only hope you’ll feel that way when I have finished, because, boy, you are about to receive some shocks.”

“Shoot! I can stand them.”

“Good! Here’s the first shock.” Her eyes danced. “At three o’clock this afternoon Mr. William Brewer and Mrs. Tydvil Jones took afternoon tea together at the kiosk in the Botanical Gardens...”

“Holy wars!” Billy was on his feet.

She waved him back. “It was your double, Billy—the one who has caused all the trouble.”

Billy sank back, gazing at her blankly.

“I never doubted for a second, Billy, believe me. I felt in my bones, as soon as I saw them, it could not be you—but the likeness was amazing.”

“Go on,” he said weakly. “I—you said shocks, Gerry—plural—don’t say there are more.”

“Afraid so, boy—much worse.” Geraldine nodded. Slowly, and carefully choosing her words, she unfolded the story of her afternoon’s adventure. Billy, exercising an amazing self-restraint, listened silently till she told of the appearance of Tyddie.

“But,” he protested, “dearest, that’s crazy—crazy!”

“Absolutely,” she agreed, “but, boy, it happened exactly as I told you.”

There was a long silence. It was broken by Billy. “What you mean is, that this bird who is the living image of me,-is also Tyddie in another skin?”

Geraldine nodded emphatically. “Quite mad, I know, but that is just what I mean.”

“And,” he went on, “this double-barrelled Casanova was also toying round with the Seventh Commandment with Mrs. Tyddie?”

Geraldine pursed her mouth. “I’m no scandal-monger, boy, but from the way she kissed him goodbye, I doubt that his attentions and intentions are platonic.”

“Suffering serpents!” growled Billy furiously. “I’ll—I’ll sue Tyddie for criminal libel—I wouldn’t be found dead with her.”

For the first time that evening Geraldine laughed heartily. “You’d never make a jury believe any man made love to Amy.”

“But don’t you see, Gerry,” Billy was very sober, “it is just that that makes the whole thing more crazy still. Husbands don’t go round

committing unnatural sorcery—for that’s what it is—to alienate the affections of their wives, especially wives like Amy—it’s not done!”

“It might be in some circumstances.” Geraldine’s voice was full of meaning. “Put yourself in Tyddie’s place.”

“God forbid!” answered Billy piously. “But I can’t imagine any circumstances that would prompt me to make love to Amy.”

“Suppose you were married to her...”

“Well?”

“And suppose you wanted to get square for years of nagging.”

Slow comprehension dawned in Billy’s eyes. “Gerry,” he chuckled, “you’ve a disgusting Machiavellian mind. That’s a horrid thought, but—it fits—it fits!”

“Yes,” Geraldine nodded, “it fits. But, Billy, where does it lead us?”

“Well, we can’t go round saying that Tyddie can switch himself into any shape he likes. That’s clear. We’d be run into a mental home faster than a bat out of Hades.”

“You see, Billy,” she argued, “how, if we assume he can do it, it explains everything. He must have been you that night without the black eye when I saw him with Hilda Cranston.”

He nodded. “You know, dearest, I’d been dodging her for months and taking no notice of her letters.”

“Billy,”—Geraldine smiled—“that murky past of yours seems to have come home to roost on Tyddie.”

“Peccavi, culpa mea. I’m penitent, and I deserve all I get, but I’d hate to see you suffer for it.”

“Forget it all, boy. I won’t remember it.” She held out her hand.

There was an appropriate interlude.



Then Billy said, “I suppose what happened was, that she nailed Tyddie in mistake for me.”

“That would account for the whole wretched mix-up,” Geraldine pointed out.

“And,” Billy spoke with deep indignation, “for the ghost of Jerry McCann, and Tyddie’s altruistic perjury next morning—the double-edged little double-crosser!”

“And,” Geraldine said with intense conviction, “for that Basil Williams man also!”

“Oh, nuts! Gerry, darlint,” protested Billy. “You’re letting it run away with you. Tyddie wouldn’t get tight and paint the town red. He never had a snifter in his life.”

“You don’t know half,” she asserted. Rising, she went to a drawer. “Look at those,” she said, handing him an envelope.

Billy examined the cigar butts and bands it contained with a

connoisseur's eye. "Crikey! Gerry, those cost three and six apiece," he said, looking up. "How come?"

Geraldine related the finding of cigars and the whisky perfumed tumblers.

He heard her out. "Well," he said with profound feeling, "I hand it to Tyddie for being the double-crossingest, and most unmitigated double-shuffler, and the finest and most uncompromising liar south of the equator."

"Fair enough as a character sketch," agreed Geraldine.

Then Billy laughed long and heartily. "I don't care, Gerry," he gasped, "but I like him all the better for it. Dash it all, what a time he's been having!"

"I know it's disgraceful,"—Geraldine had joined in the laugh—"but that's the way I feel about it, too."

"But how can he do it? How can he do it? There's no magic these days."

“Do you know, Billy,” Geraldine’s voice was very grave, “I can’t help feeling Tyddie has mixed himself up with something dreadful. What I saw this afternoon was not only not natural, it was...” She paused.

“Pretty tough stuff,” Billy nodded.

“There’s only one word,” Geraldine whispered, “Unholy!”

“It’ll get him into one unholy mess, if he’s not careful,” Billy said.

“I shouldn’t be surprised if he has done that already,” she replied.

“People don’t meddle in things like that and get off scot free.”

“The question is,” Billy returned to their own affair, “what are we to do?”

“We can do absolutely nothing,” Geraldine asserted. “Think, Billy, what would people say if I told that I had seen your double converted into Tyddie?”

“They’d probably say you’d gone potty, and believe it, too,” Billy

admitted. “Anyway, I can’t see myself saying from the witness box that the man who has been cutting capers with Hilda Cranston was Tyddie in disguise as me.”

“That’s the madly exasperating part of it,” Geraldine’s voice had an edge on it. “That demon Tyddie can laugh at us. He’s absolutely unassailable.” She paused. “Unless...”

Billy sat up. “What’s in that devious brain of yours, best beloved? I’m with you if you want to put a swift one across Tyddie.”

Geraldine held out her hand to the light so that the diamond on its finger flashed back in colour. “It’s a positively catty idea.”

“I’ll bite,” Billy laughed. “Who’s going to be the mouse?”

“Mice, darling.” Geraldine chuckled, her eyes following the flashing light from the stone. “Tyddie and Amy are elected as the mice.”

“And how?”

“Well, I think Amy believes that she has mortgaged her heart to Mr. William Brewer—the Jezebel!”

“Jezebel’s good—go on.”

“Now, suppose I let her know quietly and quite casually that I, Geraldine Brand, am engaged to marry Mr. William Brewer. Can you conceive, first, how she would feel, herself? And secondly, what she would say to that dastardly deceiver Brewer the next time they met?”

“Just because I can conceive faintly what she would say to William Brewer, I reject your plan with as much scorn as haste.”

“But, why, Billy? I think it is a lovely idea.”

“Gerry, my angel, you’re a perfect fiancée, but a positively rotten conspirator.”

“But, boy, wouldn’t that smart and festive Tyddie get all that is coming to him?”

“Perhaps, and perhaps not,” Billy insisted. “Suppose that sweet thing you have just, very properly, defined as a Jezebel, were, in the paroxysms of her joy at the news, to come hunting for Mr. William Brewer at the warehouse. Beloved child, the chances are she would chant her paeon of praise to the first Brewer she caught—who would be me.”

“Ooh! I never thought of that.”

“That’s where my superior male brain comes in.” Billy grinned. “I love Tyddie as a fellow sinner, but jigger my eyes if I care about acting as a lightning conductor for him for that thunderbolt.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” Geraldine admitted reluctantly. “What a pity! You know, Billy, it would be a pure delight for me to scratch pieces out of Amy, because the creature imagines she’s making love to you.”

“It’s a laudable ambition, sweetheart, but forget it.”

“Well,” said Geraldine decisively, “Tyddie’s not getting off altogether. Tomorrow morning I’m going to tell him what I saw and demand an explanation.”

“Gerry!” Billy’s voice was really startled.

“He can only sack me, and I don’t care if he does. But I don’t think he will do that much. He’s too clever.”

“But, dearest...!”

Geraldine swept the three cushions from the couch to the floor, and the debate closed.

That night Tydvil Jones listened in silence to the news of battle conveyed to him in accurate detail by Nicholas.

“Jove, Nicholas!” he said when the tale was completed, “you were right about that girl.”

Nicholas nodded. “She’ll make things difficult for you, I’m afraid.”

“And to think that she put her finger at once on my affair with Amy—do you know, I admire her. The pluck of her!”

“Aye, she’s a fine type. Pity,” went on Nicholas regretfully, “that she is not on my side. On my side, Tydvil, it is women like Geraldine Brand who wreck empires; on the other side they swindle me out of men like William Brewer.” Then he added, “What do you propose to do?”

Tydvil stretched his legs straight before him and laughed quietly. “Enjoy the fight, Nicholas.”

“Have a care that she does not share too much in the enjoyment,” cautioned Nicholas.



## CHAPTER XXIX

Next morning Billy made a last moment appeal to Geraldine to reconsider her decision to take the offensive. But he found himself confronted with a calm and inflexible damsel, who assured him that she was craving for battle and that nothing else would satisfy her. She declined emphatically his offer to fight beside her. The only concession she would make was that if she were cornered she would call on him for reinforcements.

“I’m afraid you’ll think I’m greedy, Billy, but I can’t share this even with you,” she said. “Tyddie has been fibbing to me for weeks. He’s let you in for a whole heap of trouble, and he is going to answer to ME for it.” There was a glorious light of battle in her eyes.

Billy surrendered reluctantly.

Scarcely had Geraldine finished preparing the mail when Tydvil’s quick step in the warehouse announced his advent. He entered his office with a hearty, “Good morning, Miss Brand. Quite well again I hope!”

Geraldine replied demurely as usual. “Thank you, Mr. Jones.”

Then, as he hung up his coat, “It’s really a pleasure to have you back. Our little Miss Marsden is willing—but—she is not Miss Brand. I’m afraid,” he took his place at the table opposite her, “that if I could arrange a quarrel between you and our Mr. Brewer, I should be tempted to do it. The thought of losing you haunts my days”. His engaging smile as he spoke was friendly and flattering.

Geraldine returned the smile. “That would be placing too high a value on my services, Mr. Jones. Even if you could cause us to quarrel, I know you are too kind-hearted to give pain to either of us.” She looked straight into his face as she spoke.

“You’re quite right, Miss Brand. Quite right!” He opened the first letter. “A charming romance such as yours is too fine to spoil but I will miss you terribly.”

The two worked on with their usual systematic efficiency that scarcely needed words between them. Tydvil dictated letter after letter in swift, flowing sentences that Geraldine caught and stowed away faultlessly in her note book.

“That, I think, is the lot!” he said finally, sitting back and running his eye over the table.

Geraldine was about to fire an opening well-rehearsed shot when, as though aware of her purpose, Tydvil cut in with: “And now, Miss Brand, I think we can discuss my private affairs on which you are so much concerned.” His smile was quite friendly.

Although Geraldine was astonished she was by no means disconcerted. Without hesitation she answered. “Thank you, sir, the suggestion coming from you makes what I was going to say much more easy.”

“Well, now we can talk comfortably. Say just what you wish,” he invited.

“I was going to do that in any case,” retorted the smiling Geraldine coolly.

“That was what I anticipated, Miss Brand,” Tydvil came back easily, “so I thought I would make the necessity of hearing what you have to say something like an engaging virtue.”

“You seem to be an adept at disguising anything as a virtue, however remote it may, be from one,” she flashed back.

He met the thrust with a quiet chuckle of evident enjoyment. “First blood to you! Though, you know, it is hardly the kind of thing a good secretary should say to her employer.”

“Nevertheless,” came the uncompromising retort, “that is only the beginning of what a good secretary is going to say to her employer.”

“Our little interview is not going to be dull then,” he was quite unabashed. “But, pray, don’t let me interrupt you. Go on.”

“I will!” Geraldine replied with spirit. “Yesterday afternoon, in the Botanic Gardens, I saw a man who looked like Mr. Brewer, but who was really you, kissing Mrs. Jones.”

“Well, really, dear lady,” protested Tydvil, “though I admit that in a public place it may not have been in the best taste, after all, it is not a cardinal sin for a man to kiss his own wife.”

“If it were not a cardinal sin, it was something rotten to kiss her when she thought it was another man—especially from my point of view, when that other man was my fiance.”

“But, Geraldine—may I say Geraldine, since our discussion is so intimate?”

“You may not! Geraldine is for my friends.”

“My apologies, Miss Brand. What I was saying was that it appears to me that your views of the ethics of the case are somewhat distorted. I knew I was kissing my wife. In justice you should admit that any obloquy was hers.”

“You or she may kiss anyone you please,” retorted Geraldine tartly. “What I object to is the wickedness of your involving Mr. Brewer in your own private and personal scandals.”

“A harmless proxy in this instance, I assure you.”

“Harmless proxy indeed!” Her voice shook with indignation. “Suppose Mrs. Jones learned of my engagement to him?”

“Oh! Miss Brand, please be fair. Why, you even suggested that you should tell her yourself, only Brewer recognised, as I do, that it would be injudicious.”

His words left her, for the moment, breathless. They made it clear that by some means he knew of everything that had passed between herself and Billy. “From what you say,” she said acidly, “you appear to have added spying to your other activities.”

“An unpleasant word very—and one that almost impels me to suggest that your own activities yesterday were not very remote from a similar practice.” He was smiling derisively.

Geraldine felt that the fight was not going on the lines she anticipated. But she kept cool. “Perhaps you will deny that I saw you transformed from the likeness of Mr. Brewer to yourself.”

“Miss Brand, I do not deny for a moment there was such a transformation.

But has it not occurred to you that it may cut either way. Since the transformation did occur, how do you know that it was not Brewer using my likeness to conceal his indiscretions from you? And throw the blame on me.”

“Of all the...” began Geraldine.

She was interrupted by a chuckle of amusement from Tydvil. “Wait! I only suggested an alternative you overlooked. I could not resist the temptation. No, I confess, freely, and without reserve, verbal or mental, that it was I you saw in the Gardens with my wife, and that it was I whom you saw passing while you were hiding behind the flower bed on the hill near the north-west gate.”

Geraldine stared with blank amazement at the smiling face across the table. “You admit that you used a dual individuality?”

He nodded his affirmation. “Exactly that.”

“Of all the cold-blooded, callous nerve! Of all the brazen impudence I ever heard in my life! I think you beat everything.” Geraldine brought

out each word to its utmost value.

“Well,” said Tydvil as though weighing her vigorous comment in his mind, “I feel that that is not an overstatement of the case.” His look conveyed the impression that she had complimented him and he was proud of it.

“Of course,” she said cuttingly, “you think I am flattering you.”

“One moment!” he interrupted. “I want to ask you one question. Only one. Will you answer it truthfully?”

“I’ll answer it truthfully or not at all,” she replied guardedly.

“Did not you and Billy Brewer agree last night that you liked me more for my misdeeds than my virtue?” There was an entirely engaging schoolboy grin on his face.

Taken aback at the extent of his knowledge, Geraldine admitted the charge.

“Then,” said Tyddie, laughing quietly, “what the heck are you making all



the fuss over?”

For a moment Geraldine tried to retain her gravity, but his laugh was too infectious.

“But aren’t you ashamed of yourself?” she demanded when she recovered herself.

“Not a bit—not an atom. I’ve enjoyed every minute of my life of sin.” He rejoined, and if appearances went for anything, he meant what he said.

“But,” she asked, “do you recognise the trouble you have caused Billy?”

Tydvil cupped his chin in his hand. “Geraldine,”—he spoke very sincerely—“I will ask you to believe me when I say that I really am sorry for that. It was done unintentionally and without malice aforethought. It just happened.”

She overlooked the “Geraldine.”

“Your regret does not help him much,” she said dryly.

“Still, I made all the amends I could.” His eyes were laughing at her across the table. “Does not a most flagrant perjury by Tydvil Jones suggest that it comes from an humble and contrite heart?”

“And to think,” Geraldine’s voice was deep with mingled amazement and anger, “that that fool of a magistrate said you were the only one who spoke the truth.”

“But what a tribute to Tydvil Jones, Geraldine.”

“I—I believe you’re proud of it!” She was feeling almost helpless in the face of his brazen impenitence.

He nodded, chuckling. “My dear girl, I am. It was my first effort at constructive lying. Every other witness spoke the truth, but the reputation of Tydvil Jones triumphed. That is where I reaped my dividends on a blameless life.”

Geraldine could only sit and stare.

“Yes,” he went on, “and even our usually astute William Brewer accepted the supernatural appearance of Jerry McCann to repay a loan, just on my reputation for veracity and probity. I suppose he told you about that.”

“He did,” she snapped, “and I disillusioned him. I knew you were not working back that night, and,” she went on, her indignation rising again, “you dared to threaten him with dismissal if Cranston wins his case.”

Tydvil laughed, unabashed. “That was all eyewash. I was obliged to take high moral stand, but I had no intention of carrying out the promise.”

“You dare!” There was a warning in her tone.

“My dear,” he said quietly, “it is my regard for your Billy that protects him—to say nothing of my regard for you, despite your uncompromising hostility,” he added.

“And to think,” her voice was cold, “I have been fool enough to look up to you all these years, as the most honourable man I ever met!”

“And a most awful mutt, too? Confess it, Geraldine,” he insisted.

She reddened under his steady, questioning gaze. There was too much truth in his suggestion to leave her comfortable, or to permit a frank answer.

“Come!” he persisted. “Did not you, and all the staff for the matter of that, regard me as a pious ninny and an office joke?”

“You know, well,” she tried to evade the question, “that we all like and respect you.”

“Geraldine, I insist that you answer my question. I am being honest with you now. I want honesty in return. Did you or did you not look on me as a silly ass?”

There was a pause. “Well, we thought you were peculiar,” she admitted hesitantly.

He slapped the table. “Woman, answer my question and don’t shuffle!”

She saw his anger was assumed and laughed. “Oh, very well! If you must have it, I thought that, apart from business matters, you were positively

nutty.”

“Ah!” he said triumphantly, “at last, the truth. On a small scale, you’re a more practised fibber than I am.”

“You flatter me, Mr. Jones,” she bowed. “Still, I don’t think the fact is any explanation for your recent behaviour.”

“That’s just where you’re jolly well mistaken. Can’t you follow the cause and the consequence?”

“I may be dull, but I certainly cannot,” she answered.

“Well let me tell you, Geraldine Brand, that you and Master Billy Brewer are responsible, individually and collectively, for all the sins I have committed in the past two months—and I’m grateful to you.”

There was no mistaking the astonishment in her eyes “Billy and I!” she gasped.

“Because I never realised how, to use your very descriptive word, ‘nutty’

I was until I saw Billy kissing you that morning I entered this room so malapropos.”

Geraldine flushed divinely at the memory.

“You see,” Tydvil went on reflectively, “I had never seen anything like that before, and...”

“Oh, please!” she protested.

“Wait, let me finish,” he went on, “and suddenly I was alive to the truth that I had never kissed a girl, wouldn’t be game to kiss a girl, and had missed a lot of fun.”

“But...”

He cut her short with a wave of his hand. “Moreover, I felt I would gladly accept Billy’s black eye in exchange for the fruits of his enterprise.”

“Mr. Jones!” Geraldine was struggling between embarrassment and mirth.

“And,” went on the shameless Tydvil, “after he had left the room I recognised for the first time what a lovely girl you are.”

“Now stop!” Geraldine cut in abruptly. “Understand this, Mr. Jones, only one man can say that to me, and you are not that man.”

“Don’t waggle your finger at me, Geraldine, it’s rude, and, moreover, don’t imagine for a moment, that in telling you this I am harbouring invidious ideas regarding you—I’m not!”

“Lucky for you,” sniffed the indignant maiden.

“What I am telling you is purely explanatory. Mind, though,” he added laughing, “if I were not sure you were thoroughly besotted over Billy, I don’t know that my regard would be so platonic.”

“Besotted!” she almost hissed. “Besotted, what a word! You, you...”

She paused for loss of a word. “Go on,” he prompted.

“You demon!”

“Very poor, very!” He was still laughing. “Really, Geraldine, I think you could have done better than that.”

She sank back in her chair, for the moment defeated by his total insensibility to her anger.

“As I was saying,” he went on, “the episode awakened me to the fact that I had not had much fun in my life, so I started out to make up for lost time.”

Geraldine regarded him speculatively, for a long moment and then murmured, “So that was it!”

“So that was it!” he repeated.

“But,” she said presently, “that may account for the things you have been doing, but it does not account for how you have been doing them.”

“Do you know, Geraldine,” said Tydvil, “that though you are a very beautiful girl, a charming girl, and a very nice girl, you have become a



nuisance. I'm sorry to say it, but you have."

"Dismissed?" She lifted her delicate brows.

"No fear!" he said hastily. "I want you near me at present in case you get into mischief. Besides, I don't want to lose my secretary until I must."

"What I want to know is," she said, "how?"

He looked at her speculatively for some moments, and said, "I think I will even tell you that."

Geraldine looked a little startled. "Perhaps I had better not know," she ventured.

"I think otherwise. Listen..." For ten minutes Tydvil spoke in quiet level tones, unwinding a story that brought first amazement, that changed gradually to consternation, and then to something like terror, into Geraldine's eyes. Preposterous as the story was, she felt instinctively that he was telling the truth.

When he had finished, Tydvil leaned back in his chair regarding Geraldine's horrified face with evident amusement.

Presently she recovered herself and, in an awed voice, said, "And you signed that note, and you were the other Billy, and Basil Williams!" It was more amazement than a question, but Tydvil nodded acquiescence to each sentence.

"Oh!" She clasped her hands. "How could you do such an awful thing?"

He laughed lightly. "I think it's a lark. You see, Geraldine, you could never understand why I did it unless you had been brought up as I have been, and lived as I have lived."

"But, it's such a dreadful price to pay!"

"Pha! I'm in no worse position than millions of others, who won't get half as much fun out of the deal as I've had."

"But suppose," she said, "he does everything, you will have no hope if

that bill falls due—others have.”

“My troubles!” smiled Tydvil lightly.

“And he is that Mr. Senior?”

Tydvil nodded. “Impressive looking, is he not?”

“I felt that day when he came to the office as though—” Geraldine paused for words, “as though I was near something electric—some vast machine.”

“He does give that impression of power,” Tydvil admitted, “but, believe me, Geraldine, he’s a splendid man, and he’s been a jolly good and understanding pal to me.”

“But why,” asked Geraldine, “have you told me all this?”

Tydvil pursed his lips. “For one thing, you have been exasperatingly clever enough to find out far more than you should have. Another thing is, that I trust you.”

“Trust me!”

He nodded. “You must see that you dare not tell anyone, except, perhaps, that Billy of yours, and that won’t matter.”

He waited for the comment she did not make, and continued, “Suppose you tried to tell. Remember, I am Tydvil Jones, Merchant, reformer, a public man of proved integrity. You and Billy are two of my employees. I should be exceedingly sympathetic toward your extraordinary obsession, and would generously make provision for you while you are under restraint, and until you are released, happily cured.”

Forgetting herself for the moment, Geraldine exclaimed, “Tyddie, you’re a devil!” Then, seeing the expression on his face, she said hurriedly, “Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr. Jones, that just slipped out.”

Tydvil laughed heartily. “Please, please don’t spoil it by apologising—I like it. You all call me Tyddie, I know.”

“But...”

“No buts! While we are together you must retain the Tyddie; aren’t we fellow conspirators?”

She shrugged her shoulders. “You’re hopeless.” Then, after a moment, “But what about the synthetic Billy and Mrs. Jones?”

Tydvil was rubbing the palm of his left hand absently, and looked up.

“I’m afraid, Geraldine, that that is a matter I cannot discuss with you.”

“Since we are being honest with one another,” she replied vigorously, “I hope you get all you deserve out of that little plan. And I hope it will be a shock.”

“If anyone gets a shock out of it, I don’t think I’ll be the one.”

“Maybe, but you’re the one who deserves it.”

“Shucks!” growled Mr. Jones. “Don’t babble, Geraldine.” Then, “Would you like to meet my friend Mr. Senior?”

“I most certainly would not.”

“He admires you immensely. He warned me all along that you would bowl me out.”

“If he were sitting in that chair,” Geraldine nodded to the visitor’s armchair, “I’d tell him just what I think of him.”

“I shouldn’t be surprised if he had been sitting in that chair all the time we’ve been talking.” Tydvil smiled at her.

Geraldine stared at the chair in alarm.

“Am I right, Nicholas?” Tydvil addressed the empty chair.

“Quite correct, Tydvil.” Nicholas in person smiled from one to the other with engaging candour.

Geraldine was beyond speech. She stared, and hers was a hostile stare.

Mr. Senior’s eyes turned on her were quite friendly and conciliating.

“I’m afraid you will think my conduct unpardonable, Miss Brand,” he

began.

Geraldine suddenly found her lost voice and interjected, “It is! Quite unpardonable!”

Nicholas disregarded the hostility and the interjection. “You see, I could not resist the temptation of being present at your interview with Tydvil.”

“It is a pity your courtesy is not as great as your curiosity,” retorted the uncompromising Geraldine. “Geraldine!” exclaimed Tydvil in protest.

“You keep out of this, Tyddie,” snapped the girl, her claws bared for battle.

The eyes of Nicholas sparkled with mirth as he glanced at Tyddie. “It’s a private fight, Tydvil,” he chuckled.

“And we don’t want a referee, either,” added Geraldine. “Rafferty rules,” conceded Nicholas.

“Now!” She turned on Nicholas, head high and battle in her eyes.

“What I wished to explain was, that I was not apparent because I thought my presence might interfere with your freedom of speech.” His smile deepened as he added, gently, “I admit, misjudging your diffidence.”

She let the jab go by unnoticed. “All I want to say to you is that I think this abominable contract into which you have inveigled Mr. Jones is entirely worthy of you and your reputation.”

Nicholas raised his eyebrows. “Have you heard Mr. Jones making any complaint?”

“You know, as well as I do, that he has no idea of what he has done,” she insisted.

“Dear lady,” his voice was aggravatingly patient, “don’t you think you are rather overworking your sex’s congenital inconsistency?”

Geraldine began to see red. “Don’t you dare to address me as ‘Dear lady’...”



He interposed: “The adjective is entirely respectful, and I trust you do not reject the noun.”

“It is because I accept the noun, I have refrained from calling you all that you deserve—and are.” She pushed out a belligerent chin.

“I should feel more grateful for your restraint, Miss Brand, were I not aware that it was the charge of inconsistency, and not the ‘Dear lady’ that caused you to boil over,” retorted the unabashed Nicholas. “It was the major truth that hurt.”

“The charge of inconsistency is as false as your friendship with Mr. Jones,” she came back at him.

“Out of your own mouth you prove me Tydvil’s friend.”

“You may fool him, but not me,” she retorted.

“And yet you, both with yourself and your fiance, have agreed that since Tydvil has been released from his inhibitions through my agency, he is

much more human, much more likeable, and a much better and natural man.”

“That was when I was unaware of the price he had paid for his release.”

Nicholas shook his head slowly. “No, no, Miss Brand, be honest. Even with that knowledge, you still like the new Tydvil better than the old.

Telling fibs to me is a most unprofitable pastime.”

“I’m not telling fibs, as you call them,” she asserted angrily.

“Oh, Geraldine! Geraldine!” said Mr. Senior reprovingly.

“Mr. Senior can read your thoughts, Geraldine,” warned Tydvil from across the table.

Geraldine sat up. There was consternation in her face, over which a deep flush spread. “Oh, you...” she gasped. Then, recovering herself, she said defiantly, “Well, if you can read my thoughts, I hope you liked them.”

“I must confess that I did not like them very much,” Nicholas admitted.

“They were very rude, and it is surprising, even to me, how such a nice girl could even think of such words. But I can be tolerant and make allowances for your unjust prejudices. You see, Miss Brand, despite your conviction to the contrary, I am quite truthful.”

“Prejudices! Indeed!” Geraldine bridled.

“And yet you owe me something, Miss Brand,” said

Nicholas.

“I owe you something!”

He nodded. “Your Mr. Brewer was, in justice and in law, my property, and you stepped in and took him out of my hands without as much as ‘by your leave’.”

“I’m delighted to hear it,” said Geraldine sincerely. “Well, I was very much annoyed,” admitted Nicholas. “And I am more delighted still to hear that.”

“So I am aware.” He was smiling almost derisively. “And if I can grab Tyddie from you, I’ll do that, too!” she said with spirit.

Nicholas turned to Tydvil. “Jove, Tydvil! There’s nothing in humanity like the flaming zest of these redheads for a fight.” Then, to Geraldine, “Miss Brand, it’s refreshing to meet an honest fighter who comes out into the open. My old opponents, the churchmen, who resort to poison gas and more poisonous propaganda, have never fought fairly. I admire your spirit.”

“Flattery now!” said Geraldine wrinkling her dainty nose. “That reminds me of a saying of my grandfather which amused the family when he became excited.”

“May we hear it?” Mr. Senior enquired.

“Certainly,” replied Geraldine politely. “In moments of stress the old boy always exclaimed: ‘May the devil admire me!’”

“Personalities apart, Geraldine,” commented Nicholas, “there are not many of the race that I do admire.”

“If you don’t like personalities, Mr. Senior, please refrain from remarks about the colour of my hair, as for the rest, I do not echo, nor ever have echoed, my grandfather’s peculiar wish.”

Nicholas laughed. “I’ve known millions of your sisters who have not agreed with you.”

“Poor mutts!” replied Geraldine flatly.

“And,” said Nicholas regretfully, “I was hoping that apart from our sentimental animosities, we could call a truce and be friends.”

“Well, that’s a hope you can forget. There’s nothing doing, Mr. Senior,” she replied decisively.

“Couldn’t I induce you and Mr. Brewer to dine with me and Mr. Basil Williams at Menzies this evening?” Nicholas coaxed.

She shook her red mane emphatically.

“Because,” and a mischievous smile danced round the corners of her mouth, “there was never a spoon made long enough for my needs in such circumstances.”

The two men laughed heartily at the thrust. Said Nicholas, when he had recovered his gravity, “Do you know what I think, Miss Brand?”

“Not having your peculiar gift, I don’t,” replied Geraldine.

“Well,” said Nicholas, “I think there may be times after your marriage when Billy may regret that he slipped out of my hands.”

“Should I ever catch him hankering after the world, the flesh and you, I can promise you that he will.”

There was such a ring of sincerity in her voice, that Mr. Senior felt a twinge of pity for Billy.

“Then it is war?” he smiled.

She looked steadily into the compelling, luminous eyes. “Yes! War!”

She stood up and gathered her baskets in her arm. “And I’m wasting my time, and you’re about the only one who could make me do that.”

Nicholas bowed ironically. “You flatter me, Miss Brand.”

She took no notice of the remark, but walked round the table and stood beside Tydvil, looking down on him. “Well?” he said, turning his face up.

She placed her disengaged hand affectionately on his shoulder. “Oh, Tyddie! Tyddie,” she said gently, “you have been an ass! But I understand.”

“Friends?” asked Tydvil.

“Always!” she nodded.

She walked towards the door, and Nicholas started to his feet and opened it for her. Head up and defiant, she paused on the threshold, “And if I don’t make you discount that infernal bill of yours, it won’t be for want of trying.”

“That, I am sure of.” He bowed as to royalty and closed the door on her exit.

Nicholas resumed his seat and the two regarded one another with smiles.

“Not much change out of her,” was Tydvil’s comment.

“You know,” said Nicholas thoughtfully, “it’s fortunate for me that there are not more like her. But, dash it all, Tydvil, I like her.”

“She’ll make Billy Brewer a good wife,” ventured Tydvil. “She’ll make him a far better husband,” chuckled Nicholas.



## CHAPTER XXX

It was a fascinated Billy who listened to Geraldine's story of her interview with Tydvil and Nicholas that evening. Said he, at the close of the narrative, "By Jove, Gerry, I'd like to slam that Nicholas bird in the jaw."

"Shouldn't advise you to try, Billy," she laughed. "And besides, after all, his behaviour was really courteous and friendly."

"Dashed cheek asking us to dinner, I think," growled Billy.

She ran her fingers through his hair. "Here's a confession. I'd have loved to have accepted that invitation. I think a dinner with Mr. Senior would be delightful—while it lasted."

"Gerry!"

"But I didn't accept; too risky." There was a trace of regret in her voice.

“Why, if you had, Tyddie as Basil Williams might have landed the lot of us in quod.” Billy was not mollified.

“I doubt it, if I had been with you,” Geraldine assured him.

“Well,” Billy said, “I know what a night out is, but from what I heard about town of Basil Williams, I’m hanged if I’d risk a binge with him.”

“Don’t you let me catch you at it, boy. Tyddie trying to catch up with his lost youth is no companion for a nice Billy. Just remember that!” She drew his head to her by his ear, and kissed him lightly on the tip of the nose.

Billy submitted to treatment and grinned. “You bet I wouldn’t let you catch me!”

“Dog!” she said, snuggling closer to him, and for a time the dialogue became incoherent.

Presently Geraldine sat up. “You know, Billy, I’m terribly worried about Tyddie.”

“But, Gerry,” he said doubtfully, “do you really think the story about the promissory note is true? Dash it all, this is the twentieth century, not the middle ages.”

“Think I’m cracked if you like, but I am positive it is true,” she asserted.

“Well, if it’s true, as you think, I don’t like Tyddie’s chance of meeting it when it falls due.” There was concern in Billy’s voice.

“That’s the maddening part of it.” Geraldine’s voice reflected her anxiety. “If we told about it, everyone would think we are crazy, and there does not seem a hope of getting out of it.”

“If that Nicholas bird can change Tyddie into any shape he likes, I guess there is nothing he can’t do.”

“Nothing, absolutely nothing! And the worst of it is,” she added, “Tyddie does not seem to care, or to be trying to save himself.”

“Hold on a moment,” Billy exclaimed. “What about the old legends? There was generally a way out of those contracts!”

“That’s just it. They’re legends and nothing else,” said Geraldine.

“But if Nicholas is what you say he is, you might try swatting him with a Bible, or getting him into Church or some gag like that,” Billy ventured hopefully.

“Oh, those stories are all just church propaganda! Don’t you ever read the papers, Billy?” she asked disdainfully.

“What the dickens have the papers to do with it?”

“Just this,” she said scornfully, “if you had read them you would know that Mr. Nicholas Senior has given a Pleasant Sunday afternoon address on the modern apathy towards religion. That he had addressed the Anglican Synod, and he has been advocating in or for half the Churches in Melbourne.”

Billy laughed. “Jove! He’s a sportsman, at any rate.”

“You can be sure there’s something in his being able to cite Scripture for his own purpose. Shakespeare did not guess that. No, Billy,” Geraldine went on, “we’ll have to think of something practical.”

A bright idea struck Billy. “Listen, darlint, give Tyddie the tip to ask him to shift St. Paul’s Cathedral on to the sit of St. Patrick’s, and St. Patrick’s on to the site of St. Paul’s.”

“Don’t be absurd, Billy,” laughed Geraldine.

“That’s not absurd,” Billy contended eagerly. “If Nicholas couldn’t do it, Tyddie would be saved, and if he could do it, think what a lark it would be?”

“Idiot! I’m trying to save Tyddie, not to start a war of religion.”

“Ump!” admitted Billy. “I suppose something like that would happen when each side began blaming the other.”

“But there must be something,” Geraldine urged. “Think, Billy.”

“I’m done, Gerry,” acknowledged Billy, “much as I like to help Tyddie, it looks like a blue duck to me.”

“But he must be vulnerable somewhere,” Geraldine stared at the carpet with knit brows.

Billy leaned his ruffled head on her shoulders. “Righto, angel! You think up his vulnerable spot and tell your Billy all about it, and I promise to swat him right on it.”

But the days slipped by, and Geraldine was no nearer a solution of her problem. She had other things to think about, too, for *Cranston v. Cranston, Brewer* corespondent, was pending.

When that case came before the Court, the newspapers temporarily forgot the international situation, for *Cranston, Cranston and Brewer* became news. After the first of the three days during which the hearing lasted, Mr. Justice Mainwaring, who heard it (but doubted his ears, as well as all the witnesses), felt impelled to emit some blistering judicial comment on the behaviour of the horde of sensation-hungry people who

stormed the Law Court's draughty corridors in the hope of obtaining admission to his Court.

Tydvil was more worried over the outcome of the case than he was about his own immediate problems. Billy's solicitors had instructed Mr. Max Mendax, K.C., for the corespondent. Privately, however, Tydvil had instructed Mr. Nicholas Senior, to intervene—not in court, but by using his influence in any manner he thought advisable, ethically or otherwise, to insure a verdict against the petitioner.

Mr. Senior had accepted the brief from Tydvil with some ironic comment on the situation. "You know, Tydvil," he remarked, "that redheaded demon of yours would never believe it, but I am glad to fight on her side. But..."

"Now what mischief are you up to, Nicholas?" Tydvil was suspicious of the chuckle that accompanied Nicholas' remark.

"Nothing!" said Nicholas evasively. "I take it that you want that Cranston person to get it in the neck."

"Just that," Tydvil agreed. "But you know, Nicholas, I have a feeling,

from my brief acquaintanceship with the lad in the case, that Cranston's allegations are not without foundation."

He looked up and caught Nicholas's amused eyes on him. "Dash it all, Nicholas, don't look at me like that. You know as well as I do that..."

"Cranston arrived with his merry men too soon," Nicholas cut in.

"Confound you," Tydvil laughed in spite of himself, "haven't you any faith in human nature?"

"Yes!" replied Nicholas judicially. "Even I have some left, and that, my friend, is a very high tribute coming from me."

"Well, don't sit there grinning at me in that superior manner," Tydvil growled.

"Tydvil," Nicholas took a cigarette from his case, "I do assure you that I have faith in human nature, but very little faith in—let me see—what was it—ah yes—two large scotches, a cocktail, sherry, three glasses of champagne and a benedictine. There is a certain virtue in that blend, but



not the kind you required on that particular evening.”

Tydvil smiled reminiscently. “I was a victim of circumstances; a fragment of life caught and tossed about in a whirlpool of chance.”

“It sounds quite poetical when you put it that way,” said Nicholas tossing a match into the grate. “But there are certain less poetically minded people—people like Billy Brewer, for instance—who would say that you went on a binge and made a night of it.”

“Vulgar people, perhaps, would look at it that way,” Tydvil agreed. “But why split hairs. To get back to the respondent. It is possible that some link with Brewer’s earlier association with Hilda Cranston may be forged in court that would lead to justice being done that I doubt if Mr. Cranston deserves.”

“It seems as though we are forced into a highly immoral position,” observed Nicholas. “In order to prevent Cranston from obtaining the justice you very rightly, say he does not deserve, I, who by rights should side against the angels, must clog the wheels of the law to aid them.”

“I’m sure the angels will be relieved,” said Tydvil, “to see you doing good by stealth, especially if you blush to find it fame.”

“Should anything go wrong, you would be the one to do the blushing,” grinned Nicholas. “However, I accept the outrage to my professional ethics.”

“What about the gentleman of the bar?” asked Tydvil.

“I have compared the respective records of Mr. Max Mendax with those of the counsel for the petitioner and respondent. In professional attainments and lack of scruple there is not much to choose between them.”

“Then you will have no trouble—it will be two to one,” Tydvil suggested.

“That will be a factor in our favour,” agreed Nicholas. “But only Mr. Justice Mainwaring and I are aware of the extent to which he is indebted to me—in fact I am depending largely on such suggestions as I will make to him during the hearing. Of course, I can prompt counsel where

necessary also.”

“Well, I leave it to you with perfect confidence,” said Tydvil relieved.

Nicholas nodded. “I have already, influenced Mr. Mendax against his first decision to call you as a witness.” Tydvil whistled. “Thanks for the escape.”

“Yes,” Nicholas went on, “after he had gone through his brief I suggested to him that your evidence would sound so fishy under cross-examination, that it would not be safe to put you in the box.”

“What a friend you are, Nicholas.” There was a hint of sarcasm in his voice.

Nicholas grinned in response. “More than you think, my boy. There’s a dashed inquisitive police inspector at Russell Street who is becoming more and more convinced that Tydvil Jones knows more than he should know about Basil Williams. And,” he added, “if you had any trouble in the witness box, he might find out more than you would care for him to know.”

“Rats to him!” Tydvil was unconcerned. “Let him find out what he likes. Nice ass he would look if he tried to place the facts before a bench of magistrates.”

“There’s something in that,” agreed Nicholas. “But, in any case, you may make your mind easy about Brewer.”

There was one other person who was profoundly distressed by the impending case. Amy, who was not usually a reader of the Law List, happened to notice the name “Brewer” as she skimmed over her paper. In its association with that of Cranston, and remembering the police court case, her perturbation was natural. Never during her association with William, had the subject been mentioned between them. Now, jealousy entered her soul.

For her own reasons, Amy was a little shy at questioning Tydvil on the subject. Latterly the extraordinary change in her husband had been causing her no little concern. By some means that were beyond her comprehension, he had succeeded in escaping her authority. He was truculent under cross-examination, and his language to her had occasionally, been almost vulgar. He absolutely refused to explain his

almost constant absences from his dinner in the evening and his chronically late hours. Moreover, he was completely neglecting his social services in a most distressing manner.

Only that morning, when she had reminded him that she had arranged for him to address a meeting of the committee of the Little Mothers' Guild at the Vicarage, he had replied that if she thought he was going to waste his time lapping milk with a bunch of she cats, she was dashed well mistaken.

Her indignant, but, in the circumstances, restrained rebuke, had called forth a most disgraceful analogy regarding she cats and little mothers that had shocked Amy inexpressibly.

However, her curiosity regarding the case prompted her to bring up the subject at breakfast on the following morning. Breakfast was now about the only time at which she could be sure of meeting her husband.

Seizing what she thought was a favourable opportunity to break in on his attention to his newspaper, she said, "Oh, Tydvil dear! I saw in yesterday's paper that there was a divorce case coming on in which

Cranston and Brewer are mentioned. I trust that is not the Mr. Brewer you employ.”

“Yes it is, and the Mr. Cranston, too,” replied Tydvil shortly. “What of it?”

“But, my dear Tydvil, I can scarcely believe it,” she protested.

“Why not?” came from the opposite end of the table. The voice was quite indifferent.

“Well, I thought that your Mr. Brewer was such a superior man,” Amy ventured. “What is it all about?”

Tydvil, scarcely looking up from his paper, gave her a brief resume of Cranston’s allegations in English so plain that Amy blushed.

“Tydvil!” she exclaimed in shocked amazement. “Well, you asked me!”

“But, surely, to your wife, you might have chosen your words more carefully,” she protested angrily.

“Look here, Amy,” he said impatiently, “however the matter is put it means the same thing.”

“It appears to me, Tydvil dear, you are strangely indifferent on such a grave matter.”

“What do you want me to do? Weep?” he demanded.

“I should have thought that if there were any ground for such a charge you would have taken strong action,” she said severely.

“Poppycock!” said Tydvil rudely. “How the deuce do I know if there is any ground for it until the case is heard?”

“I, for one, don’t believe it for a moment,” Amy asserted with conviction.

“Pha! What do you know about it?” Outwardly, Tydvil was derisive. Inwardly he was bubbling with mischievous mirth.

“From the little I’ve seen of him, that Mr. Brewer seemed a very nice man, not the kind to be involved in such a disgraceful affair,” said Amy warmly.

“And that,” retorted Tydvil, “just shows what a rotten judge of character you are. Brewer’s the best salesman in town, but from what I hear, he makes love to every woman he meets.”

Had Tydvil thrown a brick at Amy he could not have given her a greater shock. But she would not believe him. For the remainder of the meal, she enlarged on the subject of gossip and scandal. She held no brief for Mr. Brewer, she asserted, but Tydvil should not listen to such statements, much less repeat them.

Tydvil suffered the lecture with carefully veiled amusement. He refrained from replying or defending himself. He had shot his dart, and was content to let it rankle. And he could tell from her voice that it did rankle.

Later that day, Amy’s wounded feelings received their much needed balm from the clear-eyed assurance of a young man in the Botanic Gardens, that he was the victim of malice and a mistaken identity. On his honour, he



vowed that he had only met Mrs. Cranston once in his life, and had never felt the slightest desire to meet her again.

Later in life, Mr. Justice Mainwaring was wont to refer to Cranston v. Cranston as a case peculiar for the consistency and brazen quality of its perjury.

Once more the battle raged round the black-eye of William Brewer. For three hours in the witness box, Cranston blackened Billy's character by adhering to his statement that William Brewer of Craddock, Burns and Despard, and no other, was his wife's companion at his home on that night in August. He had known Brewer for twelve years and could not be mistaken. At the time of their encounter, Brewer did not have a black eye. If he had one later in the evening, it had been obtained in a scuffle that had occurred in Cranston's home, or, perhaps, in his attack on other witnesses.

Despite Mr. Mendax's gruelling cross-examination Cranston stuck to his guns that the visitor he had found in his house was Brewer. The two private detectives backed their employer vigorously. They knew Brewer well by appearance. Mr. Mendax had not much trouble with the pursuing

witnesses, though, they asserted roundly that the Brewer in court was the man they had pursued.

The policeman, who had not forgotten the assault on his person or his dignity, was emphatic, as he saw the correspondent under the lights at the corner of Acland and Fitzroy Streets, that he could not be mistaken in the man, though he admitted the one he arrested did have a black eye.

At the close of the case for the petitioner the outlook for Billy Brewer was decidedly sombre.

Things began to look up, however, when Billy accounted for his movements on the night in question. When he was backed staunchly by his host and hostess of the evening, who stuck to the black-eyed Brewer and all his works, Mr. Justice Mainwaring began to be peevish.

When counsel for the petitioner endeavoured to discredit them by asking whether one Tydvil Jones, merchant of Melbourne, had not given evidence in another court to the effect that Brewer had been working in his office until late on the night in question, Mr. Mendax intervened. In the ensuing legal dogfight, during which Mr. Justice Mainwaring severely

rebuked both counsel, the question was disallowed. He suggested that either side had been entitled to call the witness Jones if they wished.

Miss Geraldine Brand went into the witness box with some trepidation but with her chin up.

Yes she was well acquainted with the corespondent.

Unhurriedly and precisely she related that she had seen a man, who closely resembled Brewer, speaking to the respondent close to His Majesty's Theatre at 8 o'clock on the night in question.

She was certain it was not Brewer, because he did not have a black eye.

It was when Geraldine was handed over to counsel for the petitioner for cross-examination that something impelled her to turn her eyes to the spectators in court. They fell on a very distinguished head with a touch of grey on either temple. The eyes belonging to the head were alive with amusement. Geraldine was suddenly seized with a burning desire to poke out her tongue at that very distinguished head.

So far she had escaped without embarrassment, but she felt the presence of Mr. Senior boded no good.

As counsel rose to his feet and tossed back his gown, she distinctly heard a voice whisper close to her ear, "Is it still war?"

She knew that voice, and she gave her thoughts free rein regarding its owner. Had they become vocal she would have staggered the court. That they reached their intended destination she was aware from the smile that twitched at Mr. Senior's lips.

Again the voice whispered very distinctly: "War it is! I have just put an idea into that learned gentleman's head that is going to make you very uncomfortable."

"Now, Miss Brand," grated counsel. "You say you have known the corespondent, Brewer, for five years?"

"Yes."

"And you think you could not have been mistaken in saying that it was not

Brewer who you saw near the theatre?”

“I am certain it was not.”

“Because he did not possess this famous black eye we have heard so much about?”

“Yes.”

“At what time did you first see Brewer that day?”

“About nine o’clock.”

“Where was he then?”

“In Mr. Jones’s private office.”

“Were you alone with him?”

As Geraldine faltered “Yes,” mingled fear and anger came to her. She felt sure she knew who was the actual questioner.

“Did he have the black eye then, Miss Brand?”

Geraldine glanced towards Nicholas. As she did, a voice said gently in her ear, “I’ll teach you to call me approbrious names, you redheaded baggage.”

Turning to counsel, she snapped, “You cowardly brute!”

“How dare you address counsel in such terms!” thundered Mr. Justice Mainwaring in the sensation caused by her outbreak.

More staggered than His Honour was Geraldine, who had involuntarily hurled at counsel the thought she intended for Nicholas, instead of the “No” she wished to say. “I beg your Honour’s pardon, I did not mean to say that,” she stammered.

“If there is any further misconduct of the kind, witness, I warn you I will deal with you very severely,” glared the outraged Judge.

“Please, your Honour! I was upset because there is a man in the body of

the court making most insulting gestures at me,” Geraldine asserted vehemently.

“A man in...Point him out to me, witness!” snapped the Judge.

There was triumph in Geraldine’s heart as she turned and pointed. “It is the tall, dark man, third from that end in the second row.”

All eyes in court were turned on the spot she indicated.

His Honour stared, and then stared at Geraldine suspiciously. “Which tall, dark man, witness?” he demanded.

“The third from the end, sir! The clean shaven man with the dark eyes,” she said eagerly.

Once again Mr. Justice Mainwaring stared from spot to witness and back again. “Stand up that third man from the end of the second row.”

Mr. Senior stood at attention.

“Is that the tall, dark, clean-shaven man?” fairly roared His Honour.

“Yes, sir!” Then her nerve almost broke. As she looked back from the bench she saw a small, bent figure of a shabby old man standing where, a moment before, Nicholas had towered. He had a long, straggly beard, and his weak grey eyes were magnified with large, thick glasses.

From the bench behind the bar table, she saw Billy’s face turned up to her in uncomprehending consternation.

Then her eyes turned back to Mr. Justice Mainwaring, whose aspect was so far from benevolent that she looked hastily away again.

“Witness,” came a cold, uncompromising voice from the bench, “I fail to understand whether you are trifling with the court, whether this is very ill-timed impertinence, or whether you are in your right mind. But—if you dare to repeat your extraordinary behaviour I shall commit you for contempt. Indeed, I think I am too lenient in not doing so now. Proceed, Mr. Bingleton!”

As His Honour concluded his tribute to Geraldine, came again the still



small voice in her ear: “You should have brought that long spoon into court with you, Geraldine, my dear.”

“You say, Miss Brand, that when you saw Brewer alone in Mr. Jones’s office at nine o’clock, he did not have a black eye?”

“That is so,” she was much meeker.

“At what time did he acquire this decoration?”

“About twenty minutes later.” How she hated that Nicholas.

“Did you witness the accident, Miss Brand?”

“Yes,” faltered Geraldine. The thought of the next question turned her cold.

“Just explain to the Court how it happened.”

“He knocked it against something,” she temporarised. “Against something—what thing?”

There was a long pause.

“Come, come! Miss Brand, what was it?”

“Answer the question, witness!” from the bench. “My hand,” faltered Miss Brand.

“Let us get this quite clear, witness,” came Mr. Bingleton’s suave, persuasive voice. “Did Brewer knock against your hand, or did your hand knock against Brewer?”

Geraldine sped a positively poisonous look at the man third from the end of the second row in the body, of the court, and answered, “My hand knocked against him.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Mr. Bingleton, as one who has made a pleasing discovery.

“And did your hand happen to be clenched, Miss Brand?”

“Yes,” murmured the miserable Geraldine, wishing she had Mr. Senior

somewhere free from observation.

“So, Miss Brand, we can assume that at about twenty minutes past nine that morning, alone in Mr. Jones’s office, you punched the correspondent in the eye so severely that you blackened it?”

There was no answer.

Mr. Bingleton took the silence for assent, and asked, in silky tones, “Just why did you blacken Brewer’s eye, Miss Brand?”

“For nothing,” she answered desperately.

“Witness! Do you mean to tell the court that you are in the habit of punching men in the eye for nothing?” severely demanded Mr. Justice Mainwaring.

“No, sir,” said Geraldine weakly.

“Then I warn you not to prevaricate! Answer counsel’s question.”

Geraldine took a fleeting look at Billy's face that was registering intense sympathy.

"He kissed me!" The whispered words were distinct in the silent court, and released a wave of laughter.

"Silence! Silence!" roared the orderly.

"If there is a repetition of that disgraceful behaviour I shall have the court cleared!" thundered Mr. Justice Mainwaring.

Geraldine's thoughts at the moment may be imagined from the fact that those who were sitting on either side of the third man from the end of the second row noticed that he started as though something had stung him.

"So," continued Mr. Bingleton, "the corespondent took advantage of your unprotected state and kissed you, and you, in defence of your outraged modesty, punched him in the eye."

Geraldine looked miserable, but made no reply.

“Well,” he continued, “now we know all about the famous black eye, and some more of the character of the correspondent. Thank you, Miss Brand, that will do.”

The look Geraldine turned on Mr. Bingleton as she left the witness box, convinced that gentleman that she was in a mood to serve out another black eye, and that he could easily be its recipient.

It was late that day, that Mr. Justice Mainwaring observed, among other things, that the only fact that emerged from the evidence was that all the witnesses were lying.

He utterly refused to believe any statement made by any one of them. The witness Cranston was viciously malicious. His two detectives were men whose characters forbade credence. He held his own opinion on the reluctance of both sides to call in the witness from the lesser court, Tydvil Jones, who might have thrown some light on the slimy morass of evasion and falsehood. Brewer might be innocent, but if so, he did not behave as an innocent man. The silence of the respondent was a notable feature of the case.

The court, he observed in conclusion, though willing to give every consideration to fact, would not attempt to discriminate among falsehoods. For that reason he dismissed the petition. Each side should pay its own costs.

As Geraldine left the court, still boiling with fury, she overtook Nicholas. "Devil!" she hissed in his ear.

"At your service, my dear young lady; now and always," he smiled serenely.

## CHAPTER XXXI

It was little consolation to Geraldine that in both the evening and morning papers the press photographers had done her ample justice. The caption beneath the pictures of herself that conspicuously decorated every account of the case, were flattering but facetious. She did not like to see herself described as “Geraldine Brand, the lovely girl with the lively left.” Beneath another she read, “Who wouldn’t risk a black eye?” But her sense of humour came to the rescue as she and Billy discussed the events of the afternoon.

Billy was fighting mad when he heard of Nicholas’s share in her tribulations, and it was only with difficulty that she made him recognise the utter futility of any attempt at reprisals.

Geraldine’s own sentiments towards Mr. Senior were actually less friendly than those of Billy. To her, it was clear that in the Court, she alone, saw him as the tall, distinguished stranger. To the others he must have appeared as the bent and bearded septuagenarian. The exhibition she had made of herself in her attempt at retaliation made her boil when she thought of it. What perturbed her most was her own unquestioning

acceptance of Tydvil's explanation of Nicholas's identity, preposterous as it was.

Despite that knowledge, she wondered at her lack of fear. During her brief interview with Nicholas in Tydvil's room she had experienced a fascination she could not resist. Again, as on her first encounter, she had felt the impact of power that radiated from him. Behind the banter of his words, and the sardonic humour of his eyes, she sensed something terrible that was beyond her comprehension. Whatever it was it did not affect her as being evil, nor had it frightened her. Her feeling was more of awe than anything else.

Nevertheless, intuition warned her that there was peril in the fascination he exercised. A shudder went through her at the thought of the possibilities that might be masked by the almost irresistibly attractive humanity he had assumed. Tydvil, she recognised, had taken him at his face value. Geraldine was not deeply religious. Her wholesome conscience was her chief guide and guardian. Her common sense rejected the principle of evil as being embodied in horns, hooves and barbed tail as ludicrous. She felt that the Nicholas Senior she had met could be more dangerous than any composite zoological creation of mediaeval



ecclesiastical imagination.

Since knowledge of the truth regarding Tydvil had come to her, she had turned over in her mind the incongruousness of Nicholas busying himself with Tydvil's petty affairs and escapades. It seemed like using a mountain to crush a gnat, until she reflected that Tydvil would be but one among millions who were being affected by the same influence, unseen and unknown to her.

But there had gradually grown up in her a fierce determination to save Tydvil in spite of himself. It was more a desperate resolve to match herself against the unseen force than to protect Tydvil from the consequences of his folly. Her animosity against Nicholas Senior had become violently personal. He had roused a dauntless spirit that nested under her flaming helmet. Taking Nicholas on his own valuation she argued to herself that he must be vulnerable. Nothing was invulnerable in the Universe but the will of its Creator. Therefore, somewhere, Nicholas had a spot through which he could be struck.

But her first obstacles were in Billy, who looked askance at her taking the risk of fighting Nicholas, and in Tydvil himself, who was either

blind or indifferent to her peril.

Though Billy was deeply impressed by Nicholas's activities, his antagonism was very human and natural. He urged on Gerry that Nicholas was a nasty bit of work with which she had no need to become involved.

“Look, Gerry!” he said when they discussed the question, “if Tyddie is mug enough to get himself mixed up with all the devils in Hades, why should you risk getting singed fighting his battles?”

“Tell me,” she demanded, “what I looked like yesterday when I pointed out the tall, dark stranger to that old savage, Mainwaring?”

Billy strove manfully, but failed to hide his mirth at the recollection.

Geraldine reached for, and obtained, a firm handful of hair, and shook her finger in a face that was incapable of evasion. “Yes, Billy, laugh! Go on, laugh! I know I looked like a prize idiot. Just as I did when I called that pompous ass Bingleton a brute. He was, too. But who caused it all? Tell me that!”

“Crikey, Gerry!” gurgled Billy. “I didn’t...Leggo my hair! Do you want a bald husband?”

But Gerry, disregarding his protests, went on. “Nicholas Senior He did it. He’s the man I’m after. Do you think I’m letting him get away with that?”

“Poor Devil!” grinned Billy as she relinquished her hold. “He’ll wish himself home again if you do get a strangle hold on him.”

“Oh, if only I knew how!” Her voice was deep in its sincerity of purpose.

“Some of those evangelical parsons talk of wrestling with the Devil,” Billy ventured. “You might engage one to train you.”

“Idiot!” murmured Geraldine. “Can’t you think of anything?”

“Come here!” He held out his arms and Gerry responded. As she settled herself comfortably, he said, “How about trying to persuade him to swap Tyddie for Amy? Then everyone would be happy.”

“Except Mr. Nicholas Senior. Do you think he’s that sort of fool?” she said disdainfully. “Would you swap Tyddie for Amy?”

“Lord forbid!” replied Billy piously.

“Well, why should he? Although,” she added, “I should think Amy would be a far greater asset for his purposes.”

“What I can’t understand about Tyddie is why, if he did want to go on the binge, he didn’t come to me, instead of going to the Devil.” Billy’s voice sounded as though he felt Tydvil’s judgment was at fault.

Smothered by the lapel of his coat, he heard a chuckle. “What’s so funny about that?” he demanded.

“Nothing, dearest,” came from his lapel. “I was just thinking it might have amounted to the same thing.”

“What you deserve is…” he began.

She raised her face to him.

There was a long pause, and then as he looked down into the laughing eyes again, he said, “You didn’t deserve that, anyway. What you really deserve, is to be married to Nicholas Senior—you’d make a fine pair.”

“If he got what he deserved, he would be married to Amy.”

“I didn’t think you were so vindictive, Gerry.”

“When I think of those two I could bite them both,” she said. “That cat, Amy, is just as much to blame for everything as Nicholas is.”

“Urn! Maybe you’re right. Poor old Tyddie didn’t have much chance between them.”

“And,” she went on, “don’t forget that clear Amy is under the happy impression, that you, William Brewer, are her guilty partner in her flaming romance!”

“Makes me scared stiff to think of it,” Billy admitted. “Lord! Who’d have thought that Tyddie would put that across dear Amy?”

“I’m not worrying about her,” Geraldine replied. “But if Tyddie lets you in for any more trouble, I’m going to make him wish he’d never been born.”

“Yes, and if Amy gets hold of me in mistake for Tyddie, I’ll be wishing the same wish.”

“Then, there will be three of you with but a single thought,” Geraldine released herself. “Because, when I’m finished with Amy, her outlook on life is going to be very bleak.”

“There was a time,” Billy observed as his eyes took in the picture made by Gerry as she straightened her disordered hair before the Tydvil’s mirror, “when I had a reputation for enjoying a scrap. But I was the dove of peace compared with you, darlint.”

“It’s not fighting I love, Billy,” she assured him.

He caught sight of the reflection of her face in the mirror. A minute later he was shooed out of the room by a Geraldine who demanded to be

informed if he thought she had nothing to do but comb her hair every five minutes.

When Tydvil arrived at the office that morning, his humour was joyous and mischievous. He came in with the morning papers under his arm, and placed them on the table without a word, but with provocative intent. Each upturned page displayed a portrait of his secretary. He left them there, an incitement to warfare during the whole of their morning routine. As a challenge to Geraldine's refusal to notice them, he paused now and again in his dictation to admire his picture exhibition, and to compare the portraits with the original.

Said Geraldine, as she began to collect her papers, "If you had been a badly brought-up schoolboy, your behaviour might be excusable; as the head of C. B. & D., it's disgraceful."

"You're certainly in a position to criticise my behaviour." His laugh was derisive. "Who was it used abusive language to an eminent counsel? Who was it who tried to pull the leg of the Supreme Court judge? Who was it nearly had herself run in for contempt of court? You, to talk of disgraceful behaviour!"

“I suppose,” her voice was full of menace, “you, and your very distinguished and noble friend, Mr. Senior, have been enjoying the ridicule I underwent.”

“Well, yes,” Tydvil responded. “To be honest, I think enjoying is the correct word.”

“It’s refreshing to find you honest about anything these days.”

“The injury was apparently inflicted by a blunt weapon; probably a girl’s tongue,” said Tydvil to his blotting pad. “Injury!” She sniffed disdainfully.

He leaned forward on his folded arms on his table. “You might have been more conciliatory to Mr. Senior, you know, Geraldine. Without holding a brief for him, you rather asked for what happened.”

“Conciliatory! You can do what you please, but understand this, I’d rather be compromised by him any day than compromise with him.”



“You have no idea what a delightful companion he can be.”

“It’s for that very reason that I’m taking no risks,” she asserted. Then, pointing to the open papers on the table, she went on, “Do you think I liked those?”

He grinned mischievously. “I would unhesitatingly accept your assurance that you didn’t.” Then, after a pause, “There was someone who liked them almost less than you did.”

“I have one friend apparently.”

“Not quite a friend, I’m afraid.” He leaned back in his chair. “To tell you the truth, it was a high moral authority who suggested at length, and with some emphasis, that my secretary was a blot on society and quite unfitted for intimate contact with the proprietor of C. B. & D.”

Danger signals flashed into Geraldine’s face. “If I am tainting the high moral atmosphere of C. B. & D., and its highly, moral proprietor, the sooner I remove the blot the better.”

“You dare, you wild cat, and by Jove, I’ll—I’ll sue you for breach of contract or something awful!” He laughed.

“Do you think I’d let you house a blot on society?”

“Geraldine! In the first place, no Moral Authority, however high, is allowed to interfere with my management of C. B. & D. In the second place, despite the fury of your temper, I like you too much to allow you to go.” There was no mistaking the sincerity of his voice as he smiled up at the angry girl.

“Oh, Tyddie, you are a mischievous demon!” The “Tyddie” slipped out unconsciously.

“That’s better! Friends again?” There was something of a schoolboy in his engaging grin.

She laughed. “But what about the High Moral Authority?”

His eyes twinkled. “You may not believe it, Geraldine, but I derive a considerable amount of enjoyment from frustrating the High Moral

Authority.”

She looked at him speculatively. “Yes,” she said slowly, “I can quite believe that.”

He started up. “Oh, by Jove, I’d almost forgotten! Sit down again and take this note.”

Geraldine resumed her seat, pencil in hand,

“Dear Sir,” dictated Tydvil. “Will you kindly accept this as a notification that I am disassociating myself from the activities of your society, and desire my name to be removed from the list of members?”

From his wallet Tydvil drew a paper and passed it over to Geraldine. “You will find here a list of seventeen philanthropic societies. I want you to send a copy of that note to the Secretary of each one.”

Geraldine stared up from the list to Tydvil. “I wonder,” she said thoughtfully, “what the High Moral Authority will say to that?”

“It scarcely bears contemplation,” chuckled Tydvil. “Well,” commented Geraldine, “there are always Gippsland and the tall timber.”

She stood up and walked towards the door, but hesitated. Then she returned and, walking round the table, stood beside it.

Seeing her indecision he looked up. “Come, Geraldine, out with whatever it is.”

“Do you know the date?” she asked.

He glanced at the date block on his table. “October 18th, unless you have neglected to change my block. What of it?”

“There are just seventeen days before November the fourth.” Her voice was very serious.

His face was expressionless as he replied: “That will be the day after Cup Day.”

“Oh, please, please Tyddie, be serious!” she pleaded. “You know you told

me that that dreadful bill was due on the fourth.”

His eyes searched her face. “I believe, Geraldine, you really are worried.”

“Oh! How can I help being worried? You don’t seem to realise; you’re blind to what it means. I—I want to help.” The deep concern for him was very real.

“Will you believe me when I say the prospect does not worry me in the slightest degree?” There could be no doubt he meant what he said.

“But...” she began.

“Listen, Geraldine,” he interrupted, “I went into this with my eyes wide open. It was a revolt against circumstances. I have had, and will continue to have, my fun. I am not going to squeal about the price of it.”

“But, Tyddie,” her voice told the affection she felt for him, “there must be a way out. Would you not take it if there were?”

Tydvil raised his eyebrows. "You're far more optimistic than I am. In fact, the possibility of evading the bill is so remote that I have never even considered it."

"But would you take the opportunity if there were one?"

"Well," he replied thoughtfully, "the wording of the endorsement is explicit, so that I would be quite within my right to do it, and," he added, "I quite believe Mr. Senior would accept the situation philosophically."

"I doubt it." Geraldine wrinkled her dainty nose disdainfully.

"Maybe you do, my dear girl," Tydvil smiled up at her, "but I have always found him to be a gentleman and a sportsman in every sense of the word." He paused and went on, "And that is more than I can say of any single one of my former pious associates."

"Was it a sportsman who baited me yesterday?" Geraldine's indignation flashed up.

Tydvil chuckled. “I admit it must have been rather harrowing for you. But remember, you challenged him; and remember, too, that he might as easily as have made the rebuke a thousand times worse.”

“Staggered at his own moderation, no doubt.” Geraldine laughed in spite of herself.

“Anyway,” Tydvil said, “if I’m not worrying, you needn’t.”

“But I am worrying, and I’m going on worrying,” persisted Geraldine.

Tydvil raised his hands in surrender. “From toothache, flat tyres and all contumacious women, Good Lord deliver us.”

Mr. Tydvil Jones’s private Secretary looked her employer straight in the eye, and protruded the tip of a pink tongue at him in deliberate derision as she turned towards the door. Far from expressing anger at her rudeness, Mr. Tydvil Jones laughed heartily at the gesture.

As her hand was on the door-knob he called, “Geraldine!”

She paused.

“I want you to give that Billy of yours a message.”

“Well!”

“Tell him to put every penny he can spare on ‘Thundercloud’ for the Cup,”  
was the astonishing direction.

“You...” Geraldine’s stock of vituperative reply was so unfit for  
consumption that she left it unspoken. “Don’t you know I’m trying to  
break him of those habits?” she demanded.

“A dying flutter,” persuaded Tydvil.

“Why should he?” she asked indignantly.

“Tell him I have one hundred pounds on,” he grinned. “Perhaps he can take  
a hint despite the puritan conscience of his fiancée.”



“He’s saving for our home; and he won’t waste his money that way,” she retorted.

“He’ll be able to buy and furnish the house if he takes my advice,” replied the Vice-President of the Anti-Gambling League.

“More likely to lose our house and furniture,” she retorted.

“The bookmakers are laying three hundred to one against Thundercloud,” murmured the voice of Tydvil the tempter. “Twenty pounds carefully invested would return six thousand.”

“I’ll tell him no such thing,” hissed the determined damsel as she disappeared through the door, cutting the discussion short.

Nevertheless, as a cynical Tydvil expected, the advice did reach Billy Brewer; not as a recommendation to accept it, but as a warning against the wiles of Tydvil in particular, and against backing horses in general.

Billy virtuously disclaimed any intention of gambling. In any case, he alleged that his opinion of Thundercloud’s chances for the Cup was far

more pessimistic than that of the bookmakers.

During the afternoon, however, he gave the matter furtive but serious consideration. He had very scant respect of Thundercloud, but he had a very great respect for Tydvil's conservatism in money matters. He reflected that though Tyddie was lavish with his money for charities, financing bookmakers to the extent of one hundred pounds would not be likely to conform to his idea of charity.

Tyddie must have had a tip from someone. Who? Nicholas Senior, was the only answer to that question.

Next morning Billy spent some of his employer's time in putting twenty pounds on Thundercloud with as many bookmakers. One of these assured him cheerfully that the horse was not worth half of the twenty shillings invested on him.

It was by no means on moral grounds that Amy had urged Tydvil to rid the office of the miasmatic presence of that "Brand girl," as she elected to call Geraldine. Amy was a very troubled and a very jealous woman. When she read the story of Billy's black eye, that had been torn from

Geraldine in the witness box, Amy saw yellow.

The more she thought, the more bewildered she became. That night William had sought refuge from a sudden indisposition, he had not a black eye. Yet, unless that Brand girl had committed perjury, he most certainly should have had one. Of course, that Brand girl was just the sort or creature who would lure a man into kissing her, and a woman like that would not hesitate to perjure herself, Amy reasoned. Women of that type were a positive menace to every man they met. Of course, Tydvil was too simple and ignorant of women to understand.

Although by now she felt sure that the confusion had arisen from a mistaken identity, and that despite the evidence her William had not been involved with that dreadful Cranston woman, Amy felt rage surge through her at the thought that William might have kissed that Brand girl.

Undoubtedly her William was the office William, who the other was she did not care.

That afternoon when she met him, it was with an air of pained reserve. She told him she did not wish to prejudge him she had come to give him an

opportunity to explain what seemed to her inexplicable.

And William explained.

He explained with such an air of innocence and candour that Amy's heart burned with indignation at the utterly unscrupulous conduct of that Brand creature. Well it was for Tydvil that Geraldine could not hear William lying away her reputation for veracity.

He assured Amy that he had not been in the Chief's office on that fatal morning. That he had never in his life as much as laid a hand on Miss Brand, much less had he kissed her, as she alleged. Never had he experienced any inclination to kiss her. He asserted on his honour that so far as he was concerned there was not a word of truth in that girl's evidence. As proof he recalled to her mind that at their meeting at her house that night, he had not had a black eye.

All this, William's alter ego assured him, did not depart one hair's breadth from the truth.

His words carried such conviction that Amy found it impossible to doubt

him.

Moreover, the wily William strengthened that conviction by reminding Amy of the peculiar conduct of Miss Brand in the witness box. A girl who behaved like that could not be taken seriously, as the judge had pointed out.

By the time William's explanation was complete, Amy felt convinced that beside that Brand girl Sapphira was a well of the purest veracity, and Jezebel was a much overrated sinner. She voiced her thoughts to William with extensions and annotations, until William began to feel uneasy at the thought of what might happen should Amy come into contact with Geraldine on one of her occasional visits to the office.

He knew that so far as Amy was concerned he had left Geraldine's reputation a total wreck. He felt certain, too, that if Amy were to let herself loose on Geraldine, that astute young woman would, in a second, convict him of being the source of Amy's information.

Knowing Geraldine, William's alter ego regarded the outlook as rather perilous. What Miss Brand's reaction to the situation would be, did not

bear contemplation. However, he reflected that a game that did not involve risks was not worth playing. Certainly, his spurious identities of Billy and Basil Williams had made the life of Tydvil Jones' anything but drab and boring.

The domestic life of Tydvil also became more hectic than usual during the following week when news reached Amy from sorrowing secretaries of bereft societies that Mr. Jones had severed his invaluable connection from them. Life under his own roof became one long battle, into which Amy flung herself, heart and soul. In the struggle for liberty and independence Tydvil fought with a patriot's fervour. The few meals he took at home sounded like mealtime among the larger carnivora at the Zoo.

His worst experience was when he arrived home late at night to find Amy in battle array waiting for him. Following his usual tactics he charged through the enemy's lines, and, closely pursued, reached his own room. It was only when he attempted to lock the door he found that the lock had been removed. The job had been Amy's own handiwork, and had cost her half the afternoon to complete.

Under her threat to "scream the house down" if he did not let her in,

Tydvil surrendered. It was not a pleasant interview. The conversation was almost one-sided, and lasted for three hours. It took Amy every minute of them to describe Tydvil as he appeared in her eyes. In addition to her views on his desertion of her causes, his furtive conduct during the past week, and her suspicions that he was leading a profligate life, she reasserted her views on that Brand creature, that the girl was not better than she should be, and that Tydvil knew it.

Finally, some further and more scandalous reflections on Geraldine spurned Tydvil into reprisals. He fairly blew her out of the room with a blast of language such as had never before assaulted Amy's ears. She retired shaken with sobs that on an earlier day Tydvil would have heard with an abject sense of guilt and shame. Now they sounded like music in his ears as he barricaded his door with his bed in case the enemy counterattacked.

He had one satisfactory sense of superiority in the war. While he was cherishing his secret of Amy and William, which he was reserving for a crisis that he knew must come, Amy had nothing on him. He was still the impeccable Tydvil Jones of the blameless life—on the surface, at any rate.

Then, from causes beyond his control swift disaster befell him.

Since the night that he had defeated the police on the question of Basil Williams, he had been careful to keep Basil out of any mischief that might renew their attentions. As Nicholas had warned him, and as he himself observed, Tydvil Jones was under quiet but continuous police surveillance. Inspector Kane was a patient but tenacious man when his own hunches were concerned. Intuition had linked Basil Williams and Tydvil Jones in his mind, and he followed that intuition as a ferret follows a rabbit.

Tydvil had found in Elsie Wilson an entertaining friend. It was a friendship which to Nicholas's cynical amusement he kept on a strictly platonic basis. He recognised, however, that few of Basil Williams's friends accepted it at its face value.

One day, as Basil Williams, he kept a luncheon appointment with Elsie with intent to spend the afternoon at the Moonee Valley. When they met in Collins Street, Tydvil noticed that she was even more lighthearted and entertaining than usual. He was not to know that Elsie had already



absorbed more joy-producing fluids than discretion warranted. The bottle of wine they shared at lunch, preceded by a cocktail, completely unleashed Elsie's not tightly bound inhibitions.

Unfortunately, Tydvil did not rightly diagnose the cause of her spontaneous gaiety until in Collins Street, after lunch, when the fresh air took immediate effect.

Now, fate decreed that Inspector Kane had paused to speak to a uniformed man on duty as the two emerged from the restaurant. Elsie's merry laugh drew his two narrowed grey eyes on Basil Williams and his partner.

Then, two facts struck Basil with a staggering impact. One was, that Elsie was far from sober; and the other was that Inspector Kane and a uniformed man were standing within ten feet of him.

Basil's thoughts buzzed wildly for a moment and then crystallised. On the opposite side of the street, and almost in front of the Centreway, stood a taxi—and refuge.

Gently but firmly he took the now swaying Elsie's arm and led her across

the street. It was not an easy passage because Elsie's feet were manifestly unsteady and the traffic was heavy. But he breathed a sigh of relief when they reached the taxi in safety. A swift glance warned Tydvil that Kane and the constable had left the far footpath and were moving across the road with apparent indifference to his existence.

The taxi-driver regretted he was engaged. Basil quickly offered him double fare to become disengaged. The man regretfully and respectfully declined the offer. His obduracy evidently annoyed the lively Elsie, whose raised voice halted a number of staggered pedestrians on the footpath. Basil made a desperate but ineffectual attempt to draw her away through the Centreway. Elsie was beyond reason, and before he could intervene she struck the taxi-driver in the face.

What happened next occupied two irreparable seconds. The man, in trying to dodge the infuriated Elsie, bumped into Basil. The girl flew at him, and clung like a wild cat. Basil tried to pry her off her victim and the three crashed in a heap to the pavement. He was on his feet in a moment and lifted Elsie to her feet. He had a glimpse of Kane and the constable passing through the traffic towards them at increased speed.

Chivalry forbade Basil to desert his disastrous partner. With all speed, half carrying her, he made for the Centreway. The only idea in his mind was to escape pursuit. The laughing crowd let him through, but Kane and his satellite were not more than thirty feet behind him when he was half way down the short passage to Flinders Lane.

His mind flew to Nicholas for assistance, and at the same instant he saw advancing towards him no other than Amy, whose eyes were fixed with a pious glare on the dishevelled Elsie. At the same moment Elsie slipped from his grasp to a sitting posture on the pavement. Behind Basil Williams was one disaster, in front of him was another. To assume his identity of Tydvil Jones would be worse than to remain Basil Williams.

Reason fled before instinct. To save Elsie was impossible. It was a case of *saue qui peut*. Turning, he darted up the blind alley off the passage. It was happily empty, and in its far corner stood a stack of scaffold poles, behind which the breathless Basil squeezed himself. But as he did so he recognised that he was trapped. There were sounds of hurrying feet and excited voices nearing his refuge.

“We’ve got the beggar this time,” he heard Kane’s triumphant voice.

Strong hands tore the scaffold poles away. To the fugitive was revealed Inspector Kane and the constable in the immediate foreground. Slightly behind them was a group of interested spectators such as gather mysteriously at every unusual event. Among them stood Amy. Two of the faces bore an expression of undisguised astonishment. One of these belonged to Inspector Kane, and the other was Amy's.

The first of the groups to move was Amy. She almost sprang past Kane and paused with a gasped, "Tydvil! Whatever is the meaning of this?"

Kane stared from one to the other. "Who is this man?" he demanded of Amy.

"He is my husband." Amy resented the official voice and manner of Kane.

"He is Mr. Tydvil Jones."

Kane glanced over his shoulder. With the ubiquity of the force a second uniformed man had joined his colleagues. "Mason! Keep those people away. You, Burns, take that woman to the watchhouse." He waved his hand towards Elsie, who had passed out where she lay.

Tydvil's heart went out in sympathy for his unhappy little playmate who was beyond his aid.

Then Kane turned back to run a cold, inquisitive eye over Tydvil Jones, whose appearance at the moment was anything but dignified.

“So!” growled Kane, “you are Mr. Tydvil Jones?” Tydvil wished very heartily at the moment that he could deny his identity—but admitted it.

“Then will you please inform me on what you were doing concealed behind those poles?” The voice was respectful but coldly official, and its tone indicated that a full and frank answer was required.

Although Amy was silent her eyes demanded explanations even more eloquently than Kane's voice.

Tydvil's trouble at the moment was that an adequate explanation, impromptu, of the presence of an eminent merchant and philanthropist behind a pile of poles up an alley off a lane at one-thirty p.m., was not the easiest thing in the world to provide.

All he could say as he looked into the searching grey eyes was, “Urn!” He said “Urn!” several times.

At about the fourth repetition of the word, Inspector Kane said, not very encouragingly, “You have already said ‘Urn,’ Mr. Jones.”

Nevertheless, Tydvil repeated the word and halted again in his speech.

Inspector Kane was about to speak again when a diversion came that made Tydvil’s blank face light with joy. Round the corner from the Centreway came Mr. Nicholas Senior, serene, dignified and unhurried.

The expression in Tydvil’s face made Kane turn to survey the newcomer. Nicholas, however, completely disregarded Kane’s presence. He raised his hat to Amy, who also hailed his arrival with pleasure, though it was a pleasure tinged with embarrassment.

Nicholas placed his hand on Tydvil’s shoulder. “Did you get them?” he asked eagerly.

“Who are you, sir?” demanded Kane irritably.

“You may have heard of Mr. Nicholas Senior,” Tydvil explained, and to Nicholas, “This gentleman is a police officer.”

“Oh!” Nicholas smiled. “How very fortunate.” Then to Tydvil, “Did you really get them!”

Bewildered, but trusting Nicholas, Tydvil shook his head. “I’m afraid not.”

“Will you be good enough to explain to me what this is all about?” Kane’s patience was evaporating fast.

“Mr. Jones and I,” he said serenely,—“You know he is the Vice-President of the Anti-Gambling League—having been suspicious that two men are using this alleyway to conduct starting price gambling...”

“What!” snapped Kane.

“And,” Nicholas went on, unheeding the hostility of the voice, “we decided that one of us should watch each day to try to procure evidence

of the offence.”

Kane looked from one to the other and the expression in his face was not flattering to either Nicholas, Tydvil, or the explanation. What he may have intended to say was cut short by Amy, who broke in with, “But, Tydvil, you have resigned from the Anti-Gambling League!”

Under his breath Tydvil said something that was not quite nice.

Aloud, Kane gave vent to an expressive “Oh!” Then he turned on Tydvil, “If you are not a member of the League, why are you hunting gamblers?”

“I am still interested in the suppression of the vice,” replied Tydvil with dignity.

“You must be,” was Kane’s dry comment. “So perhaps you can tell me what became of the man who ran into this alley just before I arrived?”

“A man!” Tydvil’s voice sounded as though a man were as rare a phenomenon in the city as an angel.



“Yes!” went on Kane. “A man named Basil Williams. He came in here, and he certainly did not go out.”

“I certainly did not see a man come in here,” Tydvil asserted.

“Yet you were watching for gamblers.” Kane’s tone was unpleasant.

“You must be mistaken.” Tydvil had to keep his ground.

“He was not mistaken, Tydvil, dear,” put in Amy. “I distinctly saw a man who was with that horrid woman, leave her and run in here.” Amy was beginning to enjoy herself.

Kane drew himself up with a decisive motion. “Mr. Jones, there are circumstances surrounding this incident that require further information from you. I must ask you to accompany me to Russell Street.”

“I most positively decline to go to Russell Street.” Tydvil stood on his dignity. “If you wish to continue this absurd inquisition, my office is close by. We can continue our conversation there.”

“Very good!” Kane nodded stiffly. “You will come with me, please.”

He turned away, but Amy was too full of curiosity to be denied, as the other two fell in beside him.

“Tydvil, I insist on being present at this interview,” she said.

Kane looked at her, undecided. Tydvil, however, was in no humour for Amy.

“There is not the slightest necessity,” he snapped.

“But I insist.” Amy was afraid she might miss something.

“My dear Mrs. Jones,” Nicholas interfered gently but firmly, “I shall stay with Mr. Jones, and I really think you would be wiser not to accompany us.” He accompanied the words with an understanding smile that conquered Amy.

“Very well, Mr. Senior,” she said graciously, “So long as you are with Mr. Jones I feel sure I have no cause for anxiety.”

“I am certain of that.” He raised his hat. “I promise I will look after

him.”

The three men made their way through the curious crowd that still remained watching from the entrance. Kane marched stiffly ahead, without even glancing back to see if he were followed.

As they walked, Tydvil murmured his thanks to Nicholas who warned him there were still hurdles ahead.

Geraldine was at her desk as three figures advanced down the warehouse between stacks of sheeting and piled Manchester goods. Her heart danced when she recognised the third member of the party as Inspector Kane. She did not even glance up as the three men passed her desk and entered Tydvil’s private office. Tydvil pushed the door behind him but it had not quite closed. With shameless curiosity Geraldine walked to a filing cabinet close to the door, her ears alert.

Tydvil took his accustomed seat at the table. Nicholas waved Kane to the armchair, and seated himself on the corner of the table.

“Now!” Tydvil, on his native heath, spoke decisively. “Perhaps you will

let me know what this is all about.”

Unabashed at his tone, Kane replied, “That is just what I am expecting from you, Mr. Jones.”

“I am quite at sea.” Tydvil’s voice was all candour. “Perhaps if you asked some questions...” He waved his hands largely.

“That is just what I intend to do,” responded Kane, disregarding the friendliness of Tydvil’s invitation.

“Do you still assert, Mr. Jones, that though you were watching for some bookmaker, you did not see a man enter that alley?” he demanded.

“I assure you, Inspector, that I did not,” Tydvil replied. “You were not asleep, by any chance” There was more than a hint of sarcasm in the voice.

“You are jesting, Inspector.” Tydvil smiled engagingly.

“Believe me, I am not, and you would be well advised to recognise that,”

was the frosty retort. “A man did enter that alley, and I’m afraid I cannot accept your assurance that you did not see him.”

“How very peculiar!” Mr. Senior observed.

“Very!” said Kane dryly, without taking his eyes off Tydvil.

“Then I have nothing to add,” said Tydvil shortly.

“Tell me this, Mr. Jones,” asked Kane abruptly. “Do you know the man Basil Williams, or have you had any dealing with him?”

“I have never yet met the man, nor spoken to him,” replied Tydvil flatly.

“You will find it far wiser to be frank with me,” insisted Kane.

“Believe me, I am totally at a loss to understand how you can associate me with this man Williams in any way,” Tydvil affirmed.

“Candidly, Mr. Jones, I don’t believe you,” came back the uncompromising Kane.

“Then, perhaps you can supply me with some reasons for your doubt. And let me tell you, Inspector Kane, I object strongly to your manner. I find it offensive.” Tydvil tried taking the high ground.

Inspector Kane was not impressed. Others had tried that on him before.

“Mr. Jones!” his voice was becoming more official. “You will be good enough to explain why, on the night of the riot in town three months ago, your hat was in Williams’s possession? Why, on the night Mr. Muskat was assaulted, you were found alone in the lane into which Williams escaped? Why, later, when Williams was traced into De Graves Street, he had vanished and you were there alone? Why, today, when I ran Williams into that alley he had again vanished, but you were there?”

“Do you dare to say that I am Williams?” Tydvil demanded with some show of anger.

“I am asserting nothing, sir!” Kane said shortly. “I am asking for an explanation.”

“Don’t you think that is rather difficult?” Tydvil sneered a little.

“I am sure it is. One coincidence of the kind might be explained; but four coincidences, Mr. Jones, require a great deal of explanation.”

Kane’s voice had become silky, but all the more menacing.

“Then,” Tydvil exclaimed, “I can’t help you! I know nothing of Basil Williams, and I am not interested in him.”

He was still speaking when a knock at the door heralded the advent of Geraldine. She carried an open cheque book in her hand.

Jones glanced up, and said, “Not now, Miss Brand, I am engaged.”

Geraldine stood her ground. “I am sorry, Mr. Jones, but before you went to lunch you told me to bring this cheque for five hundred pounds for Mr. Basil Williams for signature the moment you returned.”

Kane sprang to his feet and snatched the book from her hands. “So!” he ejaculated triumphantly, “He told you that did he?” turning to Geraldine.

The expression of consternation on Tydvil’s face was perfectly natural.

That on Geraldine's face was perfectly acted. Mr. Nicholas Senior's eyes were dancing with suppressed mirth.

"I..." Geraldine stammered, looking at Tydvil for guidance.

"That will do! Go!" ordered Kane, bustling her to the door, which he closed abruptly after her.

Outside, Geraldine stood with a Mona Lisa smile on her lips, and with her head inclined intently to the door.

"Now!" Kane almost barked. "You will be good enough, sir, to tell me all you know of this man you don't know, but for whom you sign cheques for five hundred pounds?" He slapped the book as he spoke.

That was the second poser Kane had put to Tydvil that day, and Tydvil felt, as he sat at his table with his face in his hands, that it was one too many.

Kane resumed his seat and glared at the bent head. "I am waiting! You must recognise, Mr. Jones, that your position is serious."



Nicholas sat watching Tydvil for a sign that did not come.

Then Tydvil sat erect and turned to Kane. “You have placed me in a position which I hoped to avoid,” he said wearily. “I have to admit now that Basil Williams has been blackmailing me.”

At that dashing falsehood, look of admiration flashed into Nicholas’s face.

Thirty years’ experience of its worst aspect had left little faith in humanity in Inspector Kane. He had seen many apparently impeccable reputations smash when their owners were cornered. Still, the admission of Tydvil Jones surprised even his hardened mind but he never thought to doubt the statement.

There was even a little pity in his eyes as he regarded Tydvil. “So!” he thought, “the little pipsqueak wowser had run off the rails.”

What he said was, and he said it with decision, “You would have saved yourself a lot of trouble—and perhaps money—if you had come to us in

the first place.”

“Impossible,” murmured Tydvil.

“Mr. Jones,” continued Kane. “I am not your judge. I am not going to ask why that ruffian is blackmailing you. But, believe me, there are fools, and there are fools, and there are damn Fools. But the biggest damn fool of all is the man who pays a blackmailer.”

Tydvil sat with bend head and made no response. Kane’s voice grew a little kinder. “Come, Mr. Jones, help us. Tell me where the fellow lives.”

Tydvil shook a despairing head. “I have no idea.”

“I don’t want to press you. But is there a woman in the case?”

Tydvil, thinking of Amy, nodded an affirmative. “More than one?” suggested Kane, hopefully.

“Hell’s bells!” grunted Tydvil. “Isn’t one enough?”

Kane stood up. "One thing I would like you to do, Mr. Jones, is to consult your solicitor on the meaning of condonation, and on how it is regarded by the law."

"Oh! I know that!" Tydvil answered sullenly.

"Then make me a promise," Kane urged. "Don't pay this money and if he comes back at you, let us know, and we will deal with him as he deserves. It's a public duty as well as a legal obligation."

Tydvil remained silent and thoughtful.

"I promise you, Mr. Jones, we will protect your name and prevent it from being published." Kane was very persuasive.

Tydvil sat up as one making a great decision. "Very well, Inspector," he said, "I give you my word of honour I will not pay over this cheque. And I promise if Williams threatens me again I will communicate with you at once."

“Good man! Good man!” exclaimed Kane heartily, “and I know I can rely on you.”

“You can,” said Tydvil with conviction.

“Well, I will not trespass on your time any longer.” He turned to the door and paused. “Mr. Senior, I think that you could help Mr. Jones in this matter.”

“I assure you I will!” responded Nicholas heartily.

Kane nodded and went about his business. As he passed down the warehouse, Geraldine’s eyes followed the stiff back speculatively until three hornet-like buzzes on her table summoned her to Tydvil’s room. She made a face at the buzzer, patted her hair, and entered the presence with head erect and defiance in her eyes.

Tydvil was leaning back in his chair as she stood before him. For a long moment he stared at her in silence. Then: “So you profess to be my friend! My friend! You double-dyed traitress!”

“When I claimed to be your friend, I did not know what an unspeakable traitor you were.” She spoke coldly. “You! Call me a traitress!”

“Would you consider me inquisitive if I asked why you brought that cheque in here?” he asked bitterly.

“Not at all,” she replied airily. “I did it in the hope that it would land you in an everlasting mess with the police.”

“Thank you, Geraldine, for your kind thought and for your still kinder intentions.”

“I trust I succeeded in my plan?” asked the icy damsel.

“Alas! Geraldine, you failed,” he jeered at her. “My native intelligence saved me. But that does not lessen the debt of gratitude I owe you.”

“What a pity,” she sighed. “I hoped to see you go out with handcuffs on.”

“Might I venture to ask why you cherish these delightful sentiments towards me?” he enquired.

“It’s a pleasure to enlighten you—you unscrupulous ruffian.”

“Please, Geraldine!” Tydvil said gently. “I didn’t ask you for flattery. Just a little information on so trifling a matter.”

“My reason for trying to have you arrested arises from a visit I had from a certain high moral authority just before you came in,” she retorted with venom in her voice.

“Oh!” Tydvil straightened up. “So,” he thought, “that accounted for Amy’s presence in the lane.”

“I see you understand,” she went on.

“My dear Geraldine! There must be some mistake, surely.”

“Mistake indeed!” She tossed her head. “Who was it assured Mrs. Jones that I was a perjurer? Where did she get the notion that I am a designing unprincipled creature who lures men into disgrace? Who told her that Billy’s black eye was a pure fabrication? Who led her to believe that I

am a bright pink, if not a scarlet, woman? Who prompted...?”

“But, Geraldine!” Tydvil broke in. “Surely you don’t think...”

“Think!” she interrupted. “No! I know! Tyddie, you’ve even less moral scruple than your noble friend.” She glared at Nicholas. “I know what happened as though I’d been there. As Billy, you had to save yourself, and you—you horror!—You sacrificed me to do it.”

Tydvil’s head was bowed to the blast.

“Look me in the eye and deny it! You can’t, and you know you can’t.”

Tydvil turned to Nicholas, who shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

“Oh! You’re a lovely pair!”

Tydvil looked up guiltily at the figure of Nemesis that towered over him.

“Was it a very tough ordeal, Geraldine?” he asked sympathetically.

“You admit it?” she demanded.

“I was in a terribly tough corner, Geraldine,” he pleaded.

She looked from one to the other. Even Nicholas had the grace to look ashamed. They looked so like a pair of guilty schoolboys that she laughed, and relented.

“Now you listen to me—both of you! If I have any more trouble from you two I’ll make you both sorry for it if it takes the rest of my life to do it.”

“I’m really sorry, Geraldine,” Tydvil urged penitently,

“And so you should be,” she retorted. “And I warn you, if that high moral authority favours me with any more of her personal views on my character there is going to be a scandal in C. B. & D. I’ll live up to the reputation you have given me, my friend. She can consider herself lucky that she is not a total wreck now.”

“But surely, Geraldine, you wouldn’t use violence?” Tydvil’s voice sounded more hopeful than shocked.



“Wouldn’t I?” the fiery girl retorted. “She said things to me that no woman can say to another. Any woman between a duchess and charwoman would have been justified in peeling her for half what she said to me.”

“Geraldine! Geraldine!” Tydvil admonished, laughing.

“You can put it down to my self-restraint and self-respect that she didn’t get out of the office in her blushes; and I won’t answer for myself another time.” Voice, attitude, and eyes testified to Amy’s narrow escape from a truly sensational experience.

“And so,” said Tydvil without trying to hide his amusement, “you took it out of me.”

“I did my best,” she agreed.

“You put me in an awful hole, you demon.”

“I’m so glad,” she replied with simple candour.

“What am I to do with her?” Tydvil turned to appreciative Nicholas.

“In your place,” advised Nicholas, “my policy would be fervent conciliation.”

Tydvil laughed, “Make it pax, Geraldine. You put a nasty one over me, so that ought to make us square.”

Her wrath had died down, and with a chuckle she said, “Pax it is—but it should be a lesson to you I’m not to be trifled with.”

“Bless you, my children,” from Nicholas.

Geraldine swung round on him. “As for you, I don’t appreciate your blessing. I don’t know what you are or who you are, but even if you’re what I believe you to be, I’m not afraid of you, and I’m not done with you yet!” Her eyes turned to the date block on Tydvil’s table. “No, not yet!”

Nicholas stood up. “I have too profound an appreciation of your sex, and

of you, to disregard the warning.”

“And I know too much of your sex, and of you, to express much appreciation of either,” she said defiantly.

“Let me try to win a little by offering a sincere apology, for the trick I played on you.”

“Didn’t someone say, ‘Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes’?” Nicholas’s smile was friendly. “I’m no Greek, Geraldine, and I really mean I am sorry.”

She looked at him speculatively. “I believe you mean it, and I accept, but,” she smiled, “don’t ask me to trust you. It is still war.”

“Fair exchange,” he laughed, “you accept my apology and I accept your challenge.”

“Wait a moment,” she said, “Tydvil says you are a sportsman.”

He nodded. “I try to be one.”

“Then, if it’s war, play fair,” she challenged.

“You mean?” He was frankly interested.

“Fair play and no miracles,” she demanded.

Nicholas laughed heartily. “I might have expected something like that.”

“I only want an equality of weapons,” she persisted.

“You overestimate my strength,” Nicholas shook his head. “You may not recognise it, but you are better armed than I. Even I can’t afford to give anything away in fighting Geraldine Brand.”

“Very well!” she said decisively, “then it’s no quarter.”

“And the prize?” he glanced towards Tydvil.

Geraldine nodded. “Since he won’t help himself.” Then to Tydvil, “You’re an unscrupulous creature, and don’t think I’m doing it on your account, I’m only doing it to teach Mr. Senior a lesson.’

“Oh! Don’t mind me, Geraldine,” laughed Tydvil. “I seem to have no say in the arrangement.”

“None whatever!” she agreed. “You’re a pawn, a bone of contention—in fact, you don’t count.”

“You must agree, Tydvil, that she is quite candid with us both,” said Nicholas.

“You see,” she turned to Nicholas, “if I can cancel that Bill, I’ll settle my account with you, and Tydvil will get all he deserves by living with Mrs. Jones—so he doesn’t escape much.”

“What a woman!” There was sincere admiration in Nicholas’s voice.

“Now we understand one another, anyway,” she said, moving towards the door. “I have work to do.”

As she closed the door behind her the two men looked from it to one another.

Said Tydvil, "Cheerful child! Isn't she?"

Nicholas grinned. "It may, interest you to know, that despite that tirade against you, she is as loyal to you as steel, and she likes you immensely."

"Somehow, I think you're right," smiled Tydvil.

"And," Nicholas added, "I think Mrs. Jones would be very well advised to keep clear of her."

Tydvil nodded. "I'll do what I can, but that is not much. I wonder," he said thoughtfully, "just what Geraldine is up to."

"In a long, long experience," Nicholas replied, "one of the very few things I have learned about women is that it is unprofitable to predict what they will do."

"But can she do anything?" Tydvil asked.

“I doubt it,” Nicholas answered, “but...” He paused, sunk in thought.

“Perhaps their Creator does understand women, but they have given me so much trouble, and deceived me so often that I sometimes think they are the greatest of my punishments.”

“A punishment in disguise,” suggested Tydvil. “Perhaps,” Nicholas reflected. “But I have never married.”

“Misogamist!” laughed Tydvil.


“No, just scared,” replied Nicholas.

“Scared! You!” Tydvil was astonished.

“Aye, Tydvil, scared. How does it go—‘Fools rush in where angels fear to tread’?”

“Angels?”

“Same thing,” said Mr. Senior.

On the following morning Tydvil handed Geraldine a cheque on his private account with instructions to cash it herself and to draw the money in  100 notes. Even the well-trained Geraldine could scarce forbear to raise her eyebrows when she read the amount. Tydvil, watching her face, saw the curiosity that she could not hide.

“That, my dear Geraldine, is conscience money, since you are so curious about it,” he said.

“You must have a blotchy conscience,” replied Miss Brand, regarding the figures with awe.

“Well, not so blotchy as your censorious mind imagines,” he grinned.

“Well,” she returned, “all I can say is that its tenderness does you credit, if it isn’t blotchy.”

“It’s a debt I owe—with interest added—to my very dull youth.” Tydvil smiled.

When Geraldine returned with the notes Tydvil dismissed her, and spent



some time in making them into a neat parcel.

That night Miss Elsie Wilson received a small package addressed to her at the Casino Club. In it was a brief message from Basil Williams regretting that he had been called from Melbourne on urgent affairs and was unable to say goodbye. He begged she would accept the enclosure with his best wishes for her future.

Thereafter the Casino Club knew her no more. Within a fortnight Elsie had established a business which prospered under her own shrewd management. But she never knew why Craddock, Burns and Despard were always so kind and considerate to her in her dealings with them.

## CHAPTER XXXII

As the days passed, Geraldine began to detest the sight of the calendar on her office table. She hated to date her letters. Both clamoured that October was closing and November was at hand. When she had defied Nicholas, it was in the hope that inspiration would come to her. During the days that followed, she formed and rejected a score of plans. Billy, she found, was concerned, but hopeless. Tydvil was unconcerned and indifferent. What a nuisance men were!

Although she became more and more worried as time went on, Tydvil's disregard for its passage exasperated her. Every morning seemed to make him younger and more irresponsible. The head of C. B. & D. behaved like twenty-five years old, instead of the thirty-five he really was. The change was all the more marked because the old Tydvil was nearer fifty in outlook and deportment.

It was not that he neglected his work. He entered into it with even, a greater zest than before. Indeed, he actually worked harder in the office, so as to find time for play. And play he did, with an even greater zest than he worked. But the dull, priggish and stolid Tydvil had

vanished. Their morning session for the mail and dictation had become a lively, and to both, and enjoyable hour. He teased Geraldine with the mischief of a schoolboy. He interspersed the official letters with sheer nonsense.

Almost every afternoon by four o'clock, Nicholas would stroll into the office, and perhaps for ten minutes Geraldine's ears would catch sounds of mirth. Then they would depart together.

"Guess where I was last night," he said one morning. "I'd hate to."

Geraldine tossed her head.

"Paris!" he replied. "You've no idea what Paris can be with Nicholas for a guide."

"Perhaps it's just as well I have no idea," sniffed Miss Brand.

"Wowser!" His eyes danced.

"I suppose Melbourne is too small for our Mr. Jones now?" she said.

“No, my dear Geraldine, too hot. Our mutual friend, Inspector Kane, seems to think that there is no one in the city but me.”

“Well, there’s one thing, I can’t retort and call you a wowser now.”

“There’s a high moral authority who is in complete agreement with you on one point at any rate.”

“And she doesn’t know half,” added Geraldine.

Tydvil screwed up his eyes. “Not one-sixteenth, I’m happy to say.”

“Well,” said Geraldine, “you’d better make the most of your little playmate, Nicholas. You’ve only four days to go now.”

“With his help, my dear girl, you’d be surprised to know what can be done with four days.” Tydvil’s voice was full of appreciation.

“Paris again tonight then, I suppose?”

“You bet! I won twenty-five thousand francs at Long-champs, and I don’t

want to waste one franc of it.”

“And to think I’m worrying about you and that wretched Bill,” she said with deep feeling.

“Forget it, Geraldine. I have.” He smiled.

“You men! What with you and Billy I’m perfectly dizzy.”

“Don’t tell me he’s gone off the rails.” Tydvil looked at her in surprise.

“I was idiot enough to warn him not to back that wretched horse you told me about.”

Tydvil chuckled. “Surely you knew better than that.”

“I’ve learned now. But he has wasted twenty pounds on it,” she said indignantly.

“Wait until next Tuesday afternoon before you say ‘wasted’,” he

suggested.

“That is one reason why I am going out to Flemington with him on Cup Day,” she explained.

“And another?” He raised his brows.

“A new frock—it’s a dream.”

“Not such a wowser after all.” He laughed. “Listen! This is an order. You and Billy lunch with me out at the course on Tuesday.”

Geraldine gurgled. “All right, between you and your fine friend my reputation is damaged already. I might as well get some fun out of it.”

On the Saturday morning Geraldine, having sorted the mail, was called upstairs before Tydvil arrived at the office. On her way down again she encountered a department manager coming up. He looked as though he had been seeing things.

“Good gracious! Mr. Gale, what’s happened?” she enquired.

He goggled at her and gasped. “Holy Wars! Miss Brand, have you seen the Chief?”

“What’s wrong?” she demanded.

“G-g-go and look at him...” He passed on, suffering under some powerful emotion.

Geraldine’s feet scarcely touched the floor as she hastened to the Chief’s office.

She stood petrified as she entered. The head of C. B. & D. was inspecting himself before his mirror with not a little satisfaction in his reflected expression.

As he heard her he turned. “Do you like it?” He was grinning widely.

Mr. Tydvil Jones was wearing a new suit, oyster grey in colour, and of rakish cut. On his feet were tan shoes. The grey Alpine hat was set at a defiant angle. Across his chest was the strap of the race glasses that

rested in their case against his hip.

Still Geraldine stared. Nothing less like the once Tydvil Jones was it possible to imagine. Suddenly she found her voice and gasped, “Lovely!” Then she leaned against the wall and laughed.

“Really, Geraldine!” he protested.

“It’s perfect—perfect! But...” She struggled with her mirth. “But what did the High Moral Authority say?”

Tydvil joined in her laughter. “I don’t know all of it yet. She hadn’t half finished when I left home.”

“Do you know,” she said as she recovered herself, “that you have almost given Mr. Gale apoplexy?”

“He certainly did look surprised when I passed him coming in,” Tydvil said. “Did he say anything to you?”

“Just ‘Holy Wars!’” gurgled Geraldine.



“Hump!” Tydvil commented. “And that’s just what it is going to be at home.”

It might have been Holy Wars at home, but on the Monday morning, it was an unchastened and merry Tydvil who whistled him way down the warehouse.

In answer to Geraldine’s enquiry he told her he had had a gorgeous day, though it had cost him twenty pounds—“quid” he called it; a word that never before had passed his lips.

That morning he dictated a notice to the entire staff of the warehouse. It announced general increases in salaries of from ten per cent. to as much as twenty per cent. among its lower paid members. With twinkling eyes he said to Geraldine as she took it down in shorthand. “My charity is beginning at home in future—and besides, I’m making more out of this particular form of banditry than I need.”

By evening when the news spread round the great building, there were few who were not whistling as merrily as Tydvil had been in the morning—and the morrow was Cup Day and a holiday, There was not a more contented

population in the city than that of C. B. & D.

On that November third, that dawned next day, there were many lighthearted people in the good city of Melbourne. But of them all were none so carefree as Geraldine Brand and William Brewer. Geraldine had shut the thought of the next day out of her mind. Billy's gasp of delight as his eyes fell in the picture she made in her new frock, would have gratified any girl. Flemington was at its best, the weather was at its best, and the thousands that thronged the wide, green grounds rose to the occasion.

Neither Geraldine nor Billy had dreamed what a perfect host Tyddie could be. He treated Billy as a friend and an equal and chaffed the two happily. At lunch Geraldine glanced round. Tydvil read her meaning, and laughed. "No, Geraldine," he said, "Nicholas declined to join us. He said he might be a discordant factor, and that the spoons might not be long enough for your liking."

Alas! For evil communications that corrupt good morals. At lunch Geraldine sipped suspiciously at first, at the glass of vintage wine that was poured out for her. The second sip was less suspicious. After that

there was no suspicion whatever. When they arrived in the open air again Geraldine Brand entrusted to William Brewer one pound to put on a horse of her own choosing, despite the advice of Tydvil and Billy. When, later on she collected eight pounds, there was no holding her.

The race for Thundercloud's Cup still remains a mystery in turf history. The horse's owner admitted ruefully, afterwards, that only certain representations of certain people who had drawn Thundercloud in a certain consultation induced him to leave the horse in the race. Despite Tydvil's investment the bookmakers were still offering two hundred to one against, before the race. But even the most hardened optimists resisted that bait—to their subsequent sorrow. And, to her disgust, Geraldine was among them.

When the three, who had secured an excellent post on the terrace, saw the drove of flying horses and colours pass the stand for the first time, Thundercloud was a comfortable last, and looked like staying there forever. By the time the horses had reached the far side of the course Tydvil returned his glasses to their case. Thundercloud was still holding his position at the tail of the procession. Billy, however, was made of sterner optimistic material. His comments as the field swept nearer the

straight were anything but complimentary to Thundercloud.

Then, as the head of the field was turning into the straight, something happened. Some one hundred and fifty thousand voices yelling “Lapwing” or “Diorite” or “Hector” were suddenly smitten into silence. Something in gold, white and chocolate came raging out from the back of the ruck. It swept round the turn neck and neck with Lapwing and Hector, then passed them, flashing down the straight lengths ahead of the thundering mob behind. To the staring crowd it looked more like an accelerated motion picture of a horse than a living animal. The crowd moaned in unison as it flashed passed the post with a dozen lengths to spare. It is difficult even now to say whether horse, jockey, owner, stewards or the crowd were the most astounded. Thundercloud came in, for the only time in Cup history, in a dead silence—the crowd had lost its voice—temporarily. There was plenty said and yelled later on. All the explanation that Brandish, the amazed jockey, could give was, that Thundercloud seemed to go mad just before he reached the straight. He gave a bound that nearly unseated his rider and took complete charge of his movements, which were as swift as they were incomprehensible.

The most searching veterinary examination failed to detect dope. The

owner's evident astonishment rang true. The stewards saw no reason to interfere with the judge's decision. But that all came afterwards.

Something, however, happened on the terrace as Thundercloud passed the post that amused the immediate spectators. After having ardently embraced one of her companions, a daughter of the gods in green, who was tall and most divinely fair, put her arms about the neck of her other companion and kissed him warmly on both cheeks. Those who witnessed the incident would have been far more interested had they known that the recipient of the second demonstration was no other than Tydvil Jones.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Geraldine?" protested the pleased but embarrassed Tydvil.

"Billy," Tydvil turned to Brewer, "can you not control this turbulent wench?"

"Not I," laughed Billy, "she's a shameless baggage."

"Wowsers!" taunted Geraldine.

"Don't you dare call me that," Tydvil stormed at her.

“Would you prefer ‘Darling’?” Her voice was a caress.

“Billy! Stop her, she’s worse than Thundercloud,” cried Tydvil.

“Don’t you try to bully me,” she said recklessly, “or I’ll kiss you both again.”

Just at that moment Geraldine saw Nicholas Senior making towards them through the now disintegrating crowd. In her humour at this juncture Geraldine forgot her animosity and greeted him cheerfully as he came up to them.

“Oh Mr. Senior,” she said, her face flushed with excitement, “did you see the race? Wasn’t Thundercloud wonderful?”

“He was,” smiled Mr. Senior. “I ought to know, because I was riding him.”

“Congratulations!” laughed Geraldine.

“After all,” she told Billy that night as they talked over the events of

the day, “I couldn’t be rude to anyone who had won six thousand pounds for us? Could I?”

“Heaven forbid,” replied Billy piously, “that I should try to gauge what you could or could not do. You’re beyond me. But for the love o’ Mike, dearest, don’t alter.”

Next morning Geraldine arrived at the office with all her misgivings intact. It seemed somehow strange that the day was no different from other days. Yet everything in the office was exactly the same as usual. To her there should have been some gloom—some recognition of Tydvil’s peril. But that terrible Bill was due at midday, and none but she and Billy knew it.

Not the knowledge that their home was assured, relieved her fears for Tydvil. She confided her feelings to Billy, who shared them, but who could offer no suggestions.

Tydvil arrived on time and seemed less concerned than ever. He teased her about her behaviour of the day before and laughed at her as she rose to the bait. Somehow she sensed that he did not wish her to refer to the

date or the Bill that was so nearly clue. As she left the room he said, “Oh! Geraldine. I’m expecting Mr. Senior a little after eleven. See we are not disturbed.”

She was about to make a last plea, but his lifted hand checked her, and she went to her work with a heavy heart.

All the morning the everyday life of the warehouse buzzed on. She typed her letters, she answered phone calls and interviewed callers and the staff almost mechanically. Some how she felt she wanted support, and chased Billy through the warehouse on the house phones, and begged him to come to her at about eleven-thirty. Understanding, Billy agreed. He, too, shared her anxiety, but he felt that nothing either she or he could do would be of any avail.

It was about a quarter after eleven that a clear, vibrant voice beside her made her aware of Nicholas’s presence.

There was mischief, but friendly mischief in his eyes. “Still war?” he asked.



“To the last second,” she affirmed.

“Oh! You fighting redheads!” he laughed.

“There are still forty-five minutes,” she said.

“Forty-five years would be no use to you.”

“If I had them, I would try all the time.”

“And fail!”

“Mr. Jones is expecting you,” she said shortly, turning away.

“Goodbye, Geraldine!” he laughed.

“Thank goodness!” she retorted to his back, as he walked towards the door.

Nicholas strolled into Tydvil’s room and dropped into the armchair. For a while neither spoke. Nicholas lighted a cigarette and Tydvil took a cigar

from a box that had become part of his table furniture.

“You know, Tydvil,” said Nicholas presently, “I am sorry to be going. Ours has been a pleasant friendship.”

Tydvil nodded. “I’ll miss you, Nicholas, but I can find my own way now.”

“You certainly have developed in three months, my friend.”

Tydvil glanced at the clock. “What time do you leave?”

“Twelve exactly. There is an escort coming for me.”

“You have finished your investigations?” asked Tydvil.

Nicholas shrugged his shoulders. “Yes, my friend. All I have found out that is new, is that sin has become mechanised, and has not improved very much in the process.”

“Our clerics and economists declare the world was never in a worse state.”

“Umph!” Nicholas said. “To my knowledge the clerics have been saying that for two thousand years—as for the economists, if they’re agreed on that, it is the only subject on which I have ever known as many as two of the breed’: in agreement.”

“So it’s not so bad as they, say?” asked Tydvil.

“No, don’t think that,” Nicholas interposed quickly, “it is infinitely worse than I imagined.”

“That’s a bad lookout for us, Nicholas.” There was concern in Tydvil’s voice. “Anything that causes you to become pessimistic does not promise much for us.”

For a moment an expression flashed into the eyes of Nicholas that sent an icy chill from the tips of Tydvil’s toes to the roots of his hair. When he spoke, there was a ring of fury in his voice—fury and despair.

“I had hoped,” he said tensely, “that you poor human fools had learned your lesson, but that accursed Judas Iscariot has fooled both you and me.”

“Communism?” Tydvil asked.

Nicholas nodded. “Yes, Communism,” replied Nicholas. “I might have known when he betrayed his first Master, he would betray me also.”

“But,” interrupted Tydvil, “Will not fascism act as an antidote for the poison?”

Nicholas turned pitying eyes on Tydvil. “My friend, my friend! That was the most foul and infamous part of Judas’s plot. The two doctrines he created, which appear diametrically opposed, are one and the same evil thing. Each bears the seeds of the destruction of humanity. I would not mind that so much,” he added with a grim smile, “but they will wreck Hell itself, and you poor fools cannot recognise that fact.”

He sat for a moment, and tossed his head and laughed. “Forgive me Tydvil, but I feel sore. The only satisfaction is that I have only been betrayed once, while humanity has been betrayed twice.”

Just then the sound of raised voices outside could be heard indistinctly through the closed door. Tydvil started up. “Great Scot! That’s Amy!”

Then, to Nicholas, “Please keep her out of here, Nicholas, while you’re here at any rate.”

Nicholas laughed gently. “No need to worry for the time being, she and our Miss Brand appear to have a good deal to discuss.”

And so it was. True to his word Billy had made time to come to Geraldine. Seated on the edge of her table, and close to her, his hand was resting gently on her shoulder as they talked. It was a secluded backwater of the building where only those came who had business with Tydvil. It was not unnatural, therefore, that as they talked Billy leaned over and pressed his lips to the richly dowered head.

The gasped “William!” that reached their ears was the first notice they had of the presence of Amy, who glared in furious unbelief at the one whom she imagined to be set high above other men.

Geraldine and Billy stared blankly as the fierce apparition bore down on them. Amy looked, as she was, past discretion.

“Keep cool, Billy,” whispered Geraldine, “she’s fighting mad.”

The estimate was no exaggeration. “Nice behaviour t” Snorted Amy. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Miss Brand.”

“Why?” asked Miss Brand, with provocative innocence.

“You will be good enough to remember to whom you are speaking, your insolence is insufferable.” Amy was very red of face.

“I should say,” there was frozen vitriol in Geraldine’s voice, “that you are a better judge of insolence than of behaviour.”

Amy gasped. She turned to Billy, who was wondering just how the situation could be handled without a catastrophe. “William,” she almost hissed, “will you try to explain your behaviour, and this dreadful woman’s.”

Billy was prepared to listen to anything within reason, Amy said of him, but he was not in a humour to hear Geraldine called a dreadful woman.

“As Miss Brand and I are to be married, Mrs. Jones, I object to hearing you or anyone else speak of her in those terms,” he said warmly.

“You! You dare to tell me that! You dare to tell me that you are going to marry this shameless creature?” Amy stuttered.

Before Billy could return to the attack, Geraldine’s cool voice broke in: “I may be shameless to permit my fiance to kiss me here, in this office, but I am not a married woman, and I have not been shameless enough to allow another woman’s fiance to kiss me, publicly, in the Botanical Gardens.”

“Gerry!” gasped Billy, wondering if he heard aright. Amy almost reeled under the blow. “How dare you utter such an abominable insinuation!” she raged.

Geraldine laid a restraining hand on Billy’s arm. He was exhibiting symptoms of detonation. “If you must know, I have always considered you a canting hypocrite, and I bet Mr. Brewer sixpence that he could not make love to you and kiss you. I was there when he did it. It was on September fifth, in the afternoon.”

The crimson face went pale. She glared from one to the other. Billy stood

staring at Geraldine wondering whether he or she had gone crazy. But there was a flicker in her eye that warned him she was bad rather than mad.

Amy's expression as she turned to Billy was fiendish. "Is that—true?" she snarled.

Only Billy's utter confidence in Geraldine's ability to handle the situation she had created enabled him to bear up and rally to her help. Said he, quite unabashed, "It was only intended as a joke, Mrs. Jones."

Geraldine with difficulty repressed a giggle.

Amy made no attempt to repress anything. She opened her mouth and let it say all it liked. She began with, "You cur! You unspeakable hound! You cowardly ruffian! There are no words a self-respecting woman can use that can describe such a dastardly lying brute as you are. You have dared to conspire with this shameless creature to humiliate a woman who trusted you—who thought you a man and, heaven forgive me, an honourable man—I..."



And on she raged while Geraldine, listening, quickly raised her telephone from its stand, pressed a button, spoke a few words, and replaced the instrument. Then she started to her feet and interposed herself between Billy and the fury of Amy, cutting off the tempest of abuse.

“You can keep out of this, Billy,” she commanded. “It’s my affair, and I’ve been waiting for this for a long, long time.”

“I’m afraid I cannot compete in an argument with a...”

Amy dropped a word that made Billy see red. It filled Geraldine with cold, implacable rage. She towered over Amy, silencing Billy with a glance.

“Now you’ll listen to me.” Her voice was as cold as her wrath. She did not raise it; in low, level tones, she painted Amy Jones as she saw her with another woman’s insight and intuition. Savagely she stripped Amy of her armour of self-satisfaction and conceit. It was merciless and pitiless. She outlined Amy’s life and works, and hypocrisies, in words that stung, each a separate hornet, against which there was no defence.

In Tydvil's office he had listened to Geraldine's words on the telephone, and had replaced the instrument with a slight smile. He and Nicholas had been sitting exchanging desultory sentences, as men will, when all has been said between them, and they await the moment of parting.

"Geraldine!" he explained to Nicholas as he put down the receiver.

The room had gradually grown darker. A low rumble of thunder came through the partly opened window.

"Sounds like a storm coming," remarked Tydvil as he raised his head.

Nicholas laughed. "That is my escort coming, Tydvil." Tydvil glanced at him a question.

"Really it is," Nicholas assured him. "Lucifer, my commander-in-chief, loves to do these things in style. I expect he's turned out the entire black guard with an artillery division to ride back with me."

"Sounds noisy," was Tydvil's comment as another and nearer peal rumbled overhead.

“She’s having a lively time, I imagine,” Nicholas returned to Geraldine’s affairs.

“From the suggestion she made, I think you’re right,” agreed Tydvil.

“Suggestion!” Nicholas became alert. It wanted ten minutes to midday.

“Oh, nothing much,” said Tydvil almost indifferently, “but it is one small last service you can do for me, Nicholas.”

“Delighted, of course,” Nicholas responded warmly. “What is it?”

“Well, I want you to put a curb on Amy’s tongue—say, to reduce her verbal output to about one-sixteenth of its present flow.” Tydvil was selecting another cigar as he spoke and did not see the expression in Nicholas’s eyes.

“Was that Geraldine’s suggestion?” There was a queer ring in Nicholas’s voice.

“Yes.” Tydvil was intent on his cigar. “I should have thought of it myself.” He looked up as he spoke. Nicholas was regarding him with curious intentness. “Great Scott! Nicholas,” he asked in concern, “is here anything wrong?”

“It entirely depends on the viewpoint,” Nicholas said.

Then he leaned back and laughed without restraint. “What on earth...?” Tydvil began.

“The redhead wins,” gasped Nicholas at last.

Tydvil looked at him bewildered. “How—wins what?”

Nicholas drew his wallet from his pocket and extracted the Bill Tydvil signed three months earlier. “Just this, my friend,” he said. “You have asked me to reduce Mrs. Jones’s flow of talk to one-sixteenth of its present volume. What you apparently do not know it, that neither her Creator, nor I nor man can by any power or persuasion reduce the flow of any woman’s talk by one word or one syllable against her will.”

“You mean...?” Tydvil stared at him incredulous.

“I have failed in my last service to you—and believe me, Tydvil, it is the one I would most gladly perform if I could.

“So that...” He nodded at the Bill in Nicholas’s hand.

“This is null and void.” Nicholas was rereading his endorsement.

“It seems so simple though.” Tydvil’s voice was full of wonder.

“So simple—yet the only thing in the Universe that is impossible.”

“I just can’t understand,” said Tydvil.

“Listen, my friend. When the Creator first formed woman, and the work was completed, it was discovered, too late, that one of the assisting angels had omitted to adjust the brake on her tongue. The mistake was irreparable, and beyond even the power of the Creator to remedy.”

“And mankind has suffered for it ever since,” sighed Tydvil.

Nicholas nodded. “But the wrath of the Creator was so great that he ordered a terrible punishment to the erring’ angel. He decreed that so long as mankind lived on earth, that angel should take human form, to be reincarnated through all time, and in each incarnation to be a married man.”

“What a fearful fate,” murmured Tydvil, sympathetically.

Nicholas nodded his agreement. “But the worst part of the punishment was that through all his reincarnation he would know himself to be the missing angel and to realise the paradise he had lost.”

“But can’t he tell his wife he is the angel?” asked Tydvil.

“To guard against that, the Creator ordained that throughout time, every married man should always believe himself to be a missing angel. So, as all men try to persuade their wives they are angels, the real angel’s wife always regards him as being like the rest of them, and no better than them.”

“Terrible,” murmured Tydvil, “why, I might be—I’m sure lam...”

“So are all the rest,” Nicholas said, holding out the Bill to Tydvil.

“Au revoir, my friend.”

Tydvil reached out to take the Bill. As he did so there was a crash and a blinding flash of light. The window and the glass walls of Tydvil’s office clashed down in clang of broken glass. Tydvil was flung to the floor beside his splintered writing table. One sleeve was almost torn out of his coat. As the smoke cleared he recovered his shocked senses.

Geraldine, Amy and Billy, turned and rushed to the shattered walls. Staring through, they beheld a dishevelled Tydvil sitting on the ruins of his chair, by the remains of his table. He still held his smoking cigar in the corner of his mouth, and he was turning over, with evident interest, a scorched piece of paper he held in his hand.

It was Amy who first found her voice. “Tydvil!” she exclaimed dramatically, “this is a visitation of heaven.”

“Fat lot you know!” came the rude and truculent answer from a belligerent Tydvil.

“Are you hurt?” asked Geraldine anxiously.

Tydvil regarded the three with interest. “Come in here the three of you, and don’t stand gaping there.” Then, to the white-faced crowd of employees who had rushed to the scene, “Clear out, you people,” he shouted. “There’s nothing wrong—only a flash of lightning.”

Putting her hand through the broken pane, Geraldine opened the shattered door and the three joined Tydvil as he scrambled to his feet.

“I hope, if there is any decency left in you, Tydvil,” Amy took the floor, “that this will be a terrible warning to you.”

Disregarding her words entirely, he surveyed the three; then he fixed his eyes on Amy. “You two,” he said with a glance at Geraldine and Billy, “know as much of my affairs as I do—nearly. So I don’t mind your hearing what I am going to say.” Then, to Amy, “I’m absolutely fed up of you and all your works. Now, here’s my only offer. Either you give me a judicial



separation or I'll sue for divorce, and, by Jove, I'll get it!"

"You! You divorce me?" Amy gasped.

Tydvil stepped close to her, bent his head and murmured some words in her ear.

Amy paled and stepped back with terror in her eyes. "Well!" he snapped.

"Separation or Divorce?"

"I will have to submit to your cruelty," Amy stammered. "Then get out of this and wait at home till you hear from me."

With one savage glance at Geraldine, Amy turned and walked out of the room.

"What on earth was the row about?" demanded Geraldine. "Where's Mr. Senior?"

"Thanks to you," Tydvil held out the note on which the word "Cancelled" appeared in scorched letters.

Her eyes lit up. “It worked?”

“It did,” agreed Tydvil looking round the wrecked room.

“What worked?” asked the bewildered Billy.

“Best not tell him, Geraldine,” grinned Tydvil, “the news would scare him too much.”

“She’s scared me enough already this morning,” growled Billy. “So I won’t ask any more questions.”

Tydvil looked to Geraldine for enlightenment, and Geraldine told her story.

“You mean to tell me that you put that on to poor Billy? You ought to spank her,” laughed Tydvil.

“She deserves it, but she has me scared, Chief,” grinned Billy. “I’d never know what she’d do next.”

“Oh! by the way,” Tydvil said, “I forgot to tell you. You’re both sacked.”

“Chief!” expostulated Billy.

“What gratitude.” Geraldine laughed. “I’ve saved your body from Amy and your soul from your friend—and you sack me...”

“Billy,” Tydvil commanded, “take that woman some where and marry her as soon as you can. She’s not safe to be left lying about loose...”

“You’re not as cracked as I thought you were,” retorted Billy audaciously.

“I hope I’m not,” Tydvil went on, “because I’m off to Europe for a holiday next month, and you, Billy, are going to manage C. B. & D. in my place...”

And now, gentle reader, should you be a woman and married, I have written this story to tell you why you should be patient and gentle with him.

Because he really believes he is an angel—that is his fate. And besides,

he really might be. You never know your luck, and that missing angel is somewhere in the world.